

side the CPI (ML)'s fold find agreement on a tactical line and form a new party or before there is a full discussion on a tactical line leading to a single, unified Maoist party in India. But at the moment the relationship between the CPI (ML) and other Maoist groups including the RCC is a non-antagonistic one, just as the relationship between the two non-Maoist communist parties is a non-antagonistic one.

But meantime, the application of the two different tactical lines—of the CPI (ML) and of the RCC—and their results would be a fascinating experiment to watch.

The Naxalite Tactical Line

ABHIJAN SEN

EVER since the beginning of the Naxalbari movement an interminable controversy has been going on over the question of strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution. The amount of polemical literature that has so far been churned out may well fill several volumes. So the present article does not intend to add to these staggering volumes. Its purpose simply is to trace in bare outline the evolution of Naxalite tactics in the countryside. To be more precise, the focus is strictly on the principal Naxalite stream that organised itself as the CPI (ML).

The tactical line of mobilising and rousing the peasantry through "annihilation of class enemies" which was finalised around April 1969 had, however, been taking shape for quite some time. One of the first important attempts in this regard was made by Kanu Sanyal in his "Report on the Peasant Struggle in the Terai" (*Deshabrat*, October 24, 1968). The report dealt not only with the tactics actually employed by the revolutionary peasants of the Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa areas but made some general observations about the tactics to be employed in the next phase of the struggle.

The broad strategic objective of the communist revolutionaries who launched the Naxalbari struggle is to liberate the countryside by waging a protracted people's war and then encircle the cities. Naturally one of their principal tactical problems relates to the mobilisation of the peasants for armed struggle and creation of liberated areas. Kanu Sanyal described in detail the way the peasants were drawn into the struggle and how they set up an embryonic form of people's power in a limited area.

The process of politicalising the peasants of the area had started quite a few years ago. The local peasants' association under the leadership of the revolutionaries had in the past launched a number of struggles on partial and economic demands. A qualitative change came in March 1967 when the Peasants' Association of the Siliguri sub-division called upon the peasants to launch a struggle for the seizure of political power. Specifically the peasants were urged to establish the control of the peasant committees on all the affairs of the village, to get organised and armed for smashing the resistance of jotedars and other reactionaries, to break the monopolistic hold of jotedars over land and redistribute them through peasant committees. In response to this call thousands of peasants held numerous group discussions and meetings, formed branches of peasant committees and armed themselves. As Sanyal noted, since every small struggle of the peasants had in the past encountered armed repression the slogan 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun' had a magic effect in organising them. Thus after the peasants had been aroused and organised they went ahead to implement the decisions of the Peasants' Association.

The ten principal activities of the peasants listed by Kanu Sanyal give an idea of the methods by which the decision was implemented. The first achievement of the peasants was to strike at the monopolistic land-holding of the jotedars which is the basis of the latter's political, economic and social dominance. The land of the whole of Terai was "nationalised"

for redistribution among peasants. The second, third and fourth categories consisted in the destruction of all land records and papers concerning debt and seizure of foodgrains, livestock and other properties of the jotedars for redistribution among the people. The fifth was public trial and execution of jotedars known for their oppressive past or of those who resisted peasant struggle. Their other achievements, according to Kanu Sanyal, consisted in the building up of a village self-defence force armed with home-made and captured weapons and replacement of bourgeois-feudal power by people's power.

One thing that comes out clearly from Sanyal's report is that, although initiated by the revolutionaries of the Peasants' Association, the Naxalbari movement was something of a mass upsurge in which spontaneity and mass initiative far outweighed the planning and discipline required of a revolutionary movement. Without proper politicalisation, military experience and discipline the movement suffered setbacks in the face of police repression. The very open and public nature of their declaration and preparation for armed struggle must also have exposed them too much before they could get sufficiently organised. Perhaps that is why Kanu Sanyal suggested that in the next phase of struggle they would set up party units which will not only be armed but will also be "trained to maintain secrecy". Such party units will propagate Mao's thoughts, intensify class struggle and "as guerilla units strike and annihilate class enemies". They were also expected to participate with the people in production whenever possible.

Mazumdar's Suggestions

A conference of the revolutionary peasants of the Naxalbari area held in September 1968 reaffirmed the line suggested by Sanyal—the building of party units to propagate Mao's thoughts, intensify class struggle and launch guerilla attacks on class enemies, police informers and even the army if such opportunity arises. So far the sole concern of the party

unit, it had been thought, was associated with armed struggle for the seizure of political power. However, Charu Mazumdar had by that time just come up with some additional suggestions about the tactical line. In an article entitled "To the Comrades" (*Deshabrati*, August 1, 1968) he said, "the comrades who are working in peasant areas, while engaged in propagating politics should not minimize the necessity of placing a general slogan on economic demands. Because without drawing the large section of peasants into the movement backward peasants cannot be brought in a position to grasp politics or keep up their hatred against class enemies." In another article published in *Deshabrati* (October 17, 1968) Charu Mazumdar further elaborated on the problem of mobilising the backward sections of the peasantry. While insisting on the necessity of secret political propaganda by the party so as not to prematurely expose it to repression, he however, pointed out that backward peasants would be late in grasping politics under this method. "And for this reason", he wrote, "it is and will be necessary to launch economic struggles against the feudal classes. For this reason it is necessary to lead movements for the seizure of crops, the form of the struggle depending on the political consciousness and organization of the area." He further stated that "without widespread mass struggle of the peasants and without the participation of large sections of the masses in the movement the politics of seizure of power would take time in striking roots in the consciousness of the peasants".

