

THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT

I am grateful to Sandip Bandyopadhyay for his comments in *Frontier* (issue dated 25 September-22 October, 2011—*Autumn Number*) on my essay on the Indian Left, originally published in *Caravan* magazine. I particularly warm to his criticisms of what he calls ‘the cult of violence celebrated by Communism and the Communists in general’. Indian radicals in general, and perhaps Bengali radicals in particular, have for long had a romantic fascination with armed struggle, which they have seen as necessary to the construction of a just society. This is why it is heartening to see a direct repudiation of this cult of violence in the pages of *Frontier*. I agree with Bandyopadhyay that the fetishization of violence is intrinsic to Mao and Stalin as well as Lenin.

Bandyopadhyay asks why I focus on B T Ranadive. This is for two, inter-connected reasons : (1) he was a principal theorist of the Communist movement in India; (2) at two crucial moments, in 1948 and 1978 respectively, he poured scorn on the idea of a multi-party democracy. His intellectual influence on Communist thought in India was profound, hence the need for a critical—some might think too critical—assessment of his legacy.

In an article with a strict word limit, many aspects of Communist history in India had to be ignored or underplayed. This is why I did not, for example, go into the legacy of Jyoti Basu and Promode Dasgupta, who, as Bandyopadhyay rightly suggests, may be the two important figures in the history of Bengali communism. My hope is that my article will stimulate other, better-qualified people to delve deeper into these and other subjects, so that we may have a fuller, and constructively critical, appraisal of what Communists and non-Communists alike may learn from what the CPI(M) did or did not do in the thirty-four years it was in power in West Bengal.

Where Bandyopadhyay and I may disagree, however, is on the appropriate economic model for West Bengal and for India. Bandyopadhyay’s article betrays a prejudice against the market and entrepreneurship, which is unfortunate and unwarranted. It is true that a wholly unrestricted and unregulated market can intensify social inequalities and undermine environmental sustainability. It is also true that India has recently witnessed the most egregious forms of crony capitalism. At the same time, socialist economics has been an even greater disaster, as the history of Stalin’s Russia and Mao’s China testifies. We need an economic model which promotes entrepreneurial innovation by private individuals or companies, with the state assuring equal opportunity by providing decent education and health care, full and fair compensation for land acquired by it, and by instituting environmental safeguards.

Ramachandra Guha, Bangalore

AMRI FIRE

On 9-12-2011 the grisly death of about 93 patients as a result of asphyxiation resulting from devastating fire in the AMRI Hospital simply stupefies citizens of Kolkata. The patients came to the hospital to get the benefit of the expensive and much-sought after treatment. Nobody can salve the lacerated souls of the relatives of the dead. Nor can they be compensated by money. Money cannot be a substitute for human life. The board of directors and their phalanx of the administrative body of the hospital are primarily responsible. The unpardonable act of the business tycoons who constitute the board of directors warrants them to be incarcerated. They stack the basement of the hospital with inflammable articles cocking a smoke at the safety measure of the hospital. There is no provision for rescue operation, the incident leaves an indelible scar on the domain of medical world. An exemplary punishment should be meted out to the guilty persons. Power and pelf must not mitigate the severity of their punishment given to the big brass of the hospital.

Debal Kumar Chakravarti,

Kolkata

NIYAMAT ANSARI

2nd March, 2011, Niyamat Ansari of village Jerua, PO Manika, District Latehar (Jharkhand) was awarded the death penalty as per the regulations/procedure of lower level committee of CPI (Maoist). As Niyamat Ansari and Bhukhan Singh, were working in close association with Gram Swaraj Sanstha and Jean Dreze, member of the Central Vigilance Committee of NREGA, some intellectuals across the entire state and country have in one voice criticised the CPI (Maoist) party for this incident. Along with this a fact finding team was constituted under the leadership of Jean Dreze in which some of the intellectuals who support the maoist movement were included. Nandlal Singh, Gokhul Basant, Aruna Roy were part of this team. Following this in reaction one of the members of the party's lower level committee without applying his mind put up posters asking for action against these intellectual friends in people's court. Also some words were used in a pamphlet, which were nowhere near correct, as citizens can express their reaction even on any right action of CPI (Maoist). It is their right to express their opposition in response. Even in such a situation CPI (Maoist) does not believe in taking any such action. Therefore in this matter, with the most heart-felt self- criticism the party takes back the decree issued by the lower committee members and apologizes to all the justice loving intellectuals for these mistakes. Also no action will be taken on Bhukhan Singh for the time being and the lower level committee too has been prohibited from taking any such action.

