

Critique of the First CPI(ML)

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THE DEATH OF KANU Sanyal terminates the voyage of a leader who lived like the people he addressed. His was the strange destiny of having to dismiss the very existence of the party, CPI(M-L), whose birth he declared from the dias on the Monument maidan of Calcutta, and deny the leadership of the very man, Charu Mazumdar, whom he introduced to that audience as the leader of Naxalbari. The people of the central forests are resisting a vicious attack of the Indian state, and the leaders of the resistance consider themselves to be the successors to the heritage of Naxalbari. It is ironic that he could neither support the leaders nor hail the people's struggle. But whatever be the verdict of history on these contradictory notions, Kanu Sanyal will be remembered by posterity as the principal organizer of the Naxalbari peasant struggle.

It is a proper occasion to revisit the major points in a critical evaluation of this party, the CPI(M-L), after affirming its undeniably historic role in re-opening the question of the road to India's revolution, and the relevant theory and practice, fighting all the way against modern revisionism, while taking lessons from the cultural revolution and upholding its significance. The judgment of history is likely to state that the principal aspect of the first CPI(M-L) was positive. History will also record that it was the vision and courage of Charu Mazumdar and the sacrifice of innumerable martyrs which dovetailed with the desire of the people to fight for change and restarted the Indian revolution.

THE FIRST CPI(M-L)

The understanding of the party was that the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of people was the principal one. Whether this is the correct formulation, in the face of the specific way in which imperialism uses the centralized state in India against the people, might be debatable. Also, in the forests, the colonial style forest and administrative bureaucracy and traders and money-lenders were the main enemies of the people. The transformation of the semi-feudal relations, as capitalism emerges in an uneven manner, and the swelling number of agricultural labourers demand careful analysis. But, in 1967, there could be no doubt that in the plains, the landlords and semi-feudal land relations were the clear targets of the people.

At that time, the semi-feudal relations of production, which had become a fetter on the productive forces, were not overly affected by the capitalist ups and downs in the centralized economy. The relations of exploitation and oppression in the forests and much of the plains were unbearable and essentially resistant to change. So, the party thought that peasant struggle for land could begin anywhere at any time, depending only on the wishes and the subjective preparation of the peasantry, and take on an overly political character as the state came down on the side of the landlords, and develop into a people's armed struggle as the repressive power of the state unfolded itself.

The objective situation was ripe, locally, for beginning such struggles in many of the forest and plains areas. The tempo of expansion into a full-scale people's war would depend, of course, on many subjective factors, including the degree of disillusionment among the people, their wishes and preparation, the measure of disunity and inner fighting among the class enemies, and the measure of unity among the revolutionaries and democrats of the 'four classes'. The party, however, never talked of these restricting factors.

This scenario, derived from the idea of local seizure of power as opposed to a grand, simultaneous nation-wide uprising, was a practical challenge to the line of perpetual postponement of the revolution in the name of incomplete chocking of the productive forces, or waiting for a national high tide or the lack of sufficient subjective preparation (the people's consciousness was inadequate, the party was too weak as shown by electoral results and such excuses).

The party studied the revisionist past and rejected the notion of a long period of preparation during which electoral fights would be a major form of activity. This was what the revisionists were doing in India upto 1967. It stressed the lessons of Tebhaga and Telangana, and the Chinese revolution. The lessons from this last formed the basis of understanding of the peasant struggle in Telangana.

LESSONS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The party rejected Khrushchov's line and all forms of modern revisionism, including the Liu-Teng line.

Charu Mazumder's great contribution was the realization that all revolutions, including the Indian revolution, would now be part of the cultural revolution, in the sense that the major features of the cultural revolution would have to be reckoned with and incorporated into any revolution of the future. After the Magurjan gun-snatching incident, he declared the commencement of operations by a guerrilla army, and explained that the organ of local power would be the revolutionary committee, one-third party, one-third army and one-third people, a composition determined in the cultural revolution. Now, according to orthodox Leninism, the party is the vanguard of the working class, the party leads the people, and there is no sense in a separate representation of the people in a committee (with real power, as opposed to a showpiece committee) in which the party is already present. The implication is that the understanding of the people may not always coincide with, and may even be more advanced, in specific situations, than the understanding of the party (for example in the matter of rectification of the party), and this is characteristically an approach derived from Mao's thinking.