This line of launching mass struggles for economic demands did not, however, quite fit into the tactics of secret politicalisation by underground and armed party units. Implicit in Mazumdar's writing was that both these methods of arousing the peasants would continue *simultaneously*. But the open nature of the mass struggle for economic gains would expose the party apparatus and defeat the purpose of secret political propaganda by the party units. This dilemma was resolved in mid-1969

when, drawing on the teaching of Lin Piao that "guerilla warfare is the only way to mobilise and apply the whole strength of the people against the enemy", Mazumdar said, "the revolutionary initiative of wider sections of the peasant masses can be released through annihilation of class enemies by guerilla methods and neither mass organization nor mass movement is indispensable before starting guerilla war." (Quoted in *Deshabrati*, April 23, 1970, p. 11). Later he further clarified his stand to mean that mass struggle for economic gains would *follow* guerilla action, not precede or accompany it. In his "A Few Words on Guerilla Action" (*Deshabrati*, January 15, 1970) he explained in detail how after some preliminary propaganda work for the seizure of power has been done by the party unit, small guerilla bands would be formed in a completely conspiratorial way for striking down the most hated class enemies. After the first action has taken place political cadres would start whispering around innocently about the advantages to be obtained when the oppressors have left the area in fear or have been liquidated. Then the peasants could enjoy undisturbed the land and wealth of the village. Many peasants would now be shaken out of their inertia and encouraged to join the struggle. "When quite a number of offensive 'actions' have taken place and the revolutionary political line of annihilating the class enemies has been firmly established" only then the political cadres would give the general economic slogan 'seize the crop of the class enemy'. This slogan will achieve miracles. Even the most backward peasant would now join the struggle".

Guerilla Action

The long way that has been travelled by the revolutionaries since the Naxalbari struggle can best be guessed by comparing Kanu Sanyal's report with that of the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa border regional committee of the CPI (ML) on the Debra-Gopiballavpur struggle published in *Deshabrati*, April 23, 1970. As the report self-critically admits, initially the re-

revolutionaries of the area had a vague notion about a Naxalbari-type of armed peasant uprising and they hoped that guerilla bands would emerge out of armed clashes for the seizure of crops. But in practice they could not adopt any specific programme other than propagate the politics of seizure of power through armed struggle. Rather by resorting to pure economism and public demonstrations at places they exposed the organization and invited repression. The movement for the time being was in the doldrums. It was only after Charu Mazumdar had given the line of starting guerilla warfare through annihilation of class enemies that they could break out of their inertia, it was stated. On August 21, 1969 the regional committee of the CPI (ML) met at Soor-muhi and decided upon launching an annihilation campaign against class enemies. As the report said, the very first armed action which was not even successful released the floodgates of peasant initiative, which could not have been possible by their propaganda work. "With every action mass initiative and class hatred of the peasants started growing and so did rise the level of their political consciousness." Simultaneous political propaganda also helped the process. After two months of guerilla offensive against jotedars in November 1969 thousands of peasants, it was claimed, rose up in arms. Under the leadership of the party armed peasants seized all the crops of oppressive jotedars and those of enemy agents. Many jotedars were disarmed and fled the villages. The peasants set up people's courts to try the oppressors. They secured the return of all their mortgaged property from the moneylenders. The jotedars who stayed on agreed to abide by the dictates of the peasants who fixed the wage for khetmajurs (landless labour-

ers). Shop prices were also fixed by them. In the wake of this came brutal police repression. But, as the report says, "after the taste of liberation they had, any amount of repression would not be able to rob the peasants of their dream of bright days of liberation in future." Faced with the encirclement and suppression campaign by Eastern Frontier Rifles the guerilla squads dispersed over a wider area and carried on their annihilation campaign simultaneously with political propaganda.

The way the struggle in Gopiballavpur, Debra and Baharagora started and developed sets it apart from the Naxalbari struggle. In Naxalbari thousands of peasants responding to the call of the Peasants' Association sprang into action, concentrating mainly on the seizure of land, the basis of feudal domination. In the Gopiballavpur area the struggle was launched by small guerilla squads. By delivering lightning blows at the class enemies they created a sort of power vacuum in the area into which thousands of peasants moved in, seized crops and properties and set up peasants' rule. Kanu Sanyal stressed at the end of his report the necessity of thoroughly carrying out revolutionary land redistribution. But the report on the Gopiballavpur, Debra and Baharagora struggles summarised above does not mention this aspect. Rather than formal redistribution of land the emphasis seems to have been placed on the actual control of the peasant committees on village affairs including appropriation of crops. Compared to Naxalbari this struggle appears to be much more disciplined and planned. It is claimed that the "Red power" which came into existence, even if temporarily, helped to politicalise and enthuse the peasants. Political consciousness of the peasants has in fact been raised to such a level that the police as well the administration, as admitted even by the bourgeois press, find the local people totally un-cooperative and often hostile. All this perhaps explains why the struggle in Gopiballavpur has survived and continues to develop in the face of massive repression.

For Frontier contact
People's Book House
Meher House,
Cowasji Patel Street,
Fort, Bombay

JULY 4, 1970