INDIA'S SIMMERING REVOLUTION

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A Note on the References

Almost all the CPI (M-L) documents from which extracts have been quoted or to which references have been made in this book, are originally in Bengali, Hindi or Telegu. Some of them have appeared in English in the pages of the party's journal — *Liberation*. But because of the excessive freedom that seems to have been taken in certain places, I preferred to translate the original documents, or get them translated whenever possible, directly into English, instead of using the official translations.

The sources of quotations from Charu Mazumdar's writings are the three volumes of his Bengali articles, and a separate edition of his 'Eight documents', also in Bengali, published by the CPI (M-L). The party has also brought out an English version of the 'Eight Documents' and a volume of Charu Mazumdar's selected articles, translated into English. But when using quotations from Charu Mazumdar also, I followed the same course as with the party documents.*

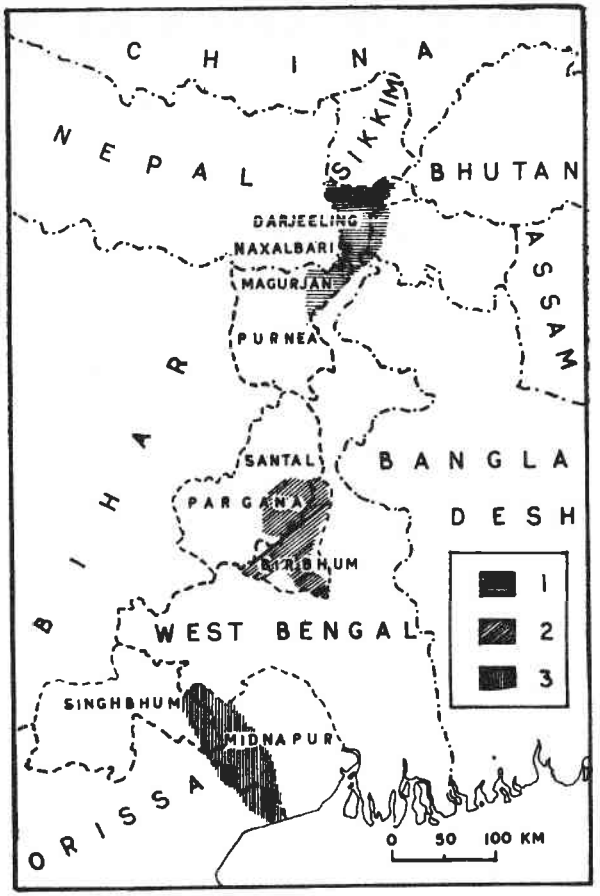
Needless to say, most of Charu Mazumdar's articles as well as copies of the party's journals — *Liberation*, *Deshabrati*, *Lokayudh* — were proscribed in India after May 1970. The CPI (M-L) publications, although quite voluminous and regular, are therefore largely out of bounds for the general public.

Besides these published materials, there are heaps of manuscripts containing minutes of important meetings, letters from jails and Charu Mazumdar's unpublished notes, most of which have been extensively used while writing this book.

A word about the style of writing often to be found in CPI (M-L) reports of struggles. The language might sound rhapsodic, even exaggerated at times. But one has to remember that those who were writing the reports from the areas of struggles, were seeing everything through the eyes of the landless peasants. A traditionally downtrodden and humiliated people were for the first time handling rifles, or standing upright before their erstwhile oppressors — things which might seem insignificant to the urban middle class readers, but were of tremendous importance to the rural poor. The news of the annihilation of some

* A list of Charu Mazumdar's writings, arranged chronologically, is appended at the end of the text. (*See Appendix II*). Quotations from his writings used in the text are referred to by numbers according to which of his writings have been listed in the bibliography.

obscure landlord in a distant village hardly stirs the reader of a newspaper, but it makes a world of difference to a landless peasant who for years has watched his own kind being coldly butchered by these landlords, not knowing how to resist. It is all a matter of adopting the class outlook of the downtrodden!

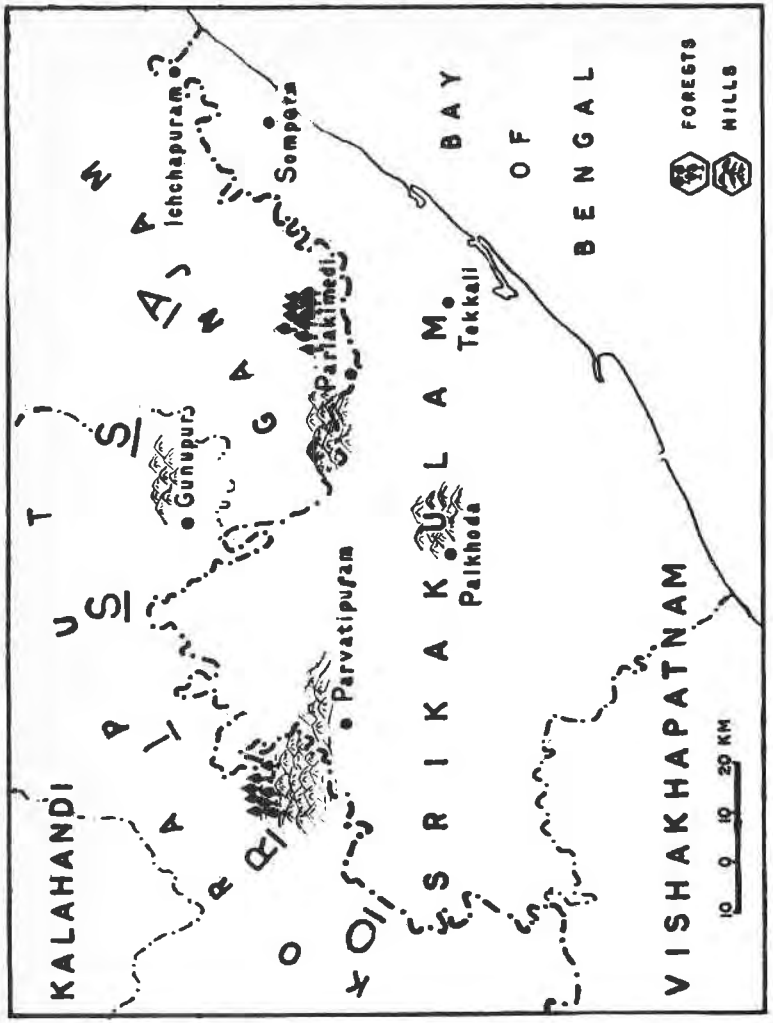


MAP I : Map of West Bengal showing CPI(M-L) areas of operations in the State and neighbouring regions where bases were set up between 1967 and 1972.

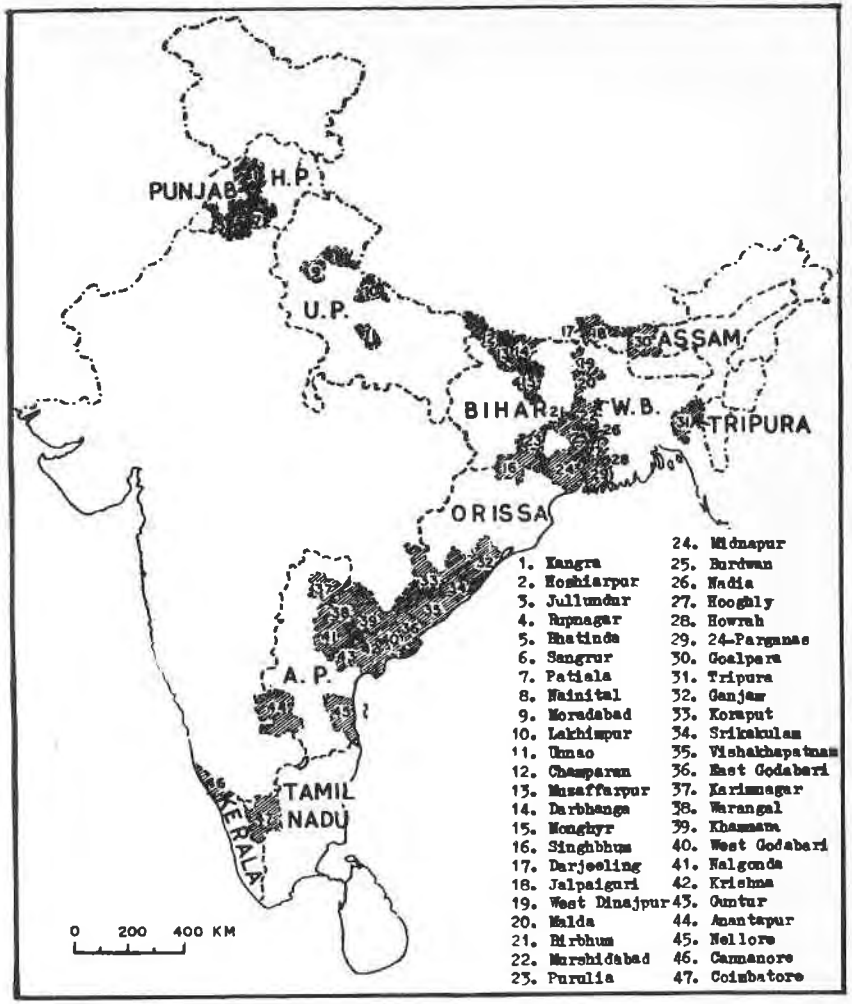
1. Areas of operation under the North Bengal-Bihar Border Regional Committee of the CPI(M-L).

2. Areas of operation under West Bengal-Bihar Border Region Committee of the CPI(M-L).

3. Areas of operation under the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Regional Committee of the CPI(M-L).



MAP II : Map of Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, showing CPI(M-L) bases in the district, and in neighbouring Koraput, Orissa, during 1969 and 1970.



MAP III : CPI(M-L) pockets of operations in India in 1970, based on a map published in *Deshabrati*, April 23, 1970.

Introduction

. . .of the battles won or lost — but fought — against the enemy.
Che Guevara: 'Message to the World' 1967

One who doesn't dream and can't make others dream, can never become a revolutionary.
Charu Mazumdar (Quoted in 'Naxalbarir Shiksha')

In May 1967, there was a peasant uprising at Naxalbari — an area in the north-eastern tip of India, bordering Nepal on the west, Sikkim and Bhutan on the north, and East Pakistan on the south. It was led by armed Communist revolutionaries who until then had been members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-(M)), but were later to break away and form a separate party — the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI (M-L)).

The uprising was crushed by the police within a few months. But from then on nothing could ever be quite the same in the Indian countryside. The long-suffering peasants appeared to have rediscovered their traditional militancy. From 1967 to 1972 — the main period dealt with in this book — in certain parts of India they boiled over in jacqueries against the privileged feudal elite. In some places, led by the CPI (M-L), they fought the police and troops when the latter were sent by the government to protect the landlords. These events highlighted their desperate efforts to end the intolerable conditions of economic oppression and social humiliation, and also represented the CPI (M-L)'s programme to seize power from the rulers and establish liberated zones in the countryside. Although during those tumultous five years its effective strength was confined to a few pockets in the country, the CPI (M-L)'s ideology thoroughly permeated Indian socio-political life. The term 'Naxalite' (from Naxalbari) has continued to symbolize any assault upon the assumptions and institutions that support the established order in India. It has become a part of the common speech all over India, and along with 'Huk' of the Philippines, 'Al Fatah' of Palestine and 'Tupamaros' of Uruguay, has today found a place in the vocabulary of world revolution.

The course of the CPI (M-L) movement occasionally diverged a little from the route mapped in 1967, and one phase ended with the setback in 1972. Will the 'Naxalite menace' (to use the favourite expression of the Indian police) create a memory only to be reduced in time to the status of another heroic but futile myth

of the Indian Left? Or, will it become a prelude to a successful Communist revolution in India?

Obituarists of the movement have always proved to be premature in their pronouncements. If the movement was contained and declared "crushed" in one part of India it soon erupted in another, sometimes a very unexpected corner of the country. Naxalbari was followed by Srikakulam; Srikakulam by Debra-Gopiballavpur; Debra-Gopiballavpur by Birbhum; Birbhum by Bhojpur — where still today, peasant guerrillas of the CPI (M-L) continue to fight back against a repressive feudal regime.

The setback of 1972 does not invalidate the bitterness of the popular grievances that stimulated the movement, or the validity of the programme of armed struggle. The ideologue of the movement — fiery-eyed, frail Charu Mazumdar, who was a victim of cardiac asthma and was driven to death by police persecution — was fond of saying: "No word ever dies. What we are saying today may not be accepted by the people at this moment. But our propaganda is not in vain. Our words remain embedded among the people."*

Although Charu Mazumdar often failed to give the correct lead, and was to a great extent responsible for the 1972 setback, his ideas still live on. While abusing him, even the ruling classes of India have tried to share Charu Mazumdar's cloak by often declaiming against feudalism and colonial powers. Their alarmist disparagement of the 'Naxalites' is an indirect acknowledgement of the survival and continuity of the CPI (M-L) movement, even in the face of the most ruthless repression launched by the Indian state. On 1 April 1981, the Minister of State in the Indian Home Ministry reported the latest situation to Parliament: "The Naxalites have been indulging in violent activities at various places. These activities include murder, dacoity, attacks on police and other government officials, and other acts of violence". As in the past, today also, in a calumny perpetrated against the CPI (M-L), the Indian government is trying to stifle the ageless plaints of the oppressed, landless peasants and their growing determination to overthrow feudal power and establish their own. It seeks to besmear the heroism of those of the poor who have plunged into battle to overturn the oppressive system.

The continuity of the CPI (M-L) movement is explained by the persistence and exacerbation of the basic causes that gave it birth: feudal exploitation, rural poverty, the Indian state's recourse to repression to silence the protests of the rural poor, and its bondage to the two superpowers to maintain the status quo.

But the birth of the CPI (M-L) movement can be understood only in the context of the contemporary international situation. In the late 1960s — when the Naxalbari uprising opened the floodgates of the revolutionary movement in India — radicalism in Europe, Asia and America was marked by rereading Marx, to rediscover the sources of revolutionary humanism and to revive the ideals that inspired individual courage and a readiness to be sacrificed

* Quoted in *Naxalbarir Shiksha (Lessons of Naxalbari)* published by the North Bengal-Bihar Border Regional Committee of the CPI (M-L).

for a cause. The general trend was toward a return to the moral fervour and spontaneity of the early days of the revolutionary movement which inspired communists, socialists and anarchists alike, and was exemplified by the predominance of morality over political expediency. This was reflected in the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA; in the students' agitations in Western Europe, which rejected both the state's promises of affluence and the established Left's bureaucratic torpor and sought to revive the past socialist notions of self-management and self-representation; in Che Guevara's self-sacrifice in the jungles of Bolivia in pursuit of the old dream of international solidarity of all revolutionaries, and in China's Cultural Revolution which, in spite of excesses, errors and crimes committed in the name of Marxism, was initially motivated by the Rousseauian emphasis on transforming the individual, and the reiteration of the doctrine that sovereignty lay with the people.

The Naxalbari movement was a part of this contemporary, worldwide impulse among radicals to return to the roots of revolutionary idealism. In the Indian context, it took the form of going back to the source of all revolutions in the Third World — the peasantry — which had a long tradition of fighting against imperialism and feudalism. The Naxalbari movement drew inspiration from the Indian jacqueries of the 18th and 19th Centuries as well as from the organized armed peasants' struggles led by the Communists in Telengana in the 1940s. Its stress on the peasant's spontaneous self-assertion, its plans of decentralization through 'area-wise seizure of power' and the setting up of village soviets, its rejection of the safe path of parliamentary opposition and of the institutions of 20th Century bourgeois democracy — all hark back to the old dream of the peasant Utopia, of the free village untrammelled by government officials and landlords! At the same time, its rediscovery of the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry posed a challenge to the ideological sclerosis of the parliamentary Left in India, which had settled down to the efficient management of the status quo by participating in a few provincial governments. The immense courage and self-sacrifice of the Naxalbari movement's leaders and cadres also restored to the country's Marxist movement the honesty and humanism that had become eroded over the years.

Yet, it must be admitted that the CPI (M-L) has often been crippled by the essentially peasant character of the movement in so far as it ignores other, important segments of the Indian population. Moreover, like other contemporary world movements, ranging from the New Left in the West to the Cultural Revolution in China, the CPI (M-L) has failed to break completely with the predominant dogmatic trends in the world Marxist movement, and to move beyond the immediate strategy of capturing power. The much-felt need for democratic functioning within a Communist party, tolerance of dissent (absence of which has led to a series of splits in the movement), an honest analysis of the degeneration of Maoism with its nadir touching the inhuman aberrations under Pol Pot in Kampuchea, a dispassionate inquiry into the causes of inequity and sufferings in post-revolutionary societies — are issues that have not yet surfaced in discussions among Marxist-Leninist circles in

India. But to avoid the repetition of similar errors and crimes in future revolutions and post-revolutionary societies, it is necessary to be wary of them from the beginning. As Marx expected of the communists: ". . . in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement." (Communist Manifesto).

Nevertheless, the CPI (M-L) movement is a historic experiment of momentous significance and a practical step more important than the hundreds of programmes spawned by the various parliamentary parties of India. If one returns to the source of the movement, one may find that with the growing unrest and increasing protests in the countryside the spring is still ready to surge forth. It is this which makes it all the more urgent to analyse the experiment and to re-examine theories of political change in India in the light of the stages of the CPI (M-L) movement.

Like the history of the events it describes, the story of the writing and publication of this book is full of complications. I was first commissioned to write it in 1972, when I was working in Delhi as a correspondent of an English newspaper.

Writing the first draft was an important lesson for me. Even after completing the manuscript and submitting it to the publishers, I was nagged by doubts that had crept in while I was working on the draft. Was my journalistic fund of information and type of specialization adequate to enable me to do justice to the events and people about whom I was writing? Is it enough to write about a cause and praise it from a distance?

A curiosity to probe deeper, as well as a desire for further commitment brought about by the pressures of the surrounding political reality, soon drove me in the direction of the CPI (M-L), and threw me in the company of its cadres. The unforgettable experience of sharing their adventures and of living among poor, landless peasants, provided me with an invaluable opportunity to understand their problems and theories, and gave me a new perspective on the entire history of the CPI (M-L) and related movements.

I soon realised that my draft manuscript lying with the publishers was incomplete and erroneous. I withdrew it and began to rewrite the book in the light of my new experiences and recently acquired information. The second draft was completed at the end of 1974, but new developments again intervened to prevent its publication. The declaration of Emergency in June 1975 and my arrest soon after forced the manuscript into hibernation to escape the minions of the law. With the lifting of the Emergency and the post-election changes in 1977, the manuscript had a fresh chance to appear in print, and was published in India in 1980 under the title *In the Wake of Naxalbari*. This present book is similar to the 1980 Indian edition, with the exception of the last chapter, which has been revised and updated, and the addition of a glossary.

Like all history, the picture presented in this book is shadowy and inadequate. The lives of many who took part in the movement were cut short by events. Many of the key figures have died without having told the whole story. The survivors, today often ranged in mutually hostile camps, contradict one another, making the task of substantiating accounts difficult. In the memory of many

others, facts are often mixed with an astounding jumble of rumours, distortions and fabrications.

A few of the events recorded here I observed directly. Some are described on the basis of interviews, both with participants in the movement and with those entrusted with the task of suppressing it. The latter I met during assignments for the English newspaper for which I worked until 1973. But a large part of the book is based on theories and events appearing in CPI (M-L) documents, most of them published secretly — some as yet unpublished — and almost all of those quoted or referred to in this book, were written originally in Bengali, Hindi or Telegu; some of them have appeared in English in the party's journal — *Liberation*. Some translations, however, seemed to be overly free and for that reason I preferred either to translate from the original language myself or have them translated anew for this book whenever possible.

The sources of quotations from Charu Mazumdar's writings are the three volumes of his Bengali articles, and a separate edition of his *Eight Documents*, also written in Bengali, published by the CPI (M-L).* In addition to these published materials, there are numerous manuscripts containing minutes of important meetings, letters from jails and Charu Mazumdar's unpublished notes, most of which have been extensively used while writing this book.

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I am fully aware of running the risk, while writing of events so contemporary and yet so confusing, of being contradicted by later revelations. New materials may surface which may alter some of the judgments formed here. But the story is too fascinating and important to await clarification of every detail and substantiation of every account — a task that in the fitness of things should be left to historians of the future

Sumanta Banerjee

* A chronological list of Charu Mazumdar's writings is given in Appendix II. Numbers in the text in square brackets (eg. [43]) indicate the source of quotations as given in Appendix II.

1 The Rural Scene

The Indian village is like a complex molecule among whose parts extreme tensions have been built up.
Gunnar Myrdal: 'Asian Drama'

... out of all the major contradictions in our country ... the one between the landlords and the peasantry, i.e. the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of the Indian people is the principal contradiction in the present phase.
'Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)', clause 16

The Agrarian Situation: 1966-67

The theories and the performances of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI (M-L)) were nourished by the sap of growing discontent among the rural poor. The countryside was the centre and the peasantry the main force, of the "armed people's war" initiated by the CPI (M-L). It is necessary therefore to recapitulate the essential features of the agrarian situation in India in 1966-67 — the eve of the uprising at Naxalbari, the uprising which set in motion a train of militant struggles throughout India.

In the middle of March 1967, some Bengali newspapers carried a small news item about one Mukunda Sarkar, an unemployed worker, in a village called Dharmapur in Bongaon in West Bengal. Unable to feed his wife and three children, he killed them and then committed suicide. Sarkar's case was not an isolated instance. All through 1966 and 1967, rumblings of discontent reverberated throughout the Indian countryside. Reports poured into newspaper offices of horrors of chronic malnutrition, deaths from starvation, self-annihilation by hungry and desperate peasants and sporadic pillaging of food godowns by men in rags and tatters.

Earlier, in the sweltering summer of Delhi, addressing newsmen from her plush air-conditioned chamber, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had announced that 46.6 million people spread over 117 districts of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Punjab, were affected by "scarcity

conditions" (19 May 1966). She was however at pains to prove that there had been no death from starvation, and that some old and infirm people might have died of malnutrition and other ailments.

But infirmities might be caused, Indira Gandhi's critics argued, by years of malnutrition, and malnutrition can be an indication of non-availability of nutritious foodstuff — a common feature of the Indian villages. While politicians were thus busy with hair-splitting arguments as to whether people died from direct effects of starvation, or from indirect effects of malnutrition, the rural poor in India continued to starve, suffer from diseases, and die.

By the beginning of 1967, it was evident that the country was facing a food shortage of about 10 million tonnes. The official food review placed before Parliament on 27 March 1967, warned that a "serious situation may develop on the food front in the remaining months of the year". This bleak prophecy came true when on 18 April that year, the Bihar Government had to declare one-third of the State as a famine area. This was the first ever declaration of famine by a State Government in India since the transfer of power in August 1947. Bihar was followed by Madhya Pradesh where 18 districts were declared famine areas on 8 August.

The situation in 1966-67 was however an aggravated instance of the perpetual poverty that had been ravaging Indian villages for years. It only illuminated in a magnified form the crisis of the Indian agrarian economy. Explaining the precarious position of rice stocks in 1966-67, the official food review of March 1967 said that procurement of harvested paddy had been very low, imports would be very small, and crops had suffered in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh because of drought.

While drought was an unforseen natural calamity, the other factors stemmed from the Government's policies. As far as procurement was concerned for instance, in some places the reluctance of the big farmers to give up their surplus produce, and in other areas an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy, often in league with the local big farmers, prevented the State Governments from reaching the procurement target. The Union Food Minister, Jagjivan Ram, told the Lok Sabha on 28 March 1967, that one of the important factors responsible for the shortfall in supplies, was the indifferent progress of procurement in the States.

The Land Tenure System

But the cause of the perennial food shortage, which became critical in 1966-67, was more fundamental. In the way of feeding the country's poor, stood the prevailing system of land tenure — the manner in which land was held, the way it was managed and its produce disposed of, among other things.

A substantial part of the total cultivated land was and is still held by a very small proportion of rural households, usually in the form of large holdings. On the other hand, a large number of rural households cultivated tiny fragmented plots. In 1966-67, the net cropped area in India was about 343 million acres.[1] Out of this, judging from the trends revealed by earlier National Sample Surveys (NSS) of landownership,[2] about 40% was owned by only 5% of rural households,

representing big farmers or landlords, who did not till their plots personally. They had their land cultivated either by leasing part of the plots to tenant farmers, or by hired wage-earners.

About the small peasants and landless peasants, the data for operational holdings relating to 1960-61 reveal that "households cultivating no land or less than 2.5 acres each, constituted 57.59% of the rural households and between them they operated only 7% of the total land".[3] The small peasants worked on their plots, utilizing family labour.

In between the non-cultivator big landlords on one hand and the small and landless peasants on the other, were a minority of rich and middle peasants who worked personally as well as hired labourers for cultivation.

This uneven pattern of land distribution affected the country's food supply. While the small peasants could hardly produce any marketable surplus, the big landlords often taking advantage of the general short supply of foodgrains, hoarded their surplus produce to sell them gradually at a huge profit. In West Bengal, in 1966, the big landlords or 'jotedars' as they are known in local parlance, evaded the State government's procurement levy on them, cornered the stocks and smuggled them into Calcutta, or across the State's borders to a few neighbouring States, where rice was sold at higher rates than those prevailing in West Bengal's villages. The bureaucracy which manned the procurement machinery usually winked at these manipulations, and thus, the State Government's much publicized plans to procure rice and distribute it through official fair price shops in rationed quotas, went awry. Although it banned sale of rice in the open market, it could not provide rice through the fair price shops, because of poor procurement. Food riots broke out, paralyzing the administration for months.

But depersonalized statistics about land holdings, or abstract figures suggesting ever growing hosts of subsistence farmers crowding uneconomic tiny plots of land, can hardly convey the grim picture of rural poverty.

Life of the Rural Poor

How did the small peasants, the share-croppers and the landless wage-earners, who were at the bottom of the Indian agrarian structure, live? Their pattern of living moved round a vicious circle of borrowings at exorbitant rates of interest from village moneylenders, and expenditure of all the borrowed money on the barest essentials and on payment of interests.

The small peasants, to begin with, were gradually being pauperized. They were too poor to feed themselves, let alone the soil, which needed inputs like irrigation and fertilizers that were too expensive for the subsistence peasants. At first they mortgaged their small plots to the big landlords, and later had to sell them, reducing themselves to the position of tenants or sharecroppers. This explains the increased concentration of land in the hands of a few at the top, particularly in Punjab, Haryana and other parts of North India. A typical instance is Punjab where:

> the land owned by the big farmers increased between 1955-56 and 1967-68, by about 9.5%. This average however concealed a significant range of variations in the rates of expansion. Farms of the size groups 20-25 acres expanded by only 4% whereas those of the size groups 100-150 acres increased by about 40%, and most of the additions to size took place through purchases.[4]

Dispossessed of the land, and reduced to a tenant, the erstwhile small peasant now entered an even more precarious stage of existence. In many States, his rights were not even nominally defined by law, and the rent he had to pay to the big landlord was exorbitant, ranging between one-half and two-thirds of the crop he produced. In some places, it was as high as 70-80% of the crop. In some areas, while the landlord provided him with the implements, like a ploughshare and a pair of bullocks, in other areas, he had to use his own, if he had any, or hire them from someone.

Even in those States where the law protected his rights to some extent, he was invariably deprived of his due share. Thus, in Punjab, both the Punjab Security of Land Tenure Act passed in 1953 and the PEPSU Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act, passed in 1955, provided that the minimum rent payable by a tenant in respect of the land leased to him should not exceed one-third of the produce of the land, or the value of such produce, as the case might be. But, according to a survey carried out in three districts of Punjab, it was revealed that cultivators had to part with half of their produce.[5]

Besides being compelled to give up more than they were obliged to pay the landlords, the tenants were subjected to other forms of persecution. Under the law in several States, a large number of tenants were eligible to occupancy of the plots on which they worked, after a certain period of time. To prevent such occupation, the landlords invariably evicted the tenants before the stipulated term ended. Many tenants, out of fear of losing their jobs, were reluctant even to record their names as tenants, and thus could not seek legal protection when evicted.

Forms of exploitation of the tenants were varied. 'Begar' or forced work for the landlord's private chores, and imposition of levies on the tenants to make them bear the cost of ceremonies in their employer's house on special occasions, were fairly common in the countryside.

But at the lowest rung of the rural hierarchy were the agricultural labourers or the landless peasants. They did not own any land and worked on the farms during the agricultural seasons, and elsewhere during the lean period to supplement their earnings. The increase in their number from 30.6 million in 1951 to 45.4 million in 1971, indicates besides the growth in population, an increasing demotion of small peasants to the position of landless peasants. Even official statistics, usually conservative, present a terrifying picture of the poverty of this class of rural peasants. The Rural Labour Enquiry Committee of 1963-64 estimated that the average annual income of agricultural labour households was Rs. 660. In the same year, the yearly average earnings of factory workers was Rs. 1,660.

In addition to the poor wages, agricultural labourers also suffered from

under-employment. "Agricultural labourers are known to have paid employment only for about 200 days in the year; most of them are casual workers without continuous employment, working irregularly, intermittently and seasonally."[6] The seasonal nature of employment varies from State to State, and even from one area to another within a State. Thus, in West Bengal, in the 'aman' (late autumnal) paddy producing area, a worker is employed for three months a year; in a double-cropping area, for nine months a year; and in areas growing cash crops like jute or tea, for all the year. But, since the 'aman' producing area accounts for a substantial part of West Bengal's agricultural area, one can easily imagine the plight of the majority of the rural labourers.

Poor wages from labour on land, and lack of extra avenues of employment outside agriculture, drove the landless worker to borrow money from private agencies. These agencies were the big farmers, agriculturist moneylenders and professional moneylenders. According to a survey conducted by the Reserve Bank of India these three sources controlled 70% of the total credit available to the cultivators, while government agencies, like co-operatives and banks provided only 7%.[7]

The rates of interest charged by these moneylenders were 50% or even more in some cases. The Second Agricultural Commission found that "of the estimated total number of 16.3 million agricultural labour households in the country, 63.9% were indebted, and debt per indebted household was Rs. 138 per annum."

Inability to pay off the debts and the accumulated interests often landed some among the agricultural poor, mainly those coming from the depressed communities, in a form of bonded slavery. Thus, we find the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes commenting in his Report of 1965-66: "The survey on the economic conditions of Paniyans of Wynad in Kerala conducted by the Bureau of Statistics and Economics of the Government of Kerala, throws light on the system of bonded labour prevalent in that area." In the same report, we come across another comment, this time about Andhra Pradesh:

> The Government of Andhra Pradesh has held that the practice of bonded labour which was found to be prevalent in the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and East Godavari, has died out. It was indicated in some previous Reports that this claim of the State Government did not appear to be correct. A limited survey conducted by the organization during the year under report, supports this conclusion.

It might be relevant to recall in this connection that Srikakulam was one of the first areas where peasant uprisings under the leadership of Communist revolutionaries took place, and that Wynad in Kerala was the scene of an armed attack on police stations by a group of Communist revolutionaries in November, 1968.

On the basis of National Sample Survey data on percentage of people by expenditure groups and the agricultural labour price index, the percentage of rural people

below the minimum level of living went up from 38% in 1960-61 to 54% in 1968-69. In absolute numbers, this was a rise from about 135 million to about 230 million rural people below the minimum level between 1960-61 and 1968-69.[8]

Besides poverty, the rural poor also suffered from social exploitation and discrimination, since a large number of them belonged to lower castes and the aboriginal community, described in Government parlance as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively. While visiting villages a few miles away from Delhi near the borders of Haryana in 1967, I remember having met some landless labourers belonging to the Chamar caste, who worked on the farms of the local big landlords, but were not allowed to draw water from the village well which was reserved for upper castes. They were not even permitted to enter the compounds of the house of their employers —pukka houses made of brick and cement, often fitted with the latest gadgets, standing out in sharp contrast with the dingy hovels where the landless were condemned to live. In South Indian villages, lynching and burning of lower caste peasants on the flimsiest excuses, reminiscent of the witch-hunting days of the Inquisition, were common occurrences.

This poverty still continues in the Indian villages. It is not merely privative. It exercises its frightful sway over hearts and minds, creeps into every corner, touches whatever is most sensitive, and throws out of gear all the delicate springs of life.

The general picture that emerges from all this is one of nightmarish poverty, humiliation and oppression, inflicted upon more than half of India's rural population by a minority of rich landlords and moneylenders, through squeezing out inch by inch, both land and labour from them, and paying them in exchange just enough to keep them working on the lands. At times of crisis, like the difficult years of 1966-67, even this subsistence wage or meal is not made available to them. As a result, many die of malnutrition or starvation.

Basing itself on these facts, and following Mao Tsetung's methods of analysis, CPI (M-L) gave shape to its agrarian theory.

CPI (M-L) View of Indian Rural Society

Summarizing the basic trends in the countryside, the CPI (M-L) in its political resolution adopted in 1969 said:

> The increasing concentration of land in the hands of a few landlords, the expropriation of almost the total surplus produced by the toiling peasantry in the form of rent, the complete landlessness of about 40% of the rural population, the back-breaking usurious exploitation, the ever-growing evictions of the poor peasantry coupled with the brutal social oppression — including lynching of 'harijans',[9] reminiscent of the medieval ages — and the complete backwardness of the technique of production clearly demonstrate the semi-feudal character of our society.[10]

As for the classes in the villages, the party placed the big farmer or landlord in a separate category as a "non-peasant owner of land". It divided the peasantry into four classes — the rich, the middle, the poor and the landless. The party felt that it was a "dangerous mistake" to determine the class character of the peasants on the basis of the size of their plots. "The determination should be made," it was felt, "on the basis of their earning and level of living." [4]

Besides this, the other factors taken into consideration while analyzing class positions of the peasantry were the degree of personal labour offered, and the degree of exploitation of hired labour by the different categories of peasants. Thus, one who cultivated some of his land, but mainly depended on hired hands or tenants for his income, was considered to be a rich peasant. A middle peasant, on the other hand, sometimes hired wage-earners but derived his income wholly or mainly from his own labour, and often had to sell his labour power. A small peasant was totally dependant on his own labour, either employing it in his personal tiny plot or selling it as wage-earner. The landless peasant owned no land and made his living wholly by selling his labour power.[11]

There were also the artisans in every village. "Ironsmiths, potters, weavers and other classes in the village belong to the artisan class of the village. Their class character is that of the poor peasant." [73]

The CPI (M-L) felt that if the poor and landless peasants, who constituted the majority of the peasantry, and were the most exploited, could in firm alliance with the working class, unite with the middle peasants, and if thus the largest section of the Indian people could be mobilized, the anti-feudal, anti-colonial democratic revolution was sure to triumph.[12]

The Government's Measures

How did the Indian Government respond to the problem of rural poverty that had been plaguing the country for so many years?

Certain economic policy measures were taken by the Government to bring about some changes in the system of land tenure. These could be categorized as "land reforms". Towards the middle of the "sixties, certain technological inventions were encouraged by the Government to increase production. These came to be known as the new agricultural strategy."

Let us briefly analyze the effects of both the two groups of measures.

Land Reforms

To begin with, the land reform measures can be divided broadly into three phases. The first phase was immediately after the transfer of power in 1947, when various State Governments passed laws to abolish the zamindari system, and eliminate the non-cultivating intermediate tenants who were parasites. The second phase, initiated during the 1950s, consisted of enactment of laws seeking to ensure security for the tenants. The third phase from the end of the 1950s was marked by plans to enforce ceilings on the size of individual land holdings and distribute the excess land recovered thus, among the landless or small peasants.

The zamindari abolition did not change the pattern of ownership. The old zamindars or feudal landlords, who had a footing in the Congress and hence a voice in the various State Governments, were only deprived of some of their traditional superior rights, like revenue collecting. They managed to circumvent the law, thanks to a number of loopholes and delay in implementation, and retain their large holdings. The fate of the Zamindari Abolition Bill enacted by the Bihar Assembly in 1948 is a typical instance. How successful the zamindars of Bihar were in obstructing the enforcement of the law, is related by the American scholar Daniel Thorner, who, while visiting Bihar in 1956, found: "Eight years after the Bihar legislature voted its acceptance of the principle of zamindari abolition, the majority of the zamindars of Bihar were in legal possession of their lands".[13]

How much did it cost the nation's exchequer to bring about this reform of revenue administration, which for all practical purposes it was, although invested with a certain amount of radicalism by the term "abolition of zamindari"? The Government had to pay Rs. 2,360 million as compensation to the erstwhile zamindars, and will have to pay another Rs. 3,340 million.[14] And all this money, merely for taking away the zamindar's right to collect revenue! There was hardly any expropriation of large properties and their distribution among the landless.

The Government's efforts to reform the tenancy relations yielded no better results. The essential aim of tenancy reform was first, to give security of tenure to the tenants, and second, to regulate the rents they paid.

But here again the big farmers or landlords scored a point over the poor tenants. In many States, there was a wide gap of time between the announcement of the proposals and their enactment as laws. This provided the landlords with ample breathing space to take adequate precautions. Since the proposed laws entitled the tenants to occupy the lands they got on lease after a certain period, the landlords resorted to large-scale eviction of tenants to prevent them from asserting their new rights. As mentioned earlier, the tenants overwhelmingly dependant on the landlords for their living, did not even dare to record their names as tenants, and hence could not seek the protection of the new law. Even those who were registered as tenants could not afford the money necessary to fight a case and wait indefinitely for the judgement. In some areas, as a result of all sorts of pressures and intimidation, the poor tenants "voluntarily surrendered" their rights.

As a result of all this, we find the committee on tenancy of the Planning Commission's Panel of Land Reforms, complaining in 1959 that "regulation of the tenant-landlord relationship has generally failed". Among the causes for the failure were the loopholes in the laws enacted by the States which enabled zamindars to resume land for personal cultivation, and evict tenants in order to cultivate land by hired labour, the absence of land records and the hostility of revenue officials.

The Third Five Year Plan in a chapter on the progress of land reforms, had to admit that the "impact of tenancy legislation on the welfare of tenants has been less than was hoped for". It also referred to the frequency of "voluntary surrenders" by tenants, many of which it felt, "were open to doubt as bonafide transactions".[15]

When we come to the third phase of the land reforms, namely the enactment of ceiling legislations, we find that as in the case of tenancy reforms, here also a wide

gap of time separated the announcement of the proposed ceilings and the actual enactment of the laws. Judging from the benefits that the landlords usually derived from such delays, one is tempted to surmise that the State Governments deliberately forewarned the landlords by announcing the size of the proposed ceilings before enacting the laws. The landlords resorted to another device this time to escape the laws. They transferred the ownership of land likely to be judged as excess over the ceiling proposed in the new laws to the names of their relations or servants, and thus virtually retained the surplus land with themselves. These transfers came to be known as 'benami'. According to a study undertaken at the instance of the Research Programme Committee of the Planning Commission, about 105,600 acres might be estimated to have been transferred malafide during 1952-54 to escape ceiling restrictions.

When the ceiling legislations were finally enacted, under pressure from the landlords the ceilings were kept high to enable the big farmers or landlords to keep as much land as possible legally. The ceiling limit varied with the class of land held. It was fixed in Andhra Pradesh from 27 to 324 acres, in Bihar 20 to 60 acres, in Punjab 27 to 100 acres, in West Bengal 25 acres and in Uttar Pradesh 40 to 80 acres. The landlords also gained by receiving exemptions under the law in relation to certain categories of land like plantations, orchards, tank fisheries, and lands held by religious institutions.

As a result of 'benami' transfers, high limit of ceilings and exemptions, the amount of land that accrued to the Government as surplus from the landlords was inconsequential. Here are a few telling figures from some States. In Andhra Pradesh, the ceiling legislation came into force in 1964, and was expected to bring in 73,692 acres. By 1970, the Government had been able to acquire only 191 acres of surplus land. In Uttar Pradesh, of the 238,000 acres declared as surplus, the Government could acquire 199,000 acres by 1970. In West Bengal, till 1965, the State Government was able to detect only 776,000 acres as surplus.

To sum up the total effects of the various land reform measures enacted from time to time, it is quite obvious that they were heavily loaded in favour of the landed gentry. The few rights that were granted to the share-croppers and the landless were negated by the loopholes within the laws. Besides, to assert their rights through law courts required both time and money in the prevalent system, neither of which the rural poor could afford. Further, at the implementation stage, the local officials with their traditional attitude of superciliousness towards the rural poor and their mental affinity with the rural gentry, were hardly expected to safeguard the interests of the small peasants or tenants. As a review by a Planning Commission unit put it:

> ... the general attitude of the administration has been one of apathy in the matter of implementing measures of land reform .... The lower echelons of the revenue administration are often ignorant of the legal provisions and are also under the sway of substantial landowners who have a vested interest in evading the enacted laws.[16]

The Green Revolution

The second part of the Government's plan to tackle the rural problems was

the "new agricultural strategy" to increase food production.

The main components of this plan were the introduction of high-yielding variety of seeds, mechanization of agriculture, utilization of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, among other things. Although the real effects of the new strategy, which came to be known as the 'green revolution', were evident in parts of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh in 1969-70 when India's output of foodgrains rose to a record 100 million tonnes, its beginnings can be traced back to 1965 when negotiations were held in Rome between the then Indian Agriculture Minister, C. Subramaniam, and the US Secretary for Agriculture, Orville Freeman.

It should be remembered that the USA began to reorient its foreign aid policy in the 1960s. Till then it had been disbursing its surplus foodgrains through PL-480 exports to India and other countries. But after the mid 1960s it began to urge technological improvements in agricultural production in developing countries. Application of the proposed American strategy in Indian agriculture led to increased production, particularly of wheat, but kept it confined within the big mechanized farms owned by a minority of rich farmers.

The reason for the circumscription of the 'green revolution' within the confines of the wheat belt of North India was partly inherent in the new strategy. As mentioned earlier, the strategy required expensive inputs, including chemical fertilizers and modern machinery, as well as well-irrigated fields. Only well-to-do farmers could afford these inputs. As Wolf Ladejinsky, the well-known authority on the new agricultural strategy, put it:

> Since it takes Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 12,000 to re-equip a seven to 10-acre holding, it is not normally within the reach of the farmer unless he can secure cooperative credit. More often than not he can get only insufficient credit, and, on occasion, none at all, for the distribution of credit and inputs in all Indian villages reflects a power structure very much biased in favour of the affluent.[17]

Another observer has noted that apart from the new strategy's "limited applicability even to the 37 million acre wheat belt", it was "totally inappropriate to the much larger area of 92 million acres under rice where the small size of average holding and high incidence of tenancy exclude all but a minority from sharing in the gains of scientific agriculture."[18]

In the wheat belt, the 'green revolution' began to create new social tensions. For one thing, the price of land rose, because of the newly discovered profitability. A new breed of farmers "made up of a motley crowd of retired military and civil servants, doctors, lawyers and business men", appeared on the scene. "Not a few of them have 'unemployed' rupees acquired through undeclared earnings, and most of them look upon farming as a tax-haven, which it is, a source of high supplementary income free of any tax burdens."[19]

With the increase in the value of land, rents payable by tenants also rose. Already, as pointed out earlier, the rents specified under the laws were seldom accepted by the landlords who managed to get more from the tenants. With the success of the 'green revolution' in some parts of Punjab, tenants were forced to give up even 70% of their crop. As Francine R. Frankel noted after a survey of

villages in Ludhiana in Punjab, and other parts of the 'green revolution' area:

> . . . the introduction of modern technology under the intensive areas and the high-yielding varieties programs has not only quickened the process of economic polarization in the rural areas, but it has also contributed to increasing social antagonism between landlords and tenants, and landowners and labourers . . . .[20]

As for the effects of the 'green revolution' on the rice-growing regions of West Godavari in Andhra Pradesh and Burdwan in West Bengal, Francine R. Frankel found that the majority of cultivators there with uneconomic holdings of two and three acres, had managed to increase per acre yields from the application of small doses of fertilizers but aggregate gains in output had been insufficient to create capital surpluses for investment in land development. At best, this permitted small farmers to stabilize their standard of living in the face of rising costs. In cases where small farmers also leased part of their holdings, or were pure tenants, rising rentals in recent years (in response to the sharp spurt in land values), or the tendency of landowners to resume land for personal cultivation with the introduction of more profitable techniques, have actually led to an absolute deterioration in the economic condition of the small owner-cum-tenant cultivator class.

How were the landless wage-earners affected? While to some extent, their wages rose at harvest times because of the need to clear the land and prepare it for the next crop, it was found nevertheless that "in the face of rising prices, labourers are generally left with little improvement in real income, and in some cases, they actually report deterioration over previous years . . . ."[21] Besides, increased use of machinery also threatened to displace a large number of agricultural labourers as they were becoming redundant. The 'green revolution' also led to an increased disparity in the distribution of income in the rural areas. Levels of living rose among the affluent farmers, setting new patterns of consumption and rousing new expectations among the poorer. While there was an equalization of expected standards of consumption, there was a lesser equalization of levels of income.

It is interesting to note that before the tensions generated by the 'green revolution' were apparent in North India, a shrewd observer of Indian politics, Chester Bowles, the former US Ambassador to India, prepared a memorandum on the problems and prospects of Indian agriculture. It was dated 30 October 1967, when the peasant uprising at Naxalbari had just been crushed, and the entire incident was being dismissed by many as an isolated and sporadic upsurge. To quote Bowles:

> Landless labourers may accept their wages of two or three rupees a day without much complaint as long as they know that everyone in their village is poor. However, when they see the landowners' incomes rising rapidly while their own rises much more slowly if at all, they become restless and resentful. In other words, the dramatic increases in food output which are occurring — and which should continue to grow in the years ahead — may lead to sharp disparities in income which in turn may create an expanding sense of economic and social injustice.[22]

It took the Indian Government two years to realize the consequences of the new agricultural strategy. By the end of 1969 it was becoming apparent that the 'green revolution', in spite of a good food output, was generating new inequalities. Speaking at a conference of State Chief Ministers in New Delhi in November that year, the then Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan, warned: "... unless the green revolution is accompanied by a revolution based on social justice, I am afraid the green revolution may not remain green."[23]

Thus, both the groups of measures initiated by the Government to solve rural poverty in India — land reforms and the new agricultural strategy — failed to make any headway. They merely reinforced the semi-feudal system in the countryside. Incomplete implementation of imperfect land reforms under the lackadaisical guidance of the Government left the rural poor as impoverished as ever, exploited by the non-cultivating landowners and usurers, and victims of a variety of social customs — all relics of a feudal past. As for the technological measures, for the country as a whole, they were far too backward and limited to earn recognition as "capitalism in agriculture" — a term that some economists in our country are quick to apply to the changes in the North Indian countryside in the wake of the 'green revolution'. For one thing, although there was an undeniable increase in the use of machinery, as a percentage of total power utilization it was still insignificant; even in 1970-71, human and animal labour power accounted for 79% of the total power used in the fields.[24] Besides, the technological measures utilized by the rich landlords, who remained basically feudal in outlook, led to huge profits. But instead of the reinvestment of the surplus in productive spheres, they were diverted to typical feudal consumption, such as the purchase of jewellery, construction of mansions and lavish ceremonies, while the balance was invested in merchant trading and usury. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the 'green revolution' created further uncertainties in the social life of the peasantry.

It was against the background of this experience — the history and nature of the government's agrarian measures — that the CPI (M-L) felt compelled to brand as its enemy, the Indian state, which it described as "the state of big landlords and comprador-bureaucrat capitalists". As an instance of the domination by the big landlords, it referred to "the unbridled freedom of the landlords to plunder and oppress the peasantry with the help of the state machinery".[25]

The Rural Tradition: Myth and Reality

How did the rural poor react to the grinding poverty that worsened day by day? How did they respond to the usurious exploitation by the money-lenders, and to the land reforms?

Until the events of 1966 and 1967, climaxed by the uprisings at Naxalbari and Srikakulam, hit the headlines, the general belief was that rural India had always been a mass of sleeping villages accepting and acquiescing in every form of injustice and oppression.

This belief, contrary to the actual history, was nurtured by the values preached and the stresses laid by the Indian bourgeois leaders, both during the anti-British

movements and after the transfer of power of 1947. While Gandhi no doubt was the first among the Indian bourgeois leaders to highlight the depressing poverty of the rural masses and recognize the need for utilizing them in the national struggle, he emphasized the trends of reconciliation of opposites in the Indian tradition, instead of the equally strong tradition of conflict. As one of Gandhi's most brilliant disciples put it:

> The ancient tradition in which people answered hatred by love, anger by calmness, or in other words, invited self-suffering instead of inflicting suffering and punishment upon others for the vindication of a just cause ... found a new expression ... under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi.[26]

While leading the movements, Gandhi therefore took special care to curb the least manifestation of violence. Whenever any evidence of it was forthcoming, he tried to put a brake on the movement, as he did after people had set fire to a police station at Chauri Chaura in 1922, or reduced it from a mass movement to individual satyagraha, as in 1933. On the question of conflict between the landlords and the peasants, Gandhi repeatedly laid stress on reconciliation instead of confrontation. Thus we find him condemning the 'kisans' of U.P. during the non-cooperation campaign in 1921, for having "overstepped the mark, taken the law into their own hands". Continuing, he suggested:

> ... it is not contemplated that at any stage of non-cooperation we would seek to deprive the Zamindars of their rent. The Kisan movement must be confined to the improvement of the status of the Kisans and the betterment of the relations between the Zamindars and them. The Kisans must be advised scrupulously to abide by the terms of their agreement with the Zamindars, whether such aggreement is written or inferred from custom. Where a custom or even a written contract is bad, they may not try to uproot it by violence or without previous reference to the Zamindars. In every case there should be a friendly discussion with the Zamindars and an attempt made to arrive at a settlement.[27]

It was not surprising, therefore, that when Gandhi's political followers took up the reins of administration, they frowned upon independent actions, particularly violent demonstrations by the peasants. In fact, even long before August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru was heard deprecating "repeated Kisan demonstrations as they were being made cheap and ridiculous" on 14 April 1938.[28]

Militant actions by the peasantry were thus most of the time discouraged by the Congress leaders. Naturally, violent expressions of protest by the peasants were underplayed in official histories of the national movement. Conflicts between the feudal landlords and the peasants were ignored, and harmonizing aspects of the rural tradition were upheld. The ideal view of the 'Panchayat' as the concord of all rural classes was counterposed against the grim reality of class-antagonisms in the villages.

The myth of a submissive peasantry was thus foisted upon the people. Intellectuals, both Indian and foreign, were also taken in by the myth. How can

one explain otherwise the following glib generalisation, made by a group of scholars:

> The very immobility of the village people had made the nearly 300 million peasants the most abiding, and therefore the most stable element in the continuity of Indian society, an elemental foundation, equal to any cultural inheritance upon which India could quite surely start to build a national society.[29]

Peasant Revolts

What was the reality? Throughout the recent history of India, the peasant remained a tormented soul. Whenever he got a chance, he broke out into rebellion, either against foreign usurpers of power, or against native oppressors.

The early years of British rule in India were marked by widespread peasant rebellions. Long before the Sepoy Rebellion — often regarded as the first war of Indian independence — hungry peasants of Bengal and Bihar, victims of a terrible famine (1770), rose in revolt against the East India Company, which had been exacting money and crops from them. This was the famous Sannyasi rebellion. A large number of 'sannyasis' and 'fakirs' who were being fleeced by the British rulers through various forms of exactions, played an important role in organizing the peasants, and hence the name — Sannyasi Rebellion. Along with the peasants and the sannyasis and fakirs, there were also village artisans — the famous silk weavers of Bengal, who had been made to slave for the British merchants — and the thousands of unemployed soldiers from the disbanded Mughal army. Led by Majnu Shah, Bhabani Pathak, Debi Chaudhurani and a host of heroic figures, the rebellion continued till the beginning of the 19th Century and was marked by widespread daring attacks on the East India Company's offices in different parts of Bihar and Bengal, killing of notorious Indian landlords and money-lenders as well as of oppressive British traders and army officers, and both guerrilla and positional warfare against the British army.[30]

Episodes from the Sannyasi Rebellion reveal interesting tactics adopted by the rebels which foreshadow in many respects the methods of guerrilla warfare fashioned by Mao Tsetung. Following is the description of one such encounter between the rebels and the British:

> On the morning of December 30, 1772, Commander Thomas launched an attack on the rebels in the field of Shyamgunj, near the town of Rangpur. The shrewd leaders of the rebel force first feigned flight with all their followers, and gradually began to retreat; in this way they lured the army of Thomas into the adjacent deep forest. The British troops overwhelmed with the joy of victory, exhausted all their shells and bullets. Now, seizing the opportunity, the rebels immediately pounced upon the British troops and encircled it from all sides. The peasants of all the villages of the area, joined the rebels, with bows and arrows, spears and rods .... Within a short time, the forces of Thomas were defeated and it fled. Commander Thomas himself was killed, struck by the swords of the rebels.[31]

A more striking resemblance with Maoist tactics of guerrilla warfare can be found in the methods adopted by peasant rebels during the chieftains' uprising all over South India from 1800-1801, against the British soldiers and Indian feudal princes. The rebels, under the leadership of Marudu Pandyan of Sivaganga, Malappan of Ramnad, and several other chieftains — all men of the masses — succeeded in forming a Peninsular Confederacy all over South India, and after having defeated the British army in different parts of South India, established their sway over a large number of villages, where people's committees were formed and villagers refused to pay taxes to the East India Company.[32] Recognizing the superior military strength of the foreign troops the South Indian rebel leagues, who were provided with armed men by the peasants, hit upon the stratagem of harassing the enemy from inaccessible jungles and hills. "They asserted that when the enemy was challenged simultaneously in all directions, its attention would be so distracted that it would be prevented from concentrating its striking power upon any particular quarter."[33]

The challenge posed by the rebels was so serious that the British had to march detachments from Ceylon, Malaya and England on an emergency basis to crush the rebellion. But "more than what the English did, the decisive factor that rendered the rebel fortunes unsustainable was the hostile attitude of the princes. The devoted service rendered by them not only made the power of the English formidable, but crippled the will of the patriots and excited dissensions in their ranks."[34]

In 1820, the Ho tribal peasants of Chhotanagpur in Bihar, rose against the British rulers and the local money-lenders and zamindars. The establishment of British authority in the area had led to dislocation in the socio-economic living pattern of the Ho people. A large number of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traders and money-lenders had come and settled among them. Their lands were being occupied by these outsiders through contracts enforced by courts of law. Widespread discontent ensued among the Hos. The first Ho uprising of 1820 was suppressed soon by the British. But the Hos rose again in 1821. This time they were well-organized and strong enough to besiege the fort of Chinepoor, and had the entire Kolhan area at their mercy. The zamindars and the Rajah of Porahat appealed to the British for help, and the Ho uprising was ruthlessly crushed.

In fact, the Chhotanagpur area remained a centre of turbulent uprisings throughout the 19th Century. The Oraons — another tribal community — rebelled in 1820, 1832, 1890. The Kol tribals organized an insurrection in 1831-32, which was directed mainly against Government officers and private money-lenders. A quotation from a contemporary report would be relevant here, as the conditions of the peasantry described there are eerie in their lifelike resemblance to the plight of the Indian peasant today. Wilkinson and Dent, who were appointed Joint Commissioners to suppress the Kol revolt, wrote in their report:

> The Mahajans, who advanced money and grain, managed within a 12th month to get from them 70%, and sometimes more .... Many people from below the Ghat

> have settled in Nagpur . . . and within the last five years several of these settlers to whom they [the Kols] had become deeply indebted, had pressed so hard for payment that many of the Kols had executed Sewakpattas, that is, had sold their services till the debt was discharged, which was in fact binding themselves to give their whole earning to the creditor thus becoming his bondsman for life. . . .[35]

The immensity of the Kol rebellion could be gauged from the fact that troops had to be rushed from far off places like Calcutta, Danapur and Benaras to quell it.

Another important rebellion of this period was the Wahabi uprising in Bengal under the leadership of the famous Titu Meer in 1831. What began as a religious reform movement soon turned into an armed revolt against orthodox mullahs, feudal landlords and British soldiers. Although Titu and his peasant followers who fought their last heroic battle from within a bamboo fortress in a village called Narikelbaria, were defeated by the British in course of the insurrection, Titu had managed to oust the British through successive operations from several villages in South 24-Parganas, Nadia and Jessore, where he established a parallel authority and collected taxes from zamindars.[36] However imperfect politically, here was a 'liberated zone' established through "area-wise seizure of power" — concepts that were to figure prominently in the theory and practice of the CPI (M-L).

But a more stirring source of inspiration for future agrarian struggles was the Santhal uprising of 1855-57. The Santhal country extended from Bhagalpur in Bihar in the north to Orissa in the south, the centre being 'Damin-i-koh' (meaning the skirts of the hill), situated near the Rajmahal Hills, stretching from Hazaribagh to the borders of Bengal. The Santhal tribes reclaimed from wild jungles every square foot of arable land, where they cultivated and lived peacefully till the arrival of Bengali and other traders and merchants. The latter persuaded the simple-minded Santhal peasants to buy luxury goods on credit, and later at harvest time forced them to pay back the loans along with interest. The balance against the Santhal in the mahajan-cum-trader's book increased year by year, till the poor peasant was compelled to give up, not only his crops, but gradually his plough and bullocks, and finally his land, to meet the demands of the traders. As the debt, lying like an incubus upon the landless Santhals, daily grew upon them, many were reduced to bond-slaves pledging their future descendants to the service of the creditors' families.

The leaders of the Santhal rebellion were two brothers — Sidu and Kanu of Bhagnadihi. Organized on a vast scale, it swept across the entire Santhal region from Bihar to Orissa. Frustrated in their repeated attempts in the past to seek justice from courts and minions of the law, the peasants raised the cry — "Death to the money-lenders, the police, the civil court officers and the landlords!" It thus took on in effect the nature of an anti-feudal and anti-state movement. Within a few months, the tables were turned. The whirlwind fanned up by the money-lenders swept down upon them without pity or remorse. Notorious landlords, traders and mahajans were selected and killed. Later historians expressed their shock at the "brutalities" committed by the rebels, but chose to ignore the years of grinding brutality that the peasants had to suffer at the hands of the

landlords and traders. The Santhal rebels were joined by poor and landless peasants of other lower castes and village artisans. They defeated the British troops in several encounters, forcing the colonial administration to declare martial law over a vast expanse from Birbhum and Murshidabad in Bengal to Bhagalpur in Bihar — the area where the rebels succeeded in destroying all semblance of British rule. The Santhal rebellion was finally crushed by the British troops. About 10,000 rebels perished in the unequal fight between peasants armed with bows and arrows on the one side and soldiers equipped with firearms, on the other. As one British major in charge of the suppression put it, the humble military equipment of the Santhals did not include the white flag; they did not know how to give in.

Sporadic peasant revolts found their culmination in the 1857 uprising, which besides being a mutiny of sepoys and a putsch by the ex-rulers of the country, had as an important component thousands of spontaneous peasants' jacqueries all over North India. Although bourgeois historians have glossed over the role of the peasantry in the 1857 uprising, contemporary records provide ample information to help us measure the extent of peasant participation. A British eye-witness account, according to one historian, admits: ". . . in Oudh the whole population was up in arms; every village was fortified, and everyman's hand was against us. As an example it may be pointed out that out of the 40,000 men who besieged Lucknow, 20,000 went away to sow the fields."[37] In February 1858, in the battle that took place at Miagunj, between Lucknow and Kanpur, among the 8,000 rebel soldiers that fought the British, only 1,000 were sepoys, the rest being peasants from adjacent villages.[38]

Within a few weeks of the uprising, British rule was almost demolished all over northern India. In a bid to establish some sort of people's rule, the rebels set up a "Court of Administration" with elected representatives from the sepoys and other sections of the population. The rest of the story is well known. In the absence of an anti-colonial bourgeoisie to lead the war against the British imperialists, the sepoys and the peasants compelled the disgruntled feudal ex-rulers to assume the leadership. The latter, as was their wont, were too eager for a compromise with the foreign power, expecting permission to retain some of their privileges, and accordingly betrayed the revolt.

Even after 1857, and the consolidation of British rule in India, the ferment of unrest among the peasants burst forth periodically into revolts. The peasants of Bengal, forced to cultivate indigo under a life-long bondage to the British planters who exported the blue dye to Britain to feed the requirements of the growing cotton industry there, rose in a rebellion in 1850, and succeeded in putting an end to the hated system.

Under the leadership of Birsa, the Mundas of the Ranchi area fought the Hindu landlords in 1895. In the princely states of Rajasthan, the traditionally militant Bhil and Meo peasants fought against the local money-lenders and landlords. In the south, the Moplah peasants of Malabar rose against feudal extortions and oppression.

Two major peasant uprisings that occurred in India in more recent times were the 'Tebhaga' movement in undivided Bengal in 1946, and the insurrection at

Telengana from 1946-51. Unlike the usually sporadic and spontaneous peasant revolts of the past, both the developments were politically inspired and had a firm organizational basis and practical programme. The then undivided Communist Party of India played a leading role in both the events.

The Tebhaga [three parts] movement, as its name indicates, demanded the reduction of the share of the landowners from one-half of the crop to one-third. Peasants, under the leadership of the Communist Party-dominated Kisan Sabhas, cultivated the fields and took away forcibly two-thirds of the harvested crops to their granaries. The landlords attacked the peasants with the help of mercenary toughs and the police, and bloody clashes ensued. The movement spread from village to village, from Dinajpur and Rangpur in North Bengal to 24-Parganas in the south of the province. Although primarily launched on economic demands, the rebellion in some areas led to the flight of landlords leaving the villages at the mercy of the peasants, who often virtually turned them into 'liberated areas' administering affairs in the villages through the Kisan Sabha.

The Tebhaga movement petered out for various reasons. According to some CPI leaders, the party failed to win over the middle peasants who often felt threatened by the demands of the share-croppers and crossed over to the enemy camp of the landlords. Secondly, a 'Bargadar Act', which was introduced in the wake of the Tebhaga movement, by the then Muslim League Ministry of Bengal, sought to pacify the irate share-croppers by giving legal sanction to their demand for two-thirds of the harvested crop. This could have temporarily taken the edge away from the movement. But the Communist leaders did little to get the Act implemented, as a result of which the landlords again got the upper hand and with the help of the police let loose a wave of repression which was difficult to withstand. After 1947, the Congress Government, true to its old policy of discouraging militant actions by the share-croppers and landless, sided with the landlords and provided them with the protection of the State machinery.[39]

The CPI (M-L) however has a different analysis. According to the party's theoretician, Charu Mazumdar, who himself was a participant in the Tebhaga movement in North Bengal,

> the peasants who took part in this movement numbered six million. It should be remembered that in the entire peasant movement this was a golden era. In the expansiveness of the movement, in the intensity of emotions, in the expression of class hatred, this movement was the highest stage of class struggle.

Explaining the reasons for the peasants' failure to seize power in spite of all this, Charu Mazumdar said in the same article:

> It couldn't be seized for one reason only — it was because the revolutionary masses of those days looked for arms at the centre; we lost faith in the path indicated by Lenin. We hesitated in those days to accept that firm assertion to carry forward the revolution by collecting arms locally and seize power area-wise. As a result, the weaponless peasants could not stand up and resist in the face of arms. Even those who fought fully aware of death, had to retreat finally. [For the future generation of

> revolutionaries the lesson that had to be drawn from these mistakes according to Charu Mazumdar was that] the responsibility of collecting arms lies with the local organizations, not with the centre.[2]

The Telengana Liberation Struggle

The insurrection at Telengana was of a more lasting value, both because of its achievements and its military organization. Telengana was a part of the former Hyderabad State in South India. It was the biggest princely state in India with 17 districts and a population of 17 million at that time, ruled by the Nizam. The Telegu-speaking Telengana region occupied half the area.

The peasant struggle in Telengana which began in 1946 was against forced labour, illegal exactions, evictions by feudal landlords and oppression by village patels, among other things, and later developed into an agrarian liberation struggle to get rid of feudal landlordism and the Nizam's dynastic rule in the state. The struggle continued even after the Nizam's rule ended with the entry of Indian troops in September 1948 and the merger of the Hyderabad State into the Indian Union. From elementary self-defence with lathis and slings against the landlords' hired hoodlums and police, the struggle evolved into a full-scale armed revolt against the Nizam and his army, and later against the offensive of the Indian troops.

By 1947, a guerrilla army of about 5,000 was operating in Telengana. During the course of the struggle which continued till 1951, the people could organize and build a powerful militia comprising 10,000 village squad members and about 2,000 regular guerrilla squads. The peasantry in about 3,000 villages, covering roughly a population of three million in an area of abour 16,000 square miles, mostly in the three districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam, succeeded in setting up 'gram-raj' or village soviets. The landlords were driven away from the villages, their lands seized, and one million acres of land were redistributed among the peasantry. As many as 4,000 Communists and peasant activists were killed, and more than 10,000 Communists and sympathizers were put behind the bars, initially by the Nizam's government, and later by the armed forces of the Indian Government.[40]

Describing the strategy and tactics adopted by the rebels during the anti-Nizam phase of the struggle, i.e. before September 1948, one Communist leader who was also a participant in the struggle wrote:

> It was felt that we could not resist the raids of army, police and Razakars* without well-trained guerrillas. The initial prerequisites were collection of arms and formation of guerrilla squads. All the previous struggles were of an economic nature and in self-defence. Although they were politically significant they were not products of the slogan of political liberation. Consequently future struggles had to be planned

* The Razakar army was formed under the leadership of Kasim Razvi, the leader of the Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, and called upon Muslims to protect Hyderabad from Hindus.

> with the slogan of political liberation unlike in the past. The Communist Party and Andhra Mahasabha [the mass front from behind which the illegal Communist Party had to work] jointly gave a call for collection of arms and formation of guerrilla squads. A directive was issued for sudden raids in the night on homes of landlords and seizure of their weapons on a fixed date . . . Guerrilla squads were formed with young men who could devote all their time. This was the first type of squad. A second sort of squad for village defence was organized with such men who could not devote all their time to guerrilla squads. The third category of squads was composed of those who destroyed the communication and transport lines of the army and razakars. . . . Some comrades who had formerly worked in the army imparted training in tactics of warfare. After some time there emerged instructors among our workers. This was a consequence of continued battles and expansion of squads.[41]

Describing the administration of the villages from where officials and landlords fled, the writer said:

> Lands enjoyed by the landlords with false revenue certificates were taken over and distributed. A ceiling on landlord's holding was fixed and the rest distributed among the people, particularly among agricultural labourers and the landless poor. All the lands, implements and cattle of landlords who were allies of the enemy were taken over and distributed. Documents of debts with money-lenders and landlords were destroyed and such debts made infructuous. Hundreds of quintals of foodgrains were taken over from the godowns of traitors and given away to the people. Wages of agricultural labour were raised.[42]

But differences developed among the CPI leaders of Telengana in 1948, after the entry of the Indian Army. Earlier, the Nizam had concluded an agreement with the new Congress government of India in November, 1947, on preserving the status of the state for one year. As the "stand-still agreement" remained in force, the troops of the Nizam and his private army, the Razakars, continued to persecute the rebellious peasants of Telengana, who waged a heroic fight. By the middle of 1948, about one-sixth of the region had passed over to Communists, who had started redistributing land confiscated from the landlords among the peasants.

Meanwhile, the Congress Government of India, besides being annoyed with the Nizam for having violated some clauses of the agreement, was also getting panicky about the success of the Communists in Telengana. In September 1948, the Government presented an ultimatum to the Nizam, who rejected it. On 13 September 1948, the Indian Army crossed the frontier and within five days was in virtual occupation of the Nizam's territory, although the Communist rebels remained entrenched in their stronghold. A section of the Communist leadership felt that the armed struggle should be continued against the Indian Government, while others were in favour of its withdrawal. Finally, in 1951, the Communist Party asked its followers to surrender arms and withdrew the movement.

Among the former participants in the Telengana struggle there are mainly two views regarding the question of continuing the struggle after the entry of the

Indian Army. Some, who are now in the CPI, feel that it was continued in a "sectarian manner" even after the entry of the Indian Army, since the "people in general" were supposed to have welcomed the intervention of the Indian Government, and since the Indian Army was militarily far superior to the rebels and could easily crush them.[43]

Others, mainly those who are in the CPI (M) now, feel that the armed struggle should have been continued, not as a war of liberation against the Indian Government, but as a partisan struggle to protect the gains that the fighting peasantry had achieved in the course of their anti-Nizam struggle, since the new Indian Government, they believed, being a bourgeois-landlord government would have naturally sided with the landlords. They are critical of those who at that time advocated the continuation of the armed struggle as a war of liberation to overthrow the Nehru Government.[44] In the words of one of these participants:

> The working class which had come out in support of the revolt in the Royal Indian Navy, and for the release of the Indian National Army prisoners during the 1945-47 period, could not be brought into effective action in support of the Telengana peasant armed struggle. There were no solidarity strikes in support of the Telengana struggle, either before the intervention of the Indian Union armies in September, 1948 or during the three long years of the Telengana armed resistance until October 1951. . . . The Telengana armed struggle alone had had to carry the entire brunt of the offensive let loose by the armed forces of the Indian Government — and that too with the subjectively conceived aim of overthrowing the Nehru Government.[45]

A different assessment is, however, available from an anti-Communist observer, whose views do not corroborate the CPI opinion that "as the army attacked in thousands it became impossible for the people and squads to offer any resistance".[46] Describing the situation in Telengana after the entry of the Indian troops, this foreign diplomat wrote:

> Despite firm Indian Army occupation, newly built roads which for the first time permitted rapid patrolling by armoured cars, concentration camps filled with captured Communists, police outposts every few miles and in some places very ruthless suppression, guerrilla fighting continued spasmodically until the Communists themselves changed their programme of violence two years later.[47]

His interview with an Indian Army officer who took part in the operations is even more revealing.

> 'Do you know really what guerrilla warfare is like?' — an Indian Army officer asked me. 'I can understand why the French have not won in Indo-China', he said. 'We could not completely win even in that one section of Hyderabad, and we were Indian not white foreigners'. He described how difficult it was to find a Communist leader who dressed and lived like the other peasants during the day. At night the Red bands would dig up their arms and strike against an isolated outpost . . . .

In spite of his anti-Communist prejudices, the diplomat had to admit that the Communist guerrillas of Telengana were the fish and the villagers the sea; "when the sea is warm and friendly the fish can multiply and swim where they wish". It was because of this that long after Hyderabad had been officially occupied by the Indian Army, the Communists remained in virtual control of the territory liberated earlier from the Nizam's yoke. "Only in the last year of my stay in India [1953] when the communists themselves had switched their tactics to 'peace and collaboration', was it safe for a government supporter to travel through this strife-torn district."

It appears therefore that while loss of morale in the face of a superior armed force or absence of sympathetic movements in other parts of India, could have been some of the reasons for the withdrawal of the movement, the main reason lay somewhere else. The ambivalence among the leaders — both those who are now in the CPI and those who are in the CPI (M) — might have sprung from their class positions. Most of the leaders of the Communist Party in Telengana came from rich peasant or landlord families. Although they donated their property to the party during the struggle and made tremendous sacrifices, they possibly retained illusions about the Congress government, which was dominated by these upper classes. Note for instance the sneaking sympathy that has crept into Ravi Narayan Reddy's description of the entry of the Indian troops in Telengana: "People of the state welcomed the police action." The next sentence, however, gives away the real class character of those who welcomed the troops: "In the absence of landlords in the villages the rich and middle peasants led these receptions."[48] He is bold enough to admit later that it was these rich and middle peasants who were instrumental in the withdrawal of the struggle. "Some agricultural labourers and poor peasants were inclined to continue the struggle but they could not do anything in the face of opposition of the middle and rich peasants."[49]

P. Sundarayya's assumption that armed partisan struggle aimed at only protecting the gains the peasants had won during the anti-Nizam struggle — as opposed to a war of liberation to overthrow the Nehru Government — would have been sufficient to "enforce an early negotiated settlement for partial solution of the land question",[50] again betrays the same illusion about the ruling class of India. Was it possible to retain the gains without destroying the state power of the ruling class? How could one expect the Nehru Government which was buttressed by feudal interests, to agree to any settlement that allowed the poor and landless peasants to retain land won through armed struggle against these same feudal interests?

These Communist leaders also ignored the real motives behind the Government's introduction of two legislations — the Jagiri Abolition Act and the Hyderabad Tenancy Act — in the wake of the successes gained by the armed Communists of Telengana. Both C. Rajeswara Rao of the CPI and P. Sundarayya of the CPI (M). describe the legislations as "radical" and "progressive".[51] According to one observer, both the legislations actually gave "the concessions which the small landlords and rich peasants wanted".[52] As Sundarayya himself admits:

> The landlords who ran away or were driven out of the villages during that movement, had trekked back and reconsolidated their positions in the rural areas. They seized back most of their so-called seri lands, and sold most of the 'anyakrantalu' and lands under the old tenants to other rich cultivators and some protected tenants, who got the right of first purchase under the land laws enacted in 1950. . . . The drive to deprive the peasants and agricultural labourers of the waste lands they have been cultivating is going on. . . .[53]

If anything else was needed to expose the real face of the Congress Government, the repression by the Indian military forces after their entry into Telengana would have been enough. Sardar Patel, the "iron man" of the Congress party, was reported to have told a meeting at Hyderabad in 1950, a few days before his death, that he would not allow a single Communist to be alive in Telengana.[54] His minions went about fulfilling his promise in a determined fashion. This is how the CPI leader Ravi Narayan Reddy — according to whom "people of the state welcomed the police action", described the atrocities perpetrated by the Indian Army:

> Attacks on the party were made in all regions at the same time. Within a month or two military camps were established in all areas. Mobilizing five to six thousand soldiers and carrying out raids through encirclement of five to six villages, the army began eliminating our squads. Squads in many villages were wiped out in this fashion. People were made victims of severe violence and repression and they were asked to resign from the party. They were beaten with lathis and bayonets and tortured to the extreme — like peeling the skin in the design of the hammer and sickle. The army concentrated its attacks particularly on families of party and squad members. Arrested comrades were tortured most brutally and shot dead in the presence of the people. . . .[55]

One wonders how even after this experience, the Communist leaders of Telengana could oppose the need for a liberation struggle to overthrow the Nehru government, and try instead to discover "progressive" or "radical" provisions in laws made by such a government.[56]

Some Common Features of the Peasant Revolts

An analysis of the nature of the peasant rebellions in India right from the early days of British rule to the post-1947 era, reveals that the peasantry has always remained a potential rebel. Certain striking features run like a common thread through most of the rebellions described so far.

First, there is the gradual pauperization of the peasant, a slow deterioration from owners of land to the landless. It is usually through debt that this happens. The frequent failure of crops, which is a standing danger to the peasant, becomes a standing opportunity for the rich. The insolvent debtor is compelled to give up to his creditor, often for a nominal price, a plot which he has no longer the means of tilling, and in some cases, surrender even his own self as a slave. For the last 200 years or so, in India, both the rural rich and the rural poor, the former by his pattern of extortions and the latter by his manner of periodic outbursts, have remained curiously consistent. The same pattern emerges from

every rebellion. Expropriation of their lands and the rapacity of the landlords over several years provoke the peasants to rebel at last. The outburst of starved instincts of vengeance is marked by the murder of the oppressors and the burning of their houses. The role of the ruling party, whether it is the East India Company, or the British Government of the past, or the Congress party, is the same. It sends its armed troops to protect the village gentry and crush the rebels.

This brings us to the second feature of these rebellions. Although without a scientific conception of the feudal system as a stage in the development of society, the rebel peasants in a somewhat confused manner had all along aimed to bring about a basic change in the situation. While most of the rebellions began on economic or religious issues, they invariably developed soon into wider upsurges demanding an end to the system of monopolization of the land by a few, money-lending at exorbitant rates of interest, bond slavery, social oppression by the landlords, — in short, the entire feudal agrarian structure. It is significant that although isolated, the rebel peasants who rose in Kaira, Ahmadnagar and Poona in west India between 1871 and 1875, had one common object — to obtain and destroy the bonds, decrees and other documents in possession of their creditors. It was natural also that at a later stage of such rebellions, the peasants could identify the character of the State power. As during the Santhal uprising, the vengeance of the rebels took in its sweep the law court officers as well as the police. Thus the rebellions carried in themselves all the potentialities of a massive revolution to transform the social structure as a whole.

The third interesting feature is the aim, although confused and imperfect at times, to capture power and establish independent regimes. From Titu Meer's attempt in 1831, to the establishment of the "Court of Administration" by the rebels of the 1857 upheaval, the aim became gradually more concretized, and was fulfilled with the emergence of Red power in the villages of Telengana during 1946-51.

A special feature of the peasant rebellions has been the role of the tribal population. A large number of the peasant uprisings were spearheaded by the tribals — the Kols, Mundas, Oraons and Santhals of east India, Bhils and Meos of the north, and Koyas in the south. The tribals, known also as 'adivasis' or the original inhabitants of this country, were ousted from their lands by colonizers who came in streams, and were thus the first to bear the brunt of expropriation by commercial capital — traders and money-lenders — tied to the feudal landlords. The tribal took shelter in the inaccessible forests and hills, and cleared the jungles to cultivate. But here also, they could not escape the avaricious eyes of the traders, and, as happened in the Santhal Parganas, fell victim to the merchant adventurers and various types of middle-men.

The tradition continues today, as is evident from the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1967-68:

> In many parts of South Bihar and of Orissa, a considerable amount of land has virtually passed out of the hands of tribal peasants to the hands of money-lenders or of more efficient farmers who have come and settled from the plains nearby. There are laws intended to prevent alienation; but alienation takes place in spite of the laws. What happens is that the poor farmer takes a loan at high interest which he is hardly able to repay. He continues to work on his land, but the produce now belongs to the money-lender who secures it at a price below the market rate. And thus the owner becomes virtually a farm labourer under the money-lender. A legal transfer is not made, the law is circumvented, and the free-man becomes virtually a hired serf. And all this because the money-lender comes to his assistance when no other help is available.

But through all these vicissitudes, the tribals have jealously guarded the autonomy of their various social institutions, and have retained a certain amount of militancy, ready to assert itself whenever their rights are threatened.

According to the 1961 census, the tribal population in India numbered about 30 million, or about one-eleventh of India's total population. In the 1951 census, the tribal landless labourers formed 6.3% of the total landless population. The figure rose to 10.6% in 1961, indicating the growing impoverishment among this section of the people.

It is significant that Naxalbari, where the first uprising took place in 1967, is inhabited by Santhal tribal people who took a prominent part in the movement. In Srikakulam in the south also, where the movement matured in 1968, Girijans or the hill tribals, formed its nucleus. By 1969, several other tribal dominated areas, like Khammam and Warangal in Andhra Pradesh, adjoining districts of Orissa, and Midnapore in West Bengal, had become the centres of CPI (M-L) activities. Referring to the unrest in these areas, a Union Home Ministry survey made during this period, said:

> The basic cause of unrest, namely the defective implementation of laws enacted to protect the interest of the tribals, remains; unless this is attended to, it would not be possible to win the confidence of the tribals whose leadership has been taken over by the extremists.[57]

It was natural, therefore, that the CPI (M-L) would lay special emphasis on the tribal problem. Long before the formation of the party, the Communist revolutionaries expressed their solidarity with the Nagas and Mizos. Thus, in the May, 1968 issue of *Liberation*, we find them quoting approvingly from a foreign journal:

> The Nagas and Mizos have taken up arms because of ruthless class oppression by the Indian big landlords and big capitalists". The Communist revolutionaries took care to remind the tribal people of their militant past. Thus, when several tribal peasants were killed in a police firing at Chiri village in Ranchi district, Bihar, in 1968, the Bihar State Committee of Communist Revolutionaries came out with a statement calling upon the "Adivasi peasantry" to "unleash revolutionary struggles against the landlords, sahukars and their agents," and to "rise and fight the way the Great Birsa, the Great Sidhu and Kanu fought against the foreign and native oppressors".[58]

CPI (M-L) Programme for the Countryside

It would, however, be an oversimplification to describe the CPI (M-L) movement as a string of tribal-based agrarian uprisings only. The movement's theoretical framework and practical programme embraced much wider aspects of the country's agrarian situation. Both the leaders and the cadres of the party drew heavily upon the lessons of the past — the history of the peasant revolts of the 18th and 19th Centuries, the role of the Communist leadership in the peasants' struggle against feudalism in the present century, and the nature of the Government's land reforms.

Recalling the "rich revolutionary traditions" of the Indian peasantry, the party's programme, adopted in 1970, described the history of the country during the last 200 years as one of "ceaseless struggles waged by the heroic Indian peasantry against British imperialism and feudal oppression". But these struggles failed, according to the programme, "as there was no scientific theory and no revolutionary leadership capable of leading them to victory".

How then was the peasant to achieve liberation from the grips of feudal exploitation, which still dominated the Indian countryside?

The CPI (M-L)'s answer was the "People's Democratic Revolution, the main content of which is the agrarian revolution, the abolition of feudalism in the countryside".[59] Explaining the wider significance of such a revolution to be led by the working class, the party said: "By liberating themselves from the yoke of feudalism, the Indian people will liberate themselves also from the yoke of imperialism and comprador-bureaucrat capital, because the struggle against feudalism is also a struggle against the other two enemies". As for the various land reform laws enacted by the ruling class, the attitude was one of rejection born of the realization that the "Indian state is the state of the big landlords and comprador-bureaucrat capitalists", and hence laws enacted by such a state, for all their high-sounding trappings, would essentially go against the interests of the poor and landless peasants.

The major premise on which the CPI (M-L) theory of a people's democratic revolution was built up, was the understanding that:

> because forty crores of people out of the total population of fifty crores live in the rural areas in our country and because even today feudal exploitation continues to be the main form of exploitation to which they are subjected, the contradiction between the peasants and the landlords in the countryside remains even today the main contradiction.[12]

This contradiction, the CPI (M-L) felt, could only be resolved by the people's democratic revolution.

Long before this, Charu Mazumdar had etched in pithy terms the main outlines of such a revolution.

> "... we have taken the programme of people's democratic revolution", he said, "and the task of that revolution is land reforms in the interest of the peasants. Land reforms in the interest of the peasantry are possible only when we are able to destroy the domination of the feudal classes in the countryside. To do this we shall have to take away the land from the feudal classes, and will have to distribute it among the landless and poor peasants. We shall never be able to do that if our movement remains confined within the purview of economism. . . .[8]

But the Communist revolutionaries could not simply grab land and distribute it within the prevailing structure of the State. "To carry out the agrarian revolution [i.e. land reforms] without destroying the State machinery means straightforward revisionism". [8] By implying the need to destroy the existing state machinery, capture State power and establish a new people's democratic state, Charu Mazumdar was demarcating himself and his followers from those various groups of parliamentary Leftists who believed in implementing land reforms within the prevailing structure, or keeping the agrarian struggle confined to mere forcible occupation of land instead of leading the peasants to seize State power.

Concretizing the methods to carry out the task of seizing State power right from the base, Charu Mazumdar said:

> So the first and main duty of the peasant movement today is to destroy the State machinery. If this cannot be done all over the country, all over the State, will the peasant sit silently? No, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung-Thought has taught us that if the peasant of any one area can be aroused with political ideology, the work of destroying the State machinery in that area should be carried forward. It is this which is known as peasants' liberated area. The struggle to create this liberated area is the most urgent and immediate task of the peasant movement. What, according to us, is a liberated area? We shall call that peasant area a liberated area from where we have been able to oust the class enemies [i.e. the 'jotedars' or feudal landlords, and money-lenders]. To create this liberated area, the peasants' armed power is necessary. By this armed power we mean the hand-made weapons of the peasants, as well as guns. . . . Where will the peasants get guns? Class enemies have guns and they stay inside the villages. Guns should be snatched away from them. They will not give us guns on their own. So we shall have to seize those guns by force. For this, the peasant militants will have to be taught all tactics beginning from setting fire to the houses of class enemies. Apart from this, we shall get guns from the armed forces through sudden attacks on them. . . . So to do this, it is necessary to propagate the politics of building up armed struggles extensively among the peasantry. It is further necessary to organize small secret militant groups to carry on the campaign of collecting guns.[8]

Charu Mazumdar here was harking back to the tactics followed in Telengana to form the first guerrilla squads.

Realizing the retrogression of peasants' struggles whenever they were allowed to be led by rich or middle peasants in the history of the Communist movement in India, Charu Mazumdar insisted on establishing the leadership of the poor and landless peasants.

In his programme, the Indian countryside was assigned a much more important role than that of a mere location for isolated liberated areas to be established by armed peasantry under working class leadership. In the Maoist

style, the villages were to encircle the cities.

This then was the new model for revolution that the CPI (M-L) leadership offered the Indian peasantry, its essential features being — peasants' armed struggle, establishment of poor and landless peasants as leaders of the struggle, seizure of power in villages through guerrilla warfare, and encirclement of cities by the liberated villages as the final step in capturing State power. The theories behind the model developed against the background of growing economic disparities and peasant militancy in the rural areas, and were fashioned out of the ingredients of past peasants' rebellions.

Although the model enriched itself with new components as the struggle developed, although specific tactics emerged to cope with particular situations in the course of the movement, which were emphasized or de-emphasized according to the various stages, the struggle in the countryside under the leadership of the CPI (M-L), in the main, wound its way along the broad course of the programme formulated by Charu Mazumdar, occasional deviations notwithstanding.

Notes

1. *Indian Agriculture in Brief*, January 1970. Brought out by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Government of India.
2. There are serious reasons to believe that the NSS understates the extent of concentration. Forewarned by the announcement of land ceiling proposals, the more wealthy of the respondents to the NSS questionnaire were not expected to give a true account of their real holdings.
3. V.M. Dandekar and Nilkantha Rath, 'Poverty in India-II: Policies and Programmes,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (9 January 1971), p. 115.
4. Pritam Singh, 'Kulaks and Muzhiks,' *Mainstream* (8 August 1970), p. 20.
5. *Ibid*.
6. M.V.S. Rao, Assistant Director of the Central Statistical Organization in his memorandum to the All-India Seminar on Agricultural Labour, 1965.
7. *All-India Rural Credit Survey*, Volume II, p. 167.
8. Pranab K. Bardhan, 'On the Incidence of Poverty in Rural India of the Sixties', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 1973.
9. The term 'harijjan' (meaning 'son of god') was invented by Gandhi for describing the lower caste people. The term is resented by the militants among these people, who would rather prefer being called 'Dalit' or the downtrodden.
10. Political Resolution of the Communist Party of India (M-L), 1969.
11. The analysis was made on the basis of Mao Tsetung's 'How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas' (*Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. I; pp. 137-39. Peking edition). Mao divides the rural population of contemporary China of 1933 into four categories — the landlord, the rich peasant, the middle peasant, the poor peasant and the worker. While Mao designates the landless as 'workers', the CPI (M-L) calls them 'landless peasants' to emphasize the implication that they are not the proletariat of a capitalist economy, but basically peasants forcibly deprived of their land and still land-hungry.
12. Political Resolution of the CPI (M-L), 1969.
13. Daniel Thorner, *The Agrarian Prospect in India*. University of Delhi. Delhi School of Economics, 1956, p. 16.

14. Vivek Bhattacharya, *Challenge of Village India*. Metropolitan Book Co., Delhi, 1971, p. 54.
15. *Third Five Year Plan*, Chapter XIV, p. 224.
16. 'Land Reforms: Policy, Legislation and Implementation'; *Mainstream*, 4 November 1972.
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18. Francine R. Frankel, *India's Green Revolution*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1971, p. 201.
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21. *Ibid.* p. 198.
22. Chester Bowles, *A View from New Delhi*. Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1969, p. 83.
23. *Patriot*, 29 November 1969.
24. Khateeb Ansari, 'Indian Agriculture: Capitalist or pre-capitalist?', *People's Power*, January-February 1974. (A journal published from Bombay).
25. Political Resolution of the CPI (M-L), 1969.
26. Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Studies in Gandhism*. Merit Publishers, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 86-87.
27. *Young India*, 18 May 1921.
28. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1938, I, 17 — published by N.N. Mitra, Calcutta.
29. Carl C. Taylor, Helen W. Johnson and others, *India's Roots of Democracy*. Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1965, p. 6.
30. *Cf.* Suprokash Ray, *Bharater Krishak-bidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram*, (Peasant rebellions and democratic struggles of India). DNBA Brothers, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 17-44. This book in Bengali is an exhaustive study of peasant rebellions mainly in Bengal, in the 18th and 19th centuries, based on a mass of contemporary records and documents, meticulously gone into by Ray over a long period of intense research work.
31. The account of the encounter given here is a retranslation of the Bengali version in Ray's book, and is based on two letters dated 29 and 31 December 1772, from Mr. Purling, Supervisor of Rangpur, to the Revenue Council. Compare the description with the following advice of Mao Tsetung's: "It is only when there is a wide disparity between the enemy's strength and ours that, acting on the principle of conserving our strength and biding our time to defeat the enemy, we advocate retreating to the base area and luring him in deep, for only by so doing can we create or find conditions favourable for our counter-offensive." (Strategy in China's Revolutionary War — *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. I, p. 219, Peking Edition, 1965).
32. *Cf.* K. Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion — First War of Independence, 1800-1801*. Rao and Raghavan, Mysore-4, 1974. The book is based on contemporary records — letters by British officials, anecdotes and ballads, which throw interesting light on an anti-colonial insurrection, mainly spearheaded by peasants of Madras, Kerala and Mysore, impoverished through exactions by the East India Company.
33. *Ibid*, p. 125. Compare Mao Tsetung: "Because of its dispersed character, guerrilla warfare can spread everywhere, and in many of its tasks, as in harrassing, containing and disrupting the enemy . . . its principle is dispersal of forces." ('Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War' — *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. II, p. 84. Peking edition, 1965). ". . . it is extremely important to . . . make widespread raids on the enemy . . . in this way the enemy will be kept in the dark about where and when our forces will attack. . ." ('On Protracted War' — *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. II, p. 166).
34. K. Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion — First War of Independence, 1800-1801*, p. 295.
35. Quoted in K.K. Datt's *Anti-British Plots and Movements before 1857*. Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1970, p. 39.
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37. R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*. Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1963, p. 216.
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39. 'Tebhaga Sangram' (A collection of reminiscences in Bengali by participants and leaders). *Kalantar*, Calcutta, 14 May 1973.
40. P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, December 1972, CPI (M-L), Calcutta.
41. Ravi Narayan Reddy. *Heroic Telengana*, CPI, New Delhi, October 1973, pp. 50-51.
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43. C. Rajeswara Rao, *The Historic Telengana Struggle*, CPI, New Delhi, October 1972. Ravi Narayan Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*.
44. P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, CPI (M), Calcutta, December 1972.
45. *Ibid*, p. 395.
46. Ravi Narayan Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*, p. 65.
47. Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1954, p. 127.
48. *Ibid*, p. 64.
50. P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle . . .*, p. 121.
51. C. Rajeswara Rao, *The Historic Telengana Struggle*, p. 39; P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle . . .*, p. 120. Incidentally, Rajeswara Rao himself exposes the "progressive" nature of the Jagiri Abolition Act, when he says: "The jagir system was abolished by giving a compensation of Rs. 17 crores and leaving vast tracts of lands and palaces, in the hands of jagirdars as personal possession. The Nizam who was also the biggest jagirdar in addition to being the ruler, was given a grant of Rs. one crore a year in lieu of his jagir which was taken over and for becoming the nominal head of the state. He was left with about 20,000 acres of land in Hyderabad district in his possession and a number of huge palaces, in addition to money, gold, silver, diamonds worth hundreds of crores of rupees in his hands." (*The Historic Telengana Struggle*, p. 19).
52. Barry Pavier, 'The Telengana Armed Struggle'; *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, August 1974.
53. P. Sudarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle . . .*, pp. 437-38.
54. C. Rajeswara Rao, *The Historic Telengana Struggle . . .*, p. 28.
55. Ravi Narayan Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*, p. 60.
56. A more elaborate discussion of the post-1948 phase of the Telengana armed uprising, and the differences among the all-India leadership of the CPI, is to be found in Chapter 3.
57. 'The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions' — an unpublished monograph prepared by the Research and Publicity Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, p. 9.
58. *Liberation*, September 1968.
59. Political Resolution of the CPI (M-L), 1969.

2 The Urban Scene

And above the packed and pestilential town
Death looked down.
Rudyard Kipling

. . . various sorts of confusion arise when the struggle suffers a setback. All such confusion may be greater among comrades in towns. Comrades living in towns therefore, must put greater emphasis on politics.
Charu Mazumdar:
'A Note on Party's Work in Urban Areas'.
18 November 1971

Poverty and Squalor

Two ingredients of signal importance for the CPI (M-L) theories were first, the existence of a peasant mass endowed with sufficient militancy handed down from the past to embark on the road to seizure of political power; and second, the existence of a working class to lead the peasantry.

The centre of the working class is the city. The city, which is also the centre of administrative policies affecting the country's economic and political development, played another important role in the CPI (M-L) movement. It provided the movement with a large group of dissident intellectuals who were recipients of new political thoughts. An understanding of the urban situation in India on the eve of the armed movement of the Communist revolutionaries therefore becomes essential.

The main features of urban India in 1966-67 were — and still are — an expanding population, increasing unemployment, growing slums, worsening sanitary conditions and a gradual deterioration in living standards.

According to a Planning Commission survey, urban population in India augmented every year by nearly 2% natural increase and by another 2-3% internal migration, mainly from rural areas within the country.[1] Migration to cities was again to a large extent prompted by the rural poverty discussed in the previous chapter. Lack of better earning opportunities in the villages also drove a large number of people seeking jobs into the cities. As one observer put it: ". . . for every 100 persons who come to urban areas because they have found better employment, 254 come in search of employment".[2]

But those who found better employment, merely shifted from low productive

agricultural employment to yet another section marked by low productivity employment, namely handicraft production or retail trading or domestic services in urban areas. The more unfortunate migrants swelled the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed in the cities.

As one can well imagine, a growing population leads to a corresponding demand for more houses. In 1965 the shortage of urban houses in India was of the order of 12 million units. As for the existing houses, 73% had no bathrooms.[3]

Where then did the people stay? A large number of people living in cities were mobile squatters without homes, and slept on the pavements. In Calcutta and its industrial suburbs alone, out of a population of 6.7 million people, 30,000 had no homes at all and were street sleepers.[4] The vast majority of the urban population lived in slums. According to the Indian Government's Advisory Committee on Slum Clearance, in 1958, there were about 1.5 million slums in India which were totally unfit for human habitation. They were variously known as 'jhuggis' and 'jhopris' in Delhi, 'chauls' in Bombay, 'ahatars' in Kanpur, 'cheries' in South India, and 'bustees' in Calcutta.

As Calcutta presented the extreme example of urban overcrowding and health hazards, and became the centre of CPI (M-L) urban strategy, it would not be out of place to study in brief the situation in Calcutta. According to a survey made in 1966, there were about 400,000 slums in Calcutta and its industrial suburbs. ". . . 38% of the slum households were without drinking water supply connection, 61% shared the facility with others, and only 1% of the households enjoyed exclusive water tap."[5] Calcutta's sewerage and drainage systems built some decades ago, were no longer able to cope with the demands of the day. The worst of the city's sanitary conditions became grossly obvious during periods of concentrated heavy rainfall. The bulk of the city's population had to depend on what were known as open 'service privies' — primitive forms of close-stools. There were about 42,000 such privies in the city of which 17,000 were in slums. During the monsoon flooding of drains, their contents were carried freely throughout the slums to infect and pollute the tanks in which people bathed and washed their clothes.[6] No wonder Calcutta acquired the unenviable reputation as the "cholera capital" of the world. Some 1,800 people died of the disease in the city in 1958.

How did the urban population eke out a living? In 1957, in the larger cities, of all the unemployed, 78% were literate and 5.1% had college education. Some 46% of all the educated unemployed were concentrated in the four major cities of India — Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras.[7]

The majority of the unemployed in urban India fell in the age group of 16-40 years, which was the prime of their life. Freshers, or those seeking employment for the first time in their life, were in the age group of 16-24, and formed the largest single group amongst the unemployed, ranging between 33% and 52% of the total.[8] Here again, Calcutta presented the most formidable picture.

One conservative estimate based on Census data shows that at the very minimum 170,000 people were directly unemployed in 1961. It has been further estimated that approximately 330,000 recorded as employees were actually employed on a marginal, part-time basis.[9]

There was a form of under-employment in the cities that corresponded to the seasonal employment of labourers in the villages. Many were employed in the low-productivity service sector. They were mainly unskilled, uneducated workers, employed often on 'badli' (against holiday vacancy) on contract basis.

While those employed in the tertiary sector formed the bulk of the urban employed middle- and lower middle-class people, the horde of uneducated unemployed or under-employed crowding the pavements or the slums of the cities came to form the lumpenproletariat — "the 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society."[10] Most of the lumpenproletariat lived on begging, stealing or smuggling. Some found lucrative means of livelihood in trafficking in women and similar other modes that thrive in a metropolis. In the sixties, political patronage opened new vistas for them — prospects of working in the pay of political leaders either as their bodyguards or as their tools to physically eliminate their rivals; or in the pay of industrialists in the role of strike-breakers. In both cases, the passive role of black-mailers also ensured them further profits.

Here was a population uprooted from the villages; uprooted also with regard to traditional pieties, whether religious, moral or political. Their potential of riotous destruction which found expression every time there was an agitation in the cities, sprang from impotent rage, impatience and despair in the face of the grinding poverty and humiliation. Referring to their blind hatred, Charu Mazumdar said: "The agitated masses today attack railway stations, police stations, etc. Innumerable agitations break out, exploding upon government buildings, or on buses, trams and trains. This is like the Luddites' agitation against machines."[5]

The Few at the Top

But side by side with this squalor and deteriorating social life in the cities, was the increasing affluence of a few at the top.

