

CPI(ML) At Crossroads

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THE fears of the friendly critics of the CPI(ML) movement of West Bengal have come true. For the time being at least, it has suffered a severe setback.

When sympathizers of the party expressed their misgivings about the wisdom of actions like indiscriminate individual annihilations, recruitment of the lumpen-proletariat, destruction of statues of national leaders and a blind worship of the Chinese Party, they were promptly denounced as "class enemies." Often such questions were voiced within the party also, and those who dared to ask them were hounded out. Finally, matters came to a head with a sharp division within the party between Mr Charu Mazumdar and Mr Ashim Chatterjee, on these very issues. As confusion gripped the young ranks, the enemy struck. Infiltrators had already found their way into influential positions in different localities. Hideouts were spotted out one by one. Party functionaries were either jailed or killed. Ashim Chatterjee,

who eluded the police all these years, and was planning to restore the rural base of the party was arrested.

This brief summary of the recent developments leading to the disarray of the CPI(ML) is familiar to observers in West Bengal. Sympathizers, who have been warning the party of the possible outcome of its wrong actions, are not now gloating over the correctness of their predictions. They rather expect an analysis of the mistakes and a suggestion of the next move to help whatever remains of the movement to gather momentum and steer a more scientific course.

But unfortunately, neither of the two existing factions in the CPI(ML)—the Charu Mazumdar faction and the Ashim Chatterjee faction—indicate in their documents any integrated scientific approach to the revolutionary possibilities in West Bengal, although each acknowledges some of the mistakes of the past.

Thus, Ashim Chatterjee's document, issued some months

ago by the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Regional Committee, realizes the mistakes of ignoring mass organizations and mass movements, of appealing to the lumpen-proletariat with the main stress on annihilations and admits that the party had to some extent lost touch with the peasantry.

While stressing the need for strengthening the mass base and participation in mass movements along with guerilla actions, within the country, Ashim Chatterjee's document takes a completely sectarian and dangerous line on the Bangladesh issue. It states that since China supports Yahya Khan, the Indian revolutionaries also should do the same. He goes to the extent of putting Yahya Khan and Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia in the same group of anti-U.S. imperialists.

Charu Mazumdar's reply to Ashim Chatterjee's document fails to answer the latter's criticisms about the sectarian condemnation of mass organizations and opportunistic alliance with the lumpen-proletariat. But Ma-

zumdar takes a sober line on the Bangladesh issue, more in tune with the popular anti-colonial mood of the Bangladesh freedom fighters.

Although the fear of being branded anti-Chinese prevents Charu Mazumdar from supporting the freedom movement, he points out the reactionary nature of Yahya Khan and refers to his banning the Communist Party in Pakistan and to his dependence on the landlord class.

Thus, both the documents leave much to be desired, although signs of a sober attitude to some of the issues are welcome.

Will the two factions be able to reconcile their respective political lines? The reported expulsion of Charu Mazumdar makes it unlikely. But the leaders and the ranks of both the factions are undergoing a process of heart-searching, in jails and in the underground. Lack of coordination and information has increased the confusion and disintegration.

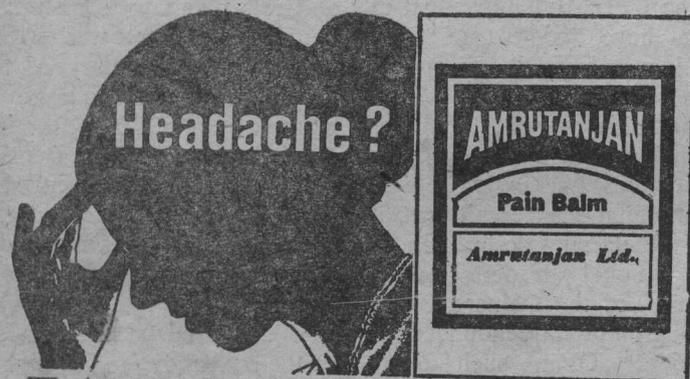
But among the ranks, those who are outside and are being hounded by the police, a realization is growing

that when party warfare replaces political action, it provides a powerful reinforcement to Right reaction. The dissipation of the militancy of both CPI(M) and CPI(ML) ranks in mutual warfare, thanks to the personal and political rivalries of the leaders of the two parties, has helped none but the repressive machinery of the State. In many localities of Calcutta, often disregarding the directives of the leaders, the ranks of the two parties, in the face of police and Congress(R) persecution, are coming together. This process might lead to the emergence of some form of workable agreement mainly based on self-defence.

The main advantage of such an agreement would be the gradual change in the mood of both the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) ranks. The former might realize the futility of continuing parliamentary politics as recommended by their leaders, while the latter might shed their sectarianism and think of winning over the militant cadres of other parties to their programme.

But, to lift a pragmatic agreement to the level of ideological unity, the CPI(ML) will have to modify its programme and practice. One of the primary needs is to assume an independent character. It should be remembered that the Chinese party itself only succeeded when it managed to set itself free from the Soviet-dominated Comintern control. Mao Tse-tung had the courage to ignore Stalin's advice and set a new course for the Chinese revolution. An independent Indian communist party capable of charting its own programme of action can be the best tribute that the Indian Marxist revolutionaries can pay to Mao Tse-tung.

Secondly, the policy of recruiting the lumpen-proletariat to do the "dirty work," should be given up. Speaking of this "social scum," Marx found them "at their youthful age—thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the barest banditry and the foulest corruption." (Class Struggles in France, 1848-50). If the



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Communists fail to politicise them, they may well turn mercenaries in the service of right reaction, as possibly happened in Calcutta in the recent months.

The CPI(ML) movement, it must be admitted, has been forced to retreat for some time at least. It should await another spell of political and economic crisis in the country, which might not be very far away, to emerge in a new form and under a new leadership.