

Manmohan Singh and Maoists

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He has come to power through a 'Long March', advocates steady encircling of the 'enemy' population, scoffs at the Indian Constitution and while paying lip service to democracy believes power ultimately flows through the barrel of a gun.

Well, this is about Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India.

This 'mild mannered' professor first did the arduous 'Long March' from academics to civil service to politics—with many sacrifices on the way—mostly of his own principles. Next as finance minister in the early nineties he promoted policies that have resulted in the encircling of the Indian countryside by urban 'liberated zones' culminating in the introduction of the notorious Chinese concept of Special Economic Zones.

As for the Indian Constitution, his contempt for it is clear from the number of important economic policy decisions that he has managed to push through bypassing even discussion, leave alone sanction, from the Indian parliament. And last but not least he today occupies the highest echelon of the brutal Indian state, which for all its trappings of representative democracy, really wields power through the bullet and not the ballot.

If Dr Singh appears to be a soft intellectual among many of his mainstream opponents and colleagues, one cannot be fooled—he is the perfect front for all kinds of radical, wild-eyed ideologues seeking nothing less than the overthrow of the Indian republic and everything it stands for.

In less than two decades of meddling with policy making the Manmohanites have dismantled much of the role of state and public sector intervention in the Indian economy, encouraged the growth of large private monopolies, slashed subsidies for the poor, mortgaged national sovereignty to global business and handed over foreign policy to the US State Department.

The consequences for most Indian citizens have been disastrous. In absolute terms more Indians are below the poverty line than ever before, malnutrition around the country is worse than at the time of Independence, 70 percent of Indians earn less than 20 rupees a day, over 80 percent of Indian citizens still pay for their health-care out of their own pockets, the list goes on.

The greed of the few and the misery of the majority means India is much more divided than ever before- not just along class lines but more so around identities of caste, religion, language, geography as people seek security in numbers of what they consider 'their own'. And everywhere even modest attempts to assert local identities and demand autonomy and respect for sub-national cultures are being brutally put down using maximum force by the Indian state- that can tolerate only slaves and not citizens with full rights.

Worse still, the pro-US slide of successive Indian governments since the opening up of the economy by Manmohanomics in the early nineties has negated the very idea of an independent India being a global player in its own right.

Today, thanks to the obsequiousness of the Indian elite towards America there are NATO troops entrenched in Afghanistan for the past eight years and making repeated forays into Pakistan in the past couple. Anyone familiar with imperialist history can tell people that it is just a matter of time before they

actually enter Pakistan and from there to Indian soil is less than a hop away. This is the real price that India will pay for having Manmohan Singh as its prime minister, the undermining of the entire Indian freedom struggle and its future existence as a free country.

In other words, Manmohan Singh's profile is far more dangerous to India than any Maoist 'terrorist' that his home ministry and security advisers would like to demonise. But what about the CPI(Maoist) itself, who Dr Singh likes to brand as India's 'biggest internal security threat' and which has been banned by his government recently?

For all the hype the truth is this ragtag band of guerrillas hiding in the Indian forests are a threat only to petty contractors, low level government officials, foot soldiers of the Indian police and to local politicians who don't toe their line.

For all the media and official claims that they are 'present' in 150 districts of India and have a 'red corridor' through the middle of India the fact remains that their influence does not run beyond the few forested tracts that still remain in these backward districts. Remove the forests- as global warming will some day do if not the 'developmental' Indian state- and the Maoists will vanish too.

It is amazing that for a force that claims to be 'revolutionary' and fighting the mighty Indian state the CPI(Maoist) does not have any urban presence at all beyond a few bearded intellectuals and some dishevelled student activists. Even more amazingly the party does not have a base among peasants anymore, the backbone of any Maoist movement.

Tribal communities—however oppressed constitute just 8 percent of the Indian population- and however brave their resistance, cannot even defend their own turf in the long run leave alone transform the rest of the country. If the CPI(Maoist) is really serious about the Indian revolution it must get out of the forests and develop a strong base among both urban and rural populations.

Why, is it, that Maoism in India does not pose any threat to the Ambani empire, the most rapacious capitalists India has produced in recent times. The state of anti-capitalist struggles in this country is so pathetic it turns out the biggest threat to this empire are the feuding Ambani brothers themselves. Revolutionaries it seems are too busy fighting small-time traders and blowing up CRPF jawans to pay attention to larger national level processes of exploitation.

