

PROBLEMS OF MAOISM

Maoist Polemics—The Mass Line

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One of the most important theoretical issues in the Communist Movement is the issue of Mass Line. In Indian Communist movement most authentic practice of revolutionary mass line took place in the 1946-1951 Telengana Armed Struggle. Thereafter armed mass peasant movements took place like in Srikakulam or Naxalbari but all of them fell victim to left deviation. The principal precursor of this was the left adventurist line of Charu Mazumdar, who called for disbanding mass organizations and called for annihilation of class enemies. Trade Unions and mass struggles had no place in his programme.

The most important historical question is whether conditions ever existed historically for armed struggle since the days of the Naxalbari movement, and it is correct to defer armed struggle. In this debate the revolutionary camp remained divided. From the late 1970's Organizations upholding armed struggle (now constituents of the CPI(Maoist)) like the Andhra Pradesh State Committee, the Maoist Communist Centre and the Party Unity Organization in Bihar made rectification in their line and upheld the formation of revolutionary mass organizations and movements. In fact there was a thaw in the post-emergency period in Andhra Pradesh, when armed actions were stopped to concentrate on building mass agitations, particularly of the peasantry. However these sections persisted with the line of 'annihilation of class enemies' and although significant peasant movements were built up Mass Organizations were not given their independent identity, and often armed squads replaced the mass movements. Today, although leading a huge mass Movement the line of the CPI-(Maoist) is vitiated by these trends.

In the author's view today there is no trend completely upholding the revolutionary mass line. Within the camp that defers armed struggle there are strong revisionist, semi-revisionist or right deviationist tendencies. Although they take progressive stands on several issues they are hardly effective in upholding revolutionary mass resistance. The best example of these are groups that originally belonged to the various sections of the UCCRI, the Janashakti groups, the Red Flag Group, and the organization led by the late Kanu Sanyal. In the present polarisation of revolutionary groups in this camp the chief representatives are the CPI(ML) Liberation, CPI(ML) led by K N Ramchandran and the CPI(ML) New Democracy groups. One feature of these groups is that they have All India Trade Union Centres or platforms uniting peasant organizations. However their style of functioning is not coherent with that of building revolutionary mass resistance, and displays reformist tendencies. True the 'New Democracy Group' still leads mass agitations, particularly in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, but powerful rightist tendencies are reflected. One of the most capitulationist tendencies within the revolutionary camp was the line of participation in parliamentary elections. This line led to some groups openly capitulating to revisionism like the CPI-(ML) Liberation Group. Quoting Scott Harrison "From what I've read, the dominant concept of the mass line in the overall revolutionary movement in India is mostly incorrect : For groups other than the CPI-(Maoist) it means something like organizing the masses in their own (mostly)

legal struggles as opposed to illegal revolutionary mass action and armed struggles. That's clearly a deeply rightist conception."

Today groups like the CPI (ML) led by K N Ramchandran (earlier known as Red Flag Group) have virtually become reformist, abandoning the path of revolutionary resistance and resorting to total open functioning. They go out of the way to condemn the military actions of the CPI-(Maoist) and assert that India is a neo-colony. The major contribution of the CPI-(ML) Red Flag Group in its earlier phase(1988-1992) was to launch a struggle against sectarianism and for the unity of the Party. It also launched a major struggle defending the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat as against the line of upholding nationality line as the principal one. Earlier a line was advocated within the organization upholding the struggle for nationalities as the principal contradiction by K Venu. A unity platform was launched for all sections of Communist revolutionaries within the camp, which was significant since there was so much disunity within the movement. Several seminars and rallies were held on defending the achievements of Socialism in USSR and China, after the toppling of the erstwhile USSR and the East European regimes. All-India efforts were initiated against Communalism and State repression. Great Emphasis was placed on launching mass struggles and the need for mass movements to substantiate armed struggle. Great efforts were also made to defend important aspects of Leninist polemics through open theoretical journals brought out regularly. However where this organization erred was the analysis of taking Imperialism as the principal contradiction and also resorting to open party functioning. One historical contribution of Red Flag Group was that they defended Mao tse Tung Thought against using the term Maoism, and tooth and nail refuted the Dengist theory of 3 Worlds upheld by the majority section of the revolutionary camp. What was significant was the All-India perspective the organization implemented. However later they capitulated to right deviation by participating in election and resorting to open functioning. A major aspect that went against them was their assesrment that Lin Biaoism existed in the CPC in the late 1960's and that trend caused left adventurism. It virtually accused the Chinese Communist Party of exhibiting revisionism. The second factor was their rejecting the semi-colonial, semi-feudal structure, characterizing India as a neo-colony—thus a state with bargaining rights.

