

# NAXALBARI AND AFTER : AN APPRAISAL

PRABHAT JANA

The armed struggle of the Naxalbari peasants upheld the truth that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun and marked the beginning of the Indian revolution. It showed the revisionists in their 'true light'—lackeys of imperialism, social-imperialism and domestic reaction, whose sole mission is to divert the people from the path of violent revolution. It correctly assessed the stage of the Indian revolution and the role of the peasant in it. It successfully aroused the masses ; led by Communist Revolutionaries, the peasant masses, armed with whatever they could lay their hands on, took part in the struggle and tea-plantation workers there and in neighbouring

areas actively supported them. The economic struggle for confiscation of the jotedars' lands and cancellation of the peasants' debts was closely linked with the political struggle for the overthrow of the reactionary ruling classes. Here, legal struggle was combined with illegal struggle and the mass organization of peasants was linked with and led by the underground party organization—the organization of the Communist Revolutionaries who had rebelled against the revisionist leadership of the CPI(M).

Though the political line of the Naxalbari struggle was correct, it suffered a setback chiefly because of the smallness of the area, inexperience of the revolutionary leaders and peasants, their inability to spread it to wider areas and to develop an appropriate military line. It was a temporary setback but no defeat; rather, it marked an advance for the revolutionary forces of the country as a whole. It aroused people in various places, from the Terai region in the northeast of India to Kerala in the southwest and Kashmir in the northwest and helped to unite a majority of the Communist Revolutionaries of the country. Thousands of them rebelled against revisionism and chose the path of armed struggle. Many went to the rural areas to educate the peasantry in Mao Tsetung Thought, the science of revolution in colonies and semi-colonies, and to organize them. The support of the Communist Party of China was of immense help in bringing the Communist Revolutionaries together, first, within the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries and then within the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Sparks of armed struggle flew from Naxalbari to Sriakulam, Musahari, Lakhimpur-Kheri, Debra-Gopiballavpur-Bahar agora, Punjab, and later to different parts of West Bengal, especially Birbhum. Naxalbari did promise a new dawn.

But the dawn did not break. The darkness of reaction blotted out the first streaks of light. The ruling classes and the minions of the law may congratulate themselves on their performance, but it is not their efficiency in perpetrating dia-

bolical crimes but the weakness of the Party's line that is to blame for the present defeat and disarray of the revolutionary forces. It is the Party line that determines success or failure of revolutionary struggles.

The richest source of strength for revolutionary wars lies in the people. "Only by mobilizing the masses of workers and peasants, who form 90% of the population, can we defeat imperialism and feudalism." This Maoist teaching was applied in Naxalbari and Naxalbari proved to be a turning point. But later, from about the end of 1968, this lesson was ignored and the Communist Revolutionaries were gradually led away from the path of Naxalbari. A "left" opportunist line that was gradually introduced from about this time did immense harm.

What were the concrete manifestations of this "left" opportunism ?

First, in the name of combating economism, the party abandoned the mass line. Instead of trying to forge close links with the masses through different mass organisations and different forms of struggle dictated both by their immediate and long-term interests, the Party led by Charu Majumdar withdrew from all mass organisations like peasant associations, trade unions and youth and student associations, and from all mass movements on the plea that they breed economism, dubbed them revisionist and described them as obstacles to the growth and spread of revolutionary struggle. This marked an abrupt change in the line of the Communist Revolutionaries. That the usefulness of mass organisations and mass movements had been acknowledged would be evident from the resolution on trade union work, adopted by the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries in its session of May 1968, and from various writings published in its journals, including those of Charu Majumdar. But, from 1969, the Party gradually withdrew into its own shell and relied not on the masses but on small, secret squads of vanguards for waging revolutionary struggle.

It is true that mass organisations and mass movements have

for a long time been utilized by reactionaries and revisionists in the interest of class collaboration and for blunting the revolutionary consciousness of the people. To confine mass organizations and mass movements within narrow, economic bounds was certainly economism. It was not the mass organizations and mass movements but the Right opportunist and revisionist leadership of the CPI, the CPI(M) and other so-called socialist and communist parties that were to blame. Even now revisionists of all hues are busy trying to divert all mass struggles and the wrath of the people along peaceful, constitutional channels. While people, even their own supporters, are driven away from their homes, robbed of their jobs or assassinated by the police, they take upon themselves the task of organizing petitions and prayers to the ruling classes.