As for the methods used by the CPI(Maoist), their insistence on using arms-irrespective of the context and situation- is a huge problem for even many who would come out openly in their support if they changed their understanding of the violence versus non-violence debate.

Marxists historically have justified violent action by pointing to the fact that capitalism as a system kills thousands of innocent people without firing a single shot, just by the way it operates as a system. So for example the 2.5 million children who die every year of malnutrition related diseases in a country like India are victims of the bloodless violence of the Indian state and its masters.

Fine, so why don't the Marxists, Maoists whatever—follow the same principle and inflict bloodless violence on the Indian state? Why not mobilise the Indian masses in their millions to grab power from the current ruling elites instead of

a handful of armed squads playing Robin Hood- and not too well at that—given the losses they have been suffering in recent years.

Despite endless debate over the categories ‘violence’ and ‘non-violence’ there is little clarity on the subject anywhere. In fact these categories are not opposed to each other, as is often assumed, because there is a continuum between the two.

In that sense the more accurate categories to use are ‘bloody violence’ and ‘bloodless violence’ with the latter being the preferred method of action in the current Indian social and political context. If there is to be bloody violence at some stage because the Indian ruling class will never give up power without using brute force then people will deal with it at that time. That juncture can be understood in advance but not pre-empted artificially by insisting on a central role for the gun and the bomb in mass struggles.

For all the bloody crimes of the Indian state it is also true that the paranoid approach of the CPI(Maoist) and indeed its seeking to constantly provoke state repression is costing people’s movements around the country very dearly. A clear example is from Lalgarh in West Bengal where a mass mobilisation of tribals against their miserable conditions of living and police atrocities has tapered off into a few guerillas taking potshots at state forces and vanishing into the forest like some recluse.

The desperate acts of armed violence the CPI(Maoist) carries out in their attempts to jumpstart the Indian ‘revolution’ only betrays lack of long-term vision, the patience to deal with complexities of the Indian situation and a needless fetish for fireworks.

The CPI(Maoist) also need to change their understanding of what the Indian state is. It is not just about paid policemen and army personnel in uniform, or faceless bureaucrats or corrupt feudal politicians on the payroll of global corporations. The Indian state ultimately is about the hegemony of the ideas of liberal democracy that mask the brutalities of the capitalist system that prevail in the country today.

A capitalism that uses every trick in the trade from using religious fanaticism and communal divides to mythology and cinema promoting conservative status-quoist politics. The Indian state is also about the growing consumerist middle-classes that are willing to sanction genocide against their own less privileged fellow citizens as long as it is all explained neatly by talk-show hosts on their flat screen color television sets.

The Indian state is not just a set of buildings, agencies and people but about a ‘way of doing things’ that has become deeply entrenched in different sections of the Indian population and will need more energy to dispel than mere dynamite can offer. It involves much more complex level opponents who cannot be blown away with guns and bombs alone.

Also a simple question one can ask the Maoist leadership is—“so what if you manage to come to power through an armed struggle?” What guarantee is there that the process of top-down, non-participatory revolution the party has adopted will actually transfer power to the Indian people and not to a small group of secretive party officials?

Even assuming one is serious about armed revolution in this country instead of blowing up policemen the Maoists should be organising them against the Indian state. And not just the police, also the army. After all this is precisely what the Hindu right wing has been systematically doing all these years.

The fact that the Abhinav Bharat group, responsible for terrorist attacks in several parts of the country, was led by a serving Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian army is not a coincidence. The Hindu right wing in this country is far, far ahead of any other force towards pulling off an insurrection against the current Indian state.

That is why the idea of the CPI(Maoist), with their current myopic strategies, taking power through an armed struggle in a huge country like India is questionable. A single spark may indeed be enough to set the prairie on fire but the Maoist spark is too deeply hidden in the damp jungles of the country today to set the regime on fire.

Those opposed to the CPI(Maoist) are bound to be irritated by this writer's 'downplaying' the threat from them to the Indian state while those supporting them may feel the 'revolutionary advances' made by the party in many parts of India are being ignored.

Manmohan Singh and his policies are the biggest threat to the future well-being of India, the CPI (Maoist) is not as big a threat to the Indian state as it is made out to be and there are many more ways in which resistance to the Indian state can manifest itself than simply through armed struggle. □