

Stand With the Struggling Masses of Lalgarh

The purpose of the current much-trumpeted operation by the paramilitary forces in Lalgarh region of West Midnapore (West Bengal), is to suppress the democratic upsurge of the tribals and to send out a warning to all oppressed sections against any attempt to similarly challenge the State authority and establish people's authority. It is also part of the ruling classes' systematic long-planned attack on the communist revolutionaries nationwide who are challenging the entire system of exploitation and oppression. For these reasons it is incumbent on all communist revolutionaries and revolutionary democrats to stand steadfast by the tribals of Lalgarh, oppose the State's campaign of suppression, and uphold the right of the masses to rebel against the existing oppressive social, economic and political order and set up their own popular authority. Whatever the differences of tactical line among the communist revolutionaries, they stand united and with the revolutionary masses against the enemy onslaught.

The sparking point for the current rebellion was the atrocities committed by the police on the ordinary tribals to exact vengeance for a CPI (Maoist) land-mine attack on the West Bengal Chief Minister. These vengeful acts by the police ignited a great store of popular wrath built up over years of autocratic, exploitative, and terroristic treatment of the tribals at the hands of the police and the CPI (M) machinery. There followed an extraordinary and inspiring democratic assertion by the tribals, drawing on their traditions of collective struggle and management of their own affairs. The tribal masses seized control of the area, blocked off entry points, gheraoed the local police station, formed the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, drove the police and administration out of the area, and declared their democratic demands. No doubt these demands were of a limited nature (i.e., not relating to a change in production relation). Rather, these demands focused on punishment of the guilty police officers by the traditional tribal method of public humiliation, compensation to the victims of police atrocities and an end to all such police repression. More important than the individual demands was the fact that the struggle amounted to a political contest between the will of the oppressed masses and the will of the reactionary ruling classes and their State authorities.

The State authorities were well aware that any real concession to even the most obviously justified demands would only further strengthen the organization, consciousness, and fighting spirit of the tribals. Moreover, the ruling CPI (M) beset by agitations and rebellions in Nandigram, Singur, and elsewhere, and facing general elections in May 2009, needed time to maneuver and re-group. Initial attempts by a private army of CPI (M) hoodlums to terrorise the tribals had proved unsuccessful. Hence the CPI (M) and the State machinery decided to play a waiting game.

The tribal rebellion achieved several important political gains. It thoroughly exposed the pretensions of the CPI (M) regarding its record among the rural poor. It exposed the acute backwardness actually prevailing, the absence of even minimum welfare facilities (such as healthcare and employment generation), and the corruption of the CPI (M) party.

At the same time, the upsurge showed what the tribal masses were capable of, on the basis of

their self-organisation and unleashed initiative. Because of its evidently mass democratic character, the tribal upsurge also awakened a sense of identification among the broad tribal masses of the region not only in contiguous areas but even at distant places, beginning a political process among them as well.

The State machinery (at the central and provincial levels) and the CPI (M) lost no time in portraying the tribals as puppets of the CPI (Maoist). The communist revolutionaries themselves are being portrayed in the State and corporate media propaganda as fearsome and sinister terrorists. In this fashion the State has for some time now been preparing the ground for a much more intense and no-holds-barred military assault nationwide on the communist revolutionaries and the masses under their influence. However, the tribals of Lalgarh, seeing the whole-hearted manner in which the comrades of the CPI (Maoist) threw in their lot with them, and contrasting them with the ruling pseudo-communists, refused to be swayed or cowed down by the State propaganda. Rather, they have openly expressed their support for the CPI (Maoist) comrades working among them.

The obstacle to the State armed forces re-entering Lalgarh was not principally military but political: the CPI (M) feared having to pay a heavy political price. Ultimately, once the elections were over, the Central and state governments, headed by the Congress and CPI (M) respectively, set aside their rivalries in order to crush the Lalgarh people's movement. Care was taken to ensure that the Trinamool Congress which otherwise has been using various popular issues in order to hit at the rural CPI (M), remained mum throughout the "cleansing operations".

No doubt, a successful armed blockade altogether preventing the entry of the State forces was not possible, given the actual balance of forces prevailing at the time and the level of the people's movement. The police-paramilitary operations appear to have regained control over part of the Lalgarh region, and the coming days will be full of trials and sufferings for the people of the region as the combing and "cleansing" operations continue. Yet the masses and the CPI (Maoist) forces are continuing their resistance.

However, the ultimate consequences of the State's operation will be intensified alienation and simmering anger among the tribal masses, which offer fertile grounds for an even more powerful organized mass revolutionary upsurge in the future.

The CPRCI (ML) supports the tribals' demand that the police and paramilitary forces of all varieties be withdrawn from the Lalgarh region. It express solidarity with the struggling masses of Lalgarh, congratulates them for their exemplary struggle, and urges them to continue their struggle in appropriate forms through ups and downs until they attain victory as part of the revolutionary movement of the Indian people.

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