The CPI-(ML) New Democracy, although adhering to many of the formulations of the mass line, have displayed several rightist-deviationist tendencies by embracing the path of participation in elections. It is significant that at one time the same organization, then known as the Chandra Pulla Reddy Group, was the strongest group in India, which asserted secret party functioning. True, later they built mass organizations and struggles and expanded to the urban areas but sowed the seeds for capitulationism by almost resorting to total open functioning.

Another significant formation was the formation of the Central-Team of the CPI-(ML). Its formation was the culmination of a historic 2-line struggle waged 30 years ago against the line of Saytanarayan Singh and Chandra Pulla Reddy that supported the participation in Elections by Communist Revolutionaries.

Quoting their document "The heroic ideological struggle through concrete actions leading to armed agrarian upsurge by the peasantry ,the main force of revolution gave birth to the re-organized Communist Party-the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist). In 30 years the party has split into several fractions. Some of them claim to be the party while others operate as part of the party. Many Communist revolutionaries are

divided in these groups. There has been failure of Communist Revolutionaries to evaluate correctly the original/correct formulation on which the structure of the party was built. The time is most suited for the true Communist Revolutionaries to merge with the whole i.e. with the CPI-(ML) and form the centre to take up the responsibility of the Indian Revolution which is New Democratic and principally an armed agrarian revolution. There must be the monolithic Centre of Democratic Centralism which was lost after 1972. (When the original CPI-(ML) disintegrated) The All India Revolutionary Centre (re-establish the 8th Central Committee) of the party must be re-established."

"The Central Leadership of the CPI-(ML) failed to resolve correctly certain questions of policy regarding mass line, military line and style of work. Instead of devising correct CT Marxist Leninist policies in the light of objective analysis, the central leadership started such policies subjectively. Consequently revolution received setbacks. The Central leadership gradually deviated from the very ideological foundation of the party. They revealed a sectarian, individualist and bureaucratic trend. They failed to mobilize all the sincere CR's in the party, through ideological persuasion and political struggle. Although the 8th Congress of the CPI-(ML), boldly drew a clear line of demarcation between Marxism and Revisionsism, upheld the correct general orientation and path of Indian Revolution, yet adopted certain left adventurist policies on the questions of mass and military line. It asserted that mass struggles and mass movements were indispensable and that the principal contradiction was that between feudalism and the broad masses."

"Some forces, in the name of taking opportunity of open activity make the whole party apparatus work openly in the name of the party, and organize mass programs and movements under the party banner. They fail to understand that the task of the party is to lead the masses in the path of protracted People's War. Only when masses come to realize the party politics through day to day movements, class struggles under the revolutionary leadership of the party, then only the party forces, can move like a fish in water of masses, even when they have become completely exposed. Any short-cut system of building closer association with the people by presenting the party banner and identity will open the whole party forces to the enemies. "

The Central Team Group at one stage strived for mass line in states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab. Dialectical analysis and practice was made on the building of peasant associations. Theoretically, they made a contribution by staunchly defending the proletarian Revolutionary line and the concept of the vanguard party. They also made great efforts towards the unification of the party. They published documents against wrong trends like the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and the liquidationist path of participation in elections. It founded the historical revolutionary journal 'The Surukh Rekha', which played a major role in the development of the mass line in Punjab. During the Khalistan Movement the Organization led major actions against the Khalistani factions to isolate them. The party organized armed combat forces. In both the villages and the cities they implemented mass revolutionary action programme. A revolutionary paper named 'Jasood' was brought out regularly and commendable work was done amongst Construction and Air India Workers. No Journal has been as regular or defended Mao tse Tung Thought so consistently in Maharashtra as 'Jasood'. It dealt with all types of sociopolitical issues from Communalism, International questions, state repression to Trade Union and peasant struggles. Public meetings were held upholding the Naxalabri Movement, the Bolshevik Revolution etc. Major efforts were made to differentiate the mass organization with the Party, and to

maintain the secret party structure... The principal weakness of this group was its reluctance to accept participation in elections as a possible tactic in the revolution at any stage, and its absolute adherence to the upholding of the Charu Mazumdar CPI-(ML) line. It also erred in its analysis by being critical of T Nagi Reddy's mass line efforts and organization. Eventually, the major part of the organization merged with the UCCRI sections to form a new centre. The part of the organization that did not merge is now virtually defunct.