Nevertheless, to withdraw from mass organizations and mass movements is to be guilty of "left" opportunism. It actually means abandoning the patient and painstaking political struggle and arousing the masses and winning them over from the influence of the counter-revolutionaries and ends in a fatal divorce between the underground Party and the people, between the revolutionary vanguard and the masses.

In a country like India, the main force of the revolution must be the peasantry and one of the main tasks of the Party is to arouse the peasants. It is necessary to link closely the peasants' struggle for land and for annulment of debts with the struggle for seizure of power. It was "left" opportunism on the part of the CPI(ML) to issue a call for a struggle for seizure of power in rural areas without linking it with the peasants' struggle for land and cancellation of usurious loans. The peasants were aroused and the movement gained in intensity and acquired a mass character only in those areas where and when the two struggles became one and inseparable.

From about the middle of 1969, the CPI(ML) began to withdraw its cadres from trade unions and all other mass or--

ganizations. In practice it also withdrew from mass movement on international issues. The mass line that had been followed in Naxalbari was abandoned. So, the inevitable happened : the divorce between the underground Party and the masses of workers and peasants gradually became complete and the revolutionary vanguard became easy targets of the reactionaries for arrest, torture and assassination.

Another manifestation of "left" opportunism was to equate class struggles with "the battle of annihilation of class enemies". It was insisted that "the battle of annihilation of class enemies" was the *only form* of struggle at this stage and party cadres were instructed to form small squads of poor and landless peasants in a secret, "*conspiratorial*" manner—secret from the people and secret even from the Party units not accustomed to underground conditions of work—and to carry out annihilation of hated class enemies one after another. Politics of seizure of power was to be propagated, not widely, but with the sole purpose of carrying out successful annihilation of individual class enemies. It was argued that "the class struggle, that is, this battle of annihilation, could solve all the problems facing us" ; it would unleash the initiative of poor and landless peasants, carry the struggle forward to a higher stage, raise the level of the people's political consciousness, create new men, build the People's Army, ensure the creation of stable base areas and bring about a revolutionary upsurge ending in a countrywide victory.

These arguments were not based on any concrete analysis of the conditions in this country but were wholly subjective. Because of the lack of a dialectical approach on the part of the CPI(ML) leadership, the 'battle of annihilation of class enemies' has, instead of solving any of our problems, made them much more difficult than before. The initiative of poor and landless peasants was roused and the struggle reached a higher stage only in those areas where the struggle for the confiscation of the *jotedars'* land and other possessions and for cancellation of usurious loans was combined with the stru-

uggle for seizure of power—for instance, in Naxalbari in 1967 and in Srikakulam and Musahari. On the other hand, when the class-enemy-annihilation line was imposed, it gradually disorganised the revolutionary forces, snapped their links with the people, and led to the degeneration of the struggle in some areas and to the suppression of the militants by the police and the army. Instead of raising the level of the people's political consciousness, this line actually spread demoralization among them. Whatever people's army appeared in an embryonic form is today faced with extinction. Neither any 'stable' (or unstable) base area nor any countryside revolutionary upsurge could be created by the class-enemy-annihilation line.

In his writing *Some Questions concerning Methods of Leadership*, Mao Tsetung said: "However active the leading group may be, its activity will amount to fruitless effort by a handful of people unless combined with the activity of the masses." He also said: "Communists must never separate themselves from the majority of the people or neglect them by leading only a few progressive contingents in an isolated and rash advance, but must forge close links between the progressive elements and the broad masses." (*The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War*)

The Party leadership did not heed this warning, ignored the teachings of all great Marxist-Leninists and mistook terrorism for revolutionary violence. Naturally, terrorism practised by groups of its militants failed to accomplish what the revolutionary violence of an aroused people can.

The Party leadership believed that annihilation of class enemies could be carried on, one after another, in an area (some of them would be killed and some would flee), the rural areas could thus be liberated from class enemies and Revolutionary Committees, organs of people's power, could be established there. The very existence of the State machinery, the purpose of which is to protect the class enemies and their regime of oppression and exploitation, was overlooked and the fact that organs of the people's power could not be established

in any area without contending with the State machinery was ignored.

To equate secret annihilation of individuals with guerilla war is not correct. Guerilla war can be waged only by relying on the people and their active help and co-operation. But annihilation of class enemies is carried out secretly, "conspiratorially"—without involving the people. Guerilla war is war between the People's Army and the enemy's armed forces ; it is a form of people's war. So there is a basic difference between guerilla war and secret assassination of individuals.

