

# Telengana And The Revisionists

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“TELENGANA means communists and communists mean Telengana”, thundered B. T. Ranadive at the second congress of the CPI in 1948 where his famous Political Thesis was adopted. The Telengana armed struggle was a few months old and it was not until after Telengana delegates had attacked the failure of the thesis to realise the “revolutionary significance” of the struggle to the “present epoch of maturing democratic revolution in India” did the new CPI leadership appear to support the Telengana struggle.

A special resolution moved by a Telengana delegate was passed at the congress amidst resounding cheers. But the leadership returned to its ways in no time. The ultra-revolutionary Ranadive, in his polemic against the Andhra communists (leading the Telengana struggle invoking Mao Tse-tung's *New Democracy* in justification of their analysis), suggestively bracketed Mao with revisionists like Tito and Browder and denounced him as a charlatan. (“...some of Mao's formulations are such that no communist party can accept them; they are in contradiction of the world understanding of the communist parties,” Ranadive wrote).

No wonder Ranadive and his party to which some of the prominent leaders of the struggle (P. Sundarayya and M. Basavapunniah) belong have been shy of owning up the Telengana armed struggle yet. Sundarayya has written a draft study. But the CPI, to which C. Rajeswara Rao, the most prominent leader of the struggle, belongs, has tried to embarrass the CPI(M) by celebrating the silver jubilee of the struggle, albeit in the most dishonest manner. When Rajeswara Rao was away in the GDR, N. K. Krishnan of the CPI's Central Secretariat inaugurated the “celebrations” in

Hyderabad with a sermon to the younger generation of communists on the futility of armed struggle. While anxious to undercut the CPI(M), the CPI cannot own up Telengana in toto. So it has to be apologetic about many things. But in fairness to Rajeswara Rao it must be admitted that he has had the equanimity to say, despite his party's commitment to peaceful transition, that the Telengana struggle “made our party in Telengana and Andhra areas a revolutionary party. The armed struggle set revolutionary traditions among the Telugu people, which is a great asset for our party.” (*New Age*, September 10, 1972). He has also had the equanimity to let the “entire communist movement” claim the legacy of Telengana. “Those who led and took part in this struggle are today inside the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party (Marxist) and in the extreme movements. It is the common heritage of the entire communist movement.”

While breaking with P. C. Joshi's reformist line, the Ranadive Politbureau did not give serious political thought to Telengana though the second congress had passed a resolution greeting the struggle. It broadly supported the armed struggle but did not effectively support the local leadership. The reason lay in Ranadive's new-fangled Titoite theory of two stages of revolution intertwining in India and his dogmatic reliance on revolution by the urban proletariat and not by the peasantry. The young and well-knit Andhra leadership challenged Ranadive and proposed an alternative thesis which attempted application of the Chinese experience to the Indian situation for a four-class alliance to achieve a two-stage revolution. The challenge from the unsophisticated “peasant communists”

was too much for Ranadive's stomach.

The Calcutta thesis was in fact based on a misunderstanding of the Europe-centred Zhdanov line. The Cominform did not seem to have a clear line for former colonies like India when Ranadive embarked on his anti-Mao polemic. The Chinese revolution had not been brought to a formal end. It was not until June 1949 that the Cominform seemed to endorse the formulations of *New Democracy*. A Soviet academician, E. M. Zhukov, advocated a four-class alliance in colonies and semi-colonies. A little later, Academician V. Balabushevich in his report hailed the Telengana struggle as the “first attempt at creating people's democracy in India” and the “harbinger of agrarian revolution”. This was vindication of the Andhra leadership's line. Another indication of Soviet support to the Maoist strategy of a four-class alliance for a two-stage revolution came in Liu Shao-chi's speech at the trade conference of Asian and Australasian countries at Peking in November 1949. He prescribed “the road of Mao Tse-tung” as the path for other colonial countries, and armed action as the *main* form of struggle, *whenever and wherever possible*. This strengthened the Andhra leadership's position vis-a-vis Ranadive. An editorial in the Cominform journal, entitled “Mighty Advance of the National Liberation Movement in Colonial and Dependent Countries” (on January 27, 1950) endorsed the most crucial formulation in Liu Shao-chi's address:

The experience of the victorious national liberation struggle of the Chinese people teaches that the working class must unite with all classes, parties and groups, and organisations willing to fight the imperialists and their hirelings to form a broad nation-wide

united front, headed by the working class and its vanguard—the Communist Party...

