

The CPI and the Naxalites

by Mohit Sen

There is an amount of misunderstanding about the approach and attitude of the Communist Party of India (CPI) to the Naxalites or communist extremists, not least among the Naxalites themselves. An attempt will be made here to remove these misconceptions so that some kind of dialogue and debate could start with these impatient students and youth who have chosen the Naxalite path or are attracted by it. Such dialogue and debate must involve, above all, clearcut ideological-political demarcation and sharp polemics.

I

The most important conception to clear up can be stated thus: is it not true that while the Naxalites, maybe wrongly, believe in revolution, the CPI holds to the peaceful path? This is absolutely wrong. The dispute between the Naxalites and the CPI is not that the former believes in revolution while the latter abjures it. The dispute, essentially, is between different conceptions of how the revolution will develop in India. It is also absolutely wrong to hold that the CPI has made an absolute of the peaceful path. The CPI strives to achieve the aims of the revolution through the form of peaceful transition but always insisting that this is only one of the possible forms of

the Indian revolution. It holds that it is equally possible that in India the attainment of the objectives of the revolution would entail armed insurrection and civil war. Both possibilities have to be kept in mind. Moreover, the CPI emphasises that in our conditions peaceful transition, if at all it proves possible, would certainly not be free from violence and elements of armed struggle.

The real trouble is that among the Naxalites and those attracted by Naxalism there is confusion about what exactly a revolution is. They tend to equate revolution with violence and armed struggle, thereby confusing the content with the form. Revolution is nothing more and nothing less than the forcible destruction of state power of one class or coalition of classes and the bringing into being the new state power of that class or coalition of classes which has achieved this forcible destruction. Revolution comes as the climax of bitter class struggle which is itself the result of the conflict between the productive forces and the production relations of a given socio-economic formation. Experience has shown that revolution can succeed only if it becomes an affair of the masses themselves and only if the masses are led by the most advanced class, itself headed by its vanguard party. This totality or ensemble of aspects gives us the real meaning of the concept of revolution.

Nor is it a matter of concepts. It is the generalisation of experience. Let us confine ourselves to an analysis of two most important revolutions of our age—the November 1917 revolution and the Chinese revolution. I shall deal with the former as the latter has already been handled by Pratap Mitra.

The November 1917 revolution, which for the first time ended the exploitation of man by man, established the dictatorship of proletariat and created the conditions for the construction of socialism was not a one-act drama. It came as the climax of decades of work by the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin among the working class and other toilers. Lenin began his revolutionary work by ideological struggle against the Narodniks. The Narodniks were Russian anarchist revolutionaries who denied that capitalism had established its control on Russian economy, denied the leading role of the working class in the Russian

revolution and glorified the peasant not bothering about the differentiation of the peasants into rich, middle, poor and landless. The Narodniks preached the typical anarchist theory that the masses were incapable of historical initiative. They had to be moved into action by the galvanising deeds of a so-called creative minority, by the shock tactics of individual heroes. And these individual heroes could, according to the Narodniks, achieve their aim of galvanising the masses by acts of individual terrorism, i.e. by killing the tsar, hated policemen, government officials, etc. Essentially, the Narodniks believed not in providing leadership to the masses but in acting on behalf of the masses, substituting for the masses.

Lenin paid due tributes to the selflessness and dedication of the early Narodniks but pointed out that their theories would only cause harm to the Russian revolution. He pointed out that it was no use repeating in a dogmatic fashion that capitalism had not become dominant in the Russian economy. One had to study the facts. And he did this himself in a masterly manner proving irrefutably the development of capitalism not only in industry but also in agriculture. Lenin further pointed out that the leading role of the working class was the product of history itself—its link with the most advanced method of production, its organisation through its work, its constant clash with the capitalists, its complete divorce from ownership of the means of production, its aim of social ownership and the unity of its emancipation with the emancipation of all the oppressed. The working class, of course, could only exercise its leadership if it won the confidence of other exploited sections of society, above all the peasants. The worker-peasant alliance was pivot and the mainstay of the Russian revolution, indeed of the revolution in almost all countries. But the peasants would win freedom from oppression only under the leadership of the working class and not vice versa. Lenin went on to sharply criticise the mob-hero concept of historical change. It was the masses who made history and individuals had a role to play in so far as they would champion the interests of and lead the masses into action. There could be no substitute for mass revolutionary action. Revolutionaries were those who could organise and lead the

masses and not those who tried to act on behalf of the masses.

