

CONTINUITY OF NAXALBARI

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The present situation in India is full of revolutionary possibilities. Yet how different it is from the situation a decade ago. There was the spring thunder over Naxalbari, an upsurge in revolutionary struggles. There was an urge for revolutionary unity sweeping away all obstacles. The CPI(ML) was formed. Big struggles were conducted under its banner. But that the process of revolution is tortuous became evident early in the seventies. Then began a period of severe setback from which the revolutionaries are yet to recover. Today the lack of unity among them is as distressing as the situation is otherwise promising. Workers and peasants are bursting forth in anger against increasing oppression and exploitation. But struggles under revolutionary leadership are too fragmented to make any appreciable impact on the country as a whole.

Eleven years after Naxalbari and nine years after the CPI(ML)'s birth, the question, therefore, persists : What was wrong ? To this some revolutionary groups and founding members of the CPI(ML) give the challenging reply : The formation of the CPI(ML) itself. Since the predominant revolutionary practice of the post-Naxalbari period is associated with the name of the CPI(ML), how one views the formation of the CPI(ML) becomes so very important. If it was basically wrong, the CPI(ML) can at best be our teacher by negative example. But if it was basically correct, the summing

up of the experiences of the past decade becomes a valuable weapon for defending the positive gains and fearlessly correcting mistakes, for deepening our knowledge of Indian society, State and classes, for developing correct strategy and tactics.

The splitting up of the CPI(ML) into several groups and the continuing setback seem to give some strength to the view that the party's formation itself was basically wrong. But is the view acceptable ?

The first argument of the supporters of this view is : The CPI(ML) was formed not on the basis of the line practised in Naxalbari and proved 'correct', but on the basis of the line initiated in the adjacent Islampur-Chaterhat area and proved 'wrong' in practice. The 'correct' line depended on mass organizations and mass struggles and created the peasant upsurge in Naxalbari. The 'wrong' line relied on secret combat groups for actions apart from the masses and led to the 'isolation' of Communist revolutionaries in Islampur-Chaterhat.

Their argument no doubt draws attention to deviations from the mass line within the revolutionary movement during the past decade. They also correctly point out that the revisionists and neo-revisionists look at the peasant problem as a 'merely economic problem' and the left adventurists deny the agrarian programme itself ; the 'correct' line is the linking of the struggle for land and the struggle for seizure of power. But the basic weakness of their reasoning is revealed when one considers their contention that the Naxalbari peasant struggle developed by fighting against both 'right' and 'left' deviations. The argument, in effect, evades the question : What was the main ideological fight on the peasant question at the stage of Naxalbari ? Was it against economism preached by revisionism ? Or, was it against negation of the agrarian programme preached by left adventurists ? In the past few years new light has no doubt been thrown on the history of Naxalbari showing how the Naxalbari peasant upsurge occurred in the process of implementing the programme of seizure of land at the stage of agrarian revolution. This is a valuable addition to our know-

ledge and constitutes a warning against separation of the struggle for land from the struggle for political power. But all this should not make us forget that at the time of Naxalbari the main ideological fight on the peasant question was against economism. Without this ideological fight the struggle for land in Naxalbari could not have been raised to the level of seizure of power. Forgetting this aspect of history today may even lead to a relapse into revisionism on the peasant question.

Secondly, supporters of the view that the CPI(ML)'s formation was wrong argue : It was the result of the 'conspiracy' of a group of political 'self-seekers' which from the beginning acted in their sectarian interests. Who constituted the group and how did they succeed in the 'conspiracy' ? The answer given is : The group consisted of those who initiated and practised the 'left' line in Islampur-Chaterhat, who utilized the glorious role of the Naxalbari peasant struggle to establish within the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) 'one and only one individual' as the creator of Naxalbari, who 'hurriedly' formed the CPI(ML) to 'perpetuate' the breach in revolutionary unity caused by the AICCCR's 'subjective' assessment of the Naxalbari struggle.

This argument confuses the ideological struggle against subjectivism and sectarianism by raising the bogey of a conspiracy without proving it. A conspiracy within the Communist movement can only be enacted through repeated violation of all norms of democratic centralism and the group accused of conspiracy must have degenerated to such an extent that it was beyond correction. Did the comrades working in Islampur-Chaterhat hide their politics from other comrades ? They did not. Even from the account of those who differed with them it is clear that the Islampur-Chaterhat comrades had gone into practice after full discussion of their differences with other comrades. Are the bitter critics of Islampur-Chaterhat comrades unaware of a process of correction of mistakes committed during the CPI(ML) movement, even though some-

what belated and piecemeal? Are they unaware of the later writings of Charu Majumdar, warning against confining the struggle any more to attacks on class enemies, urging initiation of land reform in areas of armed peasant struggle under the party's leadership, and emphasizing the need for broadest possible unity against the ruling classes on the basis of struggle? If the CPI (ML) was the result of a conspiracy, such a process of correction could not possibly have been initiated. Critics of the Islampur-Chaterhat line should realize that only when they free their mind of the bogey of conspiracy would they be able to carry on effectively the ideological struggle against 'left' deviations manifested in a subjective view of the role of the individual apart from collective practice and in sectarianism in relations with groups of Communist revolutionaries. They would then appreciate that if sectarianism was partly responsible for the failure to unite all groups of Communist revolutionaries at the time of the formation of the CPI (ML), some of these groups also took too long a time—even after Naxalbari revolted against the CPI-M leadership—to realize that it is the right as well as the duty of proletarian revolutionaries to rise up 'in revolt' against a leadership which has proved itself out and out revisionist. Were not some of these groups, though critical of the CPI-M, still trying to discover the basis of a revolutionary party in the CPI-M's programme as late as 1968?

