

‘Maoism’, State and the Communist Movement in India

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Part I

This is the first part of a three-part article to be continued in the next couple of issues - Ed [“Liberation”, December 2009].

In our last number, and partly also in some previous issues, we discussed the contours of the Indian state’s ongoing war on “left wing extremism”, a sister project of the national-international “war on terror”. From previous reports and bits of information the big picture that emerged there was that the Salwa Judum - meaning “Purification (or Peace) Hunt” in the Gondi language - which started in June 2005 as India’s most scandalous PPP (where private stands for Tata, Essar and other business interests, public stands for Chhattisgarh state government (ruled by BJP) and the union government (ruled by Congress) - see box below) has since spread over the entire country in diverse forms and with greater or lesser intensity. The UPA Government’s politico-military offensive against Maoism constitutes a veritable war on the people of India, a multipronged assault on their basic democratic rights. The central as well as state governments are bent upon using the state-Maoist confrontation as a pretext to suppress people’s struggles on basic issues and crush the voice of protest and resistance against the state-sponsored corporate plunder of the country’s resources.

The growing opposition that the footfalls of emergency have evoked from wide cross-sections of the Left and democratic forces calls for a broad unity of these forces. But meaningful unity-in-action - as opposed to formal, passive unity-in-resolutions - can only be built on the basis of a critical appraisal of the issues in discourse as well as a clear understanding of our points of agreement and disagreement on these issues and on our tasks in the present situation.

Violence, Non-Violence, And Negotiated Peace

As opposed to the brave fight put up by a number of journalists and authors, the role of corporate media in the current discourse has been mostly negative. Barring stray stories, it hardly takes notice at the continuous flow of piecemeal feudal, communal, mafia and police violence and the violence of starvation. And now that organised violence of the state interspersed with Maoist armed actions dominate the scene, the big media finds it convenient to harp on the hackneyed debate on violence and non-violence and end up justifying state monopoly of violence as the road to peace.

Taking a step forward, eminent intellectuals, activists and others have come up with calls for peace

through dialogue. "The Citizens' Initiative for Peace", for example, has issued the call "Stop Offensive, Hold Unconditional Dialogue". It has demanded that the government should first stop the offensive, and this should be reciprocated by Maoists, to facilitate a ceasefire. Amit Bhaduri and Romila Thapar on their parts have argued, "An alternative form of intervention ushered in through a multi-lateral dialogue involving all the concerned parties is not merely an option, it is imperative." [1] The idea of involving the people in any dialogue is most welcome, but to determine who are, or represent, "the people" will remain problematic. Moreover, the question of involvement of democratic bodies or other stakeholders should arise only when the talks are not supposed to be limited to the narrow confines of state-Maoist truce but covers broader social issues like land rights and development with dignity.

Starting from an opposite stance, "Concerned Citizens on "Maoist" Violence", which includes Prabhat Patnaik, Irfan Habib, Utsa Patnaik, Amiya Kumar Bagchi and others, concentrate fire against Maoists while also criticising "acts of oppression committed by members of the exploiting classes or individuals in the state apparatus" (only individual errant members — not the ruling classes or the state as such!). On this premise they urge upon the state to "restore its presence and credibility in tribal areas whose interests it has largely been ignoring" (a social democratic endorsement of Rahul Gandhi's comment that Maoism grows where the state fails!) and recommend dialogue "with those "Maoists" who are ready to give up the path of armed struggle".

One might be taken aback to see renowned Marxist intellectuals conveniently forget that every state - even the so-called welfare state, which India is not - is an instrument of class dictatorship of the oppressors on the oppressed. But did not the ruling 'Marxists' in West Bengal rely on the repressive state apparatus to tackle movements in Singur, Nandigram, and in an earlier era, Naxalbari? Did they not, even where they were not in power, always recommend strong-arm tactics of the state to crush popular upheavals as, for instance, in the case of the Assam movement of late 1970s and early 1980s? In Punjab too, in the name of combating Khalistani terrorism, the CPI(M) went to the extent of comprehensive collaboration with the state, which eventually led to splits in the party and considerable erosion of its mass base. It is one thing to mobilise the masses against divisive and communal forces or even anarchist activities for that matter, but to wage a joint campaign in collaboration with the ruling classes is a totally different proposition. More recently, it was Buddhbabu's state terror on innocent adivasis in the wake of the Maoist landmine blast in November 2008 that triggered the latest phase of the Lalgurh movement, with the CPI(M) government then unleashing a vicious circle of escalating state repression and Maoist killings. In this context, it should not really come as a surprise that academics who are more concerned about Maoist violence than about state terror, should champion the statist logic of shock-awe-negotiate!

Under pressure from all quarters, even the fire-spitting Chidambaram has offered to negotiate "on any of their [Maoists'] concerns" — such as forest rights or SEZ — "provided they stop violence". Also he has reportedly agreed to attend a public hearing in Dantewada, a Maoist hotbed in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar. [2] This seems to be his way of appearing amenable to political openings and signalling a possible peace offensive, even as he spurs on the security forces. For the Indian state, which has to its credit a long record of sterilising and assimilating militant movements, negotiations and agreements with insurgent groups are nothing new. In the North East for example, armed outfits have been put on leash. In many cases they stay in designated camps with sophisticated arms and ammunitions and engage in extortions and violence on a limited scale; the quid pro quo being that in elections they must use their firepower to mobilise votes for the ruling party, namely the Congress. Of course, this has been made possible only because the demands of these groups have generally been in the nature of statehood/greater autonomy/bigger state (such as Greater Nagaland) which is not the case with Maoists.

The basic demand of the Maoists - socialism or new democracy - is not negotiable, for that entails

destruction of the existing state to begin with. This is a difficulty for both sides of the proposed negotiations. And if Maoists enter into dialogue on partial/secondary demands such as land reform within the purview of existing laws, they stumble upon the second problem: they lack the mechanism of democratic organisation that would mobilise the broad masses to enforce an agreement even if one is arrived at. This was very clearly demonstrated in Andhra Pradesh, at the time their most important stronghold, where some sort of agreement was reached. The government, true to its class character, reneged on its promise. The newly formed Communist Party of India (Maoist) could do practically nothing while the government subsequently used the information it gathered and the network it developed during the dialogue days to crush the Maoists both from within and without. The Maoist claim that they were negotiating from a position of strength proved to be an empty boast.

But did not the Maoists score a resounding success in the recent case of kidnapping the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sankrail police station in West Bengal? In a sense, they did. It was a meticulously executed operation that attracted the maximum possible media attention, enhanced Maoist leader Kishenji's public profile big-time and succeeded in achieving the specific demand placed. And what was that demand? Release of a group of old and innocent adivasis women, arrested in Lalgurh on absolutely false and legally untenable charges. Obviously the demand was so formulated that the government would find it easy to accept. After the give-and-take (release of the OC and the adivasis) it was business as usual between the state and the Maoists in Lalgurh. Even this much was achieved by Maoists because the state administration, working under pressure of the huge groundswell of sentiment for the visibly bhadralok OC and his family, and suffering from the indecision and weakness that characterizes any administration during a period of change of guard (in this case from Left Front rule to TMC-Congress rule) was in no position to take up the gauntlet thrown by Maoists. In fact there are reports that armed forces of the state reached very near to Kishenji's hideout early in the day the OC was released, but retreated under orders from the top when Kishenji warned that the OC's life would be at stake unless the forces went back. In any case, the entire episode took place under exceptional circumstances and it is very doubtful if such a feat can be repeated under other, normal circumstances.

In the light of Andhra and Bengal experiences and given the actual balance of forces between the warring parties as well as the absolutely antagonistic nature of the conflict, it would appear that a dialogue between them, if at all it takes place, would hardly provide any "solution" to the "Maoist problem". At most it can lead to some breathing space in the confrontation that would go on after the ceasefire and continue to claim all the "collateral damages" in people's lives and livelihood that all of us are so concerned with. However, now that the CPI (Maoist) spokesperson Azad, while refusing to lay down arms and calling the governments' peace proposal "a propaganda ploy" has agreed to the possibility of a "ceasefire" if several conditions like stoppage of state terror and repeal of black laws are met⁴, the next few months will be closely watched.

