

Ending the Isolation

For the ruling elites of India, what they call the growing 'Maoist menace' is no surprise. But what surprises political observers most is how Maoist politics is being increasingly identified with tribal India, thanks to propaganda blitz by the so-called mainstream media. It was not the case at the initial phase of naxalite movement. The concept of a broad-based united front of toilers with agrarian reforms as the pivot got wide currency and unleashed a kind of ideological assault on the worshippers of status-quoism in the communist movement in the late '60s and early '70s. That the movement failed to motivate workers and break with the reformist clan was altogether a different matter. Not that emphasis was on tribal peasants only as it seems now. The ruling circles irrespective of their colour, have long been trying to isolate the naxalite identity, rather the Maoist identity, from the political perception of broad masses who think democracy doesn't mean much if it doesn't respond to their needs and will. What the establishment wants to convey to the people in so many words and cliches is that Maoist political culture lacks mass support. It is confined to some most backward pockets inhabited by perennially 'backward' tribals as if tribals are their only constituency while other segments of the toiling society should have reasons to avoid them.

True, workers, not to speak of urban middle class intellectuals, do not see the Maoist struggle of liberation as their own class liberation. The very idea of class has been so obliterated in recent years that no party talks about it. All parties represent people but people themselves face the dilemma of how to get correctly defined.

No doubt tribals in India are the worst sufferers. But dalits too are no less oppressed. Tragically enough, they see a liberator in Mayawati, not Mao. Maoist campaign as guerilla warfare in the jungles and hills—the tribal belts to be precise—seems to have reached a plateau. As violence begets violence, the authorities have no problem in isolating tribal zones further and crush even peaceful protest movements with iron fists. Civil Liberties Movements finish their routine job by producing fact-finding mission reports after visiting some rural areas plagued by naxalite actions, police excesses and state terror. No solidarity movement by workers in any industrial centre! Labour doesn't withdraw labour to support tribal upsurge. So long as Maoist projects remain isolated in some tribal hamlets, the rulers can ignore them. Also civil liberties movement-based reports fail to evoke much enthusiasm even among urban middleclass people—their main audience. Press statements are routinely issued by human rights bodies, only to be taken less seriously by ordinary people because of absence of organised efforts by these organisations. Civil Liberties Movement evolved against the backdrop of Indira Gandhi's internal emergency seems to have lost its utility to most mainstream parties, more specifically opposition parties.

Though global depression has created opportunities for militant labour-organising, the Maoists, because of their old strategic blunders are not in a position to take advantage of the situation. They will never learn from the past. Workers everywhere are systematically losing jobs while women workers are most vulnerable. As per the latest International Labour Organisation report, a further 22 million women are expected to fall into unemployment globally this year. Of the 3 billion people employed around the world in 2008, 1.2 billion were women i.e. 40.4 percent. And in 2009 the global unemployment rate for women could reach 7.4 percent, compared to 7 percent for men. And again because of poor labour organising among women the situation is anything but desperate in South Asian countries, particularly India. The majority of working women in India and in most third world countries toil in the informal economy with lower earnings and less protection. Out of the total number of 203 million unemployed globally 86 million are women and 118 million are men. For women, this represents an increase of 10

million over the estimated number of unemployed in 2007 and for men the increase would be 14 million.

Overall, women are still over-represented in agricultural sector. Internationally, the share of women employed in agriculture stands at 35.4 percent as compared to 32.2 percent for men. And it is more so in India where the percentage of women working in the industry has been low, right from the beginning. In times of economic upheaval like this Indian women workers mostly in agriculture often experience the negative consequences more rapidly and are slower to enjoy the benefits of recovery. But the Maoists have nothing to worry about the emerging tendencies in labour market and yet they cannot avoid the urgency as to how to break isolation at this critical juncture and get rid of tribal-all label. □