The most authentic work on the mass agrarian revolutionary line and formation of the proletarian party was done by Tarimala Nagi Reddy through his struggle against the Charu Mazumdar led All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries of India (AICCR) and formation of the Andhra Pradesh Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (APCCCR) with D V Rao in 1969. Nagi Reddy and D V Rao stressed emphasis on mass revolutionary line and preparation for sowing the seeds of armed struggle. Both deferred armed struggle and even opposed the armed squad resistance line of Chandra Pulla Reddy in 1973. This section fought relentlessly against the Charu Mazumdar line of Active Boycott as a strategic line for the Indian revolution and stressed on the fact that in certain stages "participation in election' could be used as a tactic. Quoting Tarimala Nagi Reddy in 1969 in an Interview to the Swedish Journalists "WE can go in for armed struggle in a really large area and still sit in parliament in other areas when armed struggle is not going on. If we had been carrying on the working class Struggles in the revolutionary way during these 16 years, we could probably also have used the parliament, even if agrarian revolution was taking place in other areas. India has many different organizational revolutionary requirements. As for the future we must wait and see how things develop, how successful is our organization's work and how effective is the co-ordination of all these struggles. Then we must consider the various tactical possibilities open to us." In Punjab, under the leadership of Harbhajan Singh Sohi, the Punjab Co-Ordination Committee, struggled for the mass revolutionary line. Mass Organizations like the Punjab Students Union and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha were revived and the famous Moga Sangram rally was held on October 22nd 1974 under the leadership of the Ferozepur-Bhatinda Committee.

In 1974 the Ferozepur-Bhatinda Committee brought out a significant document stating :

1. Since the socio-economic conditions differ and political consciousness varies from place to place the revolutionary movements have to pass through various stages and different tactics would have to be used at various places.
2. To ignore open and legal struggles is left adventurism. These will contribute to the development of armed struggle.
3. Annihilation of class enemies leads to the emergence of feelings of hero worship and retard revolutionary initiative.
4. To ignore partial and economic struggles is dogmatism. The working class will have to pass through various stages.

In April 1975, the birth of the Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (UCCRI-ML) took place, under his initiative and that of D V Rao. In July 1976, Nagi Reddy expired and D V Rao led the organization.

After the death of Nagi Reddy in 1976 on the theoretical plane the late Harbhajan Singh Sohi made the greatest contribution. He played a major role in the leading of the revolutionary mass movement of the Punjab Students Union in the late 1970's. On July

17th 1979 Prithipal Singh Randhawa, the leader of Punjab Students Union was murdered. A major armed protest struggle was developed all over the state involving 20,000 people... Sohi was the protagonist of the most correct International line in the Indian Communist Camp where he maintained the deferring of the formation of a new Communist International Line and upheld the path of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. He split the UCCRI-(ML) in 1979 on grounds of the pernicious thesis of three worlds theory of Deng Xiaoping which was upheld by D V Rao. Harbhajan Sohi also made a historic contribution by writing a document on the correct relationship of mass organizations with the Party. Quoting the document "The mass organizations are an instrument for the revolutionary party to approach the maximum number of people, bringing them into the organized movement and imparting them the preliminary understanding and experience which may enable them to grasp and absorb the revolutionary propaganda.

"While providing leadership a mass organization the party of the working class does not find it difficult to retain a separate identity of its own as the champion of the overall interests of the working class. It provides its leadership from the overall standpoint of the revolutionary movement. During the current struggles of peasants the party through its propaganda provides them with a correct direction regarding the intention of both of the contending sides, the peasants and the govt, their reliable and vacillating allies and opponents, the favourable and unfavourable conditions etc. The party maintains its separate identity as the champion of the basic interest of the working class by making the peasant movement more vigilant of the deception and allies of the opportunist political forces, exposing the anti-peasant nature of the state structure and the need and methods of destroying the prevalent system. The party leads from the overall revolutionary standpoint in connection with the making of a common cause with those allies of the peasant movement who can stand up with it against the common enemy.

