

PCPA VS CPI(M)

Jangalmahal Revisited

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The recent setback to the people's movement in the jangalmahal of West Bengal merit serious thought. The murders of Lalmohan Tudu, president of the PCPA, and Bhuta Baske, secretary of the PCPA in his incarnation as Sido Soren, as well as the encounter killing of other organizers of the movement, cannot be dismissed as 'inevitable' setbacks. In practically every case, the information came to the joint governmental forces from local spies, usually CPI(M) or ex-CPI(M) supporters. In the case of Bhuta, a group of people who made a show of leaving the CPI(M) and joining the PCPA seem to be the informants. The organizers of the Jnaneshwari express massacre, detained by the CBI, have been separately alleged to have had CPI(M) and local PCPA links; possibly there were individuals with both links. The scanty facts which emerge do point to inadequate vetting and checking of recruits to the PCPA and a fatal looseness in the technical machinery governing shelter, movement and protection of personnel, amidst white terror. Media sources, in fact, write directly of infiltration of the PCPA by CPI(M) men.

The fight with the CPI(M) has been condensed into a single threat: Leave the CPI(M) or die. The justification is that the CPI(M) Harnad gangs are carrying out a campaign of recovering lost territory by rape, murder, arson, in tandem with the joint occupation forces of the centre and the state, and CPI(M) members and sympathizers have been ordered to act as police spies. In areas where the sway of the PCPA holds, the supporters of the CPI(M) have little choice but to 'join' the PCPA, and the more enterprising of these conscripts keep their links with the CPI(M), though, according to the CPI(Maoist), this is a felony punishable by death. (Of course, those caught with PCPA or maoist links earn the same fate in the hands of the CPI(M). The CPI(M) is, in fact, the greatest butcher of its political opponents and their suspected supporters over 32 years. Its lapse into barbarity is best exemplified by its involvement in the mindless violence of the Jnanesh-wari/Nandigram type.) The fact that people will spy for the CPI(M) in PCPA-dominated areas, the sheer number of people killed for supporting the CPI(M), and the presence of working people among the executed, all go to show that the PCPA has not been able to isolate the CPI(M) politically. In fact, there has hardly been any political campaign on basic issues. Corruption, siphoning of central funds earmarked for the poor, oppression, torture and harassment in collaboration with the police are symptoms of a system of class oppression which can only be attacked through land reforms. The trick of survival learnt by the CPI(M) is to distribute the fruits of corruption and graft among many people. This leads to the formation of a mosaic of mafiosi each with its Anuj Pandey type godfather - so long as you are loyal to the family you will be provided with some means of livelihood, legal or illegal. To defeat such a system there must be a strong political call on basic demands. In Singur and Nandigram, the basic issue was land grabbing from the peasant for use by the corporates. In Dandakaranya the earliest struggles were based on increasing tendu leaf collection rates, enforcing forest rights by chasing away the corrupt foresters, and occupying cultivable lands from the forests and

the landlords. In all these cases the people fought to retain their occupancy of land and forest.

In the *jangalmahal*, the issue was police atrocity and this united a lot of people, especially from the adivasi-moolbasi population. But, as the struggle intensified, there was no concerted effort to raise the question of land reform, apart from sporadic redistribution of the land occupied by some CPI(M) leaders. Land reform is not easy here in a smallholding economy. But, of late, the media reports redistribution by the PCPA of single holding land —100 bighas in extent, although there is no declaration of comprehensive land reforms.(The accumulation of so much land points to increasing polarization in the small peasant economy, accelerated perhaps by accumulation of political power). Considering, the figures of 75% of all households in Lalgah and 92% of cultivators and agricultural labourers in Belpahari, for the percentage of small and marginal farmers, the fight to implement NREGA has not also received the importance it deserves.

It may be argued that in the *jangalmahal*, too, the first issue to be attacked was the tendu leaf collection rate. However, the rate was increased by a fiat of the armed squads and not by people's struggle. The fight against police atrocity attracted large gatherings of the people, but there is no information about the mode of occupation of large plots of land. The efficacy of military methods as a substitute for people's struggles is highly debatable.

One cannot but think that a down to earth political programme based on primary demands like land, water, forest rights, and employment, and mass struggles to implement them might have been more effective in exposing and isolating the CPI(M) than the programme of individual killing.

The PCPA is not clear in its pronouncements whether this is an 'Adivasi-Moolbasi' quasi-national struggle or a struggle of the general people, initiated by the Adivasi-Moolbasi. The SC+ST population in Lalgah and Belpahari blocks is 55% and 58% of the whole. This means, on the other hand, that more than 40% of the people do not think of themselves as Adivasi-Moolbasi, and special pains are required to unite these people (i.e. their poorer sections or the working people among them) with the Santal-Mahato led Adivasi-Moolbasi.. If the CPI(M) entrenches itself within this 40%, a bitter, fratricidal conflict will ensue. Again the way to unite all the people is the common agrarian programme. □□□

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