

The Tinderbox of Purba Bangla

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Every general in Purba Bangla [the historical name of the land is Purba Bangla—in 1971 the Indian puppet government of Sheikh Mujib named it “Bangladesh”, a name that carries an unacceptable political content] who captures state power through a military coup d’état projects himself as a great advocate and saviour of democracy right from the beginning. These enemies of democracy shed oceans of tears for the democracy that they themselves kill. How should this phenomenon be explained? Should it be attributed to a freak of history—or to the high political consciousness of the people of Purba Bangla? Whenever the ruling classes of Purba Bangla and their foreign masters find their interests threatened they resort to open fascism—civil or military—as was seen during the rule of Sheikh Mujib or General Ziaur Rahman, or as is seen today under General Ershad, the current ruler of Purba Bangla. No sooner had Ershad overthrown the previous US puppet than he began to chant full-throated slogans about “restoring democracy”—more so even than any democrat.

This is a phenomenon typical of Purba Bangla and most Third World countries: the ruling classes try to create and maintain a democratic image of themselves, but the necessity of their class interests invariably compels them to shatter that fake democratic cloak and resort to barefaced tyranny—and then these chameleons, faced with the peoples’ movements, turn right around and once again try to put a halo of democracy over their heads. But whatever form their rule takes, it is always as autocratic as it is dictatorial.

The people of Purba Bangla are historically dead against all sorts of autocratic rule, and especially military dictatorship. The history of the people of our country proves this, from the period when Purba Bangla was a province of Pakistan, and the people rose against the dictatorships of Generals Ayub Khan and Yaha Khan, up to the present. This is why the shrewd fox General Ershad portrayed himself as a democrat. But as the saying goes, you can’t fool all the people all the time, and from the very day Ershad seized power in 1982 he has faced staunch mass resistance from workers, students, intellectuals and other political forces. The three subsequent years have been filled with such struggles.

OVERVIEW OF THE ANTI-MARTIAL LAW STRUGGLES

History is a continuous process where the past has its own past. Even before the current military junta took power, there were definite signs that martial law was at the doorstep.

Before this, the last military dictator, General Ziaur Rahman, who had turned-in his khaki “khurta” (army dress) for civilian clothes, was assassinated in a military coup d’état. His vice-president, Abdus Sattar, then arranged his own election to the presidency. But even during Sattar’s rule, General Ershad—in violation of their Constitution—busily lectured the army on the “role of the army in nation-building”. The Sattar government, heavily dependent on the army, did not or could not take any action against this.

It was thus evident that military rule was in the offing—and the Purba Banglar Sharbohara Party (the Proletarian Party of Purba Bangla—PBSP) alerted the people to the danger. Soon afterwards, Ershad toppled Sattar, and the new junta immediately suspended the Constitution and banned all political activities, making the slightest criticism of their rule a punishable offence.

Thus, another burden of military fascism came down on the backs of the people of Purba Bangla.

It should be mentioned here that US hegemony over Purba Bangla was re-established through an earlier military coup in 1975, and has been maintained since then. The Ershad government is a puppet of US imperialism; Purba Bangla is a neo-colony of the US imperialists, and they are, together with their puppet Ershad, the principal enemy of the people of Purba Bangla at this time.

Ershad immediately declared his devotion to democracy in his first radio speech—and just as quickly he was met with protests. Though these were confined to the university campuses at Dhaka, the capital, and at Rajshahi University, they carry immense political importance, for they were the first courageous incidents of openly trampling on martial law, and they served as the spark for later resistance. These incidents created the atmosphere for the formation of the Student Action Committee (SAC).

Even while the students bravely protested, the big political organisations sat idle. The pro-American and pro-Indo-Soviet political forces—though they have hundreds of contradictions with each other—form part of the same ruling class as Ershad. Thus, the capture of power by Ershad, while it threatened their group interests, did not menace their class interests. And so they sat with folded hands. It was as if Ershad and these forces were performing the same function from different sides: Ershad banned political activity, while these oppositionists implemented his ban. It is aptly noted that birds of a feather flock together.

Within a few days after Ershad's seizure of power, the PBSP put anti-martial law posters up at Dhaka University and circulated a leaflet exposing him and putting forward three points as a minimum basis for a unified anti-martial law movement: 1) immediate withdrawal of martial law, 2) immediate and unconditional release of all political activists behind bars, and 3) abrogation of all black (repressive) laws. Beforehand, when the initial signs of an imminent coup had just surfaced, PBSP had suggested what should be done in the probable new situation. This laid the basis for the protests immediately after the military takeover.

The student movement continued to develop. A coalition of 14 student groups prepared to observe the twentieth anniversary of the day in September 1962 when a number of valiant sons of the soil sacrificed their lives in the fight against the Pakistani government. The day before the anniversary, three radical student leaders, including Shiblee Kayum, were arrested for pasting up anti-martial law posters. After a twenty-minute hearing they were sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment. The government followed this shortly afterwards with the announcement of a new, highly reactionary educational policy, which was rejected by the conscious students and intellectuals. So-called opposition leaders maintained almost complete silence. Only PBSP countered with an outline of a national democratic educational programme.

The students at Dhaka University launched another procession; the government countered with a police attack, including on professors. When the students called a strike, the government closed the campus for three days. All this activated the students even more. Working people and industrial labourers began to join them. On 11 January 1983, the students called for a procession and sitting strike in front of the Ministry of Education. It was the first time the students left the campus and took to the city streets.