The country's manufacturing industries were concentrated in the urban areas. The gross profits of public limited companies rose by about 51% and those of private limited companies by 67% between 1960–61 and 1965–66.[11] Apart from the industries, the urban areas were also the centres of Central and State Government administration. Total employment in the government offices rose from 5.23 million in March 1956 to 9.02 million in June 1965.[12] This overall growth of employment in the government sector was marked by an impressive expansion of the top of the staff hierarchy. The pattern of the enlargement of the elite of the Government establishments is best brought out by a study of the growth of the Planning Commission by an economist. From a modest size of staff of 244 persons in 1951-52, this figure reached 1,141 in 1964. The salaries of

officers rose from Rs. 300,000 in 1950-51 to Rs. 3 million in 1964-65, allowances and honoraria from Rs. 200,000 to Rs. 1.3 million, and total expenditure from Rs. 860,000 to Rs. 6.7 million.[13] The expansion in government activities and industrial production were together responsible for a whole complex of tertiary expansion, which again led to the increase in white-collar employment.

The spoilt children of yesterday's colonialism and of today's national government never had it so good. While about two-thirds of the urban population lived below the average of the urban consumption of Rs. 359 per annum,[14] this section — the U-sector — found ever newer avenues of expenditure to feed its voracious appetite for luxury goods. The trend of conspicuous consumption among them set the pattern of production in the country. Production of cement went up to meet the demand for building new residential mansions, five-star hotels, and garish theatre and cinema halls, sprawling over acres, while the bottom two-thirds of the urban population continued to crowd dingy and narrow tenements and slums in the murkiest parts of the cities, dragging a monotonous existence in slime and sweat.

> In the nine metropolises, more than 66% of the population live in one-room tenements and the average number of persons per tenement is 4. Of the rest, 25% of the population live in slums or zhopadpattis and many of them sleep on the footpaths. The luxurious flats and big houses which occupy so much of the land do not house even 5% of the population.[15]

While there was a stagnation or a meagre increase in the output of industries catering for the masses,[16] production of consumer goods for the U-sector showed a steady rise.[17]

Thus, by the mid-sixties the economic situation in the cities corresponded in many respects to that prevailing in the villages of India. While a few at the top reaped the fruits of growth, the majority led a hand-to-mouth existence. As in the rural ares a handful of big farmers monopolized the ownership of vast areas of cultivable land, in the urban sector too 75 big business houses dominated Indian industry.[18] Like the money-lenders, traders and various types of middlemen, who thrived in the rural feudal structure, a parasitic class of bureaucrats, business executives, contractors and agents developed in the cities, thanks to the expansion of the tertiary sector. As centres of administration and business, the cities offered better scope for graft, bribery, chicanery and other types of corruption.

The Industrial Recession: 1966-67

The 1966-67 food crisis in the Indian countryside described in the previous chapter had its repercussions in the urban industrial sphere too. Food scarcity and high prices due to crop failures and hoarding, led inevitably to a fall in the demand for goods produced in the industrial sector. There was a shrinkage of the market for consumer goods. There was also a fall in the output of

transport-oriented groups of industries, like railway wagons, trucks, tyres, tubes, etc., since there was a depression in the demand for transport services. Production of railway wagons and commercial road vehicles fell from the peak levels of 23,000 and 36,900 to the annual rates of 15,000 units and 25,600 units respectively in the first half of 1967-68.[19]

The industrial recession, as the situation came to be known, hit the workers hard. Over 23,000 workers were laid off in 95 establishments in West Bengal between 1 January and 15 March 1967. An additional 1,000 workers were retrenched in 49 establishments. Still another 700 became unemployed as a result of eight concerns closing down. In Bombay, nearly 3,000 workers were laid off by the end of June 1967.[20] The urban middle classes, consisting mainly of the white-collar employees in the tertiary sector, also felt the pinch of rising prices. After a sample survey of four metropolitan cities — Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras — in 1967, the Indian Institute of Public Opinion, New Delhi, concluded: "The broad picture that emerges is one of an almost universal struggle regardless of one's income level, to mitigate the inflationary pressures by making cuts even in items like clothing and food." In short, what with the already deteriorating social conditions in the cities, and what with the growing crowd of the unemployed, the recession came as the last straw.

But what were the factors that led to the increasing urban problems that came to a head with the recession in 1966-67? To a large extent, they could be traced to the Government's planning and industrial policies pursued since August 1947.

The Government's Industrial Policies

Gandhi's ideal of reconciling conflicting interests of opposing classes was reflected in the Government's industrial policy. Though the Government claimed that it stood for the oppressed classes in the industrial sector, it was too eager to assure the employers of the continuation of their privileges. In 1948, it adopted the Industrial Policy Statement, seeking among other things, to extend the sphere of the public sector. But the then Finance Minister, Dr. John Mathai, assured the Associated Chambers of Commerce at the same time that, "the extent to which private enterprise will function in future will be determined by the logic of facts, rather than the consideration of policy for ideology". This was in December that year. The Government has remained true to this assurance till today. Ever since 1948, the extent of the public sector has been determined not by the formal resolutions adopted now and then at the Congress sessions, but by the comparative lack of private capital and private initiative for the industries on which the Indian Government has chosen to concentrate.

It was clear for instance that private enterprise could not develop vital industries like steel, shipbuilding, locomotive, automobile or electrical industries, or the basic services at the rate demanded by the planners and needed by the industrialists. As one sympathetic observer of Indian politics pointed out once: "Steel . . . has been developed under the public sector not because Nehru was a socialist but because not even the vast wealth of the Birlas can in these days finance such national enterprises."[21] Lal Bahadur Shastri, as a Minister for

Commerce and Industry admitted that if there was any reason for the Government to undertake the building of steel plants at all, it was because the investment was too large or complex for the private sector or because the government was able to get more reasonable terms than the private sector could manage.[22] Besides, the public sector provided the private sector with cheaper ingredients and machinery and thus often became the milch-cow for the private industrialists. The largest part of the public utility output was also diverted for the use of the private sector. As one observer put it:

> By over-licensing the private sector, by allowing investments in specified industries to take place freely, by condoning delays of three or four years in every major state unit while simultaneously permitting the private sector to overreach its targets, the Government constantly adds to the backlog in public utility output.[23]

Moreover, the State helped the private sector by extending long-term credit to big industries through financial institutions like the Industrial Finance Corporation, National Industrial Development Corporation, etc. The total assistance the private sector was sanctioned during 1956 to 1966 by financial institutions and investment institutions like the Life Insurance Corporation, as also directly by the government, was Rs. 8080.4 million of which Rs. 5843.2 million were disbursed. In this the share of the large industrial sector was Rs. 4558.5 million sanctioned and Rs. 3334.6 million disbursed.[24] By 1967, 88% of the domestic product was still at the disposal of the private sector, and the share of the government rose by only 5%.[25]

As in agriculture, where the big farmer by virtue of his ability to buy better inputs became the main beneficiary of the new agricultural strategy, in industry too,the big industrialist was better able to meet obligations, and thus was the first to get state credits, foreign exchange for the import of capital goods and materials, and above all licences for production or expansion. In this way, 75 big houses managed to get multiple licences in a given industry to achieve monopoly in the product, and disproportionately large capacities which often remained unutilized, but helped them to preempt, or corner the capacities before opportunity was offered to others.[26] In 1967-68, the assets of the companies constituting the 75 industrial houses amounted to Rs. 4032.4 million representing a 54.7% increase over the 1963-64 level.[27] With this domination of the market, the big houses were in a position to dictate prices, or restrict the production of an item at a particular level, or to close the doors to newcomers. Like the big farmer in the rural areas, the big industrialist in the urban sector could manipulate the production, distribution and pricing of essential commodities and basic industrial goods.

What was the role of the government machinery? We have seen how in the rural areas, the administration with its built-in hostility towards the poor, while implementing land reforms, already heavily loaded in favour of the rich, actually acted as the instrument of the feudal gentry. In the industrial sphere too, the bureaucrats who dealt with applications from the business houses, granted licences in a way that helped the big industrialists. The Industrial Licensing

Policy Inquiry Committee Report suggested this in so many words, when it said:

> It is well-known that many of the large industrial houses maintain liaison officers in Delhi where licensing decisions are taken. These persons try to maintain contact at business and social levels with senior persons in government and seek to influence the exercise of discretionary powers in their favour.

These trends in the Indian industrial economy were described by the CPI (M-L) as

> the fleecing of the Indian people by extracting the highest rate of profit, the concentration of much of India's wealth in the hands of seventy-five comprador-bureaucrat capitalists, the utilisation of the state sector in the interest of foreign monopolies and domestic big business. . . .[28]

How the domination of the private sector can distort the country's economy was evident during India's Second Plan period. Given a free hand, the private industrialists almost exhausted the country's foreign exchange reserves by excessive purchasing from abroad. Production of essential commodities and works on social welfare were ignored in favour of manufacturing luxury goods for the upper classes. The then Finance Minister, C.D. Deshmukh, said afterwards:

> . . . at least Rs. 1000 million worth of exchange was wasted on things we do not want . . . . The use of the foreign exchange resources by the private sector was a sort of hoarding on their part when they realised towards the end of 1955 that the Second Five Year Plan was going to be short by some Rs. 8000 million of foreign exchange.

Accusing the Government of involvement in this dissipation, he continued:

> Our businessmen [were allowed to] . . . stock their larder . . . by a sympathetic Ministry and even before the Plan was fully approved.[29]

Since the big industrial houses wanted to avert demands for a larger utilization of their own resources to finance the Plan, they began to invite foreign capital in the form of loans and in the form of investments in the economy through joint companies.

The Foreign Grip on the Indian Economy

The Indian industrialist elite, having its origins in money-lending, trade and commerce, and in the role of business agents for British capitalists, has grown up in the cloistered shade of British patronage and control by using pre-capitalist forms of accumulation. Unable to emerge as an independent class of entrepreneurs, it has remained a hot-house reed, crippled from birth. Its utter

dependence on foreign capital for supplies, services and so on, is therefore a natural tendency, notwithstanding occasional nervous expressions of hurt vanity and pretences of revolt.

The Indian government also has reflected the same tendencies in its policies. The Government's Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 announced that "participation of foreign capital and enterprise ... will be of value to the rapid industrialisation of the country". A year later, on 6 April 1949, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru told Parliament that existing foreign interests would be accorded national treatment and new foreign capital would be encouraged. Although majority ownership by Indians in collaboration with foreign firms would be preferred, it was made known that the Government would not object to foreign capital having control of a concern for a limited period "if it is found to be in the national interest".

By the middle 1950s, the few restrictions on repatriating investments were being progressively relaxed. Foreign firms were encouraged to go into reserved industries such a machine tools and fertilizers.[30] Foreign oil companies were granted a substantial measure of extra-territoriality as an inducement to set up refineries. Agreements were arrived at with Standard Vacuum and Burmah Shell in 1951, and with Caltex in 1953. The agreements quarantined the companies from nearly all the regulatory legislation and rules promulgated since 1947. They reserved a maximum of 25% for Indian participation, and in preferred, non-voting shares only. The companies were guaranteed against nationalization for 25 years from the commencement of operations, and reasonable compensation thereafter.[31]

In September-October 1957, a delegation of Indian industrialists headed by Birla, visited the USA, UK and West Germany. Inflow of foreign capital in India, which had begun earlier, from now on showed a steep rise. Foreign investments in the manufacturing sector alone in India rose from Rs. 707 million in 1948 to Rs. 2149 million by the end of 1958, and leapt up to Rs. 6309 million by March 1967. The big industrialists gained from such joint ventures involving foreign investments. By associating with established and well-known foreign companies, and by using the standard names of their products, the big industrialists could offer effective competition to other Indian concerns already in the field, and thus strengthened their monopoly position. But the foreign investor had much more to gain. According to studies made by the Reserve Bank of India, the returns to foreign capital in India had been consistently better than the average in their home countries. Thus, American firms were earning an average of 13.5% of net worth in 1953 and 12.8% in 1955 after tax, compared with 10-12% at home in both years. Similarly, British firms were earning 11.9% and 9.5% in the two years compared with 8-9% at home.[32]

Three foreign oil companies — Burmah Shell, Esso and Caltex — remitted profits amounting to Rs. 2,260 million in the course of 1968, 1969 and 1970; capital investment by all these companies at the end of 1969 and 1970, was Rs. 1,100 million including Rs. 100 million of Indian capital. The average rate of profit remittance thus worked out to 71.3% per annum.[33] Analysing the foreign exchange contributions of the branches of foreign companies (FB) and foreign-

controlled rupee companies (FCRC), from 1954-55 to 1967-68, one economist said:

> All through the period, the net inflow of foreign capital has been consistently below profit remittances, [and came to the conclusion] ... foreign entrepreneurs as a whole built up their expanding empires entirely through the exploitation of the Indian consumers and workers.[34]

In this, they were of course being helped by the Indian Government's policies. The Government declared a tax holiday on the first 6% of profits for the first five years of production in foreign concerns, a development rebate which enabled foreign investors to deduct 120% of actual expenditure on plant and machinery as depreciation for income tax purposes, and exemption of dividends from Super Tax in a range of basic industries.[35] The number of licences granted to foreign private investors to form new enterprises jointly with Indian industrialists increased five times between 1957 and 1961. American share in the total foreign investments rose from 4 per cent in 1948 to 22% in 1965 and to 25% in 1967[36] But British investments still dominated. Of the total foreign capital investment, 64% was British.[37]

But the financial and positional gain of the Indian big industrialists and foreign capital was at the cost of the independence of the Indian economy. Taking advantage of their monopolistic position in the field of certain mass-consumed products in India, the foreign companies charged exorbitant prices. Thus foreign subsidiaries (with 50% or more of equity) controlled one-half of the private sector sales of drugs. Their share rose to two-thirds if one included companies with minority foreign equity participation. According to the Tariff Commission, the bulk selling prices ranged between 160 and 350% of ex-factory costs, and the mark-up of retail prices ranged between 600 and 2,000%.[38]

The foreign investors, by virtue of the terms of the inter-company agreements had almost complete control over the joint ventures even when Indian participants had a major share. To take up only one aspect of such agreements — technological dependence — the import of foreign technology, lock, stock and barrel inflicted on India an "apparatus that requires too sophisticated a network of servicing and ancillary industries or that cannot be justified in terms of its wage levels."[39] Referring to the adoption of capital-intensive investment by Indian firms mostly via further foreign collaboration, Michael Kidron feels that this leads to the weakening of traditional producers, largely rural, resulting in open unemployment and greater downward pressure on rural wage rates on the one hand, and an increase in skilled wage rates generating a secondary round of pressures for capital-intensive, labour-displacing investment on the other. "The resulting coincidence of relatively high wages for a small minority, increasing open unemployment in the towns, and unfulfilled expectations amongst the migrants from the country, constitutes a potentially explosive mixture".[40] Besides this, the cost of equipment supplied by foreign firms when setting up a project was often double that of its real value, and foreign technical know-how was inordinately expensive. As one author writing in the official journal of the

Congress party said: "... we had to pay much more than we should have for the technical know-how, the cost of capital equipment and also by way of royalties, profits or exclusive sales rights in India".[41]

Foreign capital also came in the form of loans. By 1963, American capital alone, in the form of loans, credits, donations and aid totalled about Rs. 27,000 million. While this underwrote to some extent the country's industrial production, by the end of the sixties the Indian Government was reeling under an enormous debt burden. The outstanding loans still remaining to be paid to the creditors after annual repayments and interest charges, was about Rs. 60,000 million in 1968-69.[42]

The climax came in 1966, when India had to devalue the rupee under pressure from the American-dominated World Bank. This was one of the factors that indirectly led to the industrial recession of 1966-67 since as a result of devaluation, India had to pay more for imported raw materials and capital goods, and there was also an increase in non-developmental expenditure as higher cost of foodgrains had to be subsidized.

In February 1968, the Indian industrialists were rescued from the recession to some extent by the Soviet Union which finalized agreements with the Government for the purchase of 10,000 railway wagons annually, and agreed to buy steel and other products which were lying unused. But increasing Soviet economic aid and collaboration with India during this period did not basically alter the situation. Like British and American collaboration agreements, Soviet aid also tended to strengthen the private sector. In fact the first Russian credit was granted in the private sector — to the Hindustan Gas Company of the Birlas — in 1954.[43] Since then, the Soviet Union has collaborated with other foreign powers in many Indian concerns, like the Hindustan Aluminium of the Birlas, the Associated Cement Company of the Tatas and the Birla Jute Mills. Besides, although Soviet aid to public sector of India's steel industry resulted in the production and sale of steel at a subsidized price, most of the fabricating plants which benefited from both Indian and Soviet subsidies on the steel they used, were privately owned.

The Soviet policy to give a lift to the Indian big industrialists was in keeping with its post-20th Congress aims abroad. The Soviet Communists did not appear to believe any more in the Third World's need to rely on its own resources for economic independence or to move towards socialism under working class leadership. It attached importance instead, to the "non-capitalist" path of development, which in the words of one Soviet commentator was "the path of building a socialist society in the long term." According to the commentator, "... assistance from the socialist community, which actively opposes imperialism, is the foundation of non-capitalist development and the factor which makes this development possible."[44]

But by fostering the so-called "non-capitalist" path of development, it was for all practical purposes stiffening the muscles of the Indian private sector dominated by the 75 big industrial houses who, as evident from their performances discussed earlier, had taken to a path as far removed from "the path of building a socialist society" as Groucho Marx was from Karl Marx!

It appears also that the Soviet Union gained in a large measure from trade with India. At the second session of the UNCTAD conference in 1968, the Indian delegate was reported to have protested against the Soviet practice of buying Indian products and selling them at higher price abroad, particularly relating to products like machine tools and textile goods.[45] On 16 August 1973, the Minister of Industrial Production admitted in the Indian Parliament that the factory of the India Opthalmic Glass Limited at Durgapur, West Bengal, was suffering heavy financial loss, as the glass manufactured there for spectacles, telescopes, etc., was being exported to the Soviet Union at a price which was one-third of the cost of production. Besides, the Soviet Union often sold goods at a higher price to India. Prices of spare parts for the 15,000 tractors sold to India in 1969 were three times those at which Moscow sold them to East European countries. In the same year Moscow sold India nickel at Rs. 30,000 a ton as against Rs. 15,000 a ton in European markets.

It was quite evident that the ability of the Indian big industrialists to serve the interests of the entire country was practically nil. Their servility to the foreign monopoly interests harked back to the days of their ancestors when in the early 19th Century, the European colonizers had to depend upon them for disposing of home products in the Indian market and secure return cargoes. Some of them still continue to serve similar purposes. Here for instance is a candid analysis of the motives among foreign investors for seeking local collaboration:

> Paramount is the growing need for local intermediaries. These are cast in a number of roles, the most important of which, reflecting the expanding area of state economic intervention, is that of coping with officialdom. There is so much to be done on so many levels, from obtaining licences and favourable interpretations of regulations and procedures in New Delhi, to expediting goods through congested ports and getting hold of a couple of railway wagons ... The importance of Indian partners in this role is well recognised.[46]

Thus, a servile class of industrialists, refusing to forego their huge profits and invest them, and willing to sacrifice prospects of independent growth, invited foreign capital and allowed foreign investors to dominate and dictate the manufacture of capital goods, which set in motion a stream of repayments to the foreign capitalists by India in the form of royalties and fees for technical services, use of patent and brand names, and interest on loans.

The Indian Government also, by its omissions and commissions, helped the process. Besides granting concessions to the foreign investors, referred to earlier, it allowed the escape of profits reaped by the U-sector, which could be tapped for resources. Thus, while the country was paying foreign creditors about Rs. 3,760 million in 1968-69 by way of debt servicing,[47] it was losing Rs. 4,700 million in the same year as the amount of income tax evaded by the top industrialists.[48]

Thus, the story of the Indian small peasant's enslavement by the village money-lender, narrated in the previous chapter, was repeated on a higher level in the case of the Indian industrialist's relations with international creditors; the only difference being while the peasant was forced into captivity, the Indian industrialist willingly became an obsequious menial.

But if the list of abstract data about foreign aid and investments seems to be too dull to illuminate the servility of the Indian bourgeoisie, one needs only to glance at the social and cultural habits of the nouveau riche in the Indian cities in the sixties to be convinced of the "semi-colonial" nature of upper class society. Anglomania, which goes with lucrative positions in commercial firms and Government offices and hence, recognition in high society, is reflected in the mushroom growth of what are known as "English-medium" schools.

The Government demonstrated the same servility on another level. The transfer of power of 1947 hardly seemed to be a watershed. The colonial rituals were followed meticulously. The President's journey to Parliament on the opening day of the new session was a sight that would have pleased Queen Victoria. But while this could be dismissed as an amusing anachronism, there were other features of the bureaucratic milieu which were downright humiliating. I still cannot get over the sight of rows of pictures of British police bosses — including some of the most notorious ones responsible for the murder of patriots during the anti-imperialist struggle — and their Indian successors after 1947, that used to adorn the Police Commissioner's room at the Lalbazar police headquarters in Calcutta, in the sixties. Nothing could be more demonstrative of the continuity of the colonial tradition of tyranny learnt at the feet of the British masters. The continuity was also to be found in the country's administrative and armed services, where either British-trained civil servants and senior officers (who had often earned kudos from the then colonial power for some acts of servility), or their Indian-trained successors who inherited the same contempt for the masses, occuped strategic positions. Admiral Nanda, the Chief of the Naval Staff of "free India" for instance, was a lieutenant (RIN Volunteer Reserve) serving his supervisors in the HMIS *Talwar*, when its ratings rebelled against the foreign masters during the Royal Indian Navy mutiny in 1946.[49]

By retaining the old state machinery in all its aspects — administration, repression and defence — as a legacy from the British era, thus ensuring a perfect conservation of anti-people ideas, the Indian ruling class was only demonstrating its fawning nostalgia for the days of the Raj!

CPI (M-L) Views on the Indian Bourgeoisie

All the above trends in the Indian industrial scene went ot prove that the CPI (M-L) was not wide of the mark, when it described the country's big industrialists as "comprador bureaucrat capitalists",* the country as "semi-colonial" and the Government as "a lackey of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism", in its political resolution. Further elaboration on these points is

* "A comprador, in the original sense of the word, was the Chinese manager or the senior Chinese employee in a foreign commercial establishment." — Footnote to Mao Tsetung's 'Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society.' (*Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 19; Peking edition).
"The comprador big bourgeoisie is a class which directly serves the capitalist countries and is nurtured by them; countless ties link it closely with the feudal forces in the countryside."— Mao Tsetung, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party' (*Selected Works*, Vol II, p. 320; Peking edition).

available from Charu Mazumdar's scattered notes and comments, written on various occasions.

Was the entire Indian bourgeoisie "comprador"? Was there any "national bourgeoise"† in India? If so, what should be the attitude of the Communists towards it? These were some of the questions with which the Indian Communists had been racking their brains for years.

In an attempt to answer them Charu Mazumdar agreed that there was a national bourgeoisie in India. But he hastened to warn: "In a semi-colonial country, the national bourgeois is bound to the comprador bourgeois." Explaining the ties, he said:

> First, the small and middle bourgeois take help from those compradors for their capital; secondly, the raw materials for their industries also have to be bought from the comprador bourgeois; thirdly, for the improvement of their industries they depend on the comprador bourgeois; fourthly, it is these comprador bourgeois who are the purchasers of a large part of the output they produce, and taking advantage of this the comprador bourgeois impose their crisis on the small and middle bourgeois; fifthly, in the case of opposition to the working class, they are united with the comprador bourgeois; sixthly, a part of the accumulated profits of these small and middle bourgeois, which they keep as reserve fund, is employed as shares in the big industries of the comprador bourgeois. For these six reasons, the national bourgeoisie is a class which is the weakest. It is impossible therefore for them to take any decision and implement it independently.[60]

Keeping in mind the difference between the role of the Chinese national bourgeoisie during the war of resistance against Japan, as assessed by Mao Tsetung,* and that of the Indian national bourgeoisie, Charu Mazumdar pointed out:

> Since there is no direct imperialist occupation in India, revolution will have to advance only along the path of class conflict, that is through civil war. During this stage of the struggle no section of the rich class will come with us. After the establishment of worker-peasant unity through a civil war, we can hope that a section of the bourgeoisie may join hands with us; it is them whom we shall call the national bourgeoisie. . . .[41]

At the same time, the petty bourgeois was asigned a revolutionary role in Charu Muzumdar's theories. "Who are the allies of the working class in this revolution?" he asked, and proceeded to enumerate them:

* "The middle bourgeoisie, by which is meant chiefly the national bourgeoisie, is inconsistent in its attitude towards the Chinese revolution." — Mao Tsetung: 'Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society' (*Selected Works*, Vol I, p. 14; Peking edition).

† "In the present war, it [national bourgeoisie] differs not only from the capitulationists of the big landlord class and big bourgeoisie but also from the big bourgeois diehards, and so far has been a fairly good ally of ours. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have a prudent policy towards the national bourgeoisie." — Mao Tsetung, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party' (*Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 321, Peking edition.)

> Basically, they are the entire peasantry, that is, the poor and landless peasants and the broad masses of the middle peasants . . . . Apart from these, the toiling petty bourgeoisie will also be with the working class. These three main classes are the main force of the revolution. Among these the peasants constitute the overwhelming majority. For this reason, the revolution depends mainly on them . . . . Hence, the working class as the leader and the petty bourgeoisie as a revolutionary class must unite with the peasantry. It is precisely this unity which we call the united front.[14]

Later, the CPI (M-L) programme incorporated this view when it announced: "The urban petty bourgeoisie and the revolutionary intellectuals of our country are revolutionary forces and will be a reliable ally in the revolution."

As for the contradiction within the Indian ruling class, Charu Mazumdar refused to read in it a conflict between "monopoly capitalists and the national bourgeoisie", as the CPI was wont to believe. Referring to occasional Government controls to "stop trade and profiteering in food," to solve the food crisis, he agreed that such control invariably faced opposition from a large section. But "this conflict", he held, "is primarily between the business community and the monopoly industrialists."[1]

An important component in the CPI (M-L) theories about the Indian bourgeoisie was the recognition of the growing dominance of the Soviet Union over the Indian ruling class. The CPI (M-L) programme elaborated on the joint control of India's economic and political policies by the USA and the Soviet Union. It referred to the "heavy remittances of profits abroad", control of the vital sectors of Indian economy, encouragement of the growth of comprador-bureaucrat capitalism, and military supplies for building military bases, by the two super-powers. Describing the Indian foreign policy as "tailored to the needs of the global strategy of the US imperialists and Soviet social-imperialists to encircle Socialist China, and suppress the national liberation struggle raging in various parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America . . .", it quoted as instances "India's aggression against Socialist China in 1962", "her tacic approval of Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia", and "her dirty role in supporting US imperialism against the Vietnamese people."

Because of this collective exploitation by "imperialism headed by US imperialism" and "Soviet social-imperialism", the CPI (M-L) was wont to describe India as a semi-colony.* It said: ". . . instead of two mountains — British imperialism and feudalism — the Indian people are now weighed down under the four huge mountains, namely, imperialism headed by US imperialism, Soviet social.-imperialism, feudalism and comprador-bureaucrat capital." From this, it concluded that there were

> four major contradictions in our country, that is the contradiction between imperialism and social-imperialism on the one hand and our people on the other, the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of the people, the contradiction between capital and labour and the contradiction within the ruling classes . . .

Of all these however, as pointed out in the previous chapter,

> the one between the landlords and the peasantry, i.e. the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of the Indian people, is the principal contradiction in the present phase.

Given this urban-industrial situation, one can now consider the potentialities of the different segments of the population with regard to the armed "people's democratic revolution".

There were first the industrial workers who numbered about five million during 1967-68. If one added to them workers employed in mines, plantations, railways and post and telegraph, the number would go up to about 18.5 million. There were another 15 million working in small-scale enterprises. Besides, about two million worked in shops, restaurants and similar establishments.[50]

While in India all these categories of workers came to form a little over 7% of the total population, in China in 1939, when the Chinese Communist Party was leading a massive armed war against the Japanese imperialists and local feudal landlords, such workers made up only about 3⅓% of the then Chinese population.[51] This indicates the increased importance of the proletariat in Indian conditions.

Of this total working force in India, however, only about 4.5 million or almost one-eighth, were organized in trade unions.[52] Thanks to collective bargaining, in several industries like jute, textile and engineering, during the sixties, the workers were able to increase their wages. Although these organized workers tended to be relatively secure and prosperous because of the protection given by a strong trade union movement born out of years of struggle, such benefits were confined to an insignificant minority, if one remembered the vast mass of workers outside the pale of any trade union organization.

Besides, benefits like higher wages were evanescent in conditions of inflation, when they were eaten up by the constantly rising prices of essential commodities. Thus, if one compares the index of money earnings with that of real earnings of industrial workers, one would find that although the money earnings increased from 139 in 1966 to 160 in 1968 (base 1961 = 100), real earnings fell from 95 in 1966 to 94 in 1968 (base 1961 = 100).[53] Benefits such as security of jobs also proved to be ineffectual at times of crisis. During the recession of 1966-67, thousands of workers were laid off and retrenched, or forced into idleness by lockouts and closures.

In spite of this, naturally concerned over immediate benefits in food, jobs and housing, the industrial proletariat in India, mainly because of the character of the trade union leadership, acquired aims which were legitimate within the framework of the existing society, aims which were limited and concerned wages, hours of work or working conditions, which could be achieved through

* "There is a difference between a semi-colonial country controlled by several countries and a colony controlled by a single country." — Mao Tsetung: 'Problems and Strategy in China's Revolutionary War. (*Selected Works*, Vol. I. p. 197).

institutionalized practices like collective bargaining, or legal pressure tactics like strikes, without unduly disturbing the fabric of capitalism. Thus, a job-protective type of unionism came to be more popular in the trade union movement in India, particularly after 1947. No union or political party in control of any important sector of labour strength, advocated the abolition of the State or the socialization of the means of production. Besides, trade unions could be vehicles for bringing about material benefits to the workers; they have never been vanguards for a revolutionary change of society.

Yet, the industrial proletariat of India had some potentialities of moving beyond immediate economic demands and acting for basic political changes. In the past, there were occasions when the working class responded to calls for political action. Thus, as far back as 1908, when Bal Gangadhar Tilak was arrested, the textile workers of Bombay struck in protest — possibly the first political action of the Indian proletariat which was hailed by Lenin at the time as a portent of the future. Again, during the civil disobedience movement in 1930, textile workers of Sholapur in the Bombay Presidency, rose in revolt. They held the town for a week, replaced the police and established their own administration, until martial law was proclaimed on 12 May. *The Times* of London of 14 May 1930 reported that, "Even the Congress leaders had lost control over the mob, which was seeking to establish a regime of its own." Finally, British troops crushed the rebellion, arrested the leaders of the uprising, sentenced some of them to death, and others to long terms of imprisonment.[54] Referring to the political awareness of the industrial proletariat in the thirties, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India said: "There was a possibility of a large number of workers joining our party . . . . If we could work among them immediately, many from among them would have come to our party."[55]

Immediately after the Second World War, a series of strikes swept over the country, paralysing communications and bringing production to a standstill in many vital sectors of the economy. Unfortunately however, as later events proved, little was done among the working class by the Communist leaders to propagate the need for a change in power and property relations. The movement remained mainly confined to battles for higher wages or for recognition of the right to form unions, and never became a part of the more fundamental political struggle to end the prevailing system of production and capture State power. As a result, when in Telengana a liberation struggle began, no working class solidarity actions could be organized in support of the fighting Telengana peasants during 1946-51, although the Communists at that time had considerable influence in the industrial areas of Bombay and Calcutta. The Communist revolutionaries, therefore, in trying to elevate the working class to the leadership of the "people's democratic revolution", had to begin by attacking the trends of "economism" — mere battles for higher wages and similar economic demands.

It was felt that working through the trade unions and organization of strikes for higher wages, would only perpetuate the workers' illusions about the system. ". . . it is necessary to have a revolutionary working class cadre, educated in politics, educated in the thought of Chairman [i.e. Mao Tsetung], and it is possible

to train this cadre only through a secret party organization."[22]

But Charu Mazumdar realized at the same time that "struggles will take place through trade unions, and since it is traditionally innate for the worker to struggle, he will join these struggles." He therefore warned his followers: "We cannot oppose any struggle by the workers against their class enemies. Such an opposition would be idealist petty-bourgeois thought." Demarcating the tasks of the CPI (M-L) cadres in the working class areas, he said:

> It is the general workers who will wage trade union struggles; our cadres will do the work of building up a secret party through politics. If through this work initiative and self-confidence can be instilled among the general workers, it is from them then that people will come forward and will be able to give worthy leadership to these trade union struggles and there also they will be able to fight against the revisionists.[33]

It was going to be a sort of tight-rope walking. The CPI (M-L) cadres would have to lend support to working class trade union struggles, and at the same time be cautious so that they did not lapse into "economism". While supporting strikes and other trade union modes of struggle, they would have to explain to the workers the futility of such actions, and unmask their real enemy — the State.

Compared to the poor and landless peasants in the countryside, who had a long tradition of armed rebellion, and who were provided by the CPI (M-L) with a concrete set of objectives involving immediate action — ousting of feudal landlords from the villages, seizure of arms, formation of guerrilla squads, distribution of land, etc., the urban working class was steeped in economism and its emergence as the leader of the revolution had to be preceded by a long and complicated process of realization and self-transformation.

To begin with, the urban proletariat had to realize that it could not emancipate itself alone without bringing about the emancipation of the entire exploited people of India. Since the majority of the exploited were the poor and landless peasants and the root of the country's economic misery lay in the prevailing feudal system in the villages — or, to put it in the CPI (M-L) terms, "the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of the Indian people is the principal contradiction" — the proletariat could not fight alone in the cities, either for its rights or to seize power. It had to integrate itself with the peasantry, participate in their armed struggle, and lead them.

To turn the attention of the urban proletariat to the countryside and the agrarian struggle — this was therefore to be the main task of the CPI (M-L) cadres among the industrial workers. Unlike Russia and the West, where the first step of the insurrection was the capture of cities and then advance into the countryside, it was to be the other way about in India — the liberation of the villages first and then only the encirclement of the cities along the path indicated by Mao Tsetung. The Indian industrial proletariat, by virtue of its association with the most advanced form of economy, its strong sense of organization and discipline and its lack of private means of production, was destined to be the leader of the

revolution, according to Marxism. But how was it to be lifted from its slumber of economism to the position of a political leadership?

Charu Mazumdar hammered at one point — the need to rouse a sense of dignity among the workers. ". . . the worker creates everything with his own hands, and yet the owner and the manager boss over him. If a sense of dignity is aroused in him through the propagation of revolutionary politics, it will be easy for him to tear out from the webs of economism."[33] The politically conscious worker then, he dreamt, would fight to assert his rights as a man in society, would fight every humiliation and avenge every assault on him, instead of remaining content with a few crumbs tossed by the employer to keep him quiet. "The Thoughts of Mao Tsetung again will make him realize that the enemy is weak in the countryside; so the peasant there is fighting his war for the seizure of power. He will then go to the villages to join this war."[33] This was to be the process through which the struggle for the worker's self-transformation was to be started and helped.

As for tactics, he suggested the transformation of the workers' trade union actions like strikes or "gheraos" (besieging the mill-owners — a form of action that became popular among the working class in the late sixties) into armed confrontation with the employers and the state. In practice however, the party organization appeared to neglect work among the industrial proletariat. It seemed to assign an auxiliary or supplementary role to the working class till the time the Indian peasantry was able to liberate a big chunk of the countryside. This was evident from the poor involvement of industrial workers in CPI (M-L) actions, either in factories or outside. A sample survey conducted by the Special Branch of the Calcutta Police of 300 undertrial CPI (M-L) prisoners, towards the end of 1970, revealed that of the total only ten came from any trade union background. Charu Mazumdar was heard to complain:

> Our propaganda work among the workers is still defective today. So in spite of the fact that the most politically conscious, the most militant and the largest number of workers are under our party's influence, very few among them are coming forward towards the armed peasants' struggle of the villages.[33]

The Petty Bourgeoisie

A very important segment of the urban population are the middle and lower middle classes — teachers, white-collar employees, students, etc. Politically they are the most vociferous and volatile also. Their antecedents could be traced back to the early days of British rule, when they sprouted in response to the expansion of the tertiary sector, which came up as ancillary to the colonial rule. They had access to education and employment, and could thus afford an intellectual life free from the responsibility of production. They grew into a hybrid class, blending in themselves both modern and medieval characteristics. Some of them, being descendants of old zamindars, or banians (brokers to European business firms — the compradors) who made money through connections with

the British traders, inherited the worst features of their predecessors — cold pursuit of self-interest and rank opportunism — and hungered for their lost economic and social status. But at the same time, the intelligentsia of this class was inspired by contemporary European ideas of liberalism and democracy, and often affected by the degrading poverty that surrounded them. This explained their radicalism, which occasionally took the form of furious outbursts at the slightest encroachment on their rights and privileges, and spurts of individualism.

This class played an important role in the political struggles during the British rule, and its strength and weakness influenced the course of the national movement. Impatient with the politics of compromise of the Indian National Congress led by the comprador-bourgeoisie, the radical section of this class turned to the path of armed revolt. But in the absence of the ideology of socialism, their rebellion took the form of individual terrorism or heroic group actions divorced from the masses of peasants and workers, although the anti-imperialist content of such actions was of an admirable quality. Many of them later turned to Communism. It was no wonder therefore that the intelligentsia — teachers, lawyers, journalists, professional politicians and students — came to provide the CPI (M-L) movement with the leadership and became its main ideologues. In spite of occasional betrayal of wrong ideas — again inherited from their class background — they set examples of supreme self-sacrifice.

In marked contrast with the parliamentary Leftist leaders, whose activities were a routine of revolutionary phrase-mongering from a safe distance, followed by a ruthless self-seeking through every available avenue in the existing system, the CPI (M-L) leaders of petty bourgeois origin left their homes and gave up their careers in a bid to declass themselves and become professional revolutionaries. Voluntarily sacrificing the comforts of their old environment, tossing away the tempting and useful rewards that went with social position in a bourgeois world, rejecting all the benefits that were available to those who conformed to the legal system, they chose to become one with the deprived millions of India and join their struggle to change the system.

But it was not merely their integration with the peasantry, but their belief in the cause, which was firm enough to make them see it through, whatever the danger to their personal well-being, comfort and safety, that set them apart from the other political leaders. They were brave men, ennobled by something greater than themselves. They were the only political leaders in the country who were hounded by a brutal police force, who remained — and still are — behind bars for years without trial, suffering inhuman sadistic tortures, who were killed in the obscurity of dense forests of Srikakulam, deserted night streets of Calcutta, or some gloomy police interrogation cell. Their names were banished from newspaper headlines. A conspiracy of silence was built around them. Here was a party which was in the real sense of the term "a party of martyrs"; the bulk of its central committee, including the leader Charu Mazumdar himself, lost their lives for the cause.

The Students

Among the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the students form a vital section. In December 1965, the Union Home Ministry complained in a review that "student indiscipline" continued to be on the increase, and posed "quite a serious threat to public peace." Among the causes of student indiscipline, it listed: (a) lack of proper academic atmosphere; (b) absence of respect for authority — parental, educational and Governmental; (c) ideological frustration; and (d) political indifference. Cases of agitations by students, which in official parlance were described as "student indiscipline", rose from 271 in 1965 to 607 in 1966. About 42% of the cases in 1966 took a violent turn.[56]

While the student unrest in the cities was undoubtedly linked with the general economic problems, like rise in food prices — there was a basic crisis in the academic world, upsetting old values, coupled with bleak employment prospects for graduates.

If anyone cares to look up local Calcutta dailies of a few years ago, when examinations were still allowed to be held peacefully, one would be shocked by the picture of utter callousness of the authorities that emerge from the reports. News of loss of answer scripts, errors in mark-sheets and cases of nepotism among many other irregularities, suggest not only the farce into which examinations were reduced, but also a criminal gambling with the fate of the students. Moreover, in the absence of suitable employment opportunities after graduation, examinations and diplomas became meaningless rituals for the youth. The number of applications from educated unemployed in the live registers of the employment exchanges in India increased from 163,000 in 1953 to 917,000 by the end of 1966. This figure shows only the number of those who registered their names. The actual position, if one includes the unregistered, was far worse. It was not surprising therefore to find graduates shouting at convocations — "We want jobs, not diplomas!" — a familiar slogan in the sixties.

Along with the natural propensity towards an anti-establishment attitude, born of frustration, there was also a genuine desire, at least among a section of the students, to change the system. This explains why the pioneers of the Communist revolutionary movement in the late sixties in the cities of West Bengal and other parts of India, were the students. Many left their studies and went to the villages to live and propagate new ideas among the peasants, in response to Charu Mazumdar's call after the Naxalbari uprising. They seemed to have found the way out at last in the agrarian revolution. It was admitted even by their fiercest critics that after several years, a new generation of committed and dedicated political activists had appeared.

In fact, the political orientation of these students towards armed struggle had started in 1966. It all began over an apparently innocuous incident in Calcutta's reputable Presidency College, where admission was restricted to the best students only, and which was patronized by the elite of the West Bengal society — senior Government officials, industrialists and business executives. They sent their children to this college, whose graduates were later to become cadres for the bureaucratic officialdom.

In the 1965 college union elections, the Communist students' organization, the Students' Federation, captured the Presidency College union. The college which had so long remained insulated from the general trend of students' agitation was soon drawn into the vortex. In October 1966, students of the college boarding in the adjoining Hindu Hostel exploded over years of accumulated grievances, and demanded the resignation of their hostel superintendent, whom they held responsible for their plight. The Education Department of the West Bengal Government later instituted an inquiry into the cause of the explosion, and agreed that the boarders' grievances were justified. But the Presidency College authorities retaliated by expelling a large number of students from the college and the hostel. Most of these students were activists of the CPI (M). Soon the affair took on political overtones. The hostel superintendent had sympathies with the ruling Congress party, which came out in his support. The Leftists alleged that the Congress party and the Government, alarmed by the penetration of the Students' Federation in the protected Presidency College, were being vindictive against the students.

Some of the expelled students, who had just then graduated from the Presidency College, were refused admission to the post-graduate classes of the Presidency College. The University students also struck in solidarity with the victimized. Soon a students' agitation began, marked by strikes and clashes between the students and the police, the latter coming in response to the appeal of the college authorities. The agitation spread to other parts of the State, and there were students' strikes all over West Bengal three times on this issue, namely on the demand for withdrawal of the expulsion orders. Calcutta University had to be closed *sine die* from 8 December 1966, the first time this had happened in its 110 years of existence.

The agitation which continued till January 1967, was important in the context of the future CPI (M-L) movement. For one thing, it followed its own course, heedless of the advice or dictates given by the CPI (M) leaders to the students. In fact, their differences with the CPI (M), which later led to their breaking away and joining the CPI (M-L), started in West Bengal from this period.

Many of the CPI (M) student cadres, fed all these years on revolutionary lectures by their leaders, were led to believe that revolution was round the corner. Besides, only a few months before — in March 1966 — a food movement of unprecedented dimensions had rocked the State. People had almost spontaneously raided grain shops and fought the police. Their own agitation over the Presidency College affairs synchronized with many other protest actions — both inside West Bengal and in other parts of India. In West Bengal, there was a strike by school teachers under the auspices of the CPI (M) dominated All Bengal Teachers' Association, a 48-hour strike all over West Bengal, strikes by State bus and tramway workers. The economic crisis of 1966 roused people to actions in other States too. There was a wave of student unrest and strikes by government employees, often marked by bloody clashes between the police and the protesting masses.

Many CPI (M) student activists hoped that all these agitations could be coordinated and mass upheavals would take place in West Bengal, if not all over the

country. They however failed to realize that their leaders were only interested in using their strikes and agitations for a limited purpose — that of creating some pressure on the ruling party and improving, in the process, their own image as an effective political opposition among sections of the population, to win their votes in the coming general elections to the State Assembly. In fact, while the student leaders of Presidency College were in favour of an uninterrupted agitation, the party leaders during the entire period were advising them to slow down, and finally intervened on the eve of the elections, when a compromise was reached with the college principal's withdrawing the expulsion order on the CPI (M) students. The latter were however not taken back, but given transfer certificates so that they could pursue studies in other institutions.

One of the familiar figures in the agitation was Ashim Chatterjee, or Kaka, as he was known among his friends and followers. Leader of the CPI (M) students' wing, Ashim was one of the expelled students. He was later to become an important leader of the CPI (M-L) and to take part in several heroic actions, shoulder to shoulder with the peasants of Midnapur. Slenderly built, with a twisted upper lip, dressed in a shirt and pyjama, Ashim was ubiquitous in the College Street area in those days. Presidency College, the Calcutta University Arts Department and the Coffee House — the hub of students' politics in those days — are all situated in College Street, which at that time was almost every day a scene of clashes between the police and the students. Moving to and fro was Ashim, haranguing his followers either in the Coffee House, or at the gates of his college, or leading them in procession to fight the police.

The dent made in the Presidency College insularity and the large following that Ashim Chatterjee could gather from among the upper middle class students, indicate that the militant Marxist orientation of the students in the sixties was not merely because of economic frustrations. Most of the boys from Presidency College, who left their studies to go and work in the villages, could expect to get jobs because of their high connections and brilliant academic records. Intellectual frustration with the prevailing academic atmosphere led them to the political conviction that the atmosphere was a part of the general socio-economic crisis, to escape from which it was necessary to change the social order. Experience with the existing political parties, all of whom were parliamentary, and subsequently the failure of the United Front Governments which came to power after the 1967 General Elections in many States, strengthened the belief that constitutional politics could not bring about the desired change.

Charu Mazumdar could gauge the mood of the country's youth. Long before the Naxalbari uprising, he stressed the need for forming underground groups with militant young people who were coming to the then CPI (M) through mass movements, and for educating them in the politics of establishing liberated areas in the villages through armed struggle, so that they could propagate the politics and act as units of the armed struggle.[7] After the Naxalbari uprising, when the students, ready to opt out from constitutional politics, prepared to go to the villages for political work, Charu Mazumdar welcomed them, but warned them that "going there for a few days or a few weeks will not produce any result". He said:

> They must live with the poor peasants, eat with them and help them in all their work — and thus gradually become one of them. The students should remember that while they must propagate revolutionary politics among the peasants, the most important thing for them was to be able to learn from the peasants.[57]

In the context of what happened later in West Bengal, this warning is important.

The orientation towards the politics of armed peasants' guerrilla movement was not confined to the West Bengal students only. Their counterparts in other areas in India also flocked to the movement towards the end of the sixties. Even in New Delhi, the protected capital, Maoist posters appeared on the campus walls, and groups of students from New Delhi's St. Stephen's College — the college for the capital's affluent — were reported to have gone to nearby villages in Punjab and Haryana. It is true that at this stage, 1967-68, many who went to the countryside had no clear idea about the programme of the Communist revolutionaries, or the nature of the revolution planned by them. News of the uprising at Naxalbari had unleashed a process of soul-searching among the youth, shaking them out from their indifference to rural poverty and militancy. Some went to the villages with philanthrophic intentions, some with vague notions of organizing the peasantry, some just to observe.

There was another type of youth who thronged the movement, particularly in the cities of West Bengal. They were motivated by various factors — the usual impatience of youth, common everywhere, against the idea of working within a gradualist system; anger with a system which could not provide them with jobs; a distrust of the present and disregard of the past. There was also among some of them, a romantic fascination for adventure.

This explains why when repression was let loose on them in West Bengal in 1970-71, a large number of CPI (M-L) followers promptly shifted their allegiance to the ruling Congress party. Promise of jobs, a recognition of youth power, and socialist slogans by the Congress lured away some, and the use of brute force by the State compelled others to come back to the social milieu which they had earlier rejected.

The Lumpenproletariat

The lumpenproletariat were the unassimilated fragments of the urban population. Their potentialities as a component in revolutions have been recognized by Communist leaders of the past and the present, but with reservations. Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*:

> The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

Still later, in his *Class Struggles in France, 1848-50*, Marx described the

lumpenproletariat as "a recruiting group for thieves, and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society." But he was at the same time aware of their potentialities, both revolutionary and reactionary, and thus found them ". . . thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices, as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption." Again in 1870, Engels was compelled to warn working class leaders against the lumpenproletariat since:

> this scum of the depraved elements of all classes, which establishes headquarters in the big cities, is the worst of all possible allies. This rabble is absolutely venal and absolutely brazen . . . . Every leader of the workers who uses these scoundrels as guards or relies on them for support proves himself by this action alone a traitor to the movement.[58]

But over the last 100 years, the attitude towards the lumpenproletariat changed among the leaders of the Communist movement, particularly in the underdeveloped, less industrially advanced areas. Thus Mao Tsetung felt that they were "able to fight very bravely but apt to be destructive; they can become a revolutionary force when properly guided".[59] Franz Fanon, the outstanding ideologue of the revolutionary movement in the Third World, went a step further:

> . . . any movement for freedom ought to give its fullest attention to this lumpenproletariat. The peasant masses will always answer the call to rebellion, but if the rebellion's leaders think it will be able to develop without taking the masses into consideration, the lumpenproletariat will throw itself into the battle and will take part in the conflict — but this time on to the side of the oppressor. And the oppressor . . . will be extremely skilful in using that ignorance and incomprehension which are the weaknesses of the lumpenproletariat. If this available reserve of human effort is not immediately organized by the forces of rebellion, it will find itself fighting as hired soldiers side by side with the colonial troops.[60]

In West Bengal the lumpenproletariat's rootlessness and affinity to the underworld, made it responsive to at least one aspect of the CPI (M-L) urban strategy — assassination of police and informers. In 1970-71, the political actions of the CPI (M-L) cadres and the settling of private scores by the city's lumpenproletariat often shaded off into each other. In some areas, notorious gangsters infiltrated into the CPI (M-L) organizations, sometimes at the behest of the police, and were partly responsible for bringing discredit to the movement. Misdirected violence and wreaking of private vengeance often sickened and discouraged the middle class supporters of the movement, making easier and plausible the work of the Government in stamping out the sparks of rebellion that floated in the middle class areas.

Thus, apart from the working class, the rest of the urban population in India was a soggy mass in many respects. Their debility was rooted in the very nature of India's urban growth. The major cities in India began as administrative and business centres, and continued to remain so even after the transfer of power in

1947. In the absence of adequate growth of industries, the economic base of the city, mainly tertiary, remained the same, blocking the upward mobility of the vast masses of unskilled and uneducated who come from the rural areas to the cities in search of a livelihood. At the same time, the cities corrupted the minds of the migrants from the villages as well as of the original inhabitants. Bright lights, movies, terylene shirts could be more attractive for the villager than memories of paddy fields or mango groves. Working as menials in the tertiary sector — office messengers or orderlies — they came to acquire the snooty attitude of the urban dweller, enamoured of the prospect of improving their status in the seeming affluence of the cities, and looked down upon the villager as a country bumpkin.

Thus, one who should have been in the normal course the proletarian ally of the peasant, because of the common rural heritage, became estranged from the rural labourer thanks to the few crumbs and veneer of urban culture that were available to the migrant.

But the visual evidence of progress in the cities actually masked widespread poverty — safely hidden from visitors in a place like New Delhi, but struggling to burst out in Calcutta. Moreover, the problems of the countryside proved wholly intractable for a government based in the cities. The demands of the more vocal urban population and the manoeuvrings of the city-based political cliques, which determined the making of important political decisions, increasingly estranged the city from the countryside. The urban population was isolated from the true feelings of the rural population. The wall that existed between the city and the countryside in the colonial period thickened as the years passed.

While shaping its urban strategy, the CPI (M-L) therefore had to wrestle with a host of problems — the hold of "economism" on the industrial proletariat, the volatile disposition of the middle class, the immaturity of the youth and students, and the mercenariness of the lumpenproletariat.

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3 The Communist Party

If we tried to go on the offensive when the masses are not yet awakened, that would be adventurism . . . If we did not advance when the masses demand advance, that would be Right opportunism.
Mao Tsetung, 2 April 1948,
'Selected Works', Vol. IV, p. 243

The history of the Communist Party of India is the history of struggle between the line of class struggle and the line of class collaboration and treachery, between the proletarian revolutionary ranks and the bourgeois reactionary leadership.
'Political Resolution of the
CPI (M-L)', May 1969

The Communist Party of India: Before 1947

Some words are often so overused that a stage comes when only actions, which are symbolized by those words, become necessary. In the Indian Communist movement, the word 'revolution' has suffered a similar fate. Since its birth in the twenties, the Communist Party has been pledging in its programme to lead a revolution of the workers and peasants to change the prevailing system. But although a number of spontaneous upsurges erupted in the country in the thirties and particularly after the Second World War, when the party ranks fought heroically, the leadership of the CPI (Communist Party of India) failed to coordinate all these struggles into a revolution.

It should be remembered that the CPI was the first organized political party to demand full independence for India (in 1924, when the Indian National Congress revealed its comprador character by announcing that it would be satisfied with dominion status for India within the British Empire). Yet it could not dislodge the Congress from the leadership of the national movement.

One of the main reasons for this failure was the CPI's inability to analyze the class character of the Congress and define its attitude towards it. It frequently trailed behind the Congress and as a result, in spite of being equipped with a band of devoted ranks, failed to build and expand an independent base among the workers and peasants. Pressure from below — the ranks working in the mass

fronts and the revolutionary mood of the people — often drove it forward to lead working class and peasant struggles; but the desire to placate the Congress leadership made it beat a retreat the next moment.

Another important reason for the Indian Communists' failure to lead a revolution in India was the indecision as to which section of the population would form the main component of the revolutionary cadre — whether the urban industrial workers or the rural agricultural peasantry. The party's petty bourgeois leadership, reared up to believe according to the experience of the Western Marxists and the Russian Revolution of 1917, that the industrial proletariat were the only revolutionary force in the country, tried to concentrate in the Indian cities and industrial areas. But here also the Communist movement remained bogged down in trade union struggles for better wages. The question of bringing down the colonial power by paralysing communications and industries through continuous strikes, remained hanging in mid-air.

The possibility of politicization of workers' struggles reached its height in the post-war situation when a wave of working class strikes, often led by the Communists, swept the country. But resignation by the party leadership in the face of Congress persuasion left the workers in the lurch. This is how two Soviet commentators saw the situation: "Though the Communists led working people in some of their demonstrations . . . the strikes (though their number had not diminished) ceased altogether as soon as ministers of the Interim Government promised to consider the demands of the workers and appealed to them to resume work."[1] Again, during the Royal Indian Navy ratings' uprising in February 1946, the working class of Bombay came out in their support, in defiance of Congress directives against strikes. They not only organized strikes, but actively helped the ratings in their fight against the British troops. But the Communist Party was too confused ideologically, and unprepared both mentally and organizationally for an armed uprising. As a result it could not prevent the Congress leaders from forcing the naval ratings to surrender to the British after five days of heroic resistance.

The post-War situation was extraordinarily propitous for an armed uprising. In later days, looking back at the series of struggles in 1945-46 — the movement for release of 'Azad Hind' prisoners, anti-imperialist demonstrations by students all over India, the Tebhaga and Bakasht struggles, the anti-feudal struggles in the princely states, the strike of the Post and Telegraph workers, the armed revolt of the Royal Indian Navy ratings along with the rebellions in the air force and the army and the police revolt in Bihar — the CPI (M-L) felt that "an unprecedented revolutionary situation overtook the Indian sub-continent." But as the CPI (M-L) hastened to add:

> despite tremendous opportunities, the leadership of the working class could not be established over the national liberation struggle as the leadership of the Party refused to fight Gandhism and the Gandhian leadership and to take to the path of revolution. The leadership refused to integrate the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of Indian revolution. It refused to integrate the

> Party with the heroic masses, chiefly the revolutionary peasantry, and to forge a revolutionary united front.[2]

The comprador-bourgeois leaders of the Congress were however much more alert than the Communists. The militancy among the workers in post-War India opened Congressmen's eyes to the new mood, and they hastened to nip it in the bud. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in 1946 deciding to set up a separate trade union organization. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did not mince words when in his presidential address at the inaugural meeting of the new organization — the Indian National Trade Union Congress — in New Delhi on 3 May 1947, just three months before his party formally took over the reins of administration, he said that the "present anarchy in the labour movement should be checked forthwith if the country was to be spared untold suffering and peaceful transfer of power was to be effected."[3] The organizers of INTUC justified the need for a separate organization as the All-India Trade Union Congress, the main trade union body, where both Congressmen and Communists had been working together so long, had come under the control of the Communists who were organizing strikes in different parts of India.[4]

In the rural areas again, the need to organize the landless and poor peasants and recognize their potentialities as a revolutionary force, was often neglected by the Communist Party leadership. Yet, as we saw in chapter one, the rural poor and landless peasants had always been vitally concerned in a fundamental change of the prevailing system. Their struggles invariably overstepped the bounds of legal movements and non-violent satyagrahas.

In spite of the neglect of rural organizations, agrarian discontent in the post-Second World War phase, burst forth into explosive movements in different parts of India, the most notable being the Tebhaga agitation in Bengal, and the anti-Nizam uprising in Telengana. In Telengana, as mentioned earlier, the Communists took to arms and guerrilla training in organizing the uprising. Referring to the uprising, a latter-day Communist document admitted that the movement "took the party unawares", revealing thereby the alienation of the party leadership not only from the reality, but also from its own ranks. Continuing, the document said:

> ... in the Telengana region, with a young and weak Communist Party, with no other class or mass organization in existence since time immemorial except the amorphous mass movement organized in the form of the Andhra Mahasabha, with no experience of any class and mass struggles with the exception of the State Congress satyagraha movement during 1938-40, and with comparatively less mass political awakening, it grew into the historic peasant armed struggle. . . .[5]

But here also, as we have discussed before, the Communist leadership retreated from the logic of the inevitable confrontation with the comprador-bourgeois ruling class.

The CPI: After 1947

After the transfer of power in August 1947, the CPI found itself facing a new situation, dogged on the one hand by the same ambivalence that had crippled its policies towards the Congress in the pre-1947 period, and propelled on the other to the leadership of an armed struggle against the feudal Nizam of Hyderabad.

On the eve of the formal announcement of 'Independence', in June 1947, the Central Committee of the CPI adopted a resolution which held that "new opportunities for advance have been won." It described the Congress as the "main national democratic organization", and assured it that the CPI "will fully cooperate with the national leadership in the proud task of building the Indian Republic on democratic foundations." Referring to the Muslim League Government in Pakistan, and the Congress Government in the Indian Union, brought to power as a result of the Mountbatten Award and the partition of the country, the resolution said: "The two popular Governments and Constituent Assemblies are the strategic weapons in the hands of the national leadership. It is the task of the national movements to ensure that they are used for the rapid realization of national aims." The party leadership's capitulation to the Congress government was complete, when soon after the announcement of transfer of power, Bhowani Sen, a Communist leader of the Tebhaga movement of Bengal, appealed to the peasants "not to launch direct action this year as they did last year", as the new Government "must be given an opportunity of fulfilling its promise through legal channels."[6]

One wonders how the Communists could take for granted the good faith of the Congress Government and its promises at their face value. Had not the Congress demonstrated its real attitude towards the workers and peasants in the past when Gandhi hastened to put a brake on militant expressions of mass resistance, when Nehru came out against peasants' movements during the 1937-39 Congress ministries, when Sardar Patel lured the RIN rebels into surrender to the British? One cannot but agree with the CPI (M-L) assessment of the then Communist leadership: ". . . the leadership of the CPI consciously trailed behind the leadership of the Congress and betrayed the revolution from the very beginning."[7] It was out of intense agony and self-reproach that Charu Mazumdar, having himself been a leading member of the party at that time, repeatedly advised his followers later: "Learn to hate our past; only then you will be good revolutionaries."[8]

By the end of 1947 however, the CPI was revising its attitude towards the new Government. P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the party, who was in favour of making a distinction between Nehru and Sardar Patel in the Congress, and of supporting the former, was gradually being ousted by B.T. Ranadive, who came out with a new thesis at the party's Central Committee meeting in Bombay in December 1947. According to him the entire Indian National Congress had gone over to the Anglo-American camp and was following anti-people policies.

The new attitude was elaborated further in the political thesis adopted by the Second Congress of the CPI in Calcutta, in March 1948, which described the

transfer of power as "fake independence". It held that:

> Britain's domination has not ended, but the form of domination has changed. The bourgeoisie was so long kept out of the state power and in opposition to it; now it is granted a share of State power in order to disrupt and drown the national democratic revolution in blood.

From this it concluded that the "march of democratic revolution will have to proceed directly in opposition to the bourgeois Government and its policies and the bourgeois leadership of the Congress."

According to a later revaluation of this phase by the CPI (M-L) theoreticians, it represented a "left opportunist" trend. Explaining the rise of B.T. Ranadive as the leader, they felt that he took advantage of the reaction of the party ranks against the "right opportunism" of P.C. Joshi. "The Second Congress of the Party witnessed the revolt of the ranks against the sordid betrayal. The Ranadive clique utilized this revolt to seize the leadership of the Party."[9] The Second Congress assessment of the Indian situation was in response to the growingly evident disquieting features of the new Government's policies, apart from the pressure from the ranks for a more militant programme.

The new Government had just announced its decision to prepare a constitution. Several features of the proposed constitution were not to the liking of the CPI. The draft constitution for instance did not accept the basic right of linguistic national units to self-determination; it did not provide for proportional representations in Parliament and State legislatures; it granted protection to the property and the privileges of the rich by a clause in the fundamental rights that held that no property of a person or corporation could be taken over for public use except by payment of compensation.

The CPI's suspicion about continued British domination came to be true only a month later when, in April 1948, a declaration of the government's industrial policy welcomed participation of foreign capital in industry. The policy was formulated more explicitly later, when the Government assured foreign investors that no restrictions would be imposed on the transfer of profits abroad by foreign businessmen. As a result, private British investments mounted from Rs. 2,099 million in June 1948, to Rs. 3,290 million in December 1955.[10]

The CPI's 1948 policy was also influenced by the reading of the world situation by the leaders of the international Communist movement during this period. The world situation was taking a turn towards sharp polarization of political forces. The cold war was reaching its highest pitch. The USA had become directly involved in suppressing the Communist rebels in Greece; the Marshall Plan had been announced to aid the revival of post-war European economy; the Soviet Union was apprehensive of Anglo-American conspiracy to isolate it, while with the approaching victory of the Chinese Communists in the East, the Anglo-American camp was trying to consolidate its base in South-East Asia against China. It was in this situation that the leaders of the international Communist movement stressed the new division of the world forces into the

socialist camp on the one hand and the imperialist camp on the other, and emphasized the need for national liberation movements in the colonies and semi-colonies.

Communists in Burma, Malaya, Philippines, Indonesia and other countries of South-East Asia were already getting organized, hoping to take up the threads of the anti-Japanese war of resistance, and transform the struggles into national liberation movements either against the still ruling colonial powers, or the new native governments to whom power had been handed over. Incidentally, the programme of armed insurrection in South-East Asia was discussed among Communist delegates from different parts of the world, particularly from South-East Asia, in Calcutta, when they went to attend the South-East Asian Youth Conference there in March 1948 — at the same time when the CPI was holding its Second Congress there.

But in trying to apply the programme in Indian conditions, the CPI leadership overlooked certain factors. First, unlike Burma and many other South-East Asian countries where armed insurrections were planned, the Indian Communists did not have any armed cadre with the experience of fighting the Japanese or other foreign colonial powers. Secondly, obsessed with the West European Communist experience, the leadership hoped that city-based actions like strikes and armed clashes would suffice to bring about a revolution, and neglected the task of building up rural bases for a protracted war. Thirdly, the organization of the CPI was not widespread and uniformly developed enough to coordinate actions all over India.

The result was a string of actions like armed clashes with the police, bank robberies, destruction of Government properties in cities like Calcutta, and cases of peasants' mobilization against the police and landlords in villages like Kakdwip and Bara-Kamlapur and hill areas of Mymensingh in Bengal. The Government was quick to react. Within months of the Calcutta Congress of the CPI, it swooped down upon the offices of the party in different areas. Security bills were enacted in several provinces like West Bengal, Bombay and Madras, where the party was banned. Several leaders were rounded up.

B.T. Ranadive, who had been elected General Secretary of the CPI at the Calcutta Congress, and who was still out of jail, sent a letter to his comrades in August 1948, holding out the promise that within six months there would be a general strike all over India, followed by peasant uprisings. The hope was based on a call for an all-India railway strike on 9 March 1949, which the Communists expected would ignite the revolution. But the Government was more cunning. It managed to come to an agreement with the Socialist leader of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation, Jaya Prakash Narayan, who withdrew the strike call. As a result, there was a division among the railwaymen. The Communists rejected the agreement and went on with the strike, which however ended in a fiasco. A large number of Communists were thrown out of their jobs and put behind bars.

It is interesting to note that while the urban actions failed to sustain the movement, the agrarian armed struggle which began in Telengana in Hyderabad

State in 1946* continued even after the transfer of power, and throughout the period of P.C. Joshi's leadership.

The Inner-Party Struggle Over Telengana

With the entry of the Indian Army in Telengana in September 1948, the Communist rebels were faced with such questions: should the armed struggle be continued as a war of liberation against the troops? Who would then be the allies in the liberation struggle? Till now, the middle peasants and the small capitalists had been supporting the anti-Nizam struggle; but now they might support the Indian Government, hoping for a better future in the Indian Union.

Over these questions, two sharply opposed views emerged among the leaders of the Communist Party in Telengana, which were to divide very soon the entire all-India leadership into two camps. While one section favoured the withdrawal of the armed struggle, the other wanted it to continue against the Indian Army. The latter view was represented by the Andhra secretariat of the party, which held that the Telengana struggle was the beginning of the armed liberation struggle against the bourgeois-landlord Government of the Congress party. A document prepared by the Andhra secretariat in May 1948, stated:

> Our revolution in many respects differs from the classical Russian revolution, but to a great extent is similar to that of the Chinese revolution. The perspective likely is not that of a general strike and armed uprising leading to the liberation of the rural side, but of dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of agrarian revolution, culminating in the capture of political power by the Democratic Front.[11]

Thus, in Telengana in 1948, for the first time the Chinese tactics were posed as an alternative to the Russian tactics.

Although the Calcutta Congress of the CPI lent support to the Telengana struggle, and B.T. Ranadive had said in his report at the Congress: 'Telengana means today Communists, and Communists mean Telengana", he rejected the Chinese tactics advocated by the Andhra secretariat. He maintained that the people's democratic revolution in India had to be achieved by the completion of the tasks of democratic revolution and the simultaneous building up of socialism.

The adoption of Chinese tactics presupposed a different assessment of the correlation of classes in India and envisaged a different objective for the immediate future. In the Chinese framework, the role of the peasantry, particularly that of the poor and landless in alliance with the middle peasants, assumed importance over that of the urban proletariat. Unlike the Calcutta

* For a detailed description and discussion of the struggle in Telengana before the entry of the Indian troops in 1948, see chapter I.

Congress thesis which, following the Russian example, sought to intertwine the democratic and socialist stages of the Indian revolution, the Chinese path was that of establishing a people's democracy — an intermediary stage in the journey towards socialism — a ruling coalition of several classes under the leadership of the Communist Party. Attacked from both the Right and the Left in the party — the former urging the rebels to withdraw the struggle and surrender to the Indian Government, the latter denouncing their advocacy of the Chinese line — the Telengana rebels continued their armed struggle.

In a latter day review of the situation, the CPI (M-L) held that the Andhra Provincial Committee "correctly pointed out that the Indian revolution could win victory only by following the road blazed by China — the road of People's War." It blamed the "Ranadive clique" for having opposed this line and for adopting the "Trotskyite theory of accomplishing both the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution at one stroke" and asserted that:

> this clique diverted the attention of the Party ranks from the agrarian revolution — the basic task of the democratic revolution. Sectarianism led the Party members into adventurist actions. Though the Ranadive clique followed this wrong and suicidal policy, the peasant revolutionaries of Telengana did not deviate from the path of struggle. They carried this struggle forward by adopting the tactics of guerrilla war.[12]

But only individual heroism was not adequate for sustaining an armed struggle against a ruthless and calculating enemy. A long-term political perspective was necessary in Telengana, the development of which suffered because of the ambivalence among the leaders. The task of elevating an anti-Nizam struggle based on an alliance of the poor, landless, middle and a section of the rich peasantry, to a liberation war aimed at overthrowing the Congress Government required dependence on the poor and landless peasants who alone were determined to smash once for all the feudal system and the State machinery that preserved and protected it. But apparently the possibility or necessity of turning the struggle into a liberation war at a later stage did not loom large, at the initial stage of the anti-Nizam movement, in the strategy of even those leaders who later advocated the Chinese path. The latter's upholding the Chinese line in 1948 was more like an impromptu response to the large-scale Indian military intervention, rather than a premeditated and well-planned aspect of tactics. The news of the approaching victory of the Chinese Communists and the guerrilla movements in South-East Asia also inspired them no doubt.

Concessions by the Congress Government after the "police action" of September 1948, to the middle and rich peasants weaned them away from the armed struggle, and influenced the Communist leadership also, who primarily came from these classes. Both P. Sundarayya and Ravi Narayan Reddy — participants and leaders of the Telegana struggle, now ranged in opposite camps — admitted later[13] that the poor and landless remained with the party, determined to continue the armed struggle, while the rich went over to the Government, and the middle peasants vacillated. But the Communist leaders withdrew the

struggle in 1951, leaving the poor sections of the rural population in the lurch. The division among the all-India leaders of the CPI also prevented them from organizing solidarity actions elsewhere and strengthen the morale of the rebels of Telengana.

Meanwhile, in Telengana itself, the Indian Army stepped up its operation. The military weaknesses of the rebels became apparent now. Due to lack of preparations of a long-term strategy right from the beginning, and also possibly from an underestimation of the enemy's strength, the tasks of training and equipping the guerrillas were often neglected. This is how P. Sundarayya describes the situation:

> Elementary lack of military tactics, for planning attacks or retreat, was so glaring that we failed to coordinate small guerrilla squads' actions against the enemy. Prolonged hour-long pitched actions against the enemy and their camps, with great numbers of enthusiastic but disorganised masses, used to take place. Hence we suffered serious losses or were forced to retreat in face of determined defence of the enemy, or be on continuous run before the military raids. We could not combine and develop small-scale guerrilla actions of harassing the enemy, into sufficiently large-scale operations to drive out the enemy from their scattered posts and clear the enemy from larger and larger areas.[14]

Hemmed in by the narrow confines of the "liberated zone" in the plains and in the absence of any expansion of the zone, the rebels could hardly survive there for long. The armed struggle retreated to the forests on the Godavari river, Karimnagar and the Nalgonda forests on both sides of the river Krishna. The landless in the Godavari forest area, mainly from the Koya tribal community, came forward to help the rebels and many joined the guerrillas. They had to pay a heavy price for this when the Indian Army, adopting the notorious Briggs plan, burnt down the tribal hamlets and herded the Koya people into concentration camps. But in spite of such repressions, the armed struggle continued, marked by guerrilla raids on military camps, attacks on landlords and seizure and distribution of land and grain. Even the most bitter anti-Communists had to admit that the masses were behind the Communists and that the Indian troops had had a hard time suppressing them.[15]

In the meantime the international Communist leadership had come out with a critique of the CPI Central Committee's political line adopted in the 1948 Calcutta Congress, sharply attacking B.T. Ranadive's thesis. This was published in the official organ of the Cominform — *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy* — dated 27 January 1950. Here it was stated that the "path taken by the Chinese people . . . is the path that should be taken by the people of many colonial and dependent countries in their struggle for national independence and people's democracy."

This was followed by a reshuffling of the CPI high command. The Politbureau was reorganized with a new General Secretary — C. Rajeswara Rao — who was one of the advocates of the Chinese line in Telengana. But the Rightists in the CPI, headed by S.A. Dange — who had opposed both Ranadive's city-based actions, and the Andhra secretariat's Chinese tactics — continued to

oppose the new Politbureau. Finally, advice had to be sought from the Soviet Communist Party and Stalin himself was approached by a deputation of Indian Communists consisting of both the Right and the pro-Chinese elements. A new thesis emerged out of the discussions in Moscow, which influenced the CPI policy statement and programme that were drafted in 1951.[16]

The 1951 Thesis

The new programme and statement of policy adopted by the CPI in 1951 threw fresh light on the main two issues of controversy: first, the class character of the Indian rulers and second, the possible path of the Indian revolution involving the stage of the revolution and the choice of allies.

Regarding the first point, it was maintained in the statement of policy that the Nehru government mainly served "the interests of feudal landlords and big monopoly financiers, and behind them all, the vested interest of British imperialism". Here there was no basic departure from the assessment made in the 1948 political thesis of the Calcutta Congress. But the perspective of an immediate advance to a socialist revolution by intertwining the tasks of the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution was given up. Instead, the 1951 programme envisaged the setting up of a "people's democracy created on the basis of a coalition of all democratic anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces in the country".

As for the tactics, the CPI statement of policy of 1951 said:

> There are a large number of people who think that this Government can be replaced by a People's Democratic Government by utilizing the parliament ushered in by the new constitution. . . . Even a liberal would now feel ashamed to maintain, let alone the Communist Party and other democrats and revolutionaries, that this Government and the classes that keep it in power will ever allow us to carry out a fundamental democratic transformation in the country by parliamentary methods alone. Hence the road that will lead us to freedom and peace, land and bread, as outlined in the programme of our Party, has to be found elsewhere.

Later the statement said at one place:

> All action of the masses in defence of their interest to achieve liberation is sacrosanct. [But to dissociate itself from the tactics advocated by the former General Secretary, Ranadive, it hastened to add:] But one action history does not sanction and that is individual terrorism. Individual terrorism is directed against individuals of a class or system and is carried out by individuals or groups and squads.

From their discussions with the Soviet Communist leaders, the Indian Communists felt that the course of the future revolution in India would follow neither the Russian path solely, nor the Chinese path. While the existence of an organized working class, larger in number than what China had, made India suitable for some of the tactics that the Russian Bolsheviks had used before the 1917 revolution, the preponderance of the poor and landless peasants in India

again drew the country nearer the Chinese example. But in China, even to begin with, in 1927 itself, the Chinese Communist Party had an army of 30,000. Besides, China lacked a unified and good communications system, which helped the Communist rebels to elude a concentrated attack on them by the Central authorities. Last, but not least, the Chinese Communists had a friendly rear base in the shape of the Soviet Union.

In such a situation what tactics should the CPI follow? These were spelt out in detail in a secret document known in party circles as the 1951 Tactical Line, which was however never circulated among the party ranks. The document stated that the objectives set forth in the party programme, namely the "complete liquidation of feudalism, the distribution of all land held by feudal owners among the peasants and agricultural workers, and achievement of full national independence and freedom", could not be realized in a peaceful way, but was possible "through an armed revolution of the people." Referring to the need for guerrilla warfare in the countryside, it said that:

> partisan war must be one of the major weapons in our armoury.... It has to be combined with other major weapons — that of strike and uprising in the cities led by the armed detachment of the working class.... It is absolutely essential to combine two basic factors — the partisan war of the peasants and workers' uprising in the cities. [Adding that the] onslaught of the enemy against the partisan forces, against liberated areas will have to be hampered and paralysed by mass strike actions.

But the 1951 statement of policy reflected an uneasy compromise between the Rightists and the Leftists in the CPI. Over the years that followed 1951, the Rightists came to gain the upperhand, and the CPI policy drifted more and more towards the peaceful path of parliamentarism. Accusing the CPI high command of "leading astray the Indian revolutionaries whenever they were about to tread the correct path", Charu Mazumdar said later that "No assessment was ever made of the role of the peasantry in the democratic revolution. Thus, the party ranks were alternately led towards Right reformism and Left sectarianism and finally dragged into the morass of parliamentarism and revisionism."[26]

Changes After 1951

Several factors contributed to the final abandonment of the 1951 Tactical Line. The first general elections were held in 1952. Although the Congress won, the results showed that it had considerably lost influence in the four years it had been in power. The Communists achieved significant gains in states like Andhra. The possibility of defeating the Congress at the polls and forming an alternative government of different Opposition parties began to fascinate the Communists.

In its foreign policy also, the Indian Government was modifying its earlier pro-Anglo-American stand, and shifting towards a stance of neutrality. The emergence of China as a socialist power and her growing importance in Asia, were changing the balance of forces in the world. The thaw in the Cold War also provided the Indian Government with the opportunity to accept friendly overtures

from the Soviet Union — a prelude to the beginning of Soviet aid which often helped India to bargain with the Anglo-American camp and create a false image of non-alignment. The CPI responded to this at its Congress in Madurai in 1953, by welcoming "the role played by the Indian Government on a number of important international issues in the recent period, a role appreciated by the peace-loving masses and States."

By 1956, when the CPI met for its fourth Congress at Palghat, several changes had taken place in India's foreign policy. The American decision to give military assistance to Pakistan in February 1954 had led to somewhat strained relations between India and USA. On the other hand the Chinese Communist Premier, Chou-En-lai, visited India in June that year and signed an agreement with Nehru upholding the 'five principles' of friendship and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. In November 1955 the Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Bulganin toured India as guests of Prime Minister Nehru. The Indian tricolour flew along with the hammer-and-sickle-featured red Soviet flag atop Government buildings during the visit. To many Indian Communists in those days, it appeared as if Communism had won over the Indian bourgeoisie. The CPI General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh said:

> ... today, the possibility has arisen even for a country with a backward, dependent economy to assert its sovereignty and act as a free country, because of the weakening of imperialism, and the existence of a powerful socialist world, and an alternative socialist world market ... such things were inconceivable in the past, but they are happening today.[17]

In such an euphoria, the thought of overthrowing the Nehru Government, the friend of Soviet Russia, by an armed revolution, as envisaged in the 1951 Tactical Line, was naturally found "inconceivable" by the Indian Communists. But the Indian ruling class was far too cunning for the Indian Communists. The Nehru Government had realized by the fifties that the Communist threat might come from within the Indian society, rather than from Soviet or Chinese military aggression. It could therefore without constraint strike up friendship with the socialist powers and yet, with ease again, ruthlessly crush any military Communist movement within the country. Indian neutralism was a form of double alignment with the USA and the USSR. The former was told that India needed American aid to save it from Communism, and the latter told that Soviet aid alone kept India out of the camp of imperialists. It was the game of a coy maiden letting each suitor bid against the other.

So, in spite of fits of peevishness with the USA, India basically remained dependent on American aid. In a letter dated 24 February 1954 written to assuage India's ill feelings roused by American military assistance to Pakistan, President Eisenhower assured Nehru of "continuation of economic and technical aid", and added: "If your Government conclude that circumstances require military aid of a type contemplated by our Mutual security legislation, please be assured that your request would receive my most sympathetic consideration."

In fact, in May 1955, the US administration recommended $85 million aid to

India during the next fiscal year. Justifying the need for increased aid to India and other countries in Asia, President Eisenhower told the US Congress on 25 August 1955: "It should be realized that the proximity of Communist China presents an economic challenge as well as a military and political threat to Asia's independent governments. It is the challenge of competition in the area towards specific economic goals." When Ajoy Ghosh was extolling India's ability to "assert its sovereignty and act as a free country", preparations were afoot in Washington and New Delhi for the first agreement on deliveries of American farm surpluses to India under PL 480 — an agreement which compelled India to finance indirectly the Indian private sector and American firms operating in India, in exchange for the foodgrains.*

In fact, Nehru's resistance to the USA never went beyond ineffective letters of protest or harmless resolutions. As the then American Secretary of State, J.F. Dulles, told a news conference in Washington on 28 February 1956, there were only "superficial irritations" between India and USA. Beneath the surface of such moments of pique, the USA was allowed to dominate the vital spheres of the Indian economy through aid and investments. As a result, between 1951 and 1954, American aid represented three-quarters of all the foreign aid India had received.[18] By 1955, India was bound to the USA and other American dominated international organizations like the World Bank, by an outstanding debt of Rs. 1,185 million.[19] At the same time, American private investments in the Indian economy had increased from Rs. 179.6 million in 1948 to Rs. 474.9 million in 1955.[20]

In spite of all these trends, the CPI chose to discover signs of an independent policy in India's foreign relations. At the Palghat Congress in 1956, the party report stated that "despite the vacillations and inconsistencies that still persist to some extent, it [India's foreign policy] is essentially an independent policy."

In the meantime, the sanction for parliamentarism and non-violent means to change a bourgeois government had also come from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). At the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, Khrushchev announced that the forms of transition to socialism need not be associated with civil war, and that the Communists could come to power through a parliamentary majority. It was obvious that the CPSU had travelled far from the days of 1948-49, when the world was divided into two mutually hostile camps, and when the entire bourgeoisie had to be treated as an enemy. The recently independent nations of Africa and Asia could now be bought off by economic aid, and hence could be treated as a third camp of 'non-aligned' friends.

* The first agreement on food deliveries under PL 480 passed by the US Congress in 1954, was signed in August 1956, according to which India had to pay America for the food in rupee currency. Part of the payment thus received was lent to the Indian Government by the USA with the stipulation that RS.26 crores from it would have to be given as loans to private enterprises. A year later, the US Congress adopted an amendment to the law submitted by Senator Coolie, which empowered the US Government to assign 25% of the local currency proceeds from the sale of American wheat as loans to American firms operating in India and Indian private firms selling American products.

The CPI was psychologically prepared to respond readily to the new policy recommended by Moscow. The party General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, told a news conference in New Delhi on 24 August 1956 that the CPI in alliance with other socialist and democratic forces will strive "its utmost" to achieve a socialist transformation in India by "peaceful means". In fact, for quite sometime now, the CPI had been tending to mellow its opposition to the Government inside the country also. Thus, P. Ramamurthi, the then editor of the CPI weekly, *New Age*, went to the extent of advancing the slogan of a "national platform for peace and freedom" to support Prime Minister Nehru. "The more Nehru takes a forthright stand against the imperialists and by the side of the forces of peace . . . the more enthusiastic will be the support of the millions."[21]

Although another party leader, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, was quick to condemn this approach officially,[22] the same Namboodiripad at about the same time was betraying similar class-collaborationist sentiments on a different occasion. The occasion was the 12th session of the CPI-dominated All-India Kisan Sabha, at Moga, between 13 and 19 September 1954 — the same week when he condemned Ramamurthi's views. As indicated in Chapter I, the Government's dilly-dallying over the fixation of ceiling on land holdings benefited the rich peasants. Explaining a resolution on ceiling brought before the conference, Namboodiripad said:

> . . . as for the rich peasant, we are taking adequate precautions in this resolution that his interests are not affected. There is, of course, a certain amount of contradiction in the way in which we are formulating the demands relating to ceilings. That, however, is a contradiction which can be overcome if only we bear in mind the necessity for simultaneously rousing the mass of poor peasants and agricultural labourers and keeping the rich peasants in the movement.[23]

He did not elaborate how the demands of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers could be reconciled with the protection afforded by his party to the rich peasants who owned large plots of land.

It is thus clear that a soft and flabby attitude towards class conflicts had permeated among the CPI leaders by the middle of the fifties. A latter day CPI (M) document has referred to "the stagnation of the mass peasant movement" in the fifties.

> Whatever kisan movement was organized and led, was mainly oriented to the middle and well-to-do peasant sector, instead of to the growing numbers of agricultural labour and poor sections. The relative new opportunities for well-being that presented themselves to the middle and rich peasant sections, in no small way, influenced the Communist Party in the rural areas, and in particular, a good chunk of the cadre of the middle and rich peasant origin occupying leading positions in the rural party committees.[24]

But the conciliatory attitude towards the ruling party or the landed gentry which supported it, was warranted neither by the economic situation in the country, nor by the ruling party's domestic policies. It has already been shown in the

previous two chapters, how the Government policies led to a deterioration in the standard of living of the bulk of the rural population and the industrial proletariat.

Yet at the Palghat Congress of the CPI in 1956, the party took a distinct turn towards the Right, when in its report it stated:

> The struggle to build the democratic front involves a policy of simultaneous unity with and struggle against the bourgeoisie . . . it should not be conceded that the democratic front will be an anti-Congress front. . . . Although the political party of the bourgeoisie which has taken many landlords in its folds, the Congress has, among its members, a vast number of democratic elements. It has an anti-imperialist and democratic tradition.

Although the Palghat Congress resolutions in many respects indicated the victory of the Rightists inside the party, and initiated a policy of collaboration with the Congress party, the Leftists struggled to get their views across. Thus P. Sundarayya, Basavapunniah and Hanumantha Rao — all from Andhra, and who were later to break away from the CPI and form the CPI (M) — submitted a note at the Palghat Congress reiterating that India remained "semi-colonial and dependent" and that the Government was "collaborating with British imperialism." Their note was however rejected.

The tussle between the Rightists favouring an alliance with the Congress in the form of a National Front, and the Leftists maintaining the need for an anti-Congress democratic front, continued throughout the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, and came to a head during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The schism in the international Communist movement aggravated the confusion among the Indian Communists, who were already falling out among themselves in their assessment of the Government's internal policies. While the Leftists in the party were feeling that the Government's economic measures like nationalization or building up of heavy industries were meant to serve the big bourgeois monopoly interests, the Rightists held that these measures strengthened the independent economic growth of the country, and hence the "progressive section" of the ruling class, who were responsible for these measures, should be supported.

The formal split came in 1964, with the Leftists holding a party Congress in Calcutta, and the Rightists a parallel Congress in Bombay. The former organized themselves into a separate party which came to be known as the CPI (Marxist) while the latter retained the old name, CPI.

The CPI (M)

The CPI (M) programme adopted at the Calcutta Congress described the Indian state as "the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlord, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development." The CPI on the other hand held that the state was an organ of the class rule of the "national bourgeoisie as a

whole, which upholds and develops capitalism and capitalist relations of production, distribution and exchange in the national economy of India." It further stated that the "national bourgeoisie compromises with the landlords, admits them in the ministries and governmental composition, especially at the state levels, which allows them to hamper the adoption and implementation of laws and measures of land reform. . . ."

The CPI (M) envisaged the establishment of a "people's democracy based on the coalition of all genuine anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces headed by the working class." The CPI proposed a national democratic revolution which would bring in a

> stage of non-capitalist path of development [through a state where] power will be jointly exercised by all those classes which are interested in eradicating imperialist interests, routing the semi-feudal elements and breaking the power of monopolies. In this class alliance, the exclusive leadership of the working class is not yet established, though the exclusive leadership of the bourgeoisie no longer exists.

As for the tactics to be adopted for their respective objectives, the CPI pledged itself to "peaceful means", but warned that the "ruling classes will not relinquish their power voluntarily. . . . It is therefore necessary for the revolutionary forces to so orientate themselves and their work that they can face up to all contingencies, to any twists and turns in the political life of the country." It is significant that the CPI (M) also echoed the same tactical line, when it said in its programme that it would strive to achieve its objectives through "peaceful means". Almost word by word it reproduced the warning of the CPI about the reluctance of the ruling classes to relinquish their power voluntarily, and the need of the revolutionary forces to orientate their work "that they can face up to all contingencies, to any twist and turn in the political life of the country." The dilution of the united party's 1951 Tactical Line was quite evident in the CPI (M)'s programme, in spite of the latter's militant pose. In fact, its failure to prepare its ranks to "face up to all contingencies", evident during the ruling party's onslaught on it in West Bengal in 1971-72, indicated the CPI (M)'s thorough commitment to the path of peaceful parliamentarism.

Even at the time of the CPI (M) Congress in 1964, the party leadership discouraged militant trends of a return to the 1951 thesis. Thus, the Andhra Pradesh State party conference on the eve of the 1954 Calcutta Congress adopted an amendment to the party programme draft, which declared that the foreign policy of the Indian Government was a fake non-alignment policy, that its foreign policy was subservient to that of US imperialism. But this was defeated at the Calcutta Congress. Another amendment to the party programme demanding the right of self-determination for nationalities, was proposed before the Calcutta Congress. But the CPI (M) central leadership prevailed on the Congress to postpone admission of the subject. Similar amendments of a radical nature were moved by some delegates from West Bengal also, but were rejected. These delegates were believed to have stressed the need for characterizing the Indian State as 'neocolonial' and for adoption of a programme of armed

struggle. Among them was Sushital Roy Chowdhury, who was to become one of the theoreticians of the CPI (M-L) in later days.

Thus, the CPI (M) started its journey with suppressed radicals in its ranks. Promises by the leaders to make it a revolutionary party, different from the 'revisionist' CPI, kept the ranks appeased for some time. But the participation of the party after the 1967 elections in the United Front Governments of Kerala and West Bengal began to breed suspicions among those who sincerely believed in the CPI (M)'s leading a revolution. Some of them later were to remember their hopes with regret:

> Our party was born in the ideological struggle against the revisionist policies of the Dange group. We thought that it would be working on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. The Calcutta Congress declared the establishment of people's democratic state through agrarian revolution as its aim.[25]

Besides, the attitude towards China was one of the important issues that divided the Indian Communists. In 1962, the Leftists in the CPI were known as pro-Maoists. But when the CPI (M) was formed in 1964, the new party leadership refrained from spelling out their exact views on China, or on the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute on questions like the possibility of a third world war, the role of the non-aligned countries, the future of national liberation movements, and violent or non-violent forms of transition to socialism.

The different State units of the CPI (M) were left to themselves to formulate their respective attitudes on these ideological issues. As the CPI (M) admitted later:

> . . . Since our Tenali Convention of July 1964, when our programme draft was broadly endorsed, for full three years, up to August 1967 our Central Committee's official stand on these ideological issues under debate in the world communist movement . . . was carried on solely relying on the contributions made by the Chinese Communist Party and reproducing them in our papers and pamphlets in different languages. In no other State party unit, probably except that of West Bengal, was this work carried on with such zeal, persistence and faith as in Andhra during the last three years or more.[26]

But dissidence in the CPI (M) was not confined only to West Bengal and Andhra; it was lying dormant in other state units and was to come out in the open at the first availability of an alternative programme.

Charu Mazumdar's Theories

From the early sixties, from his home town in Siliguri, Charu Mazumdar was trying to give a coherent theoretical expression to these dissident views. By 1965, a concrete alternative plan of action had almost taken shape, and his followers were already in the villages of North Bengal, propagating his views and organizing struggles among the poor and landless peasantry.

His views during this period are documented in eight important articles, written by him between 1965 and 1967, some of them having been written from inside the jail. The CPI (M-L) later published them in the form of a booklet entitled *The Historic Anti-Revisionist Eight Documents Written by Our Respected Leader. Immortal Martyr Comrade Charu Mazumdar.* An idea of his views at the rudimentary stage can also be available from a Bengali booklet *Naxalbarir Shiksha* (Lessons of Naxalbari), brought out by the North Bengal Bihar Border Regional Committee of the CPI (M-L), which, besides describing the background to the Naxalbari uprising, contains a record of Charu Mazumdar's talk and conversation.

From a study of these, it appears that even before the formation of the CPI (M), roundabout 1963, when disaffected elements within the undivided CPI were busy with theoretical wranglings against Dange, Charu Mazumdar hit the nail on the head when he said to his followers in North Bengal: "The real fight against revisionism can never be begun unless the peasant starts it through revolutionary practice." He stressed the need to take politics among the peasantry and "take in hand the task of building a revolutionary party."[27] The idea of coming out from the existing party and forming a new one was already there in an embryonic form. The recognition of the peasantry as the motive force was also present in his thoughts. After the birth of the CPI (M), Charu Mazumdar consistently urged his followers to fight against the "revisionist trends" in the behaviour of the party leadership. What were these revisionist trends? According to him, the first manifestation of revisionism was to regard working through peasants associations and trade unions for the fulfilment of certain economic demands, as the only work of the party, oblivious of the main political aim of "seizing power".[2]

A few words of clarification on Charu Mazumdar's attitude towards trade unions, peasants associations, and open, legal movements, during this period, would not be out of place, as this became a bone of contention among the CPI (M-L) leaders at a later stage.

All through the eight documents, while asserting the need for setting up underground organizations and collection of arms to resist the "counter-revolutionary violence" of the ruling class, and reiterating that "trade union or peasant association (kisan sabha) movements could never be the main auxiliary force in the present age of the revolutionary time", Charu Mazumdar at the same time said:

> It would not be correct to draw from this the conclusion that trade unions or peasants associations have become outmoded. For, trade unions and kisan sabhas are primarily organizations meant to build up unity between Marxist-Leninist activists and working class and peasants masses. This unity will be consolidated only when Marxist-Leninist activists move forward in the work of building up the revolutionary party among the working class and peasant masses by giving them the tactics of revolutionary resistance movement.[7]

He was more specific when he discussed the role of peasant associations or mass movements in the rural areas. He reminded the party activists:

> ... any movement on the fundamental demands of the peasantry will never follow a peaceful path. ... To establish the leadership of the poor and landless peasants, the peasantry should be told in clear terms that their fundamental problems can never be solved with the help of any law of this reactionary government.

But he hastened to add:

> This does not mean that we shall not take advantage of any legal movement. The work of open peasant associations will mainly be to organize movements for gaining legal benefits and for legal changes [But the main task of the party activists among the peasantry would be to] form party groups and explain the programme of the agrarian revolution and the strategy of area-wise seizure of power.[4]

A further elaboration on this aspect is found in the eighth document, where Charu Mazumdar dealt with the specific question raised by many at that time: "Is there no need for the peasants to organize mass movements in this period on the basis of partial demands?" His reply was: "Certainly the need is there, and will remain there in future too." Explaining the reason, he added:

> India is a vast country, and the peasants also are divided into various classes. So political consciousness cannot remain on the same level in all the areas and among all the classes. The opportunity and possibility of peasants' mass movement on the basis of partial demands therefore, will always be there and Communists must take full advantage of that opportunity at all times.

To demarcate the revolutionary method from the revisionist method of organizing such mass movements, he posed the question: "By what tactics shall we lead the movements on partial demands, and what will be their aim?" He then said:

> The main thing about our tactics will be to see whether there is a mobilization of the broadest sections of the peasantry; and our main aim will be to see whether the class consciousness of the peasantry has increased — whether they have moved forward towards widespread armed struggle.

Emphasizing again that "movements on economic demands are never wrong", he warned: "to lead these movements in the manner of economism is a crime". "It is also a crime", he added, "to propagate that movements on economic demands will automatically on their own take the form of political struggles, because this is worshipping spontaneity." He then reiterated the conscious role of a revolutionary party in transforming such movements into political struggles: "There is only one task at one stage of the struggle. Unless this is done, the struggle cannot reach a higher stage. Today, that particular task is the politics of armed struggle and campaign for the collection of guns."[8]

Regarding the term "seizure of power", Charu Mazumdar differed from the revisionist concept. While the revisionists, he felt, thought that power could be seized at the centre only through the gradual expansion of economic movements, he, on the other hand, stressed the need for "area-wise seizure of power",

and referred in this connection to precedents in the history of world revolutionary movements.[2], [8]

He reminded the party cadres of Lenin's writings during the 1905 revolution in Russia.* He drew their attention to the Chinese path of revolution which under the leadership of Mao Tsetung advanced through piecemeal liberation of the country†; and to the achievements of the Naga rebels in India who had managed to maintain a liberated zone for years. He held that area-wise seizure of power in the countryside by the poor and landless peasants, and the gradual expansion of these areas ending with the encirclement of the cities could be the only road to success for the people's democratic revolution in India.[8]

The next target of Charu Mazumdar's anti-revisionist tirade was the CPI (M) Central Committee's attitude towards China. In June 1966 at a full-scale session of the party's Central Committee at Tenali, the first since the birth of the party, the leadership expressed its disagreement with the Chinese assessment of the Indian Government's character and policies. Without mentioning the name of China, the Central Committee said that during the 18 months since the Party Congress, "divergent views have been expressed by some fraternal Communist parties of various countries on the Indian situation." It maintained that the Central Committee's reading of the Indian situation remained valid. Eager to dispel any impression that might have been created by the anti-Soviet and pro-Chinese articles that had come out in party journals, the Central Committee warned that "care should also be taken to avoid as much as possible the publication of such material as undermine faith in the socialist system."

The CPI (M)'s anti-China stand was to come out more sharply next year after the events of Naxalbari. Sensing the drift in the attitude of the party leadership even before that, Charu Mazumdar said that since the Soviet leadership had forfeited the right to lead the revolution because of its revisionism and collaboration with US imperialism, and since the Communist Party of China and its leader Mao Tsetung were the leaders of world revolution now, "by opposing the Chinese party, the Indian party's leadership has forsaken the revolutionary path of Marxism-Leninism." He declared: "In the fight against revisionism, these party leaders are not only not our comrades, they are not even our associates."[6]

* "A government does not cease to be a government because its power does not extend to many cities but is confined to a single city. ... Will not the problems ... of what to do with the prisons, the police, public funds etc. confront us the moment we 'seize power' in a single city, let alone in a district?... If we lack sufficient forces, if the uprising is not wholly victorious, or if the victory is indecisive, it is possible that provisional revolutionary governments will be established in separate localities, in individual cities and the like." — V.I. Lenin: 'Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', August, 1905. (*Selected Works*, Vol.I, p. 391)

† "In war, battles can only be fought one by one and the enemy forces can only be destroyed one by one. Factories can only be built one by one. The peasants can only plough the land plot by plot. The same is even true of eating a meal. Strategically, we take the eating of a meal lightly — we know we can finish it. But actually we eat it mouthful by mouthful. It is impossible to swallow an entire banquet in one gulp. This is known as a piecemeal solution." — Mao Tsetung: Speech at the Moscow Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties; 18 November 1957 (From *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*; Peking edition, 1967, p. 80)

Among the other manifestations of revisionism, he referred to the stress by the CPI (M) leadership on the formation of non-Congress governments after the coming elections and thus its acquiescence in the government's plans to perpetuate the illusion of constitutionalism among the masses; its habit of raising ultra-Leftist slogans and pushing the unarmed masses in the face of the State's repression, and yet its denunciation of any talk about "revolutionary resistance" or "armed struggle", as adventurism. He then gave the green light for the split, when he said: "... the revolutionary party can come up only through the destruction of the present party system and its democratic framework."[6] The new party, however, came into existence three years later.

