

## Calcutta Notebook

### DRC

WITH THE PASSING OF Saibal Mitra (69), Bengal loses one of the last stalwarts of the historic fight within the CPI(M), from its inception in 1964 to the 1967 peasant struggle in Naxalbari and after.

A leader of the students' movement, he was noted as an orator and a sharp political analyst. At first, a blue-eyed boy of the CPI (M), he was soon inducted into the leading group of the students' organization, the Bengal Provincial Students' Federation, which was undergoing division into factions owing allegiance to the CPI and the CPI(M).

A party member, Saibal Mitra was soon drawn into the ideological-political struggle inside the CPI(M). The struggle was so acute that the party programme had to be adopted minus stands

- (1) on the international debate between the communist parties of the Soviet Union and China regarding the theories of peaceful coexistence of the imperialist and the 'socialist' blocs, peaceful competition between capitalism and socialism, peaceful transition (that is, without a revolutionary struggle) to socialism, and a non-capitalist path of development for former colonies and semi-colonies; and,
- (2) on the tactical line to be followed by the Party.

Saibal Mitra, like a sizeable section of party members, rejected the counter-revolutionary and collaborationist politics of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This section had a general sympathy for the Chinese party's defence of revolutionary Marxism, but Saibal Mitra went much further and took an active role in formulating a revolutionary programme for India based on the lessons of the Chinese revolution, and kept close contact with other groups with the same aim, like Charu Mazumdar's consolidation in the north, and groups like Chinta, Dakshin Desh and the Committee for Inner-Party Struggle against Revisionism in south Bengal.

This was a time just after the India -China war, and supporters of the Chinese international line were persona non grata with the Indian government. Saibal Mitra had become a speaker on behalf of the students' front in rallies and meetings accompanying the many mass struggles of the time like the tramway workers' movement. He was arrested by the government and spent a stint in jail.

He was among the first of the Indian communists to attempt direct contact with the Chinese Communist Party for discussions. This was a hazardous adventure which took him to the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu in a clandestine manner. After the Naxalbari uprising Saibal Mitra

became an important organiser of support for the movement in Kolkata. He started a paper for students, named *Chhatra Fouj*, the Students' Army.

After the CPI(M-L) was formed, he went to work in a rural area and tried to implement the party line of organising the peasant movement through 'class enemy annihilation'. He found the line unworkable and became critical of the party. He was also unwell, with a heart complaint, and instead of strident opposition, he slowly removed himself from the process of disintegration of the party.

He joined a Kolkata college as a lecturer and, always a good writer, started to let his experiences gell through a series of novels in Bangla, which won acclaim and recognition. He remained helpful to political groups of the Left. He also did all he could to assist troubled participants in the turbulence of the sixties and seventies in their subsequent individual problems. Singur, Nandigram and Lalgarh saw him once again on the streets, in rallies and meetings, but his health was failing visibly. Even a few days before he died, he was present at a meeting in support of the people of Jangal Mahal. He leaves behind Sudeshna, his wife and companion all through his stormy life, and two daughters. All on the Left will miss this splendid man. □□□