Development, Democratic Space, And Beyond

Along with dialogue, development – the lack of which common sense regards as the root cause of "Naxalite/Maoist insurgency" – has figured as a major concern of pro-people forces. On this ground too, the government is in no mood to give a walkover to its detractors. In early November 2009 we saw Manmohan Singh conversing with chief ministers to wean the tribals away from the Maoists. More recently West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya met police and administrative officials of West Medinipur district and took them to task for utter failure of the grand development plans announced soon after the initiation of para-military campaign in Jangalmahal (Lalgurh and adjoining areas). The reply he got was that nothing could move until Maoists were flushed out. The PM too had endorsed this typical bureaucratic-militarist logic in his aforesaid meeting, but at the same time he identified what he considered to be the basic fault line leading to a "dangerous"

situation: "There has been a systematic failure in giving the tribals a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude into their living spaces ... The alienation built over decades is now taking a dangerous turn in some parts of our country."

How much is this concern for development worth? What are the ground realities? Conditions in tribal areas in West Bengal from Amlashol to Lalgargh are well documented; for Bastar in Chhattisgarh let us hear from a rather unexpected witness: tough cop KPS Gill.

"Politics itself is an extortion network - more so now, in the name of development and industrialisation; land acquisitions and SEZs. When you have political leaders saying that development should be part of the response mechanism, ask them what they mean by development in Chhattisgarh. How does a good road affect a man who has no transport whatsoever? Of what use is the road for a tribal with two bare feet?... We are in a great, vicious circle of violence because today development is corruption driven. ...take Jharkhand, where you have a governor whose foremost achievement is corruption. I have always maintained that corruption and operations against organisations of this nature cannot go together. ...I know what the police officer in charge of Bastar was doing. He was taking Rs 35,000 per man to transfer them out of Bastar. This was in the knowledge of everyone. ...Property ownership is very very important, but the State can't seem to find ways to give tribals property ownership in this huge forest."

In this backdrop he believes that

"Operation Green Hunt is going to be a big failure. Who is the State hunting? And once an operation fails, it is a very difficult task to repeat it. This is what the American forces are facing in Afghanistan. We need to consider: do we want to be in a similar situation?"

Gill said all this in an interview to *Tehelka Magazine* [3]. Is the recent emphasis on development an attempt to address the concerns of people like him?

The fact is, brute force and palliatives - or coercion and hegemony in Gramscian terms - have always and everywhere complemented each other in propping up oppressive regimes; only their relative proportions have changed over time and place. To look at the record of the present dispensation, the April 2008 "Report of An Expert Group to the Planning Commission" titled "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas" argued that a socially responsible decentralised state could and should wean people away from the Naxalites/Maoists and provide the basis for negotiations with the Maoists. Very recently Rahul Gandhi reiterated the development angle precisely when Chidambaram was spitting venom against Maoists/Naxalites. Gullible people saw in this an inner-party contradiction, much as they loved to see a conflict between Vajpayee and Advani during the NDA regime. Far from it, from Nehru through Indira and Rajiv to Sonia-Pranab-Manmohan-Rahul, the country's premier ruling party has mustered great skills in the art of speaking in two voices. It is in this tradition and as parts of the same game-plan that logistical arrangements for further intensification of military offensive come blended with vague (and conditional) offers for dialogue while elimination of "left-wing extremism" - an infinitely expandable category that can include workers' struggle for trade union rights (as in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu) or landless labour's agitation for promised homestead land (as in Mansa, Punjab) or anything else - is held out as a precondition for peace and development.

We the people of India must not allow ourselves to be duped and distracted by such clever political campaigns of the ruling classes. We must continue with our basic struggle for land and livelihood, justice and democracy, dignity and development; and as an important part of this broader movement we must now concentrate on a straight demand: Immediate end to all forms of state terror!

Up to a limit this struggle can and must be fought, as Nandita Haksar suggests, by "enlarging the

democratic space within the system". [4] Even that, however, is possible only when the movement has a holistic, as different from fragmented, issue-based approach to life and politics and is informed by a clear vision of the future that we wish to hammer out of the present. In other words, there is but one way to resist the contraction of the democratic space and expand its frontiers: to build sustained movements, primarily workers' and peasants' struggles, which not only seek to achieve what the Indian Constitution promises us, but aim to go beyond.

And here we confront not just the forces of status quo - the ruling parties, the Indian state with all its apparatus of deception and oppression- we also stand face to face with the Maoists. We have to engage them, if only because they too claim to be working for the same goal - demolishing the existing state and ushering in real, wholesome, people's democracy. If there is some substance in this assertion, one should actively support them. If the opposite is true, if Maoism happens to be a trend harmful to advancement of popular struggles, then our duty should be to politically combat it as such in the immediate and long term interests of the people of India. A theoretical-political assessment of Maoism thus becomes necessary at this point.

CPI (Maoist): Strategy And Tactics

To begin with, let us hear what Maoists themselves have to say about their strategy and tactics.

According to the document Strategy and Tactics,

"In the concrete conditions of semi-colonial, semi-feudal India where bourgeois democratic revolution too has not been completed and uneven social, economic and political conditions exist, the objective conditions permit the proletarian party to initiate and sustain armed struggle in the vast countryside."

"... No peaceful period of preparation for revolution is required in India, unlike in the capitalist countries where the bourgeois democratic revolutions were completed and armed insurrection is the path of revolution."

Now, "semi-colonial, semi-feudal" - is this an immutable category with a set prescription for revolution applicable equally to pre-revolutionary China and present-day India? Don't you see the enormous changes in Indian countryside - let alone urban areas - since Naxalbari, not to speak of the differences with China as it was some 70-80 years back?

"... No peaceful period of preparation is required"! On what ground do you base this assessment? And how do you propose to work in towns, cities and easily accessible plain areas which have strong enemy networks, and where the masses, while engaging in 'drab everyday struggles', is not yet ready for an armed showdown with the state? Actually you don't know, and that is why you do not and cannot work in these areas.

In your schematic understanding, nationwide armed insurrection is prescribed for countries which have completed the democratic revolution, and the path of protracted war for countries where this revolution has not taken place and which are characterised by strong feudal survivals, uneven development etc. Now, many — though not all — of the latter features were present in Russia (e.g., democratic revolution was not completed before February 1917) but Bolsheviks went in for insurrection. Can't you think of an Indian path of revolution which may have ingredients of revolutionary experiences in Russia, China and maybe other countries but based mainly on the present characteristics of Indian society and polity?

Your General Secretary says in an interview in *Open magazine*, October 2009, "...it is true that our movement is stronger in the forests than in the plains and urban areas. This focus is linked to our

path ... of protracted people's war. ... But, it is not correct to say that we have ignored the plain areas." Good that you have a strong presence in forest areas, but would you please tell us in which "plains and urban areas" you have a "movement"? Why can't you honestly say that your party line of singular emphasis on armed struggle does not provide any scope for such work?

In your opinion "boycott of elections, though a question of tactics," (this is your concession to old-fashioned Leninism) "acquires the significance of strategy in the concrete conditions obtaining in India" (here you develop Leninism to the higher stage of your Maoism!). In other words, permanent boycott in a permanent revolutionary situation! It is futile to engage in serious theoretical debates with you; however we must put the historical record straight.

"The Biggest Grab of Tribal Lands after Columbus"

A civil war like situation has gripped the southern districts of Bastar, Dantewara and Bijapur in Chattisgarh. The contestants are the armed squads of tribal men and women of the erstwhile Peoples War Group now known as the Communist Party of India (Maoist) on the one side and the armed tribal fighters of the Salwa Judum created and encouraged by the government and supported by the firepower and organization of the central police forces. This open declared war will go down as the biggest land grab ever, if it plays out as per the script. The drama is being scripted by Tata Steel and Essar Steel who wanted 7 villages or thereabouts, each to mine the richest lode of iron ore available in India. There was initial resistance to land acquisition and displacement from the tribals. The state withdrew its plans under fierce resistance. ... A new approach came about with the Salwa Judum, euphemistically meaning peace hunt. Ironically the Salwa Judum was led by Mahendra Karma, elected on a Congress ticket and the Leader of the Opposition, supported whole heartedly by the BJP led government. ... Behind them are the traders, contractors and miners waiting for a successful result of their strategy. The first financiers of the Salwa Judum were Tata and the Essar in the quest for "peace". ... 640 villages as per official statistics were laid bare, burnt to the ground and emptied with the force of the gun and the blessings of the state. 350,000 tribals, half the total population of Dantewada district are displaced, their womenfolk raped, their daughters killed, and their youth maimed. Those who could not escape into the jungle were herded together into refugee camps run and managed by the Salwa Judum. Others continue to hide in the forest or have migrated to the nearby tribal tracts in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. 640 villages are empty. Villages sitting on tons of iron ore are effectively de-peopled and available for the highest bidder. The latest information that is being circulated is that both Essar Steel and Tata Steel are willing to take over the empty landscape and manage the mines."

