

Of State Terror and Civil Society

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In West Bengal, state terror is rampant in the jangal mahal and probing tentatively into the rest of the state including the ‘progressive bastion’ of Kolkata.

Everyday the combined forces fire on the people in the jangal mahal. Today’s news (Feb 2, 2010) of the shooting down of two women during a mass demonstration at Barikul, Dt Bankura, will not cause perhaps even a ripple in the swell of book ‘lovers’ around the Book Fair. The conscience of civil society seems to have been immunized to the day by day intensification of the suppression of the people’s movement in jangal mahal. Even the criminal neglect of the terminal illness of Swapan Dasgupta, editor of the *People’s March* in Bangla, leading to what amounts to custodial death, in Kolkata itself, fails to stir the intellectuals to any concerted protest.

That like all other so-called social institutions, civil society is class-divided is clearly demonstrated. A section, aligned to the main opposition party (which still has a role to play in dislodging the present government), instead of fighting the pro-corporate trends and the opposition to independent people’s movements in that party, are falling into the trap of trying to justify these policies, which are suspiciously like the fascist trends of the present rulers. Apart from this section, a large proportion of the rest of the democrats, who supported the struggles in Singur and Nandigram, oppose the Maoists in their ideology/politics and/or strategy/tactics/forms of movement, and look at the movement in the jangal mahal through the lens of this opposition. This is the genesis of the paralysis of the opinion-makers in civil society. In this situation, the opinion of the masses of people constituting civil society at large is largely influenced by the media alone.

A movement of the toiling people may not coincide in its aims/methods with the perception of a large section of civil society, especially when the vocal leadership of the movement spells out methods and aims unacceptable to the class interests of this section. Democratic opinion should still

- (1) separate out what can be supported in such a movement and, of course,
- (2) oppose steadfastly state terror, even when it is used against a movement which it cannot support at all.

And, any informed reader of the newspapers can make out that what is happening in the jangal mahal is not typical of the Maoist tactics of individual killing, armed propaganda, and suppression of dissent by force. The Maoists may not like it or may be they are changing their tactics, but the fact is that the people are still demonstrating in thousands, unsupported by civil society which is ready to talk of people’s rights and their deprivation, of economic plight and political subjugation, in general, but refuses to apply these general principles to the particular situation of the jangal mahal. As if it is not possible to oppose specific policies (or even all the policies) of the Maoists, and yet uphold the rightful demands of the people of the jangal mahal and their right to assemble

and demonstrate. And ask for the withdrawal of the occupation armed forces and the black acts.

Having thus paralysed itself, civil society fails to see how state terror is approaching all dissidents, and doesn't know how to react when a suspected Maoist, whose only crime seems to be editing a lawful journal, is killed in custody by default.

The Maoists however, demand that civil society must not criticize the policies being executed by them in the jangal mahal. This demand further widens the gulf between the movement in the jangal mahal and civil society.

Given the disparate class bases of the movement in the jangal mahal and even democratic opinion in civil society, there are bound to be differences. On the other hand, the class relations are such that in spite of differences a large section of civil society can be retained on the anti-fascist platform. But the onus of mobilizing civil society support lies with the jangal mahal, and not the other way round.

The history of the Russian and Chinese revolutions teach the lesson that heed must be given to non-party criticism if bureaucracy and bourgeois distortions are to be avoided.

Whatever the attitude of the Maoists, civil society will no doubt realize that it has no option, in the interest of its own, independent functioning in future, other than upholding the democratic issues of the movement in the jangal mahal. Any other course will be suicidal for democracy, or what is left of it. □

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