It is interesting to recall here that Lenin's elder brother Alexander Ulyanov was a Narodnik. He paid for his convictions with his life, being sent to the gallows for attempting to kill the tsar with a bomb. When Lenin, then not yet in his twenties, heard the news he mourned for his brother and felt proud of his heroism but also said through gritted teeth that the way of Alexander Ulyanov would not be his way.

It is significant that Lenin launched upon his tremendous revolutionary career with the burning conviction that it was essential to build an organisation of revolutionaries and that for this purpose the first thing to be done was to start a newspaper. And he did start such a newspaper, the famous *Iskra*. This was the paper which acted as the agitator, propagandist and organiser of the revolutionaries and moulded them into the invincible party of the Bolsheviks. In this paper and a little earlier in his celebrated *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin had mercilessly castigated the Economists who preached that the movement was everything and the final aim nothing, who glorified the economic struggle and belittled the political struggle, who bowed before the spontaneous mass movement. He pointed out that objectively this attitude of the Economists left the field open for bourgeois politics and ideology and left the workers defenceless before the ideological-political offensive of their class enemy. It is in this book and in several articles in *Iskra* that Lenin explained how socialist consciousness, the ideas of scientific socialism had to be brought into the working-class movement from outside the economic and trade union struggles. Lenin was a merciless opponent of spontaneity. It is interesting to recall in this connection that while attacking the Economists Lenin was equally sharp against the anarchists and stated that they also bowed before spontaneity, only from the opposite direction. The Economists neglected ideological-political work among the masses on the ground that the masses would automatically, through their economic struggles, come over to socialist consciousness. The anarchists neglected ideological-political work among the masses on the ground that the masses or "the mob" would only follow the lead of the creative mino-

riety of "heroes" who would do the political work of the masses by hurling bombs and engaging in individual assassination.

Lenin worked out consistently and constantly solutions to the problems that arose with the new developments in the economy and politics of society. Above all, he analysed in masterly fashion the new phenomenon of monopoly capital or imperialism. He worked out the basic principles of the organisation of the party of new type, a vanguard party of social revolution. He worked out the tactics of the working class and its party in the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution, putting forward the concept of the proletarian hegemony of this revolution, as well as the line of transition from this stage of the revolution to the socialist stage.

While creatively developing Marxism on the basis of its fundamental principles, Lenin passionately defended the doctrine of scientific socialism from the revisionists. It can be stated that Lenin literally saved and rescued the living, revolutionary soul of Marxism from the revisionists. What was the line of the revisionists? They claimed to be Marxists. They claimed that all they wanted to do was to make Marxism "up-to-date". How? By substituting the old bourgeois liberal ideas for the fundamentals of Marxism! Claiming to "modernise" Marxism they actually wanted to drag it back to nineteenth century bourgeois liberalism. They wanted to convert Marxism into something "respectable" and "acceptable" to the bourgeoisie. The revisionists claimed that the scientific discoveries, especially in the sphere of atomic physics, had made materialism out of date—ideas, sensations and concepts were primary and not the objective reality existing independently of human consciousness. They claimed that the emergence of monopolies signified the advent of "organised" capitalism which, together with the increased wages of a part of the working class in a part of the world, had done away with economic crisis. They claimed that with the coming into being of bourgeois parliamentary democracy and adult suffrage the state had become "neutral" and revolutionary class struggle had become "outmoded". Gradual piecemeal progress through a series of reforms would ensure the smooth passage of capitalism to socialism or rather

it would evolve into socialism, grow "naturally" into it. Finally, the revisionists denied the international character and content of the working-class struggle. They claimed that the statement in the *Communist Manifesto* that the workers had no fatherland was outmoded as was the slogan—Workers of all lands, unite! They preached that the workers had a "stake" in "their nation" and that the workers had to "prove" their patriotism by supporting their capitalist government especially at moments of crisis or war. In other words, the revisionists substituted blatant bourgeois nationalism for proletarian internationalism. Without Lenin's implacable and victorious struggle against revisionism, the triumph of the November 1917 revolution would not have been possible.