But when it came to the form of struggle, the Cominform listed China, Vietnam, Malaya, and "other countries" as examples of how armed struggle was becoming the "main form of struggle" of the national liberation movement in many colonies and dependent countries. Then it listed Vietnam, South Korea, Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Burma, as countries engaged in armed struggle, but not India which was merely mentioned as a country with "sham independence".

#### Mission to Moscow

With the Cominform debunking Ranadive, the Andhra leadership assumed charge of the party and Rajeswara Rao replaced him as the general secretary in May-June 1950. The Telengana line of peasant partisan warfare as the tactic of Indian revolution triumphed at this point but Moscow's intervention was to suppress it later. When Moscow felt compelled to intervene, it was not so much out of a desire to put the CPI on the correct path but to placate Nehru as an ally in a cold war situation so that he did not go over to the Western camp. The new Soviet policy meant a moratorium on class struggle in India. Moscow tried to achieve its objective through a letter from the British party to the CPI first, later through the British leader, R. Palme Dutt, and finally through a CPI delegation which clandestinely visited Moscow early in 1951. The CPI's new draft programme as well as statement of policy rationalized the rejection of armed struggle as the tactic for India. But as a sop for the hardliners, the party had an unpublished version of the same document. The difference between the two documents was limited to the varying degrees of emphasis each of them laid on armed struggle as means. But neither of them referred to armed struggle as part of the imme-

mediate programme. At best it was to be an ultimate tactic.

The 1951 documents together meant abandonment of the Telengana armed struggle. The new leadership (with Ajoy Ghosh as general secretary) went about the task rather apologetically. A Central Committee resolution began with the tacit admission that while the CPI could offer suggestions on tactics, "it is primarily for the masses, the people of Telengana who began, fought and suffered in their great fight against feudal oppression, for land and liberty, who have to decide the issue" of the tactics of the Telengana struggle. But the Central Committee was ready to solve the issue through negotiations and settlement to protect the interests of the peasantry and restore normality in Telengana. Thus the Central Committee was virtually disowning the struggle and was trying to emerge in the role of a "mediator" offering its good offices for a negotiated settlement. The CPI was not prepared even to admit that the movement in its last phase was aimed against Nehru's government:

It is believed in some circles that the struggle in Telengana is being fought in order to overthrow the Nehru government. These circles ignore that the struggle of the peasants for land and against the oppression of the feudal lords and the Nizam began in 1946 long before the Nehru government came into existence.

And it continued even after its entry into the Nizam's state, solely to protect the peasants against the landlords who were now being reinstated by the Nehru government in alliance with the Nizam, to overthrow whose rule it had ostensibly entered the State.

The Central Committee listed seven demands as the basis of settlement but the State Government did not respond to the offer of negotiations. This forced the leadership to climb down further. It had to call off the movement with no guarantee whatever because Moscow

did not want it to continue.

A. K. Gopalan in October 1951, announced the withdrawal of the struggle. The announcement was on behalf of the Central Committee and the Andhra committee. The party, he said, was obliged "to advise the Telengana peasantry and the fighting partisans to stop all partisan actions and to mobilise the entire people to rout the Congress at the general elections".

To the new leadership, participation in the country's first adult franchise elections was more important than protecting the gains of the Telengana struggle. The party as a whole was settling for peaceful constitutionalism and the Andhra leadership was not consulted about the withdrawal of the struggle. It was a decision from above, imposed on the Andhra cadre and the guerilla fighters.

#### The Movement

In the Telengana district (that is, the Telugu-speaking, areas of the erstwhile Hyderabad State ruled by the Nizam) the contradiction between the masses of the peasantry and feudalism was most advanced in 1945-46. The communist peasant movement initially centred around simple demands against evictions and oppressive feudal extortions but quickly escalated when it met with the combined repression of the landlords and the Nizam's governmental machinery. Peasant resistance to the attacks of organised hoodlums, police, and the Nizam's military took the form of armed clashes, which eventually swelled into a movement to overthrow the Nizam himself. By mid-1946 the Telengana movement had acquired the characteristics of a national liberation struggle—to free the people from the rule of the Nizam and the feudal order. The communists were already in effective control of the nationalist movement and the Andhra Mahasabha which led it. The Mahasabha was in fact the front organisation of the illegal CPI. The decision of the Nizam of Hyderabad not to accede to India

after independence placed him in direct contradiction to the new Indian government.