As for the tactics that he suggested to his followers, the emphasis was on armed resistance at the initial stage, and switching over to armed offensive at a later stage. He lashed out at the revisionist leadership of the CPI (M) for dreaming of a peaceful mass movement. "In today's era", he warned, "we cannot organize peaceful mass movements. Because the ruling class will not, and is not giving us any such opportunity."[5] Referring to the numerous struggles taking place and assuming violent forms in the face of police repression, he said: "These struggles have been begun by the common people spontaneously. The main aim of our politics will be to establish this armed struggle consciously on a mass basis."[7] In vivid terms he assigned the tasks of the poor and landless peasants, who were to be the leaders of the agrarian struggles — formation of armed squads in every village, collection of arms by seizing them from class enemies and police, seizure of crops and arrangements for hiding them and constant propagation of the politics of armed struggle.[5]

As for the mass movements in the cities, the blind anger of the irate masses being dissipated in the destruction of government buildings and transport, will have to be channelled into premeditated, planned attacks on hated class enemies and on the State's tyrannous mercenaries. The revolutionaries will have to tell the people

> attack the hated bureaucrats, the military officers. The people will have to be taught — the repression is not unleashed by the police stations, but by the officers of the stations; attacks are directed not by government offices or transport, but by the members of the government's repressive machinery, and our attacks are against those men. The working class and the people will have to be taught that they should not attack merely for the sake of attacking, but should finish him whom they attack. For, if they merely attack, the reactionary machinery will take revenge, but if they annihilate, everyone of the government's repressive machinery will get scared.[5]

One is reminded of Trotsky's words defending Red terror: "It kills individuals, and intimidates thousands."[28]

Around 1965, various groups of dissidents, disillusioned with the revisionist politics of the CPI (M) leaders, were trying to get in touch with Charu Mazumdar's followers in North Bengal. Charu Mazumdar set down the minimum points of agreement on which basis unity could be forged with these groups. First, acceptance of Mao Tsetung as the leader of the world revolution and of his thoughts as the highest form of Marxism-Leninism of this era. Second, belief in

the view that a revolutionary situation existed in every corner of India. Third, belief in area-wise seizure of power as the path for taking forward the Indian revolution; and fourth, belief in guerrilla warfare as the only mode through which the development and advance of this revolution was possible.[29]

It is thus clear that the uprising at Naxalbari in 1967 was not a spontaneous outburst. There were years of ideological and tactical preparations behind it. It would be the height of absurdity to interpret the Naxalbari events as the CPI does, as a mere agrarian struggle which only later "underwent a transformation in the imagination of the group which had gathered round its banner."[30] The other view — expressed often by the CPI (M) leaders that it was an outcome of "factional strife" between the West Bengal State Committee of the CPI (M) and its Darjeeling district branch leaders — is equally untenable, if one goes into the history of the development of Charu Mazumdar's theories from 1965 to 1967. "Seizure of State power through armed struggle" was already on the agenda when the movement began at Naxalbari in 1967, under the leadership of Communist revolutionaries who were still then members of the CPI (M).

It was because of this that broadcasting on 28 June 1967 Radio Peking said: "The revolutionaries of the Indian Communist Party, in Siliguri sub-division, who advocate the seizure of power through armed struggle, raised the slogan in 1965 of preparing for armed struggle by arming the peasants and setting up rural bases." Party activists in the Siliguri sub-division later said:

> We adhered to and worked according to the advice of our respected leader [i.e. Charu Mazumdar] in Naxalbari, and from 1965 through small movements, with the help of peasants' struggles, we were able to overcome our shortcomings. That was why we saw the massive peasants upheaval in 1967.[31]

But while trying to evolve an alternative programme and implement it in practice, Charu Mazumdar fell foul of the CPI (M) leaders. As Kanu Sanyal, one of the leading organizers of the Naxalbari uprising was to say later:

> When in 1965, our respected leader Comrade Charu Mazumdar rebelled against the neo-revisionist leading clique of Sundarayya, Ranadive, Namboodiripad, Promode, Jyoti and company and called upon the revolutionaries in the CPM to build peasants' armed struggle, he was subjected to the vilest slanders. People like Promode Babu, Harekrishna Babu raved that he was a mad man, a man who was mentally sick, and in open statements termed him a police agent and created a fascist atmosphere inside the party with a view to preventing comrades from knowing what Comrade Charu Mazumdar had written and from meeting Charuda.[32]

But such attempts by the CPI (M) leaders, Kanu Sanyal added, proved futile.

> ... the call given out by Comrade Charu Mazumdar, [he claimed] created a stir throughout India. The analysis made by Comrade Charu Mazumdar inspired us, the revolutionaries of Darjeeling district. [Four years later Kanu Sanyal gave a completely opposite version of his relations with Charu Mazumdar, emphasizing

his differences with him that were believed to have arisen as far back as 1965. *Purba-Taranga*, 1 May 1974].

In fact, rumblings of dissent among the CPI (M) ranks exploded into open rebellion very soon after the 1967 general elections. Their disappointment at their leaders behaving like any other revisionist parliamentarians in participating in heterogeneous coalition governments, and then failing to use the governments as instruments of mass struggles, as promised by them earlier, naturally made them turn wistfully towards events happing in the north-eastern corner of India — the first clap of the "spring thunder" that was to herald the storm.

Notes

1. V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, *A Contemporary History of India*. People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1964, p. 436.
2. Programme of the CPI (M-L), 1970.
3. N.N. Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register*, 1947.
4. *Ibid.*
5. 'An Examination of the Basic Causes of Left Defections with Special Reference to Andhra' — Resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) in Calcutta on 5 to 9 October 1968.
6. *People's Age*, 30 November 1947.
7. Programme of the CPI (M-L), 1970.
8. Translated from *Naxalbarir Shiksha* (Lessons of Naxalbari), a report prepared by the North Bengal-Bihar Border Regional Committee of the CPI (M-L), containing several verbatim accounts of Charu Mazumdar's talks and conversations.
9. Political Resolution of the CPI (M-L), 1969.
10. Report on the Census of India's Foreign Liabilities and Assets, 1948. Report on the Survey of India's Foreign Liabilities and Assets, 1955
11. Quoted in P. Sundarayya's *Telengana People's Struggle and Its Lessons*.
12. Political Resolution of the CPI (M-L), 1969.
13. Ravi Narayan Reddy, *Heroic Telengana*, p. 64. P. Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle and Its Lessons*, p. 257.
14. P. Sundarayya, *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.
15. *See* Chester Bowles' comments quoted in Chapter I.
16. P. Sundarayya, *op cit.*, p. 308.
17. Ajoy Ghosh, *Some Questions of Party Policy*, November 1955.
18. *New York Times*, 5 April 1954.
19. Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, 1956.
20. Report on the Survey of India's Foreign Liabilities, December 1955.
21. *New Age*, 12 July 1954.
22. *New Age*, 19 September 1954.
23. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Peasants Meet at Moga*, All-India Kisan Sabha, September 1954.
24. 'An Examination of the Basic Causes of Left Defections with Special Reference to Andhra' — Resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) in Calcutta on 5 to 9 October 1968.
25. T. Nagi Reddy, D. Venkateswara Rao and others, 'Open Letter to Party Members', 1968.
26. 'An Examination of the Basic Causes of Left Defections with Special Reference to Andhra' — Resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) in Calcutta on 5 to 9 October 1968.

27. *Naxalbarir Shiksha.*
28. L. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*. Ann Arbor Paperback; University of Michigan Press, 1961, p. 58.
29. *Naxalbarir Shiksha.*
30. Pratap Mitra, *Communist Party and Naxalites*. CPI, p. 15.
31. *Naxalbarir Shiksha.*
32. From Kanu Sanyal's speech at the May Day rally in Calcutta in 1969, where the announcement of the formation of the party was made. The references are to P. Sundarayya, B.T. Ranadive, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Promode Das Gupta, Jyoti Basu and Harekrishna Konar — all members of the CPI (M) Politburo.

4 Naxalbari

This is the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Tse-tung's teachings.
Radio Peking broadcast on
the Naxalbari uprising, 28 June 1967.

Naxalbari has shown us the way to the Indian people's democratic revolution as much as it has unmasked the true face of the neo-revisionists. . .
From the Declaration of the Revolutionaries
of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), November 1967.

The West Bengal United Front Government

On 2 March 1967, a non-Congress, United Front Government was sworn in in West Bengal. Earlier, in the State Assembly elections, the Congress was reduced to a minority and the Leftists emerged victorious. The Government was dominated by the pro-Moscow CPI, the CPI (M) and a breakaway group from the Congress with Centrist tendencies, the Bangla Congress.

The crux of the problem in West Bengal, as also in other States of India, was land. The United Front government was pledged to bring about the long overdue land reforms, which in bread and butter terms meant to the poor and landless peasants, a small plot of land for each, and release from the usurious burden.

The Minister in charge of Land and Land Revenue in the new Government was Harekrishna Konar — a veteran CPI (M) peasant leader. Soon after his swearing in, he announced a policy of quick distribution of surplus land among the landless and stopping of eviction of sharecroppers. Later in May, in an interview with his party's Bengali mouthpiece *Ganashakti*, he said that the Government had decided to "distribute land among the landless and poor peasants on the basis of consultations with the members of gram panchayats, representatives of kisan sabhas, members of the legislature and anchal pradhans." He also invited more militant initiative from the peasantry by adding: "The development of peasants' initiative and the advance of organized force would pave the way for further progress". Konar probably did not realize then that in a situation where the emergence of the United Front government had escalated the

expectation of the poor peasantry, popular initiative, once unleashed, could go far beyond the expectations of the leaders.

Besides, for all their best intentions, the Marxists in the Government were hamstrung by several difficulties. First, although they promised redistribution of land, they were not yet sure how to recover the land transferred malafide by the landlords. As Konar admitted in the same interview, regarding 'benami' [malafide] transfers, "the Government had not yet been able to take any decision. The hurdles put by the Constitution, and the court, papers and documents are stupendous".

Secondly, the Marxists were also coming to realize that the rural landlords who were in posession of surplus land, could always take the help of the law to delay the seizure of their land, and thus postpone for an indefinite period distribution of the surplus land. As Harekrishna Konar again had to acknowledge in the same interview, "In addition to the question of benami transfers, it appears that because of orders of the court the Government had not been able to take possession of 121,000 acres of land." The helplessness of the United Front was quite evident, as borne out by the fact that by 1969, when the United Front was in office for the second time, the number of acres affected by such cases had almost doubled. Konar complained in a letter dated 9 September 1969 to Indira Gandhi,

> The Government is faced with a spate of civil rules and civil suits. Thousands of cases are pending in different courts and more than 2 lakh acres of agricultural land are hit by them. [As for the officials through whom the United Front Government planned to execute its reforms, Konar had this to say:] So long they have been accustomed to one way of work. Now they are to adjust themselves to another way of work . . . There are instances where instructions were not carried out.

Thus, the CPI (M) was in a difficult position. Because of its acceptance of office in a traditional set up, it could not totally do away with the official bureaucracy. Respect for the judiciary, one of the obligations under which the CPI (M) had to operate in the Government, prevented it from defying the court orders. Yet the new aspirations in the countryside had to be satisfied. The stark questions was — should the CPI (M) go the whole hog in supporting the hungry landless, or should it ensure its position in the Government by respecting the legal procedures to a nicety? As the days passed, the CPI (M) seemed to drift more and more towards the second course. Compulsions embedded in the prevailing administrative machinery forced its ministers to depend on the bureaucracy and advise the peasantry to submit applications through the legal channels for occupation of land.

Meanwhile, at Siliguri, Charu Mazumdar was quietly explaining to his followers that the measures for land redistribution announced by Harekrishna Konar would not only fail to satisfy the landless, but would augur danger, if implemented, for the future peasant movement. He attacked Konar on three accounts. First, he was accused of submitting to the bureaucrats and the feudal gentry, instead of supporting the forcible occupation of land by the peasants. Secondly, if the peasants were to seek land through applications to the

judiciary and attempts were made for redistribution of land according to legal forms, conflicts would invariably crop up between those peasants who had forcibly occupied land and those who might get the same land through legal channels. Thirdly, experience had shown that wherever the poor peasants had managed to occupy land with the help of law and had been provided with a licence by the administration for such occupation. They had gradually changed into smug, complacent middle peasants, absorbed into the existing system and looking down upon the vast majority of poor and landless, fighting outside the law to get land.[8]

He then reiterated the need for moving beyond economism towards the task of politicizing the peasants:

> Believers in economism judge every struggle by the amount of paddy seized or the size of land the peasant received. They never judge by the yardstick whether the fighting consciousness of the peasants had increased. . . .

He added that this "fighting consciousness" of the peasantry should be directed against the State machinery and the feudal class; without destroying the two no land reforms could be possible, since they stood against the interest of the landless and poor peasants.[8]

Beginnings at Naxalbari

As indicated earlier, Charu Mazumdar's followers were already active among the peasantry of North Bengal. On 18 March 1967 — 16 days after the formation of the United Front Government — a peasants' conference was held under the auspices of the Siliguri sub-division of the CPI (M) leadership in the Darjeeling district. The conference called for the ending of monopoly ownership of land by the landlords, redistribution of land through peasants' committees and organization and arming of the peasants in order to destroy the resistance of landlords and rural reactionaries. The conference also warned the landless that their anti-feudal struggle would have to meet the opposition of the Centre as well as that of the United Front Government of the State, and it was necessary therefore to prepare for a protracted armed resistance.[1]

Among the sponsors of the conference was Kanu Sanyal, a determined-looking member of the Darjeeling district secretariat of the CPI (M) — a man in his late thirties, who had been working among the tribal peasants of the area for many years. While Kanu Sanyal came from a middle-class home, his comrade-in-arms, Jangal Santhal, President of the Siliguri subdivisional Krishak Samity, was a tribal peasant leader of the party, who was a candidate from the Phansidewa Assembly constituency of the Darjeeling district in the 1967 elections, but was defeated. Both Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal were in jail during the elections, under the Preventive Detention Act, and were released later.

Many years later, in 1974, Kanu Sanyal gave an account of the background to the uprising at Naxalbari. He also indicated the beginnings of his differences

with the 59-year old Charu Mazumdar, the frail heart patient and leader of the CPI (M) in North Bengal, who was to break out from the party and form the CPI (M-L) and provide the basic theoretical scaffold to the movement. According to Kanu Sanyal, the Communists of North Bengal built up the peasants' organization in Naxalbari during 1951 and 1954 by fighting petty oppressive acts of the jotedars. "Even at this initial phase, the class struggle of the peasants could not advance along the so-called peaceful path." Later, between 1955 and 1957, the tea plantation workers were organized and rallied along with the peasants. "During the struggle of the tea plantation workers for bonus in 1955, thousands of plantation workers and peasants forced not only the tea garden owners but the police also to retreat". In 1958-62, the movement in Naxalbari entered a more militant phase when the local peasants' associations under the leadership of the Communists gave the call for the harvesting of crops and their collection by the tillers, hoisting of red flags in their respective fields, arming of the peasants for the protection of their crops, and defence against police attacks among other things.[2]

Regarding Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal added:

> In 1965, Charu Mazumdar wrote six documents expressing his views on the democratic revolution of India and the CPI (M) leadership, and distributed the documents among the party comrades. . . . The leading cadres of the Siliguri Local Committee [Naxalbari falls under Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district] discussed with him and agreed on some questions and failed to come to any agreement on other questions. The questions on which there was agreement were: India's liberation could be achieved along China's path; propagation of the politics of agrarian revolution among the working class and the peasantry; and the building up of a secret party to prepare them. The leading cadres of the Local [Siliguri] Committee emphasized the necessity of mass movements and organizations of peasants and workers; the need for carrying on ideological struggle within the CPI (M); and asserted that political propaganda and action were not mutally exclusive, and if importance was not attached to political work, actions would become meaningless. But Charu Babu was not willing to accept the need for building up organizations for struggle through mass movements. In other words, right from the beginning, there were two clear-cut opinions, which could be described as a struggle between two lines. In these circumstances, a compromise was arrived at. The cadres of the [Siliguri] Local Committee decided to apply the tactics which had been agreed to [by both Charu Mazumdar and the local committee] in the Naxalbari area according to their own experience. And in the Chaterhat and Islampur areas of West Dinajpur adjoining Naxalbari, work began according to the principles laid down in the Eight documents [*sic* — Kanu Sanyal probably has in mind the first six documents written by Charu Mazumdar in 1965]. Secret combat groups were organized. A little amount of politics was propagated and actions began. In other words, jotedars' houses were set on fire, some crops were harvested at night. Although there were attempts to capture rifles, they did not succeed. As a result of denying any importance to politics and rejection of the path of mass struggles and mass organizations, the combat groups obsessed with actions only, were soon reduced to roving bands.[3]

In Kanu Sanyal's views, while Charu Mazumdar's devoted followers who tried to work according to the tactics indicated in his documents in West Dinajpur failed to make any headway, the Siliguri Local Committee cadres who disagreed with Charu Mazumdar could build up an effective secret organization in the Naxalbari area because of their adherence to mass movements and ideological propaganda. Kanu Sanyal claimed that Charu Mazumdar later changed his views and veered round to the opinion that trade union movements and mass struggles were necessary, in the light of the success achieved by the cadres in Naxalbari.

> In September 1966, during the 16-day strike in the tea plantations, the ground was prepared for the peasants' uprising, and the tea plantation workers took the role of the vanguard. . . . During the peasants' uprising in Naxalbari, the tea plantation workers observed strikes thrice in their support. . . . In the light of the experience in this struggle, Charu Babu changed his views for the time being, and was compelled to accept the need for struggles on economic demands, and wrote his seventh and eighth documents on the basis of this experience.[4]

Before proceeding further, it is necessary at this stage to give an idea of the Naxalbari region. Covering an area of 300 square miles, Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari were the three important bases in the Darjeeling district, where the peasants were mainly comprised of the tribals — Santhals, Oraons and Rajbanshis. Exploited by the jotedars under the 'adhiar' system, they were mainly employed on contractual bases. The landlords provided seeds, ploughs and bullocks, in exchange for which they cultivated the plots and got a share of the crops. Disputes over shares leading to evictions of the peasants were quite common, and increased with the coming to office of the United Front. To quote Harekrishna Konar: "No sooner than the United Front had formed the Government, the jotedars and other reactionary elements began to spread the lie that the United Front Government would rob small and medium owners of their land."[5] The first response of all the land-owners — whether big or small — to such a propaganda was to get rid immediately of the sharecroppers who worked on their plots and who might, they were afraid, demand possession of those plots. As a result, there was a spate of evictions in the countryside. In fact, right in Naxalbari, just after the United Front came to office, a sharecropper, Bigul Kishan, was evicted by a landlord in spite of a court judgement which favoured the sharecropper. The landlord and his gang attacked Bigul Kishan and got away with it. If anything else was needed, the incident coming fast on the heels of the United Front's assumption of office, opened the eyes of the peasantry to the futility of expecting the coalition government to help them.

There was also a considerable number of workers in the tea gardens, most of whom were also tribals who worked as sharecroppers on the tea garden owners' surplus land. Used for paddy cultivation, these lands were shown as tea gardens to escape the ceiling on paddy lands. The sharecropper-cum-plantation workers were often retrenched by the employers, and they were thrown out of their homes. The CPI (M) dissidents wanted to draw in the tea garden workers into the peasants' struggle. Kanu Sanyal claimed later that tea garden workers armed

themselves and participated in every struggle from May 1967. "The peasants' struggle helped the tea garden workers to come out from the mire of simple trade unionism and economism."[6]

Naxalbari had a strategic importance too. A look at the map of West Bengal would reveal that the northern tip of the State has only a slender and vulnerable connection with the rest of India, through the Naxalbari neck. The neck is sandwiched between Nepal on the west, and the then East Pakistan on the east. Between Naxalbari and Nepal flows the Mechi river, which in winter, can be crossed on foot. All these conditions rendered the area ideal for rebel activities, providing them with an opportunity to set up a liberated base area for sometime, and with an escape route to foreign countries if things became too hot.[7]

The Main Events

The Siliguri sub-division peasants' conference proved to be a great success. The peasants, quickened and strengthened by their earlier militant struggles, looked forward expectantly. Faces, deadened and dulled with the grinding routine of labour on the jotedars' fields in sun and rain, glowed with hope and understanding. According to Kanu Sanyal's later claims, from March 1967 to April 1967, all the villages were organized. From 15,000 to 20,000 peasants were enrolled as full time activists. Peasants' committees were formed in every village and they were transformed into armed guards. They soon occupied land in the name of the peasants' committees, burnt all land records "which had been used to cheat them of their dues", cancelled all hypothecary debts, passed death sentences on oppressive landlords, formed armed bands by looting guns from the landlords, armed themselves with conventional weapons like bows, arrows and spears, and set up a parallel administration to look after the villages.[8]

Charu Mazumdar addressed a meeting of party cadres of the area on 13 April 1967. Clarifying the attitude towards middle and rich peasants, he said:

> We shall always have to decide — on whose side or against which side we are. We are always on the side of poor and landless peasants. If there is a conflict of interests between the middle peasant on the one hand and the landless peasant on the other, we will certainly be on the side of the landless peasant. If there is a conflict of interests between the middle peasant and the rich peasant, we will then be on the side of the middle peasant.

He then added:

> Our relations with the rich peasant will always be one of struggle. For, unless the rich peasant's influence is weeded out from the village, the leadership of the poor and landless peasants cannot be established, and the middle peasant cannot be drawn over to us.[9]

By May that year, the rebels could claim as their strongholds Hatighisha under the Naxalbari police station, Buraganj under the Kharibari police station, and Chowpukhuria under the Phansidewa police station, where no outsider would enter without their permission.

Finding the situation going out of control, Harekrishna Konar came to Siliguri and met some of the dissident leaders. According to Konar, it was agreed that all "unlawful activities" would be suspended, the peasants would submit petitions for the land vested with the Government, and land would be redistributed through official agencies in consultation with the local peasants' organizations. It was also agreed that all the persons wanted by the police, including Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal would surrender. The dissidents of North Bengal however denied that there was any such agreement. They complained that the CPI (M) ministers in the Government were attempting redistribution of land through the same official agencies which were in league with the local feudal interests, and were respecting the same old colonial laws, and describing any violation of such laws as "unlawful activities." The CPI (M), in the face of the obduracy of the rebels, pleaded helplessness. It seemed to have lost control over the police also. In a statement released on 30 May 1967, by the West Bengal State Secretariat of the party, the latter expressed its inability to "understand why immediately after the return to Calcutta of Mr Harekrishna Konar, a police camp was opened instead of pursuing the agreement arrived at."

Charu Mazumdar at this stage felt it necessary to warn his comrades of the impending attack by the State. In a letter to a comrade, he stressed the need for rousing hatred against the police. "The police obey orders; the moment the orders come they will launch the attack. They will get scared only when we attack them . . . explain this to the peasant masses." He reminded him:

> The jotedars are still there in the villages; they will guide the police and take them into the villages and indiscriminately kill the peasants. So we must drive out these class enemies from the village; they are secretly maintaining contact with police thanas; the police will launch attack with their help.

He also urged his followers to make preparations to ambush police parties and snatch rifles from them.[11]

The first serious clash between the peasants and the State machinery occurred on 23 May 1967, when a policeman named Sonam Wangdi was killed in an encounter with armed tribals, after a police party had gone to a village to arrest some wanted leaders. On 25 May the police retaliated by sending a force to Prasadjote in Naxalbari, and fired upon a crowd of villagers, killing nine, including six women and two children. While the police version of the incident was that the rebels had attacked them from behind a wall of women and children, forcing the police to open fire, the dissident Marxist leaders alleged that the police deliberately killed the women and children. Later, several peasants were arrested. In the face of persistent police interrogation as to their leaders' hideouts and the reasons for their confrontation with the police force, their stubborn and laconic reply was that they came out "for a breath of fresh air".[10]

The Repercussions

The incident created tensions both within and outside the United Front.

The West Bengal State Secretariat of the CPI (M) at a meeting on 29 May condemned the police firing and demanded a judicial enquiry into the incident. It added that "behind the peasant unrest in Naxalbari lies a deep social malady — malafide transfers, evictions and other anti-people activities of jotedars and tea gardeners." It also accused the Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee, an ex-Congressman, of laying "one-sided stress on the police measures to maintain law and order." The next day, walls in the College Street area — the scene of the Presidency College agitation in the previous year — were littered with posters carrying the slogans: "Murderer Ajoy Mukherjee must resign!" It was evident that these were the handiwork of the CPI (M) students, who were becoming disenchanted with their parliamentary leaders.

Meanwhile, reports of clashes between the rebel peasants and landlords kept pouring in from Naxalbari. According to official sources, only between 8 and 10 June, there were as many as 80 cases of 'lawlessness', 13 dacoities, two murders and one abduction, and armed bands were reported to have been dispensing justice and collecting taxes. The West Bengal Chief Minister told newsmen on 12 June that a 'reign of terror' had been created in Darjeeling. The Centre immediately took up the cue, and the next day, the then Union Home Minister, Y. B. Chavan, told the Lok Sabha that a state of 'serious lawlessness' prevailed in the area. He added that the Government had reasons to suspect that 'extremists' were playing a prominent role in it, thus dissociating them from the official CPI (M) leadership. It was evident that the entire Establishment was ganging up. To them Naxalbari was the signal of popular retribution at last arriving. Finally, the United Front Government sent a Cabinet mission to Naxalbari, consisting among others of Harekrishna Konar and the CPI peasant front leader, Bishwanath Mukherjee, who was then the Irrigation Minister. But their appeal to the rebels to give up violence did not yield any result.

By the end of June, while the CPI (M) leadership was openly coming out against the Naxalbari rebels, in Calcutta the various groups within and outside the CPI (M) who had been critical of the leadership, were coming together, thus gradually crystallizing the political differences. Mainly led by the Presidency College student leaders, the CPI (M) dissidents held a meeting in the Rammohan Library Hall of Calcutta, and formed the Naxalbari Peasants' Struggle Aid Committee, which became a nucleus for a separate party of the future. They also staged a demonstration in front of the West Bengal Assembly on 27 June 1967. Meanwhile, the CPI (M) Politbureau in a resolution adopted on 20 June, on organization matters, referred to "the activities of certain individual party members, especially in West Bengal" and concluded that "they were no more a political trend in the party, but have grouped themselves into an organized anti-party group advocating an adventuristic line and actions, challenging the party programme and resolution and directive, passed by the Central Committee." The resolution further directed the "State Secretaries, especially of the West Bengal State Secretariat, to immediately expel them from party membership."[11] In pursuance of this decision, 19 members were expelled from the CPI (M). Among them was Sushital Ray Chowdhury, a member of the party's State Committee, who was to play a leading role in the CPI (M).

As the rebel activities continued in Darjeeling, a significant development took place. In a comment on 28 June 1967, Radio Peking described the Naxalbari incidents as the "front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Tse-tung", and dubbed the United Front Government as a "tool of the Indian reactionaries to deceive the people". This was the first evidence of Chinese support to the rebels and of Peking's disenchantment with the CPI (M).

On 12 July 1967, a major police action was launched at Naxalbari, to round up the rebels and their leaders. Although Ajoy Mukherjee claimed that the CPI (M) was also a party to the Cabinet decision to launch the action, the West Bengal state secretariat of the CPI (M) in a statement issued in Calcutta on 19 July, sought to dissociate itself from the police action. It said: "The top police officials have thrown to the winds all the instructions given by the Cabinet and have launched a repressive drive against the peasantry." The Chief Minister also came in for attack: "It seems that the Chief Minister of the United Front Ministry who is also in charge of the Home portfolio, has succumbed to the pressure of the Union Home Ministry and must be held responsible for the atrocious excesses in Naxalbari."

By 20 July, Jangal Santhal and some other leaders of the Naxalbari peasants, were arrested. Although Kanu Sanyal evaded arrest till October 1968, several followers also surrendered by the end of the month. With that, an apparent lull set in in Naxalbari.

Assessments

Why did the first attempt to implement Charu Mazumdar's theories, collapse so soon? Did the movement in Naxalbari end in total failure, or were there lasting achievements hidden from the glare of publicity? It would be interesting to see how the leaders of the uprising themselves looked at the events.

Kanu Sanyal, in his Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement, felt that there was a tendency to depend on spontaneity. He gave a vivid picture of the mode of operations, in a self-critical vein:

> When all the peasants were armed and jotedars and other vested interests fled the village, we assumed that the base area had been created. We took the armed people for an armed force. . . . In one or two cases, we formed small bands and snatched away guns from the jotedars; but we did not make this the main form of struggle and assumed instead that a guerrilla force would be built upon the spontaneity of the masses. In many case we were impressed by the militant attitude of vagabonds, and made them leaders for building up an armed force. . . .

Sanyal also felt that after the ousting of the landlords, the task of redistribution of land was often neglected; "attacking a jotedar's house instead of occupying the land" often became the main aim. He also referred in this connection to "bitter conflicts between the poor peasant and the middle peasant in cases of land redistribution." He then admitted that one of the main defects was the failure to establish a "powerful mass base".

As for the military weakness of the movement, Sanyal admitted:

> In the first phase of the struggle, we underrated the strength of the enemy and thought in the old way. . . . Sometimes we hoped that the United Front would not go so far or would find it difficult to go that far (against us) . . . we kept the people unprepared in the face of the enemy; in other words, we did not prepare the people for what the enemy could unleash upon them.

He summed up this aspect of the movement with the words: "In short, we can say that absolute ignorance from the military point of view, was a reason for the temporary defeat of our struggle."[12]

Still later, in 1974, Kanu Sanyal came out with an interesting disclosure which threw a new light on the differences in the approaches between Charu Mazumdar on the one hand, and Kanu Sanyal on the other. In an article on the Naxalbari movement, Kanu Sanyal described the mood of the Communists of North Bengal in 1967 in these words:

> It is true the rebellion by the Communists of Darjeeling district and by the leading cadres of Calcutta and a few other districts against the CPI (M) leadership was right, and by firmly standing in support of the peasants' uprising of Naxalbari, they demonstrated a genuine Communist attitude. But among the vast rank and file, although there was a lot of confusion about the revisionist character of the CPI (M) leadership, the mood for a rebellion was absent. In this complex situation it was possible to sustain the Naxalbari peasants' struggle without inviting large-scale losses, and it was also possible to undertake a correct programme of advancing in a disciplined manner from utter chaos for a new movement in the future.

Kanu Sanyal then added:

> At this stage [during the uprising in 1967] the cadres of the Naxalbari area put forward the proposal to negotiate with the United Front Government. But Charu Mazumdar did not agree to the proposal and said that to speak of talks with the United Front Government amounted to revisionism. The Naxalbari peasants' uprising could not be sustained in this complex situation because of lack of subjective preparations, tactical mistakes, and absence of flexibility of policy while adhering firmly to principles.[13]

A slightly different assessment is available from *Naxalbarir Shiksha* — the report prepared by Charu Mazumdar's pupils who had been propagating his politics among the peasantry from 1965.

Objecting to the view that ignorance of military science was the reason for the temporary defeat they held that such a view "put military matters over politics". Asserting that "military experience can be attained through revolutionary movements", they held that by "forgetting the primary rule of guerrilla warfare*

* "To transform guerrilla units waging guerrilla warfare into regular forces waging mobile warfare, two conditions are necessary — an increase in numbers and an improvement in quality." Mao Tse-tung: Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War against Japan: May 1938 (*Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 79).

— development from smaller units to larger ones, from weaker units to stronger ones through battles, on one's own initiative — we suffered instead from the revisionist idea of building a large people's army right from the beginning." They described how the small groups of activists recruited from the peasants who had been propagating the politics of the eight documents, dissolved when there was a high tide in the struggle.

> This was but natural. . . . We however should have built new groups with the newer activists who had come through the struggle. But because of long-standing revisionist ideas, we did not realize the significance of forming groups. As a result, we were reduced to trailing behind a spontaneous movement.

Moreover, they admitted that they had depended on the middle peasants on most of the occasions. ". . . by passing off the words and wishes of the middle peasant as those of the people, we had blunted the fighting consciousness of the poor and landless peasants. . . ."

It appears from both Sanyal's report and *Naxalbarir Shiksha* that the concept of guerrilla warfare was absent in the minds of the rebels. The failure to sustain a base area, even temporarily, can also be traced to this deficiency.

The Consequences

Although the uprising at Naxalbari lasted for only a few months it left a far-reaching impact on the entire agrarian scene throughout India. It was like the premeditated throw of a pebble bringing forth a series of ripples in the water. It was also a watershed in the Indian Communist movement. It helped to expose the political failure of the parliamentary Leftists in power, and unrolled a process of rethinking among the Communist ranks.

To begin with, the uprising, which was widely publicized, inspired the rural poor in other parts of the country to launch militant struggles. For the first time, a cobwebbed, discreetly shadowed corner of the country's socio-economic life — the world of the landless labourers and poor peasants fast being reduced to the landless — leapt into life, illuminated with a fierce light that showed the raw deal meted out to them behind all the sanctimonious gibberish of 'land reforms' during the last 20 years.

Want of understanding in some cases, and a deliberate glossing over in some other cases, of the real motives of the Naxalbari rebels, led the bourgeois press and even sympathizers of the uprising to underplay the aim of seizure of power and represent it instead as a militant form of the land grab movement. The refusal of the Naxalbari leaders to accept the concessions made by the United Front Government (re: Harekrishna Konar's promise to distribute land through official agencies in consultation with the peasants' committees), should have indicated to both the press and the sympathizers that the purpose behind the movement was other than mere land redistribution. Thanks to the propaganda

however, the trend of forcible occupation of land by the landless (there were a few sporadic such cases in 1966), spread like wildfire all over India, after the Naxalbari events.

Figures compiled by the Union Home Ministry from September 1967 till the middle of 1969 indicate that incidents of occupation of land, demonstrations demanding land for the landless, agitations for increase in wages of agricultural workers, forcible harvesting of crops by evicted sharecroppers, protest actions against higher taxes, among other things, showed a marked increase. During the period, there were five such incidents in Assam, eight in Andhra Pradesh, nine in Bihar, seven in Kerala, seven in Madhya Pradesh, five in Maharashtra, five in Punjab, three in Rajasthan, three in Tamilnadu, five in Uttar Pradesh, and one each in Manipur, Gujarat and Tripura.[14] While some were spontaneous, in many places they were organized by the CPI (M), CPI and SSP (Sanyukta Socialist Party). The gravity of the situation could be gauged from the fact that at one stage, the then Union Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan had to warn that the 'green revolution' might not remain green for long.[15]

It cannot be denied that the spate of militant struggles for land that swept the country in 1967-69 was inspired primarily by the reports from Naxalbari, however distorted they might have been when they reached the poor and landless peasants elsewhere. A vague idea that the downtrodden had arisen and were fighting against their oppressors in some corner of the country was enough to rouse the dormant militancy of the poor and landless peasants. It is quite possible also that the CPI, CPI (M) and other Leftist parties who led their land-grab struggles, with the indirect blessings of the Government, sought to keep them ignorant about the more fundamental struggle for seizure of power in Naxalbari, and let them remain contented with a few plots of land or some maunds of grain.

While the immediate and spontaneous response to the Naxalbari uprising was the eruption of militant peasants' struggles on limited economic demands, a more long-range and predetermined sequel was the number of organized struggles led by the Communist revolutionaries in selected areas of the country with the ultimate political aim of seizure of power. It was this political aim — at which the Naxalbari rebels directed their movement — which posed a challenge to the Leftists in office. The CPI (M) ministers of West Bengal, as noted earlier, sought to persuade the dissidents to accept an economic solution within the existing political framework. When it failed they had to retreat into the role of helpless spectators of police persecution of their comrades in Naxalbari, trying at the same time to dissociate themselves from the police action.

But one cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds at the same time. It was difficult for the CPI (M) to reconcile verbal sympathies for the Naxalbari rebels with continuation in a Government that persecuted them. Its growing helplessness seemed to make it more peevish. Since it could neither expel Ajoy Mukherjee from the Government, nor could it quit the Government, it chose to expel from its party the leaders of the Naxalbari movement and their supporters in Calcutta.

To justify their stand, the CPI (M) leaders even went to the extent of associating the dissident movement with counter-revolutionary motives. Thus, the party's

Politbureau resolution of 20 June 1967, said: ". . . There are reasons to believe that certain agent-provocateurs have penetrated into these groups and taking advantage of the line and actions of the groups . . . to help the reactionary elements and the Central Government." This seemed to set the tune for the party's attitude towards all extremist dissidents. At one stage, the West Bengal CPI (M) Secretary, Promode Das Gupta even branded them as CIA agents, thus closing all doors to any future reconciliation. It is not that the CPI (M) leaders had any illusion about solving once for all the problems of the landless within the prevailing administrative framework. Harekrishna Konar's various statements indicate his awareness of the futility of such a task in the face of constitutional and legal obstacles.[16] Yet, when the Naxalbari rebels proved to be recalcitrant, the CPI (M) leaders behaved in a fashion to suggest that the rebels had repaid with black ingratitude the benevolence of the United Front Government.

The growing differences on the basic political aim were becoming apparent. The CPI (M) believed in a sort of 'reformist coup d'état' — seizure of power within the prevailing system, and maintenance of the power with the help of those very forces — the bureaucracy, the police — which the Communist revolutionaries sought to destroy.

The first physical clash between the CPI (M) followers and the dissidents occurred in Calcutta on 28 June 1967. This was to be a prelude to one of the bloodiest chapters of fratricide in the history of the Indian Communist movement. The clash was over the occupation of the office of the CPI (M)'s Bengali weekly *Desh-Hitaishi*, on Dharmatala Street, in Calcutta. The weekly was then under the control of Sushital Ray Chowdhury, who had been publishing through it, articles in support of the Naxalbari struggle. When he and his followers refused to hand over the weekly to the followers of the official party line, the Calcutta district leaders of the CPI (M) sent their men, who clashed with the occupants of the office, and finally, being better equipped and more in numbers, succeeded in ousting the dissidents.

The CPI (M) leaders at the beginning of the Naxalbari struggle, took to task Ajoy Mukherjee for treating the events as a "simple law and order problem." (Re: West Bengal State Secretariat's statement on 30 May.) But at a later stage, they themselves became guilty of the same crime when they took the law in their own hands to punish their erstwhile comrades.

After being removed from the control of the party's official weekly, the CPI (M) dissidents brought out a new weekly in Bengali, *Deshabrati*, which was to remain their mouthpiece throughout the ideological battle between the CPI (M) leaders and the dissidents, and was to be converted into the official organ of the CPI (M-L) after its formation.

Sometime later the dissidents began to bring out an English monthly, *Liberation*, also edited by Sushital Ray Chowdhury, from Calcutta.

These two journals continued to disseminate the revolutionary doctrine, reproduce articles from Chinese Communist magazines, and carry reports of struggles.

Meanwhile, the ideological impact of Naxalbari was being felt in other parts of the country. In June 1967, a 'Red Flag movement' with a clear pro-Peking

bias, was reported to have begun in Tamil Nadu. The president of the organization was a former Communist, K. Sundaram, and its secretary was an ex-Army man known as Nenjil Selvam. The movement's thesis was simple: only those who believed in violent revolution were true Marxists. It also brought out a weekly journal, called *Chengodi* [Red Flag] in Tamil.[17]

Many such groups and journals sprang up during the period. Although they had a short life span, and some even had dubious origins, their popularity indicated the new mood that gripped the middle class intellectuals of the country. A general belief in armed revolution as the only way to get rid of the country's ills was in the air, and the possibility of its drawing near was suggested by the Naxalbari uprising.

Dissensions in the CPI (M)

Dissension among the CPI (M) ranks was not confined to West Bengal for long. Dissidents in other States drew encouragement from the almost ceaseless Chinese comments made during this period through editorials in the *People's Daily* and Radio Peking broadcasts, which lauded the Naxalbari uprising, attacked the CPI (M) for having participated in the United Front Governments, highlighted the Chinese Communist Party's differences with the CPI (M) regarding the characterization of the Indian ruling class, and stressed the need for a new revolutionary Communist Party to organize the masses for an armed insurrection.

Concerned over the rising rebellion among its ranks, the CPI (M) Central Committee finally met at Madurai in August 1967, and adopted resolutions rejecting the Chinese assessment of the Indian ruling class as consisting of comprador-bureaucratic capitalists, and its suggestion for armed struggle to capture power from them. It maintained that the Government of India was a "bourgeois-landlord Government, led by the big bourgeoisie." But it admitted that the Government was "depending and relying on foreign monopoly capital to come to its aid" and warned that if the policies of "compromise and collaboration" were not resisted and defeated, "the danger of neo-colonialism stares us in the face." Explaining its reasons for opposition to the tactical line of armed struggle as suggested by the Chinese Communists, the CPI (M) Central Committee pointed out that "the single biggest weakness in the whole situation is the deplorable state of the political level of the proletariat, its class consciousness, its organization, and its unity with the other toiling masses, and particularly the peasantry." It quoted an earlier resolution warning the party ranks against any attempt to overrate or exaggerate the degree of the depth and maturity of the crisis, as

> it would lead us to grossly underestimate the immense reserves still at the disposal of the big bourgeois-landlord classes, the room to manoeuvre which they still possess on the one hand and to do everything in their power to disrupt and suppress the popular struggles on the other to perpetuate their exploiting class rule.[18]

It therefore reiterated its decision to "achieve the establishment of People's Democracy and socialist transformation through peaceful means", and stressing at the same time the need to be ever vigilant and prepared to meet all exigencies, if the ruling classes resorted to violence.[19]

In short, therefore, although the CPI (M) refused to call the Indian state neo-colonial, it admitted the existence of trends moving in that direction. But it was not prepared to take to arms because of the fear of being crushed by the superior military force of the state. As an interim measure therefore it chose to remain in the United Front Governments of West Bengal and Kerala and use them as 'instruments of struggle' to win more people and allies for the People's Democratic Revolution of the future. In this connection, it promised to fight ruthlessly

> . . . certain sectarian, dogmatic and adventurist tendencies manifesting in some Party circles. They express in the form of challenging the Party Programme, in opposing the political-tactical line of the Party, in advancing infantile and adventurist forms of struggle, and finally in the open defiance of Party norms and forms, its discipline and democratic centralism.[20]

The Madurai resolution helped the CPI (M) to clarify the official stand on several outstanding issues of dispute like attitude to China, the character of the State and the tactical line to be adopted. They also helped the critics of the official line to come out openly with their alternative thesis.

One of the first CPI (M) leaders to openly defy the official line after the Madurai session of the Central Committee, was Shiv Kumar Misra, Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh State Committee of the CPI (M). After returning from Madurai, he issued a circular dated 8 September 1967, accusing the West Bengal Government of resorting to brutal terror to suppress the Naxalbari peasant revolutionaries and urged "revolutionaries inside the Party and outside" to come forward to defend Naxalbari. In another circular, he asked State Committee members to revolt against the wrong and reformist leadership of the party. Another important CPI (M) leader from Uttar Pradesh, Srinarayan Tewary, a member of the State Committee, resigned stating in his letter: "It is useless for this party to exist. . . . It is satisfactory to note that the lowest ranks of the party have risen in revolt against the revisionist policy of this leadership." Both Misra and Tewary were soon expelled from the CPI (M).

Reports of dissensions also came pouring in from other State units, such as Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Bihar. The dissenters were also gradually chiselling into shape an alternative programme of action, and veered round to Charu Mazumdar's views regarding the character of the Indian ruling class and the stage of the Indian revolution.

Charu Mazumdar, meanwhile, came out with an article denouncing the Madurai session of the CPI (M), and stressing the need to build up a revolutionary party. He accused the CPI (M) Central Committee of having ignored the revival of capitalism in the Soviet Union and still continuing to regard it as a member of the socialist camp. By this, he felt, the CPI (M) was placing itself against China in the international ideological struggle. Regarding the domestic scene, Charu Mazumdar held that the party had exaggerated the

strength of the Indian reactionary forces by pretending that the Congress still had considerable political influence, and was thus trying to pacify the Indian people. By agreeing to remain in the United Front Governments, the party had pitted itself against the agrarian revolution, which was also proved by its intense hatred for the militant peasant revolutionaries of Naxalbari.[10]

". . . the Central Committee meeting at Madurai", Charu Mazumdar said, "has dragged down the party to the level of a revisionist bourgeois party." He therefore urged every revolutionary party member to defy the centralism of the Central Committee. "It is only by severing all ties with this C.C. and its evil ideology that a revolutionary party can grow and develop." The first task towards the building of a revolutionary party was the "propagation and dissemination of revolutionary ideology." Charu Mazumdar reiterated in this connection the ideology of agrarian revolution — establishment of rural bases through armed peasants' struggles under proletarian leadership and encirclement of urban centres through their expansion.

Warning the Communist revolutionaries against the persistence of old revisionist ideas among them, often reflected in "their lack of confidence in the people's strength and exaggeration of the enemy's strength", Charu Mazumdar reminded them:

> It is only through long-drawn hard struggles that the revolution in India can be brought to its successful culmination, since this vast country of fifty-crore strong population happens to be a strong base of the imperialist powers and the mainstay of Soviet revisionism.
>
> In this situation [he warned] to think of an easy victory is nothing but wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, he was sure of victory, because of the vast area and the huge population which once roused, would defeat all the might of the enemies. But to rouse them it was necessary to have a revolutionary party which alone could lead the Indian revolution to success, he added.

The Coordination Committee

In the middle of November, a conference was held in Calcutta, called by the All-India Naxalbari Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samity — an organization which grew from the Naxalbari Peasants Struggle Aid Committee, and was acting then as a sort of liaison body between different Maoist groups both outside and inside the CPI (M). Among those who attended the conference were Shiv Kumar Misra from Uttar Pradesh, Satyanarain Sinha from Bihar, and Charu Mazumdar from West Bengal. The conference was not merely a reflection of the rebellion against the "revisionist" politics of the CPI (M) leadership, but also of that against the party's bureaucratic tendencies which had stifled free discussions. Participants recalled Mao Tsetung's call for "bombarding the headquarters" during the Cultural Revolution to draw a parallel with their then fight against the CPI (M) bureaucracy.

The conference decided to form an All-India Coordination Committee of revolutionaries in the CPI (M). A provisional committee was formed to

consolidate all revolutionaries in India and step by step go ahead towards the formation of a revolutionary party. In a declaration issued by the conference, it was stated:

> Comrades must have noted that revolutionary peasant struggles are now breaking out or going to break out in various parts of the country. It is an imperative revolutionary duty on our part as the vanguard of the working class to develop and lead these struggles as far as possible. With that end in view all revolutionary elements inside and outside the Party working rather in isolation today in different parts of the country and on different fronts of mass struggle must coordinate their activities and unite their forces to build up a revolutionary party guided by Marxism-Leninism, the Thought of Mao Tsetung. After the final and decisive betrayal at Madurai, the situation brooks no delay. Hence, this urgent need for coordination.[21]

Soon after the Calcutta conference, the dissidents of the Bihar CPI (M) unit met and in an appeal to the "revolutionary comrades in CPI (M)" said:

> The Naxalbari struggle proved in practice that the situation in India is ripe for unleashing revolutionary political struggles and developing rural base areas. It... proved that the time has come when revolutionaries in the CPI (M) should unite and coordinate their efforts for rebuilding the Communist Party so as to give proper leadership to these struggles.[22]

At a similar gathering in Tamilnadu nine out of 14 district committees of the CPI (M) met in March 1968, and set up a State Coordination Committee. They announced:

> Nothing can be more illusory than to think of capturing state power from the bourgeois rulers without smashing their state machine with which they suppress the toiling masses. There is no shortcut to smash this instrument of class rule. The general line of Indian Revolutionaries is that of Naxalbari, which is guided by the Thought of Mao Tsetung.[23]

Thus, within a few months of their defeat in Naxalbari, the basis of a new party was laid down by the rebels. It indicated that although the uprising was militarily a failure, its significance derived from the new light it shed on the country's socio-economic problems and the new turn it gave to Communist politics. When Charu Mazumdar said in the autumn of 1967: "... hundreds of Naxalbaris are smouldering in India.... Naxalbari has not died and will never die", [9] he was not day-dreaming.

Notes

1. Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement*, 1969.
2. Kanu Sanyal's article in *Purba Taranga*, 1 May 1974.

3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *People's Democracy*, 21 May 1967.
6. Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement*, 1969.
7. See map of the area given after p. 400.
8. Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement*, 1969.
9. *Naxalbari Shiksha.*
10. Asit Bhattacharya, 'Naxalbari Reportage II', in *Mainstream*, 15 July 1967.
11. *People's Democracy*, 25 June 1967.
12. Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement*, 1969.
13. Kany Sanyal's article in *Purba Tarange*, 1 May 1974.
14. Based on figures given in 'The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions', an unpublished monograph prepared by the Research and Policy Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.
15. *Patriot*, 29 November 1969.
16. "It is impossible to do anything revolutionary under the limitations imposed by the present Constitution and existing legislatures. But it is certainly possible to introduce some progressive measures that would bring immediate relief to the peasantry." — Harekrishna Konar in an interview to *Ganashakti*, the CPI (M) Bengali weekly, published in *People's Democracy*, 21 May 1967.
17. *The Statesman*, 25 June 1967.
18. 'Divergent Views Between Our Party and the CPC on Certain Fundamental Issues' and 'Political and Economic Developments in the Country and our Tasks.' — Resolutions adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) at Madurai, 18-27 August 1967.
19. Programme of the CPI (M).
20. 'Draft for the Ideological Discussion' — Adopted by the CPI (M) Central Committee at Madurai, 18-27 August 1967.
21. *Liberation*, December 1967.
22. *Ibid*, February 1968.
23. *Ibid*, May 1968.

5 Srikakulam

Memories of past oppression die slowly. . . .
Verrier Elwin, 'Maria Murder and Suicide'

Srikakulam — Will it be the Yenan of India?
Charu Mazumdar, March 1969

The Background

On 31 October 1967, at a place called Levidi, in the Parvatipuram Agency area situated on the north-eastern tip of Andhra Pradesh, two tribal peasants were shot dead by agents of landlords. This incident was the culmination of a long history of struggles by the Jatapu and the Savara tribal peoples — and also constituted a watershed for the future course of that history.

The Parvatipuram Agency is in the Srikakulam district and covers about 300 square miles. Among the inhabitants are the Savaras, who live mostly on the jungle-clad hills and slopes of the region, and are known as Girijans. The forest used to play a central role in their life. They lived on 'podu' or what was known as shifting cultivation, under which patches of forest were felled and burnt followed by the sowing of seeds with a digging stick or bill-hook, the ashes being used as fertilizer. As the rains came, the seeds began to sprout, and the harvest was gathered as each crop ripened. The peasants went on adding a fresh patch of forest every year, while a patch which had been used several times was left free to recuperate. At one time, the Savaras used to enjoy wide rights and privileges over the produce of the forests — fruits, roots, leaves, and wood. But recently enacted rules for the preservation of forests, prevented their access to minor forest produce for domestic purposes or firewood for selling.

As in the rest of rural India, here also the grip of the moneylenders was strong over the poor tribals, many of whom were reduced to landless labourers, deprived of their rights on the forests, and forced to earn poor wages. A survey made sometime ago revealed that

> the moneylender-cum-landlord, who knows well the ignorance of the tribals, offers only Rs. 60 for transplanting, reaping and depositing the crop in the stipulated place, for labour required on a 5-acre plot, which would earn not less than Rs. 300 in other areas. Besides, the payment in this area is made in grain. Here too, the landlords use fraudulent measures, giving much less than is agreed to. . . . And the tribal finds it difficult to get even one square meal after a day's toil.[1]

While the local administration strictly enforced the rules for forest preservation depriving the Savaras of their traditional share of fuel wood from the forests and upsetting their social life, it was equally indifferent to the need for implementing those laws that sought to safeguard, in however small ways, the tribals' interests. Thus, a correspondent of a pro-establishment newspaper visiting the area in 1969, had this to say: "By the Debt Relief Regulation of 1959, the Government undertook to pay off the debts incurred by the Girijans from the plains moneylenders and afford the relief. Till last week, not a single Girijan had his debt cleared by Government." He further found that in spite of the Government's promise to distribute among the Girijans land occupied illegally by non-tribal landlords, "distribution of banjar land is a headache problem and revenue officials are subjected to political pressures and strong local influences that inhibit quick decisions." "Some of the landlords have also brought strong political pressures on the district administration to go slow in matters where the Government's declared policy is in favour of the Girijans."[2]

Some Communist teachers began to work among the Savaras and Jatapus from the 1950s. It should be recalled in this connection that the hill tribes of this area had a tradition of militancy. From 1922 to 1924, in the Vishakhapatnam Agency hills adjoining Srikakulam, the tribals waged a war against the British, under the leadership of Alluri Sitaramaraju — a young man who took to arms moved by the sufferings of the tribals at the hands of the police, became an expert strategist and guerrilla leader who eluded the police for a long time, and finally surrendered, to be shot by the police.

The group of Communist teachers who mobilized the Girijans for a movement against illegal exactions by the landlords and for better wages, was led by Vempatapu Satyanarayana. Short-statured and with a tough physique, Satyanarayana settled down among the hill tribals, married two women from the Savaru and Jatapu tribes, and was known and respected as "Gappa Guru" or chief guru among the tribal population. His popularity and anti-landlord militancy drew the wrath of the feudal interests upon him, and there were several attempts to murder him between 1960 and 1967. Under Satyanarayana's leadership, a Girijan Sangham — an organization to fight for the demands of the tribals — was set up. Its first conference was held at Mondemkhal in January 1961. Agitations for better wages were launched in Srikakulam. The tribals were also joined by another section of the local population — the Pydis, who were originally weavers but had been ousted by non-tribal tradesmen from the profession.

What began as a movement for better wages and against harassment by forest officials, soon developed into a militant struggle for the right to harvest on waste lands. With the split in the Communist Party in 1964, Satyanarayana and his followers, including his comrade-in-arms, Adibhatla Kailasam, another teacher working among the tribal peasants in the Parvatipuram Agency, threw

in their lot with the newly founded CPI (M). In the same year, they led a movement encouraging the tribals to cut the forest timber in defiance of official rules.

The police were quick to retaliate. Thousands of Girijans were arrested, and a number of cases were instituted against the poor tribals. Confirming the collusion between the political parties supporting the landlords and the police, a newspaper reporter commented: "... they [the political parties] relied and continued to rely heavily on the police to keep the tribals in check."[3]

But neither the high-handedness of the landlords, nor police intimidation could stem the tide of the Girijans' militancy. By 1967, the landlords were forced to increase the wages of the labourers, and concede two-third share of crops to the sharecroppers. These achievements strengthened the tribals' faith in political organization.

The administration was however getting panicky. After the Naxalbari uprising in May-June 1967, the authorities, presumably apprehending similar troubles in the Parvatipuram Agency, stepped up police patrol. The landlords, under police protection, sought to reassert themselves and resumed their atrocities on the Girijans. Following clashes, Section 144 was declared in 200 villages from 24 July to 25 August 1967.

Against this background the 31 October incident occurred at Levidi. A Girijan conference was being held on that date at Mondemkhal. Some Girijans on their way to the conference were assaulted by the landlords at Levidi. As a clash developed between the Girijans and the landlords' men, the latter brought out their guns and shot dead two peasants.

At that time, the CPI (M) came out in support of the Girijans and condemned the shooting, little realizing that the movement would soon go out of its control and take a new turn, which it would be compelled to oppose. N. Prasadarao, a member of the CPI (M) Central Committee, accompanied by Kolla Venkayya, another CPI (M) leader who was to join the dissidents later, visited the area soon after the incident. He said in a report that the Girijan movement was for the restoration of land illegally occupied by non-tribal sahukars and landlords, and was being suppressed by the feudal interests. He was also at pains to stress the non-violent nature of the movement. "Taking a determined stand against forced labour, etc., it [the movement] grew into a peaceful agitation in a short time." Repudiating Congress allegations of Girijan violence, he challenged Congressmen to "exhibit one girijan army-man from this tribal area."[4]

Communist revolutionaries working among the Girijans, who were still then members of the CPI (M), alleged later that because of the 'treachery' of the Andhra Pradesh CPI (M) leadership, the Girijan peasants at the time could not be armed and led along the path of guerrilla struggle to fight police repression. "The task of arming the party for the armed struggle", a report from the Communist revolutionaries of Srikakulam said, "and taking necessary steps for reshaping the organization to suit the needs should have been completed by the time the repression on us started." Referring to the mood of the peasantry after the Levidi incident, the report said:

> ... the Girijan peasantry rose in a big way against the enemy classes with great indignation. This was a new turning-point in our movement. The peasantry began to seize the properties of landlords, the Girijan Sangham began to solve all the problems in the villages. Wherever the people moved, they moved heroically with arms in their hands.[5]

By early 1968, police activities increased. Special police camps were opened in the area. In March of that year, hundreds of villages were raided and several Girijan peasants arrested. In Burjaguda village in Seetampet Agency, peasants were attacked by hired hoodlums of the landlords. In Peddakarja village under Sivinpet police station, there was a police firing on the Girijans. According to the report quoted earlier, "The people of Peddakarja village took up arms. They resisted the raiding police bands openly. The police resorted to the use of machine guns also. In this fight two of our comrades lost lives."[6]

In September 1968, the judgment of the Levidi case came out. Those accused of killing the tribals were acquitted. This judgment, along with the police repression, hardened the attitude of the tribals and their Communist leaders. The Communist revolutionaries could explain to the peasants that in the prevailing socio-economic set up the legal system was a manifestation of the interests of the ruling feudal class. To free themselves therefore, all government offices along with the landlords and moneylenders whom they protected, would have to be done away with. "... if we have to carry on our activity on any people's issue, our struggle should be higher in form aimed at seizing political power."[7]

From this realization, it was only a step forward for the Srikakulam Communists to adopt the strategy of the Communists of Naxalbari. They thought of getting in touch with the All-India Coordination Committee.

The 'Ideological Polemics'

It would be worthwhile at this point to examine the theoretical differences that had cropped up in the meantime between a section of the Andhra State Committee and the Central Committee of the CPI (M) — the 'ideological polemics' referred to earlier in the report from Srikakulam.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Central Committee of the party adopted a draft for ideological discussion at Madurai in August 1967. This draft was to be finally adopted at an all-Indian plenum of the party scheduled to be held in 1968. Some of the CPI (M) leaders of Andhra Pradesh, like T. Nagi Reddy, Kolla Venkayya, Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao and Chandra Pulla Reddy, who were opposed to the Madurai document, prepared two alternative drafts for the plenum meeting of the Andhra State Committee of the CPI (M) in January 1968, at Palakole, in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

The Andhra State Plenum rejected the official draft (i.e. the Central Committee draft) for ideological discussion, by an overwhelming majority. The Andhra dissidents' documents emphasized that the big bourgeois which ruled the country was of a comprador-bureaucratic nature — a characterization which the CPI (M)

was not prepared to accept. According to the Andhra Communists, the "comprador character consists mainly in its trading nature in addition to industrial aspect, bureaucratic nature in its growth and the main help of the State machine." The Andhra Communists attacked particularly the section in the Madurai document entitled 'On the Forms of Transition to Socialism'. They held that in the parliamentary system there would be no significant change in the power of the ruling classes, due to a change in the parties in power, and attacked the CPI (M) Central Committee's decision to join coalition governments as evidence of "nothing but preaching the peaceful parliamentary path." On the international plane, they rejected the Central Committee's plea for Soviet-Chinese united action, on the ground that the Soviet Union was a revisionist power.

The Andhra dissidents came out more forthrightly at the all-Indian plenum of the CPI (M) at Burdwan in April 1968. One of them was reported to have complained:

> Practice has revealed that instead of using the non-Congress governments as instruments of struggle, subordination of the mass struggles to the preservation of the United Front Governments has dominated the whole of our work.... Instead of raising the masses to the necessity of resisting this repression and preparing the party ideologically, politically and organizationally to meet the repression, we are restricting the scope, and the intensification of the mass struggle all in the name of preserving the legality of the party in the face of repression. It is in the context of these rising struggles, that the Naxalbari peasant struggle has acquired a symbolic importance for the path of the Indian revolution.

Referring to the Andhra Communists' own recent experience in peasants' movements in Srikakulam, Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam, he said: "The question of resistance to these repressions, the forms of resistance have come to the forefront."[8]

But the Andhra dissidents' alternative proposals were rejected by 210 against 22 votes at the Burdwan plenum. They however continued to propagate their views in Andhra Pradesh, and in June 1968, the CPI (M) leadership retaliated by expelling Nagi Reddy, Pulla Reddy, D. Venkateswara Rao and Kolla Venkayya. The expelled leaders convened a meeting of their followers at Vijayawada on 29 and 30 June 1968, and declared themselves as Commmunist Revolutionaries and formed a nine-member State Coordination Committee with Nagi Reddy as the convenor.

By July, the State Coordination Committee had fixed its programme of action. It proclaimed that Mao's Thoughts were the Marxism-Leninism of the present epoch, stressed the need for intensifying the ideological struggle against the CPI (M) neo-revisionists, and declared that it would shortly launch another movement in Telengana on the lines of the previous Telengana armed struggle of 1948-51. These points were made by Nagi Reddy, at a press conference at Hyderabad on 2 August 1968. In pursuance of this policy, Warangal and Khammam districts in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh were chosen as areas of operation.

Thus, two centres of armed struggles developed in Andhra Pradesh — one in Srikakulam in the north-east, the other covering the Telengana region; the former led by Vempatapu Satyanarayana, and the latter by Nagi Reddy. Differences developed between the two groups of leaders right from the beginning, as indicated by the report from Srikakulam published later. The Srikakulam Communist revolutionaries soon began to ignore Nagi Reddy's State Coordination Committee, and act on their own.

The Differences

The differences were mainly regarding the tactics to be followed. While Nagi Reddy and his followers were in favour of a combination of legal and extra-legal struggles, and believed in a prolonged preparation, mainly through economic struggles, before launching a full-scale armed movement, the Communist Revolutionaries of Srikakulam, inspired by the armed struggle of Naxalbari and their experience in their own district, were in favour of immediate resort to arms. As the 'Report on Srikakulam' was to say later about the State Coordination Committee leaders: "While simply opposing the neo-revisionist theories these people hesitated to break with them." Nagi Reddy and his followers appeared to be against hasty methods, like the immediate formation of a separate party, hoping that many in the CPI (M) could be won over through patient persuasion over some length of time.

There were also differences regarding the mode of conducting the Srikakulam struggle. According to the 'Report on Srikakulam', the State Coordination Committee leaders suggested: "There is slackness in government repression. We have the opportunity to go to the masses on the issues like wage-rates, problems of farm-labourers, food, etc." The Srikakulam Communists retorted: "If the people have to take up any activity it is linked with the question whether we resist the police or not. Whatever the problem we may take up, the police will be present. So our programme of action should be in such a way as to resist the police."[9]

The Srikakulam district organization of the Communist Revolutionaries was politically invigorated at this time by the active cooperation provided by a group of young Communist medical and engineering graduates. The latter had set up a committee in Guntur, south of Srikakulam in the coastal area. Most of these graduates were in their early or late twenties, and had travelled to Marxism via the violent agitation demanding the location of a steel plant in Andhra Pradesh in November 1966. Although purely on a regional demand, and supported by the Congress also, the agitation was a sort of training for the young militants in acts of sabotage, and opened their eyes to the power of violence to paralyse State administration for days together. The Naxalbari uprising and the ideological differences within the CPI (M) helped them a step forward in the political understanding of the reality, and they gradually turned to the politics of agrarian revolution. Medical students in 1968 formed the Naxalbari Sangibhaba Committee in Guntur. Youth leaders like Dr. Bhashkara Rao established liaison with Vempatapu Satyanarayna. The Guntur group took upon itself the responsibility of recruiting cadres from the middle class youth to

send them among the Girijans of Srikakulam, and to buy weapons for the Agency hill areas.

Differences between the Srikakulam Communists and the State Coordination Committee persisted. Soon, the former began to think in a "completely independent manner". "We ventured to start contacts with the All-India Coordination Committee."[10]

The Srikakulam Communists sent Chowdhury Tejeswara Rao to Calcutta in October 1968, for talks with Charu Mazumdar. After Tejeswara Rao's return in the same month, the newly formed Srikakulam District Coordination Committee convened a secret meeting at Boddapadu where it was resolved that an armed struggle should be launched immediately. Guerrilla 'dalams' [or squads] were formed in the plains as well as in the Agency hills of Srikakulam, with the ultimate object of capturing power by overthrowing the existing Government and establishing a people's democratic dictatorship led by the proletariat.

Guerrilla Struggles in Srikakulam

The guerrilla movement was heralded by the forcible cutting of crops from the land of a rich landlord at Garudabhadra, near Boddapadu in the plains area, on 24 November 1968. More significant was the action in the hill tracts the next day, when in Pedagottili village of the Parvatipuram Agency area, about 250 Girijans from several villages, armed with bows, arrows and spears, under the leadership of Vempatapu Satyanarayana, raided the house of a notorious landlord-cum-moneylender Teegala Narasimhulu — and took possession of his hoarded paddy, rice, other foodgrains and property worth about Rs. 20,000. They also seized documents, promissory notes and other records that had bound the tribal peasants all these years to the landlord through loans.

Prior to the action of 25 November guerrilla squads with militant cadres were formed.

> We conducted training camps for guerrilla squads for giving them knowledge in the handling of the gun. Police raids were usually continuing in the villages while the training camps were going on. Yet we could fulfil this programme successfully.

According to the Srikakulam leaders, the action of 25 November, created a

> great stir and panic in the hearts of the Agency landlords. . . . More special armed police were sent to the Agency area. They began to intensify the repression already started in a much bigger way. We began to resist the police bands on the lines of guerrilla struggle.[11]

Several similar actions followed, the most important being the incident at Balleruguda in the Aviri area of the Agency. On 20 December 1968, the police entered the Aviri area to make raids. "The resistance put up by the people", the 'Report on Srikakulam' said;

> shook the whole mountains. People saw the movements of the police in the morning on that day. People climbed up the mountains and called on the people from the villages nearby. Nearly five hundred people rallied to Balleruguda. The police and landlords nearing about two hundred went there. The people took up bows and arrows, stones and one country-made gun. They did not allow the police to enter the village. The police turned back. Then the people pursued them and attacked them with bows and arrows and stones. While the police were climbing down, the people shot at them and hurled down stones. . . . Two police constables and one Circle Inspector were killed in the battle.

Later the Communist leaders explained to the villagers that positional war with a militarily superior police force would be disadvantageous, and convinced them of the need for guerrilla methods. As a result, when on 23 December 1968, the police again entered the Aviri area, ". . . the people hiding themselves, waited for the enemy. One police constable fell on the ground when one of our guerrillas shot with the gun. . . ." The leaders claimed: "With this, our struggle entered the guerrilla stage."[12] In December that year, an article prepared by the 'Srikakulam comrades' appearing in *Liberation*, claimed that the Girijan struggle embraced 700 to 800 square miles of the district.

The achievements of the rebels were confirmed by the pro-Establishment papers also. Thus, *The Statesman* Special Representative in South India, after a visit to the area, wrote:

> Today, the State Government's writ does not run in scores of isolated mountain hamlets where tribesmen are being trained in guerrilla tactics and use of arms. . . . Last month the tribesmen were again on the warpath and there were at least four raids on landlords in different parts of the tribal reserve, in which property worth about Rs. 50,000 was stated to have been looted. . . . Special armed police had moved in the area last February, but their daily operations have not only failed to check the revolt but seemed to have helped the Marxists further alienate tribesmen from the Government. . . . The failure of the police to round up the ringleaders despite eight months of intensive hunt in the mountains is clear enough proof of tribal support for them.[13]

Another newspaper described the pattern of offensive followed by the rebels during the period. According to the report, a police party going to a village on a raid was surrounded by hundreds of armed Girijans in Pulipatti hills in the Parvatipuram Agency. Occupying five hill tops, they pushed boulders, pelted stones, discharged arrows and even shot from guns at the police party, killing four policemen including an officer. The police had to fire 19 rounds to come out from the ambush.[14] Another report from Hyderabad, despatched by the PTI, dated 6 January 1969, referred to an incident in Dakshini village in the Agency area two days before, when armed Girijans set ablaze a number of houses, including a school building, which were being used as police camps. They attacked the police with guns, as the latter were coming out from the burning houses.

Extension to Orissa

The guerrilla movement spilled over the neighbouring State of Orissa within a

very short time. The jungles of Koraput district in Orissa were adjacent to the Srikakulam Agency areas. Bound on the extreme north by Kalahandi and Raipur districts, on the west by Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, on the south by Khammam, East Godavari, and Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, and on the east by Srikakulam and Ganjam districts, Koraput resembles the letter Y in form.

The undulating forest hills provided an ideal sanctuary for the Communist guerrillas. According to a senior police official of the area: "It could, if the Naxalite plans succeeded, be turned into an impregnable fortress."[15]

The Communist revolutionaries first confined their activities in the Gunupur sub-division of Koraput, to make it into a part of the intended liberated zone in continuation of Srikakulam. The two most important leaders of the organization in the area were D.B.M. Patnaik and Nagabhushan Patnaik, both lawyers of the Gunupur Bar. These lawyers had won the confidence of the tribal peasants of the area, by defending them free in legal disputes. On 23 January 1969, a secret meeting was held at D.B.M. Patnaik's house at Kapilapur in Gunupur to chalk out a programme. It was decided that assaults would be launched on the rich persons of Gunupur sub-division. To propagate the revolutionary ideology, secret meetings were held in the villages of the area between 24 and 28 January. The peasants were told that the landlords and moneylenders were two-legged tigers sucking their blood for generations, and deserved punishment.

But this initial plan of the Orissa Communist revolutionaries failed. The police got information, and rushed to Gunupur with a company of Orissa military police on 28 January. Mopping-up operations and a series of raids on the houses of some of the activists revealed arms and ammunition, and according to the police they recovered plans to form a tribal belt from Koraput to Gunupur, as a part of a liberation zone from the South to West Bengal through the hilly terrains of western Orissa.

After the failure of the first plan, Subbarao Panigrahi, a famous poet of Andhra Pradesh, who originally came from Orissa, took up the responsibility of extending the movement to the border villages of Orissa.[16] The Orissa Chief Minister, R.N. Singh Deo, told the Orissa State Assembly on 28 February 1969, that 32 active "Naxalite-type cells" were operating in the jungle areas of Gunupur. Slogans like "Long Live Mao Tsetung!" and "Naxalbari Zindabad" in English and Oriya had appeared on the walls of Gunupur town. Besides, properties of landlords were being seized by the rebels and attacks on police parties had increased.

While the movement was gaining momentum in the north-eastern part of Andhra Pradesh, in the west in the Telengana region, the political trends among the dissident Communists were taking a different shape.

Nagi Reddy

The Andhra Pradesh State Coordination Committee headed by Nagi Reddy and concentrating in the Telengana region, got itself affiliated to the All-India

Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries in October 1968. But relations between Nagi Reddy's group on the one hand, and the AICCCR and the Srikakulam District Coordination Committee on the other, were, as indicated earlier, plagued by mutual suspicion.

For one thing, the Telengana Communist revolutionaries veered round to Charu Mazumdar's position much later than the Srikakulam Communists. In fact, when the Communist revolutionaries of West Bengal were being expelled by the CPI (M) Central leadership, Pulla Reddy, in a letter to the party's Central Committee on 8 August 1967, had supported the official stand, stating:

> We must demarcate ourselves, and demarcate sharply, from the Communist Party of China on this question — especially on the character of the Government, estimation of the present situation, participation in the non-Congress Governments, their [the Chinese] tactless statements on Naxalbari peasant struggles, etc. and firmly stand on the position of the party programme.[17]

A few days later, in a bid to dissociate the Girijans' struggle in Srikakulam from that in Naxalbari, Nagi Reddy was reported to have warned that "all trials to scare the people with stories that Marxist Communists were out to start another so-called Naxalbari, could not divert the people's attention from the real problems of the Girijans of Srikakulam district."[18]

According to later disclosures, the Srikakulam Communists wanted to break away from the CPI (M) much earlier, but the Andhra Pradesh State leadership under Nagi Reddy's control, while accepting the policies and theories of the Srikakulam group, were not yet prepared for an immediate organizational break because of several other comrades who were still hesitant and needed to be won over gradually.[19] In fact, the Telengana Communists launched armed struggle much later — in April 1969 — since they believed that armed actions should be built on the basis of a long protracted mass movement and preparations. Besides, the AICCCR shared the misgivings of the Srikakulam District Committee regarding Nagi Reddy, as the latter had not promptly resigned from the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly as directed by the AICCCR. It also accused Reddy's State Coordination Committee of being disloyal to the Chinese Communist Party.

The differences embraced tactical questions also, as was evident in the course of conducting the struggles in Telengana and Srikakulam. The Telengana group could not pull on with the AICCCR for long. On 7 February 1969, the AICCCR disaffiliated the Andhra State Coordination Committee, but maintained that its members would be treated as "friends and comrades" outside the AICCCR, and relations with them would be "non-antagonistic". While the AICCCR decided to form a new Communist Party, the disaffiliated Andhra State Coordination Committee maintained their separate existence and formulated an independent programme. After this the Srikakulam movement and the Telengana movement followed their own separate courses. Both however succeeded in developing revolutionary bases and sustaining them for some time against ruthless police persecution, each demonstrating in their own way the advantages and limitations of their respective tactics.

The movement in Srikakulam meanwhile, forged ahead. An article in *Liberation* of February 1969, claimed that from 20 December 1968 till 30 January 1969, "no less than 29 reactionary armed policemen, including one circle-inspector and one sub-inspector were killed in action by heroic Girijan guerrillas." The same article added that the "immediate aims of the revolutionary armed struggle" were "to take away forcibly from the feudal landlords hoarded foodgrains and other necessities of life; to refuse to repay debts and loans; and to overthrow the feudal landlords."

It was clear that the basic plan was to clear the villages of feudal landlords and moneylenders by killing the notorious ones and terrorizing the rest either into submission or into exile, and then reorganize the social life and administration, by redistribution of land among the tribal landless peasants, and by cancelling their old debts.

Achievements in Srikakulam

The insurgents succeeded to a large extent in achieving their aims. By June 1969, the State Government had to declare Parvatipuram, Pathapatnam and Palakonda as "disturbed areas". A report from Srikakulam in *Liberation* claimed that 'red political power' had come to stay in 300 villages. Terrified landlords had fled, guerrillas and self-defence squads were protecting the villages. The administration was being run by the Ryotanga Sangrama Samithi. It was stated also that the Samithi would soon undertake the work of distributing the land recovered from the landlords.

The Centre was also perturbed. According to a Union Home Ministry report, from January 1968 to August 1969, there were 86 "violent incidents" in the Srikakulam area. The report expressed concern over the fact that while initially the Girijans were "armed with bows and arrows, spears, simple explosives and muzzle-loading guns", they were now acquiring "better arms". It further stated: "The insurgents in Srikakulam area have established further contacts with extremists in the adjoining districts of Orissa."[20] The Central Government authorities crudely drew a line between the Girijans' desire for liberation, and its fulfilment, gladly enough admitting the former, so long as it did not result in the latter. They acknowledged the Girijans' trials and tribulations in voluminous reports every year; but decided to suppress the Girijans when the latter sought to change the system responsible for their plight.

An important development in the meantime was Charu Mazumdar's visit to the area in March 1969. He attended a meeting of Communist revolutionaries from various parts of the State — from Nalgonda, Warangal and Adilabad districts in Telengana and from the districts of Rayalaseema. They constituted the new Andhra State Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, the old one having been dissaffiliated erlier by the AICCCR. In a moving written article, Charu Mazumdar had narrated his experience in the meeting. He referred to the determination of the Andhra revolutionaries to fight opportunism and build up a party based on the thought of Mao Tsetung. Describing those who attended the meeting, he said:

> They are not well known or renowned men, nor men who enjoy an all-India fame. But they are men who are young, men who dream. They dream of liberating the tens of crores of peasants who have been exploited and oppressed through the ages, they dream of liberating them from the yoke of exploitation, from the murky depths of ignorance, from grinding poverty, from hunger.

He at the same time added:

> ... these comrades are no idle day dreamers. They are not thinking of winning victory the easy way. They realise that attacks are sure to come and that they may even have to suffer serious set-backs.

Charu Mazumdar was highly impressed by the dedication and revolutionary zeal of the fighters.

> It was after a long time, [he said] that I attended a meeting of Communist revolutionaries where they took the vow to sell their property and donate the entire sum thus obtained to the Party fund. ... The slogan: 'Let us build Srikakulams in different areas to support the Srikakulam struggle', instantly changed the atmosphere of the meeting. The very air in the room seemed to have been electrified. All the comrades present resolutely declared that they would build Srikakulam in Telengana, in the districts of Rayalaseema, in the whole of Andhra. At that exhilarating moment, it was only one thought that kept occurring to me: the heroic revolutionaries of Telengana did not lay down their lives in vain; for it is here that India's Yenan will be created.[20]

It was becoming evident that both in its intensity and in its expansiveness, the movement in Srikakulam was on a higher plane than what happened in Naxalbari. But that apart, it marked an important phase from the theoretical point of view, in the evolution of tactics in the Communist revolutionary movement. For, in Srikakulam for the first time, initial stage of guerrilla warfare came to be marked by what was known as "annihilation of class enemies" — the most controversial aspect of Charu Mazumdar's theories.

'Annihilation of Class Enemies'

The history of the Srikakulam movement here will have to be interrupted with a necessary digression. It calls for a detailed discussion of the tactics of 'annihilation of class enemies' often mistaken for by the uninitiated, and distorted by Charu Mazumdar's enemies, as the simple assassination of an individual — as an end in itself. It should be remembered in this connection that the tactics developed in the course of the struggle, as a part of a broader programme, and in Charu Mazumdar's writings it was accentuated or played down according to the needs of the situation.

Among his available writings, the first ever mention of the word 'annihilation' occurs in Document No. 5 ('What Possibilities are being indicated by the year 1965?'), where he urges Communist revolutionaries to teach the working class and the revolutionary people that they should not "attack merely for the sake of

attacking; but finish him whom they attack. For, if they merely attack, the reactionary machinery will take revenge; but if they annihilate, every one of the government's repressive machinery will get scared." A more affirmative role is assigned to annihilation in an article written in September 1969, where Charu Mazumdar said:

> Our experience also shows that we cannot wage guerrilla warfare simply by acquiring sophisticated weapons; we must be able to bring up men armed with Mao Tsetung's thought to wield those weapons. Unless we are able to bring up such men the weapons will be of no use. And such men are brought up only through revolutionary class struggle, only through annihilating the class enemies.[24]

By then annihilation of class enemies had already become the accepted tactics of the Communist revolutionaries in Srikakulam. The 'Report on Srikakulam' drafted in February 1969, said:

> Recently we concentrated our main efforts on annihilating the class enemies. With the annihilation of a landlord on 6th February 1969, and serious injury inflicted on a police agent, there is consternation among the enemies. Surging enthusiasm is seen on the people's faces.[21]

Charu Mazumdar elaborated on the wider significance of 'annihilation' or 'khatam', as it came to be known, in another article written in December that year. Explaining how to start guerrilla warfare, he said that it could be

> started only by liquidating the feudal classes in the countryside. And this campaign for the annihilation of the class enemy can be carried out only by inspiring the poor and landless peasants with the politics of establishing the political power of the peasants in the countryside by destroying the domination of the feudal classes.[28]

It should be noted that in the campaign for annihilation of class enemies also, Charu Mazumdar asked his followers to rely on the poor and landless peasants, since "it is the poor and landless peasants who have the most intense hatred against the feudal class." He was against any isolated annihilation of a village class enemy by a petty bourgeois outsider — a practice which was often resorted to by impetuous revolutionaries. Class struggles in the countryside take various forms and pass through different stages — ranging from a movement against eviction of sharecroppers to forcible occupation of land. But according to Charu Mazumdar, "annihilation of class enemies is the higher form of class struggle". At the same time, it was the "primary stage of the guerrilla struggle."[28]

How could the annihilation of a class enemy be the primary stage of guerrilla warfare? Envisaging the gradual transformation of the struggle, from a single annihilation to full-scale guerrilla warfare, Charu Mazumdar said:

> Without class struggle — without the battle of annihilation — the doors of the initiative of the poor peasant masses can never be opened, the political consciousness of the fighters can never be increased, the new man never emerges, the people's army can never be built. Only through carrying on the class struggle, the battle of annihilation, can the new man be born — the man who will defy death, and will be free of all self-interests. And with this contempt for death, he will move up to the enemy, will snatch away his rifle, will avenge the murder of martyrs, and in this way the people's army will emerge.[36]

Beyond the rhetoric of idealization is an acute sense of the peasant psychology. Charu Mazumdar did not look at the annihilation of a village landlord or moneylender as an ordinary act of murder, ending with the temporary satisfaction of the oppressed peasant's desire for vengeance. "The annihilation of a class enemy," he said, "does not only mean liquidating an individual, but also means liquidating the political, economic and social authority of the class enemy."[28]

He was obviously looking at the act through the eyes of the downtrodden landless peasant, humiliated and persecuted for years. When such a peasant goes to annihilate his class enemy, it is like detonating the really big bomb inside him, the one charged with a whole lifetime of oppression and mortification unpunished. How measureless, how terrifying destructive, is the everlastingly contained anger which how explodes! With the annihilation, he discovers that his hated oppressor whom he has been reared up to fear all these years, is after all a colossus with the feet of clay. When he finds that with the annihilation of one landlord, the others flee the village in panic, or surrender to him seeking mercy, he suddenly discovers his power — the power to turn upside down the traditional rural set-up, the power to rule.

But the landless peasant is not allowed to remain content with this first act, since it inaugurates a chain of events, which compels him to move forward.

> Once an area is liberted from the clutches of class enemies (some are annihilated while some others flee) the repressive state machinery is deprived of its eyes and ears, making it impossible for the police to know who is a guerrilla and who is not, and who is tilling his own land and who tills that of the jotedars . . . [It is now that the] political units . . . raise through a whispering campaign, the broad economic slogan: 'Seize the crops of the class enemy'. This works like a magic in the villages, and even the most backward peasant comes forward and joins the battle. Thus, the fight for the seizure of political power initiated by a few advanced sections is nourished by the tremendous initiative of the masses and mass actions. . .[29]

The state does not however sit idly. The police soon raid the village. This calls for a more intense guerrilla planning. "Small guerrilla squads will annihilate class enemies as well as attack the reactionary police force. This annihilation campaign will bring in the hands of the guerrilla force the modern rifles of the reactionary state machinery."[39] The guerrilla squads will now expand and at one stage the people's liberation army will emerge.[50]

Thus, the tactic of "annihilation" or "khatam" was not an end in itself according to Charu Mazumdar. It is as it were, the first stroke to push the snowball into motion, to make it roll and grow. But it is the vital stroke, since it releases the revolutionary momentum of the peasant. In fact, Charu Mazumdar was alert enough to point out to his followers at one stage: "The fundamental point of

class struggle is the seizure of political power. The fundamental point of class struggle is not annihilation; though annihilation is a higher form of class struggle."[74]

Developments in Srikakulam

Let us return to the examination of the Srikakulam movement.

Charu Mazumdar's emphasis on 'annihilation of class enemies' found expression both in the raids carried out by the guerrillas and in the setting-up of people's courts which meted out justice to the 'enemies of the people'. The raids, it is important to note, were carried out by a squad of armed guerrillas often accompanied by hundreds of villagers. They were mostly directed against big landlords, moneylenders, police informers, and sometimes police camps.

In the early phase of the movement — end of 1968 and beginning of 1969 — the landlords were let off after the seizure of their properties. The people's courts were also usually lenient towards the guilty brought before them for trial. Thus, the May 1969 issue of *Liberation* carried a report of a trial of a usurer in a people's court in Srikakulam, which gives us an idea of the prevalent mood among the rebels then. The usurer came to a village to collect his dues from the peasants who used to repay him against the cash loans taken by them in the form of bundles of tamarinds. The usurer this time demanded more than what was his due, and was promptly arrested by the peasants and taken to the 'base area' for trial. He later confessed before the people's court that he was guilty of exploiting the peasants, promised to obey the rules imposed by the Ryotanga Sangrama Samithi and gave the ring on his finger to the Samithi and cancelled all the debts the peasants owed him.

Similarly, on 12 May 1969, a policeman belonging to the Andhra Pradesh police was captured by a village self-defence squad in the village Kakithada, after having been found harassing the people. He was let off by the people's court after he had confessed his crimes and pleaded for pardon and given Rs. 20 to the party fund.[22]

But such generosity was being wasted on a ruthless enemy and at a terrible cost. It was like nursing back a dying snake to life, only to be bitten by it. As Karl Marx said about the heroic Communards of Paris: "If they are defeated only their 'good nature' will be to blame."[23] So also the Communist revolutionaries of Srikakulam had to pay a heavy price for their magnanimity towards an enemy which was unworthy of it.

On 27 May 1969, Panchadi Krishnamurthy, a brilliant young Communist who had joined the guerrillas of Srikakulam and was seeking to extend the armed struggle to the plains, was arrested along with six other guerrillas from the Sompeta railway station. Panchadi and his comrades, the majority of whom were between 18 and 20 years old, were unarmed when they were caught. They were bound and taken to a place near Jalantarkota village, where they were shot dead.[24] This was the pattern which came to be followed soon by the Andhra police in dealing with the Communist rebels. After such shootings, the police used to give out the story that the victims were killed in "encounters".

The incident, which was for all practical purposes a cold-blooded murder without any trial, set the Communist revolutionaries of Srikakulam rethinking. The petty bourgeois organizers particularly, who till now might have had some scruples regarding the tactics of annihilation, were quick to realize that there was no scope for waiting and allowing the enemy to attack and only then take on a defensive position; they had to be on the offensive, if power was to be seized. And offensive, they came to believe, could only be launched by annihilation of class enemies. They said: "There is no room for mercy and kindness towards the class enemy in this great struggle. No quarter shall be given".[25]

In fact, the police and the administration had been rallying their strength for quite some time to exterminate the rebels, and the 27 May onslaught was the first step in that direction. They decided on a plan of "encirclement and suppression" at a meeting in May, which was attended by both State and Central Government officials, including the State's Chief Secretary and the Inspector General of Police. The Centre rushed its Central Reserve Police battalions to help the State administration. On 30 July 1969, the Vijaywada edition of *Indian Express* was reporting: "The Orissa police are cooperating with Andhra police in combing operations. Raids are being conducted jointly by Orissa and Andhra police in the border areas of Parvatipuram Agency." On 12 August the same paper was reporting: "An inter-State conference of top officials of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh held this evening decided to have a close liaison between the States for effective control of Naxalite activities in border areas."

All these suggest that the activities of the Communist revolutionaries were extending further west, besides spilling over to Orissa. The Madhya Pradesh police had to be called in because of the increasing guerrilla actions in the districts of Warangal and Khammam in Telengana, which are on the borders of the Madhya Pradesh district of Bastar, a hilly forest area, inhabited by Savaras, Marias and other landless tribals. The *Liberation* of May 1969, reported:

> On the night of 17 April, peasant guerrillas, led by Communist revolutionaries, raided the houses of several landlords in five villages in the Purgampad taluk of Khammam district in Telengana, and seized firearms and gold and silver ornaments. . . . On the night of 23 April, peasant guerrillas led by Communist revolutionaries raided the houses of landlords in two villages in Khammam district and carried away from one of the villages cash and ornaments worth Rs. one lakh.

It should be noted however that in Telengana, not all the actions were carried out by revolutionaries owing allegiance to the AICCCR. Nagi Reddy's group had in the meantime managed to organize a movement in the area.

Nagi Reddy's 'Immediate Programme'

After being disaffiliated by the AICCCR, Nagi Reddy's group met at Vijaywada in the third week of February 1969. They refuted the allegations made against them by the AICCCR, and expressed the view that the AICCCR's decision to

disaffiliate them would only harm the people's struggle and hamper well coordinated activities by Communist revolutionaries throughout the country which was the need of the hour.

Nagi Reddy resigned from the Assembly on 11 March 1969. Things began to move at a rapid pace after this. A State convention of the revolutionary Communists led by Nagi Reddy was believed to have been held in a lime garden within the panchayat limits of Khambhampadu village in the coastal district of Krishna from 10 to 12 April 1969. The conference, which was held in secrecy, adopted a draft resolution on armed struggle and issued an 'Immediate Programme' which came to be known in Telegu as 'Takshana Karyakramam.'

The 'Immediate Programme' described the Indian state as one run by the comprador bourgeoisie and as bureaucratic in nature. Stressing the need to abolish the state and feudalism, it envisaged the setting up of a new democratic state. For this purpose, it was necessary to build up a revolutionary Communist Party, liberate the villages, encircle towns and gradually liberate the urban areas. Coming to Andhra Pradesh, the programme acknowledged that in the Agency area of Srikakulam district, "the people's movement has reached the stage of armed struggle", while in the "forest areas of Warangal and Khammam districts, the people's movement has transgressed the general legal limits". Stressing the need for land redistribution as 'an immediate issue', the programme warned: "As we get down into implementing our programme of agricultural revolution (i.e. redistribution of land), attacks from Government armed police should start. With this our resistance would have to be unleashed too".

It is here where Nagi Reddy's group differed from Charu Mazumdar's strategy. Charu Mazumdar stressed the need for offensive against the class enemy, seizure of political power being the main objective. In his strategy, land redistribution followed annihilation of landlords. Nagi Reddy's immediate programme on the other hand, emphasized the importance of agrarian reform or land redistribution first, and resistance to the landlords and police later. As Nagi Reddy explained later, in the course of an interview with a correspondent: "For us it is a matter of resistance, for them [i.e. Charu Mazumdar's followers] it is a matter of offensive".[26]

Sometime later, in a critique of the 'Immediate Programme', carried by *Liberation*, the question was posed: "If the class enemy survives and has the power to come back, how long can the peasants retain the land distributed to him? He would be dispossessed of the land in no time by the usurer-jotedar." The writer took to task Nagi Reddy and his followers for not propagating the necessity of "creating liberated areas in the countryside by annihilating the class enemy, by depriving the police of their 'eyes' and 'ears', and by getting rid of the local tyrants".[27]

The 'Immediate Programme' also assigned a role to the urban working class:

> It is wrong to leave towns, though forest areas assume importance in action. The help of the working class in townships is needed for the armed struggle we lead. We need the help of transport workers and other workers for other technical help for the goods supply.

Asserting that forests and mountains constituted the 'key areas' because of the weakness of the enemy in those areas and the favourable terrain which could help the guerrillas to resist and conduct a protracted armed struggle, the 'Immediate Programme' laid down the task of "militant rallying of the people against landlords till the end of summer", land redistribution with the first rains, and its coordination with guerrilla struggle, since the "rainy season provides the favourable climate for resistance movement".

In spite of the announced differences in strategy and tactics, in practice however, the followers of Nagi Reddy acted in a way which was hardly different from what was happening at Srikakulam. Thus, immediately after the secret April State convention, a few of them met at Vijaywada, and decided that actions should be started in Pagideru and Palwancha regions of Khammam. According to the police, landlords in Pagideru were attacked on 16 April 1969, and four firearms were snatched away from them by the rebels. On 23 April, a landlord in Gummadidoddi village in the Mulugu area, was attacked and property worth Rs. 100,000 was seized.[28]

Soon several guerrilla 'dalams' were formed in Warangal, Khammam, Karimnagar and East Godavari. The dalams consisted of seven or eight members, a leader, a deputy leader and a propagandist, and were armed with firearms and other weapons. The entire zone of operations was divided into three area committees: the Mulugu Area Committee, the Khammam Area Committee and the Rampachodavaram Agency Area Committee. The first two Area Committees met on 30 April and 1 May 1969, and decided among other things that

> All the officers of forest department functioning in the forest areas should be chased away and lands fit for cultivation should be occupied; . . . tyrant landlords should be chased away from the villages and if necessary should be killed and their properties taken over and distributed to the people; . . . To implement this programme the police atrocities should be resisted and in possible places the police should be ambushed and attacked. CID constables visiting villages to secure information should be killed.[29]

In pursuance of this decision, landlords, moneylenders and police were killed in Khammam, Karimnagar and Warangal, police stations were attacked and weapons seized by the rebels. Along with these, lands in East Godavari, West Godavari, Anantapur and Kurnool were occupied. Seizure of foodgrains and burning of records and documents — features which marked the movement in Srikakulam — were some of the highlights of the uprising in this area too.

The Area of Operations

It is necessary at this stage to indicate the geographical and socio-economic conditions of the area where Nagi Reddy's group operated, under the name of the Revolutionary Communist Committee (RCC) of Andhra Pradesh.

The area is almost a long stretch of forest spread over Warangal and Khammam,

bounded in the north by the River Godavari and the Bastar hills which divide Andhra Pradesh from Madhya Pradesh. Except for one metalled road running from Warangal to Etorinagaram (in the Mulugu taluka), on the bank of the Godavari, there were at that time hardly any roads worth the name. The villages which were hugged by the forests were inhabited by Koya and Gond tribals.

As in other parts of India, here also the tribal peasants were in economic distress, depending on loans and bound by credit to moneylenders. How the influx of outsiders led to the alienation of lands originally owned by the tribals is described thus by one commentator.

> The method usually adopted was to bribe the village officials who in turn used to induce the tribal to lease out his land to one of the migrant families. . . . The tribal, already a poor producer of foodgrains, with his best land leased, used to produce very little grain on his own. Within a year or two he was indebted to the lessee, who, in collusion with the village officials, would take over the land at a very low price. Yet another method was to obtain the thumb impression of the tribal under the guise that a lease deed was the document in question, but which in fact was the sale deed. The tribal could not afford to pick up a dispute or even prevent the entry of the cheat. If he did so, he was beaten up and bribes shut up the mouths of revenue and police officials.[30]

During the Communist insurrection in Telengana in 1946-51, the forests in this area served as a retreat for the Communist rebels after the entry of the Indian army into the plains in mid-1948. The Koya tribals helped the Communists and joined the guerrilla squads to fight the Indian army.[31]

Thus, both the existing economic frustration of the tribal peasants and their past militancy encouraged the leaders of the RCC to concentrate their activities in this area. In its 'Immediate Programme' the RCC stated:

> In the East Godavari District Agency area, the Agency peasants are coming forward to . . . take over the lands unjustly occupied by the landlords. . . . Landlords, sahukars, and forest officers have in various forms been exploiting common people and Girijans living in forests and mountainous areas. The people in these areas have consciously been revolting against the Government and exploiting classes.

Here, therefore, the RCC felt, were people ready to take up arms.

Although political differences divided the RCC and the AICCCR, the police refused to distinguish the followers of the one from those of the other. It ruthlessly persecuted both the groups, presumably because of the common effect generated by their actions — panic among the rural feudal interests and members of the State's repressive force. Although the AICCCR and the RCC were critical of each other, in 1969, the contradictions still seemed to be 'non-antagonistic', and had not assumed the bitter mutual hostility that was to envelop both the groups at a later stage.

Thus, the RCC's 'Immediate Programme' said:

> We must take lessons from experience of Srikakulam movement. We must also see that mistakes committed there in course of the movement are not repeated. . . . We must not only support Srikakulam armed struggle but also attack the slanderous propaganda being conducted against it by the enemy classes.

The AICCCR group also was ready to acknowledge the actions of the RCC. Thus a report in *Liberation* of July 1969 stated:

> In Mulugu taluk of Warangal, some actions have been organized of revolutionary cadres who do not yet belong to our party. In Kothagudam and Bhadrachalam taluks of Khammam, many guerrilla actions have taken place under the leadership of our party as well as under the leadership of other revolutionary cadres.

By the end of 1969, altogether 15 districts of Andhra Pradesh were affected by Communist revolutionary activities. The situation in Srikakulam and Warangal districts was so grave that the areas affected were declared as 'disturbed areas'. According to Government statistics, the Communist revolutionaries killed 48 people, including landlords, moneylenders, merchants, forest officers and policemen, made 99 attacks on the police and abducted 15 people. In all the abduction cases, according to the Government, the victims were tried in the 'Praja Courts' [people's courts], and punishments ranging from death to penalty of fine were imposed on them. Besides, a large quantity of guns, ammunitions and explosives were also seized by the rebels, during the raids. Both from its power of sustenance and its improvement of organization, it was evident that the movement in Andhra Pradesh in 1968-69, was a more resounding and clear-throated echo of the short-lived thunder of Naxalbari. While Naxalbari branded the words "Armed agrarian revolution" on the sign-post of the Indian revolution, Srikakulam engraved on it the sign — "Guerrilla warfare" to indicate the turn of the road.

Notes

1. N.Y. Naidu, 'Tribal Revolt in Parvatipuram Agency' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 November 1972.
2. 'Why Naxalites Flourish in Srikakulam', *Hindu*, 8 August 1969.
3. *The Statesman*, 11 and 12 April 1968.
4. *People's Democracy*, 19 November 1967.
5. 'Report on Srikakulam', *Liberation*, May 1969.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Liberation*, May 1968.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *The Statesman*, 14 December 1968.
14. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 December 1968.
15. K.N. Misra, S.I. of Police, DIB Koraput's article in *Orissa Police Magazine*, January 1972.

16. *Cf.* "The police are searching for one Subbarao Panigrahi, alleged to be operating on both sides of the Orissa-Andhra border" — From a report in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 December 1968.
17. Quoted in *People's Democracy*, 23 June 1968.
18. Quoted in *People's Democracy*, 17 March 1968.
19. *Liberation*, May 1969.
20. 'The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions' — an unpublished monograph prepared by the Research and Policy Division of the Home Ministry, Govt. of India, pp. 8-9
21. *Liberation*, May 1969.
22. *Liberation*, June 1969.
23. Karl Marx's letter to Ludwig Kugelmann, 12 April 1871. (From Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On the Paris Commune*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, p. 284).
24. From the declaration of the CPI (M-L), Srikakulam District Organisation Committee, of 15 June 1969 and quoted in *Liberation*, August 1969.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *The Statesman*, 6 August 1969.
27. *Liberation*, October 1969.
28. From the chargesheet in the conspiracy case against T. Nagi Reddy and others in the court of the Special First Class Magistrate, Hyderabad.
29. From a document quoted in the above chargesheet.
30. C. Chandrasekhar Rao, 'An Area in Andhra Pradesh-II', *Frontier*, 29 July 1972.
31. *See* Chapter 3.

6 The Birth of a Party

If there is to be revolution, there must be a revolutionary party.
Mao Tsetung: 'Revolutionary Forces of the World Unite, Fight Against Imperialist Aggression!' November 1948; 'Selected Works', Vol. IV, p. 284.

With great pride and boundless joy I wish to announce today at this meeting that we have formed a genuine Communist Party — the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).
— Kanu Sanyal in his speech at the rally in Calcutta Maidan on 1 May 1969.