While concentrating his fire on the revisionists, Lenin did not spare the "left" adventurists and dogmatists either. He ideologically and politically steeled his party against petty-bourgeois revolutionism which fell short, in anything essential, of the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle. Bolshevism carried on the struggle against petty-bourgeois revolutionism because these ultra-"revolutionaries" stubbornly refused to understand the need for a strictly objective appraisal of the class forces and their interrelations before undertaking any political action. Bolshevism also sharply castigated the petty-bourgeois revolutionists for their recognition of individual terrorism and assassination as being particularly "revolutionary" and "left".

The struggle against the petty-bourgeois revolutionists, who at a later stage donned the garb of "left" communists, also centred on such vital tactical questions as whether or not communists should participate in reactionary parliaments and whether or not communists should, in principle, reject all compromises. Lenin insisted that it is wrong to reject parliamentary work or work in reactionary trade unions on principle. Equally, he insisted, it is wrong to reject all compromises on principle. What is needed is always a concrete analysis of concrete conditions and to judge all tactical solutions of specific problems with the yardstick of whether or not these solutions help the

proletariat and its allies in their struggle for the revolutionary capture of power.

Lenin was able to ideologically and politically prepare the Bolsheviks for their mighty revolutionary deeds because he always upheld the fundamentals of Marxism and creatively developed Marxism by applying these fundamentals to the concrete problems of revolutionary practice and by using these fundamentals to generalise the experience of Russian and world revolutionary practice. By doing this—and in order to be able to do this—he was able to ideologically defeat both revisionism and petty-bourgeois revolutionism.

All this ideological-political work went hand-in-hand with mass work, mass revolutionary work. There were ups and downs in this work. For example, within a few years of the establishment of Bolshevism as a distinct political trend, the 1905 revolution broke out. General strikes of the workers combined with peasant actions to seize the land of the landlords. These revolutionary actions of the masses combined with the mutiny of the naval ratings. Armed insurrections took place in Moscow and Petrograd (now Leningrad) and many other towns and cities. The masses in revolutionary action not only assaulted the positions of tsarist autocracy but creatively threw up organs of struggle which were also in embryo organs of power—the Soviets of Workers' Deputies. Lenin and the Bolsheviks immediately hailed this tremendous creative act of the masses. During this period of the revolutionary upswing Lenin insisted that when the masses of workers and peasants had themselves taken to arms, the main task of the Bolsheviks was to properly organise the armed uprising and not leave matters to spontaneity. He sharply assailed the Mensheviks and other reformists who became all panicky when they saw the masses with arms in their hands and who cried out that the masses should not have taken to arms. He pointed out that in conditions of tsarist autocracy, when there were no civil liberties, no freedom of organisation, demonstration, political work and no parliament, the masses would take to arms at a time of a revolutionary situation. It was part of the heroism of the

masses. And given wise and resolute leadership the armed masses could smash tsarist autocracy.

At this time when the workers, peasants and sections of the intelligentsia had taken democracy to the streets, had taken up arms and were engaged in bitter armed struggle, the tsarist authorities tried a diversion. They announced elections to a body called the Duma with limited powers and to be elected on a limited franchise and with all kinds of subdivisions and electoral colleges heavily weighted in favour of the propertied classes. Lenin and the Bolsheviks denounced this diversion and called for a boycott of the elections to the Duma. And this was successfully carried out.

The 1905 revolution was crushed after over a year of resolute armed and other militant forms of action by the masses. By 1907 it was quite clear that the revolutionary situation had ended and that there was an ebb in the revolutionary tide. The time had come for a tactical retreat, for a regrouping of forces and preparation for a fresh assault when the inevitable upswing of the mass movement would arrive. At such a time Lenin and the Bolsheviks strenuously fought all demoralised and demoralising trends which wanted to push the party off the revolutionary path and into the bog of revisionism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks equally strenuously opposed "left" desperationism which wanted to continue the same tactics in this period as in the period of the revolutionary upsurge. They wanted to continue the boycott of the elections, refused to use whatever legal opportunities for work that existed, refused to work in and through even reactionary trade unions and other institutions that the tsarist authorities had set up for their own purposes. Some of them even wanted to continue the armed struggle without the masses—squad action of robbing banks, killing landlords, and policemen, etc. In short they both refused to see that the revolutionary situation no longer existed and to acknowledge that revolutionaries must know how to combine legal and illegal work. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had finally to expel these "left" desperationists from the party along with the revisionists. It was at this time that Lenin pointed out the

difference between the iron march of the proletarian battalions and petty-bourgeois frenzy.