Worried by this, Ershad proposed a dialogue with the students. The students responded with three demands: annulment of the proposed educational policy, a democratic atmosphere in the educational institutions, and the release of the three imprisoned student leaders.

The PBSP wholeheartedly supported the students' programme of openly violating martial law. Meanwhile the reactionary political groupings peeped out of their dark lairs and preached to the students to not violate martial law; under the pretext of awaiting the completion of preparations for country-wide actions. The opportunist section of the student leadership bowed in imbecile obedience to their respective "mother" organisations. They modified their programmes so as not to violate martial law—but no one could say they had abandoned the movement! In fury, militant students chased out these leaders and dismantled their office.

One thing to be noted here is that so long as the student movement followed their own course the anti-martial law movement was gaining strength. But as soon as the reactionary mother organisations gained control, they lost their militancy. This was also confirmed by later developments.

But 11 January, the date of the sitting strike at the Ministry of Education, was another day—a day of rightful revolt against the opportunist leaders. It was particularly marked by the growing participation of non-student outsiders in the activity, proving that the common people were moving to fight against military fascism. The student leadership, worried by its own isolation from the masses during these activities, tried to regain the initiative by calling for another action in mid-February if the government didn't heed their demands. Which the government did not—what it did instead was call out riot cars and tear gas on the February procession, and finally police opened fire on the processionists, killing a great number of people on the spot and wounding many more. Curfew was clamped down, the University closed, and the students ordered to clear out.

Like the January demonstration, thousands of common people participated in this procession too, including in fighting the police. Worried about the militancy of the students and common people, 15 pro-Indo-Soviet political parties, which up until that point had played no active part in the anti-martial law movement, came forward to contain the rising movement. The next day the government again beat up hundreds of students, and arrested thousands and thousands. Many people were killed.

Up to this point the student movement had played a positive role, with the events in February being the high point. But the students alone could carry the movement no further. Henceforth the reins of the movement were increasingly in the hands of the I5-party alliance that had been formed, led especially by the pro-Indo-Soviet Awami League (AL) and by the Communist Party

of Bangladesh, the direct agent of the Soviet Union. This was reflected in the programme the Student Action Committee (SAC) adopted. While containing some legitimate democratic demands, it also called for restoring the 1972 reactionary constitution.

The 1972 constitution, while serving all Five Enemies of the people of Purba Bangla—US imperialism, Soviet social-imperialism, Indian expansionism, bureaucratic comprador capitalism and feudalism—principally screened the Soviets and Indian expansionists. Its programme differed from military fascism only in form, not in content. The 10-Point Charter that the SAC adopted also targeted only US imperialism while seeking to protect Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionism. Under these conditions, revolutionary democratic and patriotic students could not remain in SAC. They initiated their own organisations, such as the “Revolutionary Students Movement” and “Militant Student Unity.”

The student movement faced real limitations: it lacked proletarian leadership; it was not integrated with the armed struggle and the other struggles of the people, especially the workers and peasants; and it was not directed towards truly national democratic ends. Despite this, the student movement forced Ershad to propose a “dialogue” with the opposition political parties. But what this dialogue amounted to was a process of seeking a way to share power by the various contending groups in the ruling class, while naturally keeping the key to power in the hands of the current ruling group. This kind of parlour politics may be suitable for the palace plotters, but the politics of the workers and peasants is something different.

With this dialogue, the government also sought to supplement its use of force in preventing the rise of the anti-martial law movement. And by channelling all political activity towards this parlour politics and merely setting down a few preconditions for dialogue, the I5-party alliance lent the government a hand. The SAC lost initiative and became inactive. Thus, a very militant flow of stormy anti-martial law struggle gradually subsided.

1983 Events

Now that the students and masses had paved the way with their blood, the various political forces began to come out of the woodwork.

On the one hand, this process saw a series of splits and factional divisions, which reflected the clash of various groups and their foreign masters now that there were prospects of taking a bite of the cake of power. Alongside this, different alliances and combines of political parties formed. Besides the aforementioned I5-party alliance, there arose the 10-party combine, an anti-Indo-Soviet, diehard pro-American grouping led by the Democratic League (DL) of Mostaque Ahmed, a former president. This was followed shortly by a 7-party combine, led by the pro-US BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party).

But though PBSP tried its best, no alliance of the true revolutionary and patriotic forces could be formed. It is a matter of great disappointment that in the interest of their jockeying with the military junta the pro-Indo-Soviet and the pro-American political forces had the judiciousness to minimize their differences and come to terms, while the revolutionary and patriotic forces for a long time failed to feel the urgency of uniting with other progressive forces.

Several of the alliances came together to call for a series of actions, including a general strike in November 1983. On that day, workers, students and other sections of the petit bourgeoisie responded with great enthusiasm, coming out in far greater numbers than expected. All the streets of Dhaka were full of slogan-chanting processions. The people demonstrated their determination to fight the military government to the last. Neither bullets nor death could scare them. To suppress their fury, the bloodthirsty junta used rifles and bayonets, killing and injuring very many and arresting innumerable people. The government imposed a new ban on all political activities, while also declaring a schedule of elections for the parliament, the presidency and at the local level.

