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# LETTERS

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*The following appeal was received by TDR in February 1971.*

## THE EDITOR:

On December 19, 1970, the Bengali poet Buddhadeva Bose was convicted of obscenity by Police Judge Barrari, after a trial which lasted a year and a half and included seventy days of hearings. The judge not only heaped indignity after indignity on the sixty-three-year-old writer—such as having him testify in a wire cage, ordering the confiscation and destruction of all copies of his allegedly obscene book and of the original manuscript—but also refused him permission to appeal. Bose's book has been banned and his life is now in danger.

Bose is among the most eminent of India's living writers. He is the author of over two hundred books. He edited Bengal's first poetry magazine, *Kavita*, for over a quarter of a century. Tagore admired Bose's work; and the youngest Bengali writers today admire and draw inspiration from him.

His own society sought alternately to punish and reward him, as the moods of the decades changed. One of his early works was banned in the thirties. In the sixties, he was given the highest literary award of India by one of the academies. The President of India made him a *Padmabhusan*, or lotus-jewel, of the nation in 1970. But now both the so-called Right and the Left, the police and the terrorists, are angry at those who strive to preserve basic values in embattled Bengal. Scientists are attacked in their laboratories, books are burned, statues smashed. Bengal seems to have turned on its best sons and creations in an orgy of self-hatred.

Bose, an uncompromisingly independent writer, not only refused to join any political camp but also gave up his university professorship in 1963. He works eighteen hours a day at his plays, poems, and translations,

making a living from his craft despite a very small readership. In its unending creativity, tireless industry, and independence, his has come to be a symbol of the dedicated and pure and joyous life for many of the young writers of Bengal. On the other hand, the political gangs, the Fascist-Naxalite hoodlums and the little nabobs of Bengal who are engaged in a murderous struggle for power, for the control of the sewers and alleys of Calcutta, regard every manifestation of independent thought as a challenge to their authority and a threat to their attempt to cow all Bengal into submission. Both the Right and the Left have declared that it is not hunger and disease and ignorance that are the enemies of the people, but freedom of thought and equality of sexes and originality of dress and book and song. Bose is not the first victim of this united attempt to uproot "obscenity" from Bengali culture; other writers, including the Hungry Generation poets and Samaresh Bose, author of *Prajapati*, recently have been held guilty of obscenity under Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code, which does not allow the writer to plead the truth of his writing, or its aesthetic necessity, social use, or scientific validity, as a defense against the wildest and most farfetched accusations of immorality. Buddhadeva had come to be regarded by some as the spokesman of the persecuted writers. He himself might have been spared the mob and judicial attacks on his works and his person had he less forthrightly supported freedom of expression and had he been willing, through public silence, to overlook, and thus lend negative support to, the doings of the nabobs. There is no longer any political or judicial opposition to police rule and leftist terrorism in Bengal. Only the artist and the scientist, by their very modes of life, bear witness, however shakily, to the existence of values higher than the brutal and vicious ones of power politics.

We have undertaken to raise the amount of the fine imposed on Buddhadeva. We are seeking ten paisa, or one U.S. cent, donations from people who are willing to risk such a public avowal of their convictions. So fear-ridden is the air of Calcutta that even young writers have refused to appear as defense witnesses for Buddhadeva, while others have expressed their willingness to contribute handsome sums but have declined to sign

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the appeal or put down their addresses. Of course the fear is mostly in our minds, but it has been quite as paralyzing as real danger. The signature campaign has given those who had earlier chafed against their helplessness and inactivity an opportunity to come out into the open with their beliefs and to confront others with a choice.

*Subir Roy Chowdhury  
Jyotirmoy Datta  
Amiya Dev*

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

You too can make a collection and send the signatures, addresses, and money (in international postal coupons) to Jyotirmoy Datta, 91/1B Bondel Road, Calcutta 19. You can draft your own appeal. You can write to Buddhadeva, expressing your views. You can send protests to the Indian embassy, or even send a cable to Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Please circulate this letter among your friends, fellow writers—whoever would be interested in the injustice of an attempt to destroy a book and burn even its manuscript. Please write to us, giving us news of what you have done and the addresses of your friends to whom we might write. We need your suggestions. Calcutta is not an island. Your response may help those of us who are at the moment a little weak and despairing to recover joy in living and courage in resisting all pressures, imaginary or real, psychological or external, so as not to shrink into a silent, submissive, terrified people.

*An abridged version of the following letter was published in the New York Times on April 24, 1971.*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Several weeks ago, we learned that Brazil's leading theatre director, Augusto Boal, had disappeared in São Paulo on his way home from a rehearsal at his theatre, the Arena Theatre of São Paulo. It was only on March 9 that further word reached us outlining some of the details of his disappearance.

Reports state that Boal was arrested on February 10 by DOPS (the Department of Political and Social Order), the nonmilitary

federal agency in Brazil in charge of political investigations. As of March 15 he is still being held. For ten days after his arrest, neither his colleagues nor his family could obtain any information from the Brazilian authorities regarding his whereabouts and the circumstances of his arrest. On February 20, he was allowed a visit from a member of his immediate family who learned that Boal has been in solitary confinement since his arrest and has been "in the hands of his interrogators." He has been denied access to a lawyer. The charges against him are allegedly related to his recent visits outside Brazil where his company presented plays critical of the present regime in Brazil.

In 1969 the Arena Theatre appeared with distinction in New York at St. Clement's Church with *Arena conta Zumbi*, written and directed by Boal. The company returned in 1970 to play at the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theatre and to tour universities throughout the country. In December of last year, the Arena Theatre toured Argentina and Uruguay. Mr. Boal and his company had been invited to participate in the International Theatre Festival of Nancy, France in April of this year, after which he had planned to stage a Latin American Fair of Opinion here in New York.

As members of New York's artistic community and as U.S. citizens, we are deeply concerned about suppression of distinguished artists in Brazil, or in any country. Boal's arrest has its repercussions on the right of artistic expression throughout the world. His is not an isolated case. The general repression in Brazil has been reported by the *New York Times* and other responsible news agencies. Brazil is a member of the United Nations and the Organization of American States, whose charters clearly state that the human rights of citizens of member countries be honored and upheld. Yet, Brazil has denied organizations such as the International Red Cross and Amnesty International permission to carry out impartial investigations of the reported tortures being exercised on political prisoners in that country's jails and prisons.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this situation in Brazil is the minimal coverage it receives in this country from our press.