The feature haunting Charu Mazumder was the domination of the party by young leaders of petty-bourgeois extraction and the problem of establishment of the leadership of the poor and landless peasantry over the actual struggle in the countryside. He was afraid that, like the previous versions, this party, too, would degenerate into a revisionist organization under a middle class leadership. He insisted that the initiative of the poor and landless peasantry must be unlocked.

Nobody else in the party understood that what he was talking was related to the supervision of the people over the party, partly because there was simultaneous emphasis on the cult of the revolutionary authority.

MAJOR POINTS

Let us now consider the major points of a critique, important because they hold the key to an understanding of why the movement was crushed temporarily.

It was declared that it was a new era, the era of the final defeat of imperialism and worldwide victory of the proletarian revolution. This was to be accomplished by 2001 and the Indian revolution by 1975. It was an era in which self-sacrifice was the only requirement for ensuring victory, and all thoughts of self-defence were wrong. As a corollary, the conclusion was drawn that there was no possibility of 'Left' deviation in this era. The ebb and flow of the revolutionary tide was denied; the era was to be one of revolutionary high tide only.

Also, at first, it was said that the ideology and politics of this era were contained in the red book of quotations from Mao Ze Dong, and, later, necessary reading was confined only to the Three Articles by Mao Ze Dong and the party paper. Nothing else was to be read, not even the works of Marx, Lenin and Mao: the more one read the greater a fool he became.

This concept of the new era bred in the party a sense of quick victory.
The protracted nature of a people's war was forgotten.

In deciding tactics, there was no attempt to judge and match the flow of the revolutionary tide and the tempo of reaction.

The strategic line of local seizure of power and building base areas was abandoned and actions planned all over the country. In particular, the urban youth were encouraged to undertake offensive actions.

The correct line of starting the peasant struggle on land and power was distorted into one of quick victory through individual killings all over the country. The struggle for land was also given up, and the peasant struggle was to be for political power, directly. The abandonment of study kept the cadre dependent on the highest leadership and incapable of independent theoretical analysis, leave alone critical re-examination of party policies.

The origin of the concept was a one-sided fear that even a justified criticism of 'Left' deviation might strengthen right deviation.

Now, the question of a new era of this sort cannot be settled by argument alone or quotations from Chinese party congresses . It depends on the actual nature of the crisis of imperialism, whether it is irremediable as determined by facts.



Figure 1 : *Days on Strike per 1000 industrial workers in 16 OECD Countries*

Figure 1 shows the annual number of days on strike per 1000 industrial workers in 16 OECD countries. The number slowly decreases to 200 till about 1963 and then increases from the late 1960's to 500 in 1980 and then falls dramatically.

So, the late sixties and seventies were a period of heightened working class activity, but working class activity decreased continuously for the next 30 years.

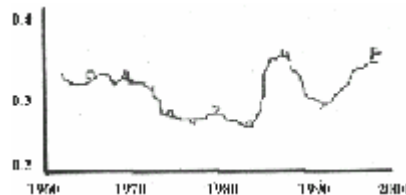


Figure 2 : *Gross Profit Share of value added in manufacture (15 OECD countries)*

Figure 2 shows the share of gross profit to value added in manufacture. This index of the gains of the capitalists in the economic war between profit and wages fell during the late sixties and seventies but rose again in the eighties.

Other indices of economic and political activity show the same up and down behaviour in place of a continuous rise or fall. (see *Capitalism Unleashed*, by Andrew Glyn, Oxford University Press, 2006, the source of the data and figures used here).

The late sixties saw big strikes in France and militant youth movements in Europe and England. The Cultural Revolution started against the party bourgeoisie in China. By the middle of the seventies the Americans were militarily defeated and thrown out by the peoples of Vietnam and Kampuchea.

However, the late seventies saw the defeat of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of capitalist restoration in China.. Capitalist restoration had already occurred in the Soviet Union and the eighties and early nineties saw the formalization of bourgeois rule in the Soviet Union and East Europe. These were heavy losses for the proletariat.

The euphoric atmosphere of the late sixties bred the theory of the new era, but the eighties and nineties showed that capitalism could still make an economic and political recovery and, during this resurgence of the bourgeoisie the wisdom of an international

line of offensive by the proletariat as predicated by the theory of the new era would be a debatable proposition..