The masses of people were trying to carry forward and intensify the movement, whereas the leadership was trying to hold them back. In their group interests those sections of the ruling classes of Purba Bangla that are now in the opposition had to resort to movements against the military rulers—and they had no choice but to allow these movements to develop somewhat in their logical direction. But from the standpoint of their class position, they could not allow these movements to develop to the point where they overthrow not only the present government but the whole system, including them.

The 15-party alliance and the 7-party combine agreed upon a common charter, which calls for an end to martial law and the restrictions on political activity, the restoration of political rights and elections. They are not in favour of the *forcible overthrow* of martial law. They want a share of power through elections, even if held under martial law conditions. As one Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) stalwart put it, referring to this common charter, “The five point movement never rejects elections, rather elections is the ultimate end of this five point programme.” (*Forum*, Bulletin 29 January 1985.) These alliances could not allow the anti-martial law movement to march forward towards true democracy for the masses of people. They were seeking to regain and re-establish *their* so-called democracy, the “democracy” of the ruling classes the Awami League and the BNP had enjoyed during their tenure, which is nothing more than the dictatorial rule of the agents of imperialism and different foreign exploiters over the masses of people. They used the movements of the people as pressure levers in their bargaining with the junta. Movement, compromise, again movements, compromise and retreat—such is their logic. Whereas the logic of the people’s movement is development from lower to higher, and then to even higher stages.

At this point, in November, General Ershad formed his own party, Janadal, from a crew of fortune hunters and mercenary politicians. He had been Chief Martial Law Administrator and now took over the office of President of Bangladesh, thus openly taking into his own hands all the powers that he already possessed.

The Year 1984

The year was filled with movements, killings, compromise, dialogue, repeated strikes, the shifting of elections, and so forth.

Early in the year, Ershad reissued a call for dialogue. Fifty-nine parties responded—which only shows that in Purba Bangla too, the old expression that scoundrels choose politics as their last

refuge holds true. (There are about a hundred political parties in Purba Bangla.) After much vacillation, the more important groups, the 15-party alliance, the 7-party combine, and the Islamic fundamentalist group Jamat—23 parties in all—declined, pointing to continued restrictions on political activity. Their real reason was that they had little to gain.

At that time Ershad still retained the offensive position, and it was from this position of relative advantage that he proposed dialogue, for his own ends. These included getting tacit recognition of his legitimacy from the opposition and generally securing his own position by passing out a few crumbs and undermining any possibility of a growth of the opposition. Also, in the heat of the previous movement the opposition groups had promised publicly that they would not participate in a dialogue under this “illegal” military government—and the masses were very much in a mood for the complete overthrow of military rule and not at all for capitulation.

So for the opposition, taking part in dialogue under these conditions ran the risk of isolation from the masses, with little prospects of real gain. And without the bigger groups like the Awami League and the BNP, Ershad gained little from his initial dialogue proposal. Thus, the reactionaries in and out of power failed to reach any agreement.

Subsequently, with the offer of sub-district elections Ershad hoped to entice the opposition into a position of tacitly recognising his government. For this very reason, the opposition parties refused to participate in these local elections. This set the stage for the bloody course taken by the strike on 1 March. Two days beforehand, the police forces drove a heavy truck into a procession and killed two students from Dhaka University. Then they let loose a reign of terror by their hired *gundas* (hooligans), arresting, injuring and killing many people.

Despite the repression, this latest round of strikes and movements pushed the government back to a strategically defensive position, and it was forced to give in to some minor demands of the opposition, while protecting the essential pillars of its power. Thus, it postponed the local elections and, to facilitate the opposition participating in the dialogue this time, it also released imprisoned members of the opposition parties (and only members of these parties) and declared an easing of restrictions on trade union and political activity.

The 23 parties did in fact participate in this new round of dialogue. But now the unity between the opposition forces began to crevice, centring on the question of which of two major constitutional arrangements of electoral power would best benefit their own interests. The 15-party alliance sought a return to the parliamentary system of government of the 1972 Constitution, while the 7-party combine sought to bring back the presidential system provided for in the subsequently suspended constitution. Both are opposed to the people’s democracy, which must be the goal of the mass struggle. When the 7-party combine announced that it would no longer go along with the new programme of elections, the compromise again fell apart. That the government and the opposition could not come to a truce was rather good for the people.

The government rescheduled elections for December. Ershad appointed members of the Janadal party, which he had initiated, to his cabinet. The opposition complained that such a government could not hold neutral elections and that Ershad was drawing the Army into politics. It

announced that it would not take part in the new elections either. The gap between the government and the opposition was as large as ever.

Each of the two opposition groups prepared its own separate mass mobilisation for mid-October, with the aim of showing their respective organisational strength. Ershad countered by calling his own gathering first, at which he declared that his government was non-political since his source of power was martial law. He then showed his venomous teeth, as he sought to instigate communal (religious) conflict.

Each of the mass meetings held by the opposition was immense, showing the anti-martial law spirit of the people. The government responded with offers of compromise. These were not the fruit of the good wishes of Ershad, nor of the fight of the opposition. They were the result of the immense sacrifice of the people of Purba Bangla. They resolutely fought the military junta, even when the big parties were inactive; and when the latter finally began to move, this was only a green light for the masses to plunge into the movement with boundless spirit and the force of a storm. It was this that forced the Awami League and the BNP to join the movement, and it was this that forced Ershad to issue his compromises.

None of these forces intended to let the anti-martial law struggle develop too far—and the weakness of the proletariat's leadership impeded this too.