On different occasions, the concerned mass organizations may adopt that part of the party's propaganda that suits their given level and need. Through sustained and repeated propaganda by the party, the image of the party being for them is increased, and the party's leadership gains credibility. The mass organizations respect the party's propaganda and more advanced sections are developed from them.

The party must introduce politics that matches with the level of political consciousness that exists in a mass organization. The masses must be able to assimilate that level of politics. The quantity and quality of politics has to be analysed."

In the period of the Khalistani Movement the UCCRI-(ML) Nagi Reddy Group led by Harbhajan Singh Sohi in Punjab exhibited outstanding examples of mass revolutionary resistance and building of mass line. (One of the most outstanding examples in the history of the Communist Movement in India) It played a major role on the formation and functioning of the anti-repression and anti-communal Front. This organization made a major contribution in the revolutionary democratic movement in the Khalistani period in Punjab and developed cores of mass revolutionary resistance against the Khalistani Terrorism. "In areas where we were strong we worked with the perspective of building checkpoints. Against the Khalistani onslaught we built mass revolutionary resistance. We organized defensive armed demonstrations where we had a solid mass base and organizations in different sections-particularly among the basic masses of the people. Defensive armed actions or red terror may be organized as an activity supplementary to the people's mass resistance basing on it and advancing it." Major mass resistance rallies against Khalistani terrorism were led by a mass resistance front formed by them

on July 10 at Moga in 1987 ,and the martyrs conferences in Sewawala in 1991 and 1992 (Memorial conference in memory of the Sewawala Martyrs). Articulate preparations and plans of military self-defence were made by the revolutionary forces against the Khalistani forces. The great achievement of the martyrs' conference of 1992 was that a most unfavourable situation was turned into a favourable one, reminiscent of the Vietcong who heroically defeated the American forces in the Vietnam war. The campaign also effectively answered the question of the mass revolutionary line over the line of squad actions. An earlier supporter of Squad actions stated "What we achieved here cannot be achieved by a squad action." Another Student leader stated "Mass revolutionary line is invincible and armed squad action cannot substitute it". A volunteer Student Group stated "We have gained a valuable experience in the mass revolutionary line."

In 1989 a Major May Day programme was launched displaying the correct Unity approach of Communist Revolutionaries.

Harbhajan Sohi's efforts played a significant role in the formation of the Communist Party Re-Organisation Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist),formed in 1994. It is significant that it is his formulations that are the basis for the current mass movement in Punjab of the landed peasantry, landless peasantry and Electricity workers. Not only have peasant organizations of landless peasants done solidarity with the peasant organizations of the landed peasantry, but there have been inter-solidarity actions launched by electricity workers with the peasants. The unity of landless peasants with the landed have great significance in revolutionary movement and so does the unity of the working class with the peasantry. Today in Punjab the mass agitations by the Electricity workers led by the Technical Services Union (Bhangal) have launched several solidarity actions with struggles of the BKU (Ekta)-Ugrahan and vice-versa. This organization defers armed struggle, but also combats open functioning and participation in elections. It staunchly defends the CPI (Maoist) as Communist revolutionaries defending their work in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand but defers with their military line. The struggles it has launched in Orissa and Punjab are an abject lesson to the revolutionary camp in the struggle for mass preparation for revolutionary mass resistance, and the correct relationship of the mass organizations with the party. A remarkable aspect of this trend is that it rejects both 'Active boycott' or 'participation' as correct tactics in the present situation. Three major Election campaigns were launched in 1998, 1999 and 2004 projecting the revolutionary Alternative and refuting both trends of 'participation' and 'active boycott' of parliamentary elections. Both the campaigns sharpened the class consciousness of the broad masses to a considerable extent towards enhancing movements for building a revolutionary alternative and overshadowed the work of any revolutionary group in Punjab.

