

LALGRAH & MISCONCEPTIONS OF SOME MISGUIDED INTELLECTUALS

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There are many well meaning individuals who are genuinely confused on the issues that the Maoist movement in general has thrown up and this has more particularly been raised by the intellectuals of West Bengal in the light of the Lalgah mass upsurge. Some of these intellectuals are well meaning progressives, but others, claim not only to be Left, but also of the M-L camp. Here we take some arguments presented mostly from the two Bengali journals *Aneek* and *Shramjeevi* (of Santosh Rana).

Here, in India, the misconceptions mostly centre around the issue of revolutionary violence. Our intellectuals actually rarely see violence in their own lives and so are, quite naturally, horrified by violence. Yet, this is surprising as India is probably one of the most violent societies in the world, with violence on a scale not probably seen even in any backward country. Of course we are here not talking of the type of butcheries unleashed by the US on a country like Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, nor its massacres (peace-time) perpetuated in countries of Latin America, Indonesia, etc. What we are talking of is everyday violence that the poor of this country have to face over and above the violence associated with acute poverty and a sub-human existence (India is on a par with countries

of Sub Saharan Africa). What we are speaking of is the additional violence on women and dalits that no other society of the world face (genocide of Muslims in India is part of what they face in other parts of the world whether in Palestine, Afghanistan, Chechnya or even in west China). The continuous so-called 'dowry killings' of women is a phenomena not seen in any other country of the world; the lynching of dalits and the inhumanity and subtle violence of the hierarchical caste system is a phenomena too not seen in other parts of the world.

Though our intellectuals may not face this violence it is important that they are sensitized to the varied forms of oppression and exploitation that the masses face. Not just excruciating poverty, but the varied forms of humiliation, oppression and intolerable discrimination, is something that our intellectuals should feel even if they do not experience it. There is necessity to first and foremost put one's heart in the right place (i.e. feel for the suffering of the masses) and then see all intellectual exercises in this framework. Democracy, violence, peace, et al are only words thrown around by one and all (including the rulers) but to what purpose. The single purpose can only be justice, humanity and equality for the vast masses of the population — and then everything would be seen with

in this framework. Or else we get lost in the wilderness of words.

In today's world, where inhuman levels of violence are being perpetrated it is the imperialists and the reactionaries throughout the world who raise it on a big scale. It is they who are therefore on a major campaign promoting Gandhism; but for most aware intellectuals around the world it is not a major issue. What is at issue are questions of justice, equality, real democracy, etc. Besides, most of the Left know the important role that violence has played historically in bringing out change and how terribly violent the capitalist /imperialist system has been since its inception — e.g. the systematic decimation of the entire local population of the Americas with the very birth of capitalism, the two World Wars, the butcheries around the world since WWII, etc. But, anyhow as it is being raised as a major issue here, it needs to be discussed once again.

So, we will start with the major misconceptions being presented and will particularly link it to the Lalgah issue.

Misconception 1: The spiraling violence between the state and the Maoists is getting out of control and in this battle between two violent forces the peace-loving tribals and poor are the main victims. Both sides should

immediately stop (conflict resolution) their violence and allow the adivasis and others to live in peace.

Answer 1: In this presentation there are two misnomers.

First, the police/para-military are sought to be presented as some independent force unleashing violence only on the dictates of the government. This is not the full truth; the government and state machinery are acting only on behalf of the ruling classes — i.e. the powerful local semi-feudal elements, big business (both comprador and TNCs) and the imperialists, particularly the US. It is these forces that are seeking the grabbing of the land for its wealth and the exploitation of labour for its super-profits. For them the immediate interests are twofold: (i) the loot of the massive mineral wealth of the country, located mostly in areas where Maoists are operating, for which they are also seeking to desperately push through the Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, and (ii) the increasing exploitation of the labour of the people, and in this period of deep economic crisis the imperialists and their lackeys want to increase their exploitation in order to cushion the impact of the crisis on their profits. They also have a long-term interest in protecting their capitalist/ imperialist system, which is particularly threatened when the movement is led by Maoists.

So at the local level we see the gangs of the semi-feudal interests, power-brokers, local mafia — all hand-in-glove with the local police. At the broader level

you have the forces of the Indian state, and internationally the imperialists are directly involved in counter-insurgency training and intelligence gathering (Mossad).