Workers and Peasants

The industrial workers started movements over economic issues, but gradually took up the anti-martial law political struggle. Their role was vital, and even when the opposition parties sat idle at the end of 1984, they continued to struggle, for instance, calling a 48-hour strike, with which the opposition failed to cooperate.

Even so, the working class movement is still predominantly confined to the narrow bounds of economic demands. The 23 parties continually sought to limit their participation and, together with the government, to silence them with the mere promise of material benefit. It should be noted that most of the big labour organisations are fronts for the opposition parties. In sum, the conscious proletarian movement in Purba Bangla is just starting, and that is why it is still very weak.

As for the peasants, neither of the big oppositional groupings has any strength and influence among them. Thus the peasants played little role in this movement. Only PBSP tried to mobilise the peasants in the anti-martial law movement.

In the urban areas generally PBSP actively integrated and co-ordinated the anti-martial law movement with the armed struggle in the countryside and other movements of the peasants. It mobilised peasants and other rural people in the anti-election movement. Owing to these activities of the PBSP, rural people in some areas rejected the election politics and did not go to the polling centres. In some places, they dismantled the polling booths and burnt them to ashes. By late 1983 and early 1984 in some of the mass base areas of the party armed struggles and other peasant movements had gained real momentum, and large numbers of people gathered

under the party's banner. A process of disintegration of the reactionary local power and the establishment of people's power began. The further development of these activities by PBSP frightened the reactionaries, and to nip PBSP in the bud they sent heavily armed repressive expeditions against the rural masses. The 23 parties never protested this mass repression. Rather, they supported the government, at least indirectly. For all these reasons, PBSP fell into a disadvantageous position after mid-1984.

By now, however, the party has once more begun to overcome the difficulties. PBSP has played a vital role in the anti-martial law movement, exerting influence on it; reactionaries cannot but count PBSP as a growing political factor.

Other than the PBSP a few other organisations like Bangladesher Sharbohara Party (BSP) and Purba Banglar Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist (PBCP/ML) are more or less conducting armed struggle in rural areas. Though they have wrong attitudes towards the anti-martial law mass movement, their struggles no doubt are hitting the present social and state system. (More on these groups later.)

At this point, in late 1984, the 23 parties fell idle, except for preparation for the spring parliamentary elections. After all, they had little else they could do. The anti-martial law mass movement had gone about as far as they could safely take it; they could hope for nothing more from it. Their only other two alternatives were people's war or a military coup d'état. They cannot but oppose people's war, from the point of view of their class interests, and they do not have enough influence in the army for a coup. Thus, they sat idle and readied themselves for the elections. This is how a year full of movements and agitation came to a close.

1985

In this tranquil atmosphere without movement the year 1985 stepped in.

Since the opposition parties had indicated willingness to participate in elections under martial law, the government began to meet some of their election preconditions. In return, the opposition did nothing to mobilise any movement against martial law, nothing at all. This situation held until February 1985.

Meanwhile, a process of unity among the revolutionary and genuinely patriotic forces began. Though the festival was almost over, in light of future developments such unity has much importance. This process led to the formation of united fronts like the "Revolutionary Committee for the Observance of Ekushey" (a day of martyrs), the "Revolutionary Democratic Front," and finally, "Militant Students Unity," which, despite the later retightening of martial law, continues its activity today.

Though the 23 parties were in favour of elections under martial law, they did not dare make this decision openly. This was because of the deep hatred of the military rulers among the masses and even among the members of these parties. Thus, a deadlock existed, blocking motion between the government and the opposition.

This deadlock was opened up somewhat by a cold-blooded manoeuvre of the government. On 13 February 1985, pro-government ruffians opened fire on a peaceful student procession and killed a young student leader from Dhaka University. Such killings at the height of huge movements that certainly threatened the government is one thing—but what could explain such a killing in the tranquil atmosphere existing then? In fact, the murder fuelled the fire among the students and others: they burst into protest with fury unrestricted by the admonitions of the leaders. The atmosphere was militant. The heads of the 23 parties were once again compelled to promise they would not take part in the elections.

Ershad seized the chance. He re-imposed the martial law regulations he had previously eased somewhat. Once again all political activity was declared illegal. However, this was not so upsetting to the chiefs of the opposition. As for the heads of the AL and the BNP, on the day Ershad reimposed martial law one of them spent the day at a cultural show and the other at a marriage—while no programme came out of either group. Ershad went on to make himself President again through a referendum, appointed more of his men from Janadal to the government, held the long-delayed local elections and then in mid-August 1985 floated a pro-government political front. Thus, Ershad consolidated his positions as best he could, while the big opposition leaders yawned lazily from their divans.

POLITICAL FORCES AND THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLE IN THE MOVEMENT

The 15-Party and 7-Party Alliances

The 15-party alliance is a group of pro-Indo-Soviet and pro-Chinese revisionist political forces, with the former in the majority. It is led by the Awami League (AL) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB). The AL of Sheikh Hasina is a puppet of Indian expansionism backed by Soviet social-imperialism; and the CPB is a paid agent of the Soviets. Other prominent pro-Soviet organisations include Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL), while the rest are generally petit bourgeois social democrats of the pro-Soviet bloc or else pro-Chinese revisionists.