Draft Report of "Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Task of Land Reforms" under Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, VOL. I [\[5\]](#)

First, Lenin showed in *Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder* that the question of participation or boycott is in no way related to the "degree of reactionariness" (to borrow a phrase from Lenin) of a particular parliament. Incidentally, the Russian Duma, which the Tsar convened and disbanded at will and which was as a rule dominated by Black Hundreds and other reactionary elements (thanks also to the patently anti-poor curia system) was arguably much more reactionary and impotent than our parliament.

Second, Lenin showed in the above pamphlet as well as in numerous other works like *Against Boycott* that under normal circumstances participation is almost obligatory for communists. It should also be noted that, out of about a dozen occasions, Bolsheviks boycotted elections only twice: once correctly (1905) and on the other occasion (in 1906) it was a small tactical mistake (as Lenin reckoned later). On all other occasions, even during the high tide before November Revolution and immediately after (in the elections to Constituent Assembly), they participated.

Third, the argument that participation in elections and parliaments have led to degeneration of many parties invites the retort that espousal of armed struggle too is known to have had the same effect on many armed groups/parties in India and abroad. Blaming a particular form of struggle for degeneration betrays a very superficial way of looking at things and has nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism.

We know you are in no mood to listen to all this 'revisionist' logic. We also know what you actually do during election times. About that, later on.

In sum, the whole thrust of your strategy and tactics and therefore your activities is premised on the illusion that as in China during 1930s and 1940s, here too "armed revolution is confronting armed counterrevolution". You visualise a permanent revolutionary situation. You do not know how to build approach roads to revolution, how to work patiently among the masses, taking their existing level of consciousness and activism as your point of departure and step by step raising that level through all forms of struggle, mainly extra-parliamentary but not excluding parliamentary forms, so as to gradually change the balance of class forces, which invariably gets reflected in people's heightened consciousness and organisation, towards a mature revolutionary situation. You are ignorant of the essence of revolutionary tactics:

"Marxist tactics consist in combining the different forms of struggle, in the skilful transition from one form to another, in steadily enhancing the consciousness of the masses and extending the area of their collective action, each of which, taken separately, may be aggressive or defensive, and all of which, taken together, lead to a more intense and decisive conflict." [6]

Incapable of grasping such revolutionary dialectics of the proletariat in theory, Maoists can only indulge in petty bourgeois revolutionism in their practical activities, as we shall see in our coming instalments where we examine their genesis and modus operandi.

4 Letter to the *EPW*, November 7, 2009

* *Liberation*, Year 2009, Dec 09.

Part II

Commentators have romanticised, eulogised and demonised 'Maoism' in many superficial ways; the point however is to appropriately assess this important trend and develop a correct political approach to it.

In the first part we showed that the Central as well as State governments are using the state-Maoist confrontation as a pretext to suppress people's struggles on basic issues and crush the resistance against the state-sponsored corporate plunder of the country's resources; from the standpoint of this broader movement we then started an investigation into the theory and practice of 'Maoism' in India. Let us move ahead.

Maoist Boycott: Participation by Other Means

Lenin opposed “passive rejection, abstention, evasion of elections” and advocated “active boycott... as a declaration of open war against the old regime, a direct attack upon it”, immediately adding, “unless there is a broad revolutionary upswing, unless there is no mass unrest which overflows, as it were, the bounds of the old legality, there can be no question of the boycott succeeding.” [7]

Really, there is no question of the boycott tactic succeeding — in a Leninist sense — in conditions generally obtaining in present-day India. But our clever friends have found a way to claim success. They want us to believe that the passive abstention of a large section of the people from elections shows that their boycott slogan is correct, conveniently forgetting that people who do not go to the polling booths are not generally involved in any “broad revolutionary upswing”. Going by their logic, the weapon of boycott would seem to be more successful in those advanced capitalist countries where polling percentages are even lower!

However, to themselves they concede that the importance of Parliament and State legislatures as the seat of political power cannot be wished away and that they too have a stake in which party forms government. So they cannot avoid taking part in electoral politics. But they do so in their own distorted ways: indirectly, secretly, conspiratorially, usually by supporting one reactionary party against some narrowly conceived “main enemy” — another reactionary or “revisionist” party.

This tactic-turned-strategy was most ‘successfully’ implemented in Andhra Pradesh in the 2004 assembly elections. They enforced one-sided boycott on TDP and BJP while canvassing in favour of Congress candidates and the ‘success’ lay in the fact that Chandrababu Naidu, whom they had earlier tried to eliminate by pure ‘Maoist’ means, was now removed from power by parliamentary means and a friendly Congress government installed. It is another matter though that after some apparent progress in the talks that ensued, the friend suddenly turned hostile and launched a repressive campaign even more ferocious than that of Chandrababu Naidu.

In Bihar, during the Laloo era Maoists were widely known as “RJD during the day and Maoists by night”. In many places they used to mobilise votes and manage booths in favour of RJD candidates while trying to damage the prospects of rival contestants, ML nominees in particular. Acting in collusion with the then ruling RJD and the local police administration, they attacked the CPI (ML) office at Paliganj, Bihar, in August 2004 — barely 6 months before the February 2005 assembly elections — killing five comrades in their sleep at the dead of night and officially justified the killings.

In Jharkhand, where the erstwhile MCC already had a long and nasty record of killing our comrades, CPI (Maoist) squads allowed themselves to be utilised by the ruling BJP and the notorious SP of Giridih in gunning down comrade Mahendra Singh during election campaign in January 2005.

Such examples in their stronger areas have been replicated even in West Bengal in a somewhat different manner as demanded by the very different conditions obtaining there. They have had clandestine local level deals with both the CPI(M) and the Trinamool Congress (mostly with the latter) in different areas at different times to suit their own convenience. In many CPI(M) strongholds including Nandigram and other areas they used their firepower to clear the ground for the entry of TMC; subsequently too, they have trained their guns mainly on CPI(M) cadres. The Maoists have even gone beyond this to express their open preference for Mamata Banerjee in no uncertain terms. In September this year Kolkata’s Ananda Bazaar Patrika and some other dailies published Politburo member Kishenjee’s detailed views on why he thought Mamata Banerjee was the fittest person to replace Buddhadev Bhattacharya as the Chief Minister. In recent months Ms Banerjee, now that her purpose has been served and she finds herself within striking distance from

the coveted seat of power in West Bengal, has started distancing herself from Maoists; but that only proves her cunning – not any principled position on the part of CPI (Maoist).

Even if we set aside the aspect of secretive, indirect participation, abstention from politics – particularly from participation in elections – always boils down to subordination of the working people to bourgeois politics and constitutes a basic feature of anarchism. This is so because you just cannot cut yourself off from crosscurrents of dominant politics of the day, which can only be bourgeois politics in present conditions. And this subordination can happen in either of two ways: when the masses are left to the mercy of bourgeois electoral propaganda alone (since the ‘revolutionary party’ is absent from the scene) or when the latter, rather than fielding its own candidates and contesting independently, supports parties like RJD or Congress with an eye to some temporary gains for itself. The Maoists are masters of both methods.

The utter Maoist indifference to the task of combating bourgeois politics with revolutionary politics, especially in the arena of elections, can also be seen in the emerging phenomenon of ‘ex-Maoists’ joining the electoral fray in Jharkhand. It started initially as Maoists contesting the polls as independent candidates before Kameshwar Baitha, an erstwhile commander contested on BSP ticket from Palamau LS (SC) seat in a by-poll in 2006. Baitha finished second in that election and in 2009 he contested as a Congress-backed JMM nominee and won the polls. The Assembly polls in November-December 2009 saw a whole contingent of Maoist leaders contesting the polls in the state, most notably in the Palamau region, and almost all of them are JMM nominees. In the 2009 LS election we had put up a former Maoist leader from the Chatra LS constituency, but by the time of Assembly election we found him migrating to the RJD!

