

## THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT

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I am grateful to Sandip Bandyopadhyay for his comments in *Frontier* (issue dated 25 September-October 22, 2011) 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 Bandopadhyay that the fetishization of violence is intrinsic to Mao and Stalin as well as Lenin.

Bandopadhyay asks why I focus on B. T. Ranadive. This is for two, interconnected 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 Bandopadhyay 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-Communist 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 Bandopadhyay and I may disagree, however, is on the appropriate economic model for West Bengal and for India. Bandopadhyay’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 a 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.