Why do Marxist-Leninists reject individual terror, secret assassination of individuals, as one of the main forms of struggle ? This is not a question of abstract morality. It is not certainly immoral to annihilate certain mass-murderers—men responsible for the murder of many workers and peasants. But, in using individual terror—in special cases, the Party should be guided not by its own wishes but by the wishes of the masses and by a proper analysis of the actual conditions at the given time and place. As a main form of struggle, individual terror—secret assassination of individuals—does tremendous harm to the cause of revolution instead of helping it. First, it diverts the Party from the path of class struggle, from the path of people's war. It is petty-bourgeois subjectivism to dream of creating mass upsurge through individual terror by a handful of militants. Secondly, this belittles the enemies' strength from the tactical point of view. A handful of militants isolated from the people can easily be suppressed by the enemy. This terrorism endangers the Party's very existence, severs its links with the masses and renders all political work impossible. Lenin said : "In principle we have never rejected, and cannot reject terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions. We, therefore, declare emphatically that under the present conditions such a means of

struggle is inopportune and unsuitable ; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole ; and that it disorganizes the forces, not of the government, but of the revolution...Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organizations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited ? Yet it is this contact that is the sole guarantee of our success.” (*Where to Begin*)

From about the middle of 1970, the annihilation of policemen, spies, bureaucrats, corrupt traders and petty millowners became the main form of struggle in urban areas. In the course of this struggle even traffic constables, educationists, judges, trade union leaders and leaders of different political parties were attacked and some of them annihilated. Instead of working underground in urban areas for a long time to co-ordinate the struggle of the workers and other working people with the struggle in the countryside, the Party's militants rushed into head-on collisions with the enemy's organised forces of violence. The Party cadres showed utter selflessness and great heroism. But the inevitable happened : while a large section of the people were antagonised, thousands of cadres were tortured, maimed and imprisoned and several hundreds—both leaders and cadres—died.

The Party militants were involved in another bloody struggle. The political struggle between the CPI(ML) and the CPI(M) degenerated into a tragic feud—a war of annihilation between the cadres and supporters of the two parties—a war that bewildered the people and served only the interest of the ruling classes. The CPI(ML) failed to distinguish between the CPI(M) leadership and the large section of its cadres and supporters, did not wage any persistent political struggle to win over the latter and did little to try to stop this mutual, senseless killing.

It is right to rebel against the education system in our

country, which is semi-colonial and semi-feudal. Today, chaos reigns in the educational sphere because of the utter rottenness of the system. But as Mao Tsetung said, it is always necessary first of all to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. But when CPI(ML) cadres and lumpen elements systematically attacked schools and colleges with bombs, destroyed their offices, laboratories and libraries and set some of them on fire, the Party leadership supported all these anarchic nonpolitical acts instead of guiding this revolt along a political channel and doing some work in the ideological sphere. Thousands of teachers felt that they were the targets of this attack.

It was also right to rebel against the long dominance of the cultural and political influence of the leaders who represented comprador-cum-feudal class interests. The "heroes" of the so-called Bengal Renaissance, able representatives in the realm of culture and education of the new comprador-cum-feudal class fathered by the British rulers, were children of the British colonialists spiritually and found salvation of the country in its imperialist fetters at a time when India was being rocked by anti-imperialist and anti-feudal peasant uprisings and the First War of Independence. The anti-imperialism of many great national leaders, who flourished in this century, was indeed sham while their role as servitors of imperialism or fascism was quite real. The new democratic politics and culture of the working class, the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, led by the working class, can not win in the struggle against the pro-imperialist and feudal politics and culture that still dominate the life of the country without unmasking its real character. But the manner in which the revolt took place, the burning of portraits and smashing of statues, bewildered and shocked the petty bourgeoisie which has been brought up to revere the pro-imperialist cultural and political leaders. Compared with the enormity of the task, very little was done in the ideological sphere. In this case, too, the Party failed to guide the revolt along the

correct path and this failure was fully exploited by the enemy.

Thanks to the Party units, the activities of gangsters and hoodlums were curbed to a great extent in many areas and people enjoyed some sense of security. But some oppression was perpetrated on the people in the name of the Party in some areas. In a few areas the local Party committees, on their own initiative, took measures to stop it, but in most areas nothing was done to check it or to demarcate the Party from the elements that were utilising its name for their own sordid ends.