Of course, this does not mean that there could not be short periods of crisis of the ruling classes in particular regions or countries of the world.. Even if the new era theory was not correct, a line of local struggles could be appropriate for India. There was certainly a terrible crisis in the late sixties as INC, the old party of the Indian ruling coalition split, and the era of state-level local parties began. A section of the Indian ruling classes set up Mrs Gandhi as their political representative and looked towards an alliance with the bourgeoisie of the Soviet Union. Mrs Gandhi rapidly consolidated power after a successful war against Pakistan in 1971, but the other section of the ruling classes hit back in 1974-5 with the Jayaprakash movement and Mrs Gandhi promulgated the Emergency. The political crisis only started abating after Mrs Gandhi's second coming in 1980, but the economy was not stable. The nineties saw, however, a relative stability on the economic and political fronts with the surrender of the Indian ruling classes to US big business and the development of a two-coalition Centre (with frantic efforts by the parliamentary 'Left' to retain relevance through an illusory third front) and a working relationship between the Centre and the States. So, all through the seventies there was turbulence, with, however, significant periods of calm (the 3-4 years of undisturbed rule after 1971 allowed Mrs Gandhi to authorize Siddhartha Ray's butchery of revolutionary youth in West Bengal), demanding flexible tactics on the part of people's movements in place of a rigid line like the new era theory.

COPYING CHINA

The old revisionism (together with the adventurism of 1949-52) which plagued the Indian communist movement till 1967 was resolute in rejecting the lessons of the Chinese revolution even though the Telengana struggle had placed them on the agenda. In a rebound, *the CPI(M-L) party would not tolerate any formulation of the Indian society and state in 1969 which differed in any way from the China of 1927-39.* Semi-colonial China was divided up among several foreign powers and ravaged by dog-fights among the warlords connected to them, these warlords being the dominant powers in China's semi-feudal countryside. There was no centralized capitalist economy and centralized state power at the beginning of 1927, and the process of centralization by Chiang-KaiShek proceeded parallel to the Chinese revolution.

Semi colonial India was colonized for 200 years by a single foreign power which had set up a centralized state apparatus at the heart of which was a trained bureaucracy and strong armed forces and police. Landlords kept private armed goons but the countryside was not parcelled between warlords in semi-feudal India. The big bourgeoisie was dependent on international capital and had betrayed the national interest, but was much more developed industrially and financially than China's 'four big families.'

These specifically Indian characteristics (together with the organization of domination by caste and the national aspirations of a multitude of nationalities and sub-nationalities) could not be discussed within the party, without howls alleging heresy. Neglect of the specific characteristics of India led to under-estimation or non-recognition of

The strength, power and reach of the Indian state

The expansionist and colonial attitude of the Indian state towards neighbours and national aspirations

The specificity of the contradictions among the targets of the Indian revolution.

The neglect rose from a fear that these might be turned into arguments against beginning and continuing the revolutionary struggle. But it led to a neglect of the facts that

right from the start the Indian revolution was facing a strong and ruthless enemy, and strategy and tactics should be tailored accordingly.

In the absence of serious contradictions among the enemy (except during 1967-80), the formation of base areas would be much more difficult than in China (of course, the very concept of base areas was given up at the highest level of the Indian party).

However, all opinions favouring a carefully planned strategy and tactics of the armed struggle, based on a study of the strength and weakness of the people and the enemy in the specific conditions faced by India, with offensives to be linked to times of serious differences within the state, or great difficulties faced by it, were dismissed as 'self-defence', 'centrism', 'deviation from Chinese path', and 'avoidance of the armed struggle.'

ELECTION BOYCOTT

China had no parliament. India has one. However, a look shows that the parliament is filled with criminals and millionaires (criminal-millionaires?) and completely controlled, if not bought outright by the landlords and corporate robbers. Only 'cretins' would dream of the parliament playing a decisive role in the revolutionary struggle. However, *boycott of elections as a strategy for all time in all places* arose in the CPI(M-L) from the paranoid fear that use of the parliament would corrupt the cadre. The role of ideology and political conviction is under-estimated in such fear. Very few working people who vote have any illusion that they are thereby exercising their sovereignty or participating in political power. In most elections, the electorate of a particular locality vote for a return of a member of the same caste or religion. So, usually, the people use the parliament tactically, almost cynically, for small, selfish favours for themselves or their community, but sometimes, in exceptional circumstances, for making a political statement regionally, or even nationally, against oppressive regimes—the 1977 electoral verdict against the Emergency, or the West Bengal verdicts against the Congress in 1967 and the CPI(M) in the Panchayet elections of 2008, the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, and the municipal elections of 2010. But, the party refused to learn from the people a tactical use of elections at certain times and in certain places.