The ebbtide of the revolution lasted for about six years and the start of the rise of the revolutionary tide began only in 1912. This got temporarily disrupted through the 1914 first imperialist world war. Lenin and the Bolsheviks correctly understood the character of the war. They saw it as an imperialist war on both sides, i.e. both Germany and her allies as well as Russia-Britain-France were fighting for a redistribution of an already divided world so as to gather a bigger share of colonial loot. Hence, basing themselves on proletarian internationalism, Lenin and the Bolsheviks called upon the revolutionaries and workers of the countries of both belligerent groups to convert the imperialist war into a civil war. They foretold that the imperialist war, itself the product of the crisis of world capitalism, would sharply aggravate all the contradictions of the imperialist system and inevitably produce a revolutionary situation. The revolutionary parties should prepare and organise themselves for such a crisis and prepare the masses as well.

And through certain unexpected twists and turns that is how it happened, In February 1917 (according to the old calendar in use in tsarist Russia) the tsar was overthrown by an armed uprising of the workers, peasants and soldiers. But, what was the power that came in its place? One of the most unique phenomena in history—a dual power. It needed the genius of a Lenin to immediately grasp the essence of this unique phenomenon and the superb tenacity of an unparalleled revolutionary propagandist, agitator as well as organiser, which was what Lenin was, to make his understanding the understanding of the party and then of the masses. What was this dual power? The tsarist autocracy had been replaced by a Provisional Government through which the bourgeoisie and the landlords exercised their power as well as by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies which represented the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. The bourgeois-landlord power was tolerated by the Soviets only because the latter was under the leadership of petty-bourgeois reformists masquerading as socialists. These petty-bourgeois leaders refused

to break with the bourgeoisie and landlords but wanted to strike a compromise with them at the expense of carrying the democratic revolution through to the end, above all by ending the war, distributing the land of the landlords to the peasants and taking over the property of the monopolists and speculators. Lenin said that thanks to the war which had partly dispersed the working class and brought vast masses of the peasants and petty bourgeoisie on to the political stage, a gigantic petty-bourgeois wave had submerged everything and everybody.

In such a situation what was the way forward? Lenin stated that the dual power could not last long. It had to be ended by transferring all power to the Soviets and by a sharp struggle in the Soviets to secure a majority for the Bolsheviks, to convert the Soviets from organs of the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants to organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the dictatorship of the working class in alliance with the poor peasantry. The task was to move on to the next stage of the revolution, the socialist revolution, through the triumph of which alone the tasks of the democratic revolution also could be carried out.

How was this to be done? It would be well if the Naxalites who make an absolute of armed struggle read Lenin's writings of that period. From February right up to July 1917 Lenin, the greatest revolutionary of all time, insisted that in Russia a peaceful transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat, a peaceful socialist revolution, was possible and that is what should be striven for! Lenin never made the mistake of equating content with form, mixing up revolution with armed struggle. At the same time Lenin kept on emphasising two other points. One was that peaceful transition was only a possibility and not an inevitability; the revolutionaries should be ready for the other possibility as well—armed insurrection and civil war—since the specific form of the revolution could not be decided by the revolutionaries alone. The other was that no transition, whether peaceful or armed, was going to be smooth. The transition would be accomplished through a series of crises—the decisive factor would be the masses in action. It was the masses who would make the revolution and emancipate them-

selves through the victory of their revolution. The Bolsheviks would have, of course, to organise them, put forward slogans which would express the consciousness of the masses and carry it forward step by step and supply the element of indispensable leadership. Leadership of the revolutionary masses—yes! Substitution for mass revolutionary action—no!

In July 1917 a drastic change took place. The bourgeoisie and landlords abandoned and destroyed democratic freedoms and institutions. They took recourse to a military dictatorship. They banned the Bolsheviks, illegalised their papers, issued a warrant against Lenin and other prominent Bolshevik leaders and worked out plans to suppress the workers and peasants by the use of military force. It was the bourgeoisie and landlords who placed the bayonet on the agenda. It was they who, to use the expressive phrase of Marx, made it necessary for the workers, the poor peasants with the Bolsheviks at their head to pass from using the "weapon of criticism" to using the "criticism of weapons".

