

Naxalite Tactics In Cities

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THE Naxalite talk of using the liberated countryside to encircle and finally capture the cities is well known. And so is the much more simplified slogan of "armed agrarian revolution". The fact that in the scale of strategic priorities liberation of the countryside comes first and in popular slogans revolution is mainly concerned about agriculture might well have created the impression that the revolution the Naxalites aim at is purely a business of the peasants. But despite the CPI(ML)'s major emphasis on organising the landless and poor peasants and talk about a "rural-based party" the work in the cities—among the working class, petty-bourgeoisie and students—has never been totally neglected. In the present article an attempt is made to trace in bare outline the evolution of Naxalite, to be more precise, the CPI(ML), tactical line in cities.

Back in 1967 when no tactical line had yet taken shape the Naxalites vaguely stated that their task would be "to develop militant, revolutionary struggles of the working class and other toiling people, to combat economism and to orient these struggles towards agrarian revolution." (Declaration of the revolutionaries of the CPI(M) in *Liberation*, December, 1967). In conformity with this line attempts were made to organise students and to some extent workers for demonstrations in favour of the Naxalbari peasant struggle. About the same time Charu Mazumdar spoke in greater detail about their task in the cities. He was most enthusiastic about the students whose lack of self-interest, courage and dedication "make them an asset for the revolution." First of all he wanted them to integrate themselves with the peasants and propagate revolutionary politics. But "those who are unable to go to the villages at present," he said, "should engage in doing propaganda work among the workers in

the cities. Their aim should be to organise democratic struggles in the cities in support of the peasant struggles in the villages." (*Liberation*, December 1967, p. 87) There was as yet no programme for their own or for workers. At the Democratic Convention in Calcutta on March 22, 1968 the nature of the democratic struggle in the cities was spelt out in greater detail. Apart from waging struggles in support of the peasants the workers were called upon to build militant organisations for the defence of their own class interests. It was decided to launch struggles against the PD Act, automation, retrenchment, lay-off, lock-out and police repression and for food and trade union rights. Charu Mazumdar, however, put the greatest emphasis on propaganda work by the students and youth whose political organisation "would inevitably be Red Guard organisation". Their task would be the widest possible dissemination of Quotations from Chairman Mao. (*Deshabradi*, 2 May, 1968)

Nevertheless, throughout 1968 and up to the birth of the CPI(ML) the students supplemented their agitprop work with movements for partial demands, of their own and the people in general. Processions and demonstrations were organised against the tramfare rise and rise in food prices. The draft political programme of the revolutionary student-youth movement published in *Deshabradi*, February 20, 1969 elaborated the reasons for waging partial struggles. Revolution, it said, cannot succeed with the help of a handful of advanced elements of students and youth. But it is difficult to draw in numerous backward elements by simple political propaganda. To unite and lead this section of students and youth into joining a revolutionary movement it is necessary to wage struggle for "food, employment, education and culture" and direct all the discon-

tent and anger of the youth to the path of long-term revolutionary struggle. At every stage of such struggle they would follow such tactics and carry on propaganda in such a way that there is a mass participation by students and youth and they become more active and politically conscious.

But as the Naxalites were moving in the direction of forming a party there was a noticeable tendency to make a distinction between the work of the ideologically advanced activists and students and youth in general. Replying to the charge of neglecting mass organisations and trade unions made by breakaway Naxalites like Parimal Dasgupta, Charu Mazumdar said, "if everyone concerns himself with building mass organisations, who is to build the underground party? Do we expect the mass organisations to organise the agrarian revolution?" (*Ghatana Prabaha*, May 1969). Elaborating further on the tactical line among workers he said that if one has to imbue the workers with revolutionary politics it has to be done through the propaganda activity of party units from outside trade unions, for "the working class will never realise the necessity of agrarian revolution through its movement for economic demands". Trade unions, he said, become a school for political education when there is no revolutionary situation, when the capitalist class appears very powerful and the working class considers itself to be very weak. At this time the trade union movement creates self-confidence among the workers and they also learn about tactics of struggle. But when the situation is revolutionary, when every struggle is fast turning into a violent clash trade unions are not enough to tackle such a situation. In a revolutionary situation the party is the class organisation of the workers. Particularly in a country like India, Mazumdar said, where the principal centre of revolution is in the countryside, the responsibility of the party is greater and the task of building party organisation among the workers extremely urgent. For, without this party organisation the

working class cannot perform its duty of leading the revolution.

