

# The Lessons Of Birbhum

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

A document is circulating in Birbhum, issued in the name of the West Bengal-Bihar Border Region Committee of the CPI(ML). It states that revolutionary cadres, following Charu Mazumdar's slogan of solving problems through the campaign of annihilating class enemies, carried out about 200 annihilations in Birbhum and the neighbouring areas and collected about 200 guns and a few rifles. In most of the thanas, the revolutionary cadres depended to varying extents on poor peasant and landless labour guerillas. It was possible in all to have about 30 poor peasants and landless labourers as organisers. In some areas, when the guerillas took over the property of the class enemies, they earned the active support of the general run of poor peasants and landless labourers. In these areas the people spontaneously took initiatives at the time of police and military repression. But not having any well-worked-out action plan for attacking the police and military, instead of involving the people in the struggle for robbing the jotedars of their social and economic power, the revolutionaries went ahead, following the Party Congress line, with the programme of annihilation. As a result the peasant masses could not be activated. This isolation of the cadres facilitated the attack of the armed forces of the government. About 50 revolutionaries got killed; most of the guns and rifles were recovered by the police. The jotedars and money-lenders who had left their villages

could return to their homes with the help of the police. A very large number of revolutionary workers got arrested. Those who were not, had to leave their areas of operation. In short the movement suffered a total setback.

The report that Charu Mazumdar placed at the Party Congress on the question of annihilations had for its main theme "class struggle, that is, annihilation of class enemies". This meant that nothing else was considered as class struggle. Every problem would be solved through this campaign; a new man would be born; there would be a new consciousness and new faith among the poor peasants and landless labourers; rural areas would be liberated, new red spots would appear on the map of the country and eventually conditions would become ripe for a countrywide mass uprising. The peasants with new consciousness and new faith would snatch arms from the enemy and would provide the armed defence of the revolutionary power. Annihilation of class enemies was regarded as a higher form of class struggle and the beginning of guerilla warfare.

This line was adopted unanimously in the Party Congress and the party journals began to highlight activities in different areas according to the number of annihilations carried out. This became the sole criterion. In Birbhum, as in other regions, little discrimination was made between the big, small and medium among the jotedars. Anybody who

OCTOBER 14, 1972

expressed any differences about the annihilation programme was immediately branded as revisionist.

In these areas where the line was applied to the letter, a very small number of youths from the poor and landless peasantry came to the fore for taking active part in the annihilation programme. Among the rest there were various reactions observable. One of the typical reactions was to say, "Not bad. Let this begin. We shall join later". A second would say, "The rich would remain rich, the poor poor. There would never be power in the hands of the peasantry". About annihilations, some said, "Well served. They will now be taught a lesson". Another section said, "Could they be eliminated by this method? What then is the good?" The peasants did not accept the line that the annihilations were meant to liquidate the social and economic power of the jotedars. They did not take it as their own fight. They took it as a line of action of the Party. Thanks to the initiative of the handful of activists from among the peasantry, a large number of peasants gave shelter and food. But when the enemy returned they said, "You better go elsewhere for your fight". The relation between guerillas and the peasants never took the form of fish in water. In certain other areas the revolutionary workers unconsciously deviated from Charu Mazumdar's line and did not confine themselves to the annihilation programme. In these areas, along with annihilations, the guerillas carried out such activities as expropriation of the jotedars, burning of documents, liquidation of scripts, forceful occupation of land, fixation of minimum wage rates etc. It turned out that in these areas the peasant masses became relatively active; they identified themselves somewhat more with the struggle and even in some cases simultaneously confronted the armed forces. However these activities could not be carried very far because the Party did not have any line in the matter.

The lesson that is to be drawn is: the line of equating class struggle with annihilation of class enemies is but a line of terrorism, not of peasant revolutionary war. There has always been, there would always be, annihilation of class enemies in any revolutionary struggle, but annihilation of class enemies cannot be acceptable as the main political line of any communist party.

### The Main Task

What ought to be the main task of the party in the village? Obviously, organising peasants for the revolution. The Party units should be formed, composed of vanguard elements of the poor and landless peasants. These units should carry out the work of educating the peasantry with Mao Tse-tung thought—organise them for revolution. They should form revolutionary peasant committees led by poor and landless peasants. Simultaneously the party units should form armed squads composed of peasant youths which will in course of time provide the basis for the formation of guerilla units. The reason for not calling these squads "guerilla units" is that it has been seen that such units take time to acquire the character and the competence that a guerilla unit should have. This leads to overestimation of the armed struggle of the party. After this stage is over the peasant committee under the leadership of the Party unit should take steps for starting struggle against the jotedars that would be aimed at taking away from them their social and economic power. The slogan should be to make the peasant committee the ultimate authority in all village-level matters.