In the initial stages the Telengana struggle was confined to 150 villages but within a year it spread to hundreds and thousands more. Throughout the Telengana region, communist guerillas were locked in combat with the Nizam's forces and with a small private army known as the Razakars. In early 1948, the CPI had begun establishing liberated zones with people's governments, people's courts, and people's militia and, by 1950 the whole of Nalagonda and Warangal districts comprised a contiguous liberated zone.

Agrarian programmes were undertaken in the liberated zones and more than a million acres of land were distributed in 3,000 villages through peasant committees. About 4,000 communists and supporters died in encounters or prison camps. More than 5,000 women were raped by the police and military during the conflagration, while 1,000 villages were burnt down and 11,000 villages thoroughly raided by the police.

The Indian army marched into Hyderabad in September 1948 and forced the Nizam to surrender and accede to India. The Nizam's autocracy was formally at an end but the peasant armed struggle continued. A section in the CPI leadership at the centre favoured withdrawal of armed struggle and cooperation with the Indian government which had brought Hyderabad State under its rule through a military governor. The Telengana struggle entered a new phase, from an anti-Nizam struggle to a struggle against the Indian government.

In the silver jubilee year, Rajeswara Rao noted that the extension of the struggle to the second phase was done with a "wrong understanding of the situation obtaining in the state, our country and the world at that time". He also holds that the extension of the struggle to the adjoining Andhra area (then in Madras

Presidency) was also wrong. If the CPI had changed its political line after the military intervention (euphemistically called police action) and utilised the opportunities which came at that time, its position and the movement would have been far stronger than what it became as a result of the continued armed struggle, according to Rajeswara Rao. He also said:

Last, there was never any difference in the Telengana and Andhra units of our Party over the anti-Nizam phase of the struggle. But when some leading comrades saw the bad effects of the second phase of the struggle, they differed and wanted the withdrawal of the struggle. But the major section of the leadership thought otherwise and the struggle continued upto the end of 1951. (*New Age*, September 10, 1972).

But a question not satisfactorily answered so far is whether even the 1951 programme and statement of policy warranted the withdrawal of the Telengana armed struggle, without tangible guarantees of protection for the gains. The withdrawal of the struggle means surrender of all the guerilla zones and the liberated zones to the Indian army and with them all the other gains.

Rajeswara Rao claims the following gains for the struggle which revisionism betrayed: 1. it ended the autocratic rule of the Nizam and foiled his plan to make Hyderabad an independent state; 2. it was a revolutionary agrarian armed struggle for ending the feudal order and for giving land to the peasants, agricultural labourers and adivasis. Though this could not be achieved in full, the struggle helped eliminate forced labour, illegal taxes and oppression by the feudal lords, and the elimination of the jagirdari system; 3. it was a struggle for division of the state into linguistic zones and for the formation of unified linguistic states (like Andhra, Maharashtra and Karnataka) with the people of the adjoining areas speaking the same language; 4. it was an

armed struggle fought under the leadership of the communist party over a vast area, in which about 20 districts in Telengana and Andhra area were involved.

But what he fails to mention is that it was part of the tide of national liberation struggles sweeping the post-second world war colonial and semi-colonial world—in Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, Indochina, Philippines and China.

At one level, Rajeswara Rao owns up the Telengana armed struggle as the common heritage of the entire Indian communist movement. (vide *New Age* articles). But in a pamphlet (in Telugu, *Charitramaka Telengana Poratam*, September 1972) he virtually disowns it. He says the 1948 Andhra document which advocated a Maoist model revolution in India based on armed guerilla struggle and liberated zones in the countryside to encircle the cities was a *sectarian* document blindly advocating the Chinese path for India. In 1948 none of the factors which made the Chinese revolution possible (its backwardness, lack of modern communications, and a weak bourgeoisie, a weak central government and domination of the government by the warlords; from the beginning the Chinese revolution adopted the path of armed revolution combating armed counter-revolution and the party which had its own army led the revolution; and the proximity of the Soviet Union to China and Soviet help to the Chinese revolution) were present in India. The Andhra leadership's subjective understanding of the favourable situation in Telengana, its elation over the initial successes in the anti-Nizam struggle, the spectacular victories of the Chinese Red Army over Chiang Kai-shek's forces; and the sweep of the armed guerilla struggle in South-East Asia, were responsible for the 1948 document, according to Rajeswara Rao. (pp. 25-7).