A new line about the students was given by Mazumdar in an article entitled 'Party's call to the youth and students' (*Deshabrati*, August 21, 1969). In this article he recalled the glorious tradition of the militant youth of the country. "At every stage of India's struggle for national freedom, the youth and students of India made enormous sacrifices, carried the call of freedom to the villages, resisted police repression, and discontinued their study and voluntarily destroyed the prospects of building a career for themselves in order to become wholtime political workers". Now, it is the task of the revolutionary student and youth to shoulder the important task of propagating revolutionary politics. But one obstacle in the path of their taking up wholeheartedly the revolutionary cause is the college union. "These college unions", he said, "cannot solve any problem of education that confronts the students. On the other hand the college unions fail to provide leadership to the youth and the students in their revolt against the existing education system". By encouraging a sort of economism the student unions blunt their revolutionary edge. As a result "the union leadership, in most cases, is found to sink deep into the mire of opportunism and careerism begins to develop among them while the temptation of staying on in leadership drags them into all kinds of opportunist alliances and thus destroys their revolutionary morality." The article ended with an impassioned call to the students and youth to integrate themselves with workers and peasants.

The tactical line in cities as it had evolved in the past two years was very briefly noted in the draft organisational report circulated after the formation of the CPI(ML) in April 1969. Since the party was to be a secret organisation, launching of mass or democratic struggle was by implication ruled out. The draft said that "though the party should learn to utilise all possible legal opportunities for developing its revo-

lutionary activities it should under no circumstances function in the open". Whether front organisations should be created for this purpose was not made clear either. It was briefly noted that the party will give first preference to work by which the working class could be prepared "to assume the role of leadership of our revolution, rather than carry on economic and cultural activities in the cities."

The most clear-cut and comprehensive statement about the CPI(ML) tactical line regarding the workers was made only in March this year. The reason why the central leadership had been so long silent on this, Charu Mazumdar explained, was that unless politics was firmly grasped by the workers the new tactics of working class struggle could well degenerate into militant economic struggles. After the comrades have gathered some experience through political work time was now considered opportune for laying down the new line. This new line marked a departure from the earlier position of total rejection of trade unions. Charu Mazumdar of course reiterated his stand that the party would neither build nor capture trade unions. "But trade unions are there and will be, mainly under revisionist leadership. Struggles would also be waged through trade unions and since struggle is the nature of the worker he will also join in this. We cannot oppose any struggle whatsoever waged by the workers against the class enemy. That would be petty-bourgeois idealism. We will not make them dependent on us in any struggle waged by the workers for economic demands or against any attack by the employer; we will encourage them with politics to take independent initiative," (*Deshabrati*, March 12, 1970). The party cadres would concentrate on building secret party units through propaganda work. If this work succeeds in developing self-confidence and initiative among workers some of them would go forward to give able leadership to the trade union struggle and also fight the revisionists there.

but it should be ensured that the workers themselves do not develop revisionist tendencies.

Blunted Tools

Although the party would "encourage the workers in any struggle we will always have to tell them that today tools like general strike or strike in factories have become largely blunted for tackling the blows of the organised employers (like lock-out, lay-off, closure etc). Today we will have to advance not in a peaceful, bloodless way but in paths such as gheraos, clashes with the police and the employer, barricades, liquidation of enemies and agents—according to the situation". The workers will also learn new tactics through such struggles. The party will pay special attention to the organisation of agitation or other kinds of struggle in support of the workers if they are attacked. They will not clash with fellow workers if they raise revisionist slogans in such a movement. It will help to cement the solidarity among the workers.

Another thing, Mazumdar wished the party to do, is to develop self-respect among the workers. Whichever party he may belong to, the worker always has suffered from the humiliation of slavery. If through political propaganda a sense of prestige can be rekindled in him he will grow into a daring firebrand revolutionary. He will transcend the fear of losing his job and even his life. If retrenched he will become a good organiser in the city or will join the peasant struggle in the village.