Anyhow the issue is the nature of the security forces who act as the tool of the classes that run this system. They do not need to use this tool if the masses silently bear the exploitation and the increased burden they seek to put on them. It is only when their discontent breaks out into the open that they call on their instruments of violence. So, if these intellectuals desire this kind of 'peace' it is also what the powers-that-be require to continue their rapacious loot of the wealth of the country and its people.

The second misnomer is pitting the mass movement against the Maoists, as though the masses are victims not of just state violence but also of Maoist violence. Without the masses the Maoists are zero. The very purpose of the Maoists, as mentioned in their programme, is to set up a truly democratic system where the people are themselves empowered through their own organs of power. The CPI (Maoists) does not conduct the revolution on its own; it is the masses who carry out the revolution, where the leadership is provided by the proletarian Party. This is of course the ABC of Marxism, which most 'Leftists' know but are somehow silent on. Besides, the masses have faced inhuman living conditions for centuries and these have only deteriorated in this period of LPG (globalization) and they have also seen that all the

parliamentary parties (including the CPM) are nothing but power brokers for the moneybags, making fortunes in the process. They see that, unlike the parliamentary leaders, the leaders of the Maoist give up the comforts of a middle-class existence and live amongst them, share their weal and woe and are even willing to sacrifice (and have sacrificed) their lives for the people's interests. As in Lalgarth, quite naturally the masses turn to them as their true leaders. The Maoists are part and parcel of the local masses and the majority of the recruits are from them. This, all are aware of.

So, this attempt to draw a wedge between the masses and the Maoists and to put it as though the masses are suffering due to Maoist violence is patently false. By equating Maoist counter-violence with state violence, they act to indirectly legitimise the state violence. For the forces of reaction any assertion of the will of the masses is ground for provocation. Any attempt to touch even a rupee of their profits or wealth, is ground for provocation of these demons. So, what are these intellectuals talking about when they say Maoists are provoking the state? The democratic space to organize the masses in the Jangalmahal area cannot be achieved unless the rule of the CPM hoodlums is eliminated from the area. Of course while conducting any class struggle/war there are tactics when to advance and when to retreat, no doubt these would have been taken into consideration by the Maoists in their battles at Jangalmahal.

If these intellectuals are really

serious about peace, they need to say how they can get not just peace, but peace with justice. Merely appealing to the government and the parliamentary parties to take up socioeconomic issues and expect any real change is wishful-thinking. We all know where the money on these schemes mainly goes. Besides, these parties have their class interests, they are tied through numerous visible/invisible threads to these powerful classes and they must serve their interests or else they will be kicked out. The present budget, the Economic Survey, the new Bills, the massive subsidies to big business (over Rs.3 lakh crores is given as concessions to big business) and imperialists, the spiraling expenditure on the armed forces and para-military, etc, etc, has set the course of their 'growth' pattern; while crumbs may be thrown to the *aam admi* to diffuse their discontent (most of which is anyhow swallowed by power-brokers at various levels of authority — Anuj Pandey style). So, where can the masses get justice and improve their inhuman existence, which, in fact, is going from bad to worse?

The issue is not violence v/s nonviolence but justice v/s injustice. Bourgeois moralists say that the means cannot justify the end; we say that the goals must be clear and just — i.e. improving people's livelihood and genuinely empowering them — and to achieve this, all necessary means are justified.

Misconception 2:
Aneek magazine and Shramjeevi both say that the

Maoists are not democratic and have no sense of democracy. Aneek says they have alienated all the other political forces in the area (like the Majhi Marwha and Jharkhandi parties) and are not even tolerating the rank and file CPM, demanding they resign. Santosh Rana in the Shramjeevi magazine raises the same question but goes even further saying two points: (i) Even if five people have a different view they must be allowed to speak otherwise it will lead to a different type of terror. And he equates this 'terror' with CPM-style terror. (ii) Upholding the existing Panchayat system and seeking to democratize it, saying that it should be controlled by the Gram Sansad and that the demand should be raised for more economic and administrative powers, like to forest revenue, stone and sand, along with control over the police. He maintains that the Maoists are for only one Party rule and will not tolerate any others. Some have gone even to the extent of equating the counter-violence of the masses and Maoists against the CPM armed goons and police informers with the terror of the CPM.