A mass revolutionary peasant uprising may not have taken place but there have been demonstrations of peasants in Orissa and Punjab defending their rights or offering mass resistance against the force of vested interests carrying traditional armed weapons. Many of their mass organization struggles like in Punjab and particularly in Orissa in the agrarian revolutionary Front are creating the grounds for peasant's eventual armed struggle or uprising during the Chinese revolution, in the preparation phase of armed struggle. The BKU (Ekta-Ugrahan) has taken historically correct steps to build a peasant movement of the landed peasantry combating wrong trends and has given a classic example of carrying out mass revolutionary work within a single large body. They have led state-wide agitations and are creating a base for district-level and State wide movements of the landed peasantry.. In Orissa in the Malkangiri district an outstanding

tribal Movement and Organization has been built. It has been an example of an organization with mass character and practising democratic functioning. It has fought for immediate, partial demands as well as political demands. It has instilled in the tribals that through their struggles and through the medium of their mass organizations, they can become the alternative centres of power and authority. The Malkangiri Adivasi Sangh has also shown the importance of assistance from the class allies, particularly the working class. The Sangh has shown that people when organized can govern their own affairs and collectively assert their authority.

Quoting a party document " It is the level of consciousness and preparedness of the people that determines the realization of the necessity and launching of any form of struggle including the armed struggle. While the armed struggle proper will start at a certain level of development of the agrarian revolutionary movement (which is objectively verifiable in terms of actual manifestations of the consciousness and preparedness of the people to seize and control the means of production and hence political power through their own instruments of struggle and power), the people should be guided and prepared to arm themselves to put up self-defence and resistance to armed attacks of the ruling classes and their agents; the party forces among the masses playing the leading role in carrying out such self-defence-all of which is a part and parcel of the process of development of class struggle to its highest form-the armed struggle. Integrating the revolutionary struggles of different sections of people with the agrarian revolutionary movement and integrating and developing different forms of struggle to the armed struggle, should be addressed to by the communist revolutionaries with an integral concept and plan of tasks of the revolutionary movement in all the stages of the process of its development. In a nutshell, the process of development of armed struggle should be conceived in its organic relationship with the process of development of the class struggle, of the Party and of the revolutionary united front.

Though the objective in starting armed struggle is to set up liberated base areas, the present correlation of forces in India is such that it is not possible to achieve this aim immediately. To achieve this aim, it is necessary to create areas of armed struggle in a number of areas in the country. For a long time they will be guerrilla zones in the military sense of the term. With the numerical extension of such areas of armed struggle it becomes extremely difficult for the ruling classes to concentrate their armed might in one area."

However mass peasant revolutionary struggles have not been led which could lead to the formation of a people's Guerilla Army. This was the stage at which mass armed struggle was built up in Telangana and for a short period in Srikakulam and Naxalbari (before left adventurism came in). Also unlike the CPI-Maoist or the other major revolutionary organizations they have hardly huilt any liaisons through regular open periodicals on the theoretical aspects of the mass line on the Indian and International situation, and on their stands on political issues. There have been no seminars on theoretical questions in defence of Mao tse Tung Thought nor effective legal mass-platforms for the projection of the party line, or an all-India Centre linking the revolutionary struggles and spreading them to other parts of India. They also do not agree that the conditions are ripe for the launching of armed Struggle in any area in India at present, whatever maybe the limitations. Although it has led revolutionary mass actions it has not developed armed struggle anywhere. This trend represents a mass perspective but has not yet completely developed the mass line.

Today the stage is not ready for an all-out Offensive against the State forces, and instead of leading armed agrarian revolutionary movements in self defence,armed actions are directly launched against the state forces by the PLGA of the CPI-(Maoist). In the view of the author today in India it is mass struggle that is the fundamental trend and revolutionary groups have to place principal emphasis on the building of mass movements to facilitate armed Struggle. Although fundamentally, the Proletarian party has to maintain an underground, secret structure, mass political platforms or legal methods of struggle have to be devised to complement armed Struggle.

True, certain regions of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh had scope for peasant armed revolutionary Struggle and armed movements could be led against the landlords. Red Army squads could even re-distribute land in certain areas. Partial armed Struggle is required to build and defend the mass movements. □□□

[Written with reference from revolutionary journals. The author, it must be mentioned has written this work on his own initiative and not been asked by any individual or group. He is no member, or supporter of any organization discussed, but historian.]