The AL is an organisation of the pro-Indo-Soviet comprador bourgeoisie and feudals. From the time of its origin, the AL undertook some sort of nationalist movement against Pakistani exploitation of the people of Purba Bangla. In the absence of any strong proletarian leadership, AL captured the leadership of the anti-Pakistani mass struggle. Originally, AL was a pro-American political organisation, but in the specific circumstances of 1971, when US imperialism backed Pakistani reaction, and on the other hand Indian expansionism and during the last leg of that year Soviet social-imperialism backed AL in its fight against Pakistan, this party changed its foreign master. They sold out Purba Bangla to India.

The 7-party combine under the leadership of BNP consists of pro-American and pro-Chinese political forces. BNP itself is a motley gathering of political fortune hunters and splinter groups piled up under government sponsorship by the late G. Ziaur Rahman. BNP, which, like AL, is an organisation of comprador bureaucrats and feudals, is itself a puppet in the hands of US imperialism.

Based upon their attitudes to the anti-martial law movement, these political parties can be grouped in three categories:

a) While not including any group in its entirety, elements and factions of a number of these parties were at all times opposed to anti-martial law struggles. The Shah Aziz group of the BNP can be cited as an example.

b) Groups, principally AL, BNP and CPB, who fought the military junta under the compulsion of their own interest but all the time took a conciliatory stand, with their eyes fastened continually on simply a share of power—even if under martial law. Their influence was a major factor in impeding the anti-martial law struggles from being carried forward. They were compelled to fight in no small part because of the consciousness and militancy of the masses, including in their own lower ranks. This militancy was a product of earlier struggles, chiefly the periods of 1969-71 and 1973-74. The first saw the people of Purba Bangla launch mass movements and armed struggle against Pakistan, a heroic struggle, which was betrayed by AL and CPB. During 1973-74, PBSP and other patriotic and democratic forces developed country-wide armed struggle against the puppet regime of Sheikh Mujib.

c) Those petit bourgeois groups and social democrats who, despite their somewhat militant character, were unable to sustain and lead the anti-martial law movement because of their class character and tailism.

Scattered among all these categories were those who dreamed of a military coup at some opportune moment.

Despite their various differences, the groups in all three categories shared one feature: they did not go into action against martial law till long after its promulgation, and in fact opposed such action in practice.

10-Party Bloc

The 10-party bloc was led by the Democratic League (DL) of K. Mostaque Ahmed, the die-hard agent of US imperialism. The DL is a reactionary communal organisation. This bloc had little influence over the movement and disintegrated due to palace plots of the DL and divergences among the groups.

Jamayat-e-Islami

This communal Islamic fundamentalist organisation serves the interests of US imperialism and the Saudi petrodollar. They are hated by the people of Purba Bangla. During the liberation struggle of 1971, Jamat stood with the Pakistani occupation forces and killed thousands of people. They have taken part in the anti-martial law movement in co-ordination with the 15-party and 7-party alliances.

Despite the differences that arise based on their international connections, the AL, BNP, DL and Jamat all have the same class base: they are organisations of the comprador bureaucrats and

feudals. And they all support the same Five Point programme. It is worth going into a bit more depth on the respective attitudes of these parties towards social revolution.

1) From among the forces active in the anti-martial law movement, AL, BNP, DL and Jamat are the most reactionary. They are dead against any change in the existing state and social system. AL, BNP and DL have all been in state power at one time or another since 1971, and have proved their unpatriotic, autocratic and utterly reactionary character. They killed thousands of revolutionaries and patriots, including hundreds of unarmed prisoners. They suppressed the economic movements of even professional groups, and have terminated low salary employees en masse. In the anti-martial law movement, they have always proved combat ready to divert all movement into the channels of parliamentary politics. Their pledge that they “are against the military rule, but never against the army,” is not so much sycophancy designed to win generals over to their own ends as a solemn promise to keep the present system intact.

The class basis of this outlook, and particularly its effort to suppress the revolutionary programme, which is today directed at the Five Enemies, is that they are the organisation of, by and for the comprador bureaucrats and feudals.

2) This second category of parties supporting the Five Point Programme includes a) paid agents of Moscow (CPB) and die-hard Soviet agents like NAP(M), NAP(H), Ekota Party, BAKSAL; b) pro-Soviet social-democrats like JSD, BSD, Workers Party; and c) pro-Chinese revisionists, RCL, UPP, Democratic Party, BSD(T), BSD(AD), etc.

Those forces of sub-categories (b) and (c) are all petit bourgeois reformists, who stand with the system; the social democrats among them tailed AL, BNP and CPB in the anti-martial law struggles. From their reformist position, they are in favour of economic movements of various professional groups. They use this to argue that they are not tailing the bourgeoisie but uniting with them on a tactical basis, even citing Lenin to justify this. This cannot obscure that they have accepted in full the programme of the comprador bourgeoisie and have aided them in their efforts to keep the present system intact. Even so, they are still able to mislead large numbers of honest, sincere patriots and revolutionaries. Without exposing and unmasking them, it will not be possible to carry forward the communist movement or even the movement for genuine people’s democracy to the desired goals.

REVOLUTIONARY AND PATRIOTIC FORCES OPPOSED TO THE FIVE ENEMIES

Though the number of genuine revolutionary and patriotic forces opposed to the Five Enemies, is great, they are scattered about in small groups and organisations. Thus, separately they do not have great influence over the masses, but their combined strength is not insignificant. From among these groups the only participants in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement are PBSP and BSD (M-L) (Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal [Marxist-Leninist], one of several parties whose Bengali name translates into English as Communist Party of Bangladesh [Marxist-Leninist]).