ANNIHILATION LINE

Annihilation of class enemies was individual killing of landlords, spies and police personnel by secret squads... It was acknowledged not only as tactics but as an important strategic line and the beginning of guerrilla warfare.

Individual killing by secret squads, as a line, was marked by the absence of the participation of the people and, together with dependence on the squads as deliverers, this line harmed the initiative of the masses.

What is the experience of the Gopiballavpur peasant struggle? There had been a movement for wage increases for daily labour on the embankments and a deeply influential movement for harvesting the paddy on landlords' land, news of the latter travelling even to rural communities in the interior forests of Bihar and Orissa. The party's central leadership disagreed with the struggle, calling it economism and pressed for the implementation of the line of annihilation of class enemies.. Killing of landlords started and many were killed. In the region of influence of the mass

struggles every killing of a hated landlord was celebrated by the people. There was no dearth of shelters and protection for the party cadre.

But when the police and the EFR started their repression the people did not resist. Slowly they started asking the cadre not to visit them as the police tortured those suspected of affording shelter and food to the party. Activities of spies increased and police started getting news of the whereabouts and movement of the cadre. Central party leadership asked the cadre to move out of the region under enemy focus and start secret killing in new areas. But, it was found that in the new areas, where there had not been previous mass struggles and political activity among the masses, a killing did not have the previous impact.

The line of individual killing took the place of a political programme for land reform through people's struggle. In fact, Charu Mazumder argued in favour of peasant struggle directly for political power (and not peasant struggle for land). If, there had been land reform, then, for example, those who had been beneficiaries of land redistribution, would have lost this land when the landlords returned with the armed forces of the state. Then the people would themselves fight for protecting or reoccupying the gains of the revolution. But there was no declared land policy and no land redistribution.

All mass organizations were abandoned including trade unions. The difficult task of organizing mass movements in a milieu of illegality was not addressed at all.

THE WORKING CLASS

The Indian working class is a complicated entity. On the one hand there are numerous workers from the peasantry who show a peasant (and after a few years a rich peasant) character in the village and its politics. On the other there are the entrants from the impoverished middle classes with dreams of class promotion for their progeny. The party did not attempt any concrete study of the working class in different regions. Economism was opposed, unions abandoned, but there was no interest in determining what would be revolutionary modes of struggle and organization, especially in the middle of illegality. There was no effort to determine the concrete way in which the working class would play a leading role.

NO UNITED FRONT

The Chinese revolution introduced the notion of the three magic weapons: the party, the armed struggle, and the united front. But, the CPI(ML) decided on postponing the united front until the party and the armed forces were strong enough—enough to resist utilization by other elements of the front. Once again there was a fear which underestimated the power of strong ideological and political moorings. The united front could, in fact, have been of good use for survival of the people's struggle during white terrors in the early stages when the struggle was less strong. This has been shown by the European communists during the fascist domination of the thirties and forties.

REVOLUTIONARY AUTHORITY

In line with the Chinese error of 'whatever-ism (whatever Mao said or says is 100% correct and cannot be questioned),' a resolution came up before the first congress of the CPI(ML) to recognize the revolutionary authority of Charu Mazumder. It faced

opposition and was withdrawn. But, in practice, this line, which forbade all debate about the party line and paralysed the party committee system, was tacitly accepted by the party after its opponents, who had differences on other points also, were segregated or expelled.

The idea of authority completely masked the lessons learnt from the cultural revolution regarding the role of the people in the leadership of the revolution. Also, it prevented self-criticism—many put all the blame for the setback on Charu Mazumdar (suppressing his pioneering role and major contributions) and avoided a unbiased analysis of the mistakes.

These ideas may hopefully provide the starting point of a critique. Such a critique will not detract from the historic role of the CPI(ML) and that is not the reason why it has been dug up after all these years.

The CPI(M-L) 'stormed heaven'. It was new and inexperienced and made mistakes.

This is but natural.

But, the mistakes need to be widely discussed. The people have to learn from them.