The CPI(M) too caters to the same subordination of the working class to bourgeois politics by means of all sorts of pacts with the latter, but they do so often with a different set of logic, like defeating the ‘main enemy’ and securing a few seats in the process, whereas Maoists want quid-pro-quo with dominant local leaders/major state parties/state governments. Subordination to bourgeois politics thus expresses itself both as social democratic parliamentary cretinism and anarchist “boycottism” (to borrow once again from Lenin, who said ‘left’ phrase mongers reduced the politics of Bolshevism to this narrow concept), with the CPI(M) taking pride in having the longest-running state government or the biggest contingent of left MPs (never mind the recent reversals) and the CPI (Maoist) complimenting itself for upholding what is commonly perceived as one of the most distinct hallmarks of pure, unadulterated Naxalism.

But this is a patently superficial and one-sided perception. Depending on assessment of situation, Charu Mazumdar advocated utilization of elections for the sake of revolutionary advance and he called for a boycott when that assessment changed radically. In the penultimate article of his celebrated Eight Documents written less than six months before the Naxalbari uprising he asked revolutionary communists “to take advantage of these elections to propagate our politics... the politics of New Democratic Revolution... of worker-peasant unity under working class leadership, of armed struggle ...” [8]

After the first UF government was formed, he wrote: “communists may join an alternative government with only one purpose – to create conditions for launching movements, and not to protect or uphold constitutional obligations. But if, instead of advancing along this path, calls for struggle are given on one hand and on the other the owning classes are assured that they have nothing to fear, the whole perspective of the struggle gets lost. The target of struggle itself gets blurred. This line inevitably leads to the path of class collaboration.” [9] Clearly, he was not against participation in an alternative government on principle; his debate was on how to utilise such government for the advancement of class struggle.

It was only before the mid-term elections that was held after the implosion of the first UF government, that CM advanced the slogan of boycott. In late 1968, with the CPI(M) spreading constitutional illusions under the slogan of another UF government and communist revolutionaries longing for a direct assault on the state in a context of rapid upswing of revolutionary peasant movement, the question of choice of the path of struggle assumed decisive importance. The latter, much like Russian Bolsheviks in 1905, felt it necessary to fight constitutional illusions “with the utmost demonstrativeness. And that meant refusing to take part, abstaining oneself and holding the people back, issuing a call for an assault on the old regime instead of working within the framework of an institution set up by that regime.” [10] On behalf of AICCR, CM wrote:

“In the present era when imperialism is heading towards total collapse, revolutionary struggle in every country has taken the form of armed struggle; Soviet revisionism, unable to retain its mask of socialism, has been forced to adopt imperialist tactics; world revolution has entered a new higher phase; and socialism is marching irrepressibly forward to victory ... the slogans ‘boycott elections’ and ‘establish rural bases and create areas of armed struggle’ ... remain valid for the entire era.” [11]

Boycott elections and build base areas/areas of arms struggle – this integrated call was clearly premised on the assumed existence of a whole era of worldwide revolutionary upswing and rapid advance of socialism. This arguably proved to be a case of overestimation, but the lesson that must be learnt here is that the tactic of boycott is premised on the assessment of situation and employed not negatively but as a positive weapon so as to lead the people along a more direct course of action towards seizure of power. But to delink the boycott tactic from these basic conditions or to imagine that such conditions obtain permanently in a country like India is a clear travesty of Marxism-Leninism, or Maoism if you will. Ostrich like, our Maoist friends bury their heads in the sands of the past because they lack the political courage to wield the difficult weapon of parliamentary struggle and continue to play with the great Leninist tactic of boycott.

This does not mean that communists should opt for the polar opposite – the parliamentary path. It is entirely possible and absolutely imperative to keep up the revolutionary spirit and uphold the revolutionary perspective even while participating in elections and waging parliamentary battles, as Lenin observed after the failure of the first Russian Revolution of 1905: “since the accursed counter-revolution has driven us into this accursed pigsty [the Duma – AS], we shall work there too for the benefit of the revolution, without whining, but also without boasting.”[i]

It is in this spirit that true heirs to the legacy of undivided CPI(ML) has been developing a principled policy framework for parliamentary struggle: (a) take parliamentary forms of struggle as supplementary and subservient to extra-parliamentary forms, (b) participate in elections for the basic purpose of organizing powerful political campaigns with a view to projecting alternative policies in different spheres and heightening the political assertion of the working people as an independent force, (c) measure success mainly by our ability to integrate our election campaign with the basic movement of the people and raise the level of popular mobilization (d) where elected, raise the voice of popular movements within these bodies (from panchayats up to the parliament) and play the role of revolutionary democratic opposition vis-à-vis higher authorities, (e) reserve the boycott tactics for exceptional circumstances marked by, inter alia, an unmistakable upswing in revolutionary struggle.

Left Sectarian Concept of Mass Organisations and Mass Movements

Right from comrade Kanai Chatterjee in late 1960s through comrade Seetaramaiya in early 1980s to the present leadership of CPI(Maoist), this stream has repeatedly stressed the importance of mass organizations and criticized the undivided CPI(ML) for neglecting these. The MCC for example,

organized the Nari Mukti Sangh, the Revolutionary Peasants Committee etc in late 1970s; but these never developed beyond being rather decorative appendages to the parent body, observing a few commemorative days like the International women's Day, Workers' Day or November Revolution Day etc. The CPI(ML) PW made a more promising start by developing powerful mass movements under banners like the Rayathu Kuli Sangham (an organization of the rural poor), the Radical Students Union and so on. Through these it developed a broad mass base and a strong cadre force, but the good practice was aborted before long. As K Balagopal later pointed out, in the face of repression they underwent a political shift that would prove fatal. They made armed squads "the focal point of the activity" instead of "exposing the anti-poor bias of the government and extend[ing] their mass activity to a point that would have given their aspiration for state power a solid mass base". One consequence of this was "The people for their part have come to look up to the squads as a substitute for their own struggle for justice. This has, on the one hand, created more enemies - victims of revolutionary arbitrariness - than they need have made, and, on the other, corrupted the masses into receivers of justice rather than fighters for it." [12]

The theoretical foundation of such lapse into anarchism is to be found in the Maoist document "Strategy and Tactics". It talks of a wide array of mass organizations from "strictly underground revolutionary mass organizations" to "legal democratic organizations" to "cover organizations", but only from a narrow militarist standpoint:

"While recognising the importance of mass organisations and mass struggles, we have to also keep in mind that in the revolution as a whole, it is war or armed struggle against state, that will be the main form of struggle and the army the main form of organisation. ... from the very beginning, our orientation, perspective and the method of building mass organisations and mass struggles should be to serve the war directly or indirectly."

Well, perhaps such perception would be valid in pre-revolutionary China, but superimposing it on present Indian conditions betrays an obsession with war, i.e., partisan armed action against the state and/or the ruling party isolated from the natural objective course of peasant struggle and other popular movements. This has been most glaringly borne out in Lalgarh.

The CPI(Maoist) admits that the people's movement in Lalgarh was a spontaneous one and the party "played the role of a catalyst." [Ganapathy's interview in Open magazine, October 2009.] Ganapathy also said "The people of Lalgarh had even boycotted the recent Lok Sabha polls, thereby unequivocally demonstrating their anger and frustration with all the reactionary ruling class parties."

This second claim is a naked lie. The adivasis, like people in Nandigram, were eager to vote, but without letting the hated police in their villages. So on their behalf the People's Committee proposed that booths must be set up outside the villages where police boycott was still on. The government had to concede this demand and the people voted en masse, with the authorities providing free transport.

And what was this "role of catalyst"?

Like peasants in Singur and Nandigram who rose in arms against state-sponsored corporate land grab, adivasis in Lalgarh revolted against police atrocities demanding apology from and punishment for guilty officials. As in Nandigram, tens of thousands of women and men with their traditional weapons actively created their own liberated zone of sorts, very different from Maoist guerrilla zones that exist on the strength of firearms of guerrilla squads. It is this mass dimension that placed Lalgarh in the proud category of Singur and Nandigram and earned for it great support from all corners of India and abroad. What Maoists managed to do was to take over the reins of the

movement from the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA) and mark it with typical Maoist features like serial killings, often with barbaric features such as murdering a teacher in front of schoolchildren, leaving the body of a slain CPI(M) cadre rot under the sun for days together; and so on. In the process, much of the movement's broad democratic appeal was lost and its distinct political voice muted, while the state government found what it was looking for: a pretext for launching the crackdown. The valiant adivasi masses are still carrying on their struggle against the state-centre joint para-military campaign, but unless the movement can free itself from the Maoist stereotype and find its independent political voice, we are afraid it stands the risk of being eventually subsumed by the ruling class agenda, whether in the name of "restoration of law and order" or "delivering development and good governance".