Revolutionary Activities on the Eve of the Formation of the CPI (M-L)

With the uprising at Naxalbari in 1967, and the achievements of the Communist revolutionaries at Srikakulam in 1968-69, it can be said that opposition to the Indian ruling class moved into the sphere of organized armed struggle to overthrow the Government and seize power, as different from the violent sporadic activities, agitations, electoral pressures or other constitutional and semi-constitutional means to change Government policies, which had been the rule since 1947. The only exception during these two decades was the brief insurrectionary phase of the Communist Party of India in 1948-51.

The growing realization among the Communist ranks of the need for armed struggle and establishing rural bases, was not confined, after Naxalbari, to ideological debates leading to expulsion or voluntary dissociation from the parliamentary CPI (M), some instances of which have already been referred to at the end of Chapter 4. The propensity towards armed offensive expressed itself in various activities in the countryside in different parts of India during 1968. The activities ranged from organized armed resistance by the peasants under Communist leadership against landlords and police, to military actions by petty bourgeois intelligentsia to rouse the peasantry.

It must be noted also in this connection that all these activities were taking place in the background of the defeat of the ruling Congress party and the emergence of heterogeneous coalition governments in several States of India.

The parliamentary reformists — Communists of the CPI and CPI (M), Social-democrats like the Samyukta Socialist Party and Praja Socialist Party, ex-Congressmen organized in the Bharatiya Kranti Dal — were too complacent after having been catapulted to power, to understand the urgent need to bring about more changes as seen from the bottom of society. Particularly impatient were those at the very bottom of the social order — the masses of poor and landless peasants. The 1967 change in the balance of power in many States, had its impact on the poor and landless peasants. The impact was not confined to West Bengal or non-Congress-ruled States only. The background to the uprising in Srikakulam and Telengana in 1968-69 has already been discussed in the previous chapter. As suggested by the figures collected by the Union Home Ministry, (see Chapter 4), instances of forcible occupation of land, harvesting of crops, fight for better wages and reprisals against landlords and moneylenders showed a marked increase almost all over India during this period.

The militancy of the peasantry in some parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab was elevated by groups of Communist revolutionaries to a political plane, and directed towards the aim of seizure of power. While these groups were attached to the Calcutta-based All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, led by Charu Mazumdar, there were other revolutionary factions outside the AICCCR, who were also active.

Thus, on 24 November 1968, in Wynad in Kerala a group of armed men with lethal weapons and explosives attacked a police wireless station at Pulpalli. Two days before there had been a similar raid on a police station at Tellicherry in the same area. The forests of the area provided the leaders of the group who led the raid with shelter and they could elude the police till the beginning of December, when one of the Communists, 23-year old Ajitha along with her mother, Mandakini Narayanan, were arrested by the police from the jungle hide-out. Ajitha's father, Kunnikal Narayanan, was a well-known Communist intellectual, who along with a few ex-teachers, also members of the CPI (M), led the raids on the police stations. The peasants of the Pulpalli area, belonging to the Kurichian tribal community, were being dispossessed of their land by outsiders, and the Communist rebels hoped that by organizing such raids, the peasants could be mobilized into a militant insurrectionary movement.

The Wynad incidents, besides illuminating the individual heroism of Kunnikal Narayanan, his family and the band of middle class intellectuals who followed him, indicated the urge for revolutionary actions among the CPI (M) ranks, growingly exasperated with the parliamentary path pursued by their leaders. But the action of the Wynad Communists was more of a symbolic gesture than a part of a well laid out long-term programme. The reaction of the AICCCR to the incidents was interesting. In an interview with a correspondent of *The Statesman* in Siliguri on 27 November 1969, Charu Mazumdar was reported to have said that no purpose would be served by attacking police stations in an isolated manner. But on the same day, he wrote an article which appeared in *Deshabrati*, entitled 'We salute the peasant revolutionaries of Kerala' where he asserted: 'The incidents in Kerala have once more demonstrated what an excellent revolutionary situation prevails in India today." He found in the incidents

"heroism and courage displayed by the impoverished masses of Kerala", and added that the "heroic peasant revolutionaries of Kerala are carrying forward the glorious tradition of the peasant struggles of Punnapra and Vayllur [sic]..."* Soon after this, the New China News Agency in a despatch expressed its admiration for the revolutionaries who had "valiantly attacked the police wireless station at Pulpalli."

Later, a note in *Liberation* of January 1969, explained the AICCCR's attitude to the Wynad incidents and similar happenings in other parts of India in the following way:

> In different parts of India, the people are rising in revolt against the present regime of oppression and exploitation. It is not likely that all these revolts will be led by Communist revolutionaries or that they will suffer from no weakness. It is only natural that mistakes will be committed even in struggles waged under the leadership of the Communist revolutionaries. But how should we assess a struggle? In assessing it, we should be guided by two criteria: (i) Which class or classes have taken part in it? (ii) Who are the targets against whom it is directed?

While Kunnikal Narayanan's group sought an alternative in direct actions, there were other groups stumbling along in different directions seeking a way out. More than 40% of the CPI (M) ranks in Andhra Pradesh had either swung in Nagi Reddy's favour or followed the AICCCR. The party's General Secretary speaking at Palghat on 21 November 1968 admitted that 10,000 people had left the party, of whom 7,000 came from Andhra Pradesh. In Kerala, several groups were plodding their separate ways. There was one group at Trichur and Calicut, another at Trivandrum headed by the city's ex-Mayor, Kosal Ramdas, and yet a third led by K.P.R. Gopalan, trying to coordinate the activities of all these groups. Their main activities during this period however consisted of publishing Maoist articles in different journals. In Tamilnadu, in the Tanjavoor area where there was a large number of agricultural labourers, an agitation was organized for greater share in harvest and higher wages. This led to clashes between the labourers and the police in November 1968, and several peasants were arrested. In the Mushabari block of Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, and in the Palia area of Lakhimpur district of Uttar Pradesh, poor and landless peasants were soon to move forward beyond these agitations on economic demands, and under the leadership of the AICCCR, were to wage a political struggle.

Ideological Campaign by the Communist Revolutionaries

Throughout this period, 1968-69, the Communist revolutionaries organized in the AICCCR propagated their ideology through *Deshabrati* and *Liberation*.

* The struggles at Punnapra and Vayullur in 1946, were actually led by the working class. In the then Travancore-Cochin State, workers clashed with reserve troops at Punnapra on 24 October 1946. There were casualties on both sides. On 27 October, the troops in retaliation gunned down 300 people at Vayullur.

The year 1968 saw extensive revolutionary activities in different parts of India — Telengana and Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, Mushahari in Bihar and Lakhimpur in Uttar Pradesh. This led Charu Mazumdar in October that year to state: "In India today, we must combine revolutionary theory with revolutionary practice," and urged his followers to build up areas of peasants' struggle in the countryside.

He asked his followers who were to organize the movement in the countryside to analyze the classes in the rural areas, and reminded them of the degrees of differences in militancy even within a class: "There are both an advanced section and a backward section among the revolutionary classes also. The advanced section can quickly grasp the revolutionary principles while the backward section naturally requires more time to assimilate political propaganda.* That is why economic struggles against the feudal class are necessary, not only in the present, but in the future also. That is why the movement to seize the crops is necessary.... If we do not try to develop a broad movement of the peasants and to draw the broad masses into the movement, the politics of seizure of power will naturally take a longer time to get firmly rooted in the consciousness of the peasant masses."[17] Thus, the need to organize struggles on economic demands was recognized not only during the stage of building up the revolutionary propaganda, but also after the formation of the party — a point so often ignored by Charu Mazumdar in the course of the movement.

Finally, in March 1969, Charu Mazumdar gave the call that it was time to form the party. Referring to the development of the peasant struggles in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, he said:

> Revolutionary authority cannot grow if we depend only on the local initiative for developing all these struggles along the same path and to a higher stage.... For taking these struggles forward it is necessary to build an all-India party and a centre recognized by all revolutionaries.

Emphasizing the need for centralized discipline, he held that the AICCCR had outlived its purpose.

Earlier, the AICCCR after having disaffiliated Nagi Reddy's group, had adopted a resolution on 8 February 1969, stating:

> ... the experience of the last one year has also made it amply clear that the political and organisational needs of the fast developing revolutionary struggles can no longer be adequately met by the Coordination Committee. These struggles have to be led and coordinated in an effective manner.... The party should immediately be

* "The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level of the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements." (Mao Tsetung: Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership'; 1 June 1943; *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 118.)

> formed with those revolutionaries as the core who are building up and conducting revolutionary class struggles.

Regarding the composition of the proposed party, Charu Mazumdar was inclined to lay emphasis on new blood rather than depend on those coming out from the CPI (M).

> Those who think that our main task is to attract the great majority of the members of the so-called Marxist parties towards us and that a revolutionary party can be built up in this way, [he warned] are consciously or unconsciously thinking of forming only another party for fighting elections.

Explaining the risk of depending on such erstwhile members of the CPI (M) or similar parties, he said:

> ... the members of these so-called Marxist parties, whatever revolutionary qualities they may still possess, have been accustomed to the practice of unadulterated revisionism and as a result of this practice, have lost many of their revolutionary qualities. Although the old political cadres will no doubt be in such a party, [he reminded them that they] must undergo the process of new practice to become revolutionaries again.[13]

The period 1968-69 was also marked by two important events, which helped the Communist revolutionaries to clarify their stand on international problems.

The first was the Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 to overthrow Dubcek. A *Deshabrati* editorial on 29 August, following China, condemned it as an act of aggression betraying the social imperialist nature of the Soviet Union. Later in an article written as a reply to certain points raised by Parimal Das Gupta, a member of the AICCCR, who had differed from the *Deshabrati* editorial, Charu Mazumdar said that "Soviet social-imperialism, in collaboration with US imperialism is striving to dominate the world". He felt that Communists should not slight or look down upon whatever resistance was developing in Czechoslovakia against Soviet aggression. Regarding the ruling class of Czechoslovakia, he said that "capitalism had already been restored in Czechoslovakia, and it was the Czechoslovak ruling clique which, with the active collaboration of the Soviet revisionists, did so after destroying socialism there". But the resistance against Soviet aggression was "an expression of the principal contradiction of the Czechoslovak people".[22]

The second was the announcement of a mid-term poll in West Bengal to be held in 1969. The first United Front Government of West Bengal had been earlier dismissed by the Centre in November 1967. The parliamentary Leftists began to prepare from 1968 for the coming mid-term poll. The AICCCR, in a resolution on the mid-term poll, said:

> ... the process of disillusionment about the parliamentary path, disillusionment about elections, ministries and so forth, is proceeding apace, and their revolutionary consciousness is on the rise.... We call upon all revolutionaries and the revolutionary people to come forward and frustrate the sinister counter-revolutionary manoeuvre of the reactionary ruling classes and their lackeys, the

> Dange clique and the neo-revisionists, by raising the slogan: 'Boycott these elections'. But it must be remembered at the same time that the mere negative slogan of boycott will not carry us far. It must be accompanied by positive action. Simultaneously with the campaign for boycott we must mobilize and organize people in revolutionary class battles under the banner of Chairman Mao's thought and must try to build up the Naxalbari type of movement leading to People's Democratic Revolution.[1]

Activities of the Communist Revolutionaries

As indicated earlier, activities of the Communist revolutionaries under the guidance of the AICCCR, expanded during 1968-69.

In Naxalbari itself, the lull that set in after the defeat of the rebels in 1967, was being gradually broken. On 7 September 1968, one of the leaders of the Naxalbari uprising — Babulal Biswakarmakar — fought a four-hour gun duel with the police, and was killed near Birsingjote. There was also the execution of a jotedar in Kharibari. But there was again a setback with the arrest on 31 October that year, of the legendary hero and main leader of the Naxalbari uprising, Kanu Sanyal, from his hideout at Birsingjote. Found dressed in olive green shorts and a bush shirt, 40-year old Sanyal did not offer any resistance.

Besides Srikakulam and Telengana, the other areas where the AICCCR activities extended their sway were Mushahari in Bihar and Lakhimpur in U.P.

The struggle of the Mushahari peasantry in Muzaffarpur district had its origins in a movement on economic issues, launched by the Kisan Sangram Samity, dominated by the leaders of the Bihar State Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. The first incident was in April 1968, at a village called Gangapur in the area, when peasants led by the Samity seized land. The landlord of Narasinghpur, one Bijli Singh, along with his hired hoodlums, launched an attack on the peasants. In the course of the ensuing clash, the peasants drove away the attackers. The peasants then harvested the Arahar crops from the land. The report of the incident spread like wildfire, and according to Satyandarain Singh, the leader of the Bihar State Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, "Gangapur had become a symbol of fighting peasantry".[2]

The landlords retaliated by instituting cases against the peasants in a bid to harass them. But unlike past practices, the leaders of the movement this time refused to surrender to the authorities and went underground. This was followed by a phase of intense organization by the Kisan Sangram Samity and the Communist revolutionaries and preparation of the peasantry for future armed clashes. The peasants were told that they would have to combat the police who would intervene on the side of the landlord.[3]

On 15 August 1968, in response to a call given by the AICCCR, for the seizure of harvests throughout India, the peasants of Mushahari began seizing the Bhadai crops. As the police and the landlords' men swooped down upon them, the peasants armed with traditional weapons resisted. "People began treating

landlords and the state alike. They also considered the entire toiling peasantry as one entity bound by blood relations."[4] The identification of the feudal landlords with the State became explicit to the fighting peasants when police camps were set up in the area and thousands of armed policemen were let loose upon the villagers. In one village called Harkesh, on 23 August, thousands of peasants fought a pitched battle with the police and managed to rescue one of their comrades earlier arrested by the police.

The leaders of the movement felt that the stage of open confrontation and pitched battles between the peasantry on the one hand and the landlords' men and the police on the other was over. With the direct intervention of the State's repressive machinery, the enemy had become too well-equipped and powerful for the poorly armed peasantry. Guerrilla warfare seemed to be the only way out: "... dozens of militants and the local Party leadership which consisted of part-timers enrolled themselves as guerrillas (full-time) and took up the task of taking the Mushahari struggle to the second stage, i.e. to the stage of armed guerrilla struggle".[5]

Before following the later course of the Mushahari movement, we should note some of the features of the situation in the area. The bulk of the poor peasants here belonged to the low-caste community and were victims of, apart from economic exploitation, social discrimination like untouchability. Lacking a tradition of independence and militancy comparable to that of the tribals, they tasted a new sense of power in some of the temporary achievements of the movement, like seizure of harvest or retreat of the landlords. Besides, unlike the Srikakulam Agency area, Mushahari is a plains area, and new tactics had to be introduced for conducting the movement.

The activities of the Communist revolutionaries in Muzaffarpur and adjoining areas of Bihar were watched with growing concern by the authorities. The main reason for this was the promiximity of the area to Nepal. In Nepal also during this period, peasant struggles under the leadership of Maoist Communists were taking place. In the first half of 1968, in Bhadarpur, a place in Nepal facing West Bengal's Naxalbari, peasants' agitations reached such a magnitude that the Deputy Inspector General of Nepal Police was compelled to remark: "Bhadarpur will not be allowed to become another Naxalbari".[6]

A report from the Special Correspondent of Patna's *Indian Nation*, published in its issue of 22 April 1968, stated: "A map and some other documents seized recently, reveal that guerrilla warfare training camps have been set up on the other side of Bihar-Nepal border. Some of these are manned by Chinese. . ." Referring to the 'extremists' — the term usually reserved for the Communist revolutionaries — the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 19 December 1968, said that they were active on the Darbhanga and Saharsa borders of Bihar and Nepal.

Almost simultaneously with the Mushahari movement, a similar peasants' agitation was being moulded into a political armed insurrection in the Pali area of Lakhimpur district of Uttar Pradesh. This area also adjoins Nepal. The peasants working in the terai lands here were mainly migrants from Eastern U.P. who cleared the forests of the area for cultivation, but were later dispossessed of their plots. Till the beginning of 1968, there were peaceful 'satyagrahas' and other

similar forms of agitations of the peasants under the leadership of different Leftist parties.

By January-February 1968, the leadership of the peasants went over to the cadres of the AICCCR. In May-June that year, there were clashes between the peasants and the landlords in farms in the Pilibhit Terai, Patian, Ghola and Ibrahimpuri areas. The peasants were able to capture some arms also. The local administration had to take the help of the U.P. Provincial Armed Police, which set up camps in 11 villages. After a period of lull, the leaders of the movement in Lakhimpur began to concretize their plans. We find one of them stating in an interview in April 1969:

> Till now our struggle was confined to the problem of land.... Now we have decided to take up other issues also. We are going to appeal to the peasants to stop all payment of a share of the produce to the landlords and big farmers.... We will ask the people to stop all payment of land rent. Payment of dues on production basis will be charged by the revolutionary committee. We will also ask the peasants to stop all payments of old debts to the moneylenders.[7]

All these events in different parts of the country — armed struggles in embryonic form as well as ideological debates leading to the proliferation of different Maoist groups — lent some sort of urgency to the AICCCR's plan to form a new party. Besides, "... the international leadership has been reminding us time and again," Charu Mazumdar said, "of the importance of building up a party".[21] It is believed that a few months before the AICCCR took the decision to form a party, a student leader of the Committee from Calcutta had gone to the United Kingdom, and got in touch with some Chinese Communist leaders there.

Differences within the AICCCR

But the decision to form a new party antagonized many Communist revolutionaries who felt that the time was not yet ripe for the taking of such a step. Among those who disagreed with the decision were Promode Sen Gupta, President of the Naxalbari Krishak Sangram Samiti, and Parimal Das Gupta, a trade union leader.

If fact, differences between Charu Mazumdar and his critics, both in West Bengal and outside, had been developing for quite some time regarding the emphasis to be laid on certain fundamental issues. The Andhra group led by Nagi Reddy, for instance, had much earlier demarcated itself by giving a different analysis of the Indian situation. While Charu Mazumdar held that the main contradiction was between feudalism and the peasantry, Nagi Reddy stressed the contradiction between the Indian people on the one hand and "American imperialism, British imperialism and neo-colonialism of Soviet revisionism" on the other.[8] From this assessment it followed that the struggle in India would have to be an anti-imperialist liberation struggle, for which a broad united front was necessary. Many in West Bengal subscribed to this view. But

the implementation of such a line in the rural areas was fraught with different and dangerous consequences for Charu Mazumdar's cadres. Thus a report from Debra and Gopiballavpur referring to the period before the formation of the CPI (M-L), said: "Some workers professing loyalty to the thesis that the main contradiction was between the people and imperialism, came to the villages and started an anti-imperialist front with 'patriotic landlords.' This was the unadulterated line of revisionism and class-collaboration in the villages."[9]

It was also during this period, 1968-9, that Charu Mazumdar's critics began to attack him for allegedly ignoring mass fronts and mass movements. This forced Charu Mazumdar to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis his critics — the principle of forming underground party units among workers and peasants — which he alleged, was often ignored by his critics. As the polemic developed, the other forms of struggle earlier acknowledged by Charu Mazumdar — economic struggles and trade union movement — tended to be overlooked in his writings. Compelled by the need to hammer at the task of forming underground party units, he probably did not always have the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other forms involved in a revolutionary movement. As a result, the impression was often created that Charu Mazumdar stood for conspiratorial activities, divorced from mass actions. But more of this later.

Parimal Das Gupta, the trade union leader of the West Bengal State Electricity Board workers, was one of the Coordination Committee members to join issue with Charu Mazumdar on the question of mass fronts. He felt that work in the cities was being neglected and that the Coordination Committee in West Bengal particularly suffered from a tendency to refuse to participate in trade union activities. He stressed the need to build mass organizations.

In reply to his criticism, Charu Mazumdar asked:

> ... If everyone starts building mass organizations, who is to build up the underground party organization? Do we expect the mass organization to organize the agrarian revolution? [If such mass organizations were built in the rural areas, he said] such an attempt on our part will strengthen the tendency to carry on open movements through those open mass organizations inevitably turning us into another set of leaders of revisionist mass organisations.

As for trade unions, he felt that "trade unions serve as training schools for the proletariat only when there is no revolutionary situation in a country...." But in India, where a revolutionary situation prevailed according to him, "our task today is to build underground revolutionary Party organizations and not mass organizations." The proletariat could not play its leading role, could not lead the agrarian revolution, unless the party organization was built among the proletariat.[22]

In the same article, Charu Mazumdar also repudiated Parimal Das Gupta's charge that the AICCCR was resorting to 'Che Guevarism' in the peasant movement, and explained:

> Obviously, the peasantry as a whole does not participate in this guerrilla warfare. What happens is that the advanced class-conscious section of the peasant masses

starts the guerrilla war. For this reason, guerrilla war at its initial stages, may appear as a struggle of only a handful of people.

Besides, the guerrilla warfare led by the AICCCR was being waged by groups of peasants, not the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, and it was being launched without modern sophisticated arms, but by solely depending on the initiative and home-made conventional weapons of the peasantry.[ibid.]

But Parimal Das Gupta had in the meantime already formed a rival Coordination Committee at the State level with his followers, and was to pursue a different path. Still later, after the 1969 mid-term poll brought the United Front back to office in West Bengal with a still greater majority, Charu Mazumdar began to face attacks from others who questioned the wisdom of his call for boycotting the elections. Promode Sen Gupta asked: "We gave the slogan for boycotting elections; the people did not listen to us; they voted in multitude and kicked out the Congress. . . . Did we make a realistic assessment of the real situation?"[10]

In 1968-69, the call for boycotting elections was naturally not expected to be popular among the broad masses of West Bengal, who still harboured illusions about constitutional reforms if the Leftists were given another chance. The AICCCR statement that "the process of disillusionment about the parliamentary path, disillusionment about elections, ministries and so forth, is proceeding apace. . ." was more in the nature of a rallying cry involving some amount of overstatement, rather than a theoretical argument or a realistic assessment of the prevailing popular mood.

But the people learn through their own experience, and when at a loss they hark back to the voice in the wilderness. Thus, in early 1974, during the election to the North-Central Bombay parliamentary constituency, about 60,000 voters belonging to the Scheduled Castes refused to vote at the call of the militant Dalit Panthers, who declared that there could be no emancipation of the downtrodden through a change of ministries brought about by elections.

To go back to the differences within the AICCCR during 1968-69, even those who were in favour of forming a party did not often see eye to eye with Charu Mazumdar. According to later revelations by Satyanarain Singh of the Bihar State Coordination Committee, at a meeting of the AICCCR in February 1969, a controversy broke out over the characterization of the Indian bourgeoisie. While Charu Mazumdar was eager to dismiss the entire bourgeoisie as comprador, Satyanarain Singh and a few others were eager to discover a section of the national bourgeoisie among them. Satyanarain Singh further claimed that while Charu Mazumdar and the West Bengal Committee described the main contradiction in India as one between the zamindars and the peasantry, the Bihar revolutionaries wanted to redefine it as one between feudalism and the masses.[11]

These differences were to assume distressing proportions in the future. But in 1969, apart from the few who were opposed to the formation of a new party, all the other members of the AICCCR were one with Charu Mazumdar in the determination to organize themselves into a revolutionary party.

Birth of the Party

In West Bengal, the United Front was voted back to office in February, 1969. One of the first acts of the new Government was the release of Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal and other leaders of the 1967 Naxalbari uprising. The United Front presumably thought that since the movement at Naxalbari was more or less at a standstill, the released leaders would have little capacity to do any harm. Besides, their continued detention might only serve to put a halo of martyrdom round them and thus make them popular. The CPI (M) leaders in particular felt that their release might be taken as a generous gesture by the party's militant ranks, who were embarrassed by and often critical of the first United Front Government's action against the Naxalbari rebels. The party leaders were also worried by the erosion in the ranks of their student cadres, many of whom were drawn to the Naxalite brand of Communism. The leadership thought therefore that the release of the Naxalite leaders might appease the younger cadres.

Addressing the 1969 May Day rally in Calcutta after his release, Kanu Sanyal explained why he had been released: "It is not that Jyoti Basu and Hare Krishna Konar and company are kind that this has become possible. Certainly not. It is not a matter of any gracious act of some ministers. This has become possible because of the law of history."[12] It must be admitted however, that although there was a lot of sympathy among the people for the heroes of Naxalbari, there had been no organized mass movement in 1967 and 1968 demanding their release, indicating thereby either the inadequate organized base of the Communist revolutionaries among the masses, or the leadership's distrust of mass movements.

Anyway, soon after their release, on 22 April 1969 — Lenin's birth anniversary — the CPI (M-L) was formed. Its formation ws announced by Kanu Sanyal from the rostrum of the May Day rally in the Calcutta Maidan.

In a political resolution adopted by the new party, it was stated that the Indian society was semi-colonial and semi-feudal, that the Indian state was the state of big landlords and comprador-bureaucrat capitalists, and that its government was a lackey of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism. It also stated that the Indian revolution at the present stage was the People's Democratic Revolution, the main content of which was the agrarian revolution, the abolition of feudalism in the countryside. The new party described its chief responsibility as that of organizing the peasantry and advancing towards seizure of power through armed struggle; the basic tactic of the struggle would be guerrilla warfare.

A few groups and individuals, including Nagi Reddy's group in Andhra Pradesh, refused to join the new party. Although they agreed on the need to launch armed struggle, they differed on the question of emphasizing certain aspects of the existing situation and immediate tactics. Formation of a party at this stage on the basis of Charu Mazumdar's thesis, they held, would lead to the isolation of all the other groups and individuals, who were no less genuine revolutionaries. Regarding these groups, Kanu Sanyal said at the May Day rally:

> ... various trends of petty bourgeois revolutionism have appeared as represented by individuals and groups. Whatever they may do or not, one thing is clear; by refusing to recognize the authority of the revolutionary party they are flouting the chief condition for making revolution. Thus they are, willingly or unwillingly creating obstacles in the way of carrying forward the revolutionary struggle. This is a counter-revolutionary trend within the revolutionary movement. We must struggle against this trend and rally all genuine revolutionaries under the banner of our Party. . . .[13]

The formation of the party thus indicated a new turn in relations between the followers of Charu Mazumdar and other groups. They were no longer to be treated as "friends and comrades"; relations with them were no longer "non-antagonistic", as earlier maintained by the AICCCR.[14]

Chinese blessings soon came when Radio Peking greeted the formation of the CPI (M-L) in a broadcast on 2 July 1969. It quoted from the AICCCR communique issued on 22 April 1969, announcing the decision to form the party.

The formation of the party however sowed new seeds of dissension among the Communist revolutionaries. Quite a number of active supporters and functionaries of the AICCCR felt that the decision to form the party was taken in an undemocratic fashion, without seeking the views of all the units of the Committee. Some like Asit Sen (who incidentally presided over the May Day rally at the Calcutta Maidan from where the formation of the CPI (M-L) was announced, but was unaware of the decision till its announcement) felt that just because armed struggle had begun, it did not necessarily mean that all the preconditions of a revolutionary party had developed. "The working class, which is the main component of a revolutionary party," he said, "is still completely isolated from the present armed struggle."

The Different Centres of Struggle

Following the birth of the party, the tactics of the Communist revolutionaries in the different centres of struggle assumed some sort of sharpness and uniformity.

As indicated in the previous chapter, in Srikakulam, after the meeting of State and Central Government officials in May 1969, a policy of 'encirclement and suppression' was resorted to against the rebels. Central Reserve Police battalions were deployed to help the local police. Villages were surrounded by the police parties, huts were raided and people arrested. Often the police set fire to entire villages in a bid to terrorize the peasants. If any Communist leader was captured, he was shot dead, as happened to Panchadi Krishnamurthy and his six comrades on 27 May 1969.

In response to the police attacks, the Communists stepped up their 'annihilation' campaign and stressed underground activities over open mass actions. The pattern of attacks changed. While in the past a guerrilla squad used to be accompanied by hundreds of peasants from different villages, now secret raids were organized through small guerrilla units which relied on furtive methods and

agility rather than frontal attacks. Thus, a report from Srikakulam published in *Liberation* of October 1969 said that on 5 August "ten guerrillas attacked the big police camp (having about 100 CRP men) at Tompalapadu in Parvatipuram Agency, from three sides with bombs and muzzle-loaders, seriously injuring one policeman".

Along with the police, the landlords and moneylenders continued to be the targets of the rebels' 'annihilation campaign.' The report from Srikakulam claimed that "moneylenders and landlords are fleeing to other areas in the face of the rising tide of peasants' revolutionary struggle". It appears that the guerrilla squads also increased in numbers. A visitor to Srikakulam in September 1969 noted: "More than 800 Girijans have been thrown into jails. Members of their families now serve as guerrillas or are members of village defence squads."[15]

Regarding the mood of the villagers, it was claimed: "A sense of freedom is felt by the people in this area after the armed struggle started there."[16]

In early 1970 plaudits came from China. "Like a beacon light, the red revolutionary area which has come into being in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, is shining brightly on the woe-stricken land of India." These were the first lines of a long article on Srikakulam that came out in *Peking Review*, No. 1, that year. The rest of the article was devoted to a history of the movement in Srikakulam, in the course of which it was stated: "Charu Mazumdar, leader of the CPI (M-L) personally kindled the flames of the armed struggle in Srikakulam." Describing the prevailing situation, it said:

> The CPI (M-L) has now more than 100 guerrilla squads under its leadership and the areas of armed struggle have rapidly extended from the mountains to the plains and coasts. The revolutionary armed forces have turned 300 villages into a red area and set up preliminary organs of people's political power called 'Councils for the People's Uprising' to take charge of administration and production and lay the groundwork for land distribution. 'People's Courts' have been set up in all villages to try the enemies and pass judgement on them.

The article also referred to the martyrdom of Panchadi Krishnamurthy and his six comrades, and added: "When one hero falls, tens of thousands of others rise to step into the void." It then proceeded to narrate the story of Sampurna, "a woman fighter of the Srikakulam central guerrilla squad", mother of three children, who was arrested by the police in June 1969, and was alternatively threatened and cajoled by the enemy to make her recant and return home. But nothing could shake Sampurna's resolve. The article then quoted her retort to the police:

> I did not seek this trouble, far from it. But I found that the solution of the problem of starvation and that of bringing up my children are inseparably connected with the solution of problems facing the peasantry. And the way to solve this problem has been pointed out by Mao Tse-tung Thought.

In conclusion it was stated:

> More and more red revolutionary areas like Srikakulam are indeed coming into existence in the vast land of India. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), the revolutionary struggle of the Indian people is bound to score victory after victory.

Charu Mazumdar also at the beginning of 1970 announced: "Red political power in rudimentary form has come into existence in Srikakulam."[30]

At about this time, the movement in Srikakulam developed roots in the plains also. The plains were a vast stretch of sandy land dotted with cashew nut tree groves. The thick trunks and dense foliage of the trees provided the guerrillas with good cover from the enemy. As a result, although CRP camps were set up within a mile or so of every village in the plains, the guerrillas continued to be active.

The *Liberation* of October 1969 reported that on 15 July that year,

> nearly 60 CRP men with the circle inspector of police who murdered P.K. [Panchadi Krishnamurthy], raided the villages near Kalinganagar in Sompeta. The guerrillas who were only four in number attacked the police party killing one policeman. . . .
>
> In the coastal area of Sompeta, 16 moneylenders from 10 villages have fled away in panic. Debts worth about 650,000 have been cancelled.

By September 1969, three taluks in the area — Sompeta, Ichhapuram and Tekkali — had to be declared 'disturbed areas' by the Government. It should be recalled that in June that year, Parvatipuram, Pathapatnam and Palakonda talukas in the Agency area were declared 'disturbed areas'. A conference of senior police officials of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh was held on 13 September 1969, in Srikakulam, for "intensifying combing operations" and "combined intelligence work" by the police forces of both the states. The Deputy Inspector General of Police of Berhampore in Orissa, his counterpart of Waltair in Andhra Pradesh, the Deputy Inspector General (Criminal Investigation Department), Hyderabad, and the Commandant of the 17th battalion of CRP were among those who attended the conference. The meeting assumed significance in view of the increased Communist activities in the Orissa areas bordering Andhra Pradesh.

In the Koraput area of Orissa, although the initial plans failed, Nagabhushan Patnaik had evaded the police and continued his activities. He was arrested along with 10 others at Vishakhapatnam on 15 July 1969. But three months later, in a daring jail break, all the arrested escaped from the Vishakhapatnam Central Jail on 8 October 1969.

In the meantime, in August that year the policy of 'annihilation of class enemies' was implemented in a village in Koraput district of Orissa, bordering Parvatipuram, when about 200 peasants accompanied by a group of guerrillas — following the tactics of the first phase of the movement in Srikakulam — killed a landlord and "cut the landlord's body into pieces".[17]

The CPI (M-L) cadres were able to create some sort of base in this area of Orissa, being favoured by the terrain, as evident from later events. When the

armed contingents of the police, particularly the Central Reserve Police (CRP) started their encirclement and suppression operations deep in the Srikakulam hills, the central 'dalam' led by Vempatapu Satyanarayana, and the minor 'dalams' started straying into the Orissa side of the border. They got shelter in the contiguous areas of Parala Khemedi taluka and the Thiva hills of Ramanaguda block. These mountain ranges covering the borders of both the States became their hideouts in the face of mounting police operations.

By September 1969, in Mushahari in Bihar also, the stress shifted from mass attacks to guerrilla actions. Giving an account of the nature of the movement, its leader Satyanarayan Singh said:

> The Mushahari guerrillas have made three attacks in a small period of one and a half months, have killed five class enemies and their agents, injured 15, burnt land notes and documents of land deeds worth lakhs of rupees, seized the properties of landlords. . . .[18]

Here also, the leaders sought to stress before the peasantry the partisan character of the State. As Satyanarain Singh said: "What does our practice show? After the annihilation of a class enemy, the State appears and we fight the State in accordance with the principles of guerrillas war, that is, we fight engagements that we can win". What was the role of the masses of the peasantry? Singh referred to "participation by hundreds of people in giving shelter and food, in collecting intelligence and information about enemies' position, guarantees of passage for retreat and advance of guerrillas."

One of the most important actions of the Mushahari rebels was the attack on the landlord of Narsingpur on 30 June 1969. As mentioned earlier, he was the first landlord to come into direct clash with the peasants of the area during the first phase of the movement in Mushahari. Although the landlord escaped, the guerrillas managed to kill three other accomplices, seize property worth Rs. 20,000 and burn land documents. Though Satyanarain Singh was to oppose the tactics of annihilation sometime later, in 1969 he supported the tactics stating: "The purpose of our present phase of armed struggle is to build up reliable revolutionary base areas. . . ." He then asked: "Can this be done without attacking individual landlords in the villages and annihilating them?"[19]

The rebels carried out attacks in two other places in the Muzaffarpur district — Paru and Baruraj — and by June the police were trying to implement the 'encirclement and suppression' policy after the Srikakulam pattern. According to Satyanarain Singh:

> The police has attacked the residential houses of over 600 persons, covering 7 thanas in Muzaffarpur. They have been harassing, interrogating and inflicting all sorts of tortures on prisoners in custody with a view to obtain the addresses and the shelters of the leadership.

As a result, the leadership changed its tactics.

> Actually, we are now planning to reduce the extent of mass participation in guerrilla raids for reasons of security and safety, and also for reasons of efficiency in fighting and retreating . . . when massive police patrolling is resorted to by the enemy, i.e. in conditions of 'encirclement and suppression' campaign launched by the enemy, smaller guerrilla units alone can effectively and efficiently operate. Larger units can be easily located by the enemy because of its size. . . . In a plain area when people alone serves as the mountains and jungles smaller guerrilla units of three or five or seven is more desirable.[20]

The Mushahari leadership paid attention to the need for retaining a base in the villages in the face of police attacks. Singh said:

> For the present, our tactics are that after the massive police mobilization is effected, the main guerrilla force take to the neighbouring areas, i.e. the main force escapes encirclement. However, the areas where guerrilla struggles are taking place cannot be developed into a political base area until and unless revolutionary work is continued . . . during the encircling operation by the enemy, while the main guerrilla force of the leadership shouild escape, there must remain local Party leadership, guerrilla units and Kisan Sangram Samities,

to continue political propaganda and other organizational tasks. About the middle peasants, Satyanarain Singh admitted that till then his party's work among this class had been 'very superficial'. He asserted: "It might be realized that without having the firm support of the middle peasant revolution cannot win. Sectarianism in this respect has to be combatted and vigorous efforts to that end are absolutely necessary."[21]

Singh hoped that the 'agrarian revolution' as envisaged by the CPI (M-L), would solve the question of seizure of state power "bit by bit and set by step". "Being a long-drawn revolution it concretely solves the question of seizure of power in one or more villages, then in one or more areas, then in one or more zones, and ultimately throughout, the country." The need for annihilation of class enemies assumed importance in this context. According to him, it "must be understood in relation to the smashing of the feudal authority and building up of peasant authority in the villages."[22]

Meanwhile, in the West Bengal countryside the mood of the rural poor was undergoing a rapid change. The second United Front Government, possibly to forestall the emergence of new 'Naxalbaris' in other parts of the State, encouraged a militant land grab movement to allow the rising expectations and the belligerency of the rural poor to find an outlet. Almost all the Leftist parties, wherever they had any influence, organized the poor and landless peasants into processions for the occupation of land held in excess of the legal ceiling by the landlords.

The movement had a negative as well as a positive aspect. First, in many areas, the shrewd landlords promptly shifted their allegiance to the Leftist parties which were the most influential in their respective areas. They were thus able to save their excess land from the land hungry peasants by paying protection money to the Leftist leaders. In some other areas, the amount of land

available being much less than the need of the landless, there was a scramble for the land which often led peasants under one Leftist party fighting peasants controlled by a rival Leftist party.

But the positive aspect cannot be denied. The movement unleashed the dormant rebellious spirit of the peasantry. Although under partial State protection — the police were neutralized to some extent by the United Front Government and the peasants in their fight for land did not have to fight the police in all areas — the peasants were awakened to an awareness of their collective strength. Armed with bamboo sticks, axes, and spears they marched in processions defying the landlord. Watching such a procession organized under the auspices of the CPI (M), Charu Mazumdar was believed to have startled his followers by extolling them to the skies. He then added: "Once the peasants are armed, even if it is done by the CPI (M) for its limited purpose, no one will ever be able to disarm them."

In fact, in some places the peasants' militancy overstepped the boundaries set by their Leftist leaders. At Chaitanpur in Burdwan for instance, on 22 June 1969, peasants under the leadership of the CPI (M) were going to take possession of the land when hired hoodlums of the landlord, Jnanendra Nath Chowdhury, attacked the peasants with spears and then followed it up by firing upon them. A pitched battle between the two sides continued for two hours, in the course of which a Santhal peasant was killed, and many injured. Later, five guns were seized from the house of the Chowdhurys. The latter had to flee the village after the incident.

But such a militant agitation, contained within the well-defined limit of land grabbing, controlled by parliamentary Leftists too eager to assure the ruling class at the Centre of their loyalty to the Constitution, and protected by the State Government, could not be sustained for long. Although a sort of hothouse plant, if allowed to grow, it could burst out any moment splintering the protective glass shell. The United Front Government had to be ousted by the vested interests in 1970, and when repression was let loose by the Centre backed by the feudal landlords who had been smarting all these months, the peasants found themselves defenceless, with most of their leaders either absconding or in jail. They lost the few plots of land that they had grabbed, were deprived in the course of massive police combing operations, of even their last weapon of defence — the chopper, and were advised by their leaders to file suits in the courts to get back their land.

Looking back at the failure of the experiment, Harekrishna Konar admitted later: "Just as a fruit cannot ripe properly if kept for long under a shade and in protection from sunlight, the peasants' movement too cannot develop only in the shade of State protection."[23] But Konar was again looking at the surface only. In the absence of the long-term perspective of seizure of state power, agitations for seizure of land, however militant they might be, were bound to reach a dead-end in the prevailing structure. In the absence of any plan to fight the State machinery, the peasants inevitably remained unprepared for guerrilla actions when the State unleashed its repression.

The alternative path was being blazed at about the same time in another corner of West Bengal.

Debra and Gopiballavpur were under two police stations in the Midnapur district of West Bengal. The area bordered Bihar and Orissa, and jungles dominated the landscape. The tribals formed an important component of the population.

The CPI (M-L) movement in Debra and Gopiballavpur assumed a special importance because of the existence of the second United Front in office in West Bengal at that time. In fact, the peasantry of the area became radicalized in the wake of the promises of land redistribution made by the first United Front Government in 1967. Raids on blackmarketeers were organized by the CPI (M) peasant cadres in Debra, where the agricultural labourers also raised demands for higher wages. There were also clashes with the landlords, and the CPI (M)-led peasants came out in armed demonstration. Police camps were set up and warrants of arrest were issued against some of the local CPI (M) leaders.

Speaking of the situation in those days, one of the organizers of the movement in the area said later: "A stage was reached during the 1967 movement when the annihilation of the class enemy and building a base area came up as an inescapable task. But open propaganda can never become the basis of a secret party unit. So the organization became helpless before the onslaught of the government and the jotedars." He also referred to the long drawn out expensive legal battles that were forced upon the organizers, when the latter chose to accept the legal system and fight through it.[24]

Even after the dismissal of the first United Front Government in November 1967 the peasants of Debra and Gopiballavpur remained militant, as evident from some of their actions. Thus, a report described the two police stations along with adjoining Jhargram as "trouble spots" and added that 2,000 acres of land had been forcibly occupied by the peasants. [25] The CPI (M) peasant leaders of the area groped for a way out during the period. Inspired by the reports of the Naxalbari struggle and the ideological controversies raging in its wake, they set up a 'Midnapore Coordination Committee'. In March 1969, they got themselves affiliated to the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. Several individuals and groups, who were in the Midnapore Coordination Committee, dropped out from the AICCCR because of differences on the tactical line. With the announcement of the formation of CPI (M-L) in May that year, the Communist revolutionaries of Debra and Gopiballavpur joined the new party. On 21 August 1969, at a meeting a Shurmuhi, they decided to implement the programme of 'annihilation of class enemies' in their zone. Three places — Gopiballavpur, Bahoragora and Debra — in the district, were chosen as the areas of operation.

Between September and October that year, several landlords were killed by the guerrillas. They seized guns, took possession of the properties owned by the landlords, returned those properties to the original owners who mortgaged them to the landlords for money, and burnt the records of debt. The actions had immediate effect. The assassination of one notorious landlord or moneylender in one village was enough to drive the rest from nearby villages. Those who did not flee surrendered to the rebels. As a result there was a sort of power vacuum in the area.

The power vacuum created in the villages by the assassination, flight and surrender of the landlords, coupled with the political training given to the peasants, paved the way for the next phase of action, which began with harvesting in November 1969. The peasants started seizing the crops from the landlords' plots. A report of the movement claimed: "The peasants not only refrained from seizing the crops of small farmers, middle farmers or sympathetic rich farmers, but also saw to it that their crops were not harmed." After this the revolutionary committees laid down new laws in the villages. Moneylenders were asked to return the mortgaged properties to the original owners. Wages for labourers in fields were fixed at five kilograms of paddy. Prices of essential commodities were fixed in the big shops. All debts that the peasants owed to the moneylenders were cancelled.[26]

As in Srikakulam and Naxalbari earlier, in Gopiballavpur and Debra also, people's courts were set up, where punishment was meted out to the landlords and moneylenders. A report in *Liberation* of January 1970, describing the situation said: "There can be no doubt whatsoever that it is the rule of the peasant masses, the embryonic form of the peasants' political power though it is only a point and is at its primary stage, and may even be temporary."

The claims made by the CPI (M-L) regarding popular support were corroborated by the pro-Establishment press. Thus, a report in *The Statesman* of 13 December 1969, described the tactics of the Communists in Debra and Gopiballavpur:

> In certain areas, jotedars had avoided forcible harvesting by paying protection money. Once this money was paid, a broken branch of a tree was stuck in the jotedar's plot to indicate that his paddy should be spared. We saw ample proof of this in the fields. . . . Naxalites still control over 20 villages in the forests along the Bihar and Orissa borders. That no policeman will enter the affected areas without an armed escort became apparent during our tour of the fringe of the Naxalite controlled pockets.

A more detailed picture is available from a report in a Bengali newspaper of that period, which said:

> . . . so far hardly anyone has come forward to cooperate with the police. The reason, according to the police, is fear of the Naxalites. It is difficult to ascertain whether it is because of fear or for love for the Naxalites. The fact however remains that the police have so far been unable to capture their leaders. Everyone knows that almost all the leaders are still here in this area, yet no one gets any information about them. . . . The local people also admit that there are quite a few villages in Debra where the police dare not enter in small numbers — two or three men — even when armed with rifles. . . . And in Gopiballavpur there are no less than three hundred such villages.[27]

It should be mentioned in this connection that city-bred students played an important role in organizing the movement in Midnapur. As noted earlier, in response to the call of the CPI (M-L), a large number of students from Calcutta

and other urban centres left their studies and went to nearby villages. Charu Mazumdar had clear-cut ideas as to the role of the petty bourgeois intellectuals who were going to the villages. "At the present time," he said, "we have a great need for petty bourgeois comrades who come from the intelligentsia. But we must remember that not all of them will remain revolutionaries to the end." So, he urged these members of the intelligentsia to undertake class analysis of the village societies, and teach the peasants to identify the various classes in the countryside on the basis of three principles: (i) class basis; (ii) eagerness to do work; (iii) eagerness to fight.

> In this way we can also develop peasants as leaders. This means the peasant movement will cease to be dependent on the wishes and desires of the petty bourgeois comrades who come from the intelligentsia. Further, this will help to quicken the process of integration of the comrades who come from the intelligentsia.[19]

To come back to the situation in Debra and Gopiballavpur, the United Front Government, and particularly the CPI (M) which was heading the Home Ministry at that time, reacted in a bellicose fashion. When the 'annihilation campaign' began in the area, police camps were put up. But apparently the local police were helpless against the popular upsurge. There were cases when in November, the police fled from places where thousands of peasants came to forcibly harvest the crops.

After this, the Home Minister, Jyoti Basu — the topmost leader of the CPI (M) in West Bengal — sought the help of the Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR), a Central force, to suppress the movement. Jyoti Basu's action was perhaps the logical conclusion of the strategy adopted by the CPI (M). The party believed in controlled violence in the rural areas aimed at minor goals, like wage increase for agricultural labourers or restitution of land to the landless. A certain amount of agitation, often bordering on violence, suited the CPI (M) or the other parliamentary Leftist parties, as long as it was contained within limits and controlled by the leaders, and did not attack the roots of the prevailing system by trying to seize political power. Since they were members of a united front of heterogeneous classes, the CPI (M) wanted to make the landless and small peasants believe that they were carrying the flag of the revolution and were out to destroy the status quo, and the middle class believe that they were arresting the danger which threatened them, and the Centre that they were faithful to the Constitution.

Such being the case, it was only natural that the CPI (M) leadership would be keen on proving their party's bona fides as loyal constitutionalists to the Centre, which was constantly watching CPI (M) activities, than to allow the development of a movement which ultimately could pose a serious challenge to the CPI (M) tactics of controlled agitation within the framework of parliamentary system. With the deployment of the Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR), the policy of 'encirclement and suppression' was applied in Gopiballavpur and Debra. The progress of its implementation can be measured from the reports coming out in the newspapers. Thus, *The Statesman* of 2 December 1969 reported that the

police had been asked to "shoot to kill if necessary". On 4 December the paper carried a report which said: "The District Magistrate, Mr. B.R. Chakravarty, said in an interview today that the plan was now to round up supporters and sympathizers of Naxalites and seize paddy from those who cannot explain its source." It was obvious that the authorities were trying to cut off the internal food supplies of the guerrillas. On 9 December the same paper reported: "The EFR forces, it is learnt, have been authorized to use light machine guns and hand grenades besides rifles".

A CPI (M-L) report stated that the police of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were operating jointly against the rebels in the area. According to the report, about 1,200 EFR men were posted in Gopiballavpur, 700 in Debra, and 400 men of the Bihar military force in Bahoragora. The leaders of the movement in the area were in some trouble. They admitted that although the authorities could not apprehend the guerrillas, "in the midst of police encirclement our guerrilla bands lapsed into extreme listlessness, and our aggressive militant mood gradually changed into an escapist mentality born of self-defence." The report also stated that the middle and rich peasants who once sided with the guerrillas, broke down under the police repression, and were often forced to participate in the combing operations planned by the police to trace the guerrillas.[28]

Was it because the area of guerrilla operations had not been expanded and the number of guerrilla units had not grown, that the leaders faced difficulties in breaking through the encirclement and increasing their mobility? As revealed from later disclosures, there had been a conflict among party organizers in Debra-Gopiballavpur regarding the main approach to the question of mobilizing the peasants. While the cadres in Debra favoured mass movements drawing rich lessons from the experience of similar movements in 1966-67, the Border Regional Committee, which was in charge of setting down the guidelines of the movement, emphasized the tactics of annihilation of class enemies to the exclusion of other forms of movement. The cadres in Debra felt that in the absence of any firm base area, continuation of isolated annihilations would lead nowhere, and would merely narrow down the scope of further extension of party activities. On 1 November 1969, at a meeting of the Border Regional Committee, the cadres of Debra put forward the proposal of formation of Peasants' Committees. But their proposal was not accepted, and they were criticized for organizing mass meetings and favouring mass movements. At another meeting in Digha in January 1970, the Debra cadres were again attacked by the Border Regional Committee for their opposition to the tactics of annihilation.[29]

Soon after this, Charu Mazumdar visited Debra and Gopiballavpur, and advised his followers to expand their activities to neighbouring areas. Expansion was necessary to escape the police encirclement, and also to surround the enemy encirclement with newer bases from outside.

But while the need for expansion was recognized, lack of adequate preparations through political propaganda in the neighbouring areas, appeared to be the major impediment. The willingness of the people to give shelter and protection to the guerrillas and later to join them presupposes some amount of political training. In response to Charu Mazumdar's advice, however, a few actions

took place in the nearby areas. There were some executions in the nature of annihilation of class enemies in the Kharagpur and Chakulia areas of Midnapur. But in the absence of any previous political work among them, there was no widespread response from the masses of the peasantry as in Gopiballavpur and Debra.

Meanwhile, similar assassinations were taking place in other areas of West Bengal, like 24-Parganas in the south, and Jalpaiguri and Naxalbari in the north. The victims were landlords, moneylenders, police spies and in one case a havildar of the Indian army posted in Jalpaiguri. By the beginning of 1970, similar incidents were being reported from Assam and Tripura also. Bearing in mind the strategic importance of the two States — both were situated on the borders of the then East Pakistan — the CPI (M-L) welcomed the "revolutionary armed struggle" in these two States as "of considerable significance from the viewpoint of the Indian revolution."[30] On 6 April 1970 the Assam Revenue Minister, M.M. Chowdhury told the State Legislative Assembly in Shillong that about 200 Naxalites were functioning in the State. On 27 April that year, the Assam Government gave a State-wide alert against the Naxalites. In North India, besides Lakhimpur in Uttar Pradesh, a few places in Punjab were scenes of action. A retired GOC-in-C of the Patiala State Army — General Balwant Singh — was shot dead by CPI (M-L) cadres in the Patiala district in August 1969.

Thus, by the beginning of 1970, the CPI (M-L) was in a position to take stock of its activities. The situation was in a sense a tribute as well as a challenge to the party leadership.

Within a short time it had been able to rouse and mobilize the peasantry to such an extent that although confined to small pockets in nine States*, the armed struggle had upset the status quo in the countryside and was considered a threat by the State, dangerous enough to make it come out in full force against the movement. The Naxalbari uprising was not a conquering feat; but it was the first step towards the creation of a new kind of revolutionary war in India. It had won over a band of dedicated men — Vempatapu Satyanarayana, a man of enormous personal bravery, charm and intelligence; Dr Bhashkar Rao, a young eye-specialist who left his thriving practice in Guntur and joined the guerrillas of Srikakulam; Subbarao Panigrahi, the famous poet — a symbol of the writer fused with the man of action — who led the guerrillas in action and composed songs that thrilled the masses; Ashim Chatterjee, the student leader who became a brilliant organizer; Satyanarain Singh, a Communist from the days when he was an aircraftsman in the Royal Indian Air Force of the British regime who was to turn into the leader of the militant peasant struggle of Mushahari. Although many of them were to die, and others were to drift away from Charu Mazumdar in later days, they did, in 1969, push forward the wheel of revolution.

* ". . . flames of the peasant armed struggle have been raging in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal, Orissa, Assam, Tripura States and particularly Andhra Pradesh." — New China News Agency, 27 March 1970.

Besides, the Communist Party of China — the leader of the world revolution in the eyes of the CPI (M-L) — had already applauded the achievements.

But on the other hand, the policy of 'encirclement and suppression' resorted to by the State, threatened the mini-red power in Srikakulam and Debra and Gopiballavpur. In Srikakulam particularly, there was a series of mishaps between November and December 1969, when prominent leaders of the movement were either killed or captured by the police. In the plains of the Sompeta taluka, the enemy encircled several guerrilla units, and killed Dr Bhashkar Rao, and later Subbarao Panigrahi, who was elected the secretary of the Sompeta Area Committee of the party after Dr Rao's death. Nirmala Krishnamurthy, the wife of late Panchadi Krishnamurthy, who had stepped in to fill the breach left by her husband;s death, was also traced and butchered. Among those arrested was Chaudhury Tejeswara Rao, one of the young intellectuals who had been associated with the Srikakulam armed struggle from the beginning.

The problem that faced the CPI (M-L) in all its stark reality was how to destroy the enemy offensive and retain the base areas. It demanded from the leadership an imaginative approach in the shaping of future tactics.

Charu Mazumdar's Suggestions

Charu Mazumdar in his articles during this period sought to lay down some practical tasks to encourage a breakthrough.

He emphasized the need to multiply the number of guerrilla squads and the areas of operations. This was vitally necessary if the revolutionaries wanted to defeat the enemy. If the enemy encircled them in one area, there should be surrounding ares of influence from where other guerillas could counter-encircle the enemy and launch offensive. Besides, an increase in the number of areas of operation would have meant the dispersal of the enemy forces all over the different affected spots, instead of its concentration against a particular base area. This would have curbed its effective strength. The slogan: 'Let us build Srikakulams in other parts of the country' assumed importance in this context.

While Charu Mazumdar urged the peasants to "avenge every attack of the enemy" by launching counter-attacks [27] he advised the cadres and political organizers to "build guerrilla squads by putting politics in the forefront". He asserted: "The spread of guerrilla actions makes the broad masses participants in the struggle."[28] In a detailed manual, in the form of an address to revolutionary peasant cadres in January 1970, Charu Mazumdar among other things, illustrated in vivid terms how the masses could be mobilized through guerrilla actions. Although, he reminded them, "the method of forming a guerrilla unit has to be wholly conspiratorial" and "the identity of that particular class enemy for whose elimination the conspiracy has been made; and the time and date of the guerrilla action" must not be known outside the guerrilla unit, the action must have a popular basis. It should be preceded, he said, by the propaganda of the politics of seizure of political power by armed force,

among the masses, "and in particular, among the masses of poor peasants". Further, the action should be directed against such a class enemy who is really considered as notorious by the peasant masses.

> ... we should arrange an investigation on a small scale with a view to knowing their [i.e. the peasant masses] opinions. In other words, the point is that we should not be guided by subjective thinking in determining our target; on the contrary we should be guided by the will of the majority of the people [29]

After the annihilation of the class enemy, the political propaganda should be resumed. Charu Mazumdar suggested that the political cadre posing as a neutral person should now start a whisper campaign somewhat on these lines:

> So that devil of a man has got killed after all. A good riddance, eh? Can't find enough words to praise those who have done it. They have done a heroic thing, haven't they? Wish they would carry on with this business until the whole pack of those bloodsuckers is finished off. Oh, how fine will be everything then! Just think, when they are gone all this area will belong to us, all this land, all this crop, all the riches will be ours! [*Ibid.*]

As the masses start to respond to such propaganda, the political cadre should become bolder and hold small group meetings. The guerrillas should come out from hiding and stay among the masses, earning their praise and in turn inspiring them. At one stage, the peasant masses themselves would "want new guerrilla actions, and eagerly point out their enemies, give advice about new targets of attack, come forward to keep watch over the movements of the enemy and provide important information to the guerrilla unit". Thus, "further guerrilla actions take place and the steady expansion of such actions gives rise to new guerrilla units and the targets of attack spread steadily to ever new areas — such is the process which goes on repeating itself."[*Ibid.*]

The next stage in mass mobilization arrives with the raising of the broad economic slogan: 'Seize the crops of the class enemy'.

> This works like a magic in the villages and even the most backward peasant comes forward and joins the battle. Thus, the fight for the seizure of political power initiated by a few advanced sections is nourished by the tremendous initiative of the masses and mass actions, and the flames of people's war engulf the whole of the countryside.[*Ibid.*]

The entire manual is, in fact, an elaboration in concrete terms of Lin Piao's thesis: "Guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilize and apply the whole strength of the people against the enemy."[31] But to spread the struggle to newer areas, it was necessary to expand the party organization. New cadres were needed. "... we must exert ourselves to the utmost," Charu Mazumdar urged, "to raise cadres from the masses of the poor and landless peasants." He added:

> The rearing of cadres is closely related to our giving them increasingly more responsibility. Try to promote the poor and landless peasant cadres to higher committees and teach them how to carry out the responsibilities of the higher committee.[30]

The petty bourgeois want of confidence in the poor and landless peasant however, frequently stood in the way of raising cadres and increasing the number of guerrilla squads, which in turn led to the confinement of struggles in a few isolated spots and prevented the much needed expansion. As an instance of such a "sectarian tendency", Charu Mazumdar referred to an incident at a group meeting in a village, where the petty bourgeois party leader while enlisting members for a guerrilla squad, included only those who belonged to the party organization and did not admit a large number of poor and landless young peasants who, although outside the organization, expressed their eagerness to join the squad.

> Even in places where we are forming such guerrilla squads, the Party leaders have been found to be not enthusiastic in enhancing the initiative or raising the political consciousness of those new squads. As a result of this, these squads remain inactive in many cases. These are sectarian tendencies.[28]

During this period, Charu Mazumdar also sought to develop the theory of administration of the base areas through revolutionary committees. With the annihilation of some class enemies and the flight of others, the problem of administration in all its aspects — harvesting of crops, redistribution of land, maintenance of law and order, protection of the village — would invariably crop up. The vacuum created in the wake of the annihilation would be filled up by the peasants' revolutionary committee. "We want to introduce a system," he said, "under which the administration will be carried on by revolutionary committees at all levels." Explaining the source of the idea, he said: "Previously this did not form a part of the programme of democratic revolution. This is a contribution of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution". Since parliament and similar institutions were the organs of power of bourgeois democracy and revisionism, Charu Mazumdar felt that his followers could never make use of these institutions in carrying forward the people's democratic revolution. "We must carry on administration," he said, "by forming revolutionary committees with the cooperation of the masses and with their leaders as members."[*Ibid.*]

It was during this period also that Charu Mazumdar reminded his followers of the need to recognize the struggle that they were waging as a part of a worldwide revolutionary struggle "led by Chairman Mao" and taking place in the "era of Mao Tsetung". The advance of the revolution in India would also smash the US-Soviet plot to launch a "war of aggression against China" — a possibility which seemed to be very real to Charu Mazumdar at that time.[25]

Moving up through this crescendo of praise for China and Mao Tsetung, Charu Mazumdar reached the climax with the words: "Victory certainly belongs to us because China's Chairman is our Chairman and China's Path is our path",[26] a statement which was immediately turned into a slogan by his

followers. The widespread popularity of the slogan was however to become an apple of discord between Charu Mazumdar and some of his comrades at a later stage, and was to earn even China's disapprobation.[32]

Notes

1. *Liberation*, June 1968.
2. Satyanarain Singh, 'Mushahari and Its Lessons', *Liberation*, October 1969.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Liberation*, February 1969.
6. *Nepal Today*, 15 July 1968.
7. *Liberation*, April 1969.
8. Nagi Reddy's 'Immediate Programme'.
9. *Deshabrati*, 23 April 1970.
10. Promode Sen Gupta, *Biplab Kon Pathey?* (In Which Way Moves the Revolution?), 1970, p. 98.
11. From a copy of a self-critical review of the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L), secretly circulated sometime in 1974.
12. *Liberation*, May 1969.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *See* Chapter 5.
15. 'Srikakulam Going the Way Predicted by Comrade Charu Mazumdar' in *Liberation*, September 1969.
16. 'Flames of Guerrilla Struggle Burn Brightly in Srikakulam' in *Liberation*, October 1969.
17. *Liberation*, October 1969.
18. *Ibid*, September 1969.
19. Satyanarain Singh, 'Agrarian Revolution and Crisis Within the Revolutionary Classes' in *Liberation*, September 1969.
20. Satyanarain Singh, 'Mushahari and Its Lessons' in *Liberation*, October 1969.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Satyanarain Singh, 'Building Up the Proletarian Party and Agrarian Revolution' in *Liberation*, November 1969.
23. Mr. Konar made the comment in the course of an interview with the writer.
24. 'A Report by the Debra Thana Organzing Committee, CPI (M-L) in *Liberation*, December 1969.
25. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 24 December 1968.
26. *Deshabrati*, 23 April 1970.
27. Translated from Barun Sen Gupta's despatch in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 28 December 1969.
28. *Deshabrati*, 23 April 1970.
29. 'Review of Debra Peasants' Struggle by a Group of Cadres' in the Bengali magazine *Lal-Tara*, 7 and 22 May 1975.
30. *Liberation*, January 1970.
31. Lin Piao, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War', New China News Agency, 2 September 1965.
32. *See* Chapter 8.

7 The Party at the Crossroads

World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.
Karl Marx to L. Kugelmann, 17 April 1871.

The main line of demarcation between revisionism and revolution is this: the revisionists demand the guarantee of victory as a precondition for joining the struggle; the revolutionaries dare to struggle, dare to win victories.
Charu Mazumdar: 'Against the Revisionist Attack on the Party Line.' October 1970.

Rumblings of War

As the winter of 1969 passed into the spring of 1970, the new year promised to inaugurate a turbulent decade. While the Communist revolutionaries in India were busy wrestling with the problems thrown up by their actions, their comrades in another part of the continent were getting embroiled in a wide-scale conflagration.

In March 1969 the booming of guns had broken the stillness over the frozen Ussuri River, intensifying the recurrent Sino-Soviet border clashes. In an editorial in August that year *Pravda* had dropped veiled hints of a Soviet nuclear strike against China. A few months later, addressing the Peking rally to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on 1 October, Vice-chairman Lin Piao had asked his people to "heighten their vigilance, strengthen preparedness against war and be ready at all times to wipe out all enemy intruders who dare to come". Turning to the people of the world, he had given the call:

> . . . unite and oppose the war of aggression launched by any imperialism or social-imperialism, especially one in which atom bombs are used as weapons! If such a war breaks out, the people of the world should use revolutionary war to eliminate the war of aggression, and preparations should be made right now.[1]

As the days passed, the threat of a war loomed larger and larger. By the beginning of 1970, the Soviet Union had raised its divisions from 20 in 1969 in its Far Eastern military district and two in Mongolia. Thirty-four Soviet divisions were posted along the rest of the frontier.[2]

In February 1970, talks between the Soviet Union and China over the disputed territory entered the fifth month without any tangible solution in sight. As the Soviet threat continued to increase in intensity over its northern borders, on its south in March that year, China faced a menace when the USA extended the war in Vietnam to Laos and Cambodia. China sponsored a secret conference of representatives of the South Vietnam National Liberation Front, the Pathet Lao and Prince Sihanouk's followers, in Peking, towards the end of April, to chalk out a strategy of joint struggle.

These international developments were to have repercussions on the CPI (M-L).

The Domestic Scene

The US-Soviet offensive against China abroad, synchronized with a stepping up of police repression against the Communist revolutionaries in India in the beginning of 1970.

In West Bengal in March that year the United Front Government fell, and in April a joint campaign by the Eastern Frontier Rifles, the Central Reserve Police and the local police, under the direct supervision of the Central Government, was launched against the CPI (M-L) cadres in Debra and Gopiballavpur. The villages where the CPI (M-L) had earlier established some sort of authority were raided by the police. Peasant cadres and supporters of the Party were thrown into prison. In Calcutta, the police swooped down upon the offices of *Liberation* and *Deshabrati*, and the journals were driven underground.

Along with the reverses in the old strongholds, CPI (M-L) activities were spreading to new States, although on a smaller scale. The party was making itself felt. On 9 April 1970, the then Union Home Minister, Y.V. Chavan told the Lok Sabha that 'Naxalite' activities had spread to Assam, Nagaland and the Mizo hills. Radio Peking in a broadcast on 2 April, describing the achievements of the CPI (M-L) said "At present, the flames of the peasants' armed struggle have spread to West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal, Orissa, Assam and Tripura, and particularly Andhra Pradesh." What were claimed to be "flames" were however, in the new areas actually sparks that went out as suddenly as they had burst out — activities ranging from Maoist propaganda through postering and distribution of pamphlets urging the necessity of armed struggles, to killing of landlords and snatching of guns, activities which were still confined to the stage of initiation by a "few advanced sections" and were yet to be "nourished by the tremendous initiative of the masses and mass actions", as envisaged by Charu Mazumdar.[29] But however isolated and shortlived such actions might have been, they spread the CPI (M-L) ideology of seizure of political power by armed struggle. The vague notion

among the people, and the peasantry in particular, about the Naxalbari uprising being a militant land grab movement, was gradually giving way to a more concrete realization that the uprising of 1967 and the chain of events that followed were based on the theory of area-wise seizure of power in the countryside by the peasantry through guerrilla warfare.

The Centre was also realizing that the ideology was a force to reckon with. The then Minister of State for Home Affairs, V.C. Shukla, told the Rajya Sabha on 20 April 1970 that the problem was "much more serious than the question that the Chambal valley dacoits are posing before us". Recognizing the importance of the youth as a vital component of the CPI (M-L) movement, the Minister said: We have to devise ways and means of making the students who are studying in our educational institutions feel that by peaceful and non-violent methods, by constitutional and legal methods, they can achieve . . . what they wish to achieve". The Centre was farsighted enough to realize the long-term implications of such actions, however insignificant they might have looked at the moment. Its response therefore followed a policy of using the "carrot and stick". In the Centre's annual budget for 1970-71, a provision of Rs. 65 million was made to help small farmers and agricultural labourers, presumably as a bait to immunize them against 'Naxalite influence'. At the same time, the expenditure on police went up from Rs. 187.6 million in 1961-62 to Rs. 888.4 million in 1970-71.

But meanwhile, within the CPI (M-L) a crisis was brewing. As one by one the old Communist positions were being eroded in the face of mounting police offensive, some among the leaders were beginning to have misgivings regarding Charu Mazumdar's tactics of 'annihilation', and his insistence on reliance on conventional weapons. How could the peasants equipped with primitive implements, they asked, stand the offensive of a superior military force? Charu Mazumdar was eager, on the other hand, to discover revolutionary potentialities even in the peasant's most minor acts of offensive, to see as it were 'the world in a grain of sand'. Calling upon his followers not to belittle their achievements, reminding them of their victories in 1969, he said: "1970 has arrived with the possibilities of a disciplined armed people's force and widespread liberated areas". Welcoming the beginning of the seventies, he urged: "Turn this decade into the decade of liberation of the exploited and oppressed masses of India!"[30]

His critics, however, from a practical standpoint were more inclined to weigh the chances of triumphant reaction, preponderating in its solidity and crushing the bases of red power, than to contemplate the vistas of victorious revolution still indistinct and evanescent on the distant horizon. An article in the party's mouthpiece in February 1970 referred to these "criticisms within the party" and stressed: "Our task today is to establish firmly the authority of the leadership of Comrade Charu Mazumdar at all levels of the party and revolution."

'Revolutionary Authority'

It was from this period that Charu Mazumdar's devoted followers in the party sought to establish him as the supreme authority of the Indian revolution, an attempt which was often to be carried to dangerous extremes, compelling Charu Mazumdar himself to come out with a severe warning against his devotees at one stage.

The controversy over the concept of 'revolutionary authority' in the CPI (M-L) was a legacy from the past, an extension in the Indian context of the old conflict between authority and autonomy that had rent the international Communist movement since the days of Marx. The need for subservience to authority to carry out a revolution was recognized even in those early days. In his controversy with the anarchists, Engels retorted:

> Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is undoubtedly the most authoritarian thing there is, an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all very authoritatian means. . . .

But he agreed at the same time that authority and autonomy were relative things whose spheres varied with the various phases of the development of society, and was in favour of restricting authority solely to the limits within which the objective conditions rendered it inevitable.[3]

In whom would this authority vest? Lenin replied by building the Communist Party — a closely-welded and steeled organization which rid itself of diffuseness by demanding unswerving loyalty to the decisions of the central committee. It is well known how his concept of authority, expressed in the firm centralism of party functioning, came under attack by those who were in favour of a more democratic mode of working. Lenin was branded as a Jacobin, a Robespierre determined to impose personal dictatorship! It cannot be denied that although, in theory, the Communist party had emphasized collective leadership, in practice, and particularly at times of crisis and moments which demanded immediate decision, an individual leader, by virtue of his towering personality, or experience or theoretical knowledge, asserted and rallied the rest behind him. That was how Lenin's revolutionary authority was built up.

The emergence of a single individual as the supreme leader at one stage is but natural. Engels compared the stage to a ship in a turbulent sea:

> . . . the necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that, will nowhere be found more evident than on board a ship on the high seas. There in time of danger, the lives of all depend on the instantaneous and absolute obedience of all to the will of one.[4]

The evolution of such a leader is not always determined by a numerically large following. Mao Tsetung was in a minority in the party in 1927 when he left for Hunan. His dogged perseverance in the belief that the peasantry were the "biggest motive force of the Chinese revolution" and the creditibility of his

theory of creating rural bases, were the first qualities which drew together initially the band of devoted followers. Later, as events confirmed the correctness of his principles and tactics, through a succession of experiences, through the testing of his theories in action, his revolutionary authority was consolidated. But for the beginners, the starting point was an unswerving faith in his theories and in his leadership, a belief based on observation of the contemporary situation and an inference from it as to the possible model for the Chinese revolution, as yet untested. For the vast masses outside the party, the requirement of a revolutionary authority usually stems from their need to trust wholeheartedly the leader, to believe in someone who can be regarded as infallible, who at the same time can conjure up the future before them and rally their anticipations and dreams to immediate action. But the leader cannot place himself above the evidence of reality; he must win the confidence of the people through concrete achievements. Thus the preponderant role of the individual leader, whether at the initial stage of the revolution in the matter of evolving a model, or at some crucial moment in the course of the revolution, cannot be denied.

On the basis of these tenets, Charu Mazumdar's followers upheld him as the 'national authority' of the Indian revolution. But as usually happens in such cases, they often tended to elevate him to a sacrosanct position, branding anyone who questioned him as a traitor to the revolution. These were the all too familiar trends that had led in the past to the development of bureaucracy and blind hero-worshipping in other Communist parties of the world.

Meanwhile, as the reports from the various areas — Mushahari, Lakhimpur, Gopiballavpur, Srikakulam — repeatedly underscored the heavy losses, they shook the confidence of many CPI (M) leaders. They pointed out that the reality was disproving Charu Mazumdar's theories. But, his followers asked, were the reverses caused by the implementation of their leader's theories or rather because of not following him in toto?

The Party Congress

In the midst of the reverses and political doubts among one section of the CPI (M-L) leadership, and determined efforts by the other section to push through the old programme and establish their leader as the supreme authority, the first congress of the CPI (M-L) was held in Calcutta in May 1970. The congress was attended by the leading representatives of the Party from the areas of struggle, and the delegates included Vempatapu, Satyanarayana, Adibhatla Kailasam and Dr Mallikarjunudu from Srikakulam and Satyanarain Singh from Bihar.

The congress adopted a full-fledged programme which held that the 'principal contradiction' of the period was that between feudalism and the broad masses of the Indian people, the resolution of which would lead to the resolution of all other contradictions too. Reiterating the comprador character of the Indian bourgeoisie and its subservience to US imperialism and Soviet social-

imperialism, the programme stated that the stage of the Indian revolution was that of democratic revolution, the "essence of which is agrarian revolution", the basic task being the overthrowing of the rule of feudalism, comprador-bureaucrat capitalism, imperialism and social-imperialism. To carry out the revolution, the programme stressed the need for a democratic front of the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and "even a section of the small and middle bourgeoisie under the leadership of the working class", the main force of the revolution being the peasantry. But "this front . . . can only be built up when worker-peasant unity is achieved in the course of armed struggle and after Red political power is established at least in some parts of the country."

Regarding the operative part, the programme stated that guerrilla warfare would remain the basic form of struggle through the entire period of the democratic revolution. ". . . guerrilla war alone can expand the small bases of armed struggle to large extensive areas through mighty waves of people's war and develop the People's Army which will . . . encircle and capture the cities." It quoted in this connection Lin Piao's thesis: "Guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilize and apply the entire strength of the people against the enemy." The programme also stressed that the Indian revolution was a part of the worldwide revolution being waged under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, and taking place in the "era of Mao Tsetung when world imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing towards world wide victory".

The congress also heard a political-organization report, which reiterated the need to "carry on the annihilation campaign more firmly and unitedly", and to rely on conventional weapons to release the initiative of the poor and landless peasants. Referring to the "spread of the flames of the struggle" to different areas, it said that a

> stage is opening when the armed peasants' struggles will create wave after wave of mass upsurge and set ablaze a conflagration all over this vast country, and our duty will be to lead this revolutionary high tide and make the revolution successful throughout the country.

About the repression let loose upon the party by the government, it felt that "preservation of our main force and our leadership depended on how far we could enter deep among the masses".

The congress adopted a constitution which pledged among other things the building up and consolidation of the party through "criticism and self-criticism" and the organization of a united front under the party leadership of all the revolutionary classes and groups engaged in armed struggle. Opening the doors of the party to "all revolutionaries in India" (including those coming from the "exploiting classes" who were obliged to give up their entire property to the party) it envisaged the laying down of the general line by the superior units, but gave freedom to the lower units to take full initiative in deciding on the tactics to implement the line.

The Party Congress formed four zonal bureaux: the West zone covering

Delhi, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir was headed by R.P. Shroff; the Central zone consisting of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar was controlled by Satyanarain Singh and S.K. Misra; the Eastern zone (West Bengal and Assam) was the responsibility of Sourin Bose, while convenors were later to be fixed for the Southern zone covering Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamilnadu. The idea was to allow these bureaux to function independently in future when and if connections with the central leadership were disrupted because of police repression.

Charu Mazumdar's Speech

An interesting part of the secret proceedings of the party congress was Charu Mazumdar's speech while introducing the political-organization report. He dealt in this speech with the tactical line recommended by him.

He lashed out at "centrism — the vilest form of revisionism" which was rearing up its head inside the party. He traced the beginnings of centrism in the movement of the Communist revolutionaries from the days of the AICCCR, when it manifested itself in Nagi Reddy's pleading against the boycotting of elections, and still later in Asit Sen's theory of forming a party basing on the industrial proletariat only. Coming to the current situation, he held that the centrist attack was being launched with the party on questions involving the use of firearms, dependence on petty bourgeois intellectuals and the tactics of annihilation. Reiterating that the annihilation struggle was simultaneously a "higher form of class struggle and the beginning of guerrilla warfare", he felt that one of the reasons for reverses in some areas was because "even without (carrying on) class struggles, we tried to build up an army and we failed."[36]

While wrestling with his critics who had been consistently blaming his theory of "annihilation of class enemies" for all the failures, Charu Mazumdar responded at the Congress with a peculiar act of self-defence which savoured of one-sidedness. In his speech, all the stress was laid on 'annihilation'. Only through the annihilation campaign, he asserted, could the new man be created — "the new man who will defy death and will be free from all thought of self-interest". He explained, "To go close to the enemy, it is necessary to conquer all thought of self." As for the martyrs, while his critics tended to look upon the loss of lives as unnecessary sacrifice, Charu Mazumdar vindicated the sacrifice thus:

> . . . only the blood of martyrs can make possible this victory. It is this blood of martyrs which creates enthusiasm, transforms the fighters into new men, fills their hearts with class-hatred; it is by being inspired by the blood of these martyrs that they move up to the enemy and with bare arms snatch away their rifles.

Turning to Srikakulam, he regretted that 'class enemies' were still living on the soil of Srikakulam and unless they were wiped out, the new consciousness and the new faith would not be born. From this view, he leapt to the conclusion that there could be no unity with those who opposed annihilation of class enemies, since they were "enemies of the people". Such people could not remain

in the party. Regarding the criticism about his insistence on conventional weapons, Charu Mazumdar asked: "Isn't it our dream that our poor and landless peasants will march forward with rifles?" He then explained: "Of course it is our dream. But the use of firearms at this stage, instead of releasing the initiative of the peasant masses to annihilate the class enemy, stifles it." He obviously had in mind the peasants' familiarity with the implements of daily use — the axe, the sickle or the chopper — which could be easily handled by the peasants and turned into weapons when necessary. "If the guerrilla fighters", he reminded the delegates, "begin their annihilation campaign with conventional weapons, the ordinary landless and poor peasants will come forward with bare hands and join the struggle of annihilation."

An important part of Charu Mazumdar's speech was devoted to developments in South-East Asia. The US aggression in Cambodia was described by him as the "beginning of the Third World War". (A few days later, however, on 20 May, Mao Tsetung was to say that the "danger of a new world war" was still present. Pointing out the discrepancy between the assessment of Charu Mazumdar's and that of Mao's, the former's critics in the CPI (M-L) were to disparage Mazumdar at a later date for his habit of exaggerating the reality and rushing to unwarranted generalizations.) Regarding the situation in India, Charu Mazumdar said in his speech that the emergence of the CPI (M-L) and the peasants' revolutionary struggle launched by it had become the decisive force of Indian history, and had changed the internal situation of the country.

Although *Liberation, Deshabrati*, and other party organs sought to create the impression that decisions had been smoothly adopted at the Party Congress, later disclosures by several important delegates reveal that the misgivings and doubts that had been nagging party workers in different parts of the country erupted both at the Central Organizing Committee's (COC) meeting held on the eve of the party congress and at the party congress itself. At the COC meeting, delegates from the Uttar Pradesh State Committee proposed an amendment to the party programme, stating that only the big bourgeoisie in India, and not the entire bourgeoisie, should be described as comprador. They also held that other forms of struggle, like legal fights and mass movements, should be declared complementary to armed struggle. But the COC rejected all the amendments. At the Party Congress, the question of revolutionary authority cropped up. Sourin Bose, an important leader from North Bengal and at that time a devotee of Charu Mazumdar's, put forth a resolution describing Charu Mazumdar as the supreme authority whose directives should always be abided by. According to later descriptions, there was almost a scramble, among the West Bengal delegates particularly, for demonstrating their loyalty to Charu Mazumdar. Ashim Chatterjee, who was in charge of leading the movement in Debra-Gopiballavpur, was reported to have told the Congress that if disputes arose between the Central Committee and Charu Mazumdar, he would always follow Charu Mazumdar. Khokon Mazumdar, another leader from North Bengal who had gone to China in 1967, announced that Mao Tsetung had described Charu Mazumdar as the greatest Marxist-Leninist outside China. Kanu Sanyal had a

fit of repentance and said that he should be criticized for having failed to refer to Charu Mazumdar's authority in his Report on the Terai Peasants' Movement.[5]*

Such adulation of Charu Mazumdar was objected to by Satyanarain Singh from Bihar, Shiv Kumar Misra and R.N. Upadhyaya from U.P. and Appu from Tamilnadu. To quote a later document, "The Charu clique demanded at the party congress that Charu Mazumdar should be established above the party, above the Central Committee, since he was the founder of the CPI (M-L).... In spite of their indefatigable attempts, because of the Marxist position adhered to by the delegates of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamilnadu and Assam, the Charu-clique was forced to retreat and withdraw the resolution."[6] Speaking on the controversial resolution, Charu Mazumdar told the congress that unless authority was established, multi-centrism and revisionism would appear in the party. But, he requested the delegates, the question should not be decided by vote. He urged those who were in favour of establishing an authority to carry on the 'two-line struggle' within the party to wait until revisionism was defeated.[7]

But the dispute did not end at the congress. It came up again before the newly formed Central Committee that met immediately after the congress. (The Central Committee consisted of Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Sushital Roy Chowdhury, Saroj Dutta, Sourin Bose, Suniti Ghosh, and Ashim Chatterjee from West Bengal; Satyanarain Singh, Gurubax Singh and Rajkishore Singh from Bihar; Shiv Kumar Misra and Mahindar Singh from Uttar Pradesh; Dr Nagbhushan Patnaik, Appalasuri, Vempatapu Satyanarayana, Adibathla Kailasam from Andhra Pradesh; Appu and Kodasudayanam from Tamilnadu, R.P. Saraf from Kashmir; and Ambaddi from Kerala. The latter left the party after two months and joined the Congress Party.) At the Central Committee meeting, Satyanarain Singh, Shiv Kumar Misra and Appu criticized Charu Mazumdar for imposing his line on the students without consulting the other party units. They were also joined by Sushital Roy Chowdhury of West Bengal. Finally, Charu Mazumdar had to concede and agreed that in future every resolution would be placed before the Central Committee.[8]

After the Party Congress

The enemy bared its fangs immediately after the party congress. The police mounted a ruthless offensive to wipe out the Communist revolutionaries. Central para-military forces like the Central Reserve Police joined the offensive in Srikakulam. As the repression took its toll reducing the defenders of the red bases to a minority, who fought bravely with desperate courage leaving behind them a heroic memory, doubts and misgivings increased among the leaders of the struggle in Srikakulam.

Differences developed during this period between the leaders of the plains

* Curiously enough, every one of these devotees of Charu Mazumdar's was to denounce him in the severest terms within a few years of the party congress.

area and those operating in the hills of Srikakulam. A document prepared by the hill leaders complained:

> After last September there has been stagnation in the movement in the 'red area'.... While applying Mao's Thought to our conditions we should have given importance to the development of a hill area as a base from which we could have spread to the plains. The importance of this aspect has been ignored and the struggle was concentrated in the plains to the neglect of the hill area. Because of this we have come to grief.

It was further stated:

> The money and gold the red area dalams seized was taken away by the district leaders. Without recognizing the red area's requirements money was doled out in limited accounts. This created difficulties for the red area comrades. Because of lack of money they could not secure ammunition independently. The result was that there was a shortage of ammunition.[9]

The main difference however developed on the theory of extending the tactics of annihilation to the plains. Absence of any background of mass movements in the plains (as in the hills) restricted the scope of preparing the peasants and developing guerrilla units. But in the desire for a quantitative expansion of the annihilation campaign, Charu Mazumdar's followers often resorted to indiscriminate killings of even small landowners, who could hardly be called "class enemies" of peasants.

A later day document of the Andhra State Committee of the CPI (M-L) admitted: "There arose contradictions between the Party leadership and the leadership of the agency area, which is the heart of our movement. It resulted in the worst type of factionalism that did great harm to the Party."[10]

The police took advantage of these differences, making the most of the gory incidents to rouse revulsion among the people. They began to propagate that the tribals were invading the plains, thus seeking to blur the class divisions and instigate instead regional differences — an old trick resorted to by the ruling class to disrupt mass movements. The biggest blow to the movement in Srikakulam came in July 1970, when the leader of the hill area, the beloved 'gappa guru' of the Girijans — Vempatapu Satyanarayana — was killed by the police at Bori hills in Parvatipuram. Along with him was his close comrade, Adibhatla Kailasam who also fell to police bullets.

Soon after this, the then Home Minister of Andhra Pradesh, K. Vengal Rao, claimed with confidence that the CPI (M-L) movement in his province was crushed. While Vengal Rao, in his announcement of the death of Satyanarayana and Kailasam at a press conference in Hyderabad, stated that they were "killed in an armed encounter", it was almost an open secret that they were killed following their arrest, after the usual pattern that had become fixed by now in anti-CPI (M-L) operations. With the elimination of the top leaders, and the consequent demoralization among the fighting ranks, it was easier for the police to gradually close in, and occupy the erstwhile red areas.

To isolate the masses of the Girijans from the guerrillas, the authorities resorted to the Vietnamese policy of setting up "strategic hamlets", moving entire villages to new areas, hoping to disperse the mass base of the CPI (M-L). A UNI despatch of 22 November 1970 said:

> 250 Girijan families consisting of 600 members were evacuated from their villages and were settled in Ramabhadrapuram, Jammivalasa and Peddabalibanda villages.... The Government took this measure to wean away the Girijans from the Naxalite influence.

By the end of 1970, the moneylenders and traders from the plains were returning to the hills in the Srikakulam Agency areas to renew their operations under the protection of the police camps.*

Four years later, a correspondent visiting one of the strategic hamlets — Ramabhadrapuram — reported the plight of the tribal residents in the following lines: "The rules of residence in the centre are strict. The tribals have to be back by sundown. There is no siren to warn them of the curfew but police bayonets up the hills hustle loiterers home." She found that the tribals had to go to work on the lands which were in their old villages from where they had been removed, and which were miles away from Ramabhadrapuram. Since they could not stay overnight in their old villages and had to return to the centre by dusk, they were forced to leave the ripening corn in the fields unguarded, often at the mercy of wild pigs and other animals. She quoted a Revenue official as having reported that the tribals "are now selling forest produce to the shahukars and once again they are at their mercy". Even when the tribals are allowed to go to their old villages, their children are kept back in the centre, as hostages, so that their parents could not think of escaping. The correspondent quoted the Special Deputy Collector who admitted: "The tribals have become discontented."[11]

The Indian state formerly used to come to the protection of the feudal interests by sending the police when the peasants revolted. Now it took a step forward by creating "villages" for them — hunting preserves filled with fair game for the chase.

Srikakulam — 1970

But in Srikakulam in the middle of 1970, misgivings regarding the tactics recommended by the leaders increased with the steady loss of important leaders and cadres and the gradual closing of the enemy dragnet.

Two important leaders of the area — Appalasuri and Nagabhushan Patnaik — came to Calcutta in July 1970, to convey to Charu Mazumdar the mood of the local party organization. They however could not return to Andhra Pradesh to

* This was openly admitted by Government officials during talks with men in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, at the end of 1970.

transmit Charu Mazumdar's message to their comrades, as they were arrested in Calcutta.

In a message to his comrades in Srikakulam, Charu Mazumdar said:

> Give democratic rights to every squad. Let them draw up their own plans, and let them successfully implement them. Form small squads, spread them all over the area. Inspire every one to avenge every drop of blood. Put forward your hands for the cooperation of the people. . . .

He urged that the small guerrilla squads should not only attack class enemies, but should annihilate the police and seize rifles from them and thus form a people's army all over Srikakulam. "Rally the masses for active cooperation," he said. "Use every tactics — from misleading the enemy with false reports to killing the enemy by poisoning them."[39]

To inspire the masses with the dream of seizure of power, he suggested experimenting with the idea of 'revolutionary committees' which would be governments in embryonic forms. "Form revolutionary committees in every village. These revolutionary committees will be our state power. Follow every directive of the revolutionary committees and teach others to follow it." Explaining the party's relations with these committees, he said:

> Unless there are very serious deviations, the party committee should not interfere. Only in this way can the state power of the revolutionary committee be established and developed. The majority of the members of the revolutionary committee should be taken from outside the party — those who are poor and landless peasants and those who are sincerely trying to understand and carry out the party's policies. Relations between the party unit and the revolutionary committee will be intimate and friendly — like the two hands of one person. Let every one follow its directive. . . [*Ibid.*]

But the cadres in Srikakulam, or at least a sizeable section among them, were in no mood to pay heed to Charu Mazumdar's advice. A document prepared by the Srikakulam Regional Communist Committee (Markist-Leninist) dated November 1970 sought to devise a new programme. It said: "We have made some tactical errors. We are trying to rectify these mistakes." The new programme shifted the emphasis to actions involving mass participation primarily on economic demands. In the document it was stated that:

> We have decided to mobilize people under the leadership of the CPI (M-L) for fighting all kinds of exploitation. Appropriation of excess land and land illegally occupied by the landlords, refusal to pay interest on usurious loans, appropriation of stocks of grain held by landlords and selling such grain at fair prices, refusal to pay the so-called dues being collected by the revenue officials of the Forest Department — these are some of the issues on which the people should fight. . . . People should be mobilized to appropriate the present harvest.[12]

The staunch followers of Charu Mazumdar who later reorganized the

Andhra State Committee of the CPI (M-L) took to task the Srikakulam district committee for trying to "retreat a step backward and mobilize people on economic issues".[13]

By the end of 1970, the revolutionary movement in Srikakulam had therefore suffered a definite setback. The enemy, desperate in its ruthlessness, had managed to gain a tottering foothold in Srikakulam. Insecure and panicky in the midst of Girijans boiling with suppressed rage, the police began a campaign of tyranny and intimidation. Wholesale arrests followed. The tribals were crammed into stinking cells of the jails and held there indefinitely without adequate food or water. The Government poured death into the villages of the Girijans in a fury of blood lust.

Decapitated of the top leadership, the second ranking leaders of the movement in Srikakulam found themselves divided politically and pursued relentlessly by gangs of ferocious police.

Review of the Srikakulam Struggle

Why did the movement in Srikakulam, which began with such high hopes and succeeded in establishing red power of some sorts, lose the day?

An exhaustive analysis of the causes of failure will have to await disclosure of the full story by the participants themselves, many of whom are languishing in jails today. We can at best hazard a few guesses.

Let us first see how the enemies of the struggle — the police administration — explained the collapse. According to an analysis made by a senior police official in charge of suppressing the movement,

> . . . the leaders made a series of miscalculations. They believed that once they started a revolt and showed results, the entire tribal population in the hills and the poor landless labourers in the plains should join them. In this they were sadly mistaken. Secondly, the tribes are too unsophisticated to understand the nuances of a 'revolution'. . . . Even the thousand odd Girijans who plunged into the movement were swayed by Vempatapu Satyanarayana in whom they had implicit faith. They had little use for the high sounding abstractions which flowed so readily from the lips of the hardline Naxalite organizers. Thirdly, the Naxalites failed to take into account the superior fire power of the police. Crude bombs, muzzle loaders, axes, spears and arrows are no match for rifles. Once the police moved in, in strength, the poor tribesmen had no chance whatsoever. The police have been pretty ruthless in their operations. On the slightest suspicion, they open fire and in the process take many innocent lives. Fourthly, the plight of the Girijans are pathetic. They are caught in a vicious circle. If they help the police, they are sure to be visited by the wrath of the Naxalites, and if they care so much as to give shelter to any suspected Naxalite, the police makes their lives miserable. . . .[14]

The entire assessment is tinged with the smug superciliousness of a police force, born of estrangement from the masses. It nevertheless throws light unwittingly and often by unconscious implications, on some of the factors — the rebels'

failure to extend the movement to the plains, and the premeditated and merciless police offensive.

Among the Communist revolutionaries, there were two different assessments. One set of arguments stressed that the rebels took the enemy lightly not only strategically but also tactically; that though their understanding was correct to a certain extent, they suffered a setback because of the line of adventurism of the central leadership; that they failed to exploit the contradictions among the class enemies because of the "wrong policy of annihilating all class enemies"; that they did not consider the fact that a section of the landlords would certainly join the democratic revolution; that they should have annihilated class enemies or confiscated their property only when there was people's participation, and not by depending on squad actions; that as the rebels did not wage economic struggles in the past in certain areas, the people did not participate in the actions in those areas; that it was wrong to start armed struggle in the plains areas as the people were not prepared; that it was wrong to launch armed struggle before securing modern weapons.[15]

Charu Mazumdar's followers rejected these arguments as an expression of "revisionist understanding". In a later day document they pointed out the failures, stating that the squads failed to snatch firearms from the enemy in time, and no serious attempts were made to build the Red Army.[16]

Coming to the details of the movement, the Andhra State Committee admitted:

> ... We suffered from the wrong understanding that hills and forests were enough for building liberated areas. ... We concentrated all available comrades in one area because the leadership suffered from the utopian idea that a liberated area could be created in the near future. ... We mobilized a big number in each action. (In many actions in plain areas the number of squad members varied between 25 and 75)* ... As we were not clear about the aims of our struggle in the plains areas, we followed wrong methods of struggle. We did not rely completely on the basic classes. These are the causes of our failure to extend our struggle to the plain areas. ...

Regarding the class composition of the party organization in Srikakulam, the document revealed:

> Even today our party is dominated by the petty bourgeois. Our cadres are predominantly petty bourgeois. Even today the villages of poor and landless peasants are not the centres of our activity. ... In the villages we still take shelters in petty bourgeois and rich peasant houses and enquire whether any poor peasant is prepared to 'cooperate' with us.

The State Committee also acknowledged that it was often estranged from the Srikakulam fighters, stating that:

* Often several leaders together accompanied these big squads. Thus, the police could capture at one stroke Subbarao Panigrahi, Nirmala Krishnamurthy and many other leaders during a single raid, and kill them in a row.

> ... many comrades were sent to Srikakulam from the plain areas. But the Party had no control on the arrival and sudden departure of those comrades. The Party had no assessment regarding the nature and amount of help needed by Srikakulam from the outside and it did not have clear ideas about what sort of cadres could exactly meet the demands of the Srikakulam struggle. ... It shows our failure to recognize the necessity of planning and foresight. As a result, we trailed behind the events. In practice, we suffered from this sort of spontaneity.

Another interesting point that cropped up during these inner-party arguments regarding the setback in Srikakulam was the question whether all the landlords should be attacked, or only the wicked ones should be made the targets. During the movement, the leadership in Srikakulam declared in a pamphlet: "A section of landlords will join the Democratic revolution and no force on earth can prevent them from joining our revolution."[17] As a result, some landlords were let off after they were introduced to the politics of the CPI (M-L); there were also attempts to discover contradictions among the landlords and take advantage of them.[18]

The Andhra State Committee later came out sharply against these trends, and declared that it was necessary to create red terror "to make it impossible for the landlords to live in the villages". Advocates of this argument were not apparently inclined to show any leniency to any landlord, however sympathetic he might appear, and were determined to clear the villages of all landlords to make them 'liberated areas' in the real sense of the term, either by annihilating them or driving them out. They probably had in mind Mao Tsetung's advice: "Everything reactionary is the same; if you don't hit it, it won't fall. This is also like sweeping the floor; as a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself."[19]

From all the assessments it is clear that revolutionaries could not establish a firm foothold in the plains. There was also a tendency to stick to the hills because of the temporary advantage of inaccessible terrain, and to consolidate it as a base area.

Dissent from Bihar

While ideological confusion gripped the Srikakulam revolutionaries and posed a threat to the unity of the CPI (M-L), another wedge to widen the schism came in the shape of a resolution adopted by the Bihar State Committee of the CPI (M-L) in September 1970.

The resolution drafted under the supervision of Satyanarain Singh bitterly criticized the central leadership of the party and without naming him, laid the blame squarely on Charu Mazumdar for the recent reverses. The Bihar Committee, like the Andhra State Committee, sought to make a distinction between the sympathetic and the notorious among the rural rich. It said that following Mao Tsetung's observation on rich peasants, the Bihar Communist revolutionaries had been able to neutralize a sizeable section of the rural rich without

resorting to annihilation. The Bihar Committee also suggested a different programme for the villages and the cities. The resolution stated:

> At this stage, the character of work in villages and cities will be different. In the cities, the party will have to work underground for long, must acquire strength, draw the urban mass towards the revolution and carry on defensive armed action. Only in villages the party will undertake offensive action. The city work will supplement the armed struggle in the village.

In this connection also the Committee stressed the need for preservation of cadres and for avoiding unnecessary sacrifice.[20]

The main brunt of the Bihar Committee's criticism fell on the functioning of the party's central leadership. It accused the centre on the ond hand of 'authoritarianism', and on the other of ignoring the need for centralized functioning by decentralizing the organization. The implication was clear. The attempt by Charu Mazumdar's followers to establish him as the revolutionary authority who had to be followed unswervingly was being resented. Charu Mazumdar's insistence on granting democratic rights to squads and encouraging individual initiative was felt to be an indirect incitement to cadres to bypass the immediate leaders — the State Committee or the regional committee.

Charu Mazumdar hastened to reply to the criticisms. Rejecting the Bihar Committee's view that the party should fight "Left opportunism", he asserted that "revisionism is still the main deviation among the masses of party members and this revisionism is standing in the way of our taking the struggle further." About relations with the rural rich, he reiterated that it would be that of struggle since the rich peasants mainly carried out feudal exploitation, and without fighting them the vacillating middle peasants could not be won over. Regarding annihilation, he held that the main factor which should be considered when any decision on annihilation was to be taken was "the class hatred of the poor and landless peasants". "If on any occasion", he said, "the poor and landless peasants insist on annihilating a rich peasant, it wouldn't do to seek the reason in the class basis of that rich peasant; it will have to be sought in his political attitude and in that case annihilating him will be correct."[44]

Regarding the difference between work in the city and rural areas, Charu Mazumdar refused to categorize it as 'defensive' and 'offensive'. The only difference, according to him, was that while it was possible to seize power and establish people's government in the villages, a similar situation could not be developed in the cities unless they were encircled by the people's army. But in the cities, "the workers and the oppressed people have every right to rebel. The more we fight against revisionism, the more the toiling masses will stand up in revolt and enter the struggle in the cities. The cadres who will emerge from these struggles and rebellions will feel the urge to go to the villages, integrate themselves with the poor and landless peasants and will be able to join the armed peasants struggle for seizure of political power." He also repudiated the suggestion for self-preservation, and stated that guerrilla struggle contained both the aspects of self-preservation and elimination of the enemy. Acknowledging the

need to fight the tendency of open work which often cropped up after some stepping up of guerrilla struggle, he warned that if otherwise, emphasis was laid on self-preservation, it would invariably enforce the revisionism that was still within the cadres and leaders.[*Ibid.*]

Coming to the main allegation about authoritarianism and decentralization of party work, Charu Mazumdar explained that centralism in functioning was not possible in the midst of a 'civil war' that was raging in the country. "It is not possible to have regular sittings of the Central Committee or Politburo; it involves so much risk that it should not be taken." Besides, he felt, centralism in functioning would weaken the initiative of the party members and in its turn weaken the party's capacity of offensive. But he stressed at the same time the need for centralism in carrying out the party's political line, in explaining the politics of the CPI (M-L) to every party member. What he meant was that the central political line should be uniformly followed at all levels. This, however, did not eschew the need or possibility of democratic discussions at various levels. Charu Mazumdar said:

> Since the Central Committee could not sit, we have therefore formed zonal bureaus in each zone with Central Committee members, and we have given the bureaus the right to invite any member to meetings of the zonal committees so that every member of the Central Committee could express views and criticisms about the Centre. We have also given this guarantee that whatever resolution might be adopted against the Centre would be distributed all over the country, so that the understanding improves.[*Ibid.*]

While all this sounds democratic in theory, in practice in many areas, the desire by his devotees to raise Charu Mazumdar to the status of the supreme authority, whose words would have to be dogmatically followed irrespective of the context when he uttered them, actually doubled the obstacles to, and halved the potentialities of, a democratic discussion at party meetings. At one stage, an atmosphere was created in which no one dared to oppose what had already proved to be exaggerations along pseudo-revolutionary lines for fear of being accused of a lack of revolutionary fervour which in the prevailing circumstances was not far from being accused of supporting the enemies. Such situations were of course not peculiar to the Indian Communist movement alone. Mao Tsetung had to warn against this trend in his country as late as 1956 when he said: "Some comrades are a bit woolly and dare not say that they are being realistic because of the ugly label of rightist conservatism and opportunism."[21] In India in 1970 however, such a tendency exerted a baleful influence on the course of the movement. As Ashim Chatterjee, who was one of the pioneers of the Debra-Gopiballavpur movement, was to admit later: "In our party for the last one and a half years, the use of the words 'agrarian revolution' has almost disappeared.... Every effort to organize mass movements has been termed 'revisionist'..."[22]

Finally, in October 1971, Charu Mazumdar himself had to intervene and advise his followers: "There is the struggle between two lines in the party, and it will remain. The struggle will have to be conducted in a principled manner...." He added that "full democratic rights" should be given to all party members to "express their views and criticisms".[64]

Misgivings in Midnapur

But to come back to the situation in 1970, a feeling of uncertainty gripped party organizers in other areas of struggle also, as the losses mounted up.

