

COMMENT

'They are Narodniks'

CPI-M GENERAL SECRETARY Prakash Karat has compared the opponents of SEZ at Nandigram as Narodniks who opposed industrialisation of Russia more than a century ago. The Russian economy was mostly agricultural at that time. Emperor Alexander had released the peasants from bondage of the big landowners but they remained agricultural labourers. The Marxists led by Lenin wanted forcible redistribution of land among the peasants and development of a capitalist industrial economy. The workers of England had at that time gone through a painful process of capitalist industrialisation. Workers were whipped and made to work for 12-14 hours a day and lived in decrepit slums as depicted in Dickensian description of England. The Marxists considered such pain as inevitable, indeed Stalin did precisely this, faithfully following Lenin's ideology.

The Narodniks, on the other hand, thought the Russian rural society could directly transit from feudal to socialist system. The landowners could be got to behave in a more humane fashion towards the people. Industrialisation could be done through the transformation of landowning classes into industrialists. It was not necessary to break up the mutuality of the Russian rural society and convert the feudal slave into a impoverished worker first before liberating him.

The Marxists and Narodniks both considered industrialisation as necessary and both wanted to establish a socialist society. The Marxists thought that ruthless industrialisation will develop the forces of production to such abundant levels that there will remain no scarcity.

This belief is questionable, however. It is seen that family conflicts among the rich are more violent and rich countries are more aggressive in military extraction of resources of poor countries. More consumption is rarely seen to bring peace and satisfaction.

Capitalism-led industrialisation may actually put the poor in worse condition. They may be deprived of reasonable wages that they got in the feudal estates and which they could continue to get in the Narodnik strategy of reorganisation of the feudal society. They would be further pushed into poverty under the Marxist formula of brutal industrialisation. The increase in production in the Marxist model is more likely to create more desires among the rich. This will perpetually impoverish the poor as the rich countries are doing to Africa today.

This problem is not solved by replacement of the ruthless capitalist with the ruthless state bureaucracy.

It seems that class conflict can only be removed by a cultural movement. The rich have to be taught that more consumption does not beget happiness. America has to be told that her problems of juvenile violence, divorce and alcoholism cannot be solved by increasing production and consumption.

The Narodniks however said that the feudal society can be reformed and one can directly transit to socialism. The basic problem, by implication, is getting the ruling elite to behave in a positive and harmonious fashion towards the masses. This problem remains unsolved in the Marxist model.

The CPI-M should also know that in the last years of his life Karl Marx had endorsed the possibility of direct transition from feudalism to socialism in Russia. It seems Marx was much troubled by the questions put by Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich. He made four drafts of the reply but finally sent a short note. In the first draft he wrote: In Russia the rural commune may develop directly from feudalism to socialism. He put the following questions to opponents of this view: "In order to utilise machines, steam engines, railways, etc, was Russia forced, like the West, to pass through a long incubation period in the engineering industry? Let them explain to me, too, how they managed to introduce in their own country, in the twinkling of an eye, the entire mechanism of exchange (banks, credit institutions, etc.), which it took the West centuries to devise?" The Preface to the second Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (1882) co-signed by Engels closed with a similar statement. These statements indicate that Marx thought dynamically. He responded to new questions creatively according to new evidences. □□□

[Contributed]