This of course would invite attacks from the class enemies and the State apparatus. It would then be the task of the armed squads to thwart and defeat these attacks and it is through this practice that they would gain in strength. Depending on differences in the circumstances and the level of political consciousness among the people, there would be an alternative

approach, that would consist in the armed squads meting out punishment (which may involve annihilations) according to the desires of the local peasant masses which are to be known on thoroughgoing investigations—all these things being a means of entry among the peasant masses, so that such steps should be immediately followed by the formation of the party unit and the revolutionary peasant committee. In all cases however the central focus of all the activities should be on the elimination of the landlord class as a class (which is not to be understood as their physical liquidation). If this is not done, if one follows the party line of mere annihilation of class enemies, the revolutionary cadres would be isolated from the peasant masses. This is what happened in Srikakulam, this is what happened in Midnapore, this is also the experience in Birbhum.

In the Party Congress report there is no line laid down about confrontation with armed forces. In Birbhum in many areas the poor peasant and landless labourer population expected such armed confrontations. But except for a few such cases, no line was adopted in a general way about confronting the armed forces. The guns and rifles that had been seized were not put to any use based on any systematic programme. The line that was given by the party was to spread the annihilation campaign far and wide with a view to defeating the enemy strategy of "encirclement and repression". Even after red areas were established in Srikakulam, Charu Mazumdar did not ask for a concentration of all the forces against the repressive armed forces of the State, did not give direction for the adoption of a military programme. In his article, "Guerilla warfare" Charu Mazumdar did not give the slightest idea about what the armed forces of the State could do to the revolutionaries, and how the latter could fight back. In Birbhum it was seen that the armed forces of the State, instead of being weakened,

selected one area after another and cleared them up. In Birbhum wherever the cadres took courage to challenge the police and the military, they got the enthusiastic support of the people. The lesson of Birbhum in this respect would seem to be that Charu Mazumdar was wrong to think that the new man would be born through annihilation of class enemies; his slogan that "one who has not made his hand red with the blood of the enemy is not a communist" was also wrong. The new man is born in the fire of class struggle in which one acts according to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung thought. It is also not true that guerilla warfare can start only through the process of annihilation of class enemies. It can start in many other ways. Comrade Babulal who gave his life in an armed encounter with the police—did he not contribute to the beginning of guerilla warfare?

It is true that lately Charu Mazumdar himself criticised the line of annihilation as "militant economism". But this criticism was made most casually without any adequate analysis or investigation.

### Mass Movements

In one article Charu Mazumdar wrote that open mass organisation work was an obstacle to the genesis and spread of guerilla warfare. In an inner-party document it has been claimed that this line had been acclaimed as correct by Peking Radio. It is however not true that Peking Radio ever made any reference to this article and it was irresponsible to involve the Chinese party in this fashion. It was arising out of this erroneous line that Charu Mazumdar criticised those workers who participated in a struggle over the paddy harvests.

There is no question about it that guerilla warfare will necessarily have to be linked with mass movements. Of course such movements will not have anything to do with bourgeois legalistic movements and the party's

responsibility in the matter does not exhaust itself in just giving the call for such movements. The Party's duty is to organise them.

In certain areas of Birbhum peasant masses wanted to go forward with the struggle over harvests but according to the directions of Charu Mazumdar they were told that the party or the guerillas had nothing to do about the matter. But last October a call was given to launch such movements all over West Bengal—but as there was no preparation and as the Party did not take any responsibility for organising the movement, the slogan remained just a slogan.

The question of the working class and struggle in urban areas is one that in practice the Party has neglected most, so that the movement has remained isolated from the vast industrial working class of the country. It appeared from Charu Mazumdar's writings that the only task of the working class front was to organise guerilla units among them to carry out the campaign of annihilation. Following that lead the Calcutta Committee adopted the programme of annihilating businessmen, usurers, blackmarketeers, etc.—From there on began a spate of annihilations of so-called class enemies in all urban areas; and there was left no difference in nature between the movement in urban and rural areas. No distinction was drawn between the various small and big left parties. As a result, from ordinary workers of such parties to major leaders became targets of the annihilation programme and these activities were hailed in the pages of *Deshabrati* and *Liberation*. Some party workers got so enthusiastic that they announced such a programme as one of annihilating any voter.