Answer 2: We are not here to condone any acts of behavior by the Maoists that maybe undemocratic/ sectarian in dealing with other non-Maoist and genuinely progressive forces, no matter what their limitations. These may invariably exist, though they should be avoided, in building up any united front activities. Yet, class struggle at the ground level is

complex and not as linear as the intellectuals expect it to go. Yet, in the Maoist appeals to the intellectuals or even in the Open Letter to Santosh Rana the approach is definitely democratic and patient (not impetuous as it often can be). Even when it is clear that Santosh Rana was aligning with dangerous, counter-revolutionary forces the tone was explanatory and asking that he come out of his errors.

Having said this, let us take the issue of democracy as this word has been much vulgarized by not only the imperialists and their henchmen but also the NGOs who oppose communist party organizational norms in the name of democracy. So let us explain the issue. We shall first look at the term first from the political angle and then from the organizational angle.

First, to take the issue of democracy in the political sense. Here democratic forces mean all anti-imperialist, anti-feudal forces. So, any democratic front must include all such forces and not just those following the Party's viewpoint. This is the ideal; but, at the ground reality the ideal rarely exists. What exists is, at the one end you get the revolutionary forces and at the other the reactionary forces, while in between there may be various shades of progressive forces, which have to be assessed, from time to time, on their attitude towards the ongoing anti-imperialist, anti-feudal class struggle. One allies with all those who overall play a positive attitude in the class struggle at any given time. But, as the class struggle intensifies, the line of demarcation becomes sharper between the real

democrats and those vacillating; so, often at such times, many forces that were progressive in the earlier phase of the class struggle, desert the movement at a later phase; some may become neutral, others may even begin to oppose it. Generally, as Mao said, one has to isolate and expose the die-hards and try and win over the rest to an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal front.

Now what are the forces that the *Aneek* and *Shramjivi* expect unity with? First, they call for unity with the BJMM, the traditional organization of adivasis in the area. These are led by the traditional leaders of the adivasis, who have been oppressors of their own people, and in this period of globalization have become stooges of the rulers. Except for the fortnight or so in Nov.2008 when the movement against police atrocities began, they have stood in vehement opposition to the movement and as agents of the CPM (clear from the article in *People's Democracy*, official organ of the CPM, dated Dec.14, 2008 by Prasant). This was also clear in their conscious role in hounding the Maoists, opposing the mass movement and acting as tools of the police/CPM, clearing the roadblocks put up by the masses.

Next, is the large number of Jharkhandi groups. It is not only important what they profess, but their attitude to the on-going class struggle must be assessed. In the open letter to Santosh Rana from CPI (Maoist) it was pointed out that some of those groups were acting together with the CPM's vigilante forces. As far as

the others are concerned they would be assessed by their attitude and role in the ongoing class struggle.

Now, let us turn to the other aspect, on the question of democracy in organizational matters. Serious class struggle necessitates not only democratic functioning but also a high level of discipline. The discipline should not be imposed but through self-realization. And real democracy can only be realized if it is democratic centralism where no matter what may be our personal view we are willing to accept the decision of the majority. NGOs are vehemently opposed to democratic centralism and compare it with some sort of fascist methods. Though leaders can often abuse the powers they have (whatever the structures), what the NGOs promote is anarchism below and unquestioned authority of the leader (normally the funder) whose decisions are final. In fact in all other organizations, those who control the funds, controls the organization and all decision-making. Here too, normally there is a show of democracy, with everyone being allowed to present their views, but these are rarely considered by the final authority. So, also is the anarchism of Santosh Rana, when he says "*Even if five people have a different view they must be allowed to speak otherwise it will lead to a different type of terror. And he equates this 'terror' with CPM-style terror.*" Very true they must be *allowed to speak*, but how must these five acts — according to their own

wishes, or that of the majority? This is not clear, but he goes to the extent of calling this, a form of terror. What in fact he is demanding is nothing but bourgeois individualism and anarchic functioning and any form of discipline is being equated with terror. What a communist opposes and despises is the vulgar and crude individualism promoted in this bourgeois society (which has been taken to extreme levels in this globalization period); what we promote is the development of the individuality of all comrades, which can best be realized in a cooperative atmosphere where comrades assist and help each other.

Aneek asks whether the Maoists can give a democratic character to the movement; and in the five questions to the Maoists at the end it says "*the pressure tactics on all other political forces proves that the Maoists lack the sense of democracy*". The essence of democracy in the sphere of organization, would be here on how and to what extent we are able to mobilize the oppressed masses and raise them to levels of leadership. For the bulk of the masses deprived of all humanity and rights for decades the essence of democracy starts with their self-respect and the assertion of their rights — not cowed down by the dictates of any leader or authority (except that of the collective). This assertion of the downtrodden, which is the essence of democracy, comes with their education, awareness, realization of their own abilities and rights, a comradely atmosphere in the mass organization and the Party, a democratic relationship between the rank-and-file and the

leadership, etc, etc. Such will be the main aspect of democracy in the organizational sphere. Over and above this, one must be patient with those forces who have a positive approach to the ongoing class struggle, but have different views from that of the Maoists. But for *Aneek* to make the latter the central point of the very movement appears to be misguided.