Now the question is why was Niyamat Ansari awarded the death penalty. On this matter too several facts have been provided by the lower level committee. But nevertheless the higher leadership has not reached a conclusion, as a team has been constituted to do a fact finding on the above incident. The party will do an in-depth fact finding in this matter and will try to present the truth behind this incident at the earliest.

Manas, Spokesperson, CPI (Maoist)

[This statement by CPI (Maoist), originally written in hindi, reached PUDR in September and PUDR in turn circulated it as the statement signals an important shift in the party's stance on crimes committed by its cadres.]

KILLING VISAKHAPATNAM

In the name of Development, the Visakhapatnam Port Trust Management, particularly the Chairman Ajay Kallam is going to destroy the historical place, old town of Visakhapatnam consisting of Kota Veedhi, Ambusarang Veedhi and other places.

The coal dust, Sulphur dioxide, Iron Ore and other pollutants emanating from the port were causing health hazards to local inhabitants including Fishermen and adversely affecting the ecology. Cargo general berths are constructed adjacent to the old town. The coking coal is dumped from a height of more than 20 feet resulting in lighter coke particles spreading into the atmosphere causing high level pollution. The coke so dumped is not covered with tarpaulins. Sprinkling of water is not done adequately to control the air pollution. Further the new berths added to VPT had been causing salination of ground water in the residential areas in the locality.

After liberalization of 1990s, the VPT started handling the dusty and dangerous cargoes refused by other ports like coal, Sulphur, Ammonium nitrate etc. Already people of Visakhapatnam are suffering with heavy pollution and the chairman of VPT recently announced further expansion with the expenditure of 1500 crore to create a modern and clean port and assures that the pollution will be drastically reduced with modern equipments. But nobody believes his assurances. In April 2010 he said that he will bring Foam Sprayers from Italy at any cost and the pollution will be reduced within a year. Already one year 7 months lapsed and the pollution is increased several folds instead of reduction. Further, the HPCL, NTPC and other Pharma industries are dumping the waste toxic materials into the sea and open lands. At many places, the ground water becoming salinated. Recently, two tons of dead fish was floated in the sea water due to toxic pollutants.

The Visakhapatnam city got a distinct recognition for religious harmony. The hindu, muslim and Christian communities are living in harmony and there are no communal disputes till today. Further, the old town is the birth place of Visakhapatnam. Many historical monuments and institutions like the Issac Madina Darga, built in 1200 AD, the Ambusarang Masjid constructed in 1844, St Alloysus High School built in 1847, St John's Church constructed by Sir Arthur Cotton in 1844 are situated in old town. It has got 800-year-old burial ground of muslims. It is the only place in the world, where places of worship from all the three faiths existed on one single hill i.e. Ross Hill. Decades back, the hill was cut into three pieces to carve road facility for the port's expansion. Now through the programme of expansion, the port chairman wants to vacate the people of old town, nearly 30,000 to 40,000. Majority of the people are fishermen and dependent on sea for fishing work. If they were sent to far away places, they will be deprived

of their livelihood and the religious harmony and secular fabric nourished from long years will be suffered.

Already the entire green vegetation around the port is spoiled and the people are suffering with breathlessness, chest tightness, throat infections, lung problems, asthma and many serious health problems and further expansion of port will be a death trap. The port handled 21.50 million tonnes in 1991- 92, 65 million tonnes in 2009-10 and now wants to handle 100 million tonnes in the year 2013 at any cost means nothing but with human sacrifice.

The men benefited from the liberalisation and development projects have coined the name of Visakhapatnam as CITY OF DESTINY but it is turning into the CITY OF SLOW DEATH.

P V Ramana, Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee

Visakhapatnam, AP