Based on their ideological and political lines and their attitude towards martial law, these groups can be grouped as follows:

a) Bangladesher Sharbohara Party (BSP) and Purba Banglar Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (PBCP-ML). Though they have differences on many issues, their line on the anti-martial law movement unites them. Both groups conduct armed struggle, but BSP has rejected Mao Tsetung Thought, has become Hoxhaite and revisionist and opposes the RIM, whereas PBCP(ML) professes to uphold Mao's Thought and at the same time blindly follows the lines and methods of Comrade Charu Mazumdar (Comrade Mazumdar was the founder-leader of the Communist Party of India [Marxist-Leninist] and was killed by the reactionary Indian government in 1972). The attitude of the PBCP(ML) towards the RIM is negative. Neither group forms mass organisations nor do they conduct mass movements; furthermore, they have no concrete line and method regarding this problem.

Their stand on the question of military rule is also the same: they do not understand that military rule has given rise to a particular situation and hence has set new duties and obligations before the revolutionaries. They confine themselves to the anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism strategic slogan and in practice oppose the anti-martial law democratic movement. In practice, then, they are unable to grasp the fact that the anti-martial law movement is the specific application of this strategy to the specific situation of military rule, so that carrying out this strategic line obliges the performance of specific duties. For this reason they do not understand and more than that do not even try to understand the problem of the anti-martial law movement and the different types and degrees of unity required with other anti-martial law forces. In fact, they have no role in the anti-martial law mass movement. Objectively, then, their inactivity favours the perpetuation of military rule. Finally, they even oppose the unity of different forces fighting the Five Enemies on the basis that some of them are "revisionist" or "counter-revolutionary." Thus, they practically oppose people's unity on the basis of the programme of the new-democratic revolution.

b) The other section of the left forces conduct, or at least want to conduct, anti-martial law movements. However, they fail to understand that unity is possible, not only with other left forces, but even, tactically, with forces who do not oppose the Five Enemies, and that if revolutionary strategy is strictly adhered to, the revolutionary forces will benefit from such unity. Their fear is that the revolutionaries will instead be "utilised" by supporters of the Five Enemies. Thus, they oppose PBSP's line of tactical unity with any force that wants to conduct anti-martial law movements. The groups in this category include: the Revolutionary Communist Party of Bangladesh Marxist-Leninist (BRCP-ML) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh ML (CPB-ML).

In connection with these groups, the question of the so-called lefts united with the 15- and 7-party alliances arises. These "lefts" claim to have made "tactical" unity with these supporters of the Five Point Programme—but in fact this amounts to unity UNDER the Five Point Programme. There is a reformist stand and they are in fact being "utilised" by supporters of the Five Point Programme. Thus, their conception of unity is rightist, while that of BRCP-ML and CPB-ML is left deviationist. The former tail the reactionaries under the cover of tactical unity, while the latter, who fear being used, oppose the unity that is necessary and possible to achieve.

On the question of Mao Tsetung Thought, the stand of these two parties is centrist. BRCP(ML) has not yet labelled Mao Tsetung Thought as revisionist, but on the other hand they do not uphold it as a contemporary development of Marxism-Leninism. In the past they practiced the

armed struggle, but in the last few years this has been abandoned. Presently they have taken up a “mass organisation-ist” stand (this is a line in Purba Bangla which rejects armed struggle on the grounds that mass organisations and mass movements are the only means to revolution). On the one hand, they rejected the call for the unity of the revolutionary and patriotic forces; on the other, when a separate process of unity of those forces opposing the Five Enemies began in early 1985, the mass organisations of BRCP(ML) came forward to take part. This reveals the lack of specific lines and a clear stand on the question of unity on the part of BRCP(ML).

As for CPB(ML), they have maintained silence on the question of Mao Tsetung Thought. In place of rural-based protracted people’s war, they advocate city-centred mass uprisings. Their practice is basically limited to theoretical discussions and cultural activities. Under pressure from its activists and as a reflection of its own half-hearted line, this group has come forward a bit for unity of the forces against the Five Enemies in the recent past. Nevertheless, like the BRCP(ML), their position is still essentially centrist on this question.

c) The third grouping sees the present anti-martial law movement as merely a quarrel between two groups of dogs, as merely a tug of war amongst the agents of US imperialism, Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionism. Consequently, they see no necessity to play an active role here.

It is true that tussle among enemies is one aspect of this situation, but it is not the whole picture. An objective contradiction between the people of Purba Bangla and the military regime does exist, and forms the basis for this movement.

This outlook sees only the contradictions among the enemy and not the contradiction between the enemy and the people. Thus, it turns these groups into helpless spectators. These groups maintained the same attitude towards the communal contradiction in the period of British colonialism (before 1947) and also towards the liberation war of 1971, which they saw as only a conspiracy of the USSR and India. They do not understand that a contradiction between Pakistani rule and the people of Purba Bangla existed, that people started armed struggle to do away with Pakistani exploitation and that it was due to this that the Awami League (the party in the lead of the anti-Pakistan struggle), the US, USSR and India could hatch their ... conspiracy. The “dogs” cannot mobilise the vast masses of people in their “quarrels” without any objective basis. These groups lack in this materialist outlook, and so they are not able to play a role, or at least any conscious role, in these movements.

d) Throughout this period of the anti-martial law struggles, the PBSP has played a significant role. It was the first force to identify the contradiction between the people of Purba Bangla and the military regime, for all its crimes, and it was the first force to call for a unified movement aimed at overthrowing the junta. It issued a call for tactical unity among anti-martial law forces based on the three minimum points, and, alongside this, it also called for unity on the programme of the new-democratic revolution of those forces opposed to the Five Enemies. Despite its previous left errors and the consequent lack of experience in mass movements, the PBSP has worked to develop, influence and lead the anti-martial law movement in the cities. The Party has developed lines and methods for this work, and has gained much experience, and some success.

