

Short History of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist)

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Badrul Alam, a member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist), visited Britain recently. During his visit he told Sacha Ismail and Martin Thomas from Solidarity about the history of his group, and how it evolved from Maoism towards Trotskyism.

Before 1971, my party was called East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (EPCP-ML). During the Liberation War [of Bangladesh, from rule by West Pakistan] one part of the party fought against the Pakistani Army and another party fought against both Pakistani Army and the Indian Army which came to Bangladesh to support the freedom fighters.

China supported Pakistan. Mao was totally wrong. Bangladesh was 1200 miles from Pakistan. It was a completely different nation with a different language and different culture. Pakistan acted like an imperial power.

The Chinese had a Chinese nationalist position. They were nationalist. Even though there is a Communist Party in power it doesn't mean anything. They supported Myanmar/Burma, even though there was a military ruler. They were not socialists.

After some years the EPCP-ML leaders came up with the conclusion that after 1971, it was not correct to say that Bangladesh was not independent, and reformed the party as Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB-ML).

It was an underground party, but it decided to do open work by forming a peasant organisation called the Krishok Federation, of which I am now president. This organisation has been very active since 1976, especially on the land occupation movement and on issues such as climate change, food sovereignty and genetically-modified foods.

In 1993, we discussed entering politics openly. After a year, we formed an open section of the CPB-ML. Those who were interested in open politics could join. Those who were not could still be active in the front organisation, like the peasants' organisation. Some of the comrades preferred being underground. Mostly they were living in the rural areas and didn't want to come out.

After 1993, also, we decided to break with Stalinism. We were not attracted to Trotskyism at that time but we studied Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and we discovered the idea of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

We do not think it is necessary to be underground. We can organise openly and mobilise the people. If we want to change society we have to fight and take risks, organise people democratically and publish our opinions in newspapers.

In 2009, I attended a caravan on the threat to the climate at the same time as the international climate summit in Copenhagen. We then went to Copenhagen, and met people closely related to the

Fourth International.

A comrade went to one of the Fourth International's schools in Manila. He came back to Dhaka and explained everything.

In 2011, the Fourth International attended our Caravan and invited us to a meeting in Amsterdam in 2012. I came to know the position of the Fourth International and how it was founded by Trotsky. At the same time, I learned that other groups could join who were not Trotskyists. We believe in the idea of permanent revolution. Even Lenin believed in permanent revolution.

In 2012, we took permanent observer status, and this year they gave us the status of the section in Bangladesh.

Now the CPBML has 500 open members across the country. Many members are active in popular organisations and who have local involvement with them.

We also lead the Floating Labor Union and Floating Women Labor Union in the informal sector, including the garment sector. We have Bangladesh Rural Intellectual Fronts inspired by Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals. We have an indigenous people's association and the Revolutionary Youth Association. We also have the Bangladesh Students' Association, but it's not functioning very well. Revolutionary Youth is very active.

We have a Bangladesh peasant womens' association and, recently, one organisation in the garment sector which is called Independent Bangla Garment Workers and Employee Federation. It's new. In the last two years it has engaged with us and worked with us during the Rana Plaza collapse.

After 2007 we were part of the Democratic Left Alliance. In June 2011 we left it. Since 1993 we had accepted the ideas of Gramsci on hegemony and counter-hegemony in society and culture.

Bangladesh: From the EPCP-ML to the CPB-ML and the Fourth International

We tried to push these ideas in the Democratic Left Alliance and we were strongly criticised. They accused of following Eurocommunism.

In 2011 we held a caravan on climate change and food sovereignty. We took up climate change as a serious political issue. The Democratic Left Alliance considered it to be an NGO issue. They are not engaged on the gender issue and the condition of women either.

They decided to expel us from the Democratic Left Alliance so we left before they could expel us, and are trying to build a new network on the basis of our understanding.

Almost all the groups in the Democratic Left Alliance are Stalinist, and some are Maoist. The Maoists are still underground and are facing problems from the government. Lots of Maoist leaders were killed extra-judicially. We oppose them ideologically but think they should not be killed.