#### Elections

Rajeswara Rao was still insisting

on continuing the armed struggle when Sundarayya was already a votary for its end. But it should be recorded here that the results of the 1952 elections showed that the CPI's performance was most spectacular precisely in those areas of Telengana and Andhra where it had led peasant partisan warfare or guerilla squad actions, inviting massive police and military repression. If the votes mean anything at all, it was the vindication of the Andhra communist line of Maoist armed struggle. The CPI's electoral fortunes have steadily dwindled since.

More than 2,000 leading CPI cadres were still in jail and over 1,000 underground when the elections took place. The party itself was illegal and its candidates had to run under various guises and had difficulty in fielding candidates for all the constituencies. It could run candidates for only 45 of the 98 Telengana seats to the Hyderabad Assembly, under the banner of the People's Democratic Front and a few independents. Thirty-six of the 45 PDF banner won. In addition 10 Socialist Party candidates backed by the PDF also won. The Congress won 41 seats, contesting all the 98 but 25 of these were from Mahboobnagar and Hyderabad districts where the PDF did not put up candidates. In the "Red" district of Nalgonda, the PDF made a clean sweep of all the 14 seats. In Warangal, another "Red" district, it won 11 of the 14 seats. In Karimnagar, the tally was 10 out of 14. Of the 2.5 million votes polled, the PDF got approximately a third, while the Congress which contested every one of the 98 seats, also polled approximately the same proportion of votes. In the Andhra area, of the 140 seats for the Madras Assembly, the CPI bagged 41 while helping the victory of 8 independents and KMPP candidates. The Congress could win only 40 seats. Though the CPI contested only 74 of the 140 seats, it polled 20 per cent of the vote while the Congress, contesting all the seats could poll just 30 per cent. The CPI vic-

tories were concentrated in its traditional bases. It won 10 of the 12 seats in Krishna district, 10 of the 18 in Guntur, 5 of the 12 in West Godavari, and six of the 12 in East Godavari.

#### Naxalbari

In 1967, the Chinese Communist Party saw the resurrection of the Telengana movement in the Naxalbari armed struggle. An authoritative Chinese commentary said, "the peasants of Telengana and some other districts in south-eastern India once established a Red regime in an area embracing a population of 10 million and carried out a large-scale armed struggle that lasted five long years..." (NCNA, 1 August, 1967). Under the influence of Soviet revisionism beginning with 1946, and because of the Indian revisionists' reluctance to work among the peasants the movement was at a standstill between 1956-58. But spontaneous struggles broke out in 1959 and again during the famine years of 1964-65, the commentary said. But it was vague about the circumstances that attended the withdrawal of the Telengana struggle in 1951 and the role of the Soviet and Cominform leadership in forcing the withdrawal. It merely said the armed struggle in Telengana had been "betrayed and put down".

Another NCNA commentary on August 2, 1967, noted that for a long time, the Indian communist movement had witnessed an intense struggle between two lines. The revolutionaries had resolutely urged seizure of power through armed struggle, that is, the path of the Chinese people who were guided in their victories by Mao's thought. "Some revisionist chieftains, however, feverishly pushed ahead with the revisionist parliamentary road resulting in doing tremendous harm to the Indian revolution". In 1946-51, base areas of armed struggle were established in Telengana where the landless and the land poor peasants were aroused to seize land by armed struggle "and become the banner of the Indian

people's revolutionary struggle of the time". The commentary charged "Indian revisionists" with betraying Telengana but was again silent on the Soviet and Cominform roles. The analysis said the Telengana struggle grew under the radiance of Mao Tse-tung Thought though the Indian revisionists described peasant armed struggles as adventurism and individual terrorism. In a party document in September 1950 and again in an open document in 1951, they vilified the Chinese people's revolutionary war led by Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and put forward the theory of India's exceptionalism, hysterically preventing the Indian people from taking the road of Chinese revolution.

Long after the Telengana "sell out" and after many setbacks the Indian peasants had realised the "futility of the parliamentary path and the need for armed struggle", the Chinese commentary said.

The real significance of Telengana lies in this: it was the first application of the Maoist model revolution outside China, even before the Chinese revolution had triumphed fully and China had proclaimed itself a people's republic. After all, the first recorded debate on the legitimacy of Mao's teachings as part of Marxism-Leninism took place between the CPI's central leadership and the Andhra communists leading the Telengana struggle. Neither of the establishment communist parties would like to be reminded of this now.

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