

# In Search of a Mass line

Political Right is not doing just fine. Nor does religious revivalism pose a threat to traditional secular institutions anywhere in the world. Even in Iran theocracy is in trouble as the Ayatollahs find it difficult to impose divine sanctions on the unwilling people. But that doesn't mean political left is on the offensive. The reverse is true. It is no longer a force to reckon with even in the social-democratic citadels of Europe. The fact that the left is out of touch with the common people is as clear as anything else. Ordinary people face stark crises that require fundamental structural reform. And the left has no answer. Their obsession with 'lying low tactics' is simply counter-productive. That diehard conservatives even in America are no longer pathologically averse to socialism, is quite remarkable. The problem is socialists themselves no longer believe in the feasibility of any kind of socialist project in the distant future. Their insistence on turning away from the past is preventing them from building a future.

If the left is in disarray in India today it is because it solely depends on electoral successes for survival. Elections are not perfect anywhere. And yet they think they have nothing to do other than championing a dysfunctional democracy. The decline of official left in India's parliamentary milieu seems irreversible despite occasional electoral gains here and there. Being the part of the ruling establishment for quite a long period various social-democratic tendencies represented in the Indian context by dozens of communist and socialist outfits and a number of 'Janata' formations with caste-bias have lost whatever mass appeal they had even three or four decades ago. Right now they derive comfort from the fact that in Latin America social-democrats are making waves by changing regimes through ballots.

But what is called 21st century socialism *a la* Venezuela is still vague. Experiment by Hugo Chavez for a new Bolivarian order has not yet produced a viable alternative model of social revolution. In other words it deviates from the path of insurgency which has been dominating Latin American revolutionary scenario since the days of Che in the fifties. They now pin too much hope on ballot which somehow gets passive acceptance in policy-making chambers of America. No doubt ballot has brought in some change in radical perception of common people in recent years but whether it is enough to energise liberation struggle against transnational corporations is open to question.

As for bullet, most ex-revolutionaries think armed insurrection is a thing of the past. Protracted guerilla warfare is being projected as a panacea for any revolutionary cause. But nowhere in the world guerilla warfare is making headlines. Gone are the days of Vietnam war-era optimism.

Too many ethnic wars are revolving around ideological wilderness. A lot of sub-nationalism and regionalism. All this makes things difficult to have a broad-based united front of toilers and socially oppressed without which no revolutionary change is possible. The solution to ethnic unrest doesn't lie in creating more unrest. The Kachen and Karen liberation movements of Myanmar otherwise ethnically inspired, have been stagnating for long. And their ideologues do not know how to make a breakthrough. Tamil tigers failed to generate

harmless solidarity movement even in India and their tragic end is not discussed even in the right-wing media. Such blatant public apathy betrays deep disillusionment with sub-nationalism propelled ethnic war.

Mass support coupled with motivation and wide appeal is the real force to sustain any guerilla movement. Douglas Pike who studied extensively Vietnamese guerilla warfare, possibly on behalf of CIA, produced a highly informative volume—'Vietcong' for American soldiers fighting Vietnamese communist guerillas. He observed that mere 20 percent solid mass support to a guerilla movement could make a hopeless situation for regular troops. Incidentally Vietnamese revolutionaries evolved their own strategic and tactical lines without imitating the Chinese military model.

In India the far left that thinks armed confrontation with the state is the only option left to carry forward continuing revolution has failed to form a broad-based mass platform. Nor did they ever try to do factional work in different parliamentary parties as a tactical manoeuvring. But the undivided communist party of India once did it. Historically in accurate way of looking at liberation movement has its own pitfalls. They are backed by a few human rights bodies having only a limited space to agitate. Both parliamentarian and non-parliamentarian left forces hope to build people's paradise of their kind through their subjective thinking. They lack the massline without which it is next to impossible to transform the existing power equation, in favour of the 'perpetual losers'. For them masses are not yet a material force. Without a grassroots uprising that challenges business as usual approach in state and national capitals, people aren't likely to get the radical change they were promised by different parties, much less the change they need. □□□