

Behind the Communist Curtain

[Some time back CIA released a collection of declassified analytic monographs and reference aids, designated within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Directorate of Intelligence (DI) as the CAESAR, ESAU, and POLO series, highlights the CIA's efforts from the 1950s through the mid-1970s to pursue in-depth research on Soviet and Chinese internal politics and Sino-Soviet relations. Of particular interest to India is a 3-part series on the border dispute with China but more juicy document is 12 MB dossier on the Indian Communist Party, this should stir up politics in India at a time when the Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi led Congress has accorded unprecedented leverage to the Communists who are just out of power after decades of their authoritarian rule in Bengal and Kerala. It's simply disturbing to learn the extent to which the Indian Communists looked for direction from Russia and China, sought support and approval and pretty much sub-ordinated national interest at the altar of a dubious ideology and subservience to the Chinese. Below are a few highlights :]

IT'S BETTER TO START WITH the border dispute with China to get a sense of Nehru's naivety in his approach in dealing with the Chinese.

Nehru believed China's Communist Leaders were amenable to Gentlemanly persuasion.

Nehru's strategy was defensive and he believed strengthening Indian Economy to resist a Chinese Military Attack was adequate. China's short term policy was not to alert Nehru on the wide gap between Chinese and Indian claims on border and hence they lied about Chinese maps.

Chinese leaders recognized that India neither by temperament nor by capability was a Military threat. China's strategy was to use diplomatic channels to cut out Indian press, public and parliament. It was a 5-year masterpiece in guile. It played on Nehru's Asian anti-imperialist mental attitude, his proclivity to temporize and his sincerity for peace with China. What China conceded with the Left Hand it retrieved with the Right Hand.

Had it not been Nehru but a more military minded man who was Prime Minister in Oct 1959, a priority program to prepare India to eventually fight would have been started.

INDIAN COMMUNISTS

The dossier on the Indian Communists runs into all of 185 pages. Its focus was on the split within the Indian Communist Parties into Pro-Soviet and Pro-Chinese factions while recounting the sequence of events drawing from many sources including a book by Minoos Masani. A good portion of the dossier is dedicated to the CPI post-independence under Ranadive with his Pro-Soviet approach and his differences with the Telangana section of the party which was toeing the Maoist line. The dossier notes the April 1957 election win of the CPI in Kerala as the first such development in history where a Communist Party attained power through an election. It then notes that in July 1957 through a reliable source that EMS Namboodiripad was asked by the Soviets to forward full report to Moscow on the methods used to attain power via elections. Another juicy detail implicates Harkishen Singh Surjeet and others on working with the Soviet Communists to set up an underground party. In February 1958 an official of the Soviet Embassy

contacted CPI Leaders to renew the request to set up an underground organization. While Ajoy Ghosh refused, HK Surjeet and others privately decided that Ghosh, was taking a complacent line and decided to reach out to the CPSU outside of party channels. Here is why things get murky—the CPI did proceed to recruit a secret organization within the Indian Army. Subsequent events saw the beginning of the tilt of the hard left faction of the CPI towards China. The dossier quotes Basavapunniah, a CPI leader, the real source of inspiration for the CPI should be Communist China, and he planned to talk to Chinese Leaders as a Disciple talks to his teachers. Some more murky details of how China and Russia influenced the CPI to set up a parallel state, apparatus. In February 1959, Ajoy Ghosh in his report to the Central Executive Committee that China, Russia insisted that the CPI must develop a standby apparatus capable of armed resistance, while intensifying penetration of Indian Military forces.

After the Nehru Government dismissed the Kerala Communist Government on July 31 1959 there was further movement within the Party to revive its illegal activities. From 6 to 8 August 1959 hard leftists, urged a revival of CPI illegal apparatus to be run from the party secretariat.

More Murky Details of CPI supporting China during the Tibetan invasion. In April 1959 Ranadive met with the Chinese Ambassador during which he offered CPI's support to China on Tibet, and advised China to concentrate its attacks on rightist Anti-Chinese Indian leaders. Further in August in a letter to the Chinese Communist Party drafted by Ajoy Ghosh and Ranadive the CPI urged the Chinese to single out particularly the Praja Socialist Party and the Jan Sangh for attack as suggested in the April meeting with the Ambassador.

At the September Central Executive Committee meeting Ajoy Ghosh argued against the tendency to welcome Chinese military presence on Indian borders to justify a new militant line for the CPI. This was rejected by the hard left who argued that with the PLA now present along the Indian Border the Indian Party had a channel of support for Armed Operations and a potential liberator in the event of mass uprisings.

The CIA reports that this line was repeated multiple times. It was first reported on 13 September 1959 by Basavapunniah, Ranadive, Jaipal Singh—head of secret illegal apparatus. However the dossier gets interesting as it moves to the 1960s closer to the formal split in the party. An interesting aspect of the split: In 1960 the West Bengal faction of the Communist Party passed a resolution criticizing the conduct of the Soviet Communist Party and Khrushchev by name while supporting the Chinese Communist Party.

The CIA calls definitely the only such resolution to have ever been passed by any Communist Party in the whole world.

The year 1960 ended with this faction of the CPI continuing to report to the Chinese Party and to receive guidance from it. Ajoy Ghosh also reported to the Central Executive that during his Peking visit Mao had revealed that China wished to exercise more control on Communist Parties in Asia.

The most concentrated of these Communist Activities were to be in West Bengal. Evidence of Chinese Influence in the growth of Communist Party in West Bengal: A new Chinese Party consul in Calcutta in September of 1960 held several meetings with members of the West Bengal party.

4 powerful radio sets had been installed in the office of the *China Review* in Calcutta to listen to broadcasts from Peking—handouts were given based on these broadcasts for propaganda work. The CIA also reports of indications from 1959 of Chinese Financial Subsidies to sections of the CPI particularly the left faction strongholds in West Bengal. Basavapunniah also reports to two CPI Leaders later on that a foreign supply base was now available for the underground organizations with Chinese occupation of Tibet and other frontier areas. In September 1960 the first evidence of a vertical split in the CPI became evident with the hard left faction comprising Jyoti Basu, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Basavapunniah, Sundarayya and Ranadive supporting the Chinese position on the India-China border dispute. Earlier in August further murky evidence of the hard left seeking Chinese support in a written letter asking for collaboration in Indian underground organization work aimed at an eventual revolution, because China has a border with India and can provide arms and supplies. Finally more evidence of anti-national stance of the Jyoti Basu led West Bengal faction—When Z A Ahmed indicated that the Party should take a nationalist stand on Chinese incursions to India, he was severely berated by the West Bengal faction. □□□

References:

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