The Committee thinks that the party requires to get involved in all kinds of working class struggles with a view to making them more militant, to organise armed resistance to all repression and if necessary to organise clandestine trade unions.

(Let us recall the example of clandestine trade union activity in China between 1928-1948). It is also necessary to criticise the emphasis that has been laid on the Party being a party of the poor peasant and landless labourers, and on the alleged hold of revisionism on the working class. The industrial working class has to become the vanguard of the revolution and for that the Party has to work primarily among the vast majority of the truly pauperised working class, leaving aside the relatively affluent sections of a class that provides the basis for the operations of the revisionist trade unions. Guerilla warfare is admissible in urban areas only when there would be a mass upsurge of the working class and toiling peoples, as it was in 1966 for some time in Durgapur. In all other situations that should be regarded as adventurism.

### On Base Areas

The question of base area comes from the recognition of the uneven development of the semi-feudal semi-colonial countries. But for this uneven development, the question that would have been relevant is that of armed uprising on a countrywide scale. In a recent document of the State Committee of West Bengal it has been stated that there is not much unevenness of development in the country. It is this understanding that has led to the line of scattered guerilla fights and it is this that gave rise to the idea of quick victory, of the country being liberated in 1975. However, base areas are necessary and indispensable as refuge in the face of white terror. Charu Mazumdar has rightly observed, the necessary precondition for the establishment of base areas is the formation of revolutionary committees headed by poor peasants and landless labourers and under their guidance involvement of the entire peasant masses in struggles. But it appeared from his writings that he considered any rural area suitable for becoming a base area. But that it is not even think-

able to have base areas in the proximity of cities should be clear from the fact that even after five years of the beginning of armed struggle in the Naxalbari area it has not been possible to form any red bases anywhere. Some such areas did exist for brief periods but they were all smashed up by the enemy. The utmost that there has been may be called guerilla zones. There was some success only in the Srikakulam area but the reason why even that failed is primarily the absence of any political and military programme regarding base areas and the liberation army. It would appear that one would have to put greater emphasis on remote areas and take fresh account of the conditions of terrain.

There has not been any people's army; there have only been some groups of guerillas. Even in this respect there has been a great deal of exaggeration. Quite often one has described as guerillas people who have not even left their homes and come under the discipline of any unit, just by virtue of their having been members of strictly temporary groups that were formed for carrying out annihilations.

Charu Mazumdar was of course quite right that the people's liberation army has to be mainly composed of peasants. But his line that in every case the command of a guerilla unit has to be a poor or landless peasant appears to be mistaken. It is mechanistic to think that if the commanders are of peasant class

background that would by itself bring about leadership of that class. It is the revolutionary peasant committees that would give leadership to the peasants' struggles. For this reason the party units have to be composed of poor and landless peasants and the peasant committees have to be under the leadership of such peasants and this makes irrelevant the question of leadership of the army commanders. It has been the experience in Birbhum that as more and more peasants join the struggle, there develops an increasing urge among the youths from working class and petty bourgeois backgrounds to join with them. While the liberation army has necessarily to be composed mainly of peasants, these elements could also be included in the ranks of the army, while strengthening the work of political education within the army. It was seen in Birbhum that these non-peasant elements were quite capable of fighting; if they were properly treated it should have been possible to form quite a strong army in Birbhum. But this human resource was allowed to go waste because of the line that the army must be composed exclusively of peasants.

The undivided Central Committee of the Party has never met even once since the meeting that took place immediately after the Party Congress in 1970. In reply to the State Committee of Bihar, Charu Mazumdar gave the explanation (and this was repeated in a West Bengal State

Committee document) that this was done on grounds of security. But the problem of security will always be there with every revolutionary movement in any country. That never meant, that ought not to mean, the stoppage of functioning of the Central Committee. At least five members of the Central Committee have been expelled for their differences with Charu Mazumdar without any meeting taking place. The atmosphere for inner-party struggle has been totally vitiated by the attitude of branding any difference with Charu Mazumdar as revisionism. The documents issued by the Bihar State Committee and by the West Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Regional Committee were condemned without their being even discussed in the Central Committee. This made inner-party discussion impossible and endangered the very existence of the Party.

The Party suffers from extreme dogmatism, rigidity and left deviation. These get expressed in regarding as equally reactionary all the other left parties, failing to exploit the contradictions within the ruling class, failing to work on the contradictions between different regional components of the armed forces as well as the contradictions between the officer class and the lower ranks, in not recognising the existence of a national bourgeoisie. All this boils down to antagonisms with all and alliance with none.