PBSP is still a small organisation. Moreover, its enemies have continually exerted tremendous pressure against it, and that is why, in the absence of a larger unity of the revolutionary and patriotic forces, the Party, despite its sincere endeavours, could not achieve the desired success in channeling the mass movement in the proper direction.

Alongside the mass movement, PBSP conducted armed struggle in the rural areas as its main task. It firmly held high the line that without armed struggle it is impossible to overthrow the military dictatorship.

When the Ershad regime tried to impose its reactionary communal educational policy, and when the conscious section of the students and intellectuals, while rejecting it, did not propose any alternative policy, it was PBSP who formulated and widely circulated such a policy.

Through all this PBSP has succeeded in re-establishing its image and its influence over various left forces and a section of the masses, and has mobilised some of them under its banner. It has also worked to begin the process of unity among revolutionary and patriotic forces, and this has been an important gain from the anti-martial law movement.

THE PEASANTRY AND THE MOVEMENT

It has been mentioned above that in general the anti-martial law movement, which to a great extent has involved the students as well as increasingly other sections of the petit bourgeoisie and workers too, has been city-centred, and that this was in no small part due to the strength and line of many of the groups involved in the anti-martial law movement. Even when these groups have carried out work in the rural areas, this generally means the rural petit bourgeoisie who live in the subdistrict headquarters and the small towns. The bulk of the rural population are peasants, especially poor, landless and middle peasants, and other strata of rural labourers. So rural organisation should mean organisation among these people—but due to their class line, the bourgeois and petit bourgeois organisations are incapable of this, as were the students.

Though neither country-wide nor very strong, only the PBSP truly had organisational bases in the rural areas. And it was only PBSP that really undertook co-ordinating and integrating the urban mass movement with the armed struggles and other movements of the peasant masses. Those other forces who centred their work in rural areas (BSP, PBCP-ML) and even carry out armed struggle, failed to mobilise the peasant masses in the movement because of erroneous views on both the anti-martial law movement and the peasants. PBSP did manage to foil the election farce of Ershad in its organisational strongholds, but as it was a small party alone in this work it was impossible to widely spread the anti-martial law movement among the rural population. PBSP even proposed joint actions to foil the election drama to some supporters of the Five Point programme, but while some lower ranking activists came forward the leaders chose to ignore this.

In sum, the anti-martial law movement could neither mobilise nor broadly influence the peasants. This is one of the spectacular reasons why this movement, though aimed at overthrowing martial law, achieved nothing. For without armed struggle and the peasant masses, overthrowing the military junta of Ershad is not possible.

There is another problem involved in the question of analysing why and to what extent work among the peasant masses was undertaken: armed struggle. In Purba Bangla today, it is not possible to establish a sound base among the rural masses without carrying out armed struggle under the leadership of the proletariat. It is through armed struggle that the PBSP is carrying on organisational work and establishing its base among the peasants, creating mass-based areas in a few districts. Once armed struggle is abandoned, all achievements are lost. The present situation of the pro-Chinese RCL and the half-Hoxhaite BRCP-ML prove this. Despite their differing lines, both conducted armed struggle and at a certain point had some organisational strength in rural areas. But since they have rejected armed struggle, their organisational strength among the peasants is being liquidated and they are growing isolated from the rural masses.

Though PBSP is carrying out armed struggle, it was unable to mobilise the peasants in the way it wanted. This was due in part to the constant pressure brought to bear by the state armed forces against the PBSP's base areas, which was added to by the aid to the government of the reactionary political parties. Following four years of their attacks, the PBSP was forced to retreat from some of these areas and so could not mobilise the peasants to take part in this movement as it might have otherwise. There is also the problem of establishing the Party's leadership all over the country.

LESSONS AND RESULTS OF THE MOVEMENT

Through the course of the last few years, the anti-people, reactionary and fascist character of the military regime of the US imperialist lackey Ershad has become as clear as daylight. To protect their power these murderers do not hesitate at crushing students and rickshaw pullers under the wheels of trucks, at creating a reign of terror by their hired ruffians in the educational institutions, or at firing on processions, and other forms of savagery. Before Ershad, the Zia government managed to gain a bit of popular support, but because of the mass movement Ershad has failed in this. This fact will be of great help to future developments.

Along with this, the reactionary political parties have been unmasked and their treacherous, compromising character exposed. Today the anti-martial law movement is proceeding through two different ways: one is led by the supporters of the Five Enemies with the aim of sharing power through elections, without even overthrowing martial law; and the other is led by revolutionary and genuinely patriotic forces with the aim of overthrowing the Five Enemies and the military rule and gaining true independence and democracy for the people.