CPB (M-L)

Introduction

Bangladesh (previously the East Pakistan) is especially known in the history of revolutionary movements in Indian sub-continent. A lot of forefront progressive revolutionary leaders in the anti-British movement lived in Bangladesh. There was a strong current of revolutionary movements in the sixties and seventies. In those times, the left current was able to influence the national politics in

Bangladesh. The left hegemony on behalf of the workers, peasants and toiling people in social, political, economic, and cultural field of Bangladesh was noticeable. Communist ideology with huge [critical] dedication vis-a-vis consumerist-capitalist spirit spread to the larger extent. Many people even from the rich and orthodox capitalist families giving up affinity to the wealth joined revolutionary politics and movements. But presently the scenario is quite different. Except for a very small left current, both the ruling class and the opposition are legacy of the thought of consumerist-capitalist bourgeoisie society. Left revolutionary politics are, thus, lagging behind in the mainstream national politics in Bangladesh.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L)

The independent Bangladesh coming out of the bondage of Pakistan started to face lot of financial difficulties and crisis led by the bourgeoisie leadership. A group of leaders of the East Pakistan Communist Party, who understood that the spirit of liberation war would not be implemented by the bourgeoisie leaderships, now strove to form a communist revolutionary party with a new line of thought and strategy. Hence in 1976 an independent communist party with a different thought, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) was formed. It held up a different thought in the sense that its activity was different from other existing left political parties. As for example, CPB-ML decided to underscore building the mass organizations with highest priorities rather than the party organization. If there is a strong mass based organization built by the party leadership, then they will be able to carry out revolutionary party activities. So the party did not function as a part other than as a party cell. For the implementation of this target the party then built a peasants' wing called Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF). The party has a bit of success in this regard because BKF expanded very swiftly. A strong organizational basis in different areas and districts of Bangladesh was created and a movement of different kinds of demands including land occupation movement began. Later other more 7-organizations were formed as its associates.

Hegemony as Idea

CPB-ML in principle owns the hegemony idea of Antonio Gramsci who was the leader of Italian Communist Party in the thirties. It feels the thought of Gramsci is a creative development of Marxism. Thus, it is creating movement and action for the establishment of a counter hegemony of workers, peasants and toiling masses in the fields of society, economy, culture and psychology to the bourgeoisie hegemony. The CPB-ML considers the hegemony as a pre-condition for the revolution. It is making efforts to strengthen the struggle of rights throughout the country by organizing the subaltern class belonging to the toiling masses including indigenous and organic intellectuals, especially rural intellectuals. It puts emphasis also building a historic bloc to play a catalyst role in the hegemonic revolution in addition to the leading role of the party. Through this struggle, to create dedicated-competent-honest and creative leaderships that brings all the people's movements and right-based struggle in a single platform with all diversities marching towards revolutionary upheavals are the serious tasks of the CPB-ML as a revolutionary party.

Eco-socialism

The CPB-ML accepted the concept of eco-socialism on principle. The CPB-ML thinks that eco-socialism as idea is a critical and creative development of Marxism. Where the existence of the earth planet is under threat due to climate change there is no way to establish socialism or communism by not building movement against green house gas emission, by avoiding the thought of environmental hazards and difficulties of climate change. CPB-ML opposes the use of fossil fuel, the major responsible for the creation of carbon gas and defends the use of renewable energy like solar energy, windmill and biogas, etc. The solutions like the use of agro-fuel, REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) and CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) that are being

promoted by the capitalist system are not the solution to the problem. The CPB-ML thinks that the internal balance of the earth has been jeopardised because of massive extraction of oil-gas-coal including other mineral resources that contributes to natural disaster in the earth. In view of all this, the CPB-ML believes in eco-socialism.