The mood comes out clearly in a letter written during this time by Ashim Chatterjee to Charu Mazumdar, where he described his feelings after three guerrillas in the area, on their way back from an action after having executed a class enemy, were butchered by hoodlums hired by the landlords. "I asked my comrades", he wrote, "that they will have to sacrifice their lives to organize Keshpur. The comrades went and gave their lives. The responsibility of asking others to give their lives is unbearable. I want to know where we are making mistakes."[23]

In his reply, Charu Mazumdar sympathized with the sorrow and agony felt by his comrade; but he reminded him: "Every wound inflicted on us is painful and from this pain are born the strength for greater sacrifice and the most intense hatred against the enemy — when these two are infused with Chairman's thought, the new man is born...." He admitted that there might have been mistakes, but it was not the time for repentance, "it is the time to flare up like fire, to pay back in blood the debt of blood". As for the mistakes, he hazarded the conjecture that "differences between the tribals and others" might have been the shortcoming, "taking advantage of which the class enemies have been able to unite".[37]

But neither his consolation nor his counsel could apparently stem the tide of mistrust and apprehension that was sweeping the cadres in the area. The death of comrades, one after another, was to drive the leaders of the area to question the efficacy of the tactics recommended by the centre. As Ashim Chatterjee was to put it later:

> We are in the midst of armed struggle in our area. Every moment we have to fight the cruel enemy. Any political question here is not the fashionable debate of intellectuals or the innocuous question of well-written articles. Here any political error is immediately translated into the language of blood and the bloody lifeless bodies of our beloved comrades pinpoint our errors.[24]

Apart from the question of loss of lives, more fundamental points of difference were emerging in course of the two-line struggle between the revolutionaries of Midnapur and the central leadership. Looking back at the situation in the area in 1970, Ashim Chatterjee was to say in 1971:

> We cannot agree with Comrade Charu Mazumdar's line on the character of the Indian revolution. Our party leadership has rejected the theory of the uneven development of revolution in India.... From our little experience in the border area we have seen that our attempt to carry on struggles simultaneously all over the border region has failed every time. ...

The Midnapur revolutionaries were feeling the need for a stable base area. Ashim Chatterjee said:

> Till now we have killed 120 class enemies, ... we are prepared to kill 120 more or even more class enemies, but with every annihilation we feel more and more the need for setting up a base area. Otherwise, every annihilation becomes a useless burden. [As a result, he felt] in our party and squads, the politics of a mobile rebel force is rearing its head. The entire line is reduced to that of a line of vagabonds.[25]

Much later, Charu Mazumdar analyzing the causes of failure in Midnapur, was to say: "There is only one reason. The leadership was in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie there. The leadership of the poor and landless peasants was not established. The poor and landless peasants were not aroused politically."[67] This is corroborated by Ashim Chatterjee also. In the July 1971 document which has already been quoted earlier, he said:

> Of the 40,000 peasants who initially came with us, barring a few, the rest have been reduced to passive sympathizers. ... In spite of annihilating 120 class enemies, in spite of our ceaseless efforts, the number of landless and poor peasants in our guerrilla band has not increased.

He was however not willing to trace the failure to the petty bourgeois inability to integrate with the poor and landless peasantry, but blamed the party line recommended by the centre: "... the line has an appeal to the students, the youth, the petty bourgeois, the dacoits and the lumpen proletariat. It approximates to their natural tendencies. ..."

The arguments over base area and peasants' mobilization were to loom large in the struggle between the two lines within the CPI (M-L) a year later, leading to a split.

Other Revolutionary Groups

Meanwhile, groups outside the CPI (M-L) were trudging along their separate paths experimenting with different tactics.

In Telengana, the Revolutionary Communist Committee (RCC) headed by Nagi Reddy, as mentioned earlier, eschewed the path of "annihilation of class enemies", and preferred the tactics of land occupation and redistribution followed by armed self-defence, to that of offensive actions. But the State made little distinction in treating the CPI (M-L) movement and the RCC acts of self-defence. As in Srikakulam, in Telengana also villages which were centres of the RCC were surrounded, searched and burnt, the villagers were beaten up, and their leaders if caught, were often shot without any trial by the police. Thus, Bathula Venkateswara Rao (is he the same Bathulu Vendateshwarlu of Khammam, who was a law graduate and former president of the Andhra Pradesh Students' Federation, who according to some reports was shot dead by the police in December 1969?) who was in charge of guerrilla operations in the Khammam area, was caught along with two others, near Gondigudem in Khammam district,

tortured by the police for two days, taken to the hillocks near Aswaraopet in an unconscious state, and shot dead.[26]

The main leadership of the RCC, consisting of Nagi Reddy, Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao — a veteran of the 1946-51 Telengana struggle — and four other members of the RCC, were apprehended by the Madras police, in the early hours of 19 December 1969, when they were engrossed in a secret meeting at a house in Madras city. Chandra Pulla Reddy, an important member of the RCC's Provincial Committee, who was to play a significant role in the group's polemics later, evaded arrest. With him in a leading position, a new provincial committee was formed in June 1970. But soon differences developed between the provincial committee and the RCC leaders in jail. In fact, it is believed that Nagi Reddy and Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao had earlier accused Pulla Reddy of following Charu Mazumdar's tactics, and had decided to take action against him.

The differences centred round tactics. While the jail committee favoured land occupation and redistribution first, before starting armed struggle, Pulla Reddy's group wanted to take to arms for the self-protection of the cadres in the course of struggles on economic demands. Referring to the 'Immediate Programme's' emphasis on occupation of land and its distribution, Pulla Reddy's group pointed out:

> Occupation of the landlords' lands by the people, on a big scale in extensive areas, depends mainly on the people's willingness and determination to directly participate in the armed struggle. The people will occupy landlords' lands in extensive areas when they become conscious and have confidence in the strength of our armed squads in resisting the government's armed forces, and when they are confident and determined that they can and will defend and retain those lands.[27]

By the middle of 1970, the Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee claimed, guerrillas had 'liberated' an area of 7,000 to 8,000 square miles in the Telegana region, covering a population of 500,000 to 600,000. But the revolutionaries could not extend the area. In March 1971, the Government of India sent about 10,444 para-military personnel fully equipped with arms and ammunition, who managed to clear the 'red bases' in Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar by slaughtering or arresting the leaders and their cadres. Here also, as in Srikakulam, the entire population of the villages were removed to 'strategic hamlets' elsewhere.

During 1973-74, isolated armed groups of guerrillas who could escape, were operating in the hills and forests of Telengana, threatening landlords and collecting protection money from them.

A similar group of revolutionaries hit the headlines of all the newspapers in India in May 1970. About 60 young people including some women, were alleged by the police to have attacked a police station in the Ruam region, near Jamshedpur in Bihar. They were apprehended from the inaccessible Jaduguda forest, after a week-long intense search by the police with the help of helicopters. One of the accused in what came to be known as the Jaduguda Naxalite Conspiracy case, was a 26-year old British girl — Mary Tyler. The group was

known as the Revolutionary Communist Council of India and owed allegiance to Marxism-Leninism and Mao's Thoughts, according to their pamphlets.

CPI (M-L) at the Crossroads

Through all these vicissitudes from the end of 1969, Charu Mazumdar stuck to his guns. Through articles, messages, letters and lectures, from his underground hideout he strove to propagate his views and repudiate criticisms.

In this relentless venture of his, he was assisted by Saroj Dutta, who was later to become the secretary of the West Bengal Provincial Committee of the CPI (M-L), whose vitriolic pen lashed out mercilessly at the critics of the official line, through the columns of *Deshabrati*. In a letter to a comrade in jail written towards the end of 1970, Saroj Dutta gave an inkling of the coming split. Referring to Satyanarain Singh's criticism, he said: "Charu Mazumdar is preparing to fight this assault, and by fighting it he intends to firmly establish his revolutionary line, the revolutionary line of the Party Congress." Asserting that the fight could not be evaded, he advised his comrade: "Do not be sad because of the impending breaking of unity. A new revolutionary unity is being forged, destroying the old. . . ."

Charu Mazumdar meanwhile was hammering at his old views — bringing up the poor and landless peasants to the leadership, expansion of the annihilation campaign and establishment of revolutionary committees. Some of his utterances and writings during this period suggest a certain amount of one-sidedness in his approach to problems. The entire stress often appears to be on tactics of annihilation to the exclusion of other forms like mass movements, the need of which he had acknowledged earlier. Sometimes his statements look contradictory. But what appear as contradictions to us now, might have been swift shifts of emphasis from one point to another in response to fleeting events, one coming fast upon the heels of the other. Charu Mazumdar during this period was like a man in a hurry, too much propelled by the rapid pace of events to afford to be consistent always.

Why did the tactics of annihilation assume such a preponderating dimension in Charu Mazumdar's thoughts? The more his critics assailed them, the more determinedly he reasserted them during this period. Was it from a fear that any soft-pedalling of the tactics at the prevailing period of white terror might lead to the withdrawal of armed struggle? Did he apprehend that any talk about mass movements on economic demands — the other stages of class struggle — might encourage the fighters in the face of the massive repression, to slide into the safe channels of economism?

Whatever might have been the motives, the over-emphasis on annihilation led to an over-simplification in the interpretation of the doctrine. His followers often reduced his entire doctrine to the practice of isolated killing of a landlord or police, divorced from all conscious attempts at mass mobilization for seizure of power, either before or after the action. That is why, although after the party congress, throughout the remainder of 1970, there were actions in different

States (in West Bengal alone by October 1970, about 150 'class enemies' had been annihilated), nowhere could a rudimentary form of people's power be set up as was possible in Srikakulam or Debra-Gopiballavpur. His followers wholeheartedly responded to his call: "You must carry forward the struggle for annihilation of class enemies."[36] But they ignored his reminder:

> . . . it is necessary to educate the people in political thought. Downtrodden by thousands of years of exploitation and oppression, man today wants liberty, wants revolution. Do not hesitate to give him politics. Only the politics of seizure of power can raise a stir in the world of his thoughts. . . .[38]

Charu Mazumdar of course hailed the isolated actions, even a single annihilation of a class enemy in some remote State. He hoped that however insignificant they might appear at the moment, they could create points of armed struggle which could become liberated areas in the near future. Much later, towards the end of 1971, he was to point out the mistakes of actions divorced from political propaganda. About Midnapur he said then: "It is quite possible that there might be no actions in Midnapur for six months. There is no loss if there is no action. What is necessary is to take politics into the depth of the masses. . . ."[69]

Towards the end of 1969, about mass movements and mass organizations, he wrote: "The revolutionary peasantry has demonstrated through its struggle that neither mass movement nor mass organization is indispensable for waging guerrilla warfare."[28] Here is a tendency to relegate mass movements and mass organizations as factors which could be dispensed with. But in 1967 in reply to the question — "Is there no need for the peasants to organize mass movements in this period on the basis of partial demands?" his reply was categorical, "Certainly the need is there, and will remain there in future too".[8] What had happened in the meantime to warrant the shift of stress? Was it the experience after the repression in Naxalbari and Srikakulam that "mass organization and mass movement increase the tendency for open movement based on economism and expose the revolutionary workers before the enemy?"[28]

During this period, Charu Mazumdar was more and more inclined to believe that the peasants were ready to take up arms in every corner of India, as opposed to his earlier acknowledgement of uneven development of consciousness and preparedness among the Indian peasantry. "In every village of India", he told the 1970 party congress, "guerrilla warfare can be waged through the annihilation campaign". "Every corner of India is explosive today. . . ." he wrote in another article.[28] Yet, in 1967 he had said:

> India is a vast country, and the peasants also are divided into various classes. So the standard of political consciousness cannot remain on the same level in all the areas and among all the classes. The opportunity and possibility of peasants' mass movement on the basis of partial demands therefore, will always be there and Communists must take full advantage of that opportunity at all times.[8]

Was his overestimation of the uniformity of revolutionary condition all over

India in 1970 born of a desire to expand the areas of armed struggle as fast as possible? In his impatient dismissal of all mass movements and in his attempt to freeze the tactics of annihilation that might have suited one area or one stage of political preparedness into a general directive meant for application all over the country simultaneously, was he hoping to hasten the pace of the revolution?

This brings us to the other important theme in his writings during this period — the possibility of the liberation of India by 1975. By reiterating this theme, he was trying to force history. Reminding his followers of the rapid pace at which events were moving in India, he said: "If the new revolutionary consciousness which was born in 1967 [i.e. from the uprising at Naxalbari] can rally one crore of people in 1970, why cannot these one crore deluge fifty crores in the revolutionary mass upsurge within 1975?" Carried away by the onward rush of his vision, he exclaimed: ". . . it is my belief that within 1975 itself, the crores of people of India will compose the epic of liberation".[*Ibid.*]

Was there a fatal admixture of illusion in this prognostication of Charu Mazumdar's — at least as regards the tempo of the whole process? But a cold dispassionate judgement on our part may not be the right attitude in such matters. As Graham Greene once remarked: ". . . pessimism is the doubtful privilege of an outsider with a return ticket. Optimism is a vital necessity for the man who makes the decisions."

Charu Mazumdar was trying to inject his optimism into his cadres, to insulate them from the nagging, nibbling doubts that seemed to spoil every confident hope and tarnish the ecstatic dream of a people's revolution. He was making their dream realizable, bringing the goal within their reach, showing them that it was attainable within five years.

But Charu Mazumdar's critics in the party were sceptical about his hopes. They had seen how with the unleashing of the police repression, defects in the fighting organizations had made themselves felt to an increasing degree. With the arrest of the leaders in Srikakulam, Debra-Gopiballavpur and other areas of struggle, the movement had assumed an incredibly sporadic character. Although actions had spread to other areas, there was no continuity and coherence that could lead them to the establishment of people's power. They felt that Charu Mazumdar in reiterating his tactics and promising an early victory was trying with ostrichlike avoidance to bury these facts, as though denial could bring about their elimination, and was encouraging reckless actions.

Describing the spate of indiscriminate actions at that time, Sushital Ray Chowdhury, the secretary of the West Bengal Committee of the party and editor of *Liberation*, who was to turn a critic of Charu Mazumdar's, said later: ". . . an idea began to be propagated that we need not fight such a protracted war. It was prophesied that we would win victory by 1975. No doubt such ideas influenced our method of work which followed, which was characterized by nothing but impetousity."[28] Ashim Chatterjee complained: ". . . it is not desirable to spread the middle class thought of easy victory by futile predictions like the end of revolution by 1975."[29] These critics possibly remembered Mao Tsetung's words: "Marxists are not fortunetellers. They should, and indeed can, only indicate the general direction of future developments and changes; they should not and

cannot fix the day and the hour in a mechanistic way."[30]

As criticism against Charu Mazumdar mounted within the party, support to his tactics from outside came to an abrupt halt. China stopped propagating CPI (M-L) achievements from the middle of 1970. Radio Peking maintained a scrupulous silence on the fate of Srikakulam. Although China was to break this silence towards the end of the year, all through those bleak months of the summer of 1970, China's non-committal attitude continued to increase the confusion among the pessimists in the CPI (M-L). They felt that something had gone wrong somewhere — wrong as a picture hung in a certain way was wrong, causing vague but persistent feelings of perplexity and dissatisfaction.

Finally, it was decided that an emissary would be sent to Peking to place before the "leadership of the world revolution" the problem that the Indian revolutionaries were facing. The emissary selected was Sourin Bose — a leader from North Bengal, who was associated with the struggle in Naxalbari. Sourin Bose managed to get a passport issued in a fictitious name, and reached Peking via a roundabout route through London, Tirana and Karachi, to escape the police.

Incidentally, this was not the first time that an Indian Maoist had gone to China. Way back in September 1967, in the first flush of the Naxalbari movement, a group of 12 Maoists crossed over to China to receive military and political training from the Communist Party of China. They included besides Sourin Bose, important leaders of Naxalbari like Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal, Dipak Biswas, Kadam Mallik, Khodan Mallik, and Keshab Sarkar. They met Mao Tsetung and Kang Shen among other Chinese leaders. Direct Chinese aid to the CPI (M-L) however did not extend beyond this initial military training and occasionally moral support through Peking journals and Radio Peking.

While the ideological dispute raged within the party, the CPI (M-L) activities, on the whole, hardly showed any sign of laxity. The rural bases in Srikakulam, Mushahari, Debra and Gopiballavpur were being eroded. But landlords, moneylenders and policemen were being annihilated in different areas in other States. Besides, developments of momentous significance were taking place in another part of the country. In Calcutta and neighbouring towns of West Bengal, the CPI (M-L) found itself at the head of a widespread youth upsurge, unprecedented in its militancy, and impregnated with the dynamite that was to set off a socio-political explosion.

Notes

1. *Important Documents on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China*. Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970, pp. 322-24
2. Annual Report of the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970.
3. Frederick Engels, 'On Authority', 1873. (In *Selected Works* of Karl Marx and F. Engels, Vol. II, pp. 376-79. Moscow edition, 1969).
4. Observer, 'To Win Victory in the Revolution, We Must Establish the Revolutionary Authority', *Liberation*, February 1970. Frederick Engels, op. cit.

5. A self-critical review by the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L), copies of which were secretly circulated in 1974.
6. From the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) on 7 November 1971.
7. A self-critical review by the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L), copies of which were secretly circulated in 1974.
8. *Ibid*.
9. Quoted in C. Subba Rao's 'Decline of Naxalism-II' in *Times of India*, 1 August 1972.
10. Andhra State Committee, 'Fight Revisionism — Review of Armed Struggle in Andhra.' *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
11. Amrita Rangaswamy, 'Making a Village; an Andhra experiment.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 September 1974.
12. Quoted in 'Report on Srikakulam' in *Frontier*, 20 March 1970.
13. *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
14. K.N. Misra, S.S. of Police, District Intelligence Bureau, Koraput, 'Koraput District — On Crime', *Orissa Police Magazine*, January 1972.
15. These arguments are quoted in a letter addressed by the Andhra State Committee of the CPI (M-L) published in *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
16. *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
17. *Ibid*.
18. A similar distinction between 'neutral' and 'wicked' landlords was also made by Satyanarain Singh of Mushahari and the leaders of the struggle in Debra and Gopiballavpur — an attitude which figured prominently during the breach with Charu Mazumdar at a later stage.
19. Mao Tsetung, 'The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan,' 13 August 1945, (*Selected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 19).
20. The New Upsurge and Struggle Against Left Adventurism — CPI (M-L) Bihar Committee's resolution.
21. Mao Tsetung, 'Talk at the conference of intellectuals called by the Centre.' 20 January 1956. (Quoted in Jerome Chen's *Mao Papers*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1971, p. 21).
22. From a secret document published by the Bengal.Bihar-Orissa Border Regional Committee of the CPI (M-L) in July 1971. (Henceforth to be referred to as BBOBRC document, July 1971).
23. *Deshabrati*, 6 July 1970.
24. BBOBRC document, July 1971.
25. *Ibid*.
26. C.K. Kutumba Reddy, 'Will You Vote?' *Frontier*, 27 February 1971.
27. Quoted in 'Serious Mistakes' — an unsigned article discussing a document released by the Revolutionary Communist Committee of Andhra Pradesh, published in *Frontier*, 29 July 1972.
28. Sushital Ray Chowdhury, 'Combat left Adventurism'. (A document, probably written in early 1971, and published later in the March-May 1972 issue of *Liberation*, brought out by the rival CPI (M-L) headed by Satyanarain Singh.)
29. BBRBRC document, July 1971.
30. Mao Tsetung, 'A single spark can start a prairie fire'. 5 January 1930. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 127.

8 The Youth Upsurge

The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. . . .
Mao Tsetung:
'Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung', p. 288

They are not burdened with any revisionist past as is the case with their elders. They are not required to go through the agonizing process of making a break with past ties like their elders. . . . Their vision is not clouded by old superstitions like their elders.
Saroj Dutta:
'In Defence of Iconoclasm', 'Deshabrati', 1970.

Calcutta: 1970

When, in early 1970, the countryside was being rocked by peasant upheavals, Calcutta was still wearing its routine look. Life went on as usual. The thunder of buses, the roar of motor horns, the clang of dilapidated tram cars, and shouting of street vendors made it the noisiest corner in India.

In the fashionable areas of Park Street and Chowringhee, gathered all the gaiety and frivolity of the city. Swanky business executives and thriving journalists, film stars and art critics, smugglers and touts, chic society dames and jet-set teenagers thronged the bars and discotheques. All mention of the rural uprising in these crowds was considered distinctly in bad taste, although the term 'Naxalite' had assumed an aura of the exotic and was being used to dramatize all sorts of sensationalism in these circles — ranging from good-natured Bohemianism to hippy-style pot sessions.

For the middle class clientele of the tea shops of Shyambazar, College Street or Bhowanipore, the rural unrest was not so remote. Over cups of tea, or munching dry toasts, they read the papers every morning. In the evenings they discussed the news, exchanged information — "Do you think Jyoti Basu will remain in office?" "What is really happening in Gopiballavpur?" — then the talk veered round to women, or the latest film, or the local scandal.

But things were not to remain so placid for long. Calcutta's walls were screaming

in black tar, calling upon the people to make the 70s the "decade of liberation", announcing that "throats of jotedars" were being slit by angry peasants, and promising that the People's Liberation Army would march across West Bengal in 1971.* Uneasy rumblings portending the thunder were already in the air.

Early in 1970, in an appeal to the youth and students, Mazumdar had regretted that although "in a man's life the age between 18 and 24, is the period when he can work hardest and can be most vigorous, most courageous and most loyal to his ideas", the students of that age-group in India were "forced to pursue anti-people courses of study and try to pass examinations." In that appeal, Charu Mazumdar also said: "It will give me the greatest pleasure if you plunge yourselves into the revolutionary struggle here and now instead of wasting your energy in passing examinations". Reminding them of the need to integrate themselves with the peasantry, he urged them to go to the villages in large numbers as the first step towards integration.[32] But the students, taking the cue from Charu Mazumdar's opposition to "anti-people courses of study" preferred to enact a mini-cultural revolution in the cities and towns of West Bengal. By the middle of 1970, they were becoming more active in Calcutta.

The CPI (M-L) urban movement had three aspects. There was first the cultural side, marked by an organized effort to debunk the intellectual heritage of the Indian, particularly Bengali, middle class. The second was an attempt to reproduce the annihilation campaign in the cities, the targets being the police personnel, informers and political rivals. The third was a preparatory move to build up the arsenal by mass-scale snatching of arms.

The cultural onslaught was highlighted by attacks on educational institutions and functions, and desecration of statues of national leaders. As already indicated in Chapter 2, the ground was fertile for such an onslaught thanks to the crisis in the entire educational system.

The Cultural Background of the Bengali Middle Class

The programme of debunking the middle class tradition and of profaning the symbols of their culture needs to be seen against the educational background of the Bengali middle class. The tradition was marked by a hiatus between the educated few at the top and the masses at the bottom. This was in fact a legacy from the days of the British colonial rule. In 1835, Macaulay set the pattern of education in India by asserting: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreter between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[1]

It was no wonder therefore that when in the 19th Century, peasants' revolts shook the Indian countryside, the educated Indian middle class — "Indian in

* Cf. "When I say that by 1970-71, the people's liberation army will march across vast areas of West Bengal, I am not day dreaming."[43]

blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" — failed to grasp their significance and opposed them. As one modern Bengali sociologist described the situation:

> When in 1855 and 1856, during the Santhal rebellion, in every district, in every village in the west of Bengal, fear shook both the native and foreign exploiters and rulers... when the Santhal rebel leaders were being hanged on the gallows... when the new railway sahibs and babus were raping with impunity Santhal and other poor women labourers, cheating them of their food and wages... only a few miles away, in Calcutta city, the middle class educated Bengali babus, different categories of babus, ranging from the banyas and agents, to the newly educated social reformers who were swinging on the crest of waves of the 'renaissance' or the new awakening, were sporting in their parlour, gossiping about widow remarriage or their favourite horse races, or making arrangements for European dishes and Hindusthani nautches at Durga Pujas... or browsing over old manuscripts to quote for or against widow remarriage — when hundreds of Santhals and their supporters — Hadi, Muchi and Dom rebels were being chained and dragged to the prisons. Widow remarriages and the luxury of women's education in the cities, and widespread mass rebellions in the villages — both were taking place at about the same time, on the same day, on the social scene. Nowhere in the world did such an amazing and strange thing happen before. Yet, it took place in our country. The wide gulf between the city and the village which is hundred times more than the geographical distance that separates them, is hardly to be seen anywhere else.[2]

Although the city-based social reform and literary movement led by the English educated middle class, and the rural peasants' uprisings ran parallel without converging at any point throughout the 19th Century, there was a confused radical strain in the former, which sometimes went off at a tangent from the mainstream of the middle class movement and came near meeting the course of the rural agitations. This was represented by the Young Bengal — the pupils of the Eurasian teacher of Hindu College, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio — who could be regarded as the intellectual ancestors of the rebellious students of Calcutta of 1970. Macaulay's system of education, while serving the interests of efficient imperialist administration, opened at the same time the floodgates of contemporary Western ideas of liberalism and democracy to the Indian students. Inspired by these ideas, the young pupils of Derozio subjected their entire tradition, their religion and social customs to a ruthless criticism, just as about 150 years later the youth of Bengal were to put in the dock their own intellectual heritage and their social origins. In their desire to challenge the established values, and in their enthusiasm for the ideals of fraternity and equality, some among them questioned the right of the British to rule them, and veered dangerously near the contemporary rural turmoil. Thus, Radhanath Shikdar (1813-70), one of the young Derozians, struggled against the Government officials to prevent exaction of forced labour from the Survey of India coolies.

There were yet a few others in 19th Century Bengal, who actively helped the peasant rebels, and paid the price by being witch-hunted and driven to death. Such a man was Harish Mukherjee, the editor of *Hindu Patriot*, who untiringly exposed, through the columns of his paper, the brutalities of the British indigo

planters, defended the peasants when they rose into revolt against the planters, spent all his savings in helping the cause of the persecuted peasants, and turned his own home in Calcutta into a refuge for the leaders of the rebellion. Deserted by his friends and relatives, and harassed by lawsuits instituted by the police, Harish Mukherjee died in 1861, when he was only 37.[3]

Barring a few such committed intellectuals, the majority of the products of Macaulay's educational system, who came to dominate the leadership of the political movement in India in the 20th Century, were primarily interested in safeguarding and, later, advancing their own class interests, rather than fighting for the downtrodden masses. They utilized the mass unheavals, but sought to put a brake upon them, whenever they threatened to assert the interests of the peasantry or the militant workers, against the interests of the educated middle class leadership. Gandhi's advice to the peasantry during the non-cooperation movement, Nehru's annoyance with the peasantry during the pre-1947 Congress Ministries, or Sardar Patel's betrayal of the Royal Indian Navy's rebel ratings — all were in keeping with the anti-peasant, anti-militant tradition of the English-educated Indian middle class. Even Subhash Bose, who paraded as a 'Leftist' in the Congress, did not hesitate to order his volunteers to beat up striking railway workers, when the latter came in a procession to the Calcutta Congress session in 1928 to press the Congress leaders to support them.

There were of course contradictions within the Congress leadership, which came to the open in an aggravated form during the Second World War. But according to the CPI (M-L), such contradictions were reflections of the conflict among world imperialist powers. Referring to Gandhi's dispute with Subhash Bose, the CPI (M-L) theoretician Saroj Dutta said: "Gandhi was the leader and representative of the bourgeois group which was the agent of the British imperialists, and Subhash was the chieftain of the gang of rising agents of German-Japan-Italian imperialist axis". About the conflict between Gandhi and Nehru, Saroj Dutta's interpretation was that during the first phase of the Second World War when Hitler was advancing, Gandhi felt that Britain would be defeated, and overnight turned into an anti-British rebel giving the call "Quit India" in 1942. Nehru on the other hand, realizing that the combined strength of Britain, USA and the Soviet Union would finally defeat the axis, held that it would be unwise to go against the British, and took an anti-fascist position. "... Everyone agreed that it was necessary to 'stay with him who would win'; the difference was regarding the question who would win..." — in these words, Saroj Dutta summed up the dispute. Saroj Dutta was equally blunt in his assessment of Subhash Bose and his army, which he described as "an army of defeated and captured mercenary troops of one imperialist power, organized into a puppet army by another imperialist power, which was given the bombastic title 'Azad Hind Fauz'...." Taking advantage of the Indian people's longing for an army of their own to drive out the British, the bourgeois leaders created out of this stuff the image of "Netaji", which in the absence of alternative Communist preparations for armed struggle, helped to nourish the illusion about and respect for Subhash among the masses.[4]

The Crisis in Education

Even after the 1947 transfer of power, the educational system basically remained the same. Knowledge of English continued to remain the criterion for assessing one's qualifications. Higher education was dominated by English which provided a person with the requisite qualifications for important jobs in government and other sectors of high status employment.

But although higher education continued to spread in the post-1947 years, when compared to India's total population it still remained confined to the top elite. In 1968-69, according to the Education Ministry, there were about 349 million illiterate people in the country, representing about 70% of the population.[5] Of the rest, which included those who could only sign their names also, the English-educated persons constituted about 8.2 million, according to one computation.[6] This would mean that the percentage of English-knowing persons in India in proportion to the total population still remained under 2%.

Thus, the 'class of intepreters' whom Macaulay fathered forth still continued to man the country's administration, the professions and services both in the public and private sectors, as distant emotionally and culturally from the masses, as it was one and a half centuries ago. Gunnar Myrdal, writing about the situation in the late sixties, felt that the system of education "conformed closely to the old colonial pattern of building up a highly educated elite with an attached lower rank of technical personnel functioning as subalterns, while leaving the population at large in a state of ignorance."[7]

The class character of the nation's rulers was not only reflected in the pattern of imparting education, but also in its content. Stress was placed on the non-violent aspect of the anti-imperialist movement in the history textbooks, and on the Western capitalist theories of development in the courses of economics and political science. Although the Sepoy Rebellion — because of its massive nature it could not be ignored — was hailed as the first war of independence, the pro-British role of the contemporary Indian social reformers and intellectuals was glossed over in the history books. The hundreds of peasants' revolts that preceded and followed the great rebellion, seldom found a place in the textbooks.

But such a system of education carried within itself the seeds of a crisis. While higher education expanded in response to middle class demands, the decline in economic growth reduced the scope of employment for those who came out from colleges and universities. The number of applications from the educated unemployed in the live registers of the employment exchanges in India increased from 163,000 in 1953 to 917,000 by the end of 1966. There were thousands more who did not care to register their names, giving up the hope of getting jobs through the exchanges. The industrial recession in 1966-67 hit hard the prospects of employment of thousands of engineers who came out from the engineering institutes.

Thus, by the end of the sixties, the students were ripe for a rebellion. The bleak employment prospects made them sceptical about the entire educational system

— the monotonous lectures on courses which were out of touch with the reality, the cramming of outmoded texts to pass examinations, corruption in the universities manifest in the arbitrary manipulation of marks in the answer scripts of favoured candidates, indifference to the fate of others, loss of mark-sheets or answer scripts due to careless handling by examiners or scrutineers, and finally the devaluation of degrees and diplomas.

The situation in Calcutta in particular appeared to have reached the breaking point. Living in overcrowded tenements and attending colleges where the teacher-pupil ratio was often 1 to 200, the youth were gripped by an impotent rage. Frustration gnawed at their souls almost every moment of the day. The anger found outlets in the tearing of diplomas at convocations, disruption of convocation addresses with demands for jobs, mass copying at examinations reducing the system to a farce, and other actions which suggested their disrespect for shibboleths of the past, and disregard of the authorities of the present. Here was a generation which refused to cooperate with the faded dream of those who held power — whether the Congress or the parliamentary Leftists. The discovery of corruption in the ranks of these leaders, the dissipation of myths that flourished immediately after the transfer of power in 1947, the disillusionment with doctrines which in the past appeared unassailable, brought forth a strong reaction among the youth.

The CPI (M-L) sought to give a political direction to the sporadic outbursts of the Calcutta students by providing an ideological justification, and sometimes by channeling the youthful anger towards selected targets.

Throughout 1968 and up to the birth of the CPI (M-L) in May 1969, the urban movement of the Communist revolutionary students and youth was marked by demonstrations in Calcutta and other towns in defence of the peasants' armed struggle,[8] and often on economic issues like rise in food prices. The draft political programme of the revolutionary student-youth movement published in *Deshabrati*, 20 February 1969, stressed the need to wage struggles for "food, employment, education and culture", to draw the masses of students into the fold of the movement. The conventional pattern of students' agitations still influenced the thinking of these Communist revolutionaries. Although they had broken away from the CPI (M), in 1968 these young revolutionaries were still contesting elections and capturing students' unions in different colleges in West Bengal.

In August 1969, however, Charu Mazumdar in a call to the youth and students said that college unions which "the reactionary ruling classes had held out as a bait before the students to kill their revolutionary potentialities", could not "solve any problem of education that confronts the students". He added: "... the college unions fail to provide leadership to the youth and the students in their revolt against the existing education system." He reminded the students how union leadership in most cases sunk deep into the mire of opportunism and careerism began to develop among the leaders, the temptation of staying on in leadership dragging them into all kinds of opportunist alliances and thus destroying their revolutionary morality. He then called upon the youth and students to "repudiate the path of capitulation" and go to the workers and the poor

and landless peasants to integrate themselves with these classes.[23]

In response to his appeal, many students left their studies and went to the villages. Among them were Ashim Chatterjee and the band of dedicated students that he had rallied round him during the Presidency College agitation in 1966. Those who remained in the cities directed all their revolutionary zeal towards the vast mass of students, who were already breaking out into sporadic violent demonstrations now and then. As a result of the concentration on this explosive section of the urban population, poised for action, the industrial proletariat received very little attention, to the detriment of the movement at a later stage.

Disruption of examinations by a vocal section of the examinees on the plea of stiff questions had become a common phenomenon in West Bengal for quite sometime. The CPI (M-L) activists strove to extend this spontaneous outburst against the education institutions — schools, colleges and universities. From April 1970, organized attacks on these institutions began in full swing. In CPI (M-L) pamphlets, these institutions were described as 'semi-colonial', deserving destruction. One such pamphlet distributed clandestinely by the Calcutta University branch of the party, said:

> The educational system that the reactionary rulers have established, is basically colonial. . . . The British government introduced it in India to create their touts and slaves. . . . After this came the farce of '47. A nation which attains 'independence' through a compromise with the imperialists under the auspices of traitors, can never have a really militant, patriotic and anti-colonial educational system. This is what has exactly happened in our country. The comprador rulers of this country, revamped the same old servile educational system. . . . For 22 years, this system fed the students and youth with the opium of careerism and taught them to go against class struggles, prevented them from standing side by side with the poor peasants and workers and fight a revolutionary war. Nevertheless they sometimes roared against this system, fought with the police on the streets; but their struggles foundered in the reformist quicksands of unions. When the peasants' liberation struggle under the leadership of the CPI (M-L) beginning from Naxalbari, struck at the roots of society, the edifice of society shook, and the road of the revolutionary students and youth became clear.

As files and records, question papers and answer scripts, chairs and tables went up in flames, stencilled portraits of Mao Tsetung gazed down approvingly from the school and college walls which shrieked out in loud letters: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun!"

Iconoclasm

Soon the attacks began to be directed against statues of the Indian bourgeois political leaders and the 19th Century social reformers. It seems that the first attacks on statues were more accidental than deliberate. In a frenzy of destruction busts or pictures of these leaders which decorated school and college buildings,

and came in the way, naturally fell victims at the hands of the young rebels. That the beginnings were spontaneous was admitted in so many words by Saroj Dutta, the CPI (M-L) theoretician, who said:

> All those who are breaking statues are not members of the CPI (M-L); it is not that they are all acting according to the directives of the CPI (M-L). . . . The party's youth and students, without awaiting directives from the central leadership, in keeping with the central political line and the mood of the people, started this movement, which within days assumed the form of a massive youth movement.

Saroj Dutta then sought to endow the movement with an ideological motive:

> This is not a negative action. They are destroying statues to build new statues. They are demolishing Gandhi's statue to put up the statue of Rani of Jhansi;* they are destroying Gandhighat to build Mangalghat [after Mangal Pande, the hero of the 1857 uprising]. [Showing an unerring insight into the mood of the youth, he added:] One might ask, are the youth doing all these fully aware of the political implications? The revolutionary people do not enact revolutionary actions, conscious all the time of all the implications. Have they analyzed the records of the work of those whose statues they are destroying? No, they have not! But still, they are doing the right things. They have been born and brought up in the era of the victory of the revolution. They are not burdened with any revisionist past as is the case with their elders. They are not required to go through the agonizing process of making a break with the past ties like their elders, to understand the character of the [leaders whose] statues [are being destroyed]. But today's youth can size them up at once. Their vision is not clouded by old superstitions like their elders. [He then reminded his readers of the roots of the urban actions:] A storm is raging over the cities; its epicentre is in the sea of the peasant masses of the villages. The storm has arisen from the depression caused there by the peasants' guerrilla struggles under the leadership of the CPI (M-L).[9]

Charu Mazumdar also hailed the iconoclasm of the youth: ". . . without destroying this colonial education system and the statues set up by the comprador capitalists, the new revolutionary education and culture cannot be created." At the same time he acknowledged:

> This struggle has not certainly begun with the aim of destroying the entire superstructure of reactionary culture as aimed at by the great cultural revolution of

* Laxmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi, was in fact dragged against her will to lead the rebels, and was not at all a conscientious champion of the cause of the 1857 uprising, as made out to be by the Indian bourgeois historians — a trap in which Saroj Dutta has unwittingly fallen. According to Ramesh Majumdar, "The Rani herself admits in a letter to Erskine . . . that she was forced under duress, to comply with the requests of the sepoys 'who behaved with much violence against herself', and even threatened 'that if she at all hesitated to comply with their request they would blow up her palace with guns.'" When one Captain Gordon was besieged by the rebels in the fort, he 'went to the Ranee and got about fifty or sixty guns, some powder and shot and balls, and she sent fifty of her own sepoys in the fort to assist us.' (G.W. Forrest — *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and other State Papers preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India,* 1857-8, p. xiii).

> China, nor can it be taken forward to that stage. This struggle is continuing because the armed agrarian revolution has emerged today in Bengal as a reality. The base is crumbling, struck by the blows of the armed revolutionary struggles of the peasants; as a result of this the superstructure is also getting a drubbing, and is bound to get it. . . . It is in the interest of this agrarian revolution that the students and youth have become restless, and they are hurling blows on the statues of those who had always tried to pacify the armed revolution of the peasant masses with the messages of peace and reforms. This struggle of the students and youth therefore is a part of the armed peasant struggle.[41]

The targets chosen by the young rebels were pictures and busts of Gandhi, Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, and other bourgeois political leaders and social reformers, in public squares and institutions of Calcutta and other towns. Over the years, these figures had turned into demigods in the eyes of the people, thanks to the constant efforts at glorification of their role by official historians, and public worship of their images on their birth or death anniversaries. Their messages, particularly those of Gandhi, were inflicted upon the masses as a sort of Holy Writ.

As the descecration of statues increased and took violent form in the cities of West Bengal, the State Government strove to play upon the public's respect for these leaders of the past, by using their utterances against violence in posters and hoardings all over the cities. One of the functions of such a moral denunciation of violence was to deter direct attacks against the Establishment, and bring forth a sense of solidarity among the middle class which had a stake in the existing society, against the CPI (M-L). In urging the destruction of the statues, the CPI (M-L) leaders were also aware of the image of non-violence that the authorities were trying to foster around the figures of the past. As one CPI (M-L) leaflet pointed out:

> It should be noticed that the shameless ruling class today are putting up their [the bourgeois leaders of the past] messages on walls, buses and trams, advertising them in radios, magazines and cinemas, and presenting them in a well-arranged form at meetings, thus creating in people's minds a hostile attitude towards class struggles, revolutionary actions and the CPI (M-L). As a result, it is natural that we should have to adopt a path of class hatred against these leaders and their messages.[10]

But the young rebels were too indiscriminate in their attacks on the 19th Century litterateurs, and too intolerant to consider the possibilities of utilizing the contributions of at least some of them, in their fight against feudalism and imperialism. Rabindranath's bourgeois humanism and anti-imperialism, although on a different plane from that of the Marxists, could have provided the CPI (M-L) cadres with a firm support in their struggle against the old order. But the young cadres did not have either the patience or the inclination to separate the chaff from the grain. Their leaders also failed to help them discriminate. Probably, the time was too short for a studious and academic appraisal of these personalities of the past. At times, some sensitive writers among the CPI (M-L) leaders felt a pang of regret perhaps at not being able to be less intolerant. Thus the above-mentioned CPI (M-L) pamphlet said:

> The national leaders whose images the revolutionary youth and students are destroying, might have been great as individuals; they had some role, although in the interests of a foreign power, in the history of Indian national culture and civilization. But the time has not yet come to analyze the work of each and every individual dissociating him from his class background There cannot be therefore any assessment of their individualities.

But as the decapitation of statues, burning of portraits, setting on fire of educational institutions, and similar activities intensified, there was a feeling among some in the leadership that the students were going too far, that they were indiscriminate in their choice of targets.

Sushital Ray Chowdhury came out with a document sometime in the autumn of 1970 urging that some sort of distinction should be made between Gandhi and the Congress leaders on the one hand and social reformers and writers like Rammohan, Vidyasagar and Rabindranath on the other. While he supported the attack on the former, he felt that the latter, who were bourgeois intellectuals, belonged to the period of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' of our country. Charu Mazumdar in his reply to the document posed the question:

> Naturally, one must decide whether these intellectuals are the intellectuals of a bourgeois democratic revolution. . . .
>
> In India as a colony, the first condition for bourgeois democracy was the attainment of national independence. Did the people, whom Comrade Purna [the party pseudonym of Sushital Ray Chowdhury] describes as intellectuals of bourgeois democratic revolution, ever speak of driving out the British? They not only did not support the first war of independence of India in 1857, they opposed it. The reformist movement that they waged therefore, was resorted to by them to divert the common people from the anti-British freedom struggle.

He then reminded Sushital Ray Chowdhury that the programme of the CPI (M-L) adopted at the party congress had described the Indian bourgeoisie as comprador from the very beginning of its existence. Any attempt to discover bourgeois democrats among them, he warned, would therefore go against the programme.[40]

Sushital Ray Chowdhury also suggested that the students should launch a movement for reforming the educational system and the cultural world, instead of indulging in destructive acts like burning furniture and office records. Charu Mazumdar retorted:

> The colonial education system of our country teaches us to hate our country and the common people. . . . Everyone believing in revolutionary ideology and the Thought of Mao Tsetung, should regard it as his sacred responsibility to create hatred against this educational system. If therefore, out of hatred for this system, the students break chairs and tables or burn records, no revolutionary has any right to discourage them.[*Ibid.*]

Saroj Dutta in his usual ebullient style went a step further in criticizing the dissenting views, when he spoke sometime later at a meeting of party workers in a

village in Hooghly, West Bengal. "The masses never make mistakes," he said. "Revolution is bound to signify excess," he asserted. Describing the assault by the youth on the old educational institutions and the statues of the leaders of the past, as the "democratic cultural revolution which is advancing along with the new democratic revolution," he advised the cadres to "forget the past; forget the old poets. It is those new revolutionary poets who have emerged from the peasants' struggle who are the fighting poets." He held up as the "poetry of today" the slogans framed by Charu Mazumdar — "Today is not the day of repentance; this is the day to flare up like fire!" or "Turn the seventies into the decade of liberation!"[11] But even while praising their agitation in the cities, Charu Mazumdar took care to remind the students and the youth that they "cannot keep alive their revolutionary entity, if they do not integrate themselves with the workers and poor and landless peasants",[41] — an advice which was more often ignored in the frenzy of iconoclasm and incendiarism in the middle class areas of Calcutta.

As the desecration of statues and the burning of schools and colleges continued, the CPI (M-L) was coming to realize that the living enemies were more powerful and harmful than the dead. Reports of extermination of revolutionaries in the rural areas of Srikakulam, Mushahari, Debra and Gopiballavpur, and of police tortures on the arrested comrades, were disquieting reminders of the ruthless character of the state's repressive machine. The need was felt to direct the attacks against the police in the cities, to avenge the death of the rural guerrillas.

Attacks on the Police

The killing of policemen in broad daylight in the streets of West Bengal's towns added a new dimension to the CPI (M-L) urban actions. Charu Mazumdar had warned in March 1970: "Red Guards should be prepared to meet fascist attacks in the cities. Whenever the fascist hoodlums dare to attack us, Red Guard groups — five or six red guards in a group — should launch counter-attacks from very close range, swiftly, and without making any noise, and thus crush the morale of the fascist hoodlums."[32]

The 'annihilation programme' was directed against traffic constables, plain-clothes policemen, police officers and personnel of para-military forces like the Border Security Force or the Central Reserve Police. It unrolled in the process a daemonic cycle of violence and counter-violence. But a dispassionate analysis cannot just draw back in horror at this point. It is necessary to probe deeper. To express outrage at the assassination of policemen, and forget the horrors of years of police atrocities behind it, is to indulge in a sort of partisanship. One has to remember the repressive aspects of the social order to which the CPI (M-L) city actions were a response, an organized manifestation in concrete actions of the hostility against the police that lay dormant in the public mind.

The police had remained, since the British colonial days, the most notorious arm of the state in India, known for its corruption, and for sadistic atrocities on

the common people. A comment made by a former judge of the Uttar Pradesh High Court is revealing. He said: "There is not a single lawless group in the whole country, whose record of crime anywhere nears the record of the organized unit which is known as the Indian Police force."[12]

Although the pattern of police behaviour was laid down at the top, by the higher officials, at the ground level, it was carried out by the subordinates — the constables, sub-inspectors and similar categories of police personnel. The latter were notorious for their habits of bullying, harassing and extorting bribes from the people. In Calcutta particularly, the pavement vendors and shopkeepers were daily victims of their atrocities. People often arrested on flimsy grounds, were subjected to third-degree methods, and left maimed for the rest of their lives. Charu Mazumdar gave a trenchant analysis of the Indian police in the following words:

> Trained by foreigners, the police of our country have always acted as a weapon of murder and suppression against the Indian people. In spite of the end of direct British rule, the bosses of this police force receive their training from Scotland Yard. In other words, they come back after having learnt the tricks to maintain colonial rule. It is not that they are murdering only today. There is not a single year when this police force had not shot dead innocent Indians. When in 1959, people from the villages came to submit petitions to the Ministers,* in one day the police force beat to death 80 unarmed peasants. We see this murderous face of theirs even in playgrounds. These are the men who beat to death the spectators during cricket matches. [A reference to a cricket match in the Eden Gardens, Calcutta, in 1967, where the police opened fire on the spectators.] This is how they are educated in killing people. The police force of our country therefore are the imperialist weapons to maintain colonial rule. They are not Indians, they do not belong to India.[45]

It was no wonder therefore, given the accumulated public hostility against the police, that when CPI (M-L) assaults on policemen began in Calcutta, the assailants could escape easily in broad daylight, as few people cared to protect the police or apprehend the assassins.

During the second United Front regime, the CPI (M)-controlled Home Ministry sought to reform the police in Calcutta, by winning over a section of the force and infiltrating it with its own men — true to the CPI (M) strategy of a reformist coup d'etat through infiltration and subersion of a small but critical part of the security apparatus, and of maintaining the status quo with the help of the apparatus converted into loyalty. Followers of the CPI (M) in the police force formed the Calcutta Police Association. Quite a number of senior police officers temporarily shifted their allegiance to the CPI (M) Ministers. This created dissensions within the police force at that time. The State's police intelligence, built

* A reference to a massive peasants' demonstration organized by the Leftist parties in Calcutta in protest against the food policy of the then Congress Government. The latter retaliated by unleashing a barbarous police offensive.

up over years of effort, steeled in hunting militant nationalist revolutionaries during the British regime and tracking down Leftists after 1947, was particularly affected. Many veterans were transferred, and new hands were brought in to man the department. The CPI (M-L) attacks in March-April 1970 — just after the fall of this second United Front Government — therefore caught the Calcutta police at a very vulnerable moment. They were already reduced to a state of disorder and confusion by internal dissensions and confusion. At the initial stage, they could not rise up to the challenge thrown up by the CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas. Till the end of October 1970, 25 police employees were killed and 350 injured in these attacks.

Used all these years to yielding the big stick, and not to be beaten by it, the police were flabbergasted. The assassination of police informers, who had been operating successfully undetected till now, the sporadic annihilation of police officers and the destructive effects of powerful home-made bombs on police vans, created panic among the personnel who were afraid of moving out alone in uniform. The high command in the police force soon had to admit that the situation was turning grim. After the murder of a plainclothes policeman at Taltala, Calcutta, on 15 June 1970, Calcutta's Police Commissioner, P.K. Sen, told reporters that "such attacks on policemen might affect the morale of the police force." He regretted that though the day's incident took place in daylight, no one from the public raised any alarm. He complained that even after the incident, people of the locality, who must have witnessed the murder, were not coming forward to assist the police in detecting the murderers.[13]

The local police were found ineffective against the CPI (M-L) attacks. The Union Home Secretary, L.P. Singh, visited Calcutta in July that year and met the police officials. During discussions it was admitted that "the local police did not seem to have been very successful in meeting the Naxalite threat". It was decided therefore to make better utilization of the Border Security Force and the Central Reserve Police.[14]

The other departments of the State's administration also were at their wits' end. Neither President's rule, nor the appointment of five advisers to watch the Governor, could tone up the administration. A typical example was the affair over hoisting of a red flag atop the Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College. The district administration of Jalpaiguri took over 15 days to make up its mind as to who had the right to take down the flag. Sometimes, the civil administration worked at loggerheads with the police administration. The District Magistrate of Murshidabad dubbed "silly" the West Bengal Inspector General of Police's order to have walls cleared of Maoist slogans.[15] Thus, the two arms of the old order in West Bengal — as in the rest of India, the bureaucracy and the police — were in a state of disarray by the middle of 1970. If the CPI (M-L) aimed at undermining the people's faith in and fear of the bourgeois state machinery — a necessary step for the final breakdown of the state structure — they had succeeded beyond their expectations.

The CPI (M-L) took this opportunity to issue a statement addressed to the police in November 1970. Reminding the police constables and other subordinate staff of their origins in the peasants, workers and petty bourgeois classes,

it asked them to "turn their rifles against their bosses, and join the agrarian revolution". It warned them that if they continued to act against the revolutionaries, the latter would be forced to kill them to avenge every murder of their comrades.

Building up the Arsenal

Meanwhile, in October that year, an interesting incident took place at Magurjan, on the trijunction of Purnea in Bihar, and West Dinajpur and Darjeeling in West Bengal, just facing Naxalbari. A guerrilla squad composed of poor and landless peasants attacked a police party and snatched away their rifles. The action was of tremendous significance to Charu Mazumdar. He hailed it later as the "birth of the People's Liberation Army of the peasants of Bengal."[47]

It should be noted in this connection that the squad which launched the attack was composed of poor and landless peasants from Naxalbari. It was organized after almost all the old leaders of the Naxalbari struggle had been arrested. Kanu Sanyal, who, after his release in 1969, had been trying to take up the threads of the last movement, got arrested in August 1970. In September that year, Jangal Santhal was also captured. Only 11 activists were left in the area. They felt: "We shall not be able to extend influence in the area now only by killing jotedars. We will have to do something bigger, we will have to snatch rifles!" After this, they established contact with their comrades outside the police encirclement, in Magurjan in Bihar. On the evening of 27 October they attacked the police from the Magurjan side, and after the action, they marched into the village with the seized rifles, shouting "Long Live Mao Tsetung!" "Long Live Charu Mazumdar!" Addressing the peasants there they said: "Although our comrades have been arrested, the government could not stop our struggle. See, we have come back snatching away rifles."[16] The pattern of assault — breaking through the police encirclement of Naxalbari and attacking from Magurjan — suggested some sort of plan to counter-attack the enemy encirclement from outside.

Soon after this, the capture of rifles became an important target with the CPI (M-L) cadres, both in the villages and urban areas. In Calcutta, groups of daring young men used to pounce upon some unwary policeman, assault him and escape with his rifle or revolver. With every success, the guerrillas grew more courageous, and at one stage in Calcutta and suburbs, rifle-snatching became almost a regular pastime, a merry prank with the young daredevils. The police authorities began to take precautions by directing the policemen to tie their rifles to their belts with iron chains. The ridiculous sight of policemen, including CRP personnel, with rifles chained to their bodies was a familiar one in the streets of Calcutta and other towns of West Bengal in 1970-71. According to West Bengal Government sources, between 1 April and 12 November 1970, 36 policemen were killed and over 400 injured in CPI (M-L) attacks.

The police estimated in November that year that, of the 10,000 to 20,000

CPI (M-L) cadres operating in West Bengal, about half were concentrating their activities in the Greater Calcutta area. The young revolutionaries also tried to win the sympathy of the citizens by taking popular measures in some areas of the cities where they wielded influence. In certain parts of North and Central Calcutta for instance, they managed to keep in check the notorious gangsters by warning them, and even by meting out exemplary punishment to a few. At a later stage, they sent warning letters to general practitioners and specialists who charged exorbitant fees, asking them to stop doing so. It must be admitted that they succeeded in their aims to a certain extent for sometime at least.

The Counter-offensive

But the State was flexing its muscles.

The Government's response to the urban actions of the CPI (M-L) passed through various stages, resembling the typical bureaucratic retaliation against guerrilla actions in South-East Asian countries. At first, as indicated, the local police were deployed, but were found to be ineffective. The Central Reserve Police had to be imported later. At one stage, the entire town of Krishnagar in Nadia, West Bengal had to be handed over to the military, following a series of CPI (M-L) actions.

Along with this, a series of draconian laws were passed to provide legal sanction for police ruthlessness. On 10 September 1970, the West Bengal Government declared that the provisions of the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act of 1936 — a notorious law used against the Indian revolutionaries during the days of the British colonial rule — would be applicable with immediate effect. This was the first time since August 1947 that the law had been invoked. Under the Act, the police were empowered to detain persons on suspicion for up to 24 hours and to take possession of arms, premises suspected of being used for terroristic activities as well as literature propagating such thoughts.

With increasing help from the Centre and imported paramilitary and military forces, police retaliation against the CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas began to gain momentum from the last quarter of 1970. No mercy was shown to any CPI (M-L) cadre or supporter if caught. A typical instance was the incident in the College Street area of Calcutta, on 25 September 1970, when the police shot dead four young men within a matter of a few hours. Among the killed was one young man, who was actually under arrest when he was shot at, in Bhowani Dutta Lane, where he was taken by the police to spot out some alleged CPI (M-L) hideouts. The fourth victim had nothing to do with the party; he was a post-graduate student who was fatally shot at point blank range as he was passing through the Calcutta University gates, with his hands up, to attend his classes. Commenting on the incident, a Bengali newspaper had to say in its editorial:

> The police bosses of Calcutta and West Bengal should know better that the people of this city and State are not games for their shootings. . . . Whatever the provocation the police is recklessly resorting to firing and the people are being killed by bullets irrespective of whether they are guilty or innocent.[17]

Here are a few more vignettes of the face of the bourgeois state in West Bengal during that period, as described by its own press, which give one an idea of police ruthlessness born of utter demoralization and panic.

> . . . On Wednesday night, during the Kali Puja festival in the Masjid Bari Street (North Calcutta), police killed in cold blood the well-known Naxalite leader, 22-year old Birendra Debnath. Observers, who were present there, told our reporter with one voice that Debnath was sitting in a chair, watching the festival while an announcement was being made on the mike. The police entered the pandel (the courtyard enclosed for the occasion) fired point-blank at Debnath and he was seen sinking in the chair itself.[18]

Or:

> Late at night on 17 November, a huge posse of armed police surrounded the CIT building at Beliaghata and carried out a ruthless search of each and every one of the 556 flats there. The police arrested over 100 young men, took four of them to a lonely quadrangle, made them stand in a single file and then riddled them to death with bullets. There was no semblance of a clash. . . .[19]

It was clear that West Bengal had been turned into a battlefield in the real sense of the term, where no civil norms operated. The sole motive was to kill the enemy. Legal procedures like arrests and trials had become outmoded. Charu Mazumdar was not wrong when he said in October that year that it was a "period of civil war".[44]

In November 1970, the second in the series of draconian laws was produced. President V.V. Giri gave assent to a new bill — the West Bengal Prevention of Violent Activities Bill — which gave wide powers, including arrest without warrant, to the police, to curb the CPI (M-L) movement, and providing the police with the legal sanction to what they had been doing for the last few months. This was meant presumably to mollify those critics of the Government who were sticklers for legal niceties. Judging by the editorials in the pro-Establishment press, it appears that these critics were not so much opposed to the extermination of the 'Naxalites' as to the methods being adopted. According to their thinking, the state should erect elaborate rituals and rules for killing its opponents, at least to maintain the facade of 'law and order'.

Aided by pomously worded laws and a well-equipped military force, the police went about on the rampage in right earnest. In many cases, after beating senseless some political suspects, the police would take them outside the lockup, pump bullets into their bodies, and throw the bodies out in the streets. It was a sort of primitive methods of demonstrating exemplary punishments, like keeping the dead hanging from tree tops for days, or sticking up decapitated heads

for display, to terrorize the masses. The usual stories given out by the police on such occasions was that there was a gun duel with the 'extremists', in course of which the victims were killed. But since almost invariably the victims were arrested previously from their homes, and must have been disarmed if they had any arms, their relatives challenged the police version.

One morning in November 1970, the bodies of 11 young men with their hands tied behind them, were found lying on the road of Barasat, a suburb of Calcutta. Describing the murders as "a clear proof of the extent of estrangement of these murderous butchers from the people", Charu Mazumdar urged "every revolutionary" to take the oath to "avenge the murder" of the heroes.[46]

As the enemy started the 'pogrom', the CPI (M-L) revolutionaries realized that they were now entering a phase of a desperate bloody struggle. They responded with amazing fearlessness, and increased defiance of the government and its aggressive outlawry. The battle assumed a 'tit-for-tat' character. The movement escalated, guerrilla actions erupting in almost every district of West Bengal, throwing the police and the civil administration in the throes of a crisis. The West Bengal Inspector-General of Police in a circular to all policemen, stressed the need for discipline and courage to face the situation. Asking his men to brace themselves up for dangers that face combatants in a battle field, he likened the situation to that prevailing in Nagaland, Mizo Hills, and the Indo-Tibetan border.

The Calcutta Police Commissioner, Ranjit Gupta, who had succeeded P.K. Sen, circulated among his men in the force, copies of excerpts from a book on defeating Communist insurgency written by Sir Robert Thompson.[20] Sir Robert headed the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam from 1961 to 1965. The need to train Calcutta's policemen in counter-insurgency measures suggested by a Vietnam war expert was an indirect recognition of the fact that CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas were becoming a force to reckon with.

Urban actions were indeed spreading. From the end of 1970 till the beginning of the second quarter of 1971, in spite of ruthless terror by para-military forces like the Central Reserve Police, Eastern Frontier Rifles and Border Security Force, in towns in almost every district of West Bengal, police were being killed, rifles and ammunition captured, local gangsters and notorious Congressmen executed by the guerrillas. In the industrial towns of Burdwan district the CPI (M-L) succeeded in mobilizing revolutionary sections of the working class. At Durgapur, between the end of October and the end of November alone, squads of workers killed nine policemen. At Asansol, a CRP van was attacked by the guerrillas, and one armed policeman was killed. Police informers, CRP personnel, scabs and usurers were the main targets in the colliery areas of Asansol and Burnpur. Along with the workers, students and youth also formed guerrilla squads. One such squad attacked the Birhata police post in Burdwan in November 1970. During this period also, the CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas began to direct their attacks on rich businessmen and Government officials in the towns of West Bengal. Several such people were killed in Nadia, Birbhum, 24-Parganas, Howrah and Midnapur.

Although the police concentrated their attack on Calcutta, guerrilla actions

continued in the city. On 21 February 1971 a guerrilla squad attacked a police camp at the Behala airstrip and seized nine rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition. The very next day, another police post was attacked and two rifles were captured. Sudden attacks on police pickets and army patrols were quite common during this period. On 9 March 1971, a squad attacked the Railway Protection Force at Santoshpur railway station, near Calcutta, with knives and daggers, killed two armed men, injured another, and escaped after having seized three rifles and some bullets. An attempt by the Border Security Force men posted nearby to encircle the guerrillas was frustrated when the latter opened fire on them.

Along with urban actions, the execution of landlords and police continued in the villages. The exploit of the guerrillas at Magurjan in October 1970 already narrated earlier in this chapter appeared to inspire squads which had become passive. Thus, the guerrillas of Debra and Gopiballavpur, dejected in the midst of police encirclement till now, resumed action in March 1971. Breaking through the encirclement, a squad attacked a police camp at Rupaskundi in Baharagora, across the West Bengal-Bihar border, on 9 March. The guerrillas seized nine rifles and a large number of bullets, killing three armed police. In spite of joint police operations by the West Bengal and Bihar Governments to recover the rifles and capture the guerrillas, the latter succeeded in returning to their bases, and on 15 March, with these seized weapons they attacked and killed the 'anchal pradhan' of Bashjora village in Gopiballavpur, his brother and two sons. The victims had earlier murdered a CPI (M-L) cadre and led the police through the villages in a campaign of terror.

As a result of the widespread launching of actions by the CPI (M-L), a "Naxalphobia" gripped the police. Their panic and cowardice drove them to shoot down even unarmed prisoners inside jails. On 17 December 1970, at least eight prisoners were killed and 60 injured when the police opened fire in the Midnapur Central Jail, where the revolutionaries of Debra and Gopiballavpur were lodged. Two more were killed and 60 injured, when the police again resorted to firing in the same jail on 4 February the next year. On the same day, the police opened fire in Presidency Jail, Calcutta, wounding 24 prisoners. On 21 February again 10 died and 62 were injured in police firing in Berhampore jail.

Charu Mazumdar held that the jail massacres were on the lines laid down by the British imperialists who shot down prisoners in the Hijli jail in Midnapur in the twenties, and by the Nehru Government which did the same thing in Dum Dum and Presidency Jails in 1949. But such massacres, he was sure, would only inflame the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. He urged his followers to avenge every murder.[49] The cadres, in fact, were not prepared to take the repression lying down. Inside the jails, they formed guerrilla squads, seized the opportune moment to launch attacks on the guards and escape.

Jail Breaks

Along with urban and rural guerrilla actions outside the jails, jail breaks soon

became a common feature of the CPI (M-L) movement. On 28 December 1970, a police van carrying a CPI (M-L) prisoner from the court to the prison was ambushed by a squad in West Dinajpur, and the prisoner was rescued. On 30 January 1971, three CPI (M-L) prisoners escaped from Kurseong Jail in Darjeeling. Five prisoners, although handcuffed, escaped from a police van on the way from Alipur Central Jail to Barasat Court. On 28 January 1971, a daring action was carried out by imprisoned CPI (M-L) cadres of Rajarhat, 24-Parganas. While being taken in a police van from Dum Dum Central Jail to Barasat Court, these prisoners attacked the armed guards in the van, seized from them two rifles and aimed them at the police officer in the van. Seven prisoners then jumped out from the running van. While two of them were recaptured by the police, five managed to escape.

The climax came on 21 February 1971, when 11 Communist revolutionaries, including some leading cadres of the party, escaped from the Siliguri Central Jail. The action was meticulously planned. The jail inmates took the help of their comrades outside the prison, attacked the gateman, snatched away the jail-keys and opened the jail gates. In broad daylight they came out in the streets of Siliguri and escaped hoodwinking the police.

Excerpts from the report submitted later by the escapees to the party are worth quoting, since they throw light not only on the individual heroism of the revolutionaries, but also on the policy of the CPI (M-L) regarding arrested party members and supporters. The report stated that:

> After being thrown behind the bars, we were faced with the main question —should we fight with the help of the laws made by the reactionary government? The struggle inside the jail began on the question of demanding division [Political prisoners are often entitled under the law to Division I classification which entails better amenities than those available to other prisoners] and taking the help of barristers. . . . Through discussions we came to this conclusion: when outside the jail comrades are taking forward the struggle by giving their lives, how can we take to the path of saving our lives inside the jail? If we begin a struggle demanding division, it would mean forgetting the sufferings of the Indian people and fighting for our own selves. . . . From this standpoint, through waging an anti-revisionist struggle, we intensified the fight inside the jail. We began to write slogans — 'Long Live Mao Tsetung! Long Live Charu Mazumdar!' — on walls, utensils, all over the place. The jail authorities tried to oppose us, but were forced to retreat in the face of our stiff resistance. We never encouraged any fight for our own amenities and privileges like food, and other things; on the other hand, we consciously organized fights against the prevailing regulations. . . .[21]

In fact, as large-scale arrests of Communist revolutionaries from the middle of 1970 began to swell the ranks of prisoners, the CPI (M-L) leadership had felt the need to formulate a policy for their comrades in jails. In September 1970, Charu Mazumdar said: "The policy regarding jails will be settled through struggles."[42]

The same year, Saroj Dutta in a letter to comrades in jail set down certain guidelines for struggle inside jails:

> While in jail the main point of our party's principle is that we will have to remain Communists inside jails and we will have to fight for dignity and freedom. The jail authorities are representatives of our class enemies and their keeping us confined is their offensive against us. We will always have to carry out counter-offensives. It should be remembered that they want to break our morale, not only by torturing us, but through numerous soft methods, like giving us a little better food and clothing than those available to others, by smiling a bit when talking to us. Granting of division is a part of the same method. They are not granting social dignity equally to all. We will force them to grant, and through this struggle to force them we will remain Communists. This is the party's line and policy. It is up to you to decide how you will implement this line.

He at the same time reminded them:

> Comrades outside jails are waiting for the time when the jail comrades will begin to come out — not on bail or acquittal by magistrates, but though other methods, in other words, the methods by which revolutionaries come out from jails during a civil war. . . .[22]

Some people inside the party felt that by refusing bail or legal help to get acquitted, the prisoners were acting stubborn. It would be foolish, they argued, not to take advantage of the loopholes in the laws made by the ruling class. They were the soft spots in the underbelly of the reactionary set up. Differences on the party's jail policy were to highlight the ideological struggle inside the party a year later. After the split in the party, critics of Charu Mazumdar resorted to legal defence, and Legal Aid Committees were set up in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal to help the detainees fight their cases.

In 1970-71, when Saroj Dutta insisted on refusal of bail, and rejection of higher classification and legal defence, he might have sounded a purist. But a position of extreme puritanism like this was perhaps inevitable as a reaction to the long history of petty-bourgeois opportunism in Congress and Leftist politics. During the British colonial regime, while political prisoners belonging to revolutionary groups were tortured, killed and forced to resort to hunger strike to win their demands, Congress leaders who were arrested were given royal treatment. Such treatment continued to be lavished on the leaders of the parliamentary Leftist parties after 1947, when the courted arrest in the course of non-violent 'satyagraha' movements. For some of them, jails were often more comfortable than their own homes. In some cases, while the petty bourgeois leaders were awarded Division I classification, peasant or working class cadres arrested at the same time with them were treated like ordinary convicts. While relatives and friends of the better-off petty bourgeois leaders could provide money for bailing them out or fighting their cases, the poorer ranks of the Leftist parties were left in the lurch. It is quite understandable therefore why the CPI (M-L) leadership was eager to create a different image of the party. By refusing to compromise and accept the privileges offered by their enemy, the party's arrested members were expected to prove their bona fides as consistent revolutionaries to the masses, to prove that the CPI (M-L) was a party that genuinely integrated itself with the suffering people.

The insistence on breaking out from jails was perhaps also necessary to reinforce the image of a revolutionary party, to demarcate itself from the 'revisionists' who by quoting provisions from the laws created by a semi-colonial ruling class, in their attempt to defend themselves, were in fact perpetuating the legal system which the revolutionaries were pledged to overthrow.

The Ominous Signs

But even though heroic activities were taking place repulsing the enemy's aim to exterminate the CPI (M-L), certain disquieting developments were noticeable within the youth movement in the urban areas.

In the absence of any well-prepared analysis of urban classes and well-defined party policy towards them, (as was formulated with regard to the rural classes) the urban guerrillas often directed their attacks on small businessmen also, along with educational institutions, policemen and bureaucrats. This alienated a large section of the middle bourgeoisie in the cities.

Charu Mazumdar was compelled at one stage to warn the impetuous cadres against such actions. In a letter referring to attacks on the businessmen, he said: "We should remember that all businessmen are not our enemies. On the contrary, after the establishment of a liberated zone, these business communities will get into touch with us in their own business interests." He then reminded them of Mao Tsetung's stress on workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the business community as components of the united front. "In other words," he said, "the majority of the business community will come with us. They are a large part of the national bourgeoisie." As for the comprador sections among the businessmen, who would try to harm the revolutionaries, Charu Mazumdar advised: ". . . one or two annihilations might become necessary."[48]

An even more dangerous threat was posed by the entry of a new component in the turmoil that was dismantling the old socio-cultural order of West Bengal. The urban lumpen-proletariat, the scum of the city's underworld — wagon-breakers, smugglers, professional murderers, thieves and bandits — often found their way into the fold of the CPI (M-L)-led movement. Settling of old personal scores by them often passed off as 'Naxalite' guerrilla actions. While the police were eager to attribute any act of violence to the CPI (M-L) to discredit them, cadres of the party also, often driven by youthful bravado, claimed such non-political acts as their actions, presumably to add to their list of 'annihilated class enemies'. Almost imperceptibly the doors of the movement were being opened to the underworld, portending dangerous consequences. The police took advantage of this when the opportune moment arrived.

The CPI (M-L) and the CPI (M)

An unfortunate dissipation of militancy by the young revolutionaries took place over a new development. As the new year (1971) began, the approach of another mid-term poll cast an ominous shadow over West Bengal.

The old rivalry between the CPI (M) and CPI (M-L) cadres had already reappeared in a much more virulent form. Leaders of both parties reared up their ranks on mutual suspicion and hostility. While the CPI (M) held the 'Naxalites' as renegades in league with the Congress, out to sabotage the party's strategy of parliamentary seizure of power, the CPI (M-L) regarded the CPI (M) as neo-revisionists misdirecting the people's struggle. As a result, clashes between the ranks of the two parties increased.

Preparations for the mid-term poll began from the end of 1970. As in 1969, this time also the CPI (M-L) gave a call for boycotting the elections. Its ranks — the urban guerrillas — began to follow up the call by taking active steps to see that the elections were not held. Candidates were threatened with death. Voters were told: "*Bhot dile porbe lash*!" [If you vote, your dead body will be on the streets]. Although the party leadership later privately forbade its ranks to indulge in such slogans, on the eve of the mid-term poll, the slogan was quite ubiquitous on the walls of Calcutta and other parts of West Bengal. The attempt to achieve their aim by bullying and terrorizing the common voters earned the CPI (M-L) ranks a certain notoriety in some urban middle class areas, making it easy for their enemies — the Congress party in particular — to perpetrate crimes against their electoral rivals and pass them off as 'Naxalite actions".

The CPI (M) leader P. Sundarayya was to claim later that 206 of its members and followers, including some leaders, were killed by the 'Naxalites'.[23] There are reasons to believe that many of these murders were committed by hoodlums in the pay of the Congress, who paraded as 'Naxalites' to shift the blame from the Congress to the CPI (M-L). At the same time, it must be admitted that in certain areas the CPI (M-L) cadres did kill CPI (M) members and supporters. A report appearing in *Liberation* of January–March 1971 claimed that in Asansol

> a CPM chieftain who was acting as a police informer, was annihilated . . . two CPI (M) gangsters were annihilated within a few weeks in Nabadwip . . . Gopal Thakur, a hated usurer and agent of the landlords and local CPI (M) chieftain, was annihilated by guerrilla comrades at Taki . . . Kana Tapi, a police agent, bad character and CPI (M) supporter was annihilated by a guerrilla squad in Chanditala police station area. . . .

The report added that in Calcutta along with class enemies, police agents and officers, "CPI (M) gangsters who are secret agents of the police, have been liquidated".

But there were also allegations that in August 1971, CPI (M) functionaries actively helped the police to hunt out and slaughter CPI (M-L) members and sympathizers in Baranagar.

The CPI (M) felt threatened because of another reason. The mid-term poll was scheduled to be held in March 1971. While the CPI (M) was preparing for the elections, the CPI (M-L) urban actions were disrupting the status quo and threatening the electoral plans. As the date of the elections approached, clashes between the two parties increased. To ensure smooth voting for its supporters, the CPI (M) sought to clear its strongholds of 'Naxalite elements'. Soon certain

localities in Calcutta and its suburbs came to be demarcated by the two parties, each carving out its own sphere of influence. Trespass by any partyman in areas dominated by the rival party was punished with death. A bloody cycle of interminable assaults and counter-assaults, murders and vendetta, was initiated. The ranks of both the CPI (M) and CPI (M-L) dissipated their militancy in mutual fightings leading to the elimination of a large number of their activists, and leaving the field open to the police and the hoodlums. It was a senseless orgy of murders, misplaced fury, sadistic tortures, acted out with the vicious norms of the underworld, and dictated by the decadent and cunning values of the petty bourgeois leaders.

But the CPI (M) allegation that the CPI (M-L) was in league with the Congress cuts no ice. One cannot ignore the grim reality in West Bengal and elsewhere in 1971, when CPI (M-L) leaders and cadres were being hunted out and slaughtered in the villages and towns by the police and goons. The main enemy of the state still remained the CPI (M-L); the CPI (M) was at best a temporary irritant with limited potentialities of gaining a majority in the election. This was borne out by the events that followed.

Police Operations in Calcutta

The Calcutta police were quick to take advantage of the vulnerable points in the CPI (M-L) movement — the entry of the lumpenproletariat and the growing apathy of the middle class due to the internecine battle between the ranks of the CPI (M) and CPI (M-L). According to one counter-insurgency expert, "A young insurgent movement is necessarily inexperienced and should be relatively easy to infiltrate with agents who will help to disintegrate it from within and derail it."[24] Since indiscriminate and widespread terrorization did not prove to be effective enough to suppress the urban guerrillas, the Calcutta police set about a more precise and scientific way of doing it by placing its well-equipped detachments of agent provocateurs, spies and roughnecks in the required places.

Towards the end of 1970, the police had already classified the CPI (M-L) cadres and supporters into three groups: first, the completely criminal lumpenproletariat; second, the non-political students dragged into the movement willy-nilly, either through frustration, or just for a lark; and third, the core of the ideologically committed and dedicated students, who posed the real threat.[25]

Then it divided Calcutta — its field of operations and the centre of the urban guerrilla movement — into four zones. The north and central parts bore marks of 18th and 19th Century Calcutta, a mass of labyrinthine lanes and by-lanes — ideal for the hit-and-run tactics of the guerrillas, who could elude the police by escaping from one twisting lane into another, lure the police into some blind lane and attack them, and could thus render a few pockets in these areas unapproachable to the enemy force for quite sometime. In local parlance, these pockets were known as 'muktanchal' or 'liberated zones'. The eastern suburbs with their middle class and lower middle-class settlements, were along the railways and canals. Smuggling and wagon-breaking activities in these areas reinforced

the extra-legal orientation of the zone, and thus rendered it a haven for guerrillas. The industrial area with the working class slums were situated in the far north. As the CPI (M-L) had very little organization among the workers, there was little threat to the administration from this zone. On the southern fringes of the city, were the refugee squatters' colonies. Uprooted from their old homes in East Bengal, they had come and settled down here, many of them still unemployed, and had remained politically keen and active, always alert in their response to calls for militant political action. Clashes between the CPI (M) and CPI (M-L) cadres assumed serious proportions in this zone. At one stage the Jadavpur University in the area, became a regular scene of battles between the two parties, and the climax was reached when the University's vice-chancellor, Gopal Sen, was assassinated.

Having divided the city and its suburbs into zones, the police started its operations. The policy of 'encirclement and suppression' was implemented, but under a different name. It came to be known as 'combing operation'. A locality used to be cordoned off by the army, while the police entered and searched each house, took to custody every young man available, and weeded out from them the committed cadres of the CPI (M-L). During such raids, no one was either allowed to enter or leave the locality. There were occasions when such raids went on for 24 hours, with the inhabitants marooned within the area, cut off from the rest of the world. The CPI (M-L) cadres who were caught were just shot dead on most of the occasions, or beaten to death in prison vans. In February 1971, in Beliaghata in East Calcutta, five boys were taken away from their homes by the police and shot dead in front of their parents. Even outside the cordoned-off areas, wherever a bomb burst anywhere, the police arrived on the spot with guns ready to go off. As a sort of reflex action, people learnt to raise their arms to cross streets. Of the vast number of supporters of the party among the youth, many were taken to police lock-ups, tortured, maimed and let off with warnings.

The lumpenproletariat were put to use in two ways. Some were used as agent-provocateurs, who precipitated some violent action and exposed the unwarned CPI (M-L) cadres in a locality to an unanticipated police raid. It was a sort of 'corpus delicti' which provided the police with an opportunity to pick up whom they wanted. Some other members of the lumpenproletariat were bought over, formed into an unofficial band of homeguards, paid Rs. 105 per head per month, and set upon the CPI (M-L) leaders and cadres. In official parlance their actions came to be known as 'people's resistance to Naxalite depredations'. Being local, they could spot the hideouts of the CPI (M-L) in their respective localities and identify the real political elements among the student and youth cadres of the party. They served wonderfully the purpose of the police, particularly in the maze of lanes of north and central Calcutta, along which the so-called 'liberated zones' were established, which without the guidance of these local hoodlums would have remained impenetrable to the CRP and the military.

The CPI (M-L) urban activities thus added to a spiral of violence. But in this way the party was compelling the ruling class to expose its repressive machinery in all its bestiality, its assaults no longer confined to the handful of politically committed revolutionaries, but extended out of fear and suspicion, to the entire

populace of West Bengal. Hoping that such an all-embracing repression would help remove blinkers from the eyes of the common people, Charu Mazumdar wrote: "This attack of theirs breaks up the personal, narrow circles with which each individual surrounds himself, and dissolves them all into one; the general masses are roused by the same revolutionary ideal."[49]

The 1971 Mid-Term Poll

As the mid-term poll date neared, it was evident that the political system was facing a crisis in West Bengal, particularly Calcutta. It appeared that it could be possible for a politically committed minority to terrorize the voters, kill the candidates and active campaigners and paralyse the election machinery by threatening poll officers and thus disrupt the elections as a whole.

Newspaper editorials lamented that if elections were held in West Bengal in such a situation, they were bound to be reduced to a farce. The leader writers conveniently forgot that elections had been a farce for a considerable section of the Indian people for quite sometime now. Coercion of scheduled caste voters or those belonging to the minority communities had been fairly common in the countryside. Kidnapping, beating up, lynching and murders of voters likely to vote against a particular powerful candidate, were the regular lot of poor villagers, specially social outcasts, during every election. In fact, right in 1971, the Election Commissioner was compelled to set up separate booths for persecuted members of the Scheduled Castes in some constitutencies of North India. The newspapers raised a hue and cry because, for the first time, the educated petty bourgeoisie and members of the establishment became the victims of such intimidation in West Bengal.

The government's response was elaborate. Troops marched into West Bengal to aid the local police. A picture of the grim, pre-election scene could be had from a speech by the then Governor of the State, S.S. Dhavan, calling upon the people to vote, broadcast over the Calcutta station of the All-India Radio on 4 March 1971. Asserting that his government had taken the "most stringent measures to defeat the design of those who may create disturbances," he proceeded to give the details of the arrangement.

> Armed police pickets have already been posted at all strategic points to deal with gangs of miscreants. These pickets have instructions to shoot if necessary. For this purpose the state police will be helped by nearly 200 companies of the Central Reserve Police consisting of over 20,000 armed men. Moreover, the army has been mobilized and its units will be posted in every area of the state up to the thana-level.

Referring to the combing operations done with the help of 'large detachments of the army', Dhavan said:

> I cannot give you the exact number of troops mobilized for this operation, but I can tell you that it is a huge force — larger than the forces in any single sector of the battle front during the war against Pakistani aggression in 1965. . . . There is no parallel in the history of Parliamentary Democracy when the army and the police were employed in such large numbers to protect the voters. . . .

Charu Mazumdar, referring to the deployment of troops, said: "The situation in West Bengal has reached such a stage that the civil administration has no power to tackle it. So they (the reactionaries) have deployed troops all over West Bengal, and holding elections with the help of the military." He then predicted: "This military will remain even after the elections are over. The Cabinet that will be formed under this military, will soon expose its puppet character to the people, and the civil war will reach a stage when nationalism will come over to us, since imperialist intervention will be exposed very clearly."[50] Charu Mazumdar suspected that the 'US imperialists' and the 'Soviet social-imperialists' were advising the Government of India from behind the scenes. He hoped that, with the expansion of the armed struggle in India, the US-Soviet intervention would assume a more brazen-faced character, and would antagonize the 'national bourgeoisie' who would come over to the side of the revolutionaries.

In March 1971, those who could emerge as the 'national bourgeoisie' in West Bengal — the small businessmen, shopkeepers, and the petty-bourgeois white-collar employees and intellectuals — were however thinking in a different way.

The results of the 1971 elections indicated a reversal of political trends among the West Bengal middle class population. The Congress won 105 seats — a leap from its achievements in 1967 and 1969 elections. The CPI (M)-led United Left Front won 124 seats, but could not form a government, because of opposition from other Leftist and Centrist parties backed by the Congress. The Leftists, both the CPI (M) and the CPI, lost influence in Calcutta — the traditional 'red city', where the bulk of the middle class voters supported the Congress. It appeared that the CPI (M-L) urban actions and the fratricidal fights among the ranks of the CPI (M-L) and CPI (M), bringing in its wake wide-scale police repression and turmoil in social life, had sickened and discouraged the pro-status quo middle class, turning them away from Leftism as a whole. Although the CPI (M-L) did not believe in electoral verdicts, the 1971 election results were a significant pointer at least as to the drift of the political wind among the urban middle class. The latter, who were neutralized or often sympathetic towards the CPI (M-L) cadres during the initial period of their urban actions — evident from the indecisive and often benevolent response of their liberal-minded teachers to the desecration of statues and educational institutions, or from the bystanders' indifference to the assassination of policemen, or from the householders' sheltering the persecuted 'Naxalites' — grew apathetic and even positively hostile in some cases towards the end, when the police repression mounted.

With intensification of police persecution, the CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas were gradually forced out from their strongholds in the labyrinthine lanes of north and central Calcutta. Although they continued to carry out daring actions, the cutting off of their local support drove them to seek shelter in unfamiliar

territories and inflict themselves upon reluctant households. The middle class citizens were harassed both by the CPI (M-L) cadres, desperate for shelter, and the police, thirsting for their blood. They were compelled to give shelter to the fugitives at the risk of being victimized by the police if found out. The experience of physicians was even more painful. There were cases, when an injured CPI (M-L) cadre was brought by his comrades for treatment to a physician. After the treatment was over and the boys left, the physician was visited by CPI (M) activists who would warn him of dire consequences if he treated 'Naxalites' again, or by the police who would try to extort from him the name and whereabouts of the patient.

People living in CPI (M-L) strongholds were regarded as suspects by CPI (M) followers living in the neighbourhood, and vice versa. When followers of one party raided the house of a rival and could not find him, they would invariably beat up or kidnap the non-political relatives of the hunted. As for the small businessmen and petty shopkeepers, apart from being made targets of occasional attacks, the disruption of the prevailing social life affected adversely their business interests and turned them hostile towards Leftism as such. Over and above all this, the alarming scenes of police persecution terrorized them into silence and drove them to seek security. Their exasperation, fear and a nostalgia for the old status quo were reflected in the 1971 election results.

The support of the urban middle class strengthened the anti-CPI (M-L) policies of the ruling class. The Democratic Front Government, which was formed consisting of Congress and other social-democratic parties in West Bengal after the elections, exuded an aura of democracy, satisfying the moral scruples of the middle class citizens. Any inexorability shown in its anti-CPI (M-L) operations would from now on be justified as a democratically sanctioned measure.

The Two-Line Struggle in the CPI (M-L)

Meanwhile, Charu Mazumdar's critics inside the party, who had been opposing the tactics recommended by him in the countryside, drew sustenance for further criticism from the losses suffered by the party in Calcutta and other urban centres due to police repression. They held that the urban actions had provided a powerful reinforcement to the enemy, and the 'white terror' unleashed by the state had proved to be far superior in its effectiveness to the 'red terror' of the CPI (M-L). As for the actions, they felt that while much of them was misdirected, the general line of operations drew the party nearer to the lumpenproletariat.

Sharply attacking the tendency to annihilate small businessmen, Sushital Ray Chowdhury wrote on the eve of the 1971 elections:

> ... what attitude is being taken towards the allied classes in our activities? They'll be compelled to come to us; we shouldn't worry about that. Sometimes, such policies have been adopted where the allied forces have been indiscriminately attacked — e.g. businessmen, teachers, etc. are being annihilated.

Regarding the nature of the urban actions, Sushital Ray Chowdhury said:

> ... an idea was propagated that in our country we need not wait long in cities as in China. We can establish red terror in the cities as well. For this purpose, annihilation of the class enemy and the state machinery through guerrilla methods was necessary immediately. All these things were done in the name of the new national and international situation, denying the uneven character of the revolutionary situation. Sentimental students were used to perform democratic and socialist revolutions simultaneously. Such activities as burning educational institutions, libraries, laboratories and destroying the educational system were prescribed. It is enough to say that no discussions were held in the Party's Central Committee before these tasks were adopted.[26]

This only corroborates the assumption made earlier in this chapter that the CPI (M-L) urban programme began at first with support and incorporation of the spontaneous acts of destruction that were being indulged in by the students. Later in July 1971, Ashim Chatterjee was to say about the party line: "The larger section of the working class has rejected the line and the youth and students and the petty bourgeois have accepted it."[27] The vague misgivings that had been floating inside the party since the beginning of 1970 were crystallizing into sharp positions of dissent by early 1971. Differences between Charu Mazumdar and his critics boiled down to specific questions regarding actions both in the countryside and urban areas.

First, the amount of losses during the previous one year in terms of human lives was a point of debate. Charu Mazumdar had been emphasizing the 'creation of a new man from the blood of martyrs', the need to defy death and move up to the enemy with bare hands to snatch away his rifle, avenge every murder of revolutionaries by acts of annihilation, and had rejected all talks of preservation of cadres as 'revisionist thoughts' since it was the era of 'self-sacrifice'. But although the number of annihilation acts had gone up and reached almost 200 in West Bengal alone in 1970, the number of martyrs among the revolutionaries was much higher. Isolated acts of annihilation appeared to be far too feeble to match the well-organized, massive repression unleashed by the state. Although prisoners had daringly broken out from jails responding to his call, the few who could escape were far outnumbered by the many who were killed inside the jail. While Charu Mazumdar from all these events was seeking to discover a qualitative change in the people and the situation, his critics were stressing the loss in quantity. Ashim Chatterjee asked in despair: "Sacrifice of lives in battles is inevitable. But why shouldn't we have the courage to seriously consider whether it was necessary to sacrifice all the lives of heroes in Calcutta?"[28]

Secondly, differences cropped up on the question whether there was a uniform revolutionary situation all over India. Charu Mazumdar held that 'every corner of India was explosive': since the lot of the poor and landless peasants was the same all over India, he believed that their dormant spirit of rebellion could be roused to create points of armed struggle everywhere. His critics in Andhra Pradesh and Debra and Gopiballavpur on the other hand felt that because of the uneven development of political consciousness and

preparedness among the peasantry, it was necessary to vary the tactics from area to area, to make a distinction between the hills and the plains.

This brings us to the third point of difference, namely the question of mode of conducting guerrilla warfare. The tactics or annihilation of class enemies by small squads came under attack on the eve of the Party Congress. Even after Charu Mazumdar had reiterated the necessity of the tactics and warned that anyone opposing it could not remain in the party, doubts persisted. As Satyanarain Singh was to say later:

> ... we came to realize that the line of annihilation of class enemy was a suicidal one. After practising it for some time we came to this realization in December 1970. We now hold that annihilation of individual enemies is nothing but individual or squad terrorism and has nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism. It turns the masses into silent spectators and robs the revolution of mass support.[29]

Explaining the change in emphasis from the days of the Naxalbari uprising to the later period, Sushital Ray Chowdhury wrote:

> ... after Naxalbari we see two sets of ideas in two stages. A comparison of the ideas in the two stages will make the change clear. 1. Instead of mobilizing the broad peasant masses in mass movements, formation of guerrilla units in a conspiratorial way. 2. Instead of the previous stand that building party units and developing class struggles will transform party units into guerrilla units, it was prescribed in the second phase to recruit someone secretly from the units to build guerrilla units.... Instead of the long term task of political progaganda and building up of class struggle, it was stated that it is wrong to emphasize propaganda.[30]

While Charu Mazumdar rejected the view that mass movements or mass organizations were "indispensable" for waging guerrilla warfare [28], Ashim Chatterjee felt that "mass movements can be used to develop into armed class struggles..." in the countryside, and asserted that in the urban areas "the working class cannot be organized by mere actions. Their mass fronts and mass movements must be organized. . . ."[31]

The question of attitude towards potential allies and enemies was the fourth point which divided the party. Charu Mazumdar insisted on annihilating and driving out the landlords, and on continuing the struggle against the rich peasants. Satyanarain Singh and the Andhra Pradesh revolutionaries appeared to be in favour of neutralizing the landlords without resorting to annihilation in all cases, and inclined to seek out sympathetic rich farmers. As for the urban petty bourgeois, Saroj Dutta who was a firm supporter of Charu Mazumdar's regarded them as 'allies of the revolution'. But he insisted: "They come over to revolution through shocks. Unless you strike, a friend never becomes a friend. Words cannot change a human mind. The mind can be changed by a revolutionary situation."[32] Opposing this view, Sushital Ray Chowdhury, as we have already seen, criticized the party leadership for antagonizing the petty bourgeois by indiscriminate attacks.

Message from China

The CPI (M-L) emissary sent to China, Sourin Bose had in the meantime come back from Peking and conveyed to Charu Mazumdar the views of the Communist Party of China on the tactics of the Indian party.

Sourin Bose had a long discussion with Chou En-lai and Kang Sheng in Peking, on 29 October 1970, and came back to India in November, when he submitted a report to the party leadership. True to past practice in such matters, the Chinese leaders refrained from giving any directive to the Indian party, but in the course of the discussion, often by implication criticized the line advocated by the party leadership in certain spheres, and sometimes by suggestion sought to propose changes in the line. According to one version,[33] Chou En-lai was reported to have said: "As conditions in each country differ, each party should apply Marxism-Leninism concretely.... Your path can be worked out only by you.... Relation between our two parties is of fraternal friendship, relation of exchange of opinions. But if we go beyond this limit that is against Mao Tsetung Thought."

The Chinese leaders particularly took exception to the slogan: "China's Chairman is Our Chairman". Chou En-lai said: "To regard the leader of one country as the leader of another party is against the sentiment of the nation; it is difficult for the working class to accept it."

The discussion touched almost all the points that were dividing the Indian party — the tactics of annihilation, the attitude towards mass organizations and mass movements, and the question of self-sacrifice. Relating the experience of the Chinese Communists, Chou En-lai was believed to have said that after the suppression of the Communists in 1927, small groups were organized to finish reactionary police officers. But this, Chou En-lai pointed out, "can go on for only sometime". In the rural areas also, peasants were mobilized to "carry out agrarian struggle, and distribute land.... They snatched fire-arms and always relied upon the broad masses. In individual cases they killed very hated landlords only after trial in the people's court." Kang Sheng was reported to have told Sourin Bose that the Chinese party could not understand the real meaning of the "annihilation policy" of the Indian party till they received the July 1970 issue of *Liberation*, when they realized that it was "secret assassination by small groups in villages". He likened this to the methods used in China by left adventurists after the Communist defeat in 1927. He also felt that the application of Lin Piao's thesis — "Guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilize and apply the entire strength of the people against the enemy" — by the Indian comrades was out of context, since Lin Paio developed this thesis during the anti-Japanese war.*

* If Kang Sheng is reported faithfully, there is a chink in his argument. The controversial comment on guerrilla warfare is made by Lin Piao while describing the anti-Japanese struggle, in his article — 'Long Live the Victory of People's War' — written in 1965. He however insists in the same article on the need to apply the thesis of guerrilla warfare propounded by him, in the prevailing national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Besides, in early 1970, the Chinese Party itself had approved of the applicability of the thesis in Srikakulam. The No 1 issue of (continued on page 202)

Regarding mass organizations like trade unions and the concept of united front, Chou En-lai again spoke of the Chinese experience. "The United Front", he said, "not only includes certain exploiting classes but also revolutionary classes. Alliance between working class and peasantry is the sound basis. But the working class is divided into advanced, middle and backward sections. So the Trade Unions are the United Front of the backward section with the advanced section." He narrated how "due to opportunist lines" the Chinese Communists once suffered "great losses in the cities, were not able to win the masses and develop, and got exposed, lost lives, had to flee to rural areas, became passive." Kang Sheng was more forthright when he said that it was 'improper' to say, as Charu Mazumdar had written [in his 'China's Chairman is Our Chairman, China's Path is Our Path'] that the democratic front of all the classes, including the small and middle bourgeoisie could be formed under the leadership of the working class, "only when worker-peasant power is established in different parts of the country."

About the CPI (M-L)'s insistence on self-sacrifice, Chou En-lai said: "Share hardship with the masses, not isolated from them." He was against "sacrifice for adventurism", and added: "secret assassination of police is anarchist, is isolated from the masses, is shortlived". The Chinese leaders also touched on another point — the CPI (M-L)'s policy on agrarian reforms. Kang Sheng said: "It is necessary to have a clear-cut agrarian policy at present," and referred to the experience of the Chinese Communists who had "an agrarian policy on which to mobilize the masses; then we struggle for the seizure of power." He also regretted that the Indian party's attitude towards trade unions was "not proper". The Chinese leaders congratulated however the formation of the CPI (M-L), which according to Chou en-lai was "born fighting against revisionism, imperialism and reaction". Kang Sheng added:

> Your general orientation is correct; only certain policies do not correspond to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tsetung Thought. . . . You have less experience, so gradually you will be able to solve problems. As long as you persist in the general orientation you will find solution to specific policies.

Regarding correction of old mistakes, Kang Sheng advised the Indian party: ". . . correction should only be step by step. Feelings of the masses, enthusiasm must not be hurt. . . . Consult the masses, sum up their experience, actively step by step establish armed force to replace secret squads." Kang Sheng further said: "We believe under the leadership of Comrade Charu Mazumdar you have a bright future." He regretted however that the Chinese party could not reprint in

* (continued from page 201) *Peking Review* that year wrote approvingly that Charu Mazumdar had conveyed to Srikakulam "the correct thesis made by Comrade Lin Piao in his work 'Long Live the Victory of People's War': "Guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilize and apply the whole strength of the people against the enemy."

