

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Much has happened in West Bengal in the last few months, but nothing that really contradicts what has been said above.

Too much was made by certain political observers and newsmen of the supposed deflection of Naxalite policy in some respects. For instance the CPI (ML) did not try seriously to disrupt the mid-term election, though few would doubt their capacity to do so in a small number of centres at least. This was because the majority of the CPI (ML) cadres were worried about the prospect of the CPI (M) coming back to office through elections which they could not hope to disrupt everywhere or for all time. It was in the pre-election period, as the battle over areas of influence got seriously under way, that the CPI (M) unleashed its violent offensive against Naxalites and all other political rivals. As its methods became more pronouncedly terroristic, sheer force of circumstances made the CPI (ML), if not exactly constitutionalists, at least more benign towards those who were trying to use the ballot-box to defeat the CPI (M). This did not make them firm allies of any other party; understandably cynical in their approach to all who participate in elections, they probably felt justified in the manoeuvres and balancing tricks seen in some constituencies. Since the election, both government and opposition have been under fire from the Naxalites.

A brief sensation was caused by the report that Charu Majumdar had repudiated the tactics of assassination. Actually he said, in a signed article in *Desabarti* (10 February 1971), that

to consider attacks on the class enemy as the only form of action would land the revolutionaries into economism. In an undated number of *Desabrati* published some time after 26 March, the "distortion" of the leader's statement in the "bourgeois press" was angrily rejected: "What he said was that simultaneously with the annihilation of the class enemy, there will be attacks on the police and military, and priority must be given to the establishment of the peasants' political power." Pages of reports giving details of *khatam* in various places appeared in this number and an earlier one dated 15 February, among the victims mentioned by name were the Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University and the Congress candidate from the Suri constituency in Birbhum. In fact, Charu Majumdar has designated *khatam* as the Maoist tactics of "tit-for-tat struggle".

Two new features do seem to have developed in this phase. The first is "snatching rifles from the enemy to arm the guerillas". The CPI (ML) literature glories in such acts carried out at Magurjan, Rupaskundi, Behala and elsewhere. The volunteers who seize rifles are depicted as "fulfilling the thousand-year-old dream of thousands of peasants", and this certainly is a step forward from the days of the "traditional weapons" and "bare hands".

The second new feature is the jail-break and jail-front idea, which has already taken a terrible toll in dead and wounded Naxalite prisoners in several jails in West Bengal. Exactly what happened, and the full political implications, can be revealed only after an impartial inquiry, but there is no doubt that the insatiable leadership of the CPI (ML) is calling for greater sacrifices. In a manner that takes one back over twenty years ago, Charu Majumdar says (in the undated issue of *Desabrati*): "Today, prison itself is a centre of rebellion..." His statement that such tactics are unprecedented in the history of prison life is false, as he very well knows. It is interesting to note how similar tactics come back under the same political compulsions.

It would be wrong to consider these new Naxalite moves as an indication of increased strength. Both rifle-snatching and attempts to escape from jail are extremely daring acts presupposing a certain degree of organisation, but taken as part of

the general situation, they must be seen as a last desperate gamble on the part of those whom the logic of left-sectarian politics has driven up the blind lane of terrorism. No such movement can be without its myth, and the CPI (ML) leadership visualises the march of rifle-holding guerillas towards a peasant (not worker-peasant) raj round the next corner, while the tragic waste of lives under its care continues. Nor have the anti-social associations of the CPI (ML) evaporated under the impact of the myth. The movement retains its basic character, shifting ground whenever necessary, stepping up isolated "guerilla" action in one area to compensate for stalemate in another. That this kind of "struggle" is reinforced by socio-economic processes and may go on for some time to come has already been indicated.

As always, the last hope for such a movement, or a section of it, is the appearance of corrective forces inside it. Though this may seem almost too much to hope for, the steady growth of political differences in the CPI (ML) is obvious. Susital Raychaudhuri, who died recently, had been forced out of his post as editor of *Desabrati*; and tension over the tactical line, including the jail-front and the urban movement, is reportedly high. Now Bangladesh, of all things, has thrown Naxalite politics into confusion. Originally the Awami League and Sheikh Mujib were suspect in the eyes of the Naxalites and the CPI (M) too, for that matter. Quite a bit of fishing went on in troubled political waters at the international border as the war unfolded across it—and some genuinely helpful moves as well.

But then *Desabrati* officially condemned the liberation struggle as part of a worldwide anti-China conspiracy, several "imperialist" (including socialist) powers having already established their troops, disguised as flood relief workers, in Bangladesh. The recent number of *Desabrati* mentioned above hints editorially at revolutionary union of the two Bengals under M-L leadership, instead of the reactionary union under the "twin puppets", Sheikh Mujib and Jyoti Basu, which "imperialism" is supposed to have set its evil heart on. Even such flights of fancy did not prevent the emergence of a saner trend in support of Bangladesh, showing that a section of the CPI (ML)

is less out of tune with the national sentiment, and less mentally frozen even in its attitude to China than one normally supposes. There may be some truth in the idea that a recent spate of "actions" of the usual type has been encouraged by the party leadership to divert its militant cadres from the famous "doubtism" to which it is prone. Certainly the future of the better elements among the Naxalites depends on their ability to think things out for themselves, and reconsider their commitments.

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