The third and final argument of those who consider the CPI (ML)'s formation wrong is: The CPI(ML)'s creation and 'subsequent events' once again prove that one of the main causes of the 'deplorable outcome' of the Indian Communist movement is the class origin of almost the majority of leadership at all levels. The leadership, it is stated, comes from the 'impetuous' petty bourgeoisie, the class of conservative petty peasant producers with their narrow outlook and the class of decadent landlords with their 'anarchist' viewpoint. The 'honest section' within the Communist movement seeking the correct path during revolutionary upsurges, big or small, has

been led into subjectivism because of their 'impetuous' class character and 'anarchist' outlook and have been victims of adventurism in trying to mechanically apply the rich experience of other countries.

Petty-bourgeois impetuosity is admittedly one of the main causes of deviation from the correct path, of adventurism based on subjective ideas, and of unnecessary losses. But we should not fail to note that petty-bourgeois impetuosity in India is partly at least a reaction against reformism within the Communist movement. We should not also fail to note that much of petty-bourgeois impetuosity here is generated by the dead weight of a stagnant philosophy of a caste-ridden society. But the revolutionary process is ruthless at crucial moments and at such moments petty-bourgeois impetuosity turns into its very opposite—frustration. As one of those petty-bourgeois joining CPI(ML) movement without necessary tempering in class struggle, this writer has personal experience of how he and some others of petty-bourgeois origin—propagandists of an adventurist line based on queer subjective notions of liberated areas—became so much frustrated during a moment of trial that they lost all sense of distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, enemies and comrades. But with all this said and done, petty-bourgeois influence on the Communist movement can not be wished away. Undoubtedly India has a much larger proletariat than was the case in pre-revolutionary China and fresh blood from the working class should be continuously injected into the Communist movement. But peasantry is the main force of the people's democratic revolution and therefore, petty-bourgeois influence on the movement will continue for a long time to come. In an underdeveloped country, moreover, the educated from among the petty-bourgeoisie groaning under different forms of oppression will feel the urge to carry Marxism to the uneducated masses. Therefore, merely pointing out the petty-bourgeois origin of many Communists as a weakness is not enough. The problem is one of transforming the class outlook of Communists of petty-bourgeois origin. A new

process was started when the post-Naxalbari movement ushered in a fresh style of work with emphasis on class analysis, investigation and integration with peasants and workers. There were certainly serious deviations from the style. But those from the petty-bourgeoisie who have not deviated from this style are still on relatively firm ground.

The basic weakness of the theory of the conspiratorial origin of the CPI(ML) is its inability to explain the particular significance of the Naxalbari peasant upsurge. The peasant upsurge of Naxalbari certainly did not drop from heaven. Without the long history of class struggle in Naxalbari the upsurge would not have been possible. But to say that mass organizations and mass struggles created Naxalbari is saying half-truth. How do we explain the leap : the transformation of the struggle for seizure of land into the struggle for seizure of power ? How do we, above all, explain the revolt against the neo-revisionist leadership, the revolt which made all the difference with Telengana ? Is it not a fact that the Siliguri sub-divisional peasant convention had given the prior call for establishing the authority of the peasant committees, for getting prepared to resist with arms the repression that would inevitably be let loose by the United Front Government of West Bengal and other 'reactionary forces' on the Naxalbari peasants struggling against feudalism ? Since the CPI-M was the largest constituent of the Front Government, did not this call mean a revolt against the neo-revisionist leadership ? Wherefrom did the convention get this consciousness to break the grip of revisionism ? The answer is given by Charu Majumdar in his poetic language : "The Indian people were about to be steeped in the mire of revisionism, at that moment came Chairman's clarion call—revisionism is the main danger today. We listened to his message with attentive ears, then we began searching our hearts. When in 1962 Chairman Mao began using his pen against modern revisionism led by Soviet revisionism, we found our path. When during the Cultural Revolution, Chairman declared in thunderous voice : it is right

to rebel against reaction, we found courage, we found tremendous strength to stand on our own legs, we ignored the revisionist Party leadership, we independently took the path of building up the armed struggle of the peasant masses.....” Without this consciousness on the part of the Naxalbari leadership, Naxalbari could not have been the first conscious application of Mao Tsetung Thought on the soil of India. During the great Telengana struggle, Andhra comrades had no doubt realized that the Indian revolution would in the main be similar to Chinese revolution. But in the historical conditions then obtaining, an open revolt against ‘organizational slavishness’ imposed from above was not possible. That is why Naxalbari is a continuation and development of Telengana. That is why it has been a decisive break with parliamentarism.

Once we realize that the armed peasant struggle of Naxalbari marked decisive break with parliamentarism, we also recognize the continuity between Naxalbari and the creation of CPI(ML). The continuity is simply the continuity of rejection of parliamentarism and adoption of the path of armed peasant struggle.

Grasping this today is not essentially a problem of identifying this continuity with any particular CPI(ML) group. The several groups—big and small—are poles apart. At one pole are groups which combine professed adherence to armed peasant struggle with practices like begging for election adjustments with reactionary parties—which smack of parliamentarism at its worst. At the other pole are groups which are steadfast to armed peasant struggle under the most trying conditions but refusing to face reality and correct mistakes boldly, and are shrinking. But this does not detract from the essential political continuity of Telengana, Naxalbari and the birth of CPI(ML). And without recognizing this basis, there cannot be any genuine revolutionary unity.

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