Of course, Santosh Rana has come a long way from the revolutionary programme. In the Shramjeevi article he talks not about changing the system but seeking to improve its functioning. He puts in bold that **'it should be remembered that none other than the elected bodies, based on universal franchise can take over the political authority'**. So, here he talks of democratizing and strengthening the existing panchayat system. And he has presented many concrete proposals for this. Rana must realize that all organs of the state, no matter which, must necessarily serve the class interests of that state. With such a constitutionalist approach it is no wonder that Rana has come out with all fury against the Maoists whose agenda is not strengthening these organs of ruling class authority (the panchayats too get dominated by the semi-feudal type authority witnessed in society and that is further strengthened by their links to the government and their schemes/ contracts) but smashing it and replacing it with the power of the peasant committee slowly developing into the Revolutionary People's Committees. Santosh Rana has to re-think where he stands vis-à-vis the revolutionary

programme for genuine democratic change.

Misconception 3: The Maoists have hijacked a beautiful spontaneous mass movement and their role is destroying it and is counter productive.

Answer 3: The reality is that with the Maoist counter-offensive the mass movement has continued and grown. All the dooms-day forecasts of the intellectuals have proved wrong. This fact needs to be recognized by them and the reasons for their wrong assessments need to be analyzed. Of course in the face of massive state terror there may be ups and downs in a movement, but in this case we have seen growth despite the onslaught. Also the forms of struggle often have to change. But here, the judicious mix of armed actions and mass mobilization (with traditional weapons) has been an excellent example on how to counter the worst forms of state terror. Though it may be true that the movement was a spontaneous outburst against state terror, the fact that the Maoists have been working in this region for over a decade cannot be ignored, and that they had no role to play in the uprising.

Aneek goes as negative as to state: *Before the outset of this adivasi revolt there was no significant mass movement led by the Maoists, even after many years of work. Maoist Party had initially a peasant organization but after armed activities the peasant organization died.* This pitting the armed activities against mass

organizational activities has become a traditional method of opposing the intensification of the class struggle. The reality is that any peacefully struggle, even a small trade union struggle, is faced with onslaught of goons of the *malik* and then the police. Anyone who has worked among the masses knows this. Due to the inability to face this violence of the state and non-state forces, we find, of late, all mass mobilization even of the legal trade union type, failing and the masses going into passivity. It is only when the masses and their leadership are equipped to crush the goons (may be of the factory owner, the semi-feudal landed elements, the government or any party) and then the police, that the class struggle can sustain and victories be achieved. It is only then that the masses will get confidence in their organized strength. So, to counter pose the two is not only absurd it displays a deep ignorance of the ground reality of our country, expecting some democratic rights, like say in Europe. Particularly, since the past decade, it has been very clear the state is not tolerating any mass mobilization, let alone those led by the Maoists — except those that are consciously manipulated to let off people's anger. Can *Aneek* and others who also talk in the same vein, give even one recent example of a peaceful mass mobilization which was effective and gave the desired results? And with each passing day, with the deepening of the crisis, such peaceful forms of struggle are going to get more and more irrelevant. Whether it is the displacement issue, the attacks on labour, the issues of the peasantry, the land struggles of the

landless and poor peasants, the issues for water, the issue of wages, the issue of permanency, the issues against caste oppression and dalit lynching, etc, etc — except for maybe some exception, where have there been any successful peaceful agitation on any of these burning issues of the masses!!! Why has the offense of capital not been beaten back?

The so-called democratic space is tolerated so long as the movements are no threat — like, standard processions at Jantar Mantar, rallies to parliament (within limits), etc, etc. Such struggles may be necessary but, more important, is the ability to intensify the class struggle to beat back the offensive on the masses. It must have practical results not just be nominal or ceremonial. Such mass mobilization is only useful if it is a process of gaining strength which will culminate in more affective battles — not if they are repeated in a routine way year-in-and year-out.