Early in 1971, the slogan that those who would seek votes (for election to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly) and those who would cast their votes were to be annihilated, was raised in some areas. Even the political struggle for boycott of elections and against parliamentarism degenerated into a 'battle of annihilation.' This was another extreme and dangerous manifestation of "Left" opportunism.

It was wrong on the part of the CPI(ML) leadership to characterize all other political parties as parties of the ruling classes. Different small parties represent the interests of the small and the middle bourgeoisie or the interests they may help the ruling classes and go against the interest of the people at certain times, but there are also contradictions between them and the ruling classes. To see only one aspect, the aspect of their unity with the ruling classes, and to overlook the other aspect, their contradictions, is contrary to dialectics and, so, un-Marxist.

The All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries had expressed the hope in a resolution adopted in May 1968 that its contradictions with the groups that believed in armed agrarian revolution and professed loyalty to Mao Tsetung thought would remain non-antagonistic. But, later, these groups were unjustly abused as agents of imperialism and international revisionism on the ground that they were opposing annihilation of class enemies. This was a manifes-

tation of extreme "left" sectarianism. Indeed, an extreme "left" sectarian line that isolated and weakened the revolutionary forces, was pursued by the Party. Even the study of Marxist classics was discouraged and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung thought was made to degenerate into a cult of '*bhakti*', into a blind, unquestioning faith in the revolutionary authority of a leader, and similar anti-Marxist trash. All this was the work of a petty bourgeoisie with a long feudal tail.

The emergence of "left" opportunism during the last three years was perhaps historically inevitable. Isn't, as Lenin pointed out, anarchism infrequently a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working class movement? In this country the Communist Party never became the party of the working class nor was its Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation ever firm. Both in ideology and in composition it remained overwhelmingly petty bourgeois and trailed behind the pro-imperialist, compromising bourgeoisie. The CPI, as well as the CPI(M), led not even by a labour aristocracy but by a petty bourgeois-and-landlord or ex-landlord aristocracy, has throughout its long life, pursued a policy not of class struggle but of class collaboration—a policy of treachery against the people. At particular places and particular periods there have been revolt against right opportunism, for example, in Telengana in the forties. But right opportunism has dominated the communist movement in this country. Revolt against right opportunism started along the correct path in Naxalbari. But, afterwards, in the course of the bitter struggle against right opportunism, this revolt degenerated into "left" opportunism, a punishment for the many right opportunist sins, hypocrisy, servility and treachery of the communist movement in this country.

When we are criticizing deviations, it would be wrong to suppose that the entire work of the last five years was utterly fruitless and all wrong, and had no positive aspect. Nothing can be more untrue. The work of the last five years has a positive aspect of immense significance. What is that aspect?

First, the Naxalbari peasant struggle, as we have said before, marked a turning point in India's history. In view of the long reign of right opportunism in this country, it was no easy task for the revolutionaries and peasants of Naxalbari to uphold the great truth that force is the midwife of the old society pregnant with a new one. No force on earth can wipe out the new revolutionary force that Naxalbari represents.

Second, the Naxalbari struggle could begin only by raising high the banner of Mao Tsetung Thought and by waging a bitter fight against revisionism and right opportunism. For the past few years Communist Revolutionaries have carried on an uncompromising struggle against sham parliamentarianism and other manifestations of revisionist ideology and politics as well as against revisionist practices.

Third, it was the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries that unmasked for the first time in India the character of Soviet revisionism. The CPI(ML) also exposed the real character of the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation."

Fourth, the CPI(ML) has waged struggle against bourgeois chauvinism and upheld proletarian internationalism. When all reactionary and revisionist parties tried their utmost to poison the minds of the people with hostility and hatred for socialist China, the CPI(ML) carried on almost single-handed a struggle against the anti-China campaign. It also exposed and denounced the Indian expansionists when they invaded and dismembered Pakistan.

Fifth, the brief history of the CPI(ML) is the history of struggle, heroism and self-sacrifice. The cadres and leaders of the Party never hesitated and do not hesitate to lay down their lives in the interest of the people. Here lies the basic difference between the leaders and cadres of the CPI(ML) and the revisionists. When the former are essentially self-sacrificing the latter are essentially self-seekers and careerists. The CPI(ML) has set examples—examples of courage to fight,

self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause of revolution—at a time when sham militancy, rank opportunism, careerism and servility masqueraded as socialism, communism and Marxism in this country.

*May 12—19, 1973*