Destroying the spontaneous dynamism of the masses in the name of armed struggle goes against Mao's revolutionary mass line and constitutes the root cause why Maoists can never build real broad mass organizations; Lalgarh proves this once again.

Maoist Modus Operandi

Of late, we are hearing a lot about Maoist development work. For example, in Dandakaranya region of Chhattisgarh they have helped the poor build irrigation tanks and wells. Such work has been compared to Gandhian constructive work/work of "good NGOs" and bestowed with generous praise from well-meaning reformist quarters and official circles [13]. However, this particular strand cannot be judged separately from Maoist praxis as a whole, and surely the main thrust or USP (unique selling point) of Maoist politics is not grassroots development work but sensational actions — the kidnappings, political killings, raids on police stations, destruction of soft targets like unguarded railway stations and tracks and so on. This brand of politics runs, and can only run, on a vast network of extortion economics. Huge levy or tax is regularly collected from all kinds of sources in their areas of operation: from contractors and brick kiln owners to tendu leaves merchants and other industrialists and businessmen, from illegal forest product dealers and coal and iron ore miners to corporate houses and bureaucrats. With manifold increase in flow of funds into rural areas for various development schemes, Maoists now find it convenient to share a slice of this development cake too. The dependence on big amounts of money runs contrary to the cardinal revolutionary principle of reliance on the people, a key tenet in the example set by the CPC under Mao's leadership in the course of the victorious Chinese revolution.

Even if the big amounts gathered through extortion is sought to be legitimized as 'tax', the problem is, by paying 'tax' the vested interests earn a license to loot and exploit, and a patron-client relation often develops between them and the 'tax' collector, and the masses are inevitably discouraged, even restricted, from launching movements against the exploiters. Maoist sensationalism thus flourishes at the cost of class struggle and adds to their coercive power and 'authority'. In the past, clashes between MCC, PWG and PU were a routine affair; even now internecine clashes among squads belonging to the unified party are occasionally reported, especially from Jharkhand and Bihar. It is such pecuniary interests again which prompts them to try and obstruct the entry of other Left parties in what they consider their fiefdoms. Our party has had a bitter experience of this sectarian exclusiveness – of direct engagement with Maoists. In the next part of this article we would like to share this experience with our readers.

Maoism or Anarcho-militarism?

The outline sketch of India's Maoism attempted above leads us to characterize it as a negation of Marxism-Leninism, a caricature of Mao Zedong Thought, and a deviation from the revolutionary legacy of CPI(ML) – as anarcho-militarism. We believe this characterisation traces so-called "Maoism" back to its basic ideological roots (anarchism) and at the same time brings out its most

important specific feature or manifestation (militarism).

Anarchism, broadly defined as a political philosophy encompassing theories and attitudes which consider the state or compulsory government to be unnecessary and/or undesirable, has been in existence within and without the arena of working class movement for a very long time. The most influential proponent of anarchism within the International Working Men's Association (First International) was Russia's Bakunin. He held that abolition of the bourgeois state was the immediate task, which the workers were to carry out not by forming a workers' party, not by political struggle, but by 'direct action'. In the words of Engels, "... since for Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can keep the state... alive. Hence complete abstention from all politics. To commit a political act, especially to take part in an election, would be a betrayal of principle...." [14]

After the historic defeat it suffered at the hands of Marx and Engels in the First International, it was no longer possible for anarchism to reappear as a wing of the working-class movement in its pristine countenance. But in newer forms it continued to resurface again and again as a disruptive trend that negates or neglects the role of protracted mass political work as a condition for the attainment of a revolutionary goal.

"Anarchism is bourgeois individualism in reverse.... Anarchism is a product of despair. [It is the] psychology of the unsettled intellectual or the vagabond and not of the proletariat ... Failure to understand the class struggle of the proletariat. Absurd negation of politics in bourgeois society. ...Failure to understand the role of the organisation and the education of the workers. ...Panaceas consisting of one-sided, disconnected means. ...Subordination of the working class to bourgeois politics in the guise of negation of politics." — [15]

In Russia for example, anarcho-syndicalists rejected "petty work", especially the utilisation of the parliamentary platform, and held that workers could capture factories and seize power through trade unions without a disciplined proletarian party. Other ultra-left trends also got mixed up with anarchism to produce various shades of "petty bourgeois semi-anarchist (or dilettante-anarchist) revolutionism" and Lenin summed up the experience of his lifelong struggle against such trends in 'Left-Wing' Communism — An Infantile Disorder. One of the most concise descriptions of anarchism is to be found in his theses contrasting anarchism against Marxism (see box).

In China as in Russia, the Communist Party found itself engaged in a continuous "struggle on two fronts" — against both right and 'left' opportunism or in other words against "rightist pessimism" and "left impetuosity". In the article On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party Mao writes about "various non-proletarian ideas", the first and foremost being "the purely militarist viewpoint". This viewpoint, says he, "regard[s] military affairs and politics as opposed to each other and refuse to recognize that military affairs are only one means of accomplishing political tasks. Some even say, 'if you are good militarily, you are good politically; if you are not good militarily, you cannot be any good politically' — this is to go a step further and give military affairs a leading position over politics....

"The sources of the purely military viewpoint are... a low political level... the mentality of

mercenaries... overconfidence in military strength and absence of confidence in the strength of the masses of the people..." (emphases added; notice the similarity with our 'Maoists')

Mao also takes note of alien ideas like "subjectivism", "disregard of organisational discipline", "the ideology of roving rebel bands" and "remnants of putschism". The most important manifestation of putschism, he says, is "blind action regardless of subjective and objective conditions", adding that "in its social origins, putschism is a combination of lumpen-proletarian and petty bourgeois ideology."

This is how, in different ways in different climes and times, "petty bourgeois revolutionism, which smacks of anarchism, or borrows something from the latter" (Lenin in *Left-Wing Communism*) tends to get mixed up with other alien tendencies and crop up "in somewhat new forms, in a hitherto unfamiliar garb or surroundings" (ibid), posing ever newer challenges to revolutionary Marxism. In the peculiar historical and social setting of our country, anarchism has evolved with a pronounced militarist overtone, compelling us to call them anarcho-militarists.

This characterization does not in the least deny that the CPI(Maoist) strikes a chord of sympathy and support among a section of students and intellectuals with revolutionary leanings. As Engels pointed out, anarchist propaganda "sounds extremely radical and is so simple that it can be learnt by heart in five minutes; that is why the Bakuninist theory has speedily found favour in Italy and Spain among young lawyers, doctors, and other doctrinaires. But the mass of workers will never allow itself to be persuaded..." [16] This is true for the Indian working class also. However, Maoism has a wide support base among some most marginalized sections, especially adivasis, among whom they have been working with great persistence over a long time. In their main areas of work they sometimes mobilize hundreds or a few thousands of people in their militant programs. For all this, they remain anarchists — in their abstention from mainstream politics, i.e. capitulation to bourgeois politics, especially during election times; aloofness from the available democratic space and fetishization of the underground; refusal to form/work in democratically functioning mass organisations; terrorist actions, including attempts on the lives of Chief Ministers, which take us back to the early phase of revolutionary terrorism in India's freedom movement.

This is about the general political content of anarchism. As for the concrete manifestation in the form of militarism, it appears and reappears, in the full glare of media publicity, as a series of sensational military actions and, in theory, as feudal-bourgeois warmongering in reverse, as an exclusively militarist understanding and articulation of the whole gamut of strategy and tactics, as a doctrine of subordination of everything to a war in permanence.

Overall, the most crucial characteristics noted by Lenin in the boxed quotation should be easily discernible to anyone familiar with Indian Maoists: individualistic work style of dalams and federative nature of the organization (much like anarcho-syndicalism, where sections of workers and their trade unions worked under separate controls) with state and regional units operating autonomously in matters of extortions, executions etc, leading to frequent cases of "mistakes" admitted later by top leaders (as in the case of Francis Indwar murder in Jharkhand and attacks on polling officials in Chhattisgarh); reckless actions causing unnecessary inconvenience, even death, to common people ; acts of heroism frequently interspersed with cases of surrender and betrayals leading to arrests of senior leaders (like Kobad Ghandy) and major losses caused by adventurism (as in Andhra Pradesh); the exclusive panacea of squad actions — which they use not only to settle scores with class enemies and the state but also to settle political debates with communist revolutionaries (recall numerous cases of murderous attacks on our comrades, including one on the house of comrade Nagbhusan Patnaik) and so on. These features unmistakably bring out the class character of anarchism: despair and desperation of "a petty bourgeois driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism" [17].