Was Kang Sheng's dismissal of Lin Piao's thesis in October 1970 a foretaste of the anti-Lin campaign that was to be launched in China from the next year?

its journals Charu Mazumdar's two articles — 'China's Chairman is Our Chairman, China's Path is our Path' and 'March Forward by Summing up the experience of the revolutionary peasant struggle of India' — the first one "because of the title though it contained many correct things", and the second because of the 'inaccurate' statement that the Naxalbari peasants "fought neither for land nor crops, but for political power," and other similar views.[34]

A slightly abridged version of the report of the discussion between Sourin Bose and the Chinese leaders, contained in a letter came out in a Delhi journal — *Mainstream*, dated 21 October 1972. It had two additional points. First, "The Communist Party of China supported Naxalbari struggle, not merely as a struggle for the seizure of state power. . . ." The Chinese leaders were reported to have complained, according to this letter, that the Indian party was counterposing the slogan for the seizure of State power to that of land problem. The other point related to the controversial question of Charu Mazumdar as 'revolutionary authority'. The Chinese leaders were supposed to have said: "The authority and prestige of a leader cannot be created, but grows and develops." Since one of the signatories to this letter was Sourin Bose himself, the report gains in authenticity.[35]

The Chinese Party leaders' views approximated in many respects to the criticisms that were being voiced by Charu Mazumdar's opponents inside the party. But although the Chinese views reached Charu Mazumdar in November 1970, the latter did not circulate them among the State units or the leaders. This is evident from the absence of any reference to the Chinese views in the documents of Satyanarain Singh, Sushital Ray Chowdhury or Ashim Chatterjee throughout 1970-71, although the latter were voicing the same views. The abovementioned letter complained:

> In our opinion, if he [Charu Mazumdar] had any reservations in respect of the suggestions from the fraternal party [i.e. the Chinese party], then he could have readily circulated the fraternal party's suggestions to all the party units for discussion. But he failed to take this course, as a result of which discussion and discord cropped up inside the Party.[36]

It was much later — in July 1972, shortly before his arrest and death — that Charu Mazumdar placed the Chinese views before a meeting of representatives of different provincial committees of the party. He was believed to have expressed the desire, according to his close comrades, to withdraw the slogan: "China's Chairman is Our Chairman". About 20 days before his arrest, when a delegation of representatives from the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) came to meet him, Charu Mazumdar was believed to have told them that the Chinese Party had expressed the fear that the slogan "China's Chairman is Our Chairman" might encourage the idea that a Fourth Communist International was in the offing, and that although China appreciated CPI (M-L)'s loyalty to Mao Tsetung, the slogan hurt the sentiments of the working class. Charu Mazumdar added that the Chinese Party had also advised the

Indian party to hasten the formation of an army. He was reported to have told the representatives that beyond these two points — the slogan and the formation of any army — the Chinese party had not raised any question regarding the Indian party's activities.

Charu Mazumdar's disinclination to circulate the Chinese views and desire to dismiss most of the points raised by Chou En-lai and Kang Sheng, except the suggestions relating to the slogan and the formation of an army, indicate to some extent the working of his mind. He was apparently not in agreement with all that the Chinese Party had said.

Much later, in June-July 1972, Charu Mazumdar was believed to have expressed his desire to make a self-criticism in the light of the Chinese suggestions. At a meeting with K.C. Satyamurthi and Rauf of Andhra Pradesh and Jagjit Singh Sohal of Punjab, he was reported to have discussed the Chinese criticism. Defending his decision not to disclose the Chinese criticism earlier, he pleaded that the Chinese party did not favour immediate disclosure at that time as it would have led to confusion and misunderstanding among the CPI (M-L) ranks. But in June-July 1972 when he was prepared to make a self-criticism, he was dissuaded from doing so by his comrades from Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. Some of the latter felt that his line was correct while the Chinese suggestions were irrelevant to Indian conditions. This indicates the strongly entrenched left sectarian attitude in the CPI (M-L) movement even when the movement was on its last tether.

Saroj Dutta on the CPC and Revolutionary Authority

It is important in this connection to refer to a speech made by Saroj Dutta, after the receipt of the Chinese views, at a meeting of the North Bengal-Bihar Regional Committee, most probably sometime in 1971.

Explaining the relations between the CPI (M-L) and foreign Communist parties, he said:

> Every party will apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought after evaluating the concrete situation of the respective country. With other (foreign) parties, our relations will always be fraternal. If at the time of leading the revolution in our own country, our views do not tally with those of the international leadership, we shall have to follow our assessment. Chairman Mao is the international leader; but the Chinese party can never be the international authority; its relations with other (Communist) parties will be fraternal. The Chinese Party and Chairman Mao are not the same.[36]

'People's Liberation Army'

The Chinese party's suggestions bore fruit at least in one respect. The CPI (M-L) leadership began to think in serious terms about the formation of a regular armed force.

Early in October 1970, Charu Mazumdar had said: "The People's Liberation Army will begin only when a landless agricultural labourer snatches away rifles from the police or military."[43] In the same article, he referred to an incident where a landless agricultural labourer woman of Gopiballavpur slit the throat of a CRP man and snatched away his rifle. But for some reason perhaps he was not willing to designate the action as the beginnings of the People's Liberation Army. Even after the action at Magurjan, Charu Mazumdar did not immediately discover in it the roots of a PLA. After more than a month, in December, by which time the Chinese message had reached him, he announced: "Through the capture of rifles at Magurjan, the People's Liberation Army of the peasants of Bengal has taken birth." He added: "All the squads of poor and landless peasants, wherever they are in Bengal, are today a part of the People's Liberation Army under the party's leadership."[47]

From now on he was to reiterate in almost every article of his that the struggle had reached a higher stage in West Bengal with the 'formation of the PLA'. He wrote on December 21: "With the capture of rifles from the police at Magurjan by the peasants of Naxalbari, the PLA has been formed in Bengal today; the imperialist agents have therefore become more desperate and ferocious." [49] Again, early next year he advised his followers: "A commander is needed whenever an army is built; so we shall have to elect area-wise and region-wise commanders from poor and landless peasants. In this way the leadership of poor and landless peasants will be established over the armed struggle."[50]

Regarding the functioning of the PLA, he reminded the cadres of what Mao Tsetung said about the Chinese Red Army in 1929: ". . . besides fighting to destroy the enemy's strength, it should shoulder such important tasks as doing propaganda among the masses, organizing the masses, arming them, helping them to establish revolutionary political power and setting up Party organizations. . . ." In this connection, he stressed the need for launching attacks on the armed force of the enemy. "To direct attacks only against class enemies during this period," he said, "would be a sort of economism. Along with attacking class enemies, if we cannot direct attacks against the armed force of the enemy, we shall sink in the mire of a sort of economism." He also attached importance to the task of mobilizing the broad masses of peasantry now. "All these days we had been busy trying to release the initiative of the poor and landless peasants. Now we shall have to strengthen the unity of the broad peasant masses and open the gates of their talents."[*Ibid.*]

In this task, the role of the 'revolutionary committees' became important. Describing these committees as the 'primary basis' of the new revolutionary government, Charu Mazumdar said:

> The responsibility of these revolutionary committees is to set upon the work of confiscating and distributing the land of fugitive landlords, with the help and active cooperation of the broad peasant masses, to make arrangements to improve the system of production, to take necessary steps to see that even in the midst of severe repression production was not hampered.[47]

Along with the setting up of revolutionary committees, the other means to establish the peasants' political power in the villages, as suggested by Charu Mazumdar, were the formation of people's militia to protect the villagers from attacks by hoodlums, arbitration to settle disputes among the peasants, and punishment of enemy spies. "... all these will have to be done with the help and cooperation of the poor and landless peasants," he reminded his followers. He gave the call: "The PLA has been formed in Bengal; now establish political power! Only then we will be able to reduce to rags all the government laws, we will be able to lay the foundations of a new democratic India."[*Ibid.*]

But did the PLA, in the real sense of the term, actually take shape? The scattered guerrilla squads retained their old character. They were just being given a new glorified name — the People's Liberation Army. No distinction was made between a regular armed force and small guerrilla squads. Mao Tsetung on the other hand, had been careful in demarcating the nature of activities of the two. "If we have local Red Guards only but no regular Red Army, then we cannot cope with the regular White forces, but only with the landlords' levies", he said in 1928.[37] Again, 10 years later he was to explain in detail that an increase in numbers and an improvement in quality were necessary "to transform guerrilla units waging guerrilla warfare into regular forces waging mobile warfare."[38]

Probably realizing the difficulty of changing overnight isolated guerrilla bands into a regular army, Charu Mazumdar was to give some months later a more sober reappraisal of the Magurjan action, when he said: "With the capture of rifles by poor and landless peasants' squad at Magurjan, the work of forming the PLA has begun."[56] Still later, in his controversy with Ashim Chatterjee, he was to be more forthright:

> The PLA is a force of a special type.... In spite of [the actions of] Magurjan, Rupaskundi, we have not yet been able to attack the mobile enemy. The reason is not technical, it is political.... To establish a base area it is first necessary to have a regular armed force and a politically conscious people.... So the PLA does not develop if we merely give the call: Build the PLA. The base area does not develop if we merely give the call: Build the base area. Only if the level of political consciousness of the broad peasant masses can be elevated and they are made to participate in the armed struggle, through the revolutionary committees, the PLA will be strong and base areas will be established.[60]

The Post-Election Situation

Meanwhile, the counter-revolutionary tide was in full flood. The reign of police terror continued unabated in West Bengal after the 1971 elections. Supporters, overt and alleged, of the CPI (M-L) were massacred. The youths and students were the main targets of the repression. Police sources themselves admitted that between March 1970 and August 1971, in Calcutta and its suburbs 1,783 CPI (M-L) supporters or members were killed; unofficial sources claimed that the

figure was at least double. The number of dead mentioned here did not include those killed inside jails. Between May and December 1971, the police opened fire on unarmed prisoners in at least six jails of West Bengal.[39]

Those months of 1971 were to remain scalded in the memory of the people of Calcutta particularly. The social scene was dominated by the military, police and hoodlums. Clumps of heavy, brutish-faced men, whose hips bulged with hidden revolvers or daggers, and whose little eyes looked mingled with ferocity and servility like bulldogs, prowled the street corners. Police informers, scabs, professional assassins, and various other sorts of bodyguards of private property stalked around bullying the citizens. Streets were littered with bodies of young men riddled with bullets.

Although Charu Mazumdar was urging his followers to avenge every murder, he was coming to realize the difficulties of continuing the ill-matched contest for long. In a letter to a comrade he wrote: "It is not possible to carry on continuous clashes in the urban areas it will result in more losses." Stressing the need to build up party units among the working class as the primary responsibility, he said: "If because of that there are less actions, it would not matter much."[55] Towards the end of the year, he was warning the urban cadres: "There are ups and downs in struggle. Therefore various sorts of confusion arise when the struggle suffers a setback. All such confusion may be greater among comrades in towns."[66]

It was evident that by the end of 1971, the struggle in the urban areas had suffered a 'setback'. The youth upsurge had spent itself, what with the ruthless extermination campaign by the police and the fear and apathy that had set in among the once-sympathetic middle class. But although the youth movement tapered off, it shook up the prevailing equilibrium in the country's socio-political life. Nothing could again be the same in West Bengal after 1970-71.

A Review of the Urban Youth Upsurge

The young people who took part in the urban actions played a double role. They contributed a valuable energy to the needed task of protest and insurgency. But they also promoted a political moral confusion, sometimes verging on nihilism, which threatened liberal values and helped provoke a backlash.

The main weakness of the youth upsurge lay in its spontaneous origin. The CPI (M-L) leadership applauded at the beginning the unorganized outbursts of the youth in the cities in the same way as they had earlier hailed the spontaneous acts of the peasantry. But the spontaneous destructiveness of the peasant masses and the impulsive incendiarism of the urban middle class youth are not of the same order. When the Santhal rebel of the past chopped off the limbs of the most notorious usurer of his village shouting "With these fingers you counted our money. With these hands you snatched away our food!", (this is an episode from the Santhal rebellion of 1855-57, described in K.K. Dutta's 'The Santhal Insurrection', p. 34) or the peasant of modern Srikakulam slit the throat of the

hated jotedar, dipped his fingers in the victim's blood and wrote revolutionary slogans on the walls of his house, one can visualize behind these gory deeds the years of oppression and humiliation that they had suffered. Since their childhood they had been used to watching their kind being coldly butchered. Once they mastered the secret of the war, the offensive, their class hatred against their persecutors naturally knew no bounds. That is presicely why, justifying the violent retaliation by the peasants of Hunan — which was described by the critics at that time as 'going too far' — Mao Tsetung had said:

> . . . the local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords have themselves driven the peasants to this . . . . The most violent revolts and the most serious disorders have invariably occurred in places where the local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords perpetrated the worst outrages. . . . Without using the greatest force, the peasants cannot possibly overthrow the deep-rooted authority of the landlords which has lasted for thousands of years. . . . [40]

But with the majority of the young iconoclasts of Calcutta in 1970, was it an intense class hatred, born of years of oppression, sustained by deep-rooted anger, and directed against symbols of political, social and economic oppression, as was in the case of the peasantry? Or, was it rather a sense of frustration with their inability to move upwards in their society, what with the lack of enough jobs and the uselessness of university diplomas, that led them to take it out on the easily available targets like schools and colleges and examination?

Curiously enough, all through 1970 and 1971 — the height of the youth upsurge — not a single of those upper class expensive schools, those phony replicas of the British public school system, that adorned the fashionable lanes behind Park Street, Lower Circular Road or Theatre Road, were attacked. Yet these were the institutions which were the brazen-faced symbols of a semi-colonial education, which taught Indians to "look down upon the masses of workers and peasants, respect everything concerning the imperialist powers, and become lackeys or agents of these powers."[32] Nor was there any assault upon the modish clubs, bars, restaurants and discotheques of Park Street or Chowringhee, which were the haunts of these 'lackeys'. Was it a petty bourgeois feeling of envy at the affluence of this class, or even a sneaking desire to gain entry into their periphery someday in the future, instead of bitter hatred for them, that deterred the iconoclasts from turning their attention to this area?

Although attacks on the police force were carried out daringly by the young urban guerrillas, it should be noted at the same time that not a single senior police officer among the better protected ranks of Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner or Deputy Inspector General, was chosen as a target. Yet, these senior officers were the brains behind the meticulously planned repression that was unleashed upon the people. Was this lapse due to an oversight, or was the same old petty bourgeois opportunism — desire for quick success through easily available routes — influencing the choice of victims?

One suspects that for the majority of the politically uncommitted youth who flocked to the movement in the urban areas, the aim was limited and immediate.

The upsurge provided them with an outlet for their pent up frustration and anger, to be spent against the nearest targets for attack.

This explains also why towards the end of 1971, when along with the severe repression, the Government also began to dole out sops of concession to the youth — temporary jobs in various establishments and provision of numerous avenues for earning money — a large number of erstwhile 'Naxalites' were ready to lap them up. By early 1972, the slogan "*Indira Gandhi yug yug jiyo*!" [A long, long life to Indira Gandhi] had replaced the once popular "*Charu Mazumdar yug yug jiyo*!" While the landless and poor peasants were too stubborn in their class hatred, and also numerous to be bribed and bought over by the state, the urban students were temperamentally malleable and numerically small enough, to be terrorized first and later won back into the fold of the establishment. Being young, they slipped through ideas, to try them on like a suit of clothing before purchasing them with the price of personal identity. 'Naxalism' and 'Indiraism' were often labels for poses rather than commitments.

This was nothing new. Years ago, Lenin had pointed out:

> The petty bourgeois 'driven to frenzy' by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, its liability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, fantasy, and even a 'frenzied' infatuation with one or another bourgeois 'fad' — all this is a matter of common knowledge. . . .[41]

But it was the politically committed core among the urban revolutionaries, the band of dedicated CPI (M-L) activists, who became the source of a stirring Communist legend. It was their bloodshed and heroism in the numerous battles fought in Calcutta and suburbs in 1970-71, that gave the movement its revolutionary aura. The halo of martyrdom which surrounded them made their names household words in their localities and inspired the next generation of revolutionaries. They were absorbed by the one exclusive interest, the one thought, the one single passion — the revolution, which they seriously believed could be unleashed by paralysing the administration and terrorizing the rulers through a series of annihilations. They were not common criminals, which the police tried to make them out, but dreamers with a violent mission, characters whom Dostoyevsky would have been proud to have created.

If their activities and utterances sometimes appeared shrill, it was not their fault alone. We all tend to raise our voices when we speak to persons who are getting deaf. Their fulmination was not lost upon those who heard them. For, although they disappeared — wiped out by the enemy — they acted as a catalytic agent, both for their elders and the next generation. Their attacks on the sacred symbols of the past, often jarring in their excesses, shook out of torpor at least a few sensitive Bengali intellectuals who were inspired to revise their worshipful assessment of the 19th century socio-cultural movement in Bengal. One of them, Benoy Ghose, had the honesty to admit: "After devoting more than 20 years to the collection and interpretation of historical material on the 19th century Bengal renaissance, I find many lacunae in the work done." After an analysis of

the pro-imperialist roots of the 'renaissance', he came to the conclusion: "What we call 'Bengal renaissance', . . . turned out to be nothing but a historical hoax, by the end of the 19th Century."[42] As for the younger generation, the CPI (M-L) urban guerrillas appeared to have set a precendent of violent defiance of any established order. Disrespect for the past and disregard for the present, became the order of the day in West Bengal. A generation of desperados, growing up without any faith in the values of the status quo, swayed between the lure of a fascist counter-revolution and the dream of a Communist revolution.

To go back to an assessment of the revolutionary activities of these politically committed CPI (M-L) cadres in 1970 — the early phase of the youth upsurge in Calcutta and suburbs — these young militants did indeed create a revolutionary situation.

A sample survey made of 300 under trial CPI (M-L) cadres by the Special Branch of the Calcutta police in October 1970, throws interesting light on the composition of the urban guerrilla squads during this period. Concentration of 250 of them, almost in equal proportion, in the age groups of 15 to 19, and 20 to 25, indicated that the core of the cadre were the youth. According to the survey, one in every 7.5 persons studied Marx seriously, and one in every six persons was well acquainted with Mao Tsetung's works, suggesting the size of the solid core among the masses of youths who flocked to the movement. One-tenth of the prisoners surveyed were graduates and one-sixth undergraduates. Two hundred and thirty eight of the total had no political background before joining the movement.[43]

While this enlivened the movement with fresh blood, it posed a problem to the police who, without any dossier on the political antecedents of these young boys, were handicapped at the beginning in the work of apprehending the new breed of revolutionaries. During the first phase of the urban actions, the urban guerrillas were able to disrupt sufficiently the administration to reduce law and order to a farce. The majority of the people of West Bengal clearly refused to use its power to oust the disrupters. The democratic processes broke down because no one was willing to raise more than a voting finger for the status quo. The passive majority was already the latent ally of the minority.

But at this stage the urban guerrillas failed to ally themselves with the most important segment of the urban population — the industrial proletariat — who were in control of the vital sectors of the economy. As a result, the prospect of their combined offensive along with the establishment of a few rural bases around the important cities in West Bengal, failed to materialize.

The Urban Proletariat

In March, 1970, in a message to the working class, Charu Mazumdar called upon them to come forward as the vanguard of the revolution, lead the armed peasants' struggles in the countryside, and rally round the CPI (M-L).[34] In the same month, in another article addressed to party activists working among the industrial proletariat, he emphasized the need to "build secret Party organization

among the workers." While asserting that it was not the party's task to organize trade unions, he maintained that the party "should encourage the workers in any struggle they wage", but at the same time should

> constantly explain to them that today, the weapons like hartals and strikes have become largely blunted in dealing with the attacks of the organized capitalist class (such as lock-out, lay-off, closure, etc.). Today, the struggles can no longer develop peacefully or without bloodshed. To develop, the struggles must take the forms of pherao, clash with the police and the capitalists, barricade fights, annihilating the class enemies, and their agents.

Charu Mazumdar also wanted his followers to develop self-respect among the workers. The latter had suffered from the humiliation of slavery for years. If through political propaganda and development of their initiative for actions, a sense of prestige could be rekindled in them, they would grow into daring firebrand revolutionaries. This was what Charu Mazumdar hoped [33]

But, swept off their feet by the youth upsurge and pressurized by the young students, who, appalled by the sluggishness of history, were wanting too much in too short a time, the leadership of the CPI (M-L) hardly had any time or inclination to develop bases among the workers.

Yet, the real power of the working class to disrupt the economy and pose a revolutionary threat to the state, was evident during this period in at least two instances. In both the cases, it should be noted, the CPI (M-L) organizationally did not play any leading role. In February 1970, the South-Eastern Railways were hit by lightning strikes, and acts of sabotage. A newspaper report said: "An impression is steadily gaining ground that extremist elements among the employees of the South-Eastern Railway are out to disrupt the Railway's operations, particularly in the Jamshedpur-Ranchi belt."[44]

The vulnerability of the country's economy to such acts of disruption was noted by the authorities, who had to move in the Territorial Army to run the trains. The Eastern and South-Eastern Railways together formed the kingpin of the entire railway system. Any dislocation of the passenger and goods train services in these two railways would affect the whole country. About 60% of the country's goods traffic was carried by these two railways. As a result, the country, particularly the urban centres of the eastern zone — Calcutta, Durgapur, Asansol, Jamshedpur — were threatened with a breakdown of supply of goods and services. One can well imagine how a combination of the two situations — collapse of the administration through guerrilla actions and disruption of the supply line through strikes and sabotage — could have brought down the city-based power structure, if a string of well-organized rural bases had closed in on the cities.

Charu Mazumdar of course much later hailed the railway strike as an outcome of the impact of the youth upsurge on the working class. ". . . the strike of the workers in the North-Eastern and South-Eastern Railways has heralded a new epoch in workers' struggle," he said, adding: "They did not cease work for any economic demand, but to establish self-respect. . ."[41] But beyond this, nothing was done to coordinate the struggle with the agrarian guerrilla warfare

or the urban youth movement. The strike fizzled out after sometime.

The next instance was a series of strikes in the State Electricity Boards of West Bengal, Bihar and the Damodar Valley Corporation in 1970-71. Four of these strikes were marked by large-scale and unprecedented acts of sabotage of vital power installations and transmission lines. Here is how a police official described the situation: "The workers plunged vast areas into darkness and paralyzed life in cities and towns for days, immobilized thousands of agricultural pumps and tubewells in the villages, forced temporary closure of factories." He then added: "Extremist ideology played the main part in these activities." Absence of any reference to these incidents in the contemporary issues of CPI (M-L) journals suggests that here also the party did not play any leading role. The ideology might have influenced the participants who acted on their own.

Although guerrilla squads of industrial workers were formed in places like Durgapur and Asansol in 1970-71, and they carried out acts of annihilation or snatched fire-arms, or raised red flags on factory-tops, the CPI (M-L) like the Vietnam Communists, did not have on its agenda any plans for large-scale strikes to paralyse communications to hinder troops movement to the areas of agrarian guerrilla struggle.

From the end of 1970, Charu Mazumdar was gradually realizing that the urban movement could not sustain itself for long by solely depending on the petty bourgeois youth. In a letter to a comrade he wrote: ". . . a time is coming soon when only the working class alone can protect us. It is not correct to assume that the petty bourgeois will never get scared." He therefore urged his followers to "increase the number of party units among the working class." "Let the students and youths do whatever they are doing," he said, "put stress on the work of concentrating our party's attention and activities among the working class."[48] Still later he admitted: "Actions automatically do not raise the level of political consciousness. So we should take up the task of building up our party units among the urban workers and poor people, as the most important task now. . . ."[55]

In 1970-71, the youth and student activists in their enthusiasm, tried to carve out 'liberated zones' in certain parts of Calcutta and suburbs, in an attempt to reproduce in the cities the programme of 'area-wise seizure of power' which could be implemented with some measure of success in the rural areas. But to sustain themselves, the so-called 'liberated zones' in the cities needed to be able to obtain for their members day-to-day benefits and protect them against reprisals — objectives which could be achieved to some extent in the villages of Srikakulam and Gopiballavpur as long as they remained inaccessible to the enemy forces and could depend on their self-sufficient economy. It was not so in the cities. The tendency to stick to the middle class localities in Calcutta and other towns exposed the cadres to the enemy, when with the help of the lumpen-proletariat 'anti-Naxal squads' the troops and police combed these localities. Charu Mazumdar had to advise his comrades: "Those who are too wellknown in the cities should be sent away to the villages. Only then we can save these cadres."[*Ibid.*]

Finally, towards the end of 1971, he had to come out with the warning: "We cannot occupy Calcutta and the different towns right now, and that is not possible also. . . ." Realizing the unfortunate consequences of the divorce from working class struggles, he was to reiterate:

> Our object is to form Party units among the working class and to help develop Party organizers from among workers. Of course we shall always support the workers and cooperate with them in their struggles. . . . The working class is ceaselessly conducting struggles, big and small. Our political work among them will help them in those struggles and draw the broad sections of the working class into the fold of our politics.[66]

But by then it was too late. The youth movement was already on the wane. The opportunity to coordinate urban guerrilla actions with acts of industrial sabotage by the workers was lost to the CPI (M-L)

Notes

1. *Speeches by Lord Macaulay with his Minute on Indian Education*— Ed. by G.M. Young, London, 1935, p. 359.
2. Translated from Benoy Ghose's Bengali article — 'Garib Ganabidroha O Bhagaban' in *Ekshan*, Autumn Number, 1972.
3. Suprokash Ray, *Bharater Krishak Bidroha o Ganatantrik Sangram*, pp. 336-37.
4. Saroj Dutta, *On Subhash Bose*. (A pamphlet brought out by the CPI (M-L) sometime in 1970).
5. *The Statesman*, 21 April 1969.
6. Prakash Karat, 'Role of the English-educated in Indian Politics', *Social Scientist*, November 1972.
7. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, Vol. III. Penguin Books, 1968, p. 1669.
8. *See* Chapter 4.
9. Saroj Dutta, 'In Defence of Iconoclasm', *Deshabrati*, 1970.
10. From a clandestinely published leaflet brought out by the Calcutta University committee of the CPI (M-L).
11. From a version of the speech carried by a CPI (M-L) publication — *Poob Akash Lal* (The eastern sky is red).
12. A.N. Mulla made the comment. It was later expunged by the Supreme Court in *U.P. v. Mohd. Naim*, AIR 1964, Sc. 703.
13. *The Statesman*, 16 June 1970.
14. *The Statesman*, 18 July 1970.
15. *The Statesman*, 20 June 1970.
16. *Naxalbarir Shiksha*.
17. *Jugantar*, 27 September 1970.
18. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 29 October 1970.
19. *Ibid*. 21 November 1970.
20. *The Statesman*, 12 December 1970.
21. Translated from *Naxalbarir Shiksha*.
22. From an undated letter in Bengali, probably written towards the end of 1970.
23. P. Sundarayya's letter to R.K. Garg, in *People's Democracy*, 25 March 1973.
24. David Galula, *Counter-insurgency warfare; theory and practice*, p. 68.
25. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 20 October 1970.

26. Sushital Ray Chowdhury, 'Combat Left Adventurism'.
27. BBOBRC document, July 1971.
28. *Ibid*.
29. From an interview given by Satyanarain Singh, published in *Hindusthan Standard*, 20 May 1974.
30. Sushital Ray Chowdhury, 'Combat Left Adventurism'.
31. BBOBRC document, July 1971.
32. From a speech by Saroj Dutta at a group meeting in a village in Hooghly in West Bengal and published later in *Poob Akash Lal*.
33. 'True copy of the report submitted by the party's representative to Comrade Charu Mazumdar at the end of November 1970' (A document distributed secretly in party circles after Charu Mazumdar's death).
34. *Ibid*.
35. From an 'Open Letter to Party Comrades', written from inside the jail by Kanu Sanyal, Chowdhury Tejeswara Rao, Souren Bose, D. Nagabhushanam Patnaik, Kolla Venkaiah, D. Bhuvan Mohan Patnaik.
36. Reprinted later in a Hindi pamphlet brought out by *Lok-Yudh*, the Hindi journal of the CPI (M-L) in June 1972.
37. Mao Tsetung, 'Why is it that Red Political Power can exist in China?' 5 October 1928. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 66.
38. Mao Tsetung, 'Problem of Strategy of Guerrilla War Against Japan'. May 1958. *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 107.
39. Dum Dum Central Jail — 14 May 1971; Howrah Jail — 16 May 1971; Suri Jail — 7 June 1971; Alipore Special Jail — 30 June 1971; Asansol Jail — 5 August 1971; Alipur Central Jail — 26 December 1971.
40. Mao Tsetung, 'Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan', March 1927. *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 28.
41. V.I. Lenin, 'Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder', *Selected Works*, Vol. II. p. 580. Moscow, 1947.
42. Benoy Ghose, 'A Critique of Bengal Renaissance'. *Frontier*, 25 September 1971.
43. *Point of View*, Delhi, 14 November 1970.
44. *The Statesman*, February 1970.

9 The End of a Phase

We have suffered a setback after the armed struggle in our country reached a stage.
Charu Mazumdar:
'It is the People's Interest that
is the Party's Interest'. 9 June 1972.

Think —
When you speak of our weaknesses,
Also of the dark time
That brought them forth,
Bertolt Brecht: 'To Posterity'.

The Countryside — 1970-71

Although often overshadowed by the tumultous demonstrations of the cities, the Indian countryside still remained the main arena of the CPI (M-L) struggles all through 1970-71.

Numerous small actions, ranging from annihilation of landlords and usurers to seizing of fire-arms through attacks on police and army, took place in different parts of the country during this period. Procurement of arms by force of arms, in a bid to graduate from the intitial stage of attacks with primitive weapons to the stage of forming the People's Liberation Army, appeared to be the main aim with the rural guerrillas. Setting up of revolutionary committees as embryonic forms of parallel administration to inspire the peasantry with the sense of power was also on the agenda in many places.

In Punjab, particularly, the movement achieved some success and made headway among the peasantry in a large number of districts between the summer of 1970 and the end of 1971. In Andhra Pradesh, towards the end of 1971, the guerrillas could overcome to some extent the setback that they had suffered after the extermination of their leaders, and could carry out actions in Telengana and Srikakulam. In Bihar, although the base at Mushahari was lost, the struggle spread to the Ranchi area among the tribal population there.

But the movement reached its highwater mark in the villages of Birbhum in West Bengal along the borders of Bihar, where the CPI (M-L) could establish peasants' political power and maintain it till the end of 1971.

Punjab

The spread of the struggle to Punjab and its taking root among the peasantry there were politically significant for the CPI (M-L).

Punjab particularly had the reputation of being a rich and prosperous State, and a myth was fostered that the 'green revolution' had changed the lot of the poor peasants who would never be inclined to join the 'red revolution'. Apart from remaining poor, the Punjab peasantry like their counterparts elsewhere had a strong sense of self-respect. The 'green revolution' might have led to some marginal increase in their wages in some areas, but the lower-caste landless peasants continued to be socially exploited and humiliated by the rich landlords. Imbued from their childhood with a brooding sense of wrong, and an inveterate hatred of a class, they were ready to respond to the call of the CPI (M-L).

As for the poverty, extracts from a report that appeared in the *Times of India* of 1 June 1973 would throw light on the situation in Punjab in the early 'seventies. The report said:

> Nearly 43.5 per cent of the population in Punjab — known as the most prosperous state with the highest per capita income — lives below the poverty line in rural areas. . . . A vast majority of such people consists of agricultural labourers who are mostly Harijans and constitute nearly 20 per cent of the work force in the agricultural field. . . . Richer farmers with resources at their disposal, made large initial investments which enabled them to take maximum advantage of the new technology. On the other hand, a large number of small and marginal farmers, suffering from lack of adequate resources, have neither been able to install tubewells nor to adopt the new technology. In fact, most of them lack resources even to make both ends meet. There is ample evidence to suggest that as a result of the green revolution, the disparities in income have become accentuated and that a large number of marginal and small farmers, owning small tracts of land, continue to live in abject poverty. Besides a large number of agricultural labourers, despite an increase in their income due to the availability of more employment, are unable to get even the basic requirements of life out of their meagre income. They continue to live in perpetual debt.

It was no wonder, therefore, that in the early phase of the movement in Punjab the targets of the CPI (M-L) annihilation squads were big landlords and usurers in the villages of Patiala, Ferozepur and Sangrur. According to police reports, 'cells' of the party under the cover of 'study circles', were operating in the summer of 1970 in Ludhiana, the State's largest industrial centre.

When, in August 1970, a Swatantra Party MLA, Basant Singh, was killed by the guerrillas, the police announced rewards of Rs. 5,000 for 20 of the CPI (M-L) leaders of the state whom they suspected to be behind the action. Two of them were killed by the police in Sangrur on 9 August, and another — Harbhajan Singh — was arrested in Ferozepur district on 12 August. But this did not daunt the CPI (M-L) activists of the State. Between October 1970 and January 1971, several landlords and moneylenders were killed in villages in Ludhiana, Patiala, Sangrur, Jullunder, Hoshiarpur and Bhatinda districts. In the third

week of December, guerrillas clashed with the police near Kapurthala, when they forcibly released a comrade from police custody. In the clash one policeman was shot dead by the guerrillas.[1] On 25 January 1971, the guerrillas killed a big landlord, Akali Dal leader and president of the Block Samiti, at Kokri Kalan village in Ferozepur district. This particular landlord had been awarded a 'jagir' (estate) by the British rulers for giving evidence against the revolutionary Bhagat Singh, who was hanged in 1931. Commenting on their achievements, the leaders of the CPI (M-L) in Punjab said:

> The rapid development of the armed struggle in Punjab has belied the hopes of those who thought that in Punjab, which is economically prosperous as compared to other Indian states and where the 'green revolution' has occurred, the line of annihilation of class enemies cannot succeed.[2]

Along with the annihilation campaign in the villages, the CPI (M-L) also sought to draw in the students in the urban areas. Maoist slogans began to appear on college walls in Punjab from the end of 1970. Red flags were hoisted atop buildings in some places. In some areas, examinations were disrupted. It should be mentioned in this connection that a large number of students of Delhi's St. Stephen's College had already been working in the villages of Punjab and Haryana. From the end of 1970, the police swooped down upon the student activists. In several districts, CPI (M-L) supporters among the students were arrested, which provoked strikes in colleges.

In the beginning of 1971, the leaders of the Punjab party met Charu Mazumdar. From now on emphasis began to be laid on forming guerrilla squads with poor and landless peasants, snatching of fire-arms and setting up of revolutionary committees.

The most spectacular action in 1971 was the attack on a police post at Dadhahoor village in Sangrur district on 23 September. The guerrilla squad which carried out the action consisted of six poor and landless peasants. While all the five mounted police posted there surrendered to the guerrillas, one havildar who was in charge of the post, tried to fire upon the squad, but was killed by the guerrillas. Four .303 rifles and 200 rounds of ammunition were seized. The squad raised slogans — "Long Live the Agrarian Revolution!" "Long Live Comrade Charu Mazumdar!" "Long Live Chairman Mao Tsetung!" before leaving the spot. The Punjab State Committee of the party described Dadhahoor as the 'Magurjan of Punjab'.

Earlier, on 2 August, CPI (M-L) guerrillas of Patiala killed a Deputy Superintendent of Police of the area. On 17 September, in Sanchera, guerrillas seized the gun of an agent of a landlord. In the same village, peasants had earlier forced usurers to destroy all records of debt that the peasants owed to them. In April 1971, Charu Mazumdar sent a letter to his comrades in Punjab stating: "Your struggle is receiving praise from all over India and is inspiring us to carry on our struggle." He then advised them:

> Rely on the poor and landless peasants, open the gates of their initiative. Only then all obstacles will disappear. This reliance on the basic masses is the root of all our

> success, for the masses can play their role in different ways and their creative talents can make possible the impossible.[54]

Meanwhile, in the villages where the Punjab guerrillas wielded influence, revolutionary committees were being set up. A report said:

> These Committees provide valuable information to the guerrillas about the activities of the enemy. [The Committee also, according to the report, demanded of the rich peasants and small usurers] (i) stoppage of opposition to the peasant armed struggle; (ii) payment of levies and (iii) reduction of rent.[3]

It appears that the Bhatinda-Sangrur area was developing as a zone where the revolutionaries wielded considerable influence. Describing the situation there at the end of 1971 a party report said:

> The annihilation of a DSP, the attack on the police post at Dadhahoor and the snatching of a rifle from a police agent have created red terror in this area. The enemy has withdrawn small police pickets from the villages; small bands consisting of four or five policemen dare not enter the villages; they do so only in large numbers. The police have asked their agents to surrender their guns, because they cannot protect them from the 'Naxalites'. Smaller class enemies and the members of the evil gentry have been forced to come to a compromise with the Revolutionary Committees. . . . Many villages in this region are free from class enemies and police agents. The political power of the exploiting class has crumbled down. . . . The class enemies who have so long plundered the people are fleeing from this area.[4]

But the police were quick to act. 'Anti-Naxal' squads were formed with the agents of landlords and were provided with guns. Six more battalions of the Punjab State police were deployed to tackle the situation in Bhatinda-Sangrur. Houses of CPI (M-L) functionaries were confiscated by the Government. Borders between Punjab and neighbouring States were sealed to prevent the guerrillas from escaping. By the winter of 1971-72, the police were able to enter the guerrilla zones with the help of a superior armed force and capture, kill and drive out the guerrillas. A report from Punjab appearing in the 10 August 1972 issue of *Liberation* said: "The struggle suffered a setback in the last winter." A review made by the Sangrur District Committee of the CPI (M-L) referred to the "naked and cruel oppression of the Congress government on the peasants of hundreds of villages and the revolutionary revenge taken by the peasantry for the . . . killing of guerrilla comrades by the police." Analyzing the mistakes committed by the party, the committee felt that it failed to understand that "the politics of sacrifice is the revolutionary politics." The review also admitted that the poor and landless peasantry had not always been at the helm of the party organization and referred to the inadequacy of mass participation. The committee also blamed the "liking for working openly and refraining from secrecy" as one of the reasons for the party's failure to preserve the underground structure and shelters.

After this, the movement in Punjab shrank into isolated assassination of landlords or usurers in a few villages.

Andhra Pradesh

From the last quarter of 1971, reports of actions began to be heard again from Srikakulam. In the Parvatipuram Agency guerrillas executed 15 landlords and police agents. In the plains of Tekkali and Sompeta, squads executed three landlords and two police agents.

Landlords who had fled from villages in the wake of the mass peasant upsurge in Srikakulam in 1969-70, did not dare to come back even after the police repression was launched against the guerrillas. A report from CPI (M-L) members of the area in the middle of 1972 claimed that the lands of these fugitive landlords were at the disposal of the people.[5] The report of an incident at Boddapadu (the one-time centre of activities of Panchadi Krishnamurthy and Subbarao Panigrahi) in Sompeta indicates the nature of CPI (M-L) actions in the area during this period. In the absence of a local landlord who had fled from the village and was staying in a town, the

> president of the village Panchayat tried to cultivate the land. The poor and landless peasants got furious, surrounded him, and demanded that he should not cultivate the land as that land was got through struggle and as such belonged to the people. But this Panchayat president brought the police from the nearby camp and harassed the people. The guerrilla squad, with the help of the people, annihilated the Panchayat president and his follower. . . .[6]

Activities also spread to Telengana. At Garla, on the borders of Warangal and Khammam districts, a squad of poor peasants and workers killed a sentry attached to the Railways, snatched his rifle and confiscated a large amount of money. According to the Andhra Committee of the CPI (M-L), it was "the first action of its kind in Andhra".[7] Apart from this there were several acts of annihilation of landlords in Warangal, Rayalaseema and Guntur.

But it was evident that the movement in Andhra Pradesh had retreated to stage one — the annihilation campaign. There were no attempts to establish Red political power, as happened in Srikakulam in 1969-70. There were no widespread guerrilla attacks on police or troops to seize rifles and form a standing army.

Bihar

In early October 1970, the police launched an operation in the Ranchi district of Bihar. They alleged that 'Naxalites' had infiltrated among the tribal population of the area.

It may be recalled that this region was the scene of a series of turbulent revolts by tribal peasants against landlords and the British army during the 19th Century. The police operation of October 1970 was prompted by news of killing of eight people, six of them big landlords, in villages.

Soon after this, on 4 November that year, about 400 military police launched

an operation in the Monghyr district of Bihar, where seven big landlords and money-lenders had been killed earlier. Large-scale arrests followed throughout the State. By January 1971, the police had thrown about 1,500 alleged CPI (M-L) activists and sympathizers behind bars. Of them 200 were from Jamshedpur, the steel town, where the party was trying to build units among the workers.

Across Bihar's borders in the east, in the Naxalbari area, the North Bengal-Bihar Border Regional Committee of the CPI (M-L) was active during this period, its actions often spilling over into Purnea in Bihar.

Naxalbari

The attack launched by the guerrillas of Naxalbari on the police camp at Magurjan in Purnea in October 1970, was regarded by the CPI (M-L) as an important landmark in the history of the movement, since it formally initiated the campaign for seizing fire-arms all over West Bengal.

But in the Naxalbari area itself, for about a year following the Magurjan action, the revolutionaries could not make much headway in building up the arsenal. Writing in September 1971, a leading organizer of the area asked: "Why was it not possible to seize any more rifles after the Magurjan incident?" According to him, the reason lay in the change of leadership: ". . . after the Magurjan incident, the middle peasants did not follow the leadership of the poor and landless peasants any longer. Rather the opposite happened: the poor and landless peasants began to follow the lead of the middle peasants."[8]

But by January 1972, things were looking up for the guerrillas of Naxalbari. "A large area has been virtually freed of class enemies," a report claimed, "and the guerrillas operate in a still larger area. . . . Crops of class enemies have been seized in some places. . . ."[9]

Birbhum

The main battle between the CPI (M-L) and its enemies was fought out during this period in the villages of Birbhum — the West Bengal district bordering Bihar, redolent of the famous Santhal uprising of 1855-57.

Initially, the CPI (M-L) secured its sympathizers among the college students in the towns of Birbhum. The Sriniketan Agricultural College in Bolpur became the 'breeding ground' of the cadres of the party, who later made the adjacent village of Surul their centre of activities. The first attack on a class enemy in Birbhum was made in the Dubrajpur police station in 1969. According to a report made by the party workers: "The attack was unsuccessful as there were middle peasants in the squad and the action was undertaken at the initiative of intellectual comrades."[10]

After this, guerilla squads were composed of poor and landless peasants and the annihilation campaign began in Bolpur, Suri and Santhal Parganas. "As the struggle began at the three places in the district the vast areas in between became

involved in it. The struggle spread to the wide area from Rampurhat, Mayureswar, Ahmedpur to Rajnagar."[11] It should be noted that these places were situated on the West Bengal-Bihar border.

Describing the prevailing mood at the initial stage of the movement, during which the Birbhum cadres depended primarily on the decision and initiative of the local landless and poor peasants, the West Bengal-Bihar Border Region Committee (WBBRC) of the CPI (M-L) said: "we have selected the most cruel and oppressive leaders of the rural reactionaries and annihilated them." They stressed:

> To us the size of the land or property is not the criterion for determining our target in the annihilation campaign; the criteria are the reactionary and cruel character of the class enemy and the class hatred of the poor and landless peasants against that enemy. In this regard, we have entirely depended on the class hatred of the broad masses of poor and landless peasants.[12]

Emphasizing conscious attempts to involve the masses in the annihilation campaign, the report referred to "detailed investigations among the masses" before acts of annihilation in cases where it was not possible to "openly try and sentence the enemy to death in the presence of all." In other cases, open trials were held. Thus,

> at Sultanpur in Hambazar thana Panchanan Chatterjee a jotedar was annihilated on the basis of the verdict of the assembled broad masses. The people's court held that Jiten Haldar, a jotedar of Itanda, a village in the Bolpur area, need not be sentenced to death. The peasant guerrillas ordered him to leave the village in accordance with the verdict of the people's court. In the Bolpur area the peasant masses summoned a guerrilla squad to annihilate the hated class enemy, Amalendu Pain. The guerrilla squad carried out the people's directive. At Ghoshnagar in Dubrajpur the peasant masses wanted that one of the class enemies be annihilated and the others let free. The verdict of the masses was carried out.[13]

The struggle in Birbhum was based on close coordination of urban and rural tactics. The towns in the district — Bolpur, Hetampur, Suri, Rampurhat and Nalhati — are surrounded by villages and grew mainly centering round rural economy like money-lending, rice-milling and petty trade. The first Maoist slogans began to appear on the walls of Suri, Rampurhat and other urban centres around May-June 1970. This was followed by the gutting of schools and colleges and government offices in October-November that year. After the annihilation campaign in the villages had got under way, the CPI (M-L) cadres launched attacks on the urban class enemies. According to the WBBRC report:

> The objectives were first, to mobilize the toiling people in towns (many of these toiling people have their relations in the villages. Naturally, the struggle in towns will have its impact on villages also); secondly, to create a certain amount of red terror in towns and to reduce the class enemies' oppression on the toiling people; thirdly, to develop urban youths and students as fighting guerrillas; fourthly, to harass the state machinery not only in villages but also in towns and thus to attack the reactionary demons from all sides, to strike at their hands, legs and heads.

The urban struggle, it was pointed out, "was built up as complementary to the struggle in villages,[14] which suggests the difference in the attitude of the Birbhum urban guerrillas and their counterparts in Calcutta who sought to build 'liberated zones' in the city divorced from rural actions.

From the beginning of 1971, stress began to be laid on the capture of rifles and other types of firearms from the police and landlords.

From 1 March to 5 June 1971, a total of 299 firearms were snatched by the guerrillas over the length and breadth of West Bengal. A district-wise breakdown of firearm-snatching was as follows: Birbhum — 109; 24-Parganas — 51; Howrah — 40; Burdwan — 26; Nadia — 19; Hooghly — 16; Calcutta — 12; Murshidabad — 12; other districts — 15.[15] It would be noticed that more than a third of the snatchings were in Birbhum alone.

The first rifle seized in Birbhum was in the Rampurhat area about the middle of March 1971. It was seized from the hands of the police. This initiated the campaign for arming peasant squads with firearms seized from landlords and the police. The WBBRC report said: "On an average, five to 10 guns reached the Party every day. It became difficult for us to keep count of them."[16] Descriptive accounts of rifle-snatching contained in the report indicate the mode of operations by the guerrillas. At Vinaybhavan, Santiniketan, in Bolpur, the guerrillas planned an attack on the armed guards there. Before proceeding to the spot, they had the impression that there were two guards on duty.

> Arming themselves with traditional weapons, 11 guerrilla comrades went out in the evening. Final investigations showed that there were on duty four guards, not two, and each was armed with a rifle. Asked whether under the circumstances, the guerrillas should return without attacking, the guerrilla commander said: 'There is no question of returning without making an attack — jump upon them.' With traditional weapons, the comrades jumped upon the guards. The other side started firing. Then began a hand-to-hand fight — a tug-of-war with the rifles. Then guards went on showering bullets. But the indomitable guerrillas, full of extraordinary courage, were also desperate — they were determined to snatch the rifles. Ultimately, the guerrillas seized rifles after annilating three of the guards. One guard escaped.[17]

A vivid description of the achievements of the CPI (M-L) guerrillas of Birbhum was carried by *The Statesman* of 13 May 1971. Reporting from the district headquarters at Suri, the paper's Staff Correspondent said:

> Despite their best efforts and even after arresting about 500 people believed to be Naxalites, an Army man and a State Government employee, the authorities have not been able to recover more than five guns and a revolver so far. . . . The authorities maintain that in most of the incidents the raiders came in small groups and asked the people to surrender their arms. The gun owners in most cases did not offer any resistance and gave away the gun or the revolver. Even dismantled guns were taken away.

At one stage, the helpless administration of the district, unable to protect the private gun owners, requested them to deposit their arms in the police station. But as a result of this, the rural and urban gentry, denuded of their weapons of

self-defence, were left completely at the mercy of gangs of dacoits, who were also becoming active at this time in certain parts of Birbhum.

With the enrichment of their arsenal, the rural guerrillas of Birbhum mounted their attacks on the feudal interests of the district. Moneylenders and pawnbrokers, after the landlords, were the main targets. These people thrived on the poverty of the landless and small peasants. They were either forced by the guerrillas to return the deposits of their clients or were killed on their refusal to do so. Many of them fled to safer places. Here is an account, by a non-party observer, of a CPI (M-L) action against the feudal landlords.

> On 19 June, more than 200 men entered Itanda, a village in Bolpur police station. They had with them 25 rifles, six or seven revolvers, bombs and spears. They encircled the house of the Pynes, a landowning family of the village, dragged the head of the family out of his room, lined him up against a big mango tree and then knifed him to death. The Santhals who participated in the action were chanting the favourite slogans of the CPI (M-L). A large number of villagers gathered on the spot as silent onlookers. None of them dared make any protest.[18]

The same report described another incident.

> On the same day [i.e.19 June], another party of about 500 men, some of them armed with rifles, muskets, pipeguns, pistols, bombs and spears, entered Madhabpur village and raided the house of Tarapada Daktar, an LMF practitioner. He was also a big notorious landowder. Dozens of Santhals and young men chanting: 'Kill, kill, kill Tarapada' invaded the rooms and dragged him out. He was then tied to the trunk of a tree just in front of his house. . . . Meanwhile, almost all the villagers gathered on the spot. After sometime one of the leaders made a brief speech narrating Tarapada's misdeeds. He then asked, 'Tell us what sentence he actually deserves? Do you want him to live and spoil the society? Do you? A large number of people, especially the Santhals who were in the procession cried, 'Death, death, he deserves death and nothing else'. 'Then Tarapada will die' replied the leader. He then gave a rifle to a Santhal and ordered him to kill the doctor. The Santhal took up position and fired at the doctor's head, but missed. The man did not die. The leader then gave the rifle to a young man and the boy fired just one round and the bullet pierced the heart of Tarak [sic]. He died instantaneously. The rifle with which Tarapada was killed had been snatched from another big landowner, who was a very good friend of Tarapada.[19]

The WBBRC's report contains accounts of numerous similar incidents all over Birbhum. The actions were marked by active cooperation by the villagers, confiscation and redistribution among the poor and landless peasants of the property of annihilated landlords, burning of documents relating to debt, and seizing of guns from the houses of these landlords. The report said: ". . . the entire area was swept by the huge storm of a peasant upheaval during the three months of May, June and July."[20] In fact, by June, the district administration had begun to consider three police station areas of Birbhum as the 'most vulnerable'. These three — Rajnagar, Khairasole and Bolpur — were on the inter-State and inter-district borders. Beyond Rajnagar and Khairasole began the dense forest of

Dumka in Bihar, which provided an ideal shelter to the guerrillas. Opposite Bolpur stretched the district of Burdwan.

An interesting effect of CPI (M-L) operations in Birbhum was the widespread immobility of the local police force. The CPI (M-L) claimed:

> The entire police force of the district was immobilized under the impact of the armed peasant struggle. The police force became terribly panicky after policemen had been attacked and their rifles snatched in six or seven places and the campaign for seizing guns under the leadership of the Party forged ahead.[21]

While confirming the immobility of the police force, the reporter of *Hindusthan Standard* gave a different explanation. According to his report published on 28 June 1971,

> . . . nearly 90% of the personnel (of the police) are from Birbhum itself and the remaining ten per cent also are working in the district for over twenty years or so. The net result is when orders are issued to take action against certain people they are not properly executed because the policemen are either directly or indirectly connected with the offenders. . . . It is also reported that sons or other relations of a few officers in charge of some thanas are connected with the Naxalites. [Continuing, the reporter narrated a personal experience:] While I was talking with the DM (District-Magistrate), one responsible person came and complained that the OC (Officer-in-Charge) of a particular thana had alerted some persons that a raid would be conducted in the night, and they must take care of themselves. The raid was organized as scheduled by the SDO (Sub-Divisional Officer) and none was found.

The failure of the local police to curb CPI (M-L) activities compelled the administration to seek the help of the Army.

Arrival of the Army in Birbhum

The decision to deploy the Army was taken at a conference of police officials and senior Government secretaries in Calcutta on 4 July, presided over by Siddhartha Shankar Ray, who was then the Union Minister in charge of West Bengal. The Democratic Front coalition government which came into existence immediately after the March 1971 elections had collapsed in the meantime because of internal differences, and President's rule had to be declared in the end of June that year, making New Delhi solely responsible for putting down the Communist revolutionaries.

Reporting the Calcutta conference, *The Statesman* of 5 July 1971 said:

> It was said at the meeting that in some areas, particularly in Birbhum, a section of the police became so panicky that they came to an understanding with the extremist elements. The administration, it is stated, wanted reshuffling of thana officers, because demoralized officers might pose impediments to the measures sought to be undertaken. It was decided that instead of immediate transfer of officers from thanas, all-out combing operations should start jointly by the police and the Army.

Soon after this, the Army entered Bolpur. But initially, the 'intelligence gap' between the police and the people continued to hamper the Army's efforts. A report of 12 July 1971 in the same newspaper said: "The Army authorities are highly disappointed at the results of the combing operations. Some of them are very sorry about the utter lack of intelligence." It was obvious that the local police failed to lead the Army to the hideouts of the CPI (M-L) cadres.

The WBBRC report also said: "The inner contradiction of the reactionary armed forces is increasing as a result of the development of the peasant struggle. Contradictions and bickerings among the police, the CRP and the Army over their respective jurisdiction and rights have developed."[22] Writing in September that year, the Committee said:

> At present thousands of members of the armed forces have been deployed in the district but they are not camping anywhere in the villages. In the 'encirclement and suppression' campaign in one area in Bolpur, 97 vans and 7,500 military personnel were deployed. Severe repression is only impelling thousands of peasants to rally more firmly round the Party. They have placed before the Party the demand: 'You have annihilated jotedars. Now you should annihilate the military.'[23]

Even in the midst of the army encirclement, the guerrillas carried out actions "directed against class enemies, the police and, at least in two cases, the Army". The actions took place at Rajnagar, Suri, Bolpur, Nanur, Mayureswar and Rampurhat thanas of Birbhum. Peasant squads attacked the police outpost at Ahmedpur, jumped upon police pickets at Nanur and snatched rifles. According to the committee these events marked 'the beginning of a new chapter' in the struggle in Birbhum.[24]

In a letter written to his comrades in Birbhum during this period, Charu Mazumdar said: "Your struggle has reached a stage when it is about to take a leap; now is the time when it is very necessary to strengthen the Party organization."

But the leap did not take place. The army did not face any widescale or sustained guerrilla onslaught. It gradually moved into the villages, forcing the party's cadres to seek shelter in the forests and hills of the Santhal Parganas. After that it was comparatively easy for the troops to close in and kill and capture the insurgents. Thousands of Santhal peasants were thrown behind bars, the petty bourgeois leaders were either killed or arrested, and a few managed to escape. The denouement of Srikakulam, Debra and Gopiballavpur was reenacted at Birbhum.

Failures and Achievements

The experiment in Birbhum approximated in a large measure to Charu Mazumdar's desired pattern of operations — annihilation of class enemies leading to the mobilization of the broad masses of peasantry on general economic slogans like seizure of crops, collection of firearms through attacks on the class enemies and police by peasants' guerrilla squads, formation of the PLA, etc. Yet, the superior military tactics of the enemy won the day. What were the reasons?

Writing in September 1971 when the rebels were still in control of the 'red villages' in Birbhum, the WBBRC said that although guerrilla squads were formed with the rural poor, the party "could not develop a greater number of organizers and political commissars from among poor and landless peasant cadres and guerrillas". The Committee also pointed out that although the people were mobilized through the campaign for annihilation of class enemies, they were not organized properly through Revolutionary Committees and village self-defence forces under the Committees.

The leaders of the Birbhum struggle asked:

> How will it be possible for our People's Army to continue to remain in the villages unless we take up the task of establishing the political rights of the peasant masses and organizing them politically by making them participants in the activities of the revolutionary peasant committees? Will not exclusive attention to the spreading of the struggle at the cost of this work threaten the entire existence of the Party in rural areas? Have we not already had some such experience? [They then admitted:] ...we did not realize the significance of the work of forming revolutionary peasant committees.... Even though the conditions and factors for forming revolutionary peasant committees were there, we could not make use of them.[25]

About the functioning of the proposed revolutionary committees, quoting Charu Mazumdar they said that they would have to perform four tasks:

> first, seizure and distribution of the land of the landlords who have fled; secondly, trial and punishment of class enemies and their agents; thirdly, resolution of contradictions among the peasant masses; and fourthly, formation of the village self-defence force and promotion of production.

They then added that of these the fundamental one was the seizure and distribution of land, i.e. land reforms, which should not be considered from an economic point of view, but should be viewed politically, since land reforms could not be carried forward unless the villages were liberated. Land reforms in a liberated village amounted to the establishment of political power there. The Birbhum leaders also recognized another aspect of the revolutionary committees.

> If emphasis is laid on the formation of the revolutionary committee's militia or village self-defence squads, the committee, in enforcing its laws in the village, will be dependent on the village self-defence squads under it, instead of being dependent on the PLA. This will help realize the objective of arming the people.[26]

Apparently the absence of village militias or self-defence squads crippled the villagers' resistance to the military troops when the latter entered the villages. With the flight of the guerrillas and the political commissars from the villages in the wake of the military pursuit, the villagers were left both politically and militarily denuded and organizationally ineffective to resist the enemy.

As indicated earlier, pursued by the troops, the party organizers and guerrillas escaped to the hills and jungles, hoping to launch a counter-offensive from

there. But cut off from the masses of the peasantry who lived in the plains, a handful of rebels could not sustain such an offensive for long against a superior military force.

In the course of the struggle however, the Birbhum cadres of the CPI (M-L) did manage to set up revolutionary committees in some areas. Their experience in this respect was interesting. In the rural areas of Suri, such committees were set up at the initiative of petty bourgeois organizers. Describing the day-to-day experience, the WBBRC said:

> Whenever any problem arises, the peasant runs to that organizer [i.e. the petty bourgeois organizer] and unconsciously the intellectual comrade establishes his leadership over the committee on many occasions. The result is that the peasant committee ceases to function in the absence of the intellectual comrade.

In some other villages, the revolutionary committees succeeded in earning the confidence of the peasantry. Describing one such village, the Birbhum leaders said:

> ... after having occupied 70 bighas (i.e. about 24 acres) of land of a jotedar who had fled, the peasant masses declared: 'There is no need to distribute the land. We shall all enjoy the fruits of this land under the guidance of the Revolutionary Committee.'[27]

Another development which the Birbhum revolutionaries had to face in the course of their struggle, was the rise in the number of dacoities during this period. News of the surrender of guns by their owners, either to the CPI (M-L) or to the district administration, encouraged gangs of dacoits to raid the houses of the affluent gentry, now rendered vulnerable without guns. But while in Calcutta, activities of common criminals were often claimed by the urban guerrillas as 'party actions', in Birbhum the CPI (M-L) cadres took pains through leaflets to dissociate themselves from ordinary criminals by asserting that they had nothing to do with common murders or dacoities. Describing the development, the WBBRC said in a self-critical mood:

> ... as we could not consolidate the work of building revolutionary committees and arming the peasant masses when the villages on the whole took the form of a liberated area, there was a vacuum in the administrative system of the villages. Gangs of dacoits and snatchers took full advantage of the situation. The number of cases of dacoity and snatching increased. In such a situation it became urgent to carry on struggle against dacoits and snatchers and the Party put forward its class line in this regard also.

The class line was to differentiate between those who were driven by poverty to resort to dacoity and those who were members of powerful gangs headed by 'reactionaries'. When dacoities were committed by these people in the name of the CPI (M-L), "the Party units first warned the leaders of dacoits and snatchers. As this did not produce the desired effect, two leaders of dacoits and

one leader of a gang of snatchers were annihilated".[28]

In some areas, the revolutionary committees intervened to implement the party's class line in resolving contradictions among the villagers.

> In Nalhati area the land of some small landowners was seized in the beginning but the revolutionary peasant committee later returned the land to those owners. This is how the peasant masses consolidated the attack on the area's class enemies and enlisted the support of small landowners.[29]

But such actions of leniency were apparently not so widespread, particularly in the urban areas where there were no revolutionary committees. A non-party observer writing about small traders, said: "Many petty businessmen of Suri, Rampurhat and Bolpur have been threatened. They wonder why and ransack their memory for their offence. Some of them ask why the CPI (M-L) avoids holding a public trial of its enemies. This proves the organizational weakness."[30]

In the eyes of another non-party observer, one of the reasons for the collapse of the Birbhum struggle in the face of military operations was that the CPI (M-L) underground organization in Birbhum was "not as mature as it is elsewhere". He added: "The activists are daring but not always tactful." But he conceded at the same time that a considerable measure of mass support was there behind the CPI (M-L) actions. "As a matter of fact, in Birbhum, more than anywhere else, the party's action programmes were considerably influenced by the likes and dislikes of its supporters."[31] It appears that there was often an overlapping of open work and underground activities, of mass mobilization and guerrilla actions. Thus, the WBBRC complained: "... in some areas the guerrilla form of the struggle was overlooked and the guerrillas accompanied by big groups, devoted their energy for hours to holding trials of class enemies, annihilation or confiscation of property" — tasks which normally should have been left to the revolutionary committees and village self-defence squads. The Committee added: "Many join these groups in a rather playful spirit and create confusion. The secrecy about the campaigns is lost."[32]

All in all, it could be said that the struggle in Birbhum and the experiment with the task of establishing political power were a tremendous step forward compared with Srikakulam or Debra-Gopiballavpur. The participation of the poor and landless peasants both in guerrilla actions and in land reforms was more direct than anywhere else. The actual development of events led the organizers to come to grips more concretely with the problems connected with the establishment of people's power — revolutionary committees, people's militia, land reforms, etc.

The immensity of the development of the movement in Birbhum could also be measured from the facts that while at Naxalbari in 1967 police action was enough to suppress the rebellion for the time being and in Gopiballavpur and Debra in 1970 a combination of police and para-military forces was necessary to crush the insurgents, in Birbhum in 1971 regular Army troops had to be deployed. The escalation of the Government's response corresponded to the

maturity of the movement. At the same time, the deployment of troops and the consequent erosion of the 'red bases' in Birbhum, reinvigorated within the CPI (M-L) the discussion on problems of base areas, PLA and counter-offensive against the military.

'Base Area'

The dispute over the concept of base area had been on in the party since 1970, when a section of the Communist revolutionaries of Srikakulam preferred the temporary inaccessibility of the hills to the plains for the location of a base area.

Still later, in July 1971, after the failure of the movement in Debra and Gopiballavpur, Ashim Chattjee harped on the same view. The document which he prepared on behalf of the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Committee that month, was entitled 'The path of liberation of the Indian people is the bright road of Red Chingkang', suggesting that just as Mao Tsetung created his first base area in the Chingkang mountains in 1927, the Indian revolutionaries also can find the most favourable terrain in the hills and jungles.

At a certain stage in the Birbhum movement, pursued by the military, some guerrillas hoped that the terrain of the hills and forests of Santhal Parganas might provide them with a suitable base. But the WBBRC fought against such ideas. In its report it conceded:

> What we need is a base area. But how and where can we build our base area? Must we leave the people and search for mountains and jungle areas for this? ... In the course of China's First Revolutionary Civil War (1924-27) was formed the great Chinese Party's powerful People's Army, which was assembled at Chingkang by Chairman Mao, Comrade Chou En-lai and Comrade Chu Te. Have we such a strong People's Army already? On the contrary, are we not faced with the task of continually forming newer and newer guerrilla squads by spreading the struggle in the vast plains, of strengthening the People's Army? Does not championing, at this stage, of the mountain-jungle theory amount to advocating a theory for abandoning these tasks, a theory for denying the present struggle in West Bengal and Punjab?[33]

The report then referred to the creation of base areas in the Mekong delta of Vietnam and the plains of Cambodia as instances of the possibility of establishing bases in plains.

Stressing three conditions for the building of a base area — a broad and deep mass base, a comparatively strong People's Army and a firm and strong Party organization — the report said:

> The more we are able to extend our Red area by establishing the peasant's political power in the wide countryside, the more firm and deep-rooted will be our mass base. The more we are able to spread the peasant's armed liberation struggle in a vast area by forming guerrilla squads of poor and landless peasants, the stronger

> will be our People's Army and the enemy will be compelled to divide his forces, to find himself in the helpless position of having to spread his ten fingers in ten directions.[34]

In his reply to Ashim Chatterjee's document, Charu Mazumdar specifically dealt with the question of terrain. Reiterating that a standing army and a politically conscious mass were the first prerequisites for a base area, he said: "The question of terrain comes only after these two conditions have been fulfilled." He then added:

> The danger of taking refuge in hills is that there is an increasing possibility of getting isolated from the broad masses. If therefore bases are built in the hills, it is the responsibility of the Party to send armed propaganda squads in the plains, make the peasant masses there politically conscious and harass the enemy through guerrilla tactics by forming units. The importance of this work is much greater, since the enemy's 'encirclement and suppression campaign' is easier in the hill areas.

He dismissed Ashim Chatterjee's suggestion with the words: "In the case of West Bengal, to go to build bases in the hills means to desert the peasants and the broad toiling masses of West Bengal, to put out the flames of the armed struggle."[60]

Charu Mazumdar emphasized the necessity of forming revolutionary committees in the villages under the leadership of the poor and landless peasants and rallying the broad peasant masses around them, as essential for building up base areas.[*ibid*.] He hoped obviously that even if the guerrillas or the PLA were forced to flee the villagers in the face of enemy offensive, the revolutionary committees would remain there to carry out secretly the political progaganda. Besides, since these committees would be formed with members of the broad peasant masses (". . . the majority of the revolutionary committee should be taken from outside the party. . ."[39], it would be easier for them to keep a watch on the movements of the enemy forces, to inform the guerrillas of the number of troops deployed or stationed in a camp, to resort to all sorts of tactics "from misdirecting the enemy by giving him false news to killing the enemy by giving him poison." In fact, in Birbhum, when the military moved in, the villagers spread all sorts of stories to hoodwink the enemy. "When the military arrived at one place after annihilation of an enemy, the people said: 'The murder was committed by outsiders who were in shorts and shirts and had caps on.' Where the guerrillas had come with two rifles, the people spread the story that they had 'come with 20 to 25 rifles and bagloads of bombs.'[35]

It is because of this potentiality of the common folks in the villages that Charu Mazumdar much earlier had urged the cadres in the villages: "We shall have to lay special emphasis on children and women. We should behave with children in such a way so that they can understand their position. They will have to be taught Chairman's Thought. . ."[30]

About the stability of the base areas, Charu Mazumdar held that it depended on arming the entire people of the particular area.[60] He reminded his

followers in this connection of Mao Tsetung's words: "In concrete terms, and especially with regard to military operations, when we talk of the people in the base area as a factor, we mean that we have an armed people. That is the main reason why the enemy is afraid to approach our base area."[36] The failure to arm the villagers in Birbhum through the formation of people's militia, in spite of wide mass mobilization by the CPI (M-L), paved the way for the almost unobstructed entry of the army in Birbhum.

But even with the fulfilment of all these conditions — the standing army, the arming of the entire peasantry, the political mobilization of the masses around the revolutionary committee — is a static base area feasible for long in India unless built in unapproachable terrains like the ravines of Chambal or border regions with alien territories as a hinterland, like Nagaland?

It is worth considering Mao Tsetung's attitude to the fluidity of base areas. In December 1936, during the Second Revolutionary Civil War period in China, referring to the constantly shifting battle lines of the Red Army in the face of the superior enemy forces, he said: "Fluidity of battle lines leads to fluidity in the size of our base areas. Our base areas are constantly expanding and contracting, and often as one base area falls another rises." But he hastened to assure his comrades: "It is only by exerting ourselves in today's fluid way of life that tomorrow we can secure relative stability, and eventually full stability."[37] Eleven years later during the war against Japan Mao Tsetung was to advise his followers again:

> Make wiping out the enemy's effective strength our main objective; do not make holding or seizing a city or place our main objective. Holding or seizing a city or place is the outcome of wiping out the enemy's effective strength, and often a city or place can be held or seized for good only after it has changed hands a number of times.[38]

To wipe out the "enemy's effective strength" either through offensive actions or through the defence of a base area, requires the formation of a People's Army. It was precisely because of this that the stress on the formation of the People's Liberation Army in Charu Mazumdar's writings from the beginning of 1971, assumes significance. By then the base areas of Srikakulam and Debra and Gopiballavpur had been overrun by the enemy. The latter had inflicted heavy casualties upon the revolutionaries, but in its turn had hardly suffered any loss worth the name. This reinforced the need to form a standing people's army. In Birbhum also, although the revolutionaries managed to develop pockets of influence over a wide area and enjoyed mass support, when the troops moved in the guerrillas failed to counter-encircle them from these pockets and chose instead to reteat to the hills. Paucity of guerrilla squads, inability to enlarge them into a standing army and failure to arm the villagers, prevented the revolutionaries from damaging the 'enemy's effective strength'.

Charu Mazumdar was to regret in August 1971, when the troops had encircled the 'red villages' of Birbhum: ". . . even after (the actions at) Magurjan and Rupasikundi we have not yet been able to attack the mobile enemy force".[60]

Next year, when the enemy troops were persecuting the villagers of Birbhum, Charu Mazumdar wrote: "A section of the people might lose their bearings in the face of the military repression." But he reminded his followers of Vietnam: "The peasants of Vietnam began their struggle with home-made weapons." Suggesting the modes of operation against the military, he said:

> The military does not always stay together in large numbers of 200 or 500; when they move around in twos or fours, they can be annihilated by small squads and their weapons can be seized. This will have to be propagated extensively. Once this sort of operation takes place, the people will regain their confidence. We will have to plan attacks on the mobile enemy. We will have to make extensive use of tunnels and mines. If these plans succeed, the people will realize the 'paper tiger' character of the enemy; they will not hesitate then to tackle a military force of 200 or 500.[70]

In fact the idea of digging tunnels in villages had been occupying his mind for quite sometime now. In October 1970 he had said: ". . . tunnels under the earth can play a significant role in concealing the revolutionary forces from the enemy."[43] Much earlier, in 1965, he had written:

> . . . fool proof arrangements should be made to keep the crops hidden. Where can they be hidden? In every country of the world, wherever the peasant fights, crops have to be hidden. For the peasant, the only place to hide the crops can be under the earth. In every area, every peasant will have to make a place under the earth to hide the crops. Otherwise by no means the crops can be saved from the enemy.[5]

The idea was finally put into practice in 1973 by the peasant guerrillas of Poon Poon in Bihar, when in their villages they succeeded in eluding the enemy forces for sometime by remaining hidden and concealing crops in tunnels.

By early 1972, Charu Mazumdar's views on the formation of the People's Liberation Army were becoming more concrete. What had earlier been rather abstract and were expressed in the most general terms and expressions, were now reshaping themselves in a coherent and precise form, moulded by the actual development of events, the living experience of Srikakulam, Debra, Gopiballavpur and Birbhum. In a letter to his comrades in Tripura, he wrote:

> The standing force will be formed under the party's leadership with those who have left their homes and are ready to go anywhere and the local force will be formed under the leadership of the revolutionary committees with those who cannot leave their homes or areas, but will participate in the local struggle. At the next stage, the people's militia will be formed by arming the wide masses of the people. These three types of armed forces will be the three essential pillars of our people's war.[72]

Along with the formation of PLA to wage the people's war, the need to launch mass movements to mobilize the peasantry was also being increasingly felt during this period. This was reflected in Charu Mazumdar's call for harvesting in

November 1971. "This is the first time," he wrote, "that we are leading a mass movement since we started our armed struggle." He explained, "the aim of the movement is to make even the backward peasants participants in our struggle. Without conducting this mass movement we can in no way realize our objective — the objective of making every peasant a fighter. Otherwise, the all-embracing character of the People's War can in no way be attained." As for the enemies and the allies in the movement, he pointed out: "This movement will be directed against the class enemy, i.e. the jotedar class. It will also be conducted against such rich peasants as may be actively cooperating with the police. All other classes are our allies in this struggle."[65] Directing the Party to conduct the struggle through revolutionary committees, he added that the "guerrilla squads will always help the revolutionary committees".

His emphasis on mass movements and differentiation between "such rich peasants as may be actively cooperating with the police" and other sections of the rich peasantry, should have bridged to some extent the division between him and his critics — Ashim Chatterjee and Satyanarain Singh. In fact there was hardly any difference between the concept of 'revolutionary committees' evolved by Charu Mazumdar at this stage, and Ashim Chatterjee's idea of 'peasants committees', proposed by him in the July 1971 document. Describing the peasants' committees as

> the main weapon of people's political power, [Ashim Chatterjee said that they would] (i) organize various types of mass movements according to the people's demands, like harvesting, occupation of land, recovery of people's properties, etc.; (ii) maintain production in spite of police persecution; (iii) brand the enemies of the people and punish them with the help of the (guerrilla) squad; (iv) resist the police force; (v) take care as far as possible of the relatives of the members of the (guerrilla) squads.[39]

But in the meantime across the borders of the country, certain significant developments had taken place bringing in their wake another spurt of ideological controversy which was to lead to a split in the CPI (M-L).

East Pakistan — 1971

In March 1971, a 'liberation struggle' broke out in East Pakistan against the Pakistani military regime. It was preceded by the victory in the general elections held in the previous year, of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League.

The Awami League was basically a party of the Bengali urban petty bourgeoisie and rural feudal gentry. The Sheikh himself and many of his comrades had at one time strong pro-American leanings. In fact, when the League split in 1956 on the question of Pakistan's remaining allied with the USA through military treaties, the Sheikh supported H.S. Suhrawardy's pro-American stand, and remained in the League, while old Moulana Bhasani left with his followers to form the Leftist oriented National Awami Party. But the Awami League, under the Sheikh, was able to mobilize the Bengali middle

classes, both in the cities and the villages, give voice to their grievances against West Pakistani exploitation, and organize them against the Pakistani military dictatorship which was treating East Bengal as a sort of colony. As a result, the Awami League swept the polls in the 1970 elections.

Being a constitutional and conservative party interested only in the betterment of the Bengali upper and middle classes, the Awami League at first demanded autonomy within Pakistan. But the obduracy of Z.A. Bhutto and the military repression by Yahya Khan, based on the assumption that strong arm methods would terrorize the people of East Bengal to surrender, led the Sheikh and his followers to launch a secessionist movement. The Awami League failed to prepare its followers and the masses for an armed confrontation. The failure stemmed from its constitutional politics. The initial response to the military repression that was unleashed on 25 March 1971, was, therefore, spontaneous, in the form of sporadic armed resistance by mutinous Bengali soldiers and student volunteers. It could by no means be called a people's upsurge, as the masses — the enormous majority of the East Bengal peasantry — did not come out actively and independently with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree.

While the leaders of the Awami League — politically closer to the Indian National Congress — escaped to India and set up a provisional government there with the blessings and active cooperation of the Indian Government, the movement in East Bengal groped for a positive direction. There were a few isolated guerrilla sniping actions in some places, but in the absence of any organized political leadership, such actions did not have much effect. In the meantime, massive repression by the Pakistani army drove thousands of East Bengalis into West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Tripura.

China's Attitude

China supported Yahya Khan and attributed the causes of the troubles in East Bengal to Indian interference in the 'internal affairs of Pakistan'. It said that "Indian reactionaries have set their entire propaganda machine in motion to fan anti-Pakistan chauvinistic sentiments." As for the repression let loose by the military dictatorship in the province, China chose to remain non-commital by stating: "The relevant measures taken by President Yahya Khan in connection with the present situation in Pakistan are the internal affairs of Pakistan. . . ."[40]

It is significant that in the same statement China hinted at the machinations of the USA and the Soviet Union behind the events in East Bengal. It accused the 'two super-powers' of "working in close coordination with the Indian reactionaries" and of crudely interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. This might provide a clue to China's attitude towards the East Bengal developments. Threatened by the Soviet Union in the north-east and by the USA in the south-east, and a hostile India backed by both the super-powers in the south, China felt that if the buffer state — Pakistan — was allowed to be dismembered, the entire subcontinent would be turned into a sinister belt to strangle China from

the south. China was always sensitive to any disturbance in the equilibrium in this region, as was to be evident again three years later when India changed the status of Sikkim. Besides, West Pakistan was its only outlet to the Indian Ocean. If the eastern wing of Pakistan was gone, West Pakistan, which had been thriving on the exploitation of resources from the east, might collapse, China feared. The friendship with Pakistan, assiduously cultivated all these years, might go waste.

But placing a large political bet on an unscrupulous military dictatorship could be embarrassing at times. Even when China was hailing Pakistan's achievements, in May 1965, Z.A. Bhutto, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, and a darling of China's, quietly signed a communique after the SEATO Council meeting in London, attacking Ho Chi Minh for "invading South Vietnam". In March 1971 also, the savage slaughter of the East Bengalis by the Pakistani troops — at a time when China was supplying arms to Pakistan for "safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty" — threatened to cloud China's image as a friend of the toiling people of the world. Chou En-lai felt compelled to advise Yahya Khan in a message: "It is important to differentiate the broad masses of the people from a handful of persons who want to sabotage the unity of Pakistan."[41]

Be that as it may, China's consistency in its support to the Pakistani military dictatorship throughout the events in East Bengal in 1971, and in its public stance of a non-committal attitude towards the massacre of East Bengalis, widened the schism in the CPI (M-L). From the Chinese statements issued from time to time during the fast-moving events in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, two different conclusions were drawn by Charu Mazumdar's followers on the one hand and his critics in the party on the other.

But before we move on to this phase of the inner-party struggle in the CPI (M-L), it is necessary to take a look at the Maoists working underground inside East Pakistan.

The East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)

The East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) was formed under the leadership of Mohammad Toaha, who was once the General Secretary of Maulana Bhasani's National Awami Party, sometime in 1970. It was in all probability formed under the direct inspiration of the CPI (M-L) in general, and Charu Mazumdar in particular, as evident from the exchange of letters of greetings between the two parties immediately after the EPCP (M-L)'s formation.[42]

The earlier activities of the Maoists of East Pakistan were confined to a few incidents, like bomb explosions in Dacca in May 1970. On 12 May, for instance, a crude version of a time-bomb exploded prematurely in the United States Information Services Library, Dacca. An anonymous message said: "This was the work of revolutionaries who owe allegiance to Mao Tsetung and are determined to teach a lesson for their doings in Cambodia." With the formation of the party, activities shifted to the rural areas. A latter-day document of the party was to claim that under its leadership, "armed peasant struggle began in East Pakistan in October 1970," and that "guerrilla units led by the Party waged the

battle of annihilation of class enemies." According to the document, "... hundreds of youths went to the rural areas to boldly rouse the poor and landless peasants with the teachings of Chairman Mao."[43]

Charu Mazumdar attached a lot of importance to the activities of the EPCP (M-L) in East Pakistan. In a message to the party in November 1970, he congratulated it on its initiating the peasants' armed struggle, and acknowledged that it had started the struggle "in much more adverse circumstances". In what was an indirect, but very significant hint, he added: "You have begun the struggle fighting against bourgeois chauvinism and repression."[45]

In fact, the Maoists of East Pakistan had from the beginning frowned upon Sheikh Mujibur's plans to further the cause of the Bengali upper and middle classes and squeeze out privileges and benefits for them from their military rulers — all in the name of Bengali nationalism. The CPI (M-L) also pointed out: "It should be noted that the Mujibur clique does not say anything against imperialist investments in Pakistan or in favour of redistribution of land among the peasants or voice any demand for better wages for workers. . . ."[44] Indeed, the Awami League's six-point programme, on the basis of which the election was fought, did not incorporate any demand of the peasants and workers. The Sheikh also was quick to recognize the danger posed to his plans from the Maoists when they formed the EPCP (M-L) and went to the villages to rally the poor and landless peasants who constituted the majority of East Bengal's population. Immediately after the electoral triumph of the Awami League, the Sheikh felt it necessary to warn his listeners at a victory rally in Dacca on 1 January 1971, against the activities of the Communist revolutionaries. He stated that by killing a few individuals no one could make a revolution.[45] The reference was obviously to the EPCP (M-L) activities in the countryside.

While the victory of the Awami League swept the Bengali middle class population of East Pakistan off their feet and drew them into the whirlwind of the secession movement, the Communist revolutionaries of the province saw in the victory "the danger of a war base in East Bengal for carrying on attacks against People's China and the liberation struggles in India, Burma and South-East Asia. . . ."[46] Charu Mazumdar writing in February that year said that the "imperialists and the social-imperialists . . . know that the struggle of West Bengal will overflow very fast into East Pakistan. No one then will be able to stem the flow of this liberation struggle." Referring to the peasants' armed struggle in East Pakistan under the leadership of the EPCP (M-L), he said: "... these two struggles will soon become one, as has happened in Indo-China involving three countries."[50]

The idea of the agrarian struggles in the two Bengals merging into one was to occupy Charu Mazumdar's thoughts all through those tumultous months of 1971. It was to recur off and on in his writings and was to become yet another target of attack by his critics in the party.

But the situation in early 1971 was indeed propitious for joint operations by Communist revolutionaries in both the Bengals. The Indian Government had virtually opened the borders to allow the Bengalis to escape the slaughter and enter India and also to facilitate the entry of its own infiltrators into East Pakistan.

Taking advantage of this, the Communist revolutionaries were moving freely to and fro between East Bengal and West Bengal. In fact, even before the Pakistani military crackdown in East Bengal, from the end of February 1971, Pakistani military authorities were found to be increasingly concerned about the free movement of 'Naxalites' between the two Bengals. The Pakistani Army Divisional Headquarters in Dacca reported to Rawalpindi on 2/3 March 1971 about an incident which took place near the borders inside West Bengal on 26 February. One Rafiqul Islam was sent by the EPCP (M-L) to West Bengal for guerrilla training under the CPI (M-L). Islam was killed in an encounter with the police in West Bengal. Throughout March 1971, the military authorities were found alerting East Pakistan Rifles border outposts to check the movement of "Naxalites", indicating that guerrillas from West Bengal were either crossing over into East Bengal probably to escape the persecution of the Indian police, or the East Bengal Communist revolutionaries were moving into West Bengal with arms and ammunitions.[47]

The CPI (M-L) hoped that in such a situation, if the peasants could be roused and mobilized in a joint armed struggle in both the Bengals, the combined offensive would pose a serious threat to the ruling classes. An editorial in *Deshabrati* of 20 March 1971 said:

> It should be remembered that in East Bengal as in West Bengal, armed peasants' struggles have begun under the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party there; the possibility of the reunion of two Bengals is there. To resist this trend, Mujibur and his Awami League have taken to the path of uniting the two Bengals in an imperialist fashion and in imperialist interests.

As the days passed, the situation continued to favour joint operations. As one commentator writing in May 1971 said:

> Whether the extreme Leftists can capture the leadership or not, there can be no doubt that conditions are going to be increasingly favourable for guerrilla operations; and not only for those of East Bengal but also for those of West Bengal. As a matter of fact, from now on the border is going to prove of great advantage to all guerrillas. The fact of the occupation army in Bangla Desh being on hostile terms with the Indian Army would prevent the two armies from collaborating to the fullest extent in hunting their respective guerrillas; but there is every reason for the guerrillas to fully cooperate among themselves.[48]

But the Indian Government was far too ingenious to allow such a thing to happen. Indira Gandhi was in no mood to permit the development of a Vietnam at the doorsteps of India.

The Indian Government's Policy

India took advantage of the situation in East Bengal and contrived to make it serve its own purpose. Right from the beginning of March-April 1971, it sent its

infiltrators — Border Security Force personnel and Army intelligence people — to East Bengal to establish liaison with the fighters there. Later, it unofficially trained East Bengal boys on Indian soil for commando actions against the Pakistani military forces. These moves helped the Indian Government to keep its hands on the steering wheel of the struggle in East Bengal. It also earned the gratitude of the Awami League Government-in-exile for the aid and help rendered by the Indian Government to create world public opinion in favour of its stand regarding East Bengal.

It was neither a humanitarian consideration for the refugees, nor an internationalistic spirit of solidarity with the oppressed people of a neighbouring country, that led India to act in East Bengal. Strategically, the country was important to India. Dismemberment of Pakistan and the establishment of a friendly government in East Bengal would reduce India's worries about defence on the eastern borders. Besides, the possibility of West Bengal's Communist guerrillas getting shelter in the enemy territory of East Pakistan and remaining a permanent source of irritation, would be eradicated once for all. Certain economic considerations like a smooth supply of raw jute from East Bengal and future possibilities of Indian investments there, also played a part in India's decision-making.

Besides, in the imbroglio of super-power interests in the sub-continent, the Indian Government could hope to convince both the powers of its ability to keep East Bengal out of China's influence. Charu Mazumdar of course was inclined to trace the roots of the troubles in East Bengal directly to the interests of the super-powers. As early as March 1971 he said: "East Bengal is essential for them in their anti-China war. They have therefore started this gamble with East Bengal."[53]

Whatever might have been the larger interests of the super-powers, that the situation in East Bengal was a sort of deus ex machina for India (partly manipulated by the Indian Government itself) could not be denied. It was not surprising therefore that immediately after the military crackdown in Dacca and its suburbs on 15 March 1971, Indira Gandhi said on 31 March in the Indian Parliament that the tragedy of the people of East Bengal had united all Indians "in grief for their sufferings, concern for the wanton destruction of their beautiful land and anxiety for their future". No such grief was forthcoming over the atrocities that were being committed by her own police and military forces, at exactly the same time, in West Bengal, in the name of curbing 'Naxalism'. They could well match the ferocity of the Pakistani army men in East Bengal.

A few days before the Pakistani army crackdown in East Bengal, Indian armymen killed a young boy, Asit Pal, in Ashokenagar near Calcutta. The statement made by his father regarding the incident bears eerie resemblance to what was going to happen in many Bengali homes in Dacca some days later. He said:

> On the night of the incident, 1 March, I was giving lessons to my children. Asit (who was ill) was listening to the radio evening news.... Suddenly there was a loud bomb blast.... We all sat silently. At about 8 p.m., on hearing sounds of banging at my door, I rushed to open the doors. As soon as I flung them open, about seven or eight military personnel entered my room, dragged everyone of us, searched our rooms and shouted at us saying that we had thrown bombs at the military. Not even my wife, my little child, my two daughters could escape their outrage.... The military dragged my sick son from the bed and poked at his chest with their rifles.... After a lot of obscene abuses and interrogations, disregarding our pleas, they took away Asit.... All the arrested boys were made to sit in the street surrounded by the military. Asit was dressed in a lungi and a shirt only.... After sometime, we heard a shout — 'Baba-Ma!' [Father — Mother!] ... we heard the sounds of shots also.

The next morning, the old father managed to trace the bullet-riddled dead body of his son in a hospital in Barasat and after another round of harassment, was finally allowed to take possession of the dead body. He concluded his statement with the words: "Is this independence? — Has the government the right to beat or shoot an innocent boy dead without caring to prove his guilt?"[49]

But shooting people dead without trial was quite common in West Bengal all through 1971. The Indian state was keeping pace with its Pakistani counterpart in carrying out a massacre. If the Pakistani troops imprisoned the Bengalis of East Bengal and tortured them, the Indian police was one up in straight away shooting down CPI (M-L) prisoners in the jails of West Bengal. While the Pakistani rulers were busy preparing lists of intellectuals of East Bengal who were to be eliminated, the West Bengal police set the precedent by arresting Saroj Dutta on the midnight of 4/5 August 1971 and killing him the same night in a dark corner of the Calcutta Maidan. To keep up with the genocide in East Bengal, the Indian police carried out a wholesale slaughter of more than 100 young people in a single locality in one sweeping stroke on 12 August 1971. The area was Baranagar, near Calcutta. With the help of hired hoodlums, the police rampaged over an area of two square miles, raiding every house, dragging out every young man suspected of CPI (M-L) leanings to be butchered. The escape-routes were blocked with the police guarding every lane. The bodies of the slaughtered were later thrown into the nearby canal.

The CPI (M-L) was not very far from wrong when it equated the two Bengals in 1971. The situation in both the provinces was similar in many respects. There were not only the discontent of the people and the emergence of the armed peasants' struggle. The counter-offensive resorted to by the ruling powers followed the same pattern.

Dissensions in the CPI (M-L)

But as indicated earlier, the developments in East Bengal drove another wedge into the already widening split in the CPI (M-L).

Charu Mazumdar supported China's denunciation of India for its interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan.[53] He condemned the "bourgeois chauvinistic activities of the Awami League" and hailed the "EPCP (M-L)'s attempts to wage firmly class struggle in the difficult situation." But he was not

prepared to give a clean chit to Yahya Khan, whom he described as a "reactionary".[56]

It was on this point that a fierce controversy broke out in the party. While *Deshabrati, Liberation* and the official journals of the party faithfully reflected Charu Mazumndar's views, some regional units of the party's West Bengal Provincial Committee opposed them and came out with an alternative thesis. Notable among the units were the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Regional Committee headed by Ashim Chatterjee and the Nadia District Committee.

These critics of the official line held that Yahya Khan represented the national bourgeoisie of Pakistan, and like Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, was fighting imperialism. They felt therefore that the Communist revolutionaries in both East and West Bengal should support Yahya Khan.

In a long reply to a letter from the Nadia District Committee, the West Bengal Provincial Committee gave an exhaustive analysis of the situation in Pakistan. Prepared probably by Saroj Dutta, the document said: "... Pakistan was born like India as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal state." Referring to the dissidents' description of it as a national bourgeois state, it said:

> If it has transformed itself today into a national bourgeois state, we must assume then that even without the leadership of the proletariat and the Communist Party, the bourgeois revolution has taken place there, and we shall then have to accept as true the Khruschov thesis that the national bourgeosie can come to power in colonies and semi-colonies merely under the inflence of the socialist world and socialist ideology.

The Provincial Committee then asserted that the state power in both India and Pakistan was in the hands of the comprador bourgeoisie and big landlords. Since the Indian comprador bourgeoisie was more powerful and organized than its counterpart in Pakistan, the USA chose India as its main base of its global war strategy against China. The ruling powers of Pakistan, in spite of being tied down all over with imperialism, established friendship with China out of the sheer need for self-defence. Stressing that the Communist revolutionaries in East Bengal should support Yahya Khan in his 'just' fight against the 'Indian aggressors', the Provincial Committee ruled out at the same time all possibilities of any united front with Yahya Khan.[50]

On this point Charu Mazumdar was to come out with more specific suggestions for the East Pakistan Communists a few days later. In reply to a document prepared by Ashim Chatterjee and his followers, he said:

> Even when foreign aggression begins, it is not the task of the Communist Party to support Yahya Khan. The Communist Party's responsibility is to rouse the broad peasant masses by class struggles and fight foreign aggression and to give a call for alliance with Yahya Khan. It should be remembered with regard to this alliance also that the leadership will be in the hands of the Communist Party, in other words, the alliance will have to be formed in the interest of the broad masses.

He called upon the Communists of East Pakistan to rally the masses and build

up an army "independently and on their own initiative". Comparing their tasks with those of the Chinese Communists during the anti-Japanese war in 1931, he said: "... the Communist Party will have to fight against a two-pronged attack — on the one hand foreign aggression, on the other Yahya Khan's assaults." Coming to the present times, he referred to the situation in the Middle East, where "the Palestinian liberation front has to lead a war against Israel and has to resist at the same time the reactionaries of Jordan, although Israel is in occupation of a part of Jordan." Rejecting Ashim Chatterjee's thesis which equated Yahya Khan with Norodom Sihanouk, Charu Mazumdar said:

> In Cambodia, the armed struggle against American imperialism and Lon Nol is being led by the Communist Party, and Sihanouk is totally supporting the struggle. Sihanouk has announced that the comprador and the landlord classes are the enemies of the country and struggles will have to be waged against them. He has further said that Communism alone can bring about the salvation of the people. Yahya has banned the Communist Party; not only that, he is trying to consolidate his power by relying upon the landlord class. His weapon is religious fanaticism. On the one hand, he is fighting against US conspiracy in self-defence, on the other hand he is sending emissaries to the Americans to present petitions. These two characters therefore are not the same.[57]

Charu Mazumdar did not lose sight of the "expansionist" motives of the Indian government. As early as 4 March 1971 he warned that taking advantage of the sympathies of the common people for East Bengal, the Indian Government would carry on an anti-China propaganda.[53] Later in June, he wrote: "The activities of the Indian Government amount to sabotaging and interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan...." [57] But at the same time he did not allow the Chinese support to Yahya Khan to blunt his opposition to the "reactionary" character of the military dictatorship in Pakistan. "If a bourgeois state", he wrote, "takes part in a just war, the Chinese party and the Chinese Government will certainly support it. But this support does not mean that within that country one has to tail after the bourgeoisie."[58]

It was in this perspective that he urged the Communists of East Bengal to act on their own initiative and go in for independent actions, both against domestic reaction and Indian aggression. He attached importance to the independent role of the Communist revolutionaries in East Bengal particularly because he hoped that the armed peasants' struggles in both the Bengals led by the EPCP(M-L) and the CPI (M-L) could be coordinated to transform the conflict between the bourgeoisie of Pakistan and India into a wider class struggle between the peasantry and workers of both the countries on the one hand and the Indian and Pakistani feudal and comprador rulers on the other. The class cleavages that had become blurred in the battle between "Bengali nationalism" and "West Pakistani colonialism", could be brought to the fore in this way, he hoped, and the basic spirit of the revolution could be revived.

Two months later in an appeal to the refugees from East Bengal who had

fled to India in the wake of the military crackdown, he said:

> We, the people of both the Bengals, are over 110 millions. Why should we not be able to defeat the reactionaries of our countries, to put an end to our miseries, to fight and win dignity as men? . . . The reactionaries of both the countries are weak. They are not therefore capable of suppressing this revolt of ours. . . . The poor people of East Bengal will build a golden Bengal; so also a golden Bengal will emerge through the efforts of the poor people of West Bengal. . . .[62]

This provided Charu Mazumdar's adversaries in the party with a handle. Ashim Chatterjee denounced his idea of taking together the people of both the Bengals as an expression of "Bengali chauvinism".[51] Ashim Chatterjee was also supported by the Bihar CPI (M-L) leader Satyanarain Singh. In a comment on Charu Mazumdar's role during this period, Satyanarain Singh was to say later:

> In March-April 1971, centering itself on the events in East Pakistan, the expansionist Indian Government in close coordination with the two super-powers created an atmosphere of chauvinism, particularly Bengali chauvinism and openly interfered in the internal affairs of Pakistan, sent armed infiltrators into Pakistan and violated the national independence, state sovereignty and territorial integrity of a neighbouring country; and plotted to use the Indian people in war against Pakistan. At this time, the authoritarian individual who was occupying the highest position within the Party refused to support the just struggle of the Pakistan people and Pakistan Government against foreign interference and aggression and raised such slogans as 'Unify the Two Bengals' and create a 'Golden Bengal'.[52]

These critics overstressed India's aggressive role and the Pakistan Government's attempts to resist it, and in the process ignored Yahya Khan's repressive role inside Pakistan. In an attempt to explain away the massacre committed in East Bengal by the Pakistani troops, Ashim Chatterjee said:

> In every war, the sufferings of the people are natural. Its responsibility devolves on the enemies of the people who are in an unjust war. Indira, Mujib and their masters are responsible for all the repression on the people of East Pakistan. Imperialism, Social-imperialism and their touts can never escape the responsibility of this crime by raising the hue and cry of genocide from the bourgeois attitude of abstract humanism.[53]

Even more pathetic was Ashim Chatterjee's attempt to glorify Bhutto and others in Pakistan as the "anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie". According to him, the small and middle-bourgeoisie of Pakistan who had come under Bhutto's leadership and had always fought against the imperialists and for state power against the comprador and big bourgeois and big landlords, formed the national bourgeoisie of the country.[54] This was more like a desperate lover endowing the girl he loves with qualities she lacked. It was an illusionist's creation raised upon the faulty armature of misinterpreted words, actions and gestures.

Ashim Chatterjee's sole justification for the stand he and his followers took during those days was China's, or what they thought was China's, attitude towards the Pakistani ruling class. Stating that China had supported the Pakistan Government, he wondered: "Why should there be any room for debates in this matter?"[55]

As the days passed, Charu Mazumdar's opponents drifted further and further away from him and the official party line, till a point of no return was reached. Meanwhile, important changes were taking place inside China, affecting its relations with the super-powers and its attitude towards people's upsurges in the countries of the Third World.

The Sino-US Detente

From the middle of 1970, China was facing threats from outside, which limited its freedom of action elsewhere. The Soviet military build-up near its borders after the Ussuri incident, and the extension of the Indo-China war by the USA to Laos right at its doorsteps, combined to make China seek alternative strategies in Asia. It probably felt that the two enemies — the Soviet Union and the USA — could well frustrate for decades any further Communist gains in Asia and could threaten gains already made in China. The Chinese efforts to erode US presence in Asia collided with the desire to engage the USA in checking Russian influence in the area. It was necessary to make up with one of the super-powers. Which one was it to be?

Although Chou En-lai was to say later: "The Sino-Soviet controversy on matters of principle should not hinder the normalisation of relations between the two States on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence,"[56] according to China, the biggest hurdle was the dispute over the boundary. In China's eyes, the Soviet Union was obdurate on this question. "Must China," Chou En-lai asked, "give away all the territory north of the great wall to the Soviet revisionists in order to show that we favour relaxation of world tension and are willing to improve Sino-Soviet relations?"[59] So, according to China, any possibility of normalization of relations with the Soviet Union seemed to be remote.

The USA on the other hand had begun to make overtures to China from 1969. In July that year it had announced relaxation in trade and travel restrictions with China. In December the same year President Nixon further relaxed controls on US trade with China. These were all being done of course with an ulterior motive. Harassed by reverses in Vietnam and facing severe attacks at home by critics opposed to his foreign policy, Nixon sought to salvage his image. A detente with China — the demand for which was mounting among a powerful section of American politicians — could come in handy during the Presidential elections in 1972 when Nixon planned to seek re-election.

China was quick to respond. Following more positive demonstrations of US desire to improve relations with China, conveyed to Chou En-lai through the Rumanian Deputy Prime Minister, Gheorghe Radulescu, who was acting at the

time as the go-between, Mao Tsetung told the veteran American journalist and old friend of his, Edgar Snow, in December 1970 that he would like to meet Nixon. The next few months were marked by intense lobbying climaxed by the secret trip of Nixon's personal envoy, Henry Kissinger, to Peking in July 1971, where he was closeted with Chou En-lai for three days making preparations for Nixon's visit. Finally on 15 July that year, Nixon announced his plan to visit China sometime not later than May 1972, before the Presidential elections.

All through these developments, changes were taking place inside the Communist Party of China. According to Western observers, it appears that Marshal Lin Piao, the Deputy Chairman of the Communist Party of China who was designated as Mao Tsetung's successor in the Party's constitution, was opposed to the proposal for a detente with the USA and expressed his views at the party's Central Committee meeting held in August 1970. Chou En-lai was to confirm this later when he accused Lin Piao of having started a "counter-revolutionary coup d'etat which was aborted, at the second Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee in August 1970". About the politics of this "counter-revolutionary coup d'etat," Chou En-lai alleged that "Lin Piao and his handful of sworn followers" wanted on the international plane "to capitulate to Soviet revisionist social-imperialism and ally themselves with imperialism, revisionism and reaction to oppose China, Communism and revolution."[58] If one has to go by Chou En-lai's report that "on 13 September [1971] after his conspiracy had collapsed Lin Piao surreptitiously boarded a plane, fled as a defector to the Soviet revisionists in betrayal of the Party and country and died in a crash at Underkhan in the People's Republic of Mongolia," it would appear that Lin Piao was in favour of a rapprochement with the Soviet Union rather than with the USA. Whatever might have been the facts of the case, as the stalemate in Sino-US relations began to thaw from the middle of 1971, Lin Piao gradually receded into the background.

