

TELENGANA FRIENDS

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A DOZEN young peasants and workers from the Telengana district of Hyderabad State live in the Central prison in the city of Hyderabad. They have been in one prison or another since they were about 18; they are now about 25; they are subject to life imprisonment.

We are old friends. I first learnt of them when I admired the work they did in freeing their Telengana country from landlords and money-lenders—work destroyed with difficulty by an invading force of the Indian Army. Then, when they were sentenced to death by 'special tribunals' on framed-up charges, I was able to show my admiration in practical form by appearing for them before the Supreme Court of India. I succeeded *only in getting them reprieved*; but that was a basis for friendship. I wasn't able to visit India again until December, 1954; but I then visited them in their prison.

Even if we had not been friends, they are worth crossing the world to see. They welcomed me with the traditional greeting of India, a garland of flowers, and gave me a book with all their signatures in it. So simple to sign, you think? But most of them were wholly illiterate when they were arrested, and they have all taught themselves in prison, to read and write in their own language of Telugu, whilst several of them have learnt English too. Nor have they studied only languages in prison; they study Marxism and Leninism profoundly, and work steadily and enthusiastically to prepare themselves to lead their people in freedom in the near future! (Nor is their optimism unjustified.) And meanwhile they are demanding facilities to sit for their University examinations.

Our long talk together was a very interesting and stimulating experience for me. These eager, keen, healthy, and spirited young men cross-examined me from prepared notes on every political problem of every continent. They wanted details of every political case I had conducted since last we met—of all of which they knew something. They displayed a pretty full knowledge of the political events and problems of the time. It was more a study circle than a jail visit. When they had exhausted their prepared questions, they asked me to tell them something they did not know! It was not easy to find a topic on which they were not already informed; on the contest then raging in the French Chamber over German rearmament, for instance, they knew as much as I did.

I asked if they needed anything. 'Thank you', they said, 'our friends give us pretty well all we need; but we would be grateful for a subscription to the *Labour Monthly*'.

What a future such young men promise to the world. And what is the good of the past trying to imprison the future?