But did not the CPI(Maoist) evolve from within the revolutionary communist movement? Yes it did, and only through a process crystallized into the present shape of fully fledged anarcho-militarism trend. The course of this evolution we plan to discuss in the last part of this article.

viii The lack of concern for people's lives stood out in an interview of Politburo Member Bimal with Mint (22 June, 2009):

Mint: A lot of civilians might die in the crossfire. Wouldn't you be morally responsible for those killed?

Bimal: In a war, there are no civilians – there are people either on your side or against you.

* *Liberation, Year 2010, Jan 2010.*

Part III

We promised to share with readers the experience of our encounter with Maoists in different parts of the country in this issue. Due to some unavoidable reasons, we are saving that for the fourth and last installment, taking up here the story of evolution of Maoist anarchism.

In part II we have seen how the historic conflict and overlap between anarchism (understood in the sense or senses in which founders of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought encountered it in their practical work, that is in the course of organising the working people for revolution, and hence also in theory, as outlined above) and revolutionary Marxism – or more generally between petty bourgeois and proletarian revolutionisms – took different shapes in different countries. Let us now survey the Indian scene.

Genealogy of 'Maoism' in India

Anti-British terrorist/anarchist trends in India, like those against Tsarist autocracy in Russia, were in existence well before the foundation of Communist Party of India. Later most of these forces joined the CPI. Following a short spell of left adventurism under BT Ranadive (1948-50) and then a few years of centrist ambivalence, the party adopted a right opportunist line of parliamentary cretinism. Rebellion against this led to the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964. In the wake of the Naxalbari uprising (May 1967), revolutionaries came out in numerous groups all over the country and joined forces first in the AICCCR (May 1968) and then the CPI(ML) (April 1969). The only major group that stood apart from both was the Dakshin Desh group (so named after a Bengali magazine published by it), which became the Maoist Communist Centre in October 1969. Gradually – and after the setback of early 1970s, increasingly rapidly – it abandoned mass peasant struggles for squad activities mainly in forest and mountainous regions even as they spread beyond West Bengal. Later on certain like-minded groups joined them, such as the Punjab-based Revolutionary Communist Party and the "Second CC" in 2003, leading to the formation of Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI).

While this original 'Maoist' body remained the main vehicle of ultra left/anarchist activities, similar trends emerged within and around the CPI(ML) also. This occurred in three distinct phases: in the wake of Naxalbari; following the setback of early 1970s; and since the 1980s.

Upsurge and 'Left-Wing' Communism

In one of his most celebrated classics, Lenin showed how left adventurist trends emerged in course of struggle against right opportunism during the formative period of communist parties in different countries ('Left-wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder) at the end of the second decade of the

20th century. He saw this as a normal teething trouble (“infantile disorder”) that could lead to catastrophic consequences unless cured in time. A similar phenomenon was to be observed in our country too during the formative years of the CPI(ML).

Charu Mazumdar (CM), the founder of CPI(ML), developed a clearly cut-out proletarian connotation or framework of agrarian revolution: build concentrated areas of anti-feudal peasant movement and extensively propagate the total politics of seizure of power; establish the leadership of landless and poor peasants – as the vehicle of proletarian leadership on peasant struggle – and rely on them rather than on party organisers from petty bourgeois background for unleashing militant peasant movement; encourage peasants to arm themselves with locally available weapons rather than sophisticated fire arms; combine different forms of struggle – mass seizure of crops, for instance – with armed attacks on class enemies and the state; and so on. [18]

CM cautioned comrades against the dangers of isolation from broad masses and the national mainstream if base areas were to be built in mountainous or forest regions and drove home the need and feasibility of developing bases in the plains. On this question, as on many others, he was keen on developing the distinct features of an Indian path of revolution. With a rapid surge in the revolutionary movement, he came to place more and more emphasis on the fight against anarchist ideas and practices such as militarism and infatuation with “actions”. When students and the youth in Calcutta were celebrating the festival of revolution in their own – often adventurist – ways, CM personally met and placed before them “only one task: go among workers and [19]

“Annihilation of Class Enemies”

However, the volcanic eruption of the pent-up revolutionary energies of the toiling millions led by revolutionary communists was naturally not free from ‘left’ excesses (it is these – not the whole upsurge – that we have called “left-wing communism”). This found concentrated expression in what was called the line of “annihilation of class enemies”. Emerging as a new form of struggle in the heat of Srikakulam peasant movement, it sought to combine, with some success, the beginnings of armed struggle with broad mass mobilisation. In certain pockets this led to the formation of peasant squads, mass upsurges and some agrarian reform measures. The valuable experience thus gained would subsequently help build sustained armed peasant struggle in Bhojpur and neighbouring regions in central Bihar. But in many areas annihilation was wrongly conducted as a “campaign”, with a lot of indiscriminate and unnecessary killings, in the process getting isolated from peasants’ class struggle. These were serious left deviations that did tremendous harm to the people and revolution. However, factors like overestimation of the revolutionary situation, generalising the form of struggle suitable for some areas for every corner of the country out of subjective wishes, infancy of the party and impetuosity on the part of the leadership as a reaction to revisionist betrayal, prevented us from taking corrective measures and the infantile disorder grew into a fatal disease with the first CPI(ML) Congress (May 1970) declaration that “Class struggle, i.e., annihilation will solve all our problems”. CM later realised that annihilation had been taken too far and tried to formulate a policy of organised retreat in the shape of a militant united front of labouring people, particularly people under the influence of Left parties, against the Congress regime [20]. But a planned and orderly retreat could not be organized because, first, the retreat was still supposed to be a very temporary phenomenon and secondly, because the policy and methods of retreat were not clearly formulated in terms of various forms of struggle and organisation. These tasks remained on the unfinished agenda of revolution when, with the martyrdom of CM, curtains finally came down on the first phase of the CPI(ML) movement.

Setback and Semi-Anarchism

Among the many splinter groups into which the CPI(ML) was split after the total setback of 1971-72,

there emerged three distinct trends or approaches on the question of evaluating the past and charting a course for the future. The first to emerge from the underground and carve out a niche for itself in the post-emergency democratic space was the Provisional Central Committee (PCC) led by SNS – an erstwhile PB member who in the name of fighting left deviation advocated unity with rich peasants in 1970 and in 1977 worked out a deal with Charan Singh, the then union home Minister, asking Naxalite prisoners to come out of jails by signing bonds abjuring violence. The organization built up largely on the basis of this ‘tactical’ surrender soon surrendered the banner of revolutionary Marxism. As this group happily abandoned all efforts of building revolutionary peasant struggle, Kanu Sanyal, who had the honour of announcing the foundation of CPI(ML) on 1 May 1970, now declared that the party foundation itself was a mistake and to make amends, now founded the Communist Organization of India(ML). The first batch of “rectifiers” thus went down the liquidationist path.

At the opposite end of the Naxalite spectrum there were groups which stuck to the letter and forgot the spirit of the revolutionary line represented by Charu Mazumdar, refusing to recognize the change in balance of class forces or take any serious lessons from the setback. They fell back on the ‘left’ deviations, as it were, to bring back the revolutionary days simply by mimicking the past. Thus it was that petty bourgeois anarchist trends, which remained submerged in and indistinguishable from the overall upsurge, now crystallised into distinct formations like Mahadev Mukherjee’s group, the Second CC, COC (PU) (subsequently CPI(ML) Party Unity) etc. We called these groups semi-anarchist in the sense that they still had one foot back in the CPI(ML) tradition of anti-feudal struggle even as they were moving in the direction of progressively abandoning class struggle for sensational squad actions. The same was more or less true for the semi-anarchist group outside the CPI(ML) stream – the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC).