The defeat of Lin Piao was bound to have significant repercussions on China's attitude towards capitalist countries and the mode of conducting revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In his 'Long Live the Victory of People's War', written in 1965, Lin Piao had extended Mao Tsetung's concept of the encirclement of cities by villages to the international plane by stating:

> Taking the entire globe, if North America and West Europe can be called 'the cities of the world' then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute 'the rural areas of the world'. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural areas. In the final analysis the whole course of the world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American people. . . .

In this strategy, the main targets of the revolutionary offensive were the capitalist ruling powers of North America and West Europe, who were to be strangled by the revolutionary struggles of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

With Lin Piao's gradual eclipse, the Communist Party of China appeared to be more inclined in making a distinction between the capitalist powers of West

Europe and Asia on the one hand, and the two super-powers, the USA and USSR on the other, the latter two and particularly the USSR, becoming now the main enemies. A series of detentes followed in 1972-73, with the resumption of diplomatic relations with Britain in March 1972, after a 22-year break. Speaking at the 10th Congress of the Party, Chou En-lai said: "The US-Soviet contention for hegemony is the cause of world intranquility. . . . It has met with strong resistance from the Third World and has caused resentment on the part of Japan and West European countries." Welcoming the French President Pompidou during his visit to China from 11 to 17 September 1973, Chou En-lai again harped on the same theme: "We are both against the monopoly of world affairs by the one or two super-powers."

More important for the revolutionaries of the Third World, were the signs of change in the Chinese Communist Party's attitude towards struggles in their countries. In keeping with his thesis propounded in 'Long Live the Victory of People's War", Lin Piao had announced at the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of China, his country's firm support to the "revolutionary struggles of the people of Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, India, Palestine and other countries and regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America." But now the Chinese Party seemed to make distinctions between the nature of the various struggles in the three continents and to be wary in lending support to all and every struggle.

The new attitude became evident in the middle of 1971, when a wide-spread youth rebellion, under radical Leftist inspiration, shook Ceylon. After the Ceylonese Premier Sirimavo Bandarnaike had crushed the rebellion in a bloody massacre of thousands of young people, aided by various degrees of Soviet, American, Indian and Pakistani military help, Chou En-lai found it necessary to congratulate her on "putting down the unlawful rebellion" started by "self-styled Che Guevarists for creating disorder in Ceylon with the help of a third country."[59] In July in the same year again, there was a military coup in Sudan led by some Leftist army personnel. A counter-coup by Major-General Nimeiry was followed by a massacre of Communists. China's reaction was different from what it had been six years ago to the pogrom of Communists in Indonesia in 1965. China sent a "good luck message" to Nimeiry on his success.

The party however remained consistent in its aid and support to the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in their "war against US aggression and for national salvation".[60] Several factors might have operated behind this. First, the war in Cambodia and Laos was an extension of the national liberation struggle of Vietnam which had been enjoying Chinese help for years. Secondly, in all these countries, the struggles were being led by Communists and allies who were friendly towards China. Thirdly, the region bordered China and any revolutionary struggle there could be allowed to suffer defeat only at great risks to China.

The other important part of Lin Piao's thesis which also seemed to fall a casualty in the anti-Lin campaign, was his insistence on guerrilla warfare as the "only way to mobilize and apply the whole strength of the people against the enemy". We have already noted how during discussions with the CPI (M-L)

emissary Sourin Bose in Peking in October 1970, Chou En-lai and Kang Shang had dismissed the thesis as irrelevant in the prevailing context. While Lin's thesis encouraged the view that other means of struggle outside guerrilla warfare had become redundant Chou En-lai and his supporters appeared to acknowledge the need for other forms of struggle also. Thus, at the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chou En-lai in his report upheld the "Korean people's struggle for the independent and peaceful reunification of their fatherland" and the "Latin American peoples' struggles for maintaining 200 nautical miles territorial waters or economic zones" — struggles which were obviously being waged along diplomatic channels.

The defeat of Lin Piao and the rejection of his 1965 thesis were to sow yet another split in the CPI (M-L) in 1974 — this time among Charu Mazumdar's followers, one section holding that guerrilla warfare was the 'only' means to be adopted to wage revolutionary struggles, the other section viewing guerrilla warfare as the 'main' form, while acknowledging at the same time the possibility of coordinating it with other forms like mass struggles, trade union movements, etc. But in 1971, to the revolutionaries in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, the fate of Lin was still unknown. What bothered them was the new turn in China's foreign policy including its attitude towards the Pakistani ruling class, the interpretation of which as we have seen was widening the gulf between Charu Mazumdar and his adversaries in the party.

How did the CPI (M-L) official leadership view the Sino-US detente? Just a day before his arrest, Saroj Dutta wrote an article in which, referring to the negotiations between China and the USA, he quoted Mao Tsetung's advice: "... such compromise does not require the people in the countries of the capitalist world to follow suit and make compromises at home. The people in those countries will continue to make different struggles in accordance with their different conditions."[61] He then reminded his readers that in the days of the 'Camp David' atmosphere, "Khrushchov had to run to Kennedy; today Nixon is running to Mao Tsetung. The picture is diametrically opposite." This was made possible according to him, by the victory of the Cultural Revolution in China, the triumph of the liberation war in Indo-China, the advance of the revolutionary struggles in the rest of the world and the inner contradictions of US imperialism.[62]

In an oblique hint at 'revisionists' — both within the party and outside — Saroj Dutta warned that they would take advantage of the Sino-US negotiations and

> try to create a climate of compromise and a climate of class collaboration within those countries and to bring about self-complacence and laxity among the revolutionaries; they will try to initiate 'dialogues' or round-table conferences between the ruler and the ruled, to drag down armed class struggle to peaceful movements; they will try to make the armed Party and masses renounce arms; they will try to make the working class and its Party give up class struggle and class-line in the name of forming an anti-imperialist united front and push them into the slippery path of liquidating themselves.

The last line was a clear reference to Ashim Chatterjee's proposal regarding the movement in East Pakistan.

The CPI (M-L) Splits

As the days passed,the cold war inside the party over the events in East Pakistan soon helped to freeze the floating differences into two rigid sets of alternative theories.

On the one side were Ashim Chatterjee, Satyanarain Singh and their followers, who maintained that Charu Mazumdar had committed 'Left-sectarian' errors on domestic issues and manifested 'bourgeois chauvinism' with regard to East Pakistan, which they felt should be combated respectively by beginning mass movements and work on mass fronts in India and uniting with Yahya Khan in Pakistan. Charu Mazumdar, Saroj Dutta and their followers on the other hand stuck to their thesis of beginning guerrilla struggles with poor and landless peasants and then to gradually expand them into broad mass movements in the Indian context, and to fight both against Yahya Khan and the local feudal landlords in East Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Ashim Chatterjee got arrested in a hotel at Deoghar, Bihar, on 3 November 1971. He was believed to have been on his way to attend a meeting of the CPI (M-L) Central Committee convened by Satyanarain Singh.

The meeting which was held somewhere in Bihar on 7 November was an open call for a split. Two leading members of the Central Committee — Charu Mazumdar and Suniti Ghosh (Saroj Dutta had already been arrested and murdered by the police) — did not attend it. The meeting expelled the two and elected Satyanarain Singh as the party's General Secretary. Ashim Chatterjee's followers were represented by Santosh Rana, who had been a leader of the Gopiballavpur-Debra struggle. He lent his support to Satyanarain Singh.

A resolution adopted at the meeting rejected the "thesis propounded by the Charu clique" that "the entire bourgeoisie of India is comprador and the entire rich peasantry is feudal." The Central Committee said that there was "an uneven political and economic development in India where a weak capitalist economy was co-existing with a powerful semi-feudal economy." Thus the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) departed from the formulations made by the CPI (M-L) at its 1970 Party Congress, and the Programme adopted there. The resolution also attacked Charu Mazumdar's dream of liberating India by 1975 and said that it was based on the belief that "the imperialists and the social-imperialists will use India as their base to attack socialist China within 1971 itself, as a result of which the burden of fearful exploitation and oppression born of war will fall heavily on the shoulders of crores of toiling Indian masses...." It also attacked Charu Mazumdar's rejection of the need for self-preservation and stress on uninterrupted offensive. It opposed the attacks on schools and colleges and annihilation of small traders and businessmen in the cities.

A call was issued from the meeting to the whole party to rectify 'Left opportunist deviations'. Soon after this, the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) began

to bring out parallel editions of *Liberation* and *Deshabrati*, setting out its views on domestic and international issues in the journals.

But although the group strove to lay down an alternative blueprint for revolution by promising to lead mass movements, mobilize the urban people for armed resistance against police repression, inspire the peasantry to occupy lands and seize crops, organize the working class through strikes — actions which, they alleged, Charu Mazumdar had neglected — there was hardly any evidence of the promise being carried out, in any part of the country. Throughout the remaining part of 1971 and the whole of 1972, the group appeared to be spending more time in trying to get together the other dissidents than in seriously putting into practice its programme. It thus provided no opportunity to political observers or to the people in general to find out whether its proposed mode of operations could yield better results than that suggested by Charu Mazumdar.

The Indo-Pakistan War

Meanwhile, the situation in the Indo-Pak subcontinent had warmed up. It was no longer confined to India and Pakistan. The super-powers had openly jumped into the fray. In August 1971, the Soviet Union signed a 20-year treaty with India which provided for the taking of "appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries" if they were attacked, thus strengthening India's hand in its dispute with Pakistan. The USA on the other hand continued to support Pakistan with military and moral help. China described the Indo-Soviet treaty as a "military alliance" with which Soviet "social-imperialists" had encouraged "the Indian reactionaries to engage in subversive activities" in East Pakistan.[63]

Inside East Bengal, the rampage by the Pakistani troops continued unabated forcing thousands to flee to India. Sniper actions by the 'Mukti Bahini' — commandos recruited from the East Bengali youth and trained by the Indian Government and sent across the borders into East Bengal to fight the Pakistani army — were the main features of the resistance against the marauding forces.

As for the EPCP (M-L), it was caught in a dilemma. Should it continue its class war against the Bengali feudal landlords who constituted the base of the Awami League, or should it join the various groups of resistance fighters that had been formed to fight the West Pakistani troops? According to later revelations made by a delegation of EPCP (M-L) representatives who visited India in early 1973, the party's Central Committee was "de facto split into two" after the events of March 1971. "A struggle began in the party leadership between national chauvinism and internationalism."[64]

But in spite of differences among the leaders of the party and snapping of contacts between different district units, driven by the compulsions of the situation, isolated bands of EPCP (M-L) guerrillas directed their attacks on the Pakistani troops as well as on the local feudal landlords. In the process they managed to

free large areas of Jessore, Khulna and Noakhali. In a report sent to the CPI (M-L) in early 1972, the EPCP (M-L) claimed that under its leadership the "peasants' armed struggle for seizure of power locally developed rapidly between the months of April and October 1971." According to the report, in the three abovementioned districts, "the PLA was formed, Revolutionary Committees were set up as organs of power, and the land of the class enemies was seized and distributed." In all these districts the guerrillas had to fight both against "the Pakistani army, Razakars and the 'militia' on the one front and the 'Mukti Bahini' hirelings on the other front." But "the temporary base areas in Jessore and Khulna fell before the vicious and treacherous attacks of the 'Mukti Bahini' hirelings in October and November. In Noakhali the people suffered a setback after 16 December."[65]

The Pakistani carnage often spilled over across the borders into India, when in pursuit of 'Mukti Bahini' commandos or refugees, West Pakistani troops crossed the borders and got embroiled in skirmishes with the Indian troops which were being massed along the Indo-Pak borders. By September-October, all the portents of a coming war were visible.

Finally, in early December the war broke out, enveloping both the eastern and western sectors of the two countries. Indian troops entered East Bengal, and the Indian Government officially recognized the 'Bangla Desh government'. The Indian army, with air-support, occupied the districts, and on 16 December the Pakistani army surrendered.

During the war, the Soviet Union came to India's help by vetoing in the United Nations Security Council a resolution calling for the withdrawal of troops from Bangla Desh. The USA on the other hand, announced its decision to suspend $87.6 million aid to India.

As the Indian army succeeded in crushing Pakistani resistance in every district of East Bengal, President Nixon ordered the nuclear-powered carrier *Enterprise* and the helicopter carrier *Tripoli* with a battalion of 800 marines, seven destroyers and frigates to proceed from Tonkin Gulf towards the Bay of Bengal, on 13 December 1971. According to a Pentagon spokesman, the aim was to evacuate American citizens from Dacca, as also to "establish American presence in the area". But on 18 December, President Nixon called off the fleet from the Bay of Bengal, presumably following CIA intelligence reports that the Soviet Union had assured India that it would not allow the Seventh Fleet to intervene in East Bengal.[66]

It was clear that the two super-powers were intent on avoiding a direct confrontation over East Bengal. Both were prepared to go only to the extent of providing military aid and political support to their respective allies. The USA was not willing to get directly involved as in Vietnam, presumably because it did not want to give up its stakes in India completely. According to the American columnist Jack Anderson, Henry Kissinger, who was responsible for making the USA adopt the strong pro-Pakistani stance, was believed to have told the State Department that Indira Gandhi "is cold-blooded and tough and will not turn India into a Soviet satellite merely because of pique". He proved to be right, as evident from Indira Gandhi's desire soon after the East Bengal hostilities were

over to make up with the USA and seek its aid. Besides, though the USA officially supported Pakistan, private and semi-official American individuals and organizations came to India's help by aiding the rehabilitation of the refugees from East Bengal.

As the war began China, in accordance with its new policy of alignment, was more concerned over the increasing Soviet hegemony in the area. While at the beginning of the East Bengal developments, in April 1971 China alleged that the "two super-powers, working in close coordination with the Indian reactionaries, crudely interfere in the internal affairs of Pakistan,"[67] with the outbreak of the war in December, it accused the Soviet Union primarily of "supporting, encouraging and approving India's aggression against Pakistan."[68] As for the Indian ruling class, Chou En-lai predicted: "India would in the end taste the bitter fruit of its own making. And from then on there would be no tranquillity on the sub-continent.[69] His words seemed to come true with uncanny accuracy within a year of the 'liberation' of East Bengal by the Indian army and the establishment of the 'Bangla Desh' government there, when anti-Indian demonstrations broke out in Dacca in May 1972, during the visit of D.P. Dhar, Indira Gandhi's special envoy who had earlier helped to negotiate the Indo-Soviet treaty.

Inside India, the CPI (M-L) was the only political party to oppose the war. The Satyanarain Singh group of the party accused India of having "violated the national independence, state sovereignty and territorial integrity of a neighbouring country."[70] In an article written on 20 December 1971, Charu Mazumdar said that "in collusion with the Soviet Union, the Indian Government has attacked Pakistan, occupied East Pakistan and turned it into a neo-colony." Regarding the Indo-Soviet treaty, he said that it had turned India into a "satellite state of the Soviet social-imperialists." From this, he concludes: "The Soviet-Indian alliance has turned out to be the main enemy of the people of East Bengal. It is against the same enemy that the struggle in East Bengal and the struggle in India will be directed." Although "temporarily, we may have to retreat in some places," he was sure that if the party was there, the "struggle will inevitably attain a higher phase." The same article contained a significant comment. "Militarily," Charu Mazumdar noted, "the Indian Government is also bound to put pressure on other neighbouring countries. For this is the nature of chauvinism."[68]

His words were prophetic. When in April 1973 an agitation for more power to the elected representatives of the people broke out in Sikkim — the tiny monarchy covering the strategically important cavity between China in the north, Nepal in the west, Bhutan in the east and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in the south — under the leadership of people who later formed the Sikkim Congress (a party which, like the Awami League, was a protege of the Indian government and the Indian National Congress), India sent its troops to maintain 'law and order' in Sikkim. With the help of the Sikkim Congress, which claimed to represent the aspirations of the 200,000 Sikkimese, the Indian Government then proceeded to change the political status of Sikkim. The monarchy used to be a protectorate of the Indian Government which looked after its external affairs and defence. In September 1974, by an amendment of the Indian Constitution, Sikkim was granted 'associate status' and was entitled to send representatives to

the Indian Parliament. On the plea of encouraging the growth of parliamentary democracy to replace feudal monarchy in Sikkim, India virtually annexed an independent kingdom.

But in that winter of 1971-72, the CPI (M-L) was a lone wolf; its followers struck the only discordant note in the chorus of war-hysteria that seemed to have gripped the nation. The intelligentsia were taken in by the fine moral flummery that was cooked up with all the sickening casuistry that passed for logic to justify Indian intervention in Pakistan. Declarations like 'save the East Bengalis from military dictatorship', 'establish parliamentary democracy and build socialism in East Bengal', by the Indian government spokesmen at home and abroad helped to rally the petty bourgeois intellectuals who never paused to ask what sort of parliamentary democracy and socialism India was interested in. Oblivious of the frightful effects of the Indian pattern of democracy and socialism inside the country during the last 24 years, they suffered from a temporary suspension of disbelief when they took Indira Gandhi's declarations at their face value. The rest of the nation had no need for such sophistry. "Crush Pakistan" became the rallying cry. The cult of brutal chauvinism infected the press, the pulpits, the classrooms, the bazaars and the 'maidan'. In utter disregard of all morality, the Congress leaders gave full reins to the expansionist ambitions of the ruling class. Slogans like "Indira Gandhi is the sun of liberation of Asia" decked the walls of Calcutta.

Whatever the future might hold for her, in 1971-72 Indira Gandhi indeed managed to emerge triumphant, both at home and abroad. The nagging problem of an East Bengal under a Pakistani ruling class friendly with China, and a happy training ground for Mizo rebels and a possible refuge for CPI (M-L) guerrillas, would be there no more. Instead, Bangla Desh could be an ideal pasture for fresh investments. In a world where might was right, Indira Gandhi could flatter her ego with the thought that India had at last established its reputation as a military power — although the entire exploit in East Bengal was carried out under the aegis of Soviet military and diplomatic protection.

The victory abroad coincided with triumphs inside the country too. The parliamentary Opposition was in a total disarray. The people were disillusioned with their performance in the various non-Congress coalition governments that came to office after the 1967 elections. Besides, a split in the Congress in 1969, ending up with Indira Gandhi's coming out with socialist slogans and the bulk of Congressmen behind her, provided the Congress with a refurbished image, no longer identified with people like Atulya Ghosh or S.K. Patil — the old bosses who were responsible for the estrangement of many Congressmen.

Besides, the CPI (M-L) was in the throes of a crisis, what with dissensions within the party and what with the repression let loose by the police and military. As Charu Mazumdar was to admit in June 1972: "We have suffered a setback after the armed struggle in our country reached a stage."[73]

The 1972 Elections

It was against this background that the 1972 elections to the State assemblies were held. The most interesting contest took place in West Bengal, where the CPI (M) was the main rival of the Congress. As indicated earlier, the CPI (M) in the 1971 elections, lost its influence on the urban middle classes. After that, the Centre saw to it that the party's base among the rural peasantry and industrial workers was destroyed. Many party activists were already killed or in jail. According to the CPI (M) leader, Jyoti Basu, from 17 March 1970 till 24 April 1971, 263 party followers were killed in West Bengal. The methods previously used against the cadres of the CPI (M-L) were applied to weaken the CPI (M) from the middle of 1971. Villages were surrounded by troops, and the police raided the huts to arrest CPI (M) followers. Those who had received plots of land as a result of some redistribution of surplus land during the United Front regime were dispossessed.

The CPI (M) leadership demonstrated a pitiably helpless attitude in face of this repression on its ranks. Unable to foresee the intensity of the ruling class offensive and unprepared for the violent retaliation that was necessary to meet the challenge, the leaders left the ranks in the lurch. Their only activities were confined to frequent complaints made to the Prime Minister or the President. There was hardly any mass movement in the State against the police atrocities. The CPI (M)'s dilemma sprang from its ambivalent attitude towards the use of force in fighting the state. Although during 1971-72, it frequently warned the ruling powers with calls of a bloodbath, or threats of creating another Vietnam, it kept its ranks totally unprepared for the ruling class offensive. If a real struggle was intended, it was a queer tactic to ignore the weapons with which it would have to be waged. It appeared that the CPI (M) leaders' revolutionary threats were mere attempts to mollify the cadres and intimidate the antagonist.

If the CPI (M-L) suffered a setback in 1971-72 because of the narrowness and isolation of its armed bases which could not withstand the massive and coordinated counter-offensive of the ruling classes, the CPI (M) failed because it refused to prepare its comparatively wider mass base in West Bengal for an armed resistance.

It is worth noting that although the CPI (M) basically remained a parliamentary party in its deeds, when the ruling powers unleashed their offensive, they treated the party on an almost equal footing with the CPI (M-L). This indicated that the Congress was no longer prepared to take chances and trust even constitutionally loyal Leftists.

Although by the time the elections began, the Government had managed to put a large number of CPI (M) activists behind bars and hound out the remaining from their areas of influence, thus immobilizing the main rival, and although the Congress party was still riding the crest of the wave of success in the wake of the Indo-Pak war, the ruling powers were not confident of their victory in West Bengal. This was evident during the election in the State in early 1972. With the help of the administration, the ruling party resorted to large scale intimidation of voters, preventing them from coming to the polling booths, and

adopted rigging to ensure a landslide victory for itself and a total elimination of the Opposition. The mode of conducting the elections in West Bengal in early 1972 was indeed a classic example of the working of democracy à la India — the pattern that was being recommended by Indira Gandhi's followers for the rest of Asia.

It was a traumatic experience for the CPI (M) cadres. The hope of forming a government — on which they had been reared up all these years — was dashed. Driven from the areas where they used to live or work, they moved about as hunted animals. The leaders had no immediate programme for them. At this vulnerable moment, the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) made an appeal to the "revolutionary section of the CPI (M)". The wording of the appeal was significant, indicating the change that had come over this group of Communist revolutionaries. The appeal which came out in the form of an "open letter" in the underground mouthpiece of the group, referred to the recent elections and said: "The same repressive methods which the reactionary State machinery had been using against the CPI (M-L), were applied to your militant cadres." It claimed that it had warned as far back as November 1971; "Indira is trying to bring about such a dark period that even the mildest opposition would not be tolerated." The appeal then went on to say that parliamentary democracy in India was as "dead as the pre-stone age creatures," and warned: "The meaning of today's entire situation is this — either one has to surrender to the fascist terror of Indira's rule, or one has to take up the gun and join the armed revolutionary struggle. There is no third way." It then added: "We know that you, the majority of the CPI (M) cadre, would prefer death to surrender to the Indira rule." The rest of the appeal was an exposure of the misdeeds of the "revisionist" leaders of the CPI (M), who it alleged, misdirected the militant cadres of the party. Demarcating itself from Charu Mazumdar's CPI (M-L), the group said:

> You know that we also committed grave errors, influenced by the neo-Trotskyite Charu clique. . . . We left the work of guiding people's struggles on the basis of economic demands, as we though such work was revisionism. We stopped work in the mass fronts of workers, peasants, youth and students. . . . Out of impatience we often confused friends with enemies.

It then appealed to the 'revolutionary section' of the CPI (M) to:

> think again about the ideological and political line and tactics of your leadership in the light of your own experience and the experience of the revolutionary struggle of our people. . . . We are appealing to you in all sincerity to come and join us, so that we can destroy the conspiracy of the neo-revisionists and the neo-Trotskyites to divide the revolutionary forces of India.[71]

The appeal did not have any immediate noticeable impact on the CPI (M) ranks. But in the middle of 1974, a large number of cadres and district unit leaders of the CPI (M) in West Bengal raised questions about the party's political line and tactics and some suggested the need for underground preparations

for armed struggle. Many of them were expelled from the party. In their private talks they expressed their willingness to come to some sort of understanding with the followers of Ashim Chatterjee and Satyanarain Singh in West Bengal and Bihar.

Charu Mazumdar

During the Setback

From 1971 to 1972, the counter-revolution in India soared from one pinnacle of success to another, tearing gaps in the ranks of the Communist revolutionaries through fierce reprisals, terrorizing and intimidating the population by draconian laws and gangsterism, and finally overflowing its own frontiers by turning East Pakistan into Bangla Desh. Revolution was definitely at a low ebb, with the CPI (M-L) decimated and split, and terror paramount.

During this period from the end of 1971, through the first half of 1972 till his arrest and death in July, Charu Mazumdar made a reappraisal of his earlier views on certain important issues, and tried to grasp and divine the inner meaning of impending events to indicate the future course of the revolution. In spite of the setback, his ecstatic dream of the revolution refused to fade into oblivion.

In an article written in December 1971, Charu Mazumdar dealt with his earlier prediction that India would be liberated within 1975 — a slogan that had provoked attacks from his critics. He now wrote:

> I had said that my country will be liberated by 1975. This does not mean that we need not fight after 1975. This would be a dogmatic way of thinking. What I meant was that within 1975 we shall reach a dominant position. This was a political assertion; I did not state it dogmatically.

He added:" . . . within that year (1975) our struggle will reach a decisive stage, we also will become a decisive factor." Admitting in the same article that the "revolutionary high tide of 1970" was no longer visible, and that there was no wave of revolutionary struggles of the youth and students in the cities, he drew comfort from the fact that the poor and landless peasants had emerged as leaders in the countryside. "At this stage," he added, "it may be that their political consciousness is at a low level; but the significance [of their coming up to leadership] is great."[69]

The earlier impression of the possibility of a quick victory that was nourished by Charu Mazumdar's previous assertions was thus sought to be modified now.

On another important issue also Charu Mazumdar was to modify his approach during this period. This was the controversial tactics of 'annihilation of class enemies'. We have seen how the emphasis on the tactics increased in 1970. While in 1969 it was recognized as the "higher form of class struggle" with the implied acknowledgement of other forms, in 1970 at the Party Congress it was projected as the only form that could "solve all problems".

From the end of 1971 however, Charu Mazumdar tended to think in a different way. In an unpublished note written during this period, we find him stating:

> Today the landless peasant, the poor peasant, must be told about the need to attack the state machinery, about our total politics, about Magurjan. The poor and landless peasants then will decide whether they will annihilate the class enemy or snatch arms. . . . To tell them only about the annihilation of class enemies will be economism.

Still later, in another unpublished note, he wrote:

> If the workers after snatching rifles hand them over to the peasants, and even if these peasants have not annihilated a single class enemy, they will accept the rifles and use them. This is because the phase of the struggle in the whole country has changed. . . . Today the armed struggle is the main feature.

Yet in another note, he was to elaborate his latest views on the matter:

> We annihilate only those who become obstacles in the way of the establishment of the political power of the peasants. They may belong to any class. In other words, these annihilations are annihilations for the seizure of power. . . .
>
> The whole class can never be annihilated. The annihilations should not be seen as one and the same as the struggle. This is not correct. . . .
>
> The fundamental point of class struggle is the seizure of political power. The fundamental point of class struggle is not annihilation.[74]

By correcting the lop-sided stress on annihilation and warning against the tendency to confuse the tactics with the strategy, he tried to put back the issue of 'annihilation of class enemies' in the proper perspective, as a tactic necessary at one stage of the revolutionary struggle. Obviously in 1971-72, according to Charu Mazumdar's views, the stage had been reached when "armed struggle was the main feature", when the tactics of seizure of firearms and arming the peasants' guerrilla squads were to be the main tactics, instead of remaining bogged down with the tactics of annihilation.

In the new situation of 1971-72, he also seemed to revise his views about the traditional forms of struggle like strikes (which he had earlier felt, had outlived their purpose), if such forms were spontaneously adopted by class-conscious peasants. In the Poon Poon area of Patna district in Bihar, guerrilla squads of landless peasants executed two landlords between March and April, 1972. Following this, "two or three landless peasants . . . on their own initiative, organized a hartal directed against the landlords in five villages" in the Poon Poon area. Describing the hartal, a CPI (M-L) organizer wrote:

> The hartal, which has united 70 poor-landless peasants, has the support of middle peasants also. . . . An oppressive landlord of Nema village, who is the secretary of the local CPI, enlisted the services of two landless peasants of a faraway village to till his land. Armed with lathis, the local landless peasants went to the spot and told

> the two landless peasants: 'Haven't you heard of our hartal? This is a struggle of the peasants. You are like our brothers. You should come forward to help your brothers in their struggle.' The two poor landless peasants realized the situation and left. Despite repeated requests from the landlord, none agreed to carry the two ploughs left in the field by the two landless peasants to the landlord's house.[72]

At a meeting with the CPI (M-L) cadres of Bihar on 13 July 1972, Charu Mazumdar urged them to form revolutionary committee with the peasants who organized the hartal in Poon Poon. Describing the hartal as "a mass upsurge", he said that the very fact that 70 poor and landless peasants sat and decided to organize a hartal amounted to the establishment of a revolutionary committee. At the same meeting, in keeping with his attitude towards the middle and rich peasants, he said: "The poor peasants should be made to understand that other classes of people must be mobilized today. Otherwise the revolution cannot be made successful. There will be strong unity with the middle peasants; they are a revolutionary class."[73]

During this period also, as we have already seen, he was to stress repeatedly the need for organizing mass movements on general economic issues in areas of CPI (M-L) influence. In a letter to comrades of Tripura, he wrote: "... we can surely put forward the slogan of seizing the crops of the class enemy. This slogan will bring the wide peasant masses in struggle. The backward section of the peasants also will participate in the liberation war. ..." Referring to the need for building up the organization on the one hand, and making necessary preparations to face the possible setback on the other, he said: "If we can mobilize wide masses of peasants through the general economic slogan like seizure of crop, both these aims can be fulfilled."[72]

A specific policy towards members of the CPI (M) was also formulated now. "The peasants and workers who are today under the grip of the CPI (M)," he said, "will come to join hands with us. Peasants and workers do not belong to the revisionists; they are ours." Presumably referring to the animosity among the CPI (M-L) ranks towards members of the CPI (M), he wrote:

> Our failure lies in the fact that we have not yet been able to fully make it [the winning over of the workers and peasants of the CPI (M)] a reality. ... We must carry on discussions with people having opposing views; we must learn to work jointly with them. [But he warned]: This does not mean that we should join revisionist organizations in order to make alliance with them. ...[74]

The same patient attitude was evident in his dealing with the two-line struggle within the party. It should be remembered that this was the period when the differences over tactics and many other issues had reached a bitter stage. Estranged relations between erstwhile comrades had degenerated into open fights. The cry of Naxalbari which in 1967 united the revolutionary Communists in a sense of common destiny and common identity, in 1971-72 divided them and produced cleavages deeper than anything in the history of the Indian Communist movement. Right in front of Charu Mazumdar's eyes, the organization that he had helped to mould, was dissolving in a spasm of hate and fear. As Charu Mazumdar's devotees, out of impatience with and intolerance of growing doubts and misgivings among party members, sought to brand every questioning as 'counter-

revolutionary', he felt it necessary to caution them repeatedly. "The question 'why' ", he said, "is meant for understanding deeply why a certain instruction is given and for understanding the depth and implication of the instruction. To work according to the instruction without understanding its implication, is slavish." He reminded his devotees that those who were raising questions did not always question the correctness or incorrectness of the instruction. The question "does not arise out of lack of faith".[*Ibid.*] Again in his letter to the comrades of Tripura, he reiterated: "There must be patience in conducting the struggle between the two lines. The majority of those who are in favour of revisionist struggle are honest. They must be given the opportunity to be re-educated."[72]

The old dispute over the concept of 'revolutionary authority' exacerbated the cleavage in the party. Charu Mazumdar's staunch followers went to the extent of imposing his authority with the help of guns. Two leading members of the party belonging to the South Calcutta region — Kamal Sanyal and Agni Ray — were 'annihilated' by them on the suspicion that they were police agents since they had the temerity to raise questions about the mode of establishing the revolutionary authority. Charu Mazumdar was forced to warn against such a stress on authority.

> It is incorrect, to mechanically bring to the forefront the question of authority during any difference of opinions. That pushes back the politics. Comprehension of the comrades does not increase. 'Do you accept, or do you not?' — this question alone assumes importance. We shall never impose authority through methods of commandism. Comprehension of the vast number of comrades can gradually grow only through experience, political discussion. It is harmful to follow blindly. How can you become a communist if you lose your own power of judgment? Confidence grows only through one's own comprehension and from confidence comes firm resolve.[*ibid.*]

His thought process during this period — retrospect of the past, shift of stresses, changes in attitude, contemplation of the near future — found a more comprehensive and total expression in his last piece of writing, 'It is the People's Interest that is the Party's Interest', penned on 9 June 1972.

Last Writing

He began this piece by admitting: "We have suffered a setback after the armed struggle in our country reached a stage." In order to keep the party alive in the midst of the prevailing crisis, he wrote: "we have to build up the Party among the broad worker-peasant masses."

But even in that bleak summer of 1972, when to all appearances the anti-ruling class spirit of the Indian people had evaporated and the Government was riding the crest of success, Charu Mazumdar visualized a "countrywide upsurge" in the near future. While the sceptics thought that he was slogging away at what was a doomed adventure, he asserted with confidence: "Within a short time a spontaneous outburst will be seen in our country and it will take the form of a national upsurge." Peering through the euphoria he could see that the

insurmountability of the economic problems would threaten the ruling class with a new challenge in the near future. Referring to the growing discontent of the people, he said that it would "cause spontaneous explosions in different places". These words seemed to reverberate posthumously in 1973-74, when disorders broke out in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and various other parts of the country.

The fast disillusionment with Indira Gandhi's charismatic image among the Indian people in 1973-74 again confirmed Charu Mazumdar's belief that "the progress of struggles is not evolutionary, but revolutionary". Envisaging a far more rapid development of mass struggles in the future, he felt that the Party organization might not be able to keep pace with the onrush. "If we calculate by the rate at which the struggle under our Party's leadership is advancing," he wrote in the same article, "our country will not be liberated even by 2001, what to speak of its being liberated by 1975?"

He was therefore inclined to take advantage of and reshape the spontaneous mass upsurge that he was sure was round the corner, instead of allowing Party activities to remain confined to strings of isolated actions to which they had been mainly reduced during this period. "Shall we be able to give leadership everywhere during the upsurge that is coming?" he asked, and admitted: "Certainly not." Explaining how the upsurge could be reoriented to serve the purpose of the revolutionaries, he wrote: "The struggles in those particular areas where we have our Party's conscious leadership, will serve as examples to other areas which lack the Party leadership. If we can effect land reforms in some areas today, the task of land reforms may be carried out spontaneously in many other areas during this revolutionary upsurge. Our conscious leadership will give birth to armed revolutionary upsurge. It is through this armed revolutionary upsurge that our leadership will be gradually established everywhere." In this connection, he hammered at the need for forming "united fronts with the broadest sections of the people on the basis of struggle". Referring to the immobility of the parliamentary Leftist parties, he said:

> The workers, peasants and toiling people in all these parties have resentment against their party leadership. We must carry on efforts for uniting with them on the basis of joint struggle. Even those who once practised enmity towards us will also in special circumstances come forward to unite with us. We must have such largeness of mind as to be united with all such forces.

It was evident that Charu Mazumdar was trying to hit out at the sectarian hostility which many in his party nourished against the ranks of the CPI (M) and other Leftist parties, and even more against their erstwhile comrades like the followers of Ashim Chatterjee and Satyanarain Singh. "Largeness of mind is a quality of the Communists," he reminded his followers, and concluded: "It is the people's interest that today demands united struggle. It is the people's interest that is the Party's interest."[73]

The article was apparently written in a mood of introspection and from a desire for genuine reassessment rather than for dogmatic reassertion of old

positions. He appeared to be willing to reconsider and revise many of these previous stances, both out of the practical needs of the prevailing situation and the necessity to accommodate all the militant groups who believed in armed struggle. That Charu Mazumdar was moving in this direction is suggested not only by the host of unpublished notes that he wrote during this period (which only add up to the views expressed in: 'It is the People's Interest that is the Party's Interest'), but is confirmed by a group of his comrades-in-arms who were closest to him at that time.

It was much later, after his death, in early 1973, that these leading members of the CPI (M-L) in a letter smuggled out from the jail where they were imprisoned, wrote: "Comrade Charu Mazumdar realized that there are sectarian deviations in our Party line, and he told us so." They further stated: "Comrade Charu Mazumdar himself wanted to make a political self-criticism. In this connection, it is necessary to inform you of another thing. He wanted to forge unity with all the groups (with whom we had snapped relations at different stages because of political differences)." Referring to the "realization that Comrade Charu Mazumdar arrived at during the last few months", they added that he wanted to place before all the leading cadres of the party at different levels the suggestions that were sent by the Communist Party of China through Sourin Bose in November 1970. "There are many people who know," they wrote, "that he himself wanted to withdraw the slogan 'China's Chairman is Our Chairman.' "[74]

From all this it appears that Charu Mazumdar had not yet spoken his last word, not even the penultimate one, but had only taken a few measured steps in a particular direction, when he was snatched away from the struggle.

Arrest and Death

On 16 July 1972, Charu Mazumdar was arrested by the police from a house in Entally, Calcutta. The police had been on the trail of this elusive revolutionary for the last two years, without having been able to make any headway.

The arrest was made possible by the disclosure about Charu Mazumdar's hideout, forced out from one of his arrested comrades by police torture. The victim of the torture was reduced to a mental and physical wreck, before he could be made to reveal the hiding place. When arrested, Charu Mazumdar also was a foredoomed victim of the vengeance of the ruling class. He lived only 12 days after his arrest. He was reported to have 'died' in police custody on 28 July 1972.

At the time of his arrest, Charu Mazumdar was suffering from an acute heart ailment. The rigours of the underground life had been telling on him all these years. The pain-killing pathedene was his constant companion during his odysseys from one place to another. In the police lock-up, Charu Mazumdar was subjected to an unrelenting police interrogation. Being already in poor health, he collapsed under the strain, and had to be removed to hospital on 27 July. Denied proper and timely medical treatment, he died the next day.

Commenting on the circumstances of his death, following close upon the heels of his arrest, the Party mouthpiece *Liberation* said:

> Even though our failings were grave, we could keep alive our respected leader, suffering from protracted illness; during the past three or four years he lived continuously in the care of the revolutionary masses, throwing dust in the eyes of the reactionary police. But during the 12 days of his capture the police, in the name of making 'special arrangements' for his treatment so much publicized in the bourgeois press, subjected him to inconceivably inhuman physical and mental torture, 'interrogating' him for five to six hours at a stretch everyday. [It alleged that the police] murdered the great leader of the Indian revolution, Comrade Charu Mazumdar, in Calcutta on the night of 27-28 July.[75]

As far as the ruling class was concerned, Charu Mazumdar's death created a sense of relief. He was the number one accused in several conspiracy cases that the Government had instituted against Communist revolutionaries in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and other places. In spite of splits and dissensions in the party, he had still remained the ideological mainspring of the movement, with his quenchless inner flame of revolutionary idealism contagious enough to rouse his followers to actions. With his death therefore the ruling class was sure the denouement had been reached.

It could indeed be said that with thousands of CPI (M-L) activists either liquidated or put behind bars, their rural and urban bases destroyed, Charu Mazumdar dead and the surviving leaders trying to pick up the threads to move on to the next stage, one phase of the movement was definitely over.

The Aftermath

But the Government of the ruling class had to make sure that the movement was finished for ever. So, the surviving rebels had to be punished in a way that the people would never forget, that the daring among them would never dream of a rebellion, that posterity might grow up with the chilling knowledge that violent upsurges against the established order always fail.

By 1973, the number of CPI (M-L) activists and supporters held in different jails all over India had swelled to 32,000. More than 20 conspiracy cases had been instituted by the Government. In the West Bengal jails alone, there were 17,787 such prisoners, among them 12,016 were youths, 1,399 below 18 years.[76] Most of them had been detained without trial for three years. In the jails of Andhra Pradesh there were 738 such prisoners. Among them was Nagabhushan Patnaik on whom a death sentence was hanging. He had refused to make any petition for mercy to the Indian President.

How were the prisoners treated? According to reports presented at a national convention on defence and release of "Naxalite" prisoners, in Delhi from 20 to 21 April 1973, thirteen people died in different jails of Andhra Pradesh because of lack of medical treatment. Besides, police torture was a regular lot for many CPI (M-L) prisoners. In reports compiled by the Association For the Protection of Democratic Rights, Calcutta, several hair-raising accounts were given of young boys either permanently maimed or killed by the police inside the jails of West Bengal. Excerpts from the reports relating to a few cases would suffice.

> Ajijul Hak: Presidency Jail; Cell No. 1/72; in custody for three years; age — above 30. On being arrested, he was mercilessly beaten at the Beniapukur Police Lock-up. . . . While in the ward named 'Satkhuta' of the same jail in '70, there was an alarm at Presidency Jail. At midnight, Hak along with other political prisoners was dragged out of his ward and blows upon blows of baton rained upon them! His already broken hand was pound to pieces. Available medical facilities in jail were totally inadequate for such severe injury. . . . At present . . . blood vessels of his hand are gradually getting dried up . . . .

> Ramal Roy Chowdhury; Presidency Jail; Arrested in October '70; . . . On being arrested he had his share of inhuman torture in police custody resulting in serious injury to his left hand and head. Severe pain in head followed. . . . At jail hospital while fighting with death, he was suddenly released for some unknown reason. The following day he died.

Special treatment was meted out to CPI (M-L) girl prisoners by sadistically inclined police perverts, who like their Nazi predecessors sought to perfect methods of torture into a fine art. Members of the All-India Women's Association — a politically neutral body — who were arrested on 3 May 1974 in connection with an anti-price rise demonstration, and were lodged in the Presidency Jail close to a cell where there were CPI (M-L) girl prisoners, had a chance to obtain an on-the-spot account of the methods of torture, and later submitted a report to the press. According to them the CPI (M-L) girls "were stripped naked," their bodies — "the neck, the breast, the stomach and other private parts not excluded" burnt with cigarettes, "accompanied by every conceivable humiliation," often leading to rupture of the more sensitive organs. "After this, the unconscious bodies of these girls were brought back to jail by police van. After 20 or 22 days, when they recovered, the girls would be once again taken to Lal Bazar [headquarters of the Calcutta police] and subjected to the same treatment."[77]

Prominent members and leaders of the CPI (M-L) were treated more vigorously. In the middle of 1973, it came to light that Ashim Chatterjee, the leader of the Debra and Gopiballavpur movement, had been kept chained in 'danda-beri' [bar-fetters] day and night ever since his arrest in 1971.

Police firings inside jails became quite common. In the two years between the end of 1970 and that of 1972, there were at least 20 such incidents resulting in not less than 100 killed and several hundreds injured.

By 1974, conditions in Indian jails and the treatment of CPI (M-L) prisoners there had become a matter of international scandal, although at home the Indian Government and the press continued to remain silent about the whole affair. More than 300 academics from all over the world including Naom Chomsky and Simone de Beauvoir signed a protest on 15 August 1974, to the Indian Government.[78] The Amnesty International prepared a report of the illegal detention and ill-treatment and torture of Indian political prisoners, and sent it to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and West Bengal Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray, expecting them to intervene. But there was no response from them, and the Amnesty International finally released the report to

the public. The Secretary-General of the organization, Martin Ennals, told a press conference while releasing the report: "We would not have published the report unless we were confident about the facts. We are confident that the information we have gathered is correct."[79]

Some in the Government in their utterances often let fall sneaking insinuations to represent the CPI (M-L) prisoners as a dehumanized breed not deserving normal treatment. Thus, the West Bengal Jail Minister Gyan Singh Sohanpal described them as "psychopaths" and said that they were "in need of psychotherapy to get rid of the extremity of mind."[80] Was this inspired by the Indian government's Soviet mentors who were well-known for their practice of branding political dissidents as 'lunatics' and dumping them in asylums? Even families of the CPI (M-L) prisoners were not spared. We have already noted how the Girijan peasants of Srikakulam were subjected to harassment, imprisoned inside 'strategic hamlets'.

While all this went on, the spokesmen of the establishment — the so-called 'Free Press' and social and political leaders — who were convulsed with horror at the desecration of statues and buildings, looked on complacently. An entire generation of young people continued to be maimed and slaughtered. In the past also, the state made much of popular retributions, but ignored the long history of years of oppression and degradation to which the retributions were the response. The Government of India was indeed like that "baron of old", who in the words of Karl Marx, "thought every weapon in his own hand fair against the plebeian, while in the hands of the plebeian a weapon of any kind constituted in itself a crime."[81]

Notes

1. *Liberation*, January-March 1971.
2. *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Liberation*, 10 August 1972.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Liberation*, July 1971 — January 1972.
8. *Naxalbarir Shiksha.*
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71. Open letter to the revolutionary section of the CPI (M). *Deshabrati* (Brought out by the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L), 1 April 1972.
72. *Liberation*, 10 August 1972.
73. *Ibid*.
74. From a letter dated 7 February 1973, signed by five leading members of the CPI (M-L), including Deepak Biswas, Anal Ray and Dilip Banerjee.
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77. Statement by the All-India Women's Association, Calcutta, May 1974.
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10 The Prospects

... the battle must break out again and again in ever-growing dimensions, and there can be no doubt as to who will be the victor in the end, — the appropriating few, or the immense working majority.
— Karl Marx: 'The Civil War in France', 30 May 1871.

The upsurge is coming, a country-wide upsurge. . . .
— Charu Mazumdar: 'It is the People's Interest that is the Party's Interests', 9 June 1972.

Critique of the Movement

The phase of the CPI (M-L) movement which ended in 1972, could be summed up as a phase of establishing the ideology of area-wise capture of power from semi-feudal and semi-colonial ruling classes by poor and landless peasants through armed guerrilla warfare. While in some parts of the Indian countryside from 1967 to 1972, sections of the peasantry came forward to take part in guerrilla actions and set up rudimentary forms of 'people's power', in the urban areas sections of the youth launched an assault upon the assumptions and institutions which held up the established order, as a support to the rural actions.

In a country like India, there could be two possible ways of area-wise capture of power and sustaining a 'liberated zone'. It could be achieved in a small corner of the country which has a foreign territory as a hinterland (like Nagaland or Mizoram in the east of India, where nationalist rebels have been fighting against the Indian Government for many years now). If the foreign hinterland is friendly or even neutral to the rebels, so much the better. It could also be achieved in a heartland area in which the terrain is favourable to the revolutionaries by virtue of being inaccessible to modern transport or/and being underadministered (like the Chambal ravines in Madhya Pradesh — a traditional refuge and kingdom of dacoits).

The second alternative could be the simultaneous creation of many rural bases, both in the hills and on the plains, scattered widely enough to keep the enemy forces dispersed and occupied, coordinated with complementary urban working class actions. Such scattered rural bases are bound to be fluid. But in

such a strategy, what counts is not the loss or gain of individual bases, but the ability to deal decisive blows piecemeal on the enemy, tearing gaps in its forces and thus gradually bringing about a change in the balance of forces and leading to the establishment of stable 'liberated areas'.

In both strategies, an indispensable condition for the protection and extension of the liberated zones is the existence of a full-fledged standing army.

The CPI (M-L) chose the second strategy. It envisaged the eruption of armed peasant rebellions in every corner of India, irrespective of whether the terrain was militarily favourable or not, moving from one village to another, growing into an avalanche, and finally pressing on to the cities — the centres of administration. But in spite of the sincerity, unflinching courage and devotion of the CPI (M-L) cadres, the party failed in several directions.

First, the essential condition for the success of the second strategy is the rapid expansion of the rural bases and the fighting forces of the revolutionaries. The CPI (M-L) however failed to advance beyond the initial stages of the warfare — "annihilation" of class enemies, collection of firearms, formation of guerrilla squads, and mobilization of the masses of peasantry on economic issues under revolutionary committees. These too were carried out in a few pockets of power. As for the higher stages that were chalked out in the party's plan — transformation and expansion of the guerrilla units into a standing People's Liberation Army, spreading of warfare in wider areas, mobilization of the urban workers to help and lead the fighting peasantry, arming the villagers and forming them into a people's militia, setting up revolutionary committees to administer the base areas, effective assaults upon the enemy forces to damage its striking power — none of these could be reached.

Secondly, during the attempt to achieve even the objectives they had set themselves for the initial stages, certain major lapses brought about disunity among the ranks of the CPI (M-L), their isolation from the masses and finally, decimation of a large number of cadres. The behaviour pattern of the CPI (M-L) leadership, particularly of Charu Mazumdar, which was shaped by the socio-economic environs, had much to do with these lapses.

Thirdly, the military requirements of the movement were neglected by the leadership. As a result, the military part of the strategy, namely the aim of changing the balance of forces between the army of the revolutionaries and that of their enemies remained unfulfilled.

These three factors prevented the CPI (M-L) from achieving its main objective of a radical transformation of the fundamental socio-political system of India.

Failure to Reach the Higher Level of Armed Struggle

The revolutionary cadres of Srikakulam, Birbhum and other areas of struggle admitted in their various reports their inability to raise the armed struggle to a higher level. We have already seen how Charu Mazumdar himself repeatedly stressed the need, during the last phase of the movements for forming a PLA,

establishing revolutionary committees and attacking mobile enemy forces.

It appears that in almost all places, the CPI (M-L) cadres failed to mobilize and organize a substantial number of poor and landless peasants, as a result of which the number of guerrilla squads, although sometimes formed from among the rural poor, remained static, and activities could not move beyond the stage of annihilation of individual landlords or usurers within the villages. The PLA remained a dream, and massive attacks on the police and military troops could not be launched.

This is pinpointed in all the reports from the areas of struggle. Referring to Srikakulam, the Andhra State Committee of the party wrote in March 1971: "Our cadres are predominantly petty bourgeois. Even today the villages of poor and landless peasants are not the centres of our activity. Leadership is not from the basic classes. . . . This is our fundamental weakness."[1]

Even in Birbhum, where the revolutionaries succeeded in attaining their objectives to a larger extent than elsewhere, the struggle suffered from the same short-coming. The West Bengal-Bihar Border Region Committee, writing in September 1971 said: "As we ignored . . . political and ideological work in respect of peasant guerrillas, as we did not entrust them with greater responsibilities in organizing the people, as we did not help them sum up their concrete experiences, we could not develop a greater number of organizers and political commissars from among poor and landless peasant cadres and guerrillas. . . . We were not able to establish completely the leadership of the poor and landless peasants over the campaign for seizure of guns. . . ."[2]

According to the party reports, annihilation of a landlord or a hated moneylender by a handful of politically initiated guerrillas in a particular village, invariably led to the flight of other landlords and won the appreciation of the masses of poor and landless villagers. But what was necessary as the next step — mobilization and organization of the peasantry for harvesting and seizure of crops — was seldom taken up throughout 1970 (the year which saw the largest number of 'annihilations'). The masses of the peasantry remained passive spectators. As Ashim Chatterjee was to report in July 1971: "In spite of annihilating 120 class enemies, in spite of our ceaseless efforts, in our guerrilla band the number of landless and poor peasants has not increased. Initially, the large peasant masses who came forward have been reduced to passive sympathizers."[3]

But if there is to be an honest evaluation, one cannot blame the cadres only. The CPI (M-L) leadership's share of the error cannot be ignored. As we have seen earlier, all through 1970 and the first half of 1971, the leadership emphasized "annihilation of class enemies" as the only goal of the party, the only means that could "solve all our problems". When speaking at the Party Congress in May 1970, Charu Mazumdar seemed to overlook the need for mass movements as follow-up actions to "annihilation of class enemies" — though he himself had urged his comrades to do this at the beginning of the year.[29] In the circumstances the cadres concentrated on "annihilation" without any attempt to move on to the next stage — mobilization of the peasantry through economic movements. They were further encouraged in this tendency by the mode of publicity given to their actions in the party journals, particularly in *Deshabrati*. A

single act of "annihilation" in any spot was good enough for *Deshabrati* to include the spot in the list of areas where the "flames of armed struggle" had spread.

It was only after police reprisals in Debra, Gopiballavpur and Birbhum had demonstrated the inadequacy of the mobilization and organization of the broad masses of peasantry, and the insufficiency of the armed strength of the revolutionaries, that the party leadership began to think seriously about the need for economic movements to draw in the majority of the peasants. Pondering over these reverses, Charu Mazumdar concluded that there was a close connection between the rallying of the entire peasantry around economic slogans and the possibility of arming them and transforming them into fighters to expand the armed base of the revolutionaries. We have seen how from the end of 1971 till his arrest in July 1972, Charu Mazumdar repeatedly stressed the need for organizing mass struggles on economic demands as complementary to guerrilla warfare — an idea which flickered in his earlier writings in 1968-69, receded into the background in 1970, and reappeared at the end of 1971.

But by then it was too late. The peasantry could not be mobilized and turned into armed fighters overnight to resist the massive onslaught launched by the government.

It appears that although the party leadership was aware of the need to raise the movement to the "higher stages" — formation of a PLA and organization of attacks on the military — it often tended to hope for a spontaneous development from the initial to the higher stages. Right through 1970 and the beginning of 1971 the party played no conscious role in initiating mass movements to draw in the broader sections of the peasantry as a means to transform small guerrilla units into a standing army and the passive sympathizers into armed militia. Referring to the Naxalbari uprising and its possible impact on the peasantry in the rest of India, the CPI (M-L) leaders and cadres were fond of quoting the Maoist aphorism that a single spark could set the prairie ablaze (Mao's article under that title, 5 January 1930). But they forgot that the people were not dry tinder to blaze up into revolt as soon as a single spark fell on them, but a motley mass struggling between different pulls, who needed to be moulded into a uniform homogeneous body capable of moving in a single direction. Charu Mazumdar's announcement that the PLA was born after peasant guerrillas had attacked the Magurjan police camp and seized rifles was not based on any organized attempt to build the PLA, but on the assumption that a spontaneous development would follow. It encouraged the belief that the small guerrilla units were good enough to earn the title of PLA. Such a propaganda build-up could never solve the basic problem of developing a full-fledged standing army to counter the offensive of the enemy.

A similar reliance on spontaneity was manifest in the party's attitude towards the urban working class. In India, where the proletariat is far more numerous that it was in China in the 1920s and 1930s, it has a tremendous role to play to complement the rural armed struggle. But although the party acknowledged that the working class would lead the struggle of the peasantry, all through 1968 and 1969 there was hardly any concrete plan of action laid down by the party for

the working class. Only in March 1970 did Charu Mazumdar come out with two articles — 'To the Working Class' and 'Our Party's Tasks Among Workers'. Explaining the delay in proposing a policy for the workers, Charu Mazumdar said that working-class struggles in the cities could easily "degenerate into militant economic struggle" if they were started without a firm grasp of the politics of the party. "Now that the party comrades have gained some experience through political work and our political propaganda rests on fairly strong basis, this line is being laid down."[33]

What was the line? In the abovementioned two articles, Charu Mazumdar stressed the need for building secret party units among the workers to propagate the politics of armed agrarian struggle and rouse workers to go to the villages and lead the struggle there. The final sphere of the worker's struggle was to be the countryside. In the cities his revolutionary tasks were to be only of a preparatory nature, rather than complementary to the rural struggle.

Even as late as April 1972, apart from the party's directive to the workers to go to the villages, there was no clear-cut plan to coordinate the prevailing struggles of the working class in the cities with the rural struggles. In his May Day call that year, Charu Mazumdar reminded the workers of the peasants' armed struggle, and asked them to "support, join and lead it".[71] Yet, as we have seen at least on two occasions in 1970-71, working class strikes staged outside the pale of CPI (M-L) organizational influence, paralysed communications and posed a serious threat to the state.

Incidentally, in June 1971, one Marxist-Leninist organization — the Maoist Communist Centre — made a significant proposal of major relevance to the working class. "Apart from sending the best organizers and tested guerrilla teams to the countryside in order to develop, consolidate and accelerate the agrarian revolution in the countryside, apart from sending money, arms, medicine, provision and various other help, the urban working class as also the Party has another major task. In order to harass a large chunk of the enemy forces in the cities, in order that the enemy may not employ their entire — or almost the entire — force against the revolutionary struggle in the countryside, and in order to hinder enemy military activities, the urban working class as also the party has to organize and mobilize against the enemy various methods beginning with the struggle for resistance."[4]

In their refusal to pay heed to such suggestions, the CPI (M-L) leaders betrayed their distrust in the ability of the Indian working class to disrupt or divert such sectors as communications and transport, in favour of the revolutionaries, and to supply them with arms and ammunitions from munition factories.

It should be remembered in this connection that in India the railways, which are the chief means of organized transportation, run over a network of a little over 60,000 kilometres, while roads, which are the next most frequent channel of transport, cover 1.6 million kilometres of which about one-third is surfaced.[5] All these should indicate the important role of the workers who man these vital sectors of the Indian economy. In China and Vietnam, urban acts of sabotage like snapping of railway lines and telegraph wires, immobilization of airports, and

blowing-up of roads helped rural struggles by preventing the rapid transportation of troops to the red bases, and by cutting off supplies to the enemies. But in India there was no recognition of the possibility of such working-class actions in the CPI (M-L)'s urban strategy. Their coordination with the rural struggles could perhaps have raised the movement to the desired 'higher stage'.

Disunity, Isolation and Decimation

Even before the movement could reach the 'higher stage', the CPI (M-L) became riddled with mutually fighting factions and its ranks found themselves gradually isolated from the people. A part of the responsibility for this can be laid on Charu Mazumdar's manner of leading the movement. In fact, an honest evaluation of Charu Mazumdar's role is necessary for an understanding of the failures of the Communist revolutionaries of India during 1967 and 1972.

In the future, in the light of his courageous struggle and death, this or that negative aspect of his actions might fade into nothingness. But his critics feel that it is essential today to fight against everything that was negative in him. As a self-critical review by the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) put it, "When assessing Charu Mazumdar's work, one should not be a victim of the Hindu superstitition that whoever is dead is good!"[6]

As is evident from the history of the movement, Charu Mazumdar changed his views and shifted emphasis from one tactic to another in the course of the long struggle. The importance which he attached in his writings and speeches during 1965 to 1968 and, in 1972, to mass movements and mass fronts, to legal struggles and the need to combine them with armed and conspiratorial activities in the final bid to capture power, stands out in sharp contrast to his distrust of these modes of struggle in 1969-71. His sweeping generalizations about annihilation [36], about mass fronts [28], about the liberation of India [43], — more than anything else, misled the cadres into following a path that finally drew them away from an extensive mass base into narrow and isolated zones of influence. It was this attitude of Charu Mazumdar's during 1969-71 that prevented the much needed coordination and cooperation between different groups of Communist revolutionaries all over India. It was this attitude again which encouraged among his devotees the idea of imposing his 'authority' on all inside the party with the help of guns, leading to the murder of Kamal Sanyal and Agni Ray in Calcutta. However much he might have tried later, in 1972, to correct his mistakes, the harm done by then was irretrievable.

From his writings and utterances in 1969-71, it appears that Charu Mazumdar was suffering from a delusion — a delusion of power. Intolerance of friendly criticism, refusal to pay heed to advice, bureaucratic behaviour in inner-party struggle, and indulging in an orgy of recrimination against all revolutionaries outside the sanctified circle of his own followers — all these bred among the young rank and file an insecure pugnacity.

What could have been the reasons for such a behaviour? One can hazard a few guesses. First, Charu Mazumdar's political thinking was cramped to a large

extent by his limited experience as a participant in the Tebhaga movement in North Bengal in the 1940s. An all-India perspective was lacking. An insular approach to militancy in his familiar surroundings led him to assume that every corner of India was 'inflammable', to belittle the uneven nature of political awareness among the Indian people and to ignore the important role of the working class.

Secondly, from 1970 onwards, increasing ill-health forced him more and more to restrict his mobility, as a result of which he often remained completely cut off from the areas of struggle. Even though reports of reverses reached him from Srikakulam, Gopiballavpur and other places, his ego, fed by his devotees who wanted to foist his 'authority' on the party, refused to admit the failure of his tactics.

Thirdly, the delusion about his own infallibility was fed to a great extent by the Communist Party of China, which till the middle of 1970 continued to elevate Charu Mazumdar as the sole CPI (M-L) leader, and through Radio Peking and *Peking Review* sought to give the impression that armed struggles under his leadership had broken out all over India. Sanction for Charu Mazumdar's tactics from such a powerful source as the Chinese Communist Party, helped him to muffle criticisms within the CPI (M-L). Those who secretely nursed doubts were forced to remain silent. Those who dared to disagree openly were hounded out. Thus, all possibilities of collective decision-making in the light of criticisms and exchange of experiences were suppressed. Even when he realized his mistakes towards the end of 1971 and the beginning of 1972, Charu Mazumdar did not make an honest self-criticism. His last writing begins with the words: "We have suffered a setback after the armed struggle in our country reached a stage."[73] He did not point out the mistakes that lay behind the setback, although he asserted in this article the need for mass movements, a united front with other groups, and largeness of mind — exactly the same needs which his critics in the party had been stressing all along. Had he conceded these points in 1969, the movement could have been sustained to some extent, and the party could have been spared the numerous splits that followed Charu Mazumdar's adamant position on these questions. Although he used to swear by Lenin's name, he forgot Lenin's warning: "He is not wise who makes no mistakes. There are no such men nor can there be. He is wise who makes not very serious mistakes, and who knows how to correct them easily and quickly."[7]

It is said that prophets often find disciples they did not seek. Charu Mazumdar may have matured into a more effective leader had he been able to resist the blind devotion of his disciples. It was this band of devotees — Kanu Sanyal, Sourin Bose, Khokon Mazumdar, Ashim Chatterjee, Saroj Dutta — who elevated him to the sacrosanct position of the 'revolutionary authority'. At the 1970 Party Congress, Charu Mazumdar did not oppose the idea of metamorphosing him into an image of infallibility but, in the face of opposition from other delegates, suggested that his disciples should carry on the struggle to establish the 'revolutionary authority'. This acted as a sort of green light for his followers, who in their attempt to impose the authority exceeded all bounds, and could not be restrained even by the 'authority' himself.

What is significant is that barring Saroj Dutta, who was killed by the police in 1971, one by one, all the devotees who were responsible for turning Charu Mazumdar into a demi-god later deserted him and denounced him in the vilest terms. Ashim Chatterjee came out with his dissenting note in July 1971, opposing Charu Mazumdar's tactics of annihilation. Sourin Bose and Kanu Sanyal, in an open letter published in the Delhi journal *Mainstream* of 21 October 1972, accused Charu Mazumdar of suppressing the suggestions of the Communist Party of China among other things. Later, in 1974, Kanu Sanyal was more forthright in voicing his differences with Charu Mazumdar which, he claimed, began during the days of the Naxalbari uprising. But like Charu Mazumdar, none of these leaders who later so vehemently criticized Charu Mazumdar, was honest enough to admit his own fault. They refused to acknowledge their own responsibility in transforming Charu Mazumdar into a demi-god. While at the 1970 Party Congress there was a sort of competition among them in eulogizing Charu Mazumdar, subsequently there was a similar scramble among them for dissociating themselves from their erstwhile hero. Had they realized their mistakes earlier and cooperated with the first group of dissenters like Asit Sen and Sushital Ray Chowdhury, the cult of personality that was growing round Charu Mazumdar would have been curbed and it would have also compelled Charu Mazumdar to have second thoughts about his insistence and over-emphasis on the tactics of annihilation.

The entire history of the two-line struggle in the CPI (M-L) suggests that the petty bourgeois background of the leaders exerted a baneful influence on the course of the movement. Although they correctly hit out at the Indian bourgeoisie's slavish loyalty to their Western mentors in the past, they themselves fell victim to a similar tendency when they began the fanatical worshipping of Mao Tsetung. As noted earlier, Charu Mazumdar's slogan — "China's Chairman is Our Chairman" — which fired the imagination of a generation of young petty bourgeois revolutionaries, embarrassed even the Chinese who had to come out against such blatant expressions of hero worship. The excessive identification with China also robbed them of a nationalistic image and was responsible to a large extent for their isolation from the common people. True to petty bourgeois habits again, both Charu Mazumdar and his followers made an over-optimistic evaluation of the possibility of advancing rapidly and an underestimation of the enemy strength. This attitude was reflected in the party journals where wishful thinking often replaced objective reporting in articles exaggerating the achievements in high-falutin style, often reminiscent of religious rhetoric.

Although Charu Mazumdar and his followers were in the habit of always quoting the 'Red Book' and Mao Tsetung's Thought, they perhaps forgot the warning that Mao gave his party comrades in China in 1942 against the "three ill-winds" of "subjectivism, sectarianism and stereotyped Party writing".[8]

But the most tragic result of such subjectivism was the heavy casualties suffered by the CPI (M-L), particularly in Calcutta, during 1970-71. Ashim Chatterjee asked in July 1971: "Why shouldn't we have the courage to seriously consider whether it was necessary to sacrifice all the lives of heroes in Calcutta?"[9]

We have noticed earlier how Charu Mazumdar viewed the matter. Every bullet, every corpse, he felt, would bring more adherents to the cause, more defiance of the government and its police force. "It is this blood of the martyrs," he told the Party Congress in May 1970, "that creates enthusiasm, turns the fighters into new men, fills their hearts with class hatred. . . ."[36] As the enemy mounted its offensive inflicting more and more casualties on the ranks of the CPI (M-L), Charu Mazumdar repeatedly urged his followers to take revenge. He gave a call for a "tit for tat" struggle; "Murder can be avenged by murder only."[51] In response, bands of daring young men pounced upon policemen, killed them, snatched away their rifles, and in the process many lost their lives.

But in trying to match punch for punch with the enemy's superior force, Charu Mazumdar's followers often overlooked the cost in human lives it entailed, a cost which the party could not afford at that stage. The isolated acts of annihilation of policemen, however heroic they might have been, were dwarfed by the massive reprisals carried out by the police. Any fruitful rejoinder to such massive onslaught is usually possible only through a counter-offensive by a standing people's army.

To prevent the revolution from squandering its reserves piecemeal, Lenin said during the time when he was laying the foundations of the Bolshevik Party: "We are convinced that to sacrifice one revolutionary, even in exchange for ten scoundrels, means only disorganizing our own ranks, which are thin as it is, so thin that they cannot keep up with all that is 'demanded' of them by the workers."[10] Even at the height of the Chinese Red Army's victorious march, Mao Tsetung warned his followers: "Strive to avoid battles of attrition in which we lose more than we gain or only break even."[11] While extolling martyrdom, and acknowledging that "wherever there is struggle there is sacrifice, and death is a common occurrence", he cautioned at the same time: "Nevertheless, we should do our best to avoid unnecessary sacrifice."[12] In 1971, in India, one would have thought that it was necessary to conserve the strength of an infant revolutionary party. One of the basic principles of revolutionary warfare is to give the enemy the last battle not on a day chosen by them, but when it suits the armed and organized revolutionaries. This principle was ignored by the CPI (M-L) leadership.

At the initial stage of the rifle-snatching campaign in 1970, the party leadership might have also underestimated the repressive power of the government. In a letter in December that year Charu Mazumdar wrote: "If a squad of plainclothed policemen can be annihilated by a squad of two or three workers, the former's morale will be crushed. The moment we can seize a few pistols from the police, they will get panicky and then they will be afraid of carrying out repression."[48] It is true that the police in West Bengal got panicky at the beginning. But they soon adapted themselves to the new conditions of the struggle, and we have seen how, with the help of para-military and military forces, they managed to gain an edge over the revolutionaries.

From Charu Mazumdar's repeated stress on the need for self-sacrifice in his writings and speeches in 1970 and 1971, one has the feeling that he was trying to

shape an elite of self-immolators. The apostles of revolution have to buy universal recognition for their beliefs with the price of their lives. There examples of martyrdom mould a future generation of steeled fighters, more chastened and better prepared for the final war. But all the same, it often encouraged the tendency among the young revolutionaries of India to stick their necks out. By dying they inspired their heirs, but deprived the party of an entire generation of fighters who could have retreated in order after having mustered their forces, to emerge later in the shape of a well-organized People's Liberation Army.

The Military Failure

Among many in the CPI (M-L) leadership there was a tendency to discourage thinking on military lines out of a fear that it might lead to 'militarism' and negligence of the task of politicizing the masses. But the one-sided stress on political propaganda excluding military training led first to the imperfect development of the People's Liberation Army (PLA); secondly, to a naive underestimation of the military strength of the enemy; and finally, to a supercilious indifference to the necessity and possibility of politicizing the Indian troops and winning them over.

The belittling of military experience and training was evident right from the beginning of the movement. When, after the suppression of the rebellion at Naxalbari in 1967, Kanu Sanyal said that "absolute ignorance from the military point of view was a reason for the temporary defeat of our struggle," he was frowned upon by many of his comrades. Charu Mazumdar's pupils who worked in North Bengal said: "Many may say that ignorance about military matters is the reason for this for this failure. We think that this view is not correct and that it is against Mao's Thought, and that in this view military affairs are given prominence over politics."[13]

But Mao Tsetung had consistently laid stress on the military training of the revolutionary cadres. "All officers and fighters of our army must improve their military art. . . ." he reminded them in the 'Manifesto of the Chinese People's Liberation Army' in October 1947.[14] It should be pointed out also that Mao Tsetung's First Division of the First Workers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Army at the Chingkang Mountains in 1927 was not only strengthened by Communists trained in the Whampoa Military Academy, but was also joined by members of the Guards Regiment of the National Government at Wuchang.[15]

But the CPI (M-L) appeared to follow a contradictory policy of neglecting military affairs and at the same time desiring an armed insurrection of the popular masses. Dismissing the critics who laid stress on military efficiency as 'revisionists', the Andhra State Committee of the party said: "In the era when we are leading our revolution, when world reaction is afraid of the people of the world, we need not follow from A to Z all the methods adopted by the Chinese comrades in 1926 in building liberated areas. . . . By waging the battle of annihilation in vast areas in a big way, we can pave the way for the building of the Red Army and liberated areas."[16]

Charu Mazumdar attached more importance to the training of the 'new man' through political initiation, than to training in military matters. The People's Liberation Army, he felt, should be built up only with the politically conscious poor and landless peasants when they were ready to seize firearms — 'an unnecessary precondition' according to Ashim Chatterjee.[60] Also, on the question of developing base areas, Charu Mazumdar stuck to the idealistic precondition of creating a 'politically conscious' peasant mass first, before considering geographically favourable terrain like hills or forests as suitable entrenchments for the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla forces. The sense of pragmatism in utilizing propitious situations, as Lenin and Mao did, in preference to a superstitious adherence to pet theories, was sadly lacking in Charu Mazumdar's thinking.

The State's Repressive Forces

While on the one hand the Indian Marxist-Leninists failed to develop their own army and defences, on the other they neglected to infiltrate into the existing armed forces of the Indian state. There seemed to be an incredibly naive disregard, among the leaders and ranks, for the excellently trained and equipped repressive forces at the disposal of the ruling powers.

As the revolutionaries continued to neglect the military training of their own ranks, hoping for a spontaneous split in the state's repressive machinery, the police force was augmented to quell the revolutionary outburst. Significantly, the armed component of the police increased considerably. Between 1969 and 1974 — the period when CPI (M-L) activities were at their height — while the civil police forces in all the States increased by 17.44% the armed police increased by 27.25%.

The Central Government also maintained a variety of para-military forces such as the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police Force, the Eastern Frontier Rifles, the Central Industrial Security Force, etc. A report of the Public Accounts Committee of the Indian Parliament for 1973-74 gives us some idea of the pace at which the armed component of the police force was expanding. It tells us that the government's expenditure on the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) rose from Rs. 135 million in 1968-69 to Rs. 357 million in 1973-74. While there were 16 battalions of the force up to 1964-65, 16 new battalions were raised and 28 battalions of the Indian Reserve Police were merged with the CRPF during the period between 1965-66 and 1972-73, thus bringing the total to 60. The expenditure on the Border Security Force increased from Rs. 254 million in 1968-69 to Rs 574 million in the budget estimates of 1974-75. Though meant for manning the Indo-Pak borders, the force was used for maintaining 'internal security' in as many as 13 states during 1973-74.[17] The Central Industrial Security Force, founded to guard Central Government plants and installations and used to beat up striking workers, increased from 10,220 in 1971-2 to 15,545 in 1972-73. Commenting on the rising expenditure on the para-military and police forces, the Public Accounts Committee report complained: ". . . the expenditure on police both at the Centre and in the States had reached levels where clearly

they are eroding the resources available for developmental activities."

That the increase in the police and para-military forces was not aimed at preventing and tackling crime but directed against popular protest movements, particularly against CPI (M-L) activists in West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, Andhra and other parts of the country, could be gauged from the admission made by the Public Accounts Committee: "... in spite of heavy expenditure on the police in the Centre as well as in the States, crimes abound. ... What is more, there is involvement of police personnel (including senior officers) in serious crimes." Besides increasing the number of armed policemen, the State also empowered them with a host of tyrannical laws, which were climaxed by the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, signed by President Giri on 7 May 1971, under which people could be detained without trial for an indefinite period.

The State also reinforced its repressive machinery by on certain occasions diverting its defence wing to the aid of the police to suppress popular uprisings.

The Indian Army

The Indian Army is one of the four largest armies of the world, the other three being the American, the Chinese and the Russian. It is the biggest public enterprise of the Indian government, accounting for one-fourth of the government's total annual expenditure and involving a little over 800,000 personnel.

How important a role the Army assumed in quelling popular movements can be gauged from the fact that during the 10 years from 1961 to 1970, the army had to be called out in aid of the civil power on no less than 476 occasions. Additionally, since the early 1950s the Indian Army and Air Force have been engaged in combating insurgency in Nagaland, Manipur and the Mizo hills.[18]

While a hot-headed revolutionary might feel tempted to totally relegate the Indian Army into the camp of the enemy, one should pause to inquire whether the army as it is composed today, cannot be susceptible to a patient political indoctrination.

Let us have a close look at the Indian Army. Its basic arm is the infantry. In attack, the infantry must close with the enemy and destroy him. This involves patrolling enemy-held terrain, surviving enemy air attacks, passing through enemy artillery fire, crossing mine-fields, wire and other obstacles, and other such hazards. Little wonder that the infantry has suffered the heaviest losses during different operations. While during the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the percentage of casualties among the infantry in the Indian Army was 73%, it rose to 82.6% in the Indo-Pak war of 1965; but during the counter-insurgency operations in Naga and Mizo hills, it was 94%.[19] In spite of being the raison d'etre for the Indian Army, in 1971 the infantryman was the lowest paid soldier; his pay scales were lower than some categories of cooks and were equal to those of petty tradesmen like tailors and boot repairers.[20] But the infantryman could not voice his grievances, for the soldier was forbidden to form associations or to go on strike.

Commenting on the situation, an expert cell consisting of representatives of the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force in its report on pay and allowances of personnel of the Armed Forces, said in 1971: "The general socio-political unrest in the country is on the increase. Authority is being challenged in all walks of life, be it the home, the school, the university or the place of work. Agitational approach, owing to the high dividend it has paid so far, is gaining popularity with the younger generation. Fissiparous tendencies are on the increase. Such an environment is not conducive to the functioning of a disciplined organization such as the armed forces. It is obvious that it would be subjected to unhealthy pressures from various directions." The cell then warned: "... disgruntled ex-servicemen could be a source of considerable danger, if their activities somehow got channelled in a wrong direction. This could give a strong fillip to the activities of undesirable elements which would make things more difficult for the Government machinery. Prudence would, therefore, demand the creation of environment and conditions which would keep the armed forces clear of the pernicious influence of the prevalent conditions both during active service and on retirement."[21]

An indication of the growing indiscipline in the Indian Army can be gauged from the fact that during 1965-69 there were 13,267 courts martial for "purely military offence", resulting in 12,789 convictions with sentences varying from reduction to ranks or loss of seniority to imprisonment up to 14 years.[22] While the Army authorities were rightly concerned over the "pernicious influences" and "unhealthy pressures" from outside, and the possibility of a "strong filip to the activities of undesirable elements", the CPI (M-L) leadership was curiously indifferent to any such likelihood. Barring the isolated involvement of one or two army personnel and ex-servicemen in some urban actions, there was no CPI (M-L) activity within the Army. There did not seem to be any awareness in the Party of the growing discontent among the ill-paid jawans, and there was hardly any plan to politicize them and carve out a foothold in the Army which in future could serve as a complement to the inchoate PLA of the CPI (M-L).

Moreover, there were close links between the Army jawans and the rural peasantry whom the CPI (M-L) sought to mobilize for an agrarian revolution. The rural masses of India have, over the ages, provided the bulk of the manpower for the armed forces. The jawans come from various strata of peasant families. Although the authorities in the past sought to pamper them by giving them privileges and thus insulate them from their peasant comrades who toiled in the fields, such barriers were breaking down in 1970-71. As the armed forces experts cell complained in their report of February 1971: "The Services today are no longer an exclusive organization, drawing the officers from the elite of the society and other ranks from certain sections of the population only, as in the past ... Despite their close unit life, the personnel cannot... divorce themselves totally from the conditions prevalent at large in the country." It was inevitable, therefore, that agrarian discontent in the countryside would have its repercussions on the jawans who came from the affected areas.

Besides the jawans, there were also the non-combatants in the Indian Army, who were as ill-paid as the infantry soldiers. Totalling about 4,000, they

constituted 1/22 of the strength of the army. Belonging to the Scheduled Castes, they were recruited for jobs of mess barbers, cooks, washermen and sweepers, and came from the most depressed sectors of the Indian rural society.[23] Even among the officers, a large number came from middle-class families, and could not be immune to the general problems that affected the Indian middle classes. A survey carried out in 1970 of 3,544 cadets at officer training establishments revealed that 52.5% came from families with a low income group of Rs. 500 per month and below.[24] All this indicates that there was fertile ground in the army for political propaganda, which was ignored by the CPI (M-L).

Even the Government's para-military forces were seething with discontent, which erupted into an unprecedented mutiny in Uttar Pradesh in 1973. It all began with a students' agitation in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, in May that year. To aid the police, the State Government brought in the Provincial Armed Constabulary — a para-military force. On 20 May 1973, members of the PAC along with the students held joint demonstrations demanding their withdrawal. There were already signs of unrest among the PAC over inadequate pay and miserable service conditions. On 22 May, the army was called in and troops tried to take over PAC armouries all over the State. They met resistance from the PAC at Kanpur and Ramnagar, near Varansasi, and clashes took place. The mutineers were forced to surrender by the evening, but those at Gorakhpur and Jehangirabad held on till 24 and 25 May respectively. On 27 May, the Uttar Pradesh Government announced that 379 PAC mutineers had been arrested and 600 were still missing.*

But in blaming the CPI (M-L) leadership for not having tapped all the potentially revolutionary sectors of Indian socio-economic life, one should not forget that the party had very little time at its disposal — hardly five years from 1967 to 1972. Even before it could build up a tightly knit organization, ideological differences fissured the small group of revolutionaries, and the enemy pounced upon it with all its well-trained military force. Even during that short period, so torrential was the flow of events that the leaders who lived through the time often found themselves without bearings, forced to come up with ad hoc responses to new situations. Besides, hindsight might dwell on the short-comings of the CPI (M-L) so much that the latter could overshadow the accurate assessment of the Indian situation made by the party. The reality of 1967-72 conformed precisely to the appraisal contained in the party's political resolution of 1969: "Today, the ruling classes are enmeshed in a deeper economic and political crisis than ever before. Contradictions between imperialism and the people, between feudalism and peasants, between capital and labour, and between different sections of the ruling classes are growing sharper and sharper everyday ...

* In June-July that year, members of the North-India Committee of the CPI (M-L) who had by then broken away from the Charu Mazumdar-led CPI (M-L), told this author that about 300 ex-PAC mutineers who were still roaming round with their arms and ammunition, had approached the Party. "But we do not have any base area in this part of India to accommodate them", the party spokesman said. It was learnt some months later that many from among the fugitives had crossed over to the ravines in Madhya Pradesh to join the dacoits

the working class, the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie are victims of growing pauperization and unemployment. At least 95% of our people can no longer endure the poverty and wretchedness that are now their lot and are impatient for a fundamental change. . . ."

That the movement, even without the barest military expertise could sustain itself, proves not only the vulnerability of the prevailing political and economic system, but also the vitality of the sources that fed the movement. Although the CPI (M-L) suffered a setback in 1972, the system that provoked the explosion continues to fester, and the sources that provided the powder flow unabated. The defeat inflicted by the ruling powers on the CPI (M-L) was a military success — temporary at that. The defeat does not negate the political and economic failures of the ruling powers. The sluggish pace of parliamentary reforms, which drove the Communist revolutionaries to opt out of the constitutional framework, still fails to keep up with the growth of economic pressures. As for the poverty and wretchedness of the people, five years after the Naxalbari uprising, Mohan Dharia, the Union Minister of State for Planning, was telling the Indian Parliament in 1972 that the absolute number of people below the poverty line was as large as it was two decades ago.[25] On the other hand, since 1967, big industries have continued to reap profits. According to a Reserve Bank of India study, the retained profits of 200 large companies doubled from Rs. 450 million to Rs. 970 million in the period between 1968-69 and 1970-71.

The Government's Policies — 1967-72

We have seen how the Government of India rallied its entire repressive machinery in response to the CPI (M-L) challenge. It would be worthwhile to consider what changes, if any, the Government attempted in its economic and political policies, to meet the challenge, during 1967-72.

Anti-Communist specialists who have gone into the causes of guerrilla movements and done research in counter-insurgency methods are almost unanimous in stressing the need for combining repression against the political rebels with concessions to the general public. Walt Whitman Rostow, a former intelligence officer, economist, professor and adviser to President Lyndon Johnson of the USA, claimed: "We can learn to prevent the emergence of the famous sea in which Mao Tse-tung taught his men to swim. This requires, of course, not merely a proper military programme of deterrence, but programmes of village development, communication and indoctrination. The best way to fight a guerrilla warfare is to prevent it from happening."[26] Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert who studied anti-guerrilla operations in Malaya, and excerpts from whose book, it may be recalled, were circulated for study among policemen by the Calcutta Police Commissioner in 1970, felt that "there should be a proper balance between the military and the civil effort," as otherwise, he feared "a situation will arise in which military operations produce no lasting results because they are unsupported by civil follow-up actions."[27]

According to these American and British specialists, the ideal combination of

repression and concession was represented by the policies of President Magsaysay, who successfully quelled the Communist-Huk rebellion in the Philippines in the early 1950s. Famous for his policy of "all out-force and all-out-friendship", Magsaysay used 'force' in the shape of ruthless suppression against the Communist rebels and their landless peasant followers, and 'friendship' in the shape of some land reforms and concessions directed towards the middle and rich peasants and the petty bourgeoisie.

The Indian ruling powers were also quick to take lessons from these foreign experts and the experience of their counterparts in other semi-colonial countries, when the agrarian situation in the wake of the Naxalbari uprising threatened their status quo. The contours of the new strategy that was to be followed were taking shape from 1967, and became clear after the split in the ruling party in 1969. The split was caused by a combination of several factors — Indira Gandhi's attempt to erect a pro-poor facade by populist slogans of pinchbeck socialism; some of her measures to govern the development of bureaucrat capital in a more organized way, and her policy of doling out concessions to selected sections of the population which could only be possible, under the circumstances, by a circulation of fresh money, leading to deficit financing. While all these antagonized the conservative old guard represented by people like Morarji Desai, S.K. Patil and Atulya Ghosh, they bolstered up Indira Gandhi's 'socialist' image. In reality, and as later events were to prove, 'socialism' for Indira Gandhi in 1969 was more a label than a commitment in the power-struggle. Since 1967 in electoral politics, the Congress party had been facing a challenge from the parliamentary Leftists who had been clamouring for reforms, like nationalization of important sectors of the economy and changes in the agrarian structure. Indira Gandhi took the wind out of the Leftist sails by adopting their slogans and splitting the party in 1969.

But mere adoption of slogans would not do. The CPI (M-L) movement, operating from outside the pale of constitutional politics, was in fact a reaction against electoral promises made by the Congress and the socialist rhetoric used by the Leftists all these years. In the wake of the uprisings at Naxalbari and Srikakulam, the Research and Policy Division of the Central Home Ministry had warned: "Although the peasant political organizations in most parts of the country are still organizationally weak and their capacity for launching sustained agitations is limited, the tensions in the rural areas, resulting from the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of small landholders, landless and agricultural workers, may increase in the coming months and years."[28] Apparently, something positive and concrete was called for. The same Research and Policy Division had suggested: "It is possible to spur the States to some action if only the seriousness of the problem in a nation-wide perspective is brought home to them convincingly."

But in the States, as also in the Centre, the governments were run by the "relatively few affluent farmers", in other words, the feudal landlords. The Congress party could not underwrite its own disappearance by taking steps against them. As late as May 1973, the Planning Commission's task force on agrarian relations had to admit: "In the context of the socio-economic conditions prevailing

in the rural areas of the country, no tangible progress can be expected in the field of land reforms in the absence of the requisite political will. The sad truth is that this crucial factor has been wanting. . . ."[29] In such a situation, repetition of pious resolutions and legal acts could not assuage any more the feelings of the masses. Some other measures were necessary which might, at least for the time being, carry conviction and promise relief.

In July 1969, Indira Gandhi nationalized 14 major banks of the country. She promised that this would divert some of the funds from the banks to the small and middle peasants, who hitherto had to depend on loans from moneylenders, and pay exorbitant interests. She also hoped by this means to create a new base for her party in the countryside by mobilizing the small and middle peasantry. By nationalizing the banks, Indira Gandhi also reinforced her image among the people as a radical Prime Minister, courageous enough to take action against the big industrialists who owned the banks. The Leftists had been demanding nationalization of banks for years. Indira Gandhi thus stole the Leftists' thunder.

But the euphoria was to melt away after a couple of years. By 1972 it was evident that the amelioration promised after the nationalization of banks had been infinitesimal, touching only a fraction of the small and middle peasants. A bulletin published by the Reserve Bank of India that year, with a sectoral classification of advances by 34 scheduled commercial banks which accounted for 96% of the total bank credit up to April 1972, showed that for the agricultural sector the direct bank finance had been only 8.6% and the indirect finance 4.5% of the total.[30] The major share of the bank credit had gone as it used to go in the past, to the large and medium industries.

In the agrarian sector, Indira Gandhi encouraged some special programmes in certain vulnerable areas. Thus, Naxalbari and Debra were selected among other areas for a Comprehensive Area Development Programme (CADP), under which farmers, both big and small, were to receive inputs and credit from the local Project Authority set up to plan the pattern and intensity of cropping, and coordinate all the developmental activities in the area. Besides, activities ancillary to modern agricultural processes, like operation and servicing of mechanical equipment, and industries based on agricultural products were to be planned for the total area as a unit to generate secondary employment. It is interesting to note that while the big landowners were not allowed to increase their plots within the Project area, they enjoyed the right to buy land in the neighbouring areas and thus emerge into a class of kulaks, widening in the process the gap between the rural rich and poor. Moreover, by virtue of their social power and prestige in the villages, these big landlords would come to dominate the local Project Authority and corner the inputs, like fertilizers and pesticides which were to be financed by funds from the nationalized banks.

Since the tribal belt became an important centre of CPI (M-L) activities during 1967-72, to defuse the situation, the Government selected a few areas in the belt to initiate so-called developmental programmes. Orders were given to the local Government officials to see to it that the debts incurred by the tribal poor were cancelled, and that loans were advanced to them from banks and other

sources for agricultural improvement. But in actual practice, such loans never reached the needy. When I visited Andhra Pradesh in 1974, I found that the official credit agencies, like the Girijan Cooperative corporation branches and other banks, followed the practice of lending money only to those who had *patta* (a document showing the right of ownership to land). Many Gond (a tribal community in Adilabad in northern Andhra Pradesh) small farmers did not own any such *patta*, since to obtain it each was expected to pay the local registration officer Rs. 300 or a buffalo — a price they could not afford. The disappointed Gonds returned to their patron moneylenders, who now pegged up their interest rates from 50% to 200%.

The reforms which began to be initiated from 1969, while doling out concessions, both marginal and ephemeral, to sections of the under-privileged, at the same time made protective provisions for the privileged. Although the big industrialists, at the time of bank nationalization, raised a hue and cry against the measure, they were not at all deprived of their source of funds. The public financial corporations continued to extend loans to them, and even after nationalization the banks remained their main source of loan capital. At the end of 1971 — two years after nationalization — large industrial houses were found to have received Rs. 5,347 million from the nationalized banks — about Rs. 1 million more than what they had on the eve of nationalization.[31] By 1974, even the few moderate measures taken against the privileged were being dropped. Thus, in March 1974, the government scrapped the previously announced policy of taking over the wholesale wheat trade, allowing the landlords to dominate the free market. To placate the wheat-growing landlords who had been demanding higher prices, the Government raised the procurement price from Rs. 71 to Rs. 82 per quintal.

It was the same with the Government's measure against the increasing control by monopolists over industry and trade. The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act was passed in 1969 to prevent the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few industrial giants. But licences for new industries continued to be granted to these giants. The assets of 20 top business houses, headed by the Tatas and Birlas, rose from Rs. 24,306 million in 1969 to Rs. 44,651 million in 1975. Their share in the overall private corporate sector increased from 25.1% to 34.7% during this period.[32]

A show of anti-colonialism, soon followed by an amicable settlement with the West, marked India's economic relations with foreign powers. Immediately after the 1971 war with Pakistan, when the USA took a pro-Pakistan stand and suspended aid to India, there were talks in the first flush of victory of rejecting US aid. But the temptation of a short-cut to growth through foreign aid was too compelling, and the Soviet Union alone could not provide a dependable alternative. On 6 February 1973 at the One Asia Assembly in New Delhi, Indira Gandhi spoke of the sufferings of the Vietnamese people and in an indirect reference to the USA, said that the saturation bombing in Vietnam was incompatible with the declaration of love for democracy.[33] This immediately brought forth a sharp rebuff from the USA. The new ambassador-designate to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, postponed his departure for India.[34] Sensing the

reaction of the aid-giver, Indira Gandhi promptly resiled. At a meeting in Kathmundu, Nepal, on 9 February — just three days after her New Delhi speech — she said that her remarks on Vietnam "were not intended to criticize any country".[35]

The USA was quick to respond to India's obsequiousness. It announced on 15 March 1973, its decision to release $87.6 million development loan to India — which had remained suspended since December 1971 — for priority imports. Explaining the motive behind the decision, D.G. McDonald, the Assistance Administrator of the Agency for International Development (AID) said that the aid involved "goods and services appropriate for US financing". He referred in this connection to India's need for fertilizers, which could be bought from the amount given as aid. It was obvious that for fertilizers, India had to go to the US private firms again and pay their exorbitant price.

During the year 1972-73, external assistance commitments to India from World Bank and other foreign sources stood at Rs. 7,420 million against Rs. 7,220 million in the previous year. The slogans of self-reliance that were raised following the victory in the war against Pakistan soon became devoid of all glitter, like false jewels in a counterfeit crown, and the old obsequious self reappeared in all its cringing form. The USA was happy with the turn of events. Visiting India in October 1974, the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said of Indo-US relations: ". . . our disputes are often in the nature of a family quarrel",[36] echoing the sentiments expressed about two decades ago by another Secretary of State, J.F. Dulles. India had thus come full circle.

In spite of the Government's announced policy of avoiding foreign collaboration in fields in which indigenous knowhow was already available, the number of foreign collaborations showed a steady increase every year — 183 in 1970, 245 in 1971, 257 in 1972 and 265 in 1973. The consumption goods that were to be produced by some of these ventures — ready-made garments, leather watch-straps, wrist watches, sports goods — indicated the weight in favour of the more affluent sections of the consumers. For some of these, the expensive import content could have been avoided since indigenous knowhow for their production was available.

It will be seen that all the economic measures introduced by Indira Gandhi were either aimed at placating some sections of the population, or were concentrated in selected areas only, without any attempt to make the rich disgorge their wealth. In this she had the approval of the US specialists. As one of them suggested about India: "The primary purpose of the centre's assault on low-end poverty should be to shore up disadvantaged groups and classes within their respective areas, not quickly to equalize incomes between areas."[37] The same tendency to create isolated islands of well-being instead of adopting an overall programme of mass uplift marked the official plans for cooperatives in selected blocks in West Bengal or tribal development programmes in Andhra Pradesh.

It may be recalled that similar stratifications between regions and classes had resulted from the 'Green Revolution'. By breeding new grain varieties that gave maximum results on carefully irrigated land only, pockets of affluence could be developed solely in limited areas in the north-western States of India. The

so-called 'revolution' intensified inequalities within the region also, as the wealthier farmers who could adopt the new grains and afford all the complementary inputs, reaped the maximum profit.

It appears that Indira Gandhi's aim was to create a few vested interests in every layer of society and to make them establish some kind of stake in the national political economy. Segments of the lower and middle classes in isolated areas were to enjoy a large stake in the system, while the rest of these classes throughout the country remained outside the pale of the benefit programme. With some members of each social category included and some excluded, there could develop only multiple conflicts between 'ins' and 'ins', and between 'ins' and 'outs', but no radical confrontation between defenders and antagonists of the social system as a whole. Such intra-class conflicts and regional stratifications could be a means of balancing and hence maintaining a society as a going concern. Besides, if there was any plan for a future uprising in the rural areas, these islands of well-being could act as buffer zones, preventing any coordination between the rebels seeking to operate over a widespread area. By hoping to create a few pockets of incombustibility, she strove to prevent the 'flames of Naxalbari' from leaping from one 'highly inflammable corner' of India to another.

The Urban Problems — 1967-72

The classic instance of creating such buffer zones was evident in her handling of the urban youth. Along with repression, there was a judicious combination of economic and political concessions to selected groups among the youth.

While the nationalization of banks in 1969 diverted some funds to a few unemployed young entrepreneurs in Calcutta and other cities, a political step to placate the restless youth came sometime later. In the middle of 1970, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, K.C. Pant surprised the nation when he told Parliament on 21 July that year that the Government was ready to open a dialogue with the young "Naxalites". Three days later, clarifying the point, he referred to the need for a persuasive process to wean away the "non-committed elements" among the followers of the CPI (M-L). The follow-up to this announcement was throwing open the doors of Indira Gandhi's Congress party in West Bengal in 1971 to the 'non-committed Naxalites' with promises of jobs and protection from the police. These 'non-committed' had joined the movement from a variety of causes — despair, impatience, a sense of being neglected, visions of power, discovery of violence which offered them access to hitherto desired areas of achievement.

Once the initial thrill of 'actions' had worn off, only the fear remained — fear of being caught and killed by the police. Constantly on the run to escape the police, these 'non-committed' Naxalites were thus vulnerable to Indira Gandhi's machinations. The Congress's urban strategy was one of buying off this section of the youth and absorbing the more restless among the unemployed

(who could be potential Naxalites) into the prevailing socio-economic structure; a structure sustained by bribery, blackmail, protection money and gang warfare. All that a young man in his most secret imagination could desire — power, official recognition and career — were provided through these means. Some of the young people managed to become paid leaders of the different units of the Congress student and youth organizations. Some found other openings — jobs as armed bodyguards to local Congress leaders, or as touts or even hired murderers. Protected by patrons, gangs of grinning teenagers collected subscriptions at gun point from reluctant shopkeepers or middle-class citizens, ostensibly for some religious festival or cultural soiree, but actually to subsidize their personal expenses. This was a common sight in Calcutta and other towns of West Bengal throughout 1971-74. An entire generation of young people was thus gradually depraved, made susceptible to bribery and other forms of corruption, and stripped of all idealism and prematurely reduced to old cynics pursuing irresponsibly their own selfish ends. They raised the spectre of an ignorant, uninformed group of dropouts, incompetent to deal with society's real evils, and with too many stakes in the corrupt social system to rebel against it.

But they were soon to become a Frankenstein's monster. Tricked by the Congress party to expect too much too soon, they found to their chagrin that the avenues of income were shrinking. While a few made it to the top, the rest faced uncertainty. By 1974, the Congress youth organization in West Bengal had split into several factions, each blaming the other for the failure of their hopes, and the leaders desperately trying to paper over the cracks.

The crisis was not peculiar to West Bengal. Nor was it confined to the youth only. Indira Gandhi's party was cracking up. Her failure to solve the economic problems had led to disenchantment, and dissidents within the party — both the old guard and the younger elements — ganged up against her proteges in various States. By July 1973, they had forced the Congress Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat to resign. The party was riddled with factions fighting against each other in every part of the country. The problem was aggravated by the utter chaos reigning among the youth in different parts of India. The main disgruntled section among them was the ever-increasing segment of unemployed educated youth. Their number went up from 2.2 million in 1972 to 3.2 million in 1973 to 4.1 million in 1974.

In the industrial field also, there was a virtual stagnation (a 0.7% rise) in production in 1973, as compared to a 7.1% rise in 1972. About 60% of industries showed decline in production.[38] Power failure in the industries led to the retrenchment of about 500,000 workers in India during 1972-73, of which 330,000 were in West Bengal alone. Urban consumers also felt the pinch of a 27% rise in the price of rice and 13.3% rise in the price of wheat during 1972-73.[39]

In the midst of these growing economic problems and increasing popular disenchantment, to keep the system going, Indira Gandhi had to spring constant surprises. She executed a *coup d'etat en miniature* every now and then by reshuffling her Cabinet (by October 1974, there had been seven such changes since the 1971 Parliamentary elections), providing political theorists with opportunities to speculate why a Minister had been demoted, or promoted, or dismissed, and

keeping her admirers and opponents guessing whether the new entrants were 'progressive' or 'reactionary'.

Such *coup d'etats* were also manipulated across the country's borders to impress the gullible middle class at home, and public opinion abroad with India's concern for the sufferings of the people of East Bengal or Sikkim. While until 1971 the former was under a military dictatorship, the latter was a feudal monarchy — both backward political forms of government judging by the conventional values of bourgeois democracy. The establishment of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh and the grant of associate status to Sikkim, therefore, could be palmed off upon the unsuspected as mighty advances in the history of democracy, obscuring the continuation of feudal land relations and colonial exploitation in both the countries.