Although Lenin and the Bolsheviks were clear from July 1917 that peaceful transition was not possible and that an armed uprising would now have to be undertaken, they did not immediately commence armed struggle. On the contrary they, first and foremost, intensified their mass work. They went all out to secure a Bolshevik majority in the forthcoming All-Russia Congress of Soviets scheduled to meet on 8 November (26 October—old style). They went all out to raise the tempo of the peasant movement for the seizure of the land of the landlords. They increased their work in the army. They worked night and day among the industrial workers and organised the Red Guards or workers' armed militia squads. Once an insurrection had been decided upon, the first thing was to make this the consciousness of the masses and to organise them to carry it out. Naturally, the actual date of the uprising and its details were known till the end only to a few leaders, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. But the uprising itself was never treated as a great conspiracy, much less was it left to be carried out by a peculiar combination of some students in league with underworld elements.

When news reached Lenin that the Bolsheviks were clearly going to have a majority in the forthcoming Congress of Soviets, he insisted that a detailed plan be drawn up of the insurrection, especially in Petrograd and Moscow. He warned that to delay now would be dangerous. The insurrection had to be launched and carried through to a successful conclusion just on the eve of the date fixed for the convocation of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets. 6 November (24 October—old style) would be too early and 8 November (26 October—old style) would be too late. And when it came to fixing the details of the insurrection Lenin did not pick out individuals who had to be liquidated but key vantage posts which had to be seized and the bourgeois-landlord ministry which had to be arrested. It was a meticulously planned revolutionary seizure of power by the vanguard armed detachments of the workers and the poor peasants. And ever since 7 November 1917 (25 October—old style) has become an immortal date in the history of humanity.

The insurrection succeeded remarkably swiftly and with scarcely any bloodshed. It was the imperialists in league with the bourgeois-landlord whiteguards who later forced a cruel civil war which lasted for years and caused immense devastation and took a heavy toll of lives. It was Winston Churchill who grandiloquently declared that to strangle the Bolshevik baby in its cradle fourteen armies would march into Russia. These armies marched but it was the Bolshevik baby who strangled the imperialist monsters invested as it was with the invincible Herculean power of the emancipated workers and toilers who were defending their revolution, guns in hand. As part of the civil war and in retribution against the killings of Bolsheviks, revolutionary workers and peasants and the individual assassination attempts—including on the life of Lenin—the Soviet power declared a “red terror” against the “white terror” that was already raging. The red terror was again not directed against petty policemen and small usurers but consisted in taking as hostages some of the most prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie and landlords. Red terror was never an end in itself nor was it carried out in isolation. It was a part of

and was meant to work towards the victory of the cruel civil war imposed on the victorious Soviet power by the foreign imperialists. And again, let it be stressed that it was carried out by the armed detachments and the coercive state apparatus of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat. It was not left to be done by squads of intellectuals in the company of lumpen criminal elements. And, certainly, never was a whole ritual made of red terror with the chopping off of the heads of landlords and exhibiting them, dipping hands in the blood of the slain persons, and the like. The Bolsheviks and the revolutionary workers and peasants left such grisly doings to the imperialists. The Bolsheviks carried out the red terror against the class enemy imbued with class revolutionary humanism. Never did they make a fetish of violence, bloodshed and killing. Never did they degenerate into sadists.

There are many other aspects of the work of Lenin and Bolsheviks which need to be studied deeply by all who wish to be revolutionaries in India in our epoch. But the brief sketch presented above should make it clear that revolution has much, much more to it than just killing and stabbing and robbery. Above all, what should be clear is that revolution is the affair of the masses. And what should be clear is that revolution and revolutionary work have many forms. Not he who writes the most “revolutionary” of essays, not he who shouts the most “revolutionary” of phrases, not he who takes to the revolver, the pipegun and the knife is necessarily the true revolutionary. He is a true revolutionary who by his work helps to bring the workers and other toilers to revolutionary positions.

II

The CPI precisely sets itself that objective. The CPI is perfectly clear that India cannot complete the national democratic revolution, much less make the transition to socialism, under the present state power. It is of the view that the present state power is the state power of the capitalist class as a whole. Under this state power and this class rule India can make only