Reorganisation of CPI(ML) and the “Rectification Campaign”

Diametrically opposed to both these extremes, there was the party centre reorganized on the second anniversary of CM’s martyrdom (28 July, 1974), comprising comrades Jauhar (Subrata Dutta), Vinod Mishra and Swadesh Bhattacharya. The reorganization provided a new fillip to the armed peasant struggle, but persistence of old metaphysical ideas prevented us from formulating a comprehensive policy for developing mass movements. We suffered serious losses in different areas. In November ‘75 comrade Jauhar died fighting the enemy’s encirclement and suppression campaign in Bhojpur. Comrade Vinod Mishra then took over as the General Secretary. The Second Party Congress (February 1976) played an important role in uniting the revolutionary forces and in keeping alive the flame of revolutionary peasant struggle in the plains of Bihar in the face of enemy offensive during the emergency. But, as the Political-Organisational Report of our Third Party Congress pointed out, “Over this entire period of 1974-76, our main drawbacks consisted, firstly, in our failure to link up with the anti-Congress upsurge of students, youth, and all sections of people of Bihar (the leadership of this upsurge was later captured by JP and it degenerated into impotency) and secondly, in our failure, when the movement collapsed with the arrest of leaders and repression on the masses, to provide a new guideline to organise the remnant forces. Although we maintained the political line of building an anti-Congress united front and upheld our areas as models of the same, we could not link this with the actual anti-Congress mass upsurge. This so happened because we had a mechanical conception of the development of united front on the basis of what Comrade Charu Mazumdar had said and we refused to analyse the concrete way in which things were actually developing beyond that mechanical framework.” During the 1974-76 period, “heroic actions and great sacrifices notwithstanding, the line was clearly left-adventurist in character”, as comrade VM later noted. [21]

However, things did not stand still either in the party or in the society at large. “By 1976, the dialectics of practice had clashed violently with the metaphysics in theory and, given the required conditions, the Party was poised for a major change.” [22]The post-emergency watershed in national

life saw an explosion of democratic and opposition impulses in various forms and class dimensions. If the Janata Party became its big bourgeois tribune, the CPI(ML)(Liberation) emerged as the proletarian platform while the CPI(M) came up with its new project of formation of stable governments in states and “conclaves” with parties of bourgeois opposition at the centre. The inner-party campaign that enabled us to make this historic transition has been known as the rectification movement.

This movement or campaign started with the limited purpose of correcting wrong ideas and practices concerning armed units, but quickly developed into a full-fledged onslaught on the metaphysical viewpoint of dogmatism and perfectionism. This led to great changes in the party’s political and organisational lines. Mass organisations were built up on students’, workers’, peasants’ and other fronts, later brought together under the umbrella of Indian People’s Front (launched in April 1982).

Semi-Anarchism Crystallises into Anarcho-Militarism

Meanwhile, the semi-anarchist groups were going through a long and complex process of coming together and falling apart to give rise to several short-lived and few relatively stable combinations. The CPI(ML) People’s War (PWG for short) was founded in 1980. There was a long and tortuous course of three-way unity talks among MCCI, PWG and PU, frequently interrupted by internecine clashes including a “black chapter” (as the concerned organizations called it after the merger). In 1998 the PU merged with the PWG. Then in September 2004, the two “Maoist” formations merged to form the CPI(Maoist). The long process of centralization of semi-anarchist groups around two centres – the MCCI and PWG – was thus brought to culmination. The quantitative growth and enhanced strength led to a qualitative leap too: the unified body started its solitary journey tangentially away from the CPI(ML) trajectory as an anarcho-militarist current.

In an unprincipled attempt to satisfy the cadre of the two organisations, both Charu Majumdar and Kanai Chatterjee were projected as co-founders of the new party! The two leaders who in their lifetimes consciously and resolutely avoided uniting in a single party were now posthumously compelled to do so by their followers! The post of general secretary went to PWG’s comrade Ganapathy while the group agreed to drop the ML tag and with it the residual commitment to the CPI(ML) tradition, without, of course, saying it in so many words. The new organisation’s ideological-political orientation came to be fully dominated by the MCC brand of Maoism.

The primary immediate task announced by the new organisation in its first press communique was to transform the existing armed squads into a full-fledged People’s liberation Army (PLA) and the existing guerrilla zones into base areas. But the first task that the world actually saw it taking up was a truce with the Congress government in Andhra Pradesh, a ‘tactic’ that backfired before long. After losing much of their old bases in AP at the hands of the YSR government, which ironically they had helped to come to power, they concentrated their activities in relatively newer areas like Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, Koraput-Rayagada region in Orissa and the Bankura-Purulia-Medinipur belt in West Bengal.

‘Maoist’ Sect versus Revolutionary Communist Party

With their dogmatic adherence to the Chinese path, our Indian Maoists continue to negate the very essence of Mao’s method. Mao had to conduct a firm struggle against Chinese dogmatists, who despite severe losses were bent upon blindly copying the Russian model in Chinese conditions. The famous formulation of Mao on the integration of the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete conditions of China arose only in the course of this struggle. Our ‘Maoists’ gloss over the huge differences between Indian and Chinese conditions; and by upholding and absolutising one

part of Mao's teachings (political power growing out of a gun) in isolation from the other part (party, that is ideology and politics, commanding the gun), they in effect turn the whole thing upside down.

Similarly, from the rich experience of the application of Mao Zedong Thought in Telangana and Naxalbari-Srikakulam, they have isolated the armed dimension (the element of squad activities) from the mass dimension (the element of broad peasant movement). Whereas CM was no advocate of isolated and exclusive armed actions - for him the two key phrases were "integration with the landless rural poor" and "politics in command" - our Maoist friends have delinked the whole question of arms from this essential context and have thus moved beyond the purview of the CPI(ML). Perhaps this was why they found it necessary to choose new names to describe their ideology and organization.

In clear contrast to the anarcho-militarist trajectory of the Indian Maoists, our Party has boldly re-emerged as a frontline organisation of revolutionary communists, reclaiming and upholding the revolutionary legacy of now nearly nine decades of communist practice in India. Drawing on an expanding mass base and armed with a rich variety of struggles and organisations, we have effectively combated the sectarian conceptualization of "Naxalites" as a special kind of New Left current or a product of the cultural Revolution in China and repositioned the CPI(ML) in the mainstream of the Left movement in opposition to opportunists of all hues.

The wholesome development of our Party - of course this is not to forget the many weaknesses - has been based primarily on two things. First, our success in critically assimilating the lessons of the past, separating elements of petty bourgeois anarchism from proletarian revolutionary steadfastness, discarding the former and developing the latter. Second an open, honest, serious ideological struggle rather than factional manoeuvres as the key link in party building and gradually perfecting the system of democratic centralism. Over the last few decades this party culture has enabled us to protect the party from the intrusion of both rightist/liquidationist and 'left'/anarchist ideas and move forward through a series of readjustments in political line and policies with a united and consolidated party organisation.

** Liberation, Year 2010, Feb 2010.*

Part IV

The fourth and concluding part of our discussion is followed by an account of our experience of engaging with the Maoists in various states.

The UPA government is clearly preparing the ground for a full-scale intensification of Operation Green Hunt. To begin with, the government has embarked on a massive propagation of its new found doctrine of security which singles out Maoism as the biggest threat to national security. The government is also busy cobbling a grand political consensus around this doctrine and it has already achieved a good deal of success in this regard. If Narendra Modi is effusive in praising Chidambaram's clarity and firmness, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee too clearly speaks the same language as Chidambaram. For the sake of political convenience, Shibu Soren and Nitish Kumar may have skipped the February 9 meeting in Kolkata with Chidambaram and Buddhadeb, but the governments of Jharkhand and Bihar are very much part of the growing centre-state coordination on this issue.

Whoever is not ready to join this 'coalition of the willing' or dares question the wisdom of this approach is being branded a Maoist sympathizer. Time and again Chidambaram has blamed intellectuals and the civil society, bracketing them all with Maoists. It is not just a case of branding;

many are already being harassed, hounded out and persecuted in real life. The plight of Himanshu Kumar of Vanvasi Chetna Ashram of Bastar, a charkha-spinning practising Gandhian, whose Ashram in Chhattisgarh has been ransacked and razed to the ground, is a clear case in point. Fact-finding teams trying to make an independent assessment of the actual situation have all been debarred from visiting 'conflict zones' whether in Chhattisgarh or West Bengal. Meanwhile, the UAPA is being invoked on a daily basis to arrest people across the country and we already have the first case of custodial death under UAPA when journalist Swapan Dasgupta, a UAPA detainee in CPI(M)-ruled West Bengal, was left to die without timely and proper medical care.

The Maoists too seem to have stepped up their retaliatory response. In a major attack on the Eastern Frontier Rifles, Maoists raided and destroyed an EFR camp at Shilda (170 kilometers southwest of Kolkata), killing at least 24 EFR jawans and looting whatever arms and ammunitions were available at the camp. In another typical incident, Maoists abducted the BDO of Dalbhumgarh in Jharkhand, held him hostage for six days before finally releasing him in lieu of assurances by the Jharkhand government of a possible release of some Maoist detainees. As often in the past, it is however not just the state but the people too who are finding themselves at the receiving end of Maoist actions. In a dastardly attack on Phulwaria-Korasi village in Jamui district in Bihar, Maoists recently killed at least 12 people, including 2 women and a child and injured at least 50 villagers, most of them adivasis.