This reality is obvious to any who are sensitive to the plight of the poor and oppressed and do not have their visions blinkered by revisionist (supposedly Marxist) theory. In its desperation to draw a dichotomy between the mass movement and the Maoist Party, Aneek seeks to turn even the reality on its head by ignoring the impact of the Maoists would have had through hard and consistent work in the area for over a decade, in the face of the worst repression by the armed gangs of the CPM and the police. To deny this reality on the imagined basis that the Maoists had no success, till now,

is naïve, as it is by only painstaking work on a step-by-step basis that quantitative growth lead to a qualitative leap in the movement. After all, one does not get a tree to bloom and yield fruits overnight after planting the seed. The initial sapling needs much care only then it will grow into a sturdy tree. Lalgah, no doubt, seems to be developing into a sturdy tree as its roots appear deeply imbedded in the hearts of the masses.

Misconception 4: In attacking and killing the CPM the Maoists have become like the CPM themselves. They should allow democratic space for all to function.

Answer 4: The CPM has ruled West Bengal, particularly its rural areas, with a brutality not witnessed by even many other ruling class parties. Its *Harmad vahini* has a notoriety of not only raping and killing at random but terrorizing any who dare even question (let alone oppose) the CPM power brokers at all levels. They have used this brutality not only against the Maoists, not only against the parliamentary opposition, but also against its very own left partners. Its social fascist fangs were clearly displayed at Singur and Nandigram. And in these decades of CPM rule, while the Party bosses and their henchmen have made fortunes, the lives of the people continue to be as miserable as ever. The CPM offices in the localities have become the fountain head of its terror regime. It is nothing but white terror at its worst. Without smashing this

authority any real work in rural West Bengal is unthinkable. The semi-feudal type authority of these new elite when smashed only will facilitate the growth of a real democratic authority of the peasants and landless labourers of rural West Bengal. Besides, at the local level the CPM and its main cadre force act as the eyes and ears of the state giving information to the police on Maoist activities.

In this scenario what is to be done? How does one build an effective mass movement? The smallest form of independent organization will be smashed in the bud by these goons. They do not permit any democratic space. So, if some democratic space is to be made, this is inconceivable without armed actions on its goon force (armed to the teeth) and their CPM bosses. It is only by smashing this authority that the new democratic authority of the peasant organization can come into being and grow. In rural India the semi-feudal type autocratic atmosphere allows for little democratic space. This democratic space can only be created by destroying this authority, not by adjusting with it in the name of democracy.

In Jangalmahal too it was seen that with the entry of the security forces the CPM bosses sought to make a comeback. In this area the CPM leadership is the main enemy of the people. The mass anger too is directed at them. But the CPM bosses and their armed gangs function through their cadre base in the region. If this social-fascist authority is to be uprooted

thoroughly the kingpins have to be crushed and the poisonous weeds they sprout in the area uprooted. Only then the place will become safe for the people to mobilize and operate in.

It is indeed creditable that Maoists and the people could continue their campaign against this terror force even after the entry of the huge security forces. The CPM looters were dreaming of a come-back. Aneek and Rana say these attacks on the CPM are no different as to what the CPM was doing; this too they say is nothing but terror. Unfortunately these two do not see the class content of the actions of the two forces — one being that of the ruling elite, the other of the oppressed masses who try them in people's courts. Without a class approach it is natural to fall into the above trap. Besides, many of these M-L forces have been hob-knobbing with the CPM and taking favours; this tends to blunt their class stand. True, as they say, both are creating terror — the CPM white terror, the Maoists red terror. The Maoists' terror and panic is only in the minds of the CPM and state forces; for the people they can for the first time in decades get a breath of freedom. True peace can be achieved only if the security forces withdraw and the people establish their own democratic organs of power in village after village, free from the terror of the CPM hoodlums.

Conclusion

These then are some of the main points being raised. We hope this has helped clarify some of the misconceptions of

comrades on the path of the Maoists in general and that of the Lalgarh movement in particular. In fact, the Lalgarh experiment has many lessons for the revolutionaries. It is important that this movement sustains and grows both in depth and extent. It is a hope once again for the people of West Bengal who were put into three-and-a-half decades of slumber by the CPM revisionist domination over the state. This had lulled the Bengali population, with its great revolutionary traditions, putting them into a stupor, of which the Aneek/Rana views are a continued reflection. Lalgarh has once again awakened the revolutionary hope of the people of that state, shown up the CPM revisionists for what they really are — social fascists, and inspired the youth to once again take to the Naxalbari path.