Feminist Approach

The CPB-ML believes in an equality-based society of men and women. In a patriarchal society women are more victims and deprived than men. Even women are affected more than men as a result of climate change. The findings of a survey on the death toll caused by cyclones Sidr and Aila in Bangladesh showed that the number of women doubled men out of death. The CPB-ML reasons that the oppressed, repressed and deprived women should enjoy opportunities and rights in the spheres of society, politics, economy and culture equal to men.

Religion Approach

The CPB-ML reckons that the belief on religion lies deep in the heart of working class people. It is also part of their life and livelihood. [Today] still, religion loving people take religion as some sort of resort, [recourse] to [help them] live. So the CPB-ML thinks that we should not hurt religious spirit, which working class people brace and get mental peace from. Religion is own affairs of the people. As all have their right to practise religious rituals so they should have their right not to practise. However, the CPB-ML is completely opposed to the business capitalizing religion, religion based fanatic politics, religious fascism and fanatic militancy.

The Left Politics in Bangladesh

There are two mainstream lines of politics in pre-independent Bangladesh. One is pro-Moscow and the other is pro-Beijing. However, in the course of the liberation war, the Beijing line encountered odd situation. Chairman Mao Zedong took the position against the liberation expected by the people of Bangladesh, defending the side of Pakistani invaders sponsored by the American imperialism. Although the position of Mao went to the side of imperialism and against the independence of Bangladesh it was not possible for the pro- Beijing groups to take position against the liberation war. They also took part in the liberation war that had very controversial aspects. As a result, the Maoist political groups have been disappearing gradually. In the post independent Bangladesh leftist means the parties belonging to Marxism-Leninism. However, those who are Marxist-Leninist own of Mao's work as thought, not as theory.

Underground and Armed Left Group

- In major part of the sixties and the seventies underground and armed cadre based left politics was in effect a part of the leftist politics in the country. But in the later part of the seventies the underground politics and armed wings of the party were isolated from the people. The CPB-ML, since its inception, identified underground politics and the use of arms as a wrong line in the socio-political context of Bangladesh. The CPB-ML acknowledges the open politics for a peoples' democratic revolution.
- Because of the ill propaganda [launched from] bourgeois political quarters on the one hand, and [because] the underground left politics got unpopular on the other hand, many dedicated-experienced-talented leaders and activists died [due to] different controversial steps of the ruling class aimed at eliminating the leftists. Besides, many others have been killed even by the left due to internal conflicts on the [question] of political differences, leadership [issues], and feud among the armed wings of different political parties. Ideological degradation, deviation and separation from the party gave the rise to it. [In addition], lots of left political

leaders are sold out to the bourgeoisie political parties in exchange of Ministership or opportunity. At present, in both ruling and opposition [blocs], there are many stalwart leaders who came from left background giving up their ideology. Many are Ministers and MPs now with ruling party. Many were Minister and MP before. As a result, a meltdown started in the left politics long goes.

Present Left Politics

The left politics of Bangladesh is divided in two main blocs. A portion of left is aligning behind [practicism "tailendism"] ruling bourgeoisie parties and sharing their power. Another portion is trying to create a left current in the real sense. In its case, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) was at the forefront in practising tailism [tailendism] with the bourgeoisie. However, under the present regime, they are out of power and it is another party, called the Workers Party of Bangladesh, which has occupied their space. Some other left political parties accompanied them.

On the contrary, the Democratic Left Alliance is working with firm determination in order to create a left political current out of the bi-partisan bourgeois political circle. The Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) is an active component of this Democratic Left Alliance. The Democratic Left Alliance comprises 10 political parties and organizations. These are presently the only forces out of the bourgeois circle. Despite various differences of opinions among the components of the Democratic Left Alliance, the movement is going on based on common minimum issues. The forces of movement and the understanding among these parties are progressively on the increase. The CPB-ML believes in united movements. Thus it is determined to create a left political current and create revolutionary conditions by unifying different struggles and to take the lead to insure a hegemony based peoples' democratic revolution in Bangladesh of which ultimate goal is eco-socialism.

Badrul Alam

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Badrul Alam

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