In the midst of this stepped up state-Maoist confrontation, both sides are also talking of talks. From time to time Chidambaram has been repeating his rhetorical offer of 'talks in 72 hours' which he first made in the Rajya Sabha in last December. If only Maoists 'abjured' violence for 72 hours, the Centre would invite Maoists for talks and also facilitate talks between Maoists and concerned state governments, says Chidambaram. The Maoists, on their part, have let it be known that they were ready for talks if only the government would release some of their key leaders and call off the ongoing operation. The Maoists have reportedly made a recent overture for a ceasefire for 72 days and talks. It is quite obvious that for talks to materialise, there has to be a conducive atmosphere and that can only be possible if there is at least a moratorium from both sides, a cease-fire and an end to the ongoing witch-hunt. This is what is desired by the progressive democratic opinion and the CPI(ML) has been and will remain consistent in advocating such a course.

Sections of the ruling classes are however openly advocating a military solution. For them, human rights, constitutional provisions and democratic conventions are just 'bogey' that must be ignored to push Operation Green Hunt to its logical conclusion. Many of them are citing Sri Lanka's war against LTTE as a relevant example. Demands have been raised for army deployment and even for invoking Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in all so-called "Maoist-affected" areas. The Indian Air Force has already been pressed into service in some states even as the Government of India claims it has refrained from deploying the army. Ideologues, architects and managers of a hard state are all working overtime and the footfalls of another Emergency can be heard all around. Progressive democratic forces will have to meet this challenge by heightening their vigilance and resistance. While resisting the Operation Green Hunt, progressive democratic forces must also question and reject the Maoists' exclusive emphasis on armed actions. The neo-liberal policies and especially the corporate plunder of our precious natural and human resources have generated tremendous amount of mass resentment across the country. Whether it is the rural poor's struggle for land, wages and survival or outburst of farmers' anger against corporate acquisition of agricultural land or distress sale of agricultural produce, student unrest against commercialization and privatization of education or struggle of dalits, adivasis and women for dignity and equality, the demand for separate states or for withdrawal of draconian laws, the country is witnessing powerful mass struggles in almost all states. The Maoists have no policy of participating in or advancing these struggles except by armed means. When it comes to the political, especially electoral arena, Maoists have no independent agenda of intervention and everywhere they allow themselves to be used by dominant parties for the

latter's own electoral gains. And even in the Maoists' own arena of armed actions, there are examples galore of killing of activists and leaders of contending political parties as well as common people (as in the most recent incident of Phulwaria massacre in Bihar), and attacks on buses and trains and railway stations and tracks which more than anything add to the misery of the masses.

Experience shows that no movement in India has succeeded in achieving its goals by such one-dimensional means and by negating the political process. Take the example of the armed nationality movements in the North-East. Far from challenging or curbing the political hegemony of the ruling classes, these armed forces find themselves helplessly trapped in the political design of the Indian state. In Sri Lanka the LTTE, in spite of its strong historical roots, massive military prowess and undeniable popular support, ultimately met with total defeat in the one-dimensional war it launched against the state.

Some people cite the experience of the Maoists in Nepal as an example of military strength turning into a political force in a favourable political situation and hope that the Maoists in India may achieve a similar feat. The contexts of Nepal and India are quite different. In Nepal the whole battle is for the establishment of a constitutional republic, a stage that India has long passed through. Even in Nepal, the process of transition from monarchy to a constitutional republic is proving to be quite tortuous and the Maoists are having to reassert their strength through renewed people's struggles. However, the Maoists in India are not even prepared to learn from the experience of Nepal and they have already rejected the experiment of their Nepali comrades.

While not disregarding the ultimate role of force as the midwife of any fundamental or radical social change, the political nature and grammar of the struggle of contending classes in modern society must be recognized. To put an end to the political hegemony of the ruling classes, the working people must assert themselves as an alternative and independent political force – they must develop an alternative discourse of people's power against the power and domination of capital. And this can be achieved only through wide-ranging initiatives and assertion of the people. There can be no shortcuts, no bypasses. Will the Indian Maoists ever realize this?

Today Left politics in India is poised for a new turn. The CPI(M)-led politics of 'Marxist' elitism and bourgeois respectability which revolves around compromise and capitulation vis-à-vis the ruling classes has all but collapsed on the soil of Bengal. Naturally, its projection on the all-India plane is also in for a serious crisis. The Left ground today can only be reclaimed through powerful struggles and initiatives in the democratic arena. For a resurgence of the Left we need a new realignment, a new model of fighting unity based on mass struggles. It remains to be seen how and to what extent this new situation is grasped, in theory and practice, by different Left trends in the country. And the future alone will tell us whether the Maoists too will come out of their orbit of one-dimensional theory and practice to reposition themselves as a constituent or participant in this new realignment of the Left.

* *Liberation, Year 2010, March 2010.*

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Footnotes

[1] "Will the mindset from the past change?" — *The Hindu*, Nov 8, 2009

[2] *The Telegraph*, November 17, 2009.

[3] Vol 6, Issue 42, dated October 24, 2009.

[4] See her article in *Mainstream*, October 31, 2009, where she also criticises the Maoists, saying they “always increase the resistance of the class enemy by their tactics and then claim there is no democratic space in the system.”

[5] The said committee was set up in January 2008 under the chairmanship of the then Union minister for rural development. The committee submitted its report in March this year to the present Union minister for rural development, and is now available as an official publication. The quotation is from Chapter IV of the report. (see

http://www.rd.ap.gov.in/IKPLand/MRD_Committee_Report_V_01_Mar_09.pdf)

The first armed campaign against Naxalites in this area — the ‘Jan Jagran Abhiyan’ — was started in 1991 by Mahendra Karma with the support of local traders and businessmen. After its collapse the second round, better known as Salwa Judum was started in June 2005, a day after Tata Steel signed a Rs 10,000 crore Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Chhattisgarh state government for opening a Steel plant in the Bastar region of the state.

[6] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 20, P 210.

[7] Against Boycott, Lenin, *Collected Works*, volume 13.

[8] This theoretical direction corresponds to what he did in practice when he contested the 1963 by- election from Siliguri constituency as a CPI candidate, he used the occasion to forcefully propagate the politics of armed struggle and to condemn the Indian government as aggressor against China, thus going directly against the party line. He was defeated, scoring only some 3000 and odd votes. Let us have a victory procession, he said, for it is a big achievement that so many people have voted for armed struggle and against the frenzy of chauvinism. The procession was duly organised.

[9] “Lessons of the Elections and the Responsibility of the True Marxist Leninists”, dated 3rd April’ 67.

[10] Against boycott, Lenin, *collected works*, volume 13.

[11] “Boycott Elections!” International Significance of the Slogan (*Liberation*, December 1968).

[12] Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh, *EPW*, July 22, 2006, emphasis added.

[13] See “Report of an Expert Group to the Planning Commission”, April 2008.

[14] Engels to Theodor Cuno, 24 January 1872.

[15] Lenin, Anarchism and Socialism, *Collected Works*, volume 5.

[16] Letter to Theodor Cuno (24 January 1872).

[17] Lenin in *Left-Wing Communism*.

[18] In *Fight against the Concrete Manifestations of Revisionism* he wrote:

“Chairman Mao has pointed out: ‘Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive.’ The oppressed and persecuted peasants launch their struggle against the ruling classes with bare hands or with whatever they have, but as needs arise with the development of the struggle and dictated by the compulsions of advancing the revolution, they begin snatching and seizing arms from the ruling classes. This is how people’s armed forces develop. It is impossible to wage a revolutionary war by bringing arms from the outside. This is so because, as Chairman Mao has taught us ... ‘The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them.’”

[19] Notes Taken in a Meeting with Student Comrades, *Collected Works of Charu Mazumdar* published in Bengali by CPI(ML)(Liberation)

[20] see his last article “People’s Interests Are the Only Interests of the Party” – AS

[21] CPI(ML) – The Firm Defender of the Revolutionary Legacy of Indian Communists

[22] Political-Organisational Report of the Third Party Congress of CPI(ML), which serves as the basis of the evaluation of the past in this article.