

# A TELANGANA PRISONER WRITES

'OBSERVER'

IN the year 1948 there was civil war in the Telengana region of Hyderabad state, in which the peasants drove out the landlords and moneylenders and took over the land for themselves. The Indian army and the police intervened, and arrested a large number of peasants and detained them for months without charge.

Among those so detained was one Janardhan Reddy, then a schoolboy of 17.

What sort of a boy was Janardhan Reddy? You shall see.

After he had been in detention for some months, it occurred to someone that he and a number of other young men should be charged with the murder of certain persons. It was a curious murder case. Murders are usually reported to the police by what is called in India a 'First Information Report', filed within a few hours of the crime and giving the names of the persons said to have committed it.

This particular murder, said to have taken place on September 21, 1948, was first reported on March 5, 1949, even then the report gave no names of the persons said to have done the crime.

Nevertheless, this schoolboy was taken out of prison and on a day or two's notice tried on July 27, 1949, before a 'Special Tribunal', without any opportunity to prepare his defence, or to get a lawyer or witnesses.

The identification and the evidence generally were such as any competent lawyer could have torn to pieces; the case was tried in English, a language of which he knew very little, and no interpreter was provided for him. In the forefront of the prosecution's case was the assertion that he and his fellow-accused were Communists, as if that settled the matter—as indeed it did! (But at the time of the alleged murder the Communist Party had not even been made illegal in Telengana.) He was convicted and sentenced to death.

Ever since his conviction Janardhan Reddy has lived in a condemned cell in Secunderabad Jail; and when he is allowed out of his cell for exercise the only thing he can see is loops in the rope of the scaffold which is waiting for him.

His friends appealed to the Hyderabad High Court, where those

who chose to say that they were not Communists had their death sentences cancelled. Twice his case has been taken to the Supreme Court of India, and twice rejected, not on its merits but on technical grounds.

He now lies under sentence of death, a boy still only 19 years of age, a victim of injustice and oppression.

Such a history might break any boy's spirit, or any man's. But what has it done to Janardhan Reddy?

One example may be found in a statement he made in his defence in another trial, in which his oppressors thought fit to charge him—this time in vain—with another murder, as if hanging him once would not satisfy them. He said:

We have been tried and convicted on false charges. We may lose our lives but we shall not bow our heads. It is because the Congress is losing ground that in desperation it has resorted to hanging patriots like us. To the very last moment of our lives we shall hold high the banner of the Communist Party. We swear by the honour of the movement we represent: 'The people are invincible; they shall not yield to repression!'

This he said in his native Telugu language; but he has given another striking example.

In his long imprisonment he has succeeded in studying English, and in learning to write it. (Few, very few, boys in Telengana learn any language but their native Telugu, or learn to write at all.) And on March 23, 1951, after two and a half years of imprisonment, anxiety, uncertainty, on learning that his second and last possible appeal to the Supreme Court had been rejected for want of jurisdiction, he sat down and—using his hard-won knowledge of English—wrote to his lawyer the letter you see here.

*[Janardhan Reddy, with the other Telengana prisoners, is awaiting the result of an appeal for mercy addressed to the President of India; Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister; and the Raj Pramukh of Hyderabad. Messages of support should be sent to the High Commissioner, India House, Aldwych, or cabled to Prime Minister Nehru, New Delhi. Some of the story of Telengana was told in LABOUR MONTHLY (July, 1950) under the title 'Oppression in India', by D. N. Pritt.—Ed., L.M.]*

District secunde  
bad jail  
Barek No 9

8/23/3/19

My dear comrade

Red salut,

I had sent a post card to Mr. Solafi and his  
reply has encouraged me to send this letter  
to you. I am writing this to thank you personally  
and on behalf of the other comrades with me.  
We have just come to know of the decision of the  
Supreme court. Believe me when I tell you  
that it had had no effect on us. We are  
happy as before and will always be happy.

what ever be the final result. We don't even  
mind being hang for the communite cause so  
dear to us all. It was to really our great good fortune  
to have an able and learned man of your  
reputation to plead for us. We are all as highly  
greatful to you and others who have been helping  
us together with you. We have done our duty and  
we are not affraid of anything. We are happy to  
have had an occasion to meet you here personally  
and to have been defended by you. We shall  
always carry gratefule memories of our contact  
with you and the very kind and fatherly affection  
you showed to us all. We shall always remem-  
ber you as long as we live and we hope you will  
not forget us. We do not know really how to thank  
you, for making the whole world know how we  
have been treated in our cases from the very  
begining and now we do not care for the end.

With all the good wishes and thankfule reg-  
ards from self and other eleven comrades  
who are all equally obliged to you personally,  
I beg to remain your most thankfule and  
loving.

Comrade. G. Raghupathi Reddy  
From. S.C. Jail