However, after the CPI(ML) tactical line in the city began to take shape by March this year, Calcutta and other towns of West Bengal saw scenes that did not seem to tally with the line. The students started hit-and-run attacks on educational institutions, burning pictures of Gandhi and hoisting the red flag atop schools and factories. Although there was no published theoretical justification of this movement *Deshabrati* continued to support the students' actions. It was only in a

special edition of *Deshabhati* (August 15, 1970) that Charu Mazumdar came out with an explanation of this line of movement. The way he has justified the attacks on Gandhi and other bourgeois leaders and the hoisting of red flags indicates that these were more a spontaneous movement than something chalked out and led by the party. The students, he said, are making "a festival of breaking statues" and in factories the workers are making a "festival of hoisting the red flag, enjoying the sense of fear among employers and helplessness among the police and military". The students and youth, according to him, are doing a correct thing. A revolutionary education and culture cannot be created without destroying the colonial education system and the statues erected by the comprador bourgeoisie. But he has taken care to remind that this movement is neither unique nor self-sufficient. It is not a movement like the Chinese Cultural Revolution

for demolishing the superstructure. It is born out of the revolutionary tide that has been created in the countryside. "The students and youth have become restless for the sake of the agrarian revolution and they are striking blows at the statues of those who had always tried to pacify the armed struggle of the peasant masses. So this struggle of the students and youth is a part of the agrarian revolution." The peasant armed struggle is striking at the base and in the process encouraging attacks on the superstructure which in turn is helping the destruction of the base. In short, Mazumdar says that the present movement is an offshoot of the peasant struggle and though not a permanent feature, "in this age of inevitable collapse of imperialism", he said, "the revolutionary tide would swell and burst again and again into India's countryside". While thus approving the students' actions in the cities Charu Mazumdar has warned them against neglecting the primary

task of integrating with the workers and peasants. In an oblique reference to their city action he said it is easy to do one or two revolutionary things but very difficult to remain a revolutionary for ever. This can be done only by integrating oneself with the poor and landless labourer. Thus, while taking an approving notice of student innovations, he asks students and youth to go back to their primary task, that of agitprop.

However, a most serious aspect of Naxalite activities in cities—"annihilation" of police and military personnel—has not so far been adequately explained in CPI(ML) publications. But the course of events since April this year leading to the death of more than a dozen policemen indicates that this programme enjoys top priority on the Naxalite agenda in the city. It is not possible to determine at which stage this type of action in cities was planned but it can be seen as a sequel to clashes between the Naxalites and CPI(M)

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and Naxalite attacks on educational and other institutions leading to encounters with and torture by the police.

It was in March that Charu Mazumdar while talking to a group of students and youth urged them to be "always alert to retaliate against" any party that dared to attack CPI-(ML) comrades. As to the methods of attack he said that in order to break the morale of "fascist gangs" they should go in a group of 5 or 6 and launch "swift, guerilla-style attacks from a very close quarter." (*Deshabirati* March 5, 1970). The slogan that henceforth became very frequent was "Take revenge for every murder of our comrades". Following the death of some leading Naxalites in Srikakulam, peasants were exhorted to take revenge for this by murdering landlords. Finally in July it was announced that the "Calcutta District Committee has decided to take revenge of the murder of the heroic comrades in Andhra and West Bengal by annihilating police, CRP and blackmarketeers and capitalists". (*Deshabirati* July 9-16, 1970). In his latest instructions to the CPI(ML) Charu Mazumdar has approvingly noted that "students of cities and workers...are striking at the police force and killing police officers".

Thus the present action against the police in the cities is presented more as one of supporting action for struggle in the countryside and resistance to police repression in the cities than one designed to achieve a particular strategic objective. Although blackmarketeers and capitalists have been included in the list the party has not explained how this would be fitted in with the tactical line evolved earlier. However, the fact that intelligence agents and Special Branch police are special targets of Naxalite attack indicates perhaps a desire to shut off the "eyes and ears" of the state power—a thing which is being attempted in the countryside. But so far there has not been any call to develop guerilla units and wage war against class enemies as in villages.