There is no alternative but armed struggle for overthrowing the military dictators. The peaceful transfer of power from one class to another is unimaginable: the junta is even reluctant to share power with members of their own class. And at every point where the movement has developed to a new stage, Ershad has resorted to bloody repression, while the reactionary opposition parties would simply withdraw the movement.

The urgency of launching armed struggle and developing rural strongholds is once again being felt by left forces. In the past, a great majority of the left forces practiced armed struggle, but ran into problems. The problem of sustaining the armed struggle is the problem of developing it both quantitatively and qualitatively. The left forces failed to solve the problem of developing a

certain stage of the armed struggle to its next higher stage—and they summed up a line directly opposed to continuing the armed struggle, and subsequently fell into mass organisationism.

But in the process of the current movement it has become clearer that mere mass movements cannot do away with the reactionaries or change the social and state systems, and sometimes they cannot even achieve reformist ends. But their importance can in no way be negated. The movements during these years facilitated the development of armed struggle and other revolutionary activities. The relation between armed struggle and mass movement is dialectical—the development of one helps the other. It is, ultimately, impossible to qualitatively change a reactionary state and social system without armed struggle and without mass movements developed in the process of and integrated with the armed struggle—this is one of the most important lessons of the past few years.

The movement has also shown that, contrary to the belief current in some quarters, the role of the students as a force opposed to military and other autocratic rule is not exhausted. Following the establishment of “Bangladesh,” the student community for various reasons almost completely lost the militant image that they had developed in the course of the fight against Pakistani oppression. Their role in the past few years has restored that image to some extent. At the same time, unless the student movement is integrated with the workers’ and peasants’ movement at a certain stage they will again lose momentum. This is one of their class limitations.

There is also the already mentioned unity that is developing, really for the first time, among the forces opposed to the Five Enemies, which though still very weak, indicates a bright future. Also developing different mass organisations that follow Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought—and in fact the level of unity among the left forces has generally developed in proportion to the strength of these mass organisations. Also, other revolutionary and patriotic forces have become active as the armed struggle and mass movements under the leadership of the PBSP have gained strength. The unity of the revolutionaries and patriots of Purba Bangla depends on the development of the armed struggle and the mass movements under the leadership of the proletariat—this is a universal truth proved by the last few years.

The image of PBSP, which was won from its leading of armed struggle in 1971 and in 1972-74, was mainly ruined due to subsequent setbacks. Due to correct lines on and active role in the mass movement, that lost image could be restored to some extent. Also, it was mentioned that PBSP had virtually no prior experience in mass movements in urban areas. In the last few years, lines and methods for this work have been developed, enabling PBSP and other Marxist-Leninist forces, who are also developing these lines and methods, to intensify their work.

CONCLUSION

Thus, through repeated cycles of attack and retreat, the military junta of General Ershad has at this point pushed the opposition onto the defensive and seized the offensive. He is beaming, triumphant and self-satisfied.

The defensive position into which they have been forced has aggravated the crises of the bourgeois opposition, especially the 15-party and 7-party alliances. Extremely frustrated,

sections of these forces who yesterday brandished swords have today gulped down the bait of ministerial positions and joined the government's political front (including such as the pro-Chinese Gonoantrik Party, the UPP of Kazi Zafar Ahmed and BNP stalwarts like Moudud Ahmed). Other organisations, in the leisure moments of their complete lack of activity, are carrying on self-appraisal. The CPB, the private agent of Soviet social-imperialism, has concluded that they committed a grave error by not taking part in elections, even under martial law. Others have not yet dared to reach such conclusions openly. Overall, then, the 23 parties are not carrying on anti-martial law movements, under the cover of the ban on political activities, etc. All this has given rise to an on-going process of splits, re-organisation and reorientation, the outcome of which will greatly influence the future development of the anti-martial law movement.

Nor is the junta free from crises. Despite the government's ability to create its political front, the current balance within these forces, including with Janadal, could quickly give rise to imbalance. Ershad, despite his arrogance, is not able to measure all the live frogs in a single scale-pan.

Most fundamentally, the hatred of the masses for martial law is deep and unabated. However many political prostitutes Ershad gathers he cannot do away with this. Thus, he will continue to face grave crisis. It is not Ershad's fortune to rule the kingdom peacefully.

In this situation, the apparent stasis between the government and the opposition cannot last long. Momentum will gather, and things will head in one direction or the other.

Crucial to future events is Ershad's need to shed his khaki kurta and don a civilian cloak, in no small part in order to meet the exigencies of foreign diplomacy. Elections are his only way out. But the problem is this: the bourgeois opposition will not yield to Ershad's conditions, and if he yields to theirs his power base will be shaky, perhaps ruined. So reaching a compromise might not be so easy. Behind this difficulty is the situation the opposition faces with the masses: the masses are the lever to which they must resort, while at the same time the opposition fears and must restrain them.

There are numerous possible variations: perhaps again Ershad will re-initiate his parlour politics, perhaps again the opposition will take to the streets. And so it seems that history repeats itself. But it does not: this apparent repetition is no mechanical replay of historical events. We have seen how during the last three years PBSP and others upholding the red banner of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought have grown stronger and closed their ranks. True revolutionaries gather strength in periods of crisis for the reactionaries. So deep down, history was not and is not standing still at the crossroads. Rather, beneath the apparent repetition history is preparing a leap into the future—newer, and brighter.

(Written in the last week of August 1985.)

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