Resort was made to sudden strokes of diplomacy to bolster up India's 'anti-colonial' image by safe gestures like the belated recognition of North Vietnam. On the other hand, the arrival of a full-blown nuclear power was announced in May 1974 by the explosion of a 'nuclear device' at an estimated cost of $1.5 billion — a *tour de force* executed by diverting scarce funds and foreign exchange from essential priorities — at a time when around 46% of India's total population were living below the poverty line, or unable to spend even the minimum amount necessary for the barest nutritionally balanced diet.

'The Countrywide Upsurge'

By 1974, the shape of the Government's policies, as in a strip-tease act, was gradually reassuming its original form, which had got a bit blurred during the previous few years by the ostentatious garb of populist measures in the floodlight of radical slogans.

The hungry people were getting impatient again. Once more they could recognize the familiar curves of a 'semi-feudal' and 'semi-colonial' country, the bloated and sagging torso tottering on rickety limbs of an economy dominated by 'big landlords' and 'comprador-bureaucrat capitalists' — all the ugly features against which the Communist revolutionaries began a war in 1967.

One of the first ominous signs of disenchantment with the post-1969 image of the ruling powers, was the PAC mutiny in Uttar Pradesh in May 1973 — the first of its kind since the 1947 transfer of power. All through 1973 and 1974, in different parts of India, food riots, strikes by students and railwaymen, looting of foodgrains by irate and hungry masses, clashes with police and similar spontaneous protests by the common people seemed to confirm Charu Mazumdar's prediction of a 'countrywide upsurge'. The railwaymen's strike, which began on 8 May 1974 and lasted for 21 days was an important event in the history of the Indian trade union movement. It was staged on demands for a higher bonus and parity with employees belonging to public sector enterprises. For the first seven days, the strike was a total success, dislocating traffic and communications throughout the country. The Government unleashed repression on the strikers and sought the help of the Territorial Army to run the trains. About 25,000

activists from among the railwaymen were detained without trial, and several thousands were dismissed from their jobs. Living quarters of the strikers in important cities were raided by the police, who drove out the families of the agitators. In the face of repression, and in anticipation of concessions, a section of the leadership vacillated. The CPI-led All-India Trade Union Congress called upon the workers to decide, on a zonal basis, whether they should continue the strike. With most of the leaders in jail, absence of solidarity actions in other spheres of the socio-economic life, and an non-conciliatory attitude on the part of the Government, continuation of the strike appeared to be futile. On 28 May, it was called off unconditionally, after signs of collapse had been evident in several zones.

Although it ended in failure, the strike, which was the first of its kind in post-1947 India, demonstrated not only the fighting mood of the workers even in the face of the most brutal repression, but also their ability to disrupt the system. According to the Government, the country's economy suffered a loss of Rs. 5,000 million during the strike period. The transport of industrial commodities such as coal, iron and steel and cement and foodstuff — the daily freight being 600,000 tonnes — came to a standstill.

To sum up, the events of the years 1973-74 indicated a growing revolutionary situation. The characteristics of the agitations in some areas, such as the railway-workers' strike in May 1973 conducted by a new generation of leaders from underground, snatching of rifles from policemen in Ahmedabad, mutiny among a section of the police, boycott of elections by 'Dalit Panthers' (an organization of socially and economically exploited lower-caste people of Maharashtra) in early 1974 — suggested that the demonstrations were breaking out from the legal framework within which usually, they had remained confined so long.

It must be noted that the agitations were isolated and occured at different periods, so that the Government did not have to face a concerted and simultaneous challenge. By the time these agitations started, the steam of the revolutionary Communist movement had been stifled. The survivors, divided into various groups, could not provide any leadership to these sporadic outbursts of mass discontent.

Curiously enough, the man who sought to support these agitations with an ideological scaffold and an organizational frame was the Gandhian socialist — Jayaprakash Narayan, who took over the leadership of students in Bihar when they began a campaign against high prices, food shortage and corruption in politics. Jayaprakash, or JP as he was known, tried to set up parallel centres of power known as *janata sarkar* or people's government, which were to distribute essential commodities, adjudicate disputes, fight against corruption in selected localities — Gandhian shades of the CPI (M-L) programme of 'area-wise seizure of power'. JP had, in fact, recognized much earlier the popularity of the CPI (M-L) programme which restated the revolutionary political doctrine that sovereignty lay with the people. Such a programme was bound to have an appeal for poor villagers who, suffocated by bureaucratic control from the top, were desperately eager to run their own affairs. In a vain bid to turn their desires into non-violent channels, JP had, as early as 1969, visited Mushahari in Bihar,

where the Marxist-Leninists were operating at that time, and told the villagers that while he agreed with the ideals of the young revolutionaries, he wanted them to eschew violence. In 1975 also, while touring Bhojpur in Bihar — a CPI (M-L) stronghold — he asked the people to shun violence and work for his brand of revolution — 'total revolution'. He was reported to have said: "If in five years from now, nothing changes I will not ask you to give up Naxalism." Jayaprakash's total revolution did not aim at any confrontation with the landlords in the rural areas or blackmarketeers in the cities. Following Gandhi, he appealed to them to give up corrupt practices! In a similar vein, he appealed to the army not to carry out illegal orders — an appeal which Indira Gandhi was to seize upon as one of the pleas to declare Emergency. Needless to say, JP's hope for a change of soul among landlords and businessmen did not materialize, just as 25 years ago the appeal of another Gandhian — Acharya Vinoba Bhave — to the landlords of Telengana to give away their lands (significantly, the *bhoodan* or land gift movement as it was known, was launched by Bhave with the blessing of the Indian government after the suppression of the armed peasants' movement there, and fostered the illusion that the agrarian problem could be solved in a non-violent way by the landlords voluntarily relinquishing part of their land) evoked little response, barring the gift of some useless fallow land by a few landlords.

But JP's stress on democratic decentralization of power, his repeated appeals to the villagers of Naxalite strongholds, and his attempts to incorporate some of their demands in his programme of 'total revolution', are an indirect acknowledgement of the fact that the CPI (M-L) ideology of breaking out from the prevalent institutional framework and organizing the poor peasants into political bodies rivalling the authority of the established ruling powers, had become a force to reckon with. His failure — both to persuade the oppressive landlords and the rebellious landless of Bihar — is yet another testimony to the irrelevance of Gandhian non-violence to the turbulent Indian countryside.

Jayprakash's only concrete achievement was ironically contrary to what he set out to do when launching his 'total revolution'. Although he sought to shun the existing political parties and build up a 'partyless democracy', he succeeded in bringing together India's hitherto fragmented Opposition parties — mainly the Right-wing Hindu communalist Jana Sangh, the Socialists and disgruntled Congressmen — who, in 1974, found in JP a charismatic image to be used to mobilize the disgruntled masses in their efforts to oust Indira Gandhi.

Indira Gandhi, meanwhile, was facing problems from within her own party. Failure to solve the economic crisis and the resultant mass discontent which in its turn aggravated the crisis was tarnishing her image as the indisputable leader of the party. When on top of all this, a judgement by the Allahabad High Court in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh found her guilty of corrupt electoral practices and made her election to Parliament null and void, thus preventing her from holding any office, a large number of her own party men demanded her resignation. While Indira Gandhi managed to secure from the Supreme Court a stay of the Allahabad court's order, the Opposition parties under JP's leadership planned to hold rallies all over the country to pressurize her to step down.

It was evident that the crisis defied any solution within the prevailing framework of parliamentary democracy. What with the widespread rigging of elections in the past, charges of corruption mounting against numerous Congress governments in the States and the confirmation of such allegations against the Prime Minister herself by the judiciary, the democratic institutions were fast losing their credibility among the people. The ruling powers were finding it more and more difficult to command loyalty by manipulating the democratic institutions. Besides, certain powerful industrial interests felt that the prevailing bourgeois democratic norms — collective bargaining, adjudication over industrial disputes, etc. — too often acted as shackles on increased productivity. Their desire for greater freedom and leverage in this respect coincided with Indira Gandhi's growing intolerance of dissent both within and outside her party. The obligation for accountability for every action — particularly when such action departed from her public postures of 'democracy' and 'socialism' — stood in the way of taking drastic and pragmatic measures in the interests of herself and her class. It was absolutely necessary to concentrate all power in her hands and build up a coterie of loyal henchmen on which she could rely. It was time to unsheathe the fascist sword which had remained concealed till now in the scabbard of democracy.

Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency on 26 June 1975, preceded by a pre-dawn swoop on hundreds of important Opposition and dissident Congressmen, and followed by strict pre-censorship of news, and suspension of certain fundamental rights.

The Emergency and After

With the Opposition leaders in jail and a complete blackout of news, it was now easy for Indira Gandhi to mercilessly suppress any sign of dissent and to steamroll the nation with her 20-point programme — a long list of reforms.

One of the first measures was to curb the birth-rate (39.9 per 1,000) by forcible sterilization in the countryside and urban slum areas. Reports of deaths due to such operations and of brutal police retaliation against those who dared to protest (in the towns of Muzaffarnagar and Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh in October 1976) were kept out of the press. In adopting this heinous method of population control, Indira Gandhi was influenced by the Western capitalist theory that 'over-population' in the Third World countries was the main cause of poverty.*

* According to the 1971 census, the average density of population in India was 178 persons per square km as against 375 in the Netherlands, 233 in the Federal Republic of Germany and 226 in Great Britain, which challenges the commonly held belief in the West that not enough land and resources to sustain population growth exist in India. An equitable redistribution of the available land, the rich national resources and the products of industrial growth could reduce poverty and hunger. Besides, poverty is often the cause of increased birth rates, rather than the other way round. Social and economic relations in the semi-feudal countryside create compulsions for a larger (continued on page 290)

To lure the masses and impress the international powers — particularly the Soviet Union, which backed Indira Gandhi to the hilt in her Emergency measures — the rhetoric of socialism was maintained. Promises were repeated to implement land reforms, to free bonded labourers, fix minimum wages for agricultural workers, etc. Meant apparently to defuse rural anger by satisfying some of their needs, the actual implementation of these measures remained confined to a fraction of the total rural poor. While in some parts of south India, attempts at implementation might have roused the expectations of the depressed classes, in the rest of the country the poor and landless continued to live as before. Eight months after the declaration of Emergency, a report of the Union Ministry of Agriculture was complaining that there was 'lack of political will' on the part of the State Governments in the implementation of land reforms[40] — repeating the same cliche that the Planning Commission's task force on agrarian relations used in May 1973. In November 1978 — four years after the so-called liberation of bonded labourers — a national survey revealed that 2.1 million people in eight Indian States, comprising 6% of the 37 million agricultural labourers in these States had been held for years in bondage by their landlord employers.[41]

The industrial scene was no better. In February 1976, the Union Labour Minister, K.V. Raghunath Reddy, said in Calcutta that "while the number of man-days lost had come down substantially during the period of the Emergency, showing the workers' response to the Government's call to increase production, the number of closures and retrenchments and lay-off of workers had increased during the same period. . . ." The report containing his statement, added: "During 1974 about 40.2 million man-days were lost. But in 1975 only 17 million man-days were lost. The figure included 1.6 million man-days lost after the Emergency. About 300,000 workers were laid off, several thousands retrenched, and some industrial units were closed during the last six months."[42]

It was thus quite obvious in whose favour Indira Gandhi was wielding the Emergency powers. The basic pattern of the government's policies remained the same. Leaving the landlords in the countryside to rule the roost, and the industrialists to reap profits, had been the basis of Congress policies. Expressions of popular resentment against this were mollified by populist rhetoric, and when they became explosive were suppressed with violence. The Emergency only institutionalized these trends. The basic pattern was brought under the direction of a powerful central authority fast assuming a Hitlerian appearance. After Hitler's style, personal oath to Indira Gandhi soon became the only yardstick

(continued from page 289) family: a poor farmer who cannot afford to hire labour for farm work tends to consider an extra child an asset in his agricultural work; the rate of infant mortality — 122 per 1,000 live births, as against 16 in the UK and the USA — encourages the poor to give birth to more children in the hope of maturing at least two or three sons to adulthood; social backwardness of, and unemployment among rural women relegate them to the position of mere housekeepers and child raisers. Removal of these basic socio-economic causes and an improvement in the standard of living of the rural poor, instead of orders from above, can induce them to have smaller families.

for judging loyalty of all Congressmen. "India is Indira, Indira is India" — was the slogan coined by the President of her party, Dev Kanta Barua.

But it was this attempt to build up a highly personalized administrative structure that proved to be the heel of Achilles. Indira Gandhi's tendency to create a coterie of trusted minions and groom her youngest son Sanjay as the real ruling authority, at one stage threatened the vested interests who had earlier welcomed the Emergency. They felt that a personality-centred coterie rule might in the long run ignore class interests and serve only individual pursuits. The industrialist class was already split into groups of fierce competitors, each trying desperately to forge alliance with the dictatorial clique in Delhi to make money, wield power — and destroy rivals. The old leaders in Indira Gandhi's party also felt threatened by the emergence of the new generation of brash youngsters who had no time for the veterans.

Rumblings within the party and nervousness among a section of industrialists coincided with renewed signs of popular discontent against rising prices of essential commodities and police atrocities. Press censorship and curtailment of democratic rights estranged the vocal urban middle class and intellectuals. Reports of continued imprisonment of well-known Opposition leaders and tortures in prisons also tended to damage Indira Gandhi's image abroad, particularly in the West, where as the leader of the largest 'democracy' in Asia she was laying claim to increased aid. Pressures were mounting on her to legitimize the state of affairs and elect a new parliament which had already finished its five-year term in 1976. Reassured by her intelligence agencies that her party was sure to win, Indira Gandhi agreed to call for general elections in January 1977.

The results of the elections which overthrew Indira Gandhi and her party and brought to power in Delhi a coalition of heterogeneous Rightist, Centrist and social-democratic parties, reflected to a large extent the desires of both the Indian ruling classes and the ruled. The former, disturbed by the unpredictable policies of a personality-centred coterie at the top, and apprehending that popular protest might take the form of conspiratorial violence if the policies were allowed to continue (as had happened in many despotic regimes), favoured restoration of the 'democratic' facade behind which arbitration between conflicting interests could take place. The Janata party, which replaced Indira Gandhi, served this purpose by channeling popular discontent from the streets to the legislature. Soon after its coming to power, industrialists began speculating about a two-party system — the Janata and the Congress — each ruling in turn in future, as happens in the USA and other parts of the West. On the other hand, the Indian people — ranging from the rural poor to the urban middle class — share in common a widespread resentment against the arbitrary high-handedness of the administration. Demolition of slums, forcible sterilization, mass arrests and police firings in north and central India were the immediate issues that provoked them to vote against Indira Gandhi. They did not question the basic class character of the authoritarian regime — a character which can take many shapes and yet continue the fundamental role — or the continuity of the political process which could bring to power new representatives of the same old order.

It was precisely because of this lack of political awareness that, in the larger part of the country, the demands of the majority of the people have been limited to greater buying power or removal of some immediate discomfiture, rather than the aspiration of transforming the political social order, and their hopes pinned on parliamentary elections rather than on an armed revolution. It is this which makes them a manoeuverable mass par excellence for political demagogy, as was evident after only three years of Janata rule, when in the 1980 general elections they voted back Indira Gandhi to head another Congress Government in Delhi. Disgusted with squabbles among Janata leaders and the stalemate in the administration (which again prompted the industrialists and other vested interests to search for a stabler government) and unwilling to choose Indira Gandhi as an alternative, a large number of voters (150 million comprising about 45% of the 361.7 million electorate) abstained from voting.* Among those who voted, only 42.5% chose Indira Gandhi's party. With the Opposition in disarray (except in Kerala and West Bengal where the parliamentary Communists managed to retain the confidence of the voters, due to some measure of relief given to the people by the Leftist Governments there), and in the absence of any viable alternative at the Centre, these voters apparently became vulnerable to Indira Gandhi's promise of a 'Government that works' — her slogan during the 1980 elections.

How has Indira Gandhi's new Government worked? A brief review will show that there has been a mere reshuffling of the same old programmes, populist in rhetoric but protective of the rich in practice. On the food front for instance, in the summer of 1981, wheat production reached a record 36 million tonnes. Yet, the Government failed to provide consumers with adequate wheat through its fair price shops. People were forced to buy wheat from private traders in the open market paying Rs. 25 more per quintal than the previous summer. This was because the Government had earlier hesitated to procure the wheat stocks from the rich farmers, the beneficiaries of the Green Revolution, out of fear of antagonizing them. These farmers hoarded their stock, created an artificial scarcity in the market, and sold it by driblets at higher prices. Instead of forcing the rich farmers to disgorge the wheat stocks, the Government chose the soft option of importing 1.5 million tonnes of wheat from the USA (for the first time since 1976) paying nearly Rs. 2,400 million.

As a result of importing wheat, India's trade deficit will widen. The country is already staggering under an import bill of Rs. 121,061 million (with exports worth Rs. 66,704 million showing a nominal rise of under 2% over the previous year) which is fast eroding India's foreign exchange reserves. Due to the higher prices of imported oil, petroleum products and fertilizers, India's import bill is going up every year.

But foodgrains production has shown a steady increase during the last five years (barring 1979-80), and the Government has been claiming that India is

* The number of people refusing to vote has gone up with every general election — from 95 million in 1967 to 119 million in 1971, to 123 million in 1977, suggesting the growing erosion of popular faith in parliamentary elections.

self-sufficient in food. Yet, during the same period, the number of people living below the poverty line has increased from 46% to nearly 50%. This suggests inaccessibility of the vast masses to foodgrains, which although available in abundance, are allowed by the Government to be sold by rich farmers and traders at an exorbitant profit to a handful of affluent consumers.

How does the Government propose to tackle the problem of these poor people? Instead of concentrating on wide-embracing basic structural changes like land reforms, progressive direct taxation of the rich, measures to restrain conspicuous consumption, and control over monopoly, India's latest, Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) emphasizes special anti-poverty programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) meant for selected target groups of population. This is in keeping with Indira Gandhi's earlier policy of creating a few vested interests from among the rural poor and thus intensifying stratifications in rural society. What has been the experience with similar programmes in the past? Commenting on the achievements of the Small Farmers Development Agencies Programme (SFDA) which was launched in 1971 to raise the income level of small farmers and agricultural labourers, the Sixth Plan has this to say: ". . . while the numbers identified for assistance represented only a segment and not the whole of the target group, the numbers benefited are only about half the number identified. Furthermore, the nature of assistance given to the bulk of them comprised items which did not lead to any specific additional asset creation." Reviewing the progress of the IRDP which was started in 1976-77, the Sixth Plan laments: ". . . it has also tended to operate on the same lines as the SFDA". Given the continuity of the bureaucratic structure of the administration and the control over assistance-giving machinery by powerful landed interests in the countryside, one does not see much hope of any tangible benefits flowing from these anti-poverty programmes.

To support even these half-hearted sectoral concessions like a few social welfare schemes or provision of temporary jobs to some among the underprivileged, the Indian Government is hesitant to mobilize resources from the rich. The Government agrees — although it is not willing to specify the exact amount involved — that a huge sum of money is concealed by the rich few who accumulate it by evading taxation, indulging in smuggling, over-invoicing and under-invoicing of transactions on legal trade and other illicit operations. This has come to be known in Indian economic parlance as 'black money'. The Direct Taxes Inquiry Committee set up by the Indian Government in 1971 revealed that the taxable amount evaded in 1968-69 was Rs. 4,700 million. Today, according to unofficial estimates, it has risen to Rs. 300,000 million, supporting a parallel economy as against the official economy that functions on the basis of the official monetary system. The parallel economy is marked by speculative deals and transactions, investments in assets like real estate, gold, silver and jewellery, and conspicuous consumption.

Since the Government is unwilling to force the rich to part with their wealth, to pool resources it has to fall back upon deficit financing (i.e. Reserve Bank of India credit to Government through treasury bills, rupee notes, coins, etc.).

Budgetary deficit is now a regular feature of the Indian Government's annual estimate of revenue and expenditure. The 1981-82 budget provided for a deficit of Rs. 15,390 million, although the Sixth Five Year Plan document proposed to restrict deficit financing to an average annual level of Rs. 10,000 million. One of the results of deficit financing is an increasing rate of inflation. From less than 8% per annum in the 1960s, it grew to 12% per annum in the 1970s, and 28% in the early 1980s.

The policy of doling out concessions to certain sections of the population can act as temporary palliatives only against sectional discontent, and can never solve the basic problem of growth, covering both growth in the income of those living below the minimum subsistence level, and growth in the output of goods necessary for the minimum subsistence — foodgrains, oilseeds, cloth, fuel, etc. While there has been some growth in the production of foodgrains in the last few years, lack of purchasing power among the majority of the people stands in the way of equitable distribution of the increased output.

The contradictions of trying to build capitalism in a semi-feudal environment are more blatant in the industrial sector. A giant network of steelworks, factories and railways makes India among the ten most industrialized nations of the world. It is among the three countries which have the world's largest pool of technically trained man-power. But all these conceal the crisis in the economy. Since the structure of production in the private sector and sometimes in the public sector too, is suited to the consumption pattern of the upper classes, stress on luxury goods increases at the cost of capital goods. At the same time, the growth of the market is extremely slow. While there has been an increase in the output of textiles, jeeps, scooters and motorcycles, negative growth rates were registered in 1980 in the production of steel ingots, mining and quarrying, cement and saleable steel — products that are the pace-setters of industrialization. Most of these crucial sectors have been working far below capacity — sometimes because of power failure, often due to lack of demand in the domestic market.

To get around the problem of selling the industrial output, the Government has been trying to encourage exports on a big scale. Apart from paying for imports, exports today have become a necessity for many industries in order to maintain their viability. To make export the most attractive and profitable to industrial houses, the Government is offering them incentives like cash assistance, right to import capital goods, components and raw materials for the manufacture of exportable items, and permission to collaborate with foreign multinationals without being subjected to the previously promulgated rules restricting foreign equity shares in collaboration projects. Dependence on the world market for the survival of domestic industries has often led to curious experiments. Thus, when protectionist measures taken by the Western importers of traditional Indian goods, such as textiles, threatened to stem the flow of Indian exports, India switched over to exporting essential food items like sugar, leading to scarcity of the commodity at home. Seafish which used to be the main source of protein for the poor living in the coastal areas, are either unavailable in the local market, or too expensive for their reach, since the bulk of the catch is

being exported. To compete with other rivals, India is also forced to increase the volume of exports by selling them at lower prices.

The stress on exports and foreign collaboration for export-oriented industrial units is also paving the way for further control by multinationals. As it is, at least 23 of the 50 largest multinationals are now operating in India directly through branch, or subsidiary, or indirectly through collaboration with Indian industrialists. Soon after coming to power in February 1980, Pranab Mukherjee, the Commerce Minister in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet invited multinationals to help India boost its exports.[43] Yet, past studies have shown that subsidiaries of multinationals spend more foreign exchange by importing raw materials, capital goods and components than earn foreign exchange by exports. "... all the efforts at exports in the form of concessions, rebates and policy exemptions made to the foreign private capital in India, in the hope of expanding exports, have yielded negative result, a minimum net loss of Rs. 200 million of foreign exchange during one year, 1975-76."[44] Another study covering the period 1974-77 shows that most of the imports and exports of the subsidiaries are a part of intra-firm trade and that transfer pricing techniques (export by a subsidiary of its products from India to its holding and associate companies abroad at a much lower price than the cost of production) adversely affecting the foreign exchange balance of India.[45]

To stem the deterioration in the external payments position, India is resorting to massive borrowings from foreign powers. Gross inflow of external assistance from various sources which was Rs. 13,670 million in 1979-80 went up to Rs. 23,410 million in 1980-81. But much of this aid is to be wiped out by India's having to pay off earlier debts to the foreign aid-givers. Debt service payments have been around Rs. 8,800 million every year in the recent period, siphoning off a large amount of gross aid receipts. Although the Western powers represented in the World Bank and other international bodies remain the main source of aid,* the Soviet Union is also emerging as an important aid-giver. Since the inception of the Soviet aid programme in the early 1950s, disbursements of such aid in India amounted to Rs. 8,645 million by the middle of 1979. But by then repayments of principal alone amounted to Rs. 8,156 million, while interest payments since 1960-61 already exceeded Rs. 1,200 million. Thus, India's repayments to the Soviet Union have overtaken Soviet aid receipts.[46] Although the CPI and other pro-Soviet elements in India point out that Soviet loans are repayable in rupees, and not in dollars or sterling thus helping India to preserve its foreign exchange reserves, a deeper probe reveals that India is often forced to make the best of a bad bargain. Thus, in November 1978 India was pressurized by the Soviet Union to accept a new rupee-rouble exchange rate which fixed the exchange parity at Rs. 10 to one rouble instead of Rs. 8.33 to one rouble used earlier. This increased India's repayment obligations substantially. Secondly, the Soviet Union is using much of the rupee payment received from India to purchase products like Indian fans, electrical appliances, air-conditioners,

* In August 1981, The Indian Government was negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for a loan of Rs. 45,000 million.

engineering goods, etc., which have a large amount of imported spare parts and technology for which India had paid with foreign exchange. In other words, it seems that India is importing materials with hard currency, manufacturing finished products from them, and selling them to the Soviet Union for rupee currency. One wonders in such a situation whether the rupee payment system is really helping India to reduce its foreign exchange commitments.

But more important than financial and industrial aid from the Soviet Union, is the flow of Russian military aid into India, which, beginning from 1962 has today reached immense proportions. Apart from supplying a variety of MIG aircraft, missiles and naval vessels, the Soviet Union is also training personnel of the Indian armed forces. A large part of India's burgeoning defence expenditure (which is increasing by leaps and bounds — from Rs. 10,500 million in 1970-71 to Rs. 22,500 million in 1975-76 to Rs. 35,000 million in 1980-81) is being diverted for arms purchase from the Soviet Union. In May 1980 the Indian Government announced that it had signed a military deal with the Soviet Union to buy about Rs. 8 billion of weapons systems. India will pay the Russians in instalments over 17 years at an annual interest rate of 2.5%. Political observers interpreted the Soviet Union's attractive financial terms as its desire to garner support from India at a time when Moscow was becoming increasingly isolated over its aggressive actions in Afghanistan. Indian Marxist-Leninists referring to India's desire to emerge as a mini-super-power in South Asia commented: "The regional chauvinistic ambitions of the Indian ruling class forces them to strengthen themselves militarily; this in turn leads them to seek military aid and favours from the Soviet Union."[47]

The terms and conditions of Soviet military aid have made India completely dependent on Moscow for even basic materials and spare parts, with the result that if the Russians decide to withdraw assistance many of India's defence manufacturing plants will close down. Such dependence is evident not only in relation to arms and military advice, but also in matters like deployment of Soviet troops. Article IX of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971 provides for the taking of "appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries" if "either party" is "subjected to an attack or a threat thereof". If the Indian Government at any stage finds it difficult to quell a popular upsurge by its own troops, it may be easily interpreted as India's being "subjected to an attack" calling for Soviet assistance. This is not a far-fetched idea. Under a similar provision of the Afghan-Soviet Treaty of 5 December 1978, the Soviet Union sent its troops to Afghanistan when rebellion broke out against the pro-Soviet regime there in December 1979.

It is clear that the Indian ruling classes will have to depend more and more on aid and assistance from abroad, if India has to build up the basis for growth the easier way, rather than the hard way of settling the underlying contradictions of its internal structure. It is likely, therefore, that the future will see continued Soviet-American collaboration and competition, varying from sphere to sphere in India, to the temporary advantage of the Indian ruling classes, which hope to stave off periodic crises and build up ad hoc arrangements in response to economic difficulties with the help of such aid.

Thus, the economic situation in India in the early 1980s still conforms to the assessment made more than a decade ago by the CPI (M-L) in its programme (adopted at the Party Congress in May 1970): "While preserving and perpetuating the semi-feudal set-up, the big comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie and big landlord ruling classes have become pawns in the hands of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism. . . . With their octopus-like grip on India's economy, the US imperialists and Soviet social-imperialists control the political, cultural and military spheres of the life of our country."

In the political sphere also, recent developments are ominously reminiscent of the Emergency days. In the 1980 winter session, the Indian Parliament passed the National Security Act (NSA) providing for preventive detention of citizens without trial for an indefinite period — similar to the notorious Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) under which thousands of people were put behind bars during 1975-76. Shortly afterwards several trade union leaders were arrested under the NSA. In July 1981, the Government armed itself with wide powers to prohibit strikes in railways, posts and telegraphs, telephones, ports, aerodromes and other essential services and to hold summary trial for offences through the promulgation of a Presidential Ordinance called the Essential Service Maintenance Ordinance. This was to preempt possible workers' protest against the increasing prices of essential commodities. When newspapers report cases of police atrocities, like blinding 40 prisoners in a jail in Bhagalpur, Bihar, or raping peasant women, or killing armed insurgents without trial, Ministers drop indirect threats against the Press. The air in India is thick with speculations about impending draconian measures by the Government to suppress popular protests.

After all the fast moving political changes that India had passed through since 1974 — the imposition of the Emergency in 1975, the defeat of the Congress party at the Centre in 1977 after 30 years of uninterrupted monopoly rule, the coming to power of the heterogeneous coalition called the Janata, the collapse of the Janata in 1979 under the pressure of internal fighting, and the return of Indira Gandhi's Congress party through a mid-term poll in early 1980 — India is today back to square one. It seems that the Indian people are condemned to pass through a cyclical ebb and flow of radical drift and conservative consolidation.

The experience of the period between 1974 and 1980 is one of waves of mass agitations allowed to dissipate through lack of leadership. To turn the drops and streamlets of popular upsurge into a gigantic flood, the leadership of a revolutionary party is vital, a party which consciously expresses the ideas that spring unconsciously from tempestuous life.

The Odyssey of the Communist Revolutionaries

What was the position of the party of the revolutionaries — the CPI (M-L) — during this period of political changes? How did the various groups into which the movement had splintered survive the repression of 1972-74, live through the

Emergency, respond to the arrival of the Janata government and to the aftermath?

It must be remembered at the outset that as an armed force, the CPI (M-L) was always insufficiently rooted in the masses, and being a small organization it could not penetrate through the screen of enemy bayonets and false propaganda to project its message to the large majority. Its failure to sustain a liberated zone dissipated the hope of a viable alternative power structure, and its indifference to mass movements deprived it of a nation-wide organized base.

Yet, because of their ability to integrate with the masses in the few small areas where they operated, the CPI (M-L) cadres succeeded in retaining their foothold. In January 1972 a police official referring to the situation in Srikakulam, warned: "It looks as if the revolution is petering out, but it will be a mistake to assume that the Girijan problem will be solved once law and order is restored. There are still second rankers like Paila Vasudev Rao, Vempatapu Bharati, Kurangi Chakrapani, Arika Somulu, Purna Chandra Gomango, Purusottam Palli, Rabi Das, Gananath Patra, trying to reorganize the rebels and continue armed struggle in the region."[48] Although the party had split, many such second rankers who could escape the police dragnet in different parts of the country formed groups with new recruits during 1973-74.

At least in two areas — the forests of Telengana in Andhra Pradesh, and the Bhojpur district of Bihar — Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries have been able to sustain their bases for the last decade or so, in spite of severe police repression. The two different groups active in these areas differ from each other on strategy and tactics. But their experiments open up interesting possibilities for future revolutionaries.

In the Telengana forests, which spread over Karimnagar, Warangal and Khammam on the west of the Godavari river, and East Godavari on the other side of the river, Chandra Pulla Reddy's Revolutionary Communist Committee (RCC) had been active since 1970. In March 1975, the RCC merged with the Satyanarayan Singh-led CPI (M-L), but broke away from it in 1980 and was formed in what today is a separate CPI (M-L). The Girijan tribals, who once owned some fertile lands in the forests, were deprived of these lands by rich farmers who came from outside to settle down here. Today, while some among the Girijans work as poorly paid labourers of these farmers, the majority are employed by forest contractors for cutting down bamboo or timber. The industrial house of the Birlas is the biggest forest contractor in Telengana and is the worst exploiter of the Girijan workers who are invariably paid less than their dues. The Girijans also face harassment from the forest officials who extort money from them whenever the Girijans collect fuel or timber for their personal use from the forest area.

The Marxist-Leninists working in the area formed armed squads and mobilized the Girijans around struggles for immediate demands, like better wages and an end to extortions by forest officials. The struggles have been marked by a combination of legal and armed resistance. Village committees, formed on the lines of trade unions, organized strikes of labourers for better wages. The armed squads put up resistance whenever the landlords or forest contractors

launched offensives against the striking labourers. The armed squads usually avoided direct confrontation with the police. Visiting some Marxist-Leninist strongholds in Khammam district of Telengana in early 1980, the Swedish author Jan Myrdal saw how a strike by bamboo cutters was being led by the Communist revolutionaries: "The armed platoons organize sympathy actions. Transport workers are in solidarity. Road workers have barricaded all the paths in the bamboo forest. No car can enter without the strikers' permission." Admitting that there was no 'liberated area' as such, Myrdal added: "But during one week we moved around with the armed platoon through the forest district where the Emergency has been in operation for the last 10 years and 20,000 policemen have been brought to restore order. We slept in the villages, completely secure; people keep the platoons informed about the movements of police, but don't say a word to the police troops about where the platoons are."[49]

It is obvious that leaders of the struggles in the Telengana forest area do not aim at setting up liberated zones immediately, but at gradually politicizing the peasantry through helping them to assert their rights and defend themselves. According to Chandra Pulla Reddy, who carries a reward of Rs. 100,000 on his head, and is still eluding the police: "Along with these struggles, with the intense propagation of revolutionary politics, the people are continuously being politically roused and their political consciousness is steadily growing. . . ."[50] In this respect, Chandra Pulla Reddy's followers have remained consistent all these years in taking up arms only for the self-protection of the cadres in the course of struggles on economic demands. It is this policy of taking up immediate problems of the peasantry and of avoiding risky confrontation with the police that has probably helped these Marxist-Leninist cadres to survive and maintain their base in the Telengana forests. The forests of course provide the CPI (M-L) armed platoons with ideal hideouts — a geographically favourable terrain — a factor often neglected by Charu Mazumdar's followers.

Through strikes and other forms of trade union activities supported by armed resistance whenever necessary, Chandra Pulla Reddy's followers have been able to achieve some gains for the Girijans. The forest labourers are getting more than they used to do earlier. The forest contractors and officials have been forced to some extent to give up their old ways of harassing and extorting from the Girijans. The CPI (M-L) claims that Girijans have been able to occupy 300,000 acres of forest lands where they have free access to the forest produce.

While these gains have certainly boosted the morale of the downtrodden Girijans, they do not as yet pose a challenge to the State power. The movement is still confined to demands for economic benefits and an end to social oppression. When the CPI (M-L) organizes the peasants to dig canals to create irrigation facilities for the small plots owned by the Girijans, or to start night schools for the education of the peasants, it strengthens links between itself and the peasantry in the forest areas, and at the same time creates embarrassment for the government officials in the locality who are committed to carry out these reforms. Thus, a CPI (M-L) report from the area in 1979-80 referring to the developmental programmes carried out by the party said: "The Congress in power for the last thirty years did not take up these problems . . ." and described the reaction of the local

administration: "... the district collector of Khamman placed a special demand on the provincial government, reporting that the Communists are organizing the people for building tanks, for organizing night schools and for getting medicines and as such he demanded more funds from the government to implement the government schemes."[51]

One wonders how the State will respond if the Communist revolutionaries carry the present movement to the higher stage of seizing power by setting up parallel administrative bodies in the villages, and administering them. Only the future can answer the question raised by Jan Myrdal: "... if the platoons begin to develop into a guerrilla (squad) of larger form it is certain that police troops are going to use all methods against them. Under such conditions, is it possible at all to slowly build up a movement in the forests till the time they are strong enough to secure a base area?"[52]

Followers of Charu Mazumdar who carried out stray guerrilla actions in Telengana in the early 1970s, are still active in the Karimnagar and Adilabad districts of the region. Reorganized as the CPI (M-L) — People's War group — they are headed by Kondapalli Seetharamayya, a veteran from the days of the 1946-51 Telengana armed struggle. Instead of sticking solely to the tactics of annihilation, they have expanded into other forms of movement. From the summer of 1977, student members of the group began to trek to the villages and conducted socio-economic surveys. They were followed by the group's cultural team — Jana Natya Mandali (People's Theatre Group) which mounted plays propagating the CPI (M-L) ideology in the style of popular folk form known as *katha*. Soon after this, the peasants were organized into Girijan Ryotu Coolie Sanghams (Girijan peasant labour associations) and started a movement demanding an end to the system of bonded labour, extortions by landlords, better wages for agricultural labourers and return of land illegally occupied by landlords.

Like the issues they took up the forms of struggle they employed also resemble those adopted by Chandra Pulla Reddy's followers in the neighbouring areas of Warangal and Khammam — strikes by agricultural labourers, social boycott of the landlords by their bonded labourers who refuse to milk their cows, clean their homes or wash their clothes, and occupation of lands. When, quite predictably, the government sends police to protect the landlords, the CPI (M-L) activists build up armed squads. Like Chandra Pulla Reddy's followers again, these squads avoid direct confrontation with the police, but put up resistance when attacked by landlords, and punish notorious feudal oppressors. To suppress the struggle, the police have unleashed a reign of terror, and several villages of the area today are declared as 'disturbed areas' under the Andhra Pradesh Suppression of Disturbances Act of 1948, according to which a policeman can kill anyone in these 'disturbed areas' without the risk of facing any legal prosecution for murder.

When on 20 April 1981, the People's War group attempted to hold a conference of the Girijan peasant labour associations at Indervalli village in Adilabad, the police opened fire on the Gond tribal peasants who came to attend the conference. An inquiry team sent to the spot by a civil liberties

organization — People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi — reported later: "The official figures put the death toll at 13. But discussions with various people, including private conversations with officials, indicate the number to be many more...." Commenting on the origins of the troubles, the team noted: "... it is the policies of the State government and the corruption of the officials that are the prime reasons for the present conflict."

The movement in Bhojpur in Bihar has been marked by a different approach. Initiated by Charu Mazumdar's followers, it has passed through various stages during the last decade. But armed offensive (as opposed to armed self-defence in the Telengana forests) highlighted by annihilation of landlords, attacks on police camps and military troops, and attempts to carve out liberated zones, have remained the main tactics till recently.

Cradled between the river Ganges in the north which also separates Bihar from Uttar Pradesh, and the river Sone in the south-east, Bhojpur — particularly its southern part — is a 'green revolution' area. Adequate irrigation facilities from the Sone river have led to increased foodgrains production and prosperity for the rich farmers who could afford the expensive inputs required for raising better yields. Landless labourers who are employed by the upper-caste landlords either as casual workers or bonded labourers, get extremely low wages and are victims of social oppression, because most of these landless people are from the lower castes. A report from the area describes their plight:

> ... even till this day, low caste labourers are not permitted to sit on charpoys (light bedstead), outside their house in the presence of Rajput or Bhumihar (upper-caste) landlords. Even the wearing of a clean dhoti (an unstitched piece of cloth worn by males to cover the lower part of the body) can provoke animosity or threaten superiority in the eyes of the upper castes. The Harijan (term used to describe the lower castes) or Musahar (name of a lower-caste community) labourer in the eyes of his employee is an 'object': a pair of hands that will tirelessly plough the land, an outsider to the 'Civilized Order', who is condemned to inhabit the sunless, southern fringes of the village. The fact that even his wife and daughters are not his own is brought home to him by the sexual tyranny of landlord mercenaries and debauched scions of landlords.[53]

Apart from this barbarous manifestation of the 'principal contradiction' — the contradiction between feudalism and the masses (re: the CPI-ML programme), a new type of socio-economic tension has arisen between the upper-caste landlords and the younger generation of middle-caste middle peasants. Education, and a few other privileges that have trickled down to these people as a result of the 'green revolution', have propelled them to take up the cause for which their fathers and grandfathers fought earlier — equality of rights. The socio-economic oppression of the landless poor and the assault on the sense of dignity of the aspiring middle class have brought them together in the CPI (M-L) movement in Bhojpur.[54]

In fact, a member of this class — Jagdish Mahto, a teacher by profession from the village of Ekwari in Bhojpur — was the first to provide leadership to the incipient Marxist-Leninist movement in the area. Although stray posters had

appeared earlier in some towns of Bhojpur, no activity worthy of the name took place before February 1971, when a landlord's mercenary was annihilated by guerrillas. This was followed by an attack on a party of home-guards, and snatching away of their rifles in September 1972 in a village in Piro. A series of annihilations of landlords followed. The guerrilla squads that executed these operations consisted of Jagdish Mahto, Rameshwar Ahir (along with Mahto, he was also one of the founders of the CPI (M-L) movement in Bhojpur. Son of a poor peasant, Rameshwar in his early life was driven by upper-caste persecution to join a gang of dacoits, turned to Marxism while serving a sentence of life imprisonment in jail, and joined the movement after his release) and Ramayan Chamar and his nephew Jwahar — both from lower-caste communities. Although Jagdish Mahto was killed in December 1972, the movement had by then spread to other parts of Bhojpur throwing up new leaders — mostly local poor peasants. One such peasant leader was Ganeshi Dusadh, son of a bonded landless peasant of Chauri village. From November 1972 to May 1973, under his leadership, CPI (M-L) guerrillas annihilated notorious landlords and money-lenders of the area, set up a revolutionary committee which confiscated the lands of the dead landlords, organized the peasants to sow the fields, distributed foodgrains seized from traders among the villagers and settled disputes. For six months Chauri remained under the control of the revolutionary committee. On 6 May 1973, a posse of armed policemen entered the village and a battle ensued with the guerrillas and the villagers on the one side, and the police and landlords on the other. The 12-hour long battle ended with the death of Ganeshi Dusadh and four of his comrades, and a number of policemen. Later, a government-appointed commission to inquire into the police firing at Chauri reported: "The local police officers were not well equipped to deal with the growing menace of Naxalite violence and were treating Naxalite criminals and Naxalite crimes in a conventional fashion. . . ."[55]

But although henceforth the police were to equip themselves with superior arms and a better intelligence machinery, the CPI (M-L) guerrillas managed to continue their operations in the villages of Bhojpur. The years 1974-75 were marked by large scale battles between guerrillas and police, sniper attacks on military troops, annihilation of landlords — and of course, landlord and police retaliation in the form of massacres of Harijan villagers in different parts of Bhojpur. One of the most serious encounters took place in the Bahuara village between 29 June and 2 July 1975, between the police and the Central Reserve Police Force and CPI (M-L) guerrillas. The village, which was a stronghold of the party was surrounded by the police on the evening of 28 June; the battle continued for four days. The guerrillas had earlier created a network of tunnels, connecting one hut with another leading to neighbouring villages. This helped them to elude the police for quite a long time. They also succeeded in tearing gaps in the enemy ranks, who, taken aback by the ferocity of the guerrilla resistance, became demoralized and fell out among themselves. "Among the incredible number of paramilitary casualties, 123 were alleged to have been killed due to intra-group conflict."[56]To capture the guerrillas, the police set fire indiscriminately to the huts of the Harijans, which they suspected to be CPI (M-L)

hideouts. While the majority of the guerrillas, including their commander Butan Musahar managed to escape, three fell to the police bullets. Among them was the secretary of the village revolutionary committee, Biswanath Chamar. Butan was, however, captured and killed later in another neighbouring village.

The ideologue behind the Bhojpur movement during this period was Subroto Dutta, known as Jwahar among the peasants, who in 1974 took over as the general secretary of the CPI (M-L) group operating in Bhojpur and the neighbouring areas. An ardent follower of Charu Mazumdar, Jwahar sharpened the party's military line. Instead of concentrating on the tactics of annihilation of landlords by small bands of guerrillas, as was the practice in the past, Jwahar stressed the need for building up a standing force. To do this, he urged his followers to attack mobile enemy forces. "In the course of 'mobile actions' the standing army will be born and the building of the base area will begin . . . 'Mobile actions' will be aimed against mobile enemy forces, that is the mobile military." The idea was to forestall the 'encirclement and suppression' of guerrilla bases by the military, by attacking them when they were on their way to the bases.[57] In this, Jwahar's party was aided by the influx of a large number of ex-army men into the party fold. Bhojpur provides the country's defence forces with considerable number of recruits every year. Mainly from the lower- and middle-castes (which in class terms fall in with the poor and landless peasants and middle peasants respectively), these people found on their return to the villages how the long-oppressed fellow members of their communities were rising in revolt. Out of sympathy, many deserted the army and joined the guerrillas. The contributed to a large extent to the training of the peasant guerrillas who successfully carried out attacks on police camps, military troops and paramilitary forces, and snatched arms and ammunition to build up their arsenal. Commenting on one such action, a senior police official who was in charge of suppressing the movement in Bhojpur, wrote:

> ...on the evening of 21.5.75 on Sahar Canal road... a CRP (Central Reserve Police) vehicle was ambushed, one jawan (a soldier) was killed, two jawans seriously injured and the vehicle's tyre deflated, and on five occasions there was an open cross-fire with contingents of CRP, BMP (Bihar Military Police) and District armed police. The activists (the guerrillas) wore khahi uniform, used police weapons looted from the armed posts previously, and displayed trained skill.[58]

Jwahar also stressed the tactics of 'hit and stay' by which he meant that the guerrillas would attack the police or military, and when repulsed would retreat temporarily, but would converge on the enemy at the same spot from some other direction, after rotating in a sort of spiral.

Under Jwahar's leadership, the Bhojpur party cadres appeared to correct some of the old mistakes. The workers, for instance, were assigned a role: "In the urban areas we cannot set up Red political power immediately through guerrilla warfare. But the working class can surely create Red terror in the urban areas through different struggles by guerrilla tactics . . . it is necessary to form armed

squads of workers. . ."[59] Women among the poor and landless peasants, who besides sharing economic privations with their menfolk, had to face the worst forms of social discrimination and persecution in the feudal environment, were assigned a special place in the CPI (M-L) programme. In 1974, a women's armed squad was formed, and women fought shoulder to shoulder with male guerrillas in various actions in Bhojpur.

Jwahar was killed on 29 November 1975, when police raided his hideout at Babubandh village. The police never got Jwahar's body which was carried away by his peasant comrades who cremated it on the banks of the Sone river. After Jwahar's death, his close comrade-in-arms Vinode Mishra took over the party's leadership, and is still its general secretary. The guerrilla squads and the poor and landless followers of the party faced the severest police repression, known as 'Operation Thunder' during the Emergency years of 1975-76. But there was no let-up in the activities of the squads. Reports of gun-snatching, annihilation of landlords, attacks on police and military continued to pour into the state government headquarters at Patna, the capital of Bihar. The coming of the Janata party to power in 1977 made no difference to the fate of the lower-caste peasants of Bhojpur. The azure of the sky in some areas remained blotted out by the smoke of burning Harijan villages reduced to ash and cinders by vindictive landlords. The atmosphere in some other parts was leaden with the heavy smoke of gunpowder rising from fire exchanged between the guerrillas and the police. By the end of 1979, the Bihar government's writ virtually ceased to run in at least half a dozen 'Naxal-liberated' *anchals* (blocks) of Bhojpur district in South Bihar, according to a newspaper report.[60] By the end of 1980, CPI (M-L) activities were no longer confined to Bhojpur, but had spilled over to adjoining districts of Patna, Gaya, Aurangabad, Vaishali, East Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Begusarai.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the CPI (M-L) strongholds in Bhojpur are 'liberated areas'. Some could be described as fluid bases (like Chauri or Bahuara which, after a few months of control by the revolutionary committees, passed into the hands of the enemy forces), while others change hands every 12 hours — the government in control during the day, and the guerrillas taking over at night. What separates Bhojpur from Naxalbari, Srikakulam or Birbhum is that the movement is sustained for a longer period there. This has been possible primarily because of the integration of the cadres with the villagers at the grassroots leading to the development of leaders from the peasant stock. The fuel that drives the movement is the firm alliance between the poor and landless peasants and the vocal younger generation of middle peasants, who together form the bulk of the population in all the villages. A tradition of strong organized movement among these middle-caste peasant communities (Ahira, Kurmis and Koeris) for social equality and economic benefits — mainly directed against the upper-caste privileged landlords[61] — combined with the new ideology of Marxism-Leninism, helped the educated younger elements of the middle-castes to discover allies among the lower-caste poor peasants, and organize a united armed offensive against the feudal interests. Better military tactics have also helped the guerrillas to maintain the pace of their attacks on

the enemy forces — a "well-oriented movement punctuated with lull, recession and sudden escalation".[62]

Although the Bhojpur Marxist-Leninists are still far from their original goal — seizure of power — they have achieved a few things in the course of their operations. First, the traditionally downtrodden submissive lower-caste peasants and landless people have gained confidence from their exploits and have started on their own to assert their rights. Secondly, the hitherto well-entrenched feudal class in the countryside has been shaken loose from the power structure into which it was born. Thirdly, the struggle has proved that with proper integration with the local people the Marxist-Leninists can sustain areas of influence even in the plains, and that forests and hills need not be their only bases.

But the inability of the Vinod Mishra-led CPI (M-L) to extend its activities beyond Bihar (barring a few isolated actions and appearance of posters in some parts of West Bengal) suggests that the combination of circumstances that has favoured the party in Bhojpur — the caste-class convergence and alliance, the roots of militancy among the middle peasants, the influx of ex-army personnel into the party — may not have a replica elsewhere. Besides, even in Bhojpur the struggle seems to have reached saturation point. An article in the party's mouthpiece, *Liberation*, in May 1981 while claiming that a Red zone and a Red army exist in embryonic forms in Bhojpur, admits: "In spite of our repeated efforts, it has not been possible to move beyond this stage," and adds that "given the present balance of class forces it is not possible to develop the armed struggle to further heights." It then urges the party's ranks to switch over to such other activities as political education, organization of self-defence squads from among the masses, unifying the different groups of revolutionary Communists and work for a United Front of 'democratic and patriotic forces' (including sections of the bourgeoisie) on a national level to fight Soviet social-imperialism.[63]

It seems that in Vinod Mishra's approach the stress is gradually shifting from offensive to defensive actions, from secret and conspiratorial activities to open political work among the masses, from total opposition to all feudal and bourgeois elements to attempts at some sort of temporary adjustments with them.

Rethinking on the strategy and tactics of people's war in India is not confined to the Vinod Mishra-led CPI (M.-L), but dominates inner-party discussions of almost all the different CPI (M-L) groups operating in the country at the moment. They still remain divided on questions like the desirability of legal or illegal work, need for participating in elections or boycotting them, choice of allies from amongst the bourgeoisie and identifying as the main enemies only Soviet social imperialists or both the USA and the USSR.

Attempts at Unity in the Face of State Repression

The repression let loose by the Indian state against the Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries since the beginning of their activities has continued unabated

through the Emergency and the Janata rule till today. In response, the various groups into which the revolutionaries are split have often tried to close their ranks, negotiated among themselves for unity, but have again fallen out mainly due to differences on tactics, and sometimes because of clash of personalities.

A major sphere of united actions of all these groups is the movement for civil liberties, which came into being in the early 1970s in the form of legal aid committees, to defend accused CPI (M-L) and other revolutionary leaders and cadres in the courts. Started by sympathizers of the CPI (M-L), the civil liberties movement gradually attracted people of other political shades also, ranging from liberals to Gandhians, particularly as the Emergency approached when Indira Gandhi extended her offensive to the parliamentary Opposition parties also. When in 1972, two CPI (M-L) peasant leaders — Kista Gowd and Bhumaiyya — were sentenced to death, the civil liberties associations organized mass protests and their lawyers succeeded twice in staying their execution by appeals to the courts. But with the declaration of Emergency in 1975, when the prevalent legal system was superseded by extraordinary laws, the civil liberties association activists and lawyers were put behind bars, and on 1 December that year Kista Gowd and Bhumaiyya were sent to the gallows — the first execution of political prisoners in India since the hanging of Nathuram Godse and Apte (the assassins of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) more than a quarter of a century before.

With the coming of the Janata to power in 1977, there was a brief respite. Civil liberties organizations resurfaced, brought out massive documentary evidence of police brutalities and killings over the previous ten years in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and other parts of the country,[64] and succeeded, after long and persistent campaigns, in getting some of the CPI (M-L) prisoners released, especially in West Bengal, where the newly formed Leftist government responded to some extent to public pressure. But CPI (M-L) leaders and activists continued to rot in the jails of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and other States. In Andhra Pradesh, the trial of CPI (M-L) prisoners in the Parvathipuram Conspiracy case — perhaps the world's biggest conspiracy case — involving 141 accused and 1,024 prosecution witnesses and spreading over almost a decade, ended in July 1979, with the acquittal of all the accused on the ground that the prosecution had failed to prove its charges. But of the accused in the case, 33 were never brought to trial. They were killed by the police long ago! Among those who survived, Nagabhushan Patnaik, whose death sentence had been earlier commuted to life imprisonment, remained in jail, since the Andhra Pradesh State government appealed to the Supreme Court against his acquittal. Suffering from asthma, gastric troubles, difficulties of blood circulation in the brain and a variety of ailments, Patnaik was released in the middle of 1981 when he was almost on his deathbed, and that also following a long and arduous legal battle carried on by civil liberties organizations. Earlier, from inside jail, an ailing Patnaik had issued a statement asking all the CPI (M-L) groups to unite.[65]

All through the police repression, efforts to unify the various CPI (M-L) groups continued in the underground hideouts of Bihar, jails of West Bengal and forests of Telengana. Due primarily to the efforts of Satyanarain Singh, a

merger was brought about in 1975 between his CPI (M-L) and Chandra Pulla Reddy's Revolutionary Communist Committee of Andhra Pradesh, and again in 1977 with the Unity Committee, CPI (M-L), led by Khokon Mazumdar, a veteran of the Naxalbari uprising of 1967. But soon differences arose within this united party and led to the departure of Chandra Pulla Reddy and his followers. Again, from 30 January to 2 February 1981, 13 CPI (M-L) groups met to explore possibilities of unity, and issued an appeal for united actions against Indira Gandhi's Government. But the outstanding differences on tactics, and even on ideological questions, were not thrashed out, as a result of which the meeting could not lead to any concrete programme.[66]

An important question on which differences persist is the issue of open and underground activities. Satyanarain Singh's CPI (M-L) prefers open functioning like participating in elections, electoral alliances with other parliamentary parties, trade union activities (it has set up an open trade union front called the Indian Federation of Trade Unions) to immediate guerrilla actions and underground operations. Observing his party's campaign during the 1977 elections at Gopiballavpur (the scene of CPI (M-L) armed struggle during 1969-70), a team of sociologists from Delhi wrote: "The CPI (M-L) has taken up the position that it would abide by the democratic norms in letter and spirit. Enhancement of wages, tenancy shares, illegal usury, the freedom of expression and association and so on, are all provided for in the legal statutes. To enforce them is to follow the spirit of the law. The party has put the system on test now — will the system permit these changes to be promoted by the Party?" Commenting on the differences in the tactics used by the CPI (M-L) in Gopiballavpur in 1969-70 and 1977, the team said:

> Gopiballavpur saw the resurfacing of the movement formations of 1969-70, albeit in an electoral context .... The same issues had been revamped, only methodological idiom and style had changed. The threat of direct action is ever-present, but through 'gherao' and 'satyagraha' [non-violent forms of struggle marked by mass sit-ins obstructing the movement of the encircled landlord]. The attempt at creating a parallel locus of power are there, but it is difficult to think of it replacing the power of the State. The crucial difference between the Naxalite movements of 1970 and 1977 lies here.[67]

Although the election of the CPI (M-L) candidate, Santosh Rana from Gopiballavpur, to the West Bengal legislature in 1977 indicates the ability of the Marxist-Leninists to retain their foothold among the peasants there, even seven years after the suppression of the armed uprising, Satynarain Singh's form of struggle reflects a retreat to the pre-1967 position when Communists led a movement for economic benefits and democratic reforms within the framework of the Indian Constitution. As is evident from recent history, there has been no basic change in the character of the Indian ruling powers to warrant the hope that they would allow such constitutional, non-violent movements to succeed. There are ample reasons to suspect whether the present tactics of parliamentarism and non-violent struggles for economic reforms (reminiscent of the CPI's retreat to electoral politics after the withdrawal of the armed struggle in

Telengana in the early 1950s) are not a cover for those who no longer contemplate a radical change through armed struggles, but are ashamed to admit it.

It is presumably this apprehension that led Chandra Pulla Reddy and his followers to break with Satyanarain Singh towards the end of 1980. Although they have decided to continue to participate in elections "on the basis of our own strength", their stress is on

> ... selection of strategic areas, concentration of cadres, formulation of fighting and agitational slogans with extensive discussions [with] the people of the area, mobilizing the peasants for struggles on these issues, building the peasant organizations, arming the people with the locally available weapons in the anti-feudal struggles from the very beginning, organizing the village volunteer organizations, people's resistance to landlord-police *goonda* [roughnecks] violence and repression and thus create and develop and defend areas of sustained resistance and thus advance to the establishing of the base area in the countryside.[68]

The Vinod Mishra-led CPI (M-L) has not yet come out openly in favour of participating in elections. But as mentioned earlier, it is gradually switching over to open functioning and mass work. In an interview in the spring of 1980, Mishra said:

> . . . besides mobilizing the peasantry in ever larger numbers in agrarian revolutionary struggles, we would have to develop our work in the cities to mobilize there, besides the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie and other patriotic forces. To this end our Party is paying more attention than ever before to our work in big cities and among the upper strata of the petty bourgeoisie, and is striving to take an active part in all democratic and anti-imperialist struggles and organizations of nationwide character.

In the same interview Mishra reiterated: "... our tactical line still remains that of opposing the landlords and the comprador big bourgeoisie and our rural policy that of agrarian revolution."[69] It seems that Mishra's party is seeking a pause in the armed struggle to gain some breathing space during which it hopes to build mass support for its agrarian revolution and coordinate the latter with working class struggles.

One major stumbling block in the path of unity of the different Marxist-Leninist groups in India in the past was the nature of evaluating the struggles during the 1969-72 period, particularly of Charu Mazumdar's role. While Satyanarain Singh, Chandra Pulla Reddy and the majority of the groups insisted on the denunciation of Mazumdar as a precondition for unity, Mazumdar's followers maintained that acceptance of his 'authority' could be the only basis for unity. Both the sides have now given up their respective, adamant positions, as is evident from the series of talks taking place between them. Vinod Mishra expressed the mood when he said:

> Certain differences on the evaluation of the past — which it is otherwise necessary to solve — can even be left aside for the time being. The organizational form of

> unity should essentially be based on the principles of democratic centralism and debates on important issues should be conducted as a process of discussion and not of outright condemnation. . . .[70]

Besides the three major Marxist-Leninist parties — the Satyanarain Singh-led CPI (M-L) concentrated mainly in West Bengal and Punjab, Vinod Mishra's CPI (M-L) active in Bhojpur and neighbouring areas of Bihar, and Chandra Pulla Reddy's CPI (M-L) with its strongholds in the Telengana forests — there are at least a dozen small groups operating in different parts of the country. Among them two groups — Reorganizing Committee, CPI (M-L) operating in Kerala, and a group in North Bengal, led by Nishith Bhattacharya and Azizul Huq — still firmly adhere to Charu Mazumdar's tactics of 'annihilation of class enemies' which they emphasize over other forms of struggle. Undue stress on one particular tactic only (which emerged in the past under certain historical conditions) to the exclusion of others, is both archaic and dangerous, and parties or individuals which perpetuate them, however salutary some of the other attitudes such tactics embody may be, are severely limited in their validity. Among the veterans of the 1969-72 period of struggle, many like Kanu Sanyal and Ashim Chatterjee have refused to join any of the existing groups. In August 1981, Sanyal was touring India to bring all Communist revolutionaries into yet another organization — the Organizing Committee of Communist Revolutionaries!

The major point of difference that divides these parties and individuals is the question of forming a united front with allies from different classes to fight Soviet social-imperialism.

United Front and Relations with China

The differences that have cropped up among the Indian Marxist-Leninists over identifying the main enemy and choosing allies to form a united front against it, are a fall-out from the international debate on the Chinese theory of the Three Worlds. According to the Communist Party of China (CPC) "of the two imperialist superpowers, the Soviet Union is the more ferocious, the more reckless, the more treacherous and the most dangerous source of world war,"[71] and hence the need for "unity between the US, China, Japan, West Europe and other countries of the world, unity among these countries to deal with Soviet hegemonism."[72]

While the majority of the CPI (M-L) groups have accepted this theory, differences prevail over its interpretation. Some, like Satyanarain Singh, are eager to apply the theory in India in the shape of an alliance of all anti-Soviet elements, including the traditional anti-Communist, pro-US forces.[73] This interpretation approximates in a large measure to the desires of the present Chinese leadership. Chandra Pulla Reddy's party is as yet unwilling to go to this extent, as it regards the main struggle as one for "Protracted People's War for the destruction of imperialism, bureaucratic monopoly capitalism and feudalism" in which it does not expect any section of the ruling classes to unite with the CPI

(M-L). A common basis for such unity, according to his party, can come when any superpower attacks India and a section of the ruling classes oppose that aggressor, or when there is fascist repression, as happened during the Emergency.[74]

Although Vinod Mishra agrees with Satyanarain Singh that the Soviet social-imperialists are the main enemies, his party does not see the possibility of pro-US forces "uniting with us on the basis of a common programme in a democratic and patriotic front" at the present moment.[75] Explaining the call for a united front of 'democratic and patriotic forces', a party document says that such a front would be a national alternative consisting of the 'third force' — all the political parties and groups engaged in armed struggles or extra-constitutional forms of movements, as well as individuals belonging to the existing national (parliamentary) parties who are opposed to imperialism and Indira Gandhi's Government.[76]

A few groups have rejected the Three Worlds theory and denounced the post-Mao Chinese leadership as "revisionists". Notable among these groups is the Reorganizing Committee of the CPI (M-L). It attended the meeting of the 13 Marxist-Leninist groups from 30 January to 2 February, but later dissociated itself from their joint statement as it felt that the statement reflected "the influence of the Three Worlds theory in the Indian context and did not put the perspective of New Democratic Revolution in the proper light." The Reorganizing Committee feels that unity of the Marxist-Leninists can be brought about only by fighting the "counter-revolutionary Three Worlds theory". It has, however, agreed to cooperate with other groups in joint actions on important issues.[77] Incidentially, the Reorganizing Committee has aligned itself with 12 Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations from different parts of the world, which issued a communique in late 1980 stating: "After revisionism had clearly come to power in the USSR with Khrushchev, the international proletariat suffered a further grievous loss after the death of Comrade Mao Tse-tung in 1976, with the seizure of power in socialist China by a new counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie dragging one-fourth of humanity back down the capitalist road."[78]

Some other groups, like the CPI (M-L) — People's War group — have reservations about the way the Chinese party is implementing the Three Worlds theory, but are not willing to publicly criticize China's growing proximity to the USA and its indifference to the people's liberation movements in the Third World countries. The group has, however, opposed Satynarain Singh's call for a united front with pro-US forces.

It is significant that the majority of the CPI (M-L) groups have accepted the Chinese theory of the Three Worlds with it emphasis on the Soviet Union as the main enemy and its dismissal of the USA as a declining force. The differences relate only to the mode of building up an anti-Soviet united front in India.

While repeating the Three Worlds theory by rote, many CPI (M-L) leaders fail to distinguish between Chinese rhetoric and realpolitik, between China's national interests and the interests of the Indian revolution, between the Sinocentric view of the international situation and the actual reality. A desire to

conform to China's international posture often leads them to ignore the balance of Soviet and American control in India, particularly the still powerful US influence over Indian economy.

The development of the Three Worlds theory has to be seen in the proper perspective. China's national economic requirement of Western technology to accelerate the pace of modernization, and its international political goal of isolating the Soviet Union which it considers to be a military threat to its national security, have driven it to seek alliance with the USA and the 'Second World' of West Europe. Since the Marxist-Leninist movements in the South and South-east Asian countries along the Chinese borders have not yet been able to set up pro-Peking regimes (while the Governments of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh remain undependable, those in Afghanistan, Laos and Vietnam are under Soviet control) to act as buffer states against possible Soviet attacks from the south, China prefers the continuation of US presence in the Indian Ocean to counter Soviet moves. Judging by China's steady withdrawal of support from Communist guerrilla movements in the ASEAN region,[79] it seems that for China, the issue of the day is not a people's liberation movement, but nationalism versus Soviet imperialism. In its international strategy, distinctive Communist objectives, like acceleration of class struggles to complete the agrarian revolution and capture power in the semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries, will now have to be temporarily abandoned in favour of an ameliorative political stance that would facilitate the building of an anti-Soviet alliance. In some countries such as Thailand, China has put pressure on the Communist guerrillas to make up with the ruling powers and forge a united front with them to fight "Vietnamese aggression". As regards India, since the middle of 1970 China has stopped reporting the activities of the CPI (M-L) groups in its media. It has followed this up with patient efforts at reconciliation with the Indian Government, marked by exchange of ambassadors, increase in trade and finally by the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua to Delhi in June 1981. Indira Gandhi's Government has responded favourably to the Chinese overtures and is back by a section of Indian industrialists and traders who are interested in exporting their goods to China. The Sino-Indian Trade Promotion Forum, soon after Huang Hua's visit, urged the Indian Government to explore the possibilities of transferring Indian technical knowhow to China in such areas as agriculture, mineral development, irrigation, light industries, power and transportation. On the political plane, Chinese Communist leaders have had a series of talks with representatives of the CPI (M) (which was described as "revisionist" by the CPC in 1967) and have established fraternal relations. The CPI (M) still steers a middle course in the Sino-Soviet dispute, regarding both the countries as socialist and yet critical of some of their policies.

It seems that China is keen on neutralizing, or winning over as many sections of the Indian political forces as possible in its confrontation with the Soviet Union.

In this overall strategy of China's how can the CPI (M-L) groups of India fit in? In the past, interaction between the CPI (M-L) and the CPC had not always been healthy for the growth of the revolutionary movement in India. The attitude of the CPI (M-L) leaders to the CPC in general and Mao Tse-tung in

particular, was one of prostrate adoration, reflected too often in emphasizing China's national interests over the needs of the Indian revolution and taking pains to trot out apologies or explanations for China's diplomatic manoeuvres (as happened with Ashim Chatterjee during the 1971 developments in East Bengal), or taking ridiculously extreme forms like Charu Mazumdar's slogan: "China's Chairman is Our Chairman, China's Path is our Path" (although Charu Mazumdar had the good sense to take an independent stand on the East Bengal events, and later to withdraw the slogan). The CPC for its part, continued to lend support to Charu Mazumdar's tactics and policies, even when experience undermined their validity for the success of the revolution in India. Judging by past experience of Chinese expediency it is quite possible that in the CPI (M-L) the CPC found the best stick with which to beat Indira Gandhi's Government, irrespective of its political colour. Just a year before the uprising at Naxalbari, the Chinese were even prepared to support the most obscurantist feudal elements against Indira Gandhi. On 12 November 1966, a *Jen-min Jin-pao* commentator came out with an article entitled "Indian People Have Arisen in Resistance", describing a demonstration by Hindu religious fanatics demanding a ban on cow-slaughter in Delhi on 7 November that year! This is how the commentator saw the demonstration: "A 700,000 strong anti-Government demonstration broke out in New Delhi on 7 November. This was a violent eruption of the Indian people's pent up feelings against the Government ... and a signal of the sharpening of class contradictions in India." Seven months later, however, Radio Peking was to discover in the Naxalbari uprising "the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle", glossing over the fact that the Naxalbari peasants were fighting against the same feudal elements who had organized the 7 November demonstration in Delhi. One wonders if the CPC was motivated by ideological sympathy with the Indian Communist revolutionaries, or merely temporary anti-Indira Gandhi policies, in lending support to the CPI (M-L) from 1967 to 1970.

Today, although the CPC is non-committal about the different CPI (M-L) groups operating in India, the majority among the latter still retain their slavish adherence to the CPC and Mao Tse-tung — a relic from the tradition of colonial training, paralleled by the Indian comprador's fawning dependence on the West. Even those who oppose the present CPC leadership are haunted by their past. At one time or another, following blindly the policies of the then CPC, they had upheld Lin Piao and Chiang Ching. Today these groups are in a dilemma, finding it difficult to convince their ranks about the 'counter-revolutionary' nature of Chinese leaders whom only a few years ago they lauded as ideal revolutionaries. To get around the problem, they have chosen to stick adamantly by their position of loyalty to these denigrated leaders, claiming that Mao had supported these leaders, but had been superseded by the "Deng-Hua clique". As a result, one finds the ludicrous spectacle of one group of CPI (M-L) revolutionaries in North Bengal swearing by Lin Piao, while another group in Kerala (the Reorganizing Committee, CPI-ML) support the "Gang of Four" — a medley of irresolute revolutionaries tossed to and fro by the changing fortunes of individual Chinese leaders!

As for those supporting the present Chinese leadership, by trying again to identify themselves with China's international stance, they tend to undermine the danger of US military and economic offensive both in the world and in India. While they rightly join hands in demonstrating against Soviet aggression in Afghanistan, they seldom denounce the presence of US servicemen and the American fleet in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, or condemn US intervention in El Salvador.[80] They are justified in warning against Soviet exploitation in Indian economy, but their silence on similar exploitation by US and Western multinationals evokes suspicion among genuine anti-imperialists. Given the built-in pro-US orientation of the Three Worlds theory, when a section of the CPI (M-L) — led by Satyanarain Singh — publicly urges an alliance with pro-US forces in India, there is a danger of the Marxist-Leninist movement acquiring a Right-wing image and departing from the traditional Leftist mainstream in the country. Both because of the aggressive role of the USA in the region in the past, and its continuing control over important sectors of the Indian economy today, anti-US feelings are quite strong among radical-minded urban youth, Leftist academics and ranks of Left parties. Marxist-Leninists who wish to build up a political base among these sections, will either have to adopt a neutral attitude towards China's pro-US policies, or come out openly against the present Chinese leadership. Torn between national compulsions and loyalty to the CPC, the leaders of the various CPI (M-L) groups are passing through an agonizing process of soul-searching. The sooner they realize that slavish adherence to foreign leaders or models must be replaced with ingenuity in devising new social mechanisms and new policies for unprecedented situations, that enemies and allies should be identified in accordance with the demands of the objective conditions prevailing in India, instead of with the requirements of some external power, the better is the future of their ideology.

From an analysis of the statements and activities of the various Marxist-Leninist groups, it appears that the Communist revolutionaries of India are passing through a sort of intellectual odyssey, moving back and forth between an inquest into the past to a probe into the present and contemplation of the future. The contradictions and imperfections in their utterances, and the amoeba-like changes, shifts and splits in their activities, are the stammerings that are associated with a period of gestation. Still a farrago of weak and disconnected individuals and factions, they are groping for some sort of unity before launching any action. Most of them seem to be in favour of a pause in the armed struggle, to pick up the pieces the establishment has shattered, to get back the bearings, and nurse latent power for the next phase of the struggle. There is, however, the danger of their becoming lost in these intellectual diatribes, of abandoning the battlefield and having their attention diverted from concrete programme by extraneous factors.

The Prospects

In the absence of any direct occupation of India by foreign powers, the nature of any armed struggle here is bound to be different from the national liberation movements of Vietnam or Africa. It is also going to differ from the struggles in the Latin American countries where dictatorship is bare-faced.

In India, the imperialists operate from behind the scenes, and the mask of democracy over the years has become firmly annealed to the curves of a totalitarian system. It is a country where dissidents are killed to the whine of righteous words, where opposition is muffled in accordance with elaborately established rituals and rules, where both hypocritical laws are enacted and rendered impotent by constitutional and legal niceties, where the ruling powers hope to fool the world into believing that the challenge of armed revolution is insignificant, and yet respond with violent punitive raids whenever any sign of armed uprising is noticed anywhere, where the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi can mourn for the victims of dictatorship in Chile or the death of Bobby Sands in an Irish prison, while CPI (M-L) prisoners are killed in Indian jails.

In such a situation, Communist revolutionaries will have to frame a set of tactics flexible enough to be operative along the curves of the mask of democracy and yet adequately combative for the final struggle to change the power structure. It is obvious that revolutionaries can intensify the violence of their blows only when linked with an offensive movement of the masses. In the past, due to the disparate and divergent quality of mass upsurges, the offensive forces failed to converge upon the ruling powers, which were thus able to concentrate their repressive forces and inflict defeat upon the isolated strands of protest. Revolutionaries belonging to all the various CPI (M-L) groups cannot afford to close their eyes to the experience of the events of the last 14 years. If they fail to use this experience to educate themselves, and instead continue passively to repeat the same mistakes all that can be expected is to see sporadic uprisings here and there, the creation of isolated bases in some areas to be rapidly overrun by the enemy forces, followed by periods of frustration and disillusionment.

Meanwhile, occasional respites notwithstanding, the internal conditions in India are fast building up to bursting point, and the pressure rises with every failure of the Government's economic policies. The economic strife will deepen the political turmoil. In such a situation, any successful offensive against the Indian ruling classes would depend on a well organized combination of several simultaneous thrusts — area-wise seizure of power in the countryside through protracted, peasants' guerrilla warfare, industrial strikes and upsurges in the cities to cripple the economy and paralyse the administration, and attempts to neutralize or win over at least a section of the state's armed apparatus, which will of course succeed to the extent the former two thrusts can make headway.

Unlike the aftermath of the Telengana armed struggle in the early 1950s, not all Communist revolutionaries today have laid down their arms. In some obscure village of Bihar, in the thatched huts of landless peasants, young CPI (M-L) organizers are still to be found patiently propagating the politics of armed struggle. They hold meetings by the dim light of oil lamps, the flames dance over

groups of intense faces, scarred and roughened by life at its hardest. They spend sleepless nights on straw mats dreaming of the revolution, under the bamboo reeds of the roof which conceal hatchets or pipe-guns ready to be used when the enemy attacks. When night moves in a hungry, rushing tide across the forest-clad flanks of the mountains of Srikakulam, it is time for the revolutionaries to come out from their shelters and plunge into the dark wilderness, feeling their way along the narrow ridges of the paddy-fields. With revolvers tied in the knot of their loincloth, or guns slung across their shoulders, they move from village to village, among the gentle hills of Parvathipuram which sweep up to the great mountains and dark forests of Koraput. They try to pick up the threads left by Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam. Along the sandy stretches of Budyanam in the plains of Sompeta, dotted with cashew-nut groves, they trudge for miles, seeking out old comrades of Panchadi Krishnamurthi, trying to gather again and rebuild the broken pieces.

There is also a new generation that is germinating quietly in the furrows that the strife of 1967-72 ploughed in the bleeding land of India. Will they draw inspiration from the rich experience of their predecessors? Will it enable them to avoid the pitfalls? And the industrial workers choked in the vicious circle of wage increase and price rise; the more they find no sustaining breath of hope left to draw upon, the faster they will graduate from the role of trade unionists to that of revolutionaries.

But ultimately it is the vast countryside — the centre of the CPI (M-L) armed struggle — that will determine the success of the revolution. It is the rural millions of India who will provide the critical weight in the balance between progress and reaction and give the "proletarian revolution . . . that chorus without which its solo song becomes a swan song in all peasant countries".[81]

The tempestuous years of 1967-72 have shown how superficial is the serenity of the Indian countryside; it conceals the inflammability of desperate, hungry masses — the smouldering fuse that is laboriously winding its way to the wild explosive that will shatter the present order. It threatens the ruling powers with forebodings of a fatal judgement.

Notes

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54. For an excellent documentary history of the CPI (M-L) movement in Bhojpur, including its economic and historical background, see *Bhojpur: Naxalism in the Plains of Bihar* by Kalyan Mukherjee and Rajendra Singh Yadav, published by Radha Krishna, Delhi, 1980. Also cf. "Those who have lands and consequently, a social recognition are looked upon as the kulaks whereas those who have no lands are called the down-trodden. The group is knit by one rudiment, the caste, but not necessarily always. There is division among co-castemen and the land is generally the divisive factor. The Yadavs (a middle-caste community) in Bhojpur are spearheading the attack on the Bhumihars and the Rajputs (the upper-caste landlords) and the same Yadavs are active in Patherhat against their rich co-castemen." ('From Telengana to Taregna' by B.N. Sinha, Indian Police Service, in *Searchlight* (newspaper), Patna, 12 June 1975).
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62. B.N. Sinha, 'From Telengana to Targena' (in *Searchlight*, 12 June 1975).
63. 'Strengthen the Party Leadership' in *Liberation* (Hindi), May 1981.
64. In all, 674 Naxalites were killed in jails and in "staged encounters" during the past 10 years, according to a fact-finding report published by the Committee for the Protection of Democractic Rights, Bombay, headed by the well-known Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar. In an introduction to the report, V.M. Tarkunde, the jurist, said that such cold-blooded murders could not have been committed by police officers without the backing of the executive.
65. *Frontier*, 18 October–1 November 1980.
66. The 13 groups were: Liberation Front; United Communist Revolutionary Group, Uttar Pradesh; Organization Committee, CPI (M-L); Maoist Communist Centre (MCC); Unity Organization, CPI (M-L); COC, CPI (M-L); West Bengal State

Committee, CPI (M-L); State Committee, CPI (M-L), Tamilnadu; PCC, CPI (M-L) led by Satyanarain Singh; CC, CPI (M-L), People's War; CC, CPI (M-L) led by Chandra Pulla Reddy; CC, CPI (M-L) led by Vinode Mishra; and Reorganization Committee, CPI (M-L).

67. Partha N. Mukherhjee, et al, *Left Extremism and Electoral Politics: Naxalite Participation in Elections*. Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, July 1979.
68. 'Our Tasks in the Present Situation', *New Democracy*, December 1980.
69. *New India Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1980, IPANA, Canada.
70. 'Unite We Shall' by Vinod Mishra in *Frontier*, 15 November 1980.
71. *Jenmin Jinpao (People's Daily)* 1 November 1977.
72. Deng Xiao Ping's interview in *Time*, 5 February 1979.
73. *For a New Democracy*, (Organ of the Provisional Central Committee, CPI-ML), November 1980.
74. 'Our Tasks in the Present Situation', (in *New Democracy*, December 1980).
75. *New India Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1980. IPANA, Canada.
76. 'Strengthen the Party Leadership' (in *Liberation* (Hindi), May 1981).
77. Letter from Reorganizing Committee, CPI (M-L), (in *Frontier*, 25 July 1981).
78. Published in *Revolutionary Worker* — a journal brought out by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2 January 1981.
79. During talks with President Marcos of the Philippines in Manila on 8 August 1981, the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang said that China would cease supporting various Communist underground movements operating in South-East Asia and added that China had already stopped its previous regular propaganda radio broadcasts for the various local guerrilla organizations. (*Statesman*, 10 August 1981).
80. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, at one point in early 1980, the USA had a total of 30 ships in the Indian Ocean including three carriers, and in February 1980, a force of 1,800 Marines with equipment was despatched to join this force. The proposed Financial Year 1981 budget allotted $220 million to fund the construction of the first two specialized multi-purpose cargo vessels (in a fleet of 15) stocked with tanks, artillery vehicles, ammunition and supplies, and by 1983 the Marines hope to be able to move 16,500 men by these vessels with armour and air support, to virtually any place, within six days, and sustain them in combat for 30 days. When, on top of this, President Reagan ordered the production of neutron bomb — designed to kill people with intense radiation without causing damage to buildings — the Chinese theory about the USA being a declining superpower loses credibility. In fact, from a position of underrating the aggressive capacities of the USA, China is fast moving to that of appreciating its increasing offensive postures, as is evident from the Chinese leaders' welcoming the US armed presence in the Indian Ocean and its decision to produce the neutron bomb. It is quite evident now that since the early 1970s, China's aim all along had been to ally with the USA — irrespective of whether the US is a declining or an aggressive power — to counter Soviet moves. The tendency to emphasize the USA's declining power in the 'Three Worlds theory' was aimed at blunting the traditional anti-US militancy of Maoists both within and outside China, and condition them to accept the Soviet Union as the only enemy.
81. Karl Marx, 1852 edition, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Appendix 1

Biographical Notes on CPI (M-L) Leaders who Died Between 1969 and 1972.

Biswakarma (Biswa Karmakar), Babulal

Born in 1938, Babulal came from a family of landless peasants of North Bengal. His first political experience was at the age of 15, when in February 1953, he took part in a demonstration of sharecroppers against a landlord-cum-moneylender, whose habit of charging excessive interest infuriated the peasants of the area. Babulal was injured in the clash that ensued, and was arrested. He was later released on bail.

In 1955, Babulal became a wholetime organizer of the CPI peasants' association — the Kisan Samity — in the Phansidewa police station area of Siliurgi sub-division. In 1956, he became a full-fledged member of the undivided CPI.

During 1959-60, Babulal took an active part in the struggles that the CPI waged to seize excess land held illegally by the landlords. He soon became the Assistant Secretary of the sub-division Kisan Samity and Secretary of the Hatighisha Union Kisan Samity. He also took part in trade union activities, and became the Assistant Secretary and member of the working committee of the Terai tea-garden workers' union.

After the CPI split, Babulal joined the CPI (M). In 1967, he was a leading figure in the Naxalbari uprising, and was expelled from the CPI (M). He was arrested and put in solitary confinement in Kurseong Jail. As soon as he was released on bail, he jumped bail and went underground in March 1968, and began to reorganize the movement, along with other dissidents of the CPI (M).

On the midnight of 7 September 1968, Babulal was killed near Birsingh Jote village, under the Naxalbari police station, after a four hour gun-duel with the armed police

Dutta, Saroj

A veteran journalist, Saroj Dutta at one time worked with *Swadhinata* — the daily organ of the undivided CPI, in West Bengal. He was also well-known as a poet.

He became a leading light of the CPI (M-L) when it was formed, and was made a member of the Political Bureau of the party's Central Committee, and later became the Secretary of the party's West Bengal State Committee.

Saroj Dutta played an important role in the youth upsurge that rocked Calcutta and suburban towns of West Bengal in 1970-71, by providing an ideological justification for the iconoclastic assaults on statues of national leaders and social reformers.

Writing under the pseudonym 'Shashanka' in the CPI (M-L) Bengali weekly *Deshabrati*, Saroj Dutta lashed out at dissident views expressed within the party. Known for his

penchant for the vitriolic, he ridiculed in his writings other Maoist groups outside the CPI (M-L), like Nagi Reddy's faction in Andhra Pradesh, and Asit Sen's followers in West Bengal.

Saroj Dutta was arrested from a hideout in Calcutta on the midnight of 4/5 August 1971. In the early hours of 5 August the police brought him to a deserted corner of the Calcutta Maidan and shot him dead. The Calcutta police however still claim that Saroj Dutta is absconding.

Commenting on his murder, Charu Mazumdar said: "Comrade Saroj Dutta was a leader of the party and it was like a leader that he courted a hero's death. The youths should follow his revolutionary zeal as an ideal."

Kailasham, Adibhatla

Adibhatla was the son of a landlord, and hailed from Karyavalasa in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. He rebelled against his father, and became a school teacher, as a result of which he was disinherited by his father. Along with the late Vempatapu Satyanarayana, he began to work among the tribals of Srikakulam Agency areas from 1955. He joined the CPI (M-L) after its formation, and led the peasants movement in the hills until July 1970, when he was shot dead by the police. He was 40 at the time of his death.

Krishnamurthi, Nirmala

Wife of Panchadri Krishnamurthi (see below). Nirmala was 22, and a mother of two, when she joined the movement with her husband. When the latter was killed, she stepped in to fill the breach. She accompanied guerrilla bands during raids on houses of landlords, and took an active part in the annihilation of class enemies.

In the early hours of 22 December 1969, Nirmala, along with five other guerrillas, was encircled by the police while they were in their hideout in Orissa near the Andhra Pradesh-Orissa border. All the six, including Nirmala, were later shot dead.

Krishnamurthi, Panchadri

One of the first Communist revolutionaries to be killed by the police in Andhra Pradesh. Thirty five year old Panchadri was seeking to extend the armed struggle to the plains, when along with six other young comrades, he was arrested by the police near Sompeta railway station, and shot dead.

Mazumdar, Charu

Born in a landlord family of Siliguri in 1918, Charu Mazumdar studied at Edwards College, at Pabna (now in Bangladesh). He gave up his studies to join the then outlawed CPI in 1938, and devoted his work to the organization of the party's peasant front in the Jalpaiguri area of North Bengal.

Charu Mazumdar took a leading part in the Tebhaga movement of the forties in Jalpaiguri, and also played an important role in organizing the workers of the then Bengal Dooars Railway at Domohani. In 1948, Charu Mazumdar returned to Siliguri to organize the tea garden workers of Darjeeling district. He was arrested during the CPI's post-1947 phase of insurrection.

In the CPI, Charu Mazumdar was always known for his strong "anti-revisionist" position. He sharply criticized the "revisionist" deviations of the leadership, and was arrested in 1962 following the Sino-Indian war, along with many other CPI leaders and activists, who were identified with a pro-China stand. After his release in 1963, he contested a by-election as a CPI candidate for the Siliguri Assembly seat, but was defeated. Referring to the number of voters who supported him, although numerically small, he was believed to

have said that his objective in fighting the election was to see how many people supported China, so that he could begin his political work with them.

In 1964, after the split in the CPI, Charu Mazumdar joined the CPI (M). The next year he issued a leaflet containing his views on certain current topics, for which he was censured by the party leadership. This was one of what later came to be known as the 'Eight Documents'.

Between 1965 and 1967, Charu Mazumdar consistently urged his followers through leaflets to concentrate in the countryside, and prepare the peasants for armed struggle to seize power in their respective villages.

His differences with the CPI (M) leadership came to a head when, after the 1967 elections, the party decided to form a government with other political elements. The Naxalbari uprising which broke out soon after the installation of the United Front Government in West Bengal in 1967, found its ideological leader in Charu Mazumdar, who at that time was laid up with a heart ailment in Siliguri. He was expelled from the CPI (M) towards the end of 1967.

When the CPI (M-L) was formed in 1969, Charu Mazumdar became its General Secretary. He earned plaudits from the Communist Party of China, in early 1970, by which time the movement had spread to various parts of India. But differences erupted inside the party towards the end of the year, when several leaders of the CPI (M-L) began to express their misgivings about Charu Mazumdar's recommended tactics.

From 1970, when the party's journals were banned and its offices sealed by the police, Charu Mazumdar, who was a chronic heart patient, was forced underground, from where he continued to lead the struggle. In July 1972, he was arrested from a house in Calcutta. Grilled by police interrogation, Charu Mazumdar, already physically weakened by privations of years of underground life, collapsed with a heart attack. He was removed to hospital on 27 July but, denied proper medical treatment, he died the next day.

Panigrahi, Subbarao

Born in an Oriya family in Sompeta talukam Andhra Pradesh, Subbarao joined the Communist movement during the Telengana armed struggle in the late forties, when he was still at school. He consistently took a radical stand against the leadership of the undivided CPI, and later of the CPI (M). His radicalism drew him to the CPI (M-L), and at one stage, he was in charge of extending the Srikakulam movement in adjoining Orissa.

Subbarao was a revolutionary poet. He was interested in the folk arts, and popularized 'Jamukulakatha', — a form of drama interspersed with songs and presented by a group of three actors. He composed Jamukulakatha with the struggle of the Girijan peasants as the main theme, and staged the plays throughout Andhra Pradesh.

In November 1969, Subbarao was elected Secretary of the Sompeta Area Committee of the CPI (M-L). Soon after this, in December that year, he, along with Nirmala Krishnamurthi and a few other guerrillas, was captured and shot dead by the police. He was 35 years old.

Ray Chowdhury, Sushital

Was the editor of the CPI (M-L) English monthly *Liberation*, and Secretary of the West Bengal State Committee of the Party.

Connected with the armed revolutionary nationalist groups of pre-1947 days, Sushital Ray Chowdhury later became a member of the CPI. After the split of 1964, he joined the CPI (M). He edited the CPI (M)'s Bengali weekly *Deshahitaishi*, where during the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, he published articles in support of the uprising. This provoked the ire of the CPI (M) State leadership, who expelled him from the party. The *Deshahitaishi*

office at Dharamtalla Street, Calcutta, was attacked by CPI (M) men, and Sushital Ray Chowdhury and his followers were forcibly ousted from the office.

Sushital Ray Chowdhury was the convenor of the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries and of the West Bengal State Coordination Committee. When the CPI (M-L) was founded, he became a member of the Central Organizing Committee of the Party. After the 1970 Congress of the Party, he was elected Secretary of the West Bengal State Committee.

Soon after this however, he began to voice his differences regarding the youth movement in Calcutta. He opposed the indiscriminate attacks on statues and educational institutions. His objections were to draw sharp rebukes from Charu Mazumdar. As the days passed, Sushital Ray Chowdhury drifted further and further away from the line of the central leadership.

What with physical ailment and political disagreement, Sushital Ray Chowdhury was an embittered man when he died from a heart attack on 13 March 1971.

Satyanarayana, Vempatapu

The legendary hero of the Srikakulam peasants, Vempatapu was a teacher. With Adibhatla Kailsam, he began to work among the Girijan tribals of the Srikakulam hills from 1955. Known as 'Gappa Guru', he was loved and obeyed by the tribal peasants, who, inspired by him, took to arms in 1968 first, to resist the extortions of landlords and moneylenders, and later to seize power in their villages.

Vempatapu joined the CPI (M-L) in 1969. He succeeded in retaining the party base in the hills of Srikakulam for quite some time, till differences arose in the party's Andhra Pradesh State Committee. This also synchronized with severe police repression in the area. Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam were apprehended by the police in July 1970, and were shot dead.

Appendix II: A List of Charu Mazumdar's Writings

1. Our Tasks in the Present Situation (Document No. 1), January 28, 1965.
2. By Fighting Revisionism, Take Forward the People's Democratic Revolution to Success (Document No. 2), 1965.
3. What is the Source of The Spontaneous Revolutionary Outburst in India? (Document No. 3), 1965.
4. Carry on the Struggle Against Modern Revisionism (Document No. 4), 1965.
5. What Possibilities are Indicated by the Year 1965? (Document No. 5), 1965.
6. The Main Task Today is the Struggle to Build Up the True Revolutionary Party Through Uncompromising Struggle Against Revisionism (Document No. 6), August 12, 1966.
7. Untitled (Document No. 7), 1966/67.
8. The Peasants' Struggle Will Have to Be Taken Forward By Fighting Revisionism (Document No. 8), April, 1967.
9. Long Live the Heroic Peasants of Naxalbari! *Deshabrati,* Autumn, 1967.
10. It is Time to Build Up a Revolutionary Party. *Deshabrati,* October 26, 1967
11. Letter to a Comrade of Naxalbari, 1967.
12. To the Youth and Students. *Deshabrati,* May 2, 1968.
13. Indian People's Democratic Revolution. *Deshabrati,* May 16, 1968.
14. The United Front and the Revolutionary Party. *Liberation,* July, 1968.
15. To My Comrades. *Deshabrati,* August 1, 1968.
16. Undertake the Work of Building a Revolutionary Party. *Deshabrati,* Autumn number, 1968.
17. Develop Peasants' Class Struggle Through Class Analysis, Investigation and Study. *Deshabrati,* October 17, 1968.
18. Boycott Elections — International Significance of the Slogan. November 21, 1968.
19. To the Comrades Working in Villages. *Deshabrati,* December 26, 1968.
20. Srikakulam — Will It be the Yenan of India? *Deshabrati,* March 13, 1969.
21. Why Must We Form the Party Now? *Deshabrati,* March 20, 1969.
22. Parimal Babu's Politics. *Ghatana-prabaha,* May, 1969.
23. Party's Call to the Youth and Students. *Deshabrati,* August 21, 1969.
24. Fight Against the Concrete Manifestations of Revisionism. *Deshabrati,* September 4, 1969.
25. Chairman's China May be Attacked; Hasten the Work of Revolution. September 19, 1969.
26. China's Chairman is Our Chairman, China's Path is Our Path. November, 1969.
27. A Call to Peasant Revolutionaries. December 11, 1969.
28. March Forward By Summing Up the Experience of the Revolutionary Peasant Struggle of India. December 12, 1969.
29. A Few Words About Guerilla Actions. *Deshabrati,* January 15, 1970.
30. Make the 1970s the Decade of Liberation. *Deshabrati,* January 22, 1970.

31. The Peasants Revolutionary Struggle of Srikakulam is Invincible. *Deshabrati,* January 9, 1970.
32. A Few Words to the Revolutionary Students and Youths. *Deshabrati,* March 5, 1970.
33. Our Party's Tasks Among the Workers. *Deshabrati,* March 12, 1970.
34. To the Working Class. *Deshabrati,* March 12, 1970.
35. May 20 is a Memorable Day of World Revolution. *Deshabrati,* May 14-20, 1970.
36. Hate, Brand and Smash Revisionism. May 15-16, 1970.
37. Today is not the Time for Repentance, but the Time to Flare Up like Fire. July 6, 1970.
38. Do Not Hesitate to Give the Politics of Seizure of Power to the Poor and Landless Peasants, July 14, 1970.
39. To the Srikakulam Comrades. July 14, 1970.
40. On the movement of the youth and students. Autumn, 1970.
41. Unite With the Peasants Revolutionary Struggle. August 5, 1970.
42. Letter from Afar. September 11, 1970.
43. Get Prepared, March Forward for a Great Upsurge. October 1, 1970.
44. Against the Revisionist Attack on the Party Line. October, 1970.
45. Greetings to the Communist Party of East Bengal (Marxist-Leninist). November 7, 1970.
46. Avenge the Murder of the Heroic Martyrs. November 22, 1970.
47. Give Priority to the Task of Establishing Peasants' Political Power. *Deshabrati,* December 1, 1970.
48. Letter to a Comrade. December 13, 1970.
49. Retaliate Against the Massacre in Midnapore Jail. December 21, 1970.
50. Build Up the People's Liberation Army and March Forward. February 10, 1971.
51 Seize the Enemies' Rifles and Arm the Peasants' Guerrilla Squads. February 23, 1971.
52. Red Salute to the Jail Comrades. February 23, 1971.
53. The Imperialists Have Begun to Gamble with the Fate of East Bengal. March 4, 1971.
54. To the Comrades of Punjab. April, 1971.
55. Letter to a Comrade. April 4, 1971.
56. One Year After the Party Congress. May 20, 1971.
57. Pakistan and the Role of the Communist Party. June 29, 1971.
58. Kruschev Thesis is Being Propagated in the name of Chairman Mao. July 1971. Published in *Deshabrati*, September 1, 1971.
59. To the Comrades. August 4, 1971.
60. On the People's Liberation Army and Base Area. (In Reply to Khokon's Documents on Party Line). August 9, 1971.
61. In Memory of Martyrs. August 20, 1971.
62. To the Friends Who Have Come From East Bengal. September 7, 1971.
63. To the Comrades of Birbhum. September 10, 1971.
64. Strengthen the Party Organisation. 4 October 1971.
65. On the Harvesting Movement. November 18, 1971.
66. A Note on Party's Work in Urban Areas. November 18, 1971.
67. Crores of Indian People Will Compose the Epic of Liberation by 1971. December
68. Down with the Indo-Soviet Military Pact. December 20, 1971.

69 An Untitled Hindi Article Written on December 21, 1971, and published in the CPI (M-L)'s Hindi journal *Lok-Yudg* of June 1972.
70. Establish People's State Power Through People's War. March 11, 1972.
71. On May 1 of 1972. April 22, 1972.
72. Undated Letter to Comrades of Tripura. 1972.
73. It is the People's Interest That is the Party's Interest. June 9, 1972.
74. Unpublished Notes. 1972.

Glossary

Crore:
Ten million.

Dalam:
Squad — mainly guerrilla squad.

Dalit Panthers:
Name of a loosely-knit organization launched by young, militant sections of the lower-caste people of Maharashtra in western India in the late 1960s. Instead of accepting the term 'Harijan' (see below), they preferred to describe themselves as 'Dalit' which means 'depressed'. The term 'Panther' was taken from the contemporary 'Black Panthers' movement in the USA, to denote their propensity towards militant tactics in defying the feudal caste system. Some powerful poets and literateurs came out from amongst the Dalit Panthers, who also sought to give a Leftist orientation to the movement by coordinating with the industrial proletariat. Today, however, the movement is split into several factions.

Girijans:
A term used to describe all the different tribes living in hills in Andhra Pradesh and its borders along Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Harijan:
Used by Gandhi to describe the lower-caste people in Hindu society. While Gandhi maintained that it meant 'son of god' thereby glorifying them, among some lower-caste communities it has been a traditional term of abuse. The Dalits, therefore, rejected the term.

Hectare:
Approximately 100 acres.

Lakh:
One hundred thousand.

Panchayat:
A village council.

Pipe-gun:
A home-made musket that needs to be reloaded after every shot fired. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was manufactured on a wide scale in West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

Rupee (Re. or Rs.):
Approximately six British pence or 13 US cents.

Udyanam:
Literally meaning 'garden', but used in the plains of Andhra Pradesh for cashew-nut groves.

Zamindar:
Owners of land in British India paying tax to the Government.

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INDIA'S SIMMERING REVOLUTION
The Naxalite Uprising
SUMANTA BANERJEE

India's Simmering Revolution is the first authoritative account based on inside sources of the Naxalite uprising that began in 1967. It gives an exhaustive and sympathetic evaluation of the revolt which shook West Bengal and many other parts of North-east and Eastern India. Although largely defeated by 1972, it was the most significant popular uprising to challenge the established order in India since Independence.

The author analyses the rural and urban conditions of poverty and oppression that fuelled the rising. He tells the story of the actual course of the revolt from its initial outburst in Naxalbari, through the founding of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), to the subsequent divisions and defeat. In a major new Conclusion for this edition, he analyses the resurrection of Naxalite activity in recent years and what it portends for India's future stability.

The Naxalites were defeated, but the lessons to be learnt from their uprising are of relevance to all revolutionary resistance to oppression – the relationship between mass struggle and military action; the creation of a people's army from scattered guerrilla groups, the role of the working class in Third World revolutions; and the relevance of Maoist strategy.

Sumanta Banerjee was educated in Calcutta and worked for ten years as staff correspondent for *The Statesman*. Contact with leaders of the CPI(M-L) permitted him access to Party documents and information in preparing this book; it also led to his arrest in 1975 during the Emergency. He is the author of several works including *India's Monopoly Press: A Mirror of Distortion* (1973) and *Child Labour in India* (1979). He currently works as a freelance journalist and civil rights worker based in Delhi.

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