

THE WEAPON OF CRITICISM

57

Indian Communists Criticise Armed Economism

By Sunil

Reprinted from *Mass Line*

Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar

A CPI(ML) Document Published
by: Prabodh Bhattacharya 10B,
Radha Madhab Dutta Garden
Lane Calcutta 700 010

Bihar has long occupied an important place in the peasant movements of India. In the pre-1947 period, it was a centre of militant peasant struggles led by the Kisan Sabha (peasant organisation) — one of the most important contingents of the All-India Kisan Sabha itself. Later on the total degeneration of the Communist Party India (CPI) into revisionism took its toll in Bihar also. The momentum of social change built up by the movement was dissipated in the par-

liamentary pigsty. Casteism in the worst form once again reared up its ugly head. Landlordism ran rampant under the blessings of all parliamentary parties. The CPI-CPM (Communist Party of India, Marxist, a centrist split-off from the CPI formed in the early sixties) revisionists have always fixed the blame for this degeneration on the “cultural backwardness of the caste-ridden Hindi belt.” Socio-cultural backwardness is no doubt a reality in Bhojpur. But that is only one side of the picture. The other side is that the victims, the oppressed peasantry, are a potent powder-keg which can be ignited with revolutionary politics. Naxalbari and its politics of seizing power through armed struggle was such a spark. Within a short time “backward” Bihar was

catapulted into an advanced centre of struggle, symbolised by Bhojpur. Ever since then Bihar has remained a centre of militant peasant struggle.

"Report from the flaming fields of Bihar" claims to give us a picture of this struggle, particularly centred in South Bihar. The fact that the area covered was the centre of the earlier Bhojpur movement makes it even more important. But this book is not the ordinary journalistic record or sociological study one comes across. In the words of the authors, it is a "document," a political summation of its work carried out by the CPI(ML) (Liberation) led by Vinod Misra. As such the reportage only serves to substantiate certain political positions upheld by this group. Evidently, to do justice to the book, a review must assess this politics and draw appropriate lessons. Yet this is precisely where a notable drawback of the book stands out. Despite an impressive list of documents given as Appendices, the reader is never informed of the basic political line guiding the group's practice.

Since some reviewers have enthusiastically welcomed this very style of the book as a model to be followed by all, it is necessary to go into this aspect a bit more deeply. The main propaganda statement of the book (incidentally, the publisher is the central propaganda team of the VM group itself) is summarised in its last chapter. In brief, it claims that, "The ongoing peasant struggle in Bihar represents a new phase in the development of the Naxalbari movement" (p. 169). Before going into the numerous salient features of this "new phase" listed in the chapter, let us try to examine this very claim itself. How can a critical reader assess it independently? Obviously a clear grasp of the aims and politics of Naxalbari and the CPI(ML) could be a good basis for this task. Yet in this case that itself is insufficient. The VM group has abandoned a number of positions upheld by the CPI(ML) earlier, including positions on the crucial strategy of seizing power. In fact, this was the prominent aspect of the "Rectification" of 1979 and the "3rd Congress" of 1982 carried out

by the VM group. One comes across numerous references to those events throughout the book. One is also informed that they played a crucial role in initiating the "new phase." But any enquiry about the new political positions advanced by them runs into a stonefaced silence. Given the strident nature of political claims, an honest propaganda effort surely calls for providing such vital information also.

Let us take a specific example. According to the "Report," one salient feature of this "new phase" is that of "... sustaining guerrilla struggle, though still at a primary stage, for a long period in the plains" (p. 174). This is contrasted to the "fear" of other ML groups who wish to avoid the complex agrarian scene of the plains of South Bihar and shift to areas of "classical feudalism" and favourable topography for armed struggle. No doubt this sounds very innovative. But how does one link up this attempt to the latest strategy of forming provisional governments and carrying out insurrection from above (whatever it is!) — the strategy proclaimed by the 1982 Congress of the VM group? *Liberation*, organ of the VM group, envisages a rather complicated scenario for seizing power — "revolutionaries" coming to "power" through elections in one or two States, this government (or governments) confronting the centre and getting dismissed in the process, this dismissal leading to mass uprisings, etc. Moreover, it insists that this convoluted process "finally leads you to the basic path and ultimate form of struggle" (October 1984). Since the VM group has not yet been "forced" to form a government (though it is desperately trying its best), and hence has still a long way to go to arrive at the "basic path and ultimate form of struggle," what exactly is the purpose and content of its sustained guerrilla activities? Or, what does it have in common with the politics of seizing power through People's War put forward by the CPI(ML)? We hope this example gives a good illustration of the problem we had mentioned earlier. To be meaningful, the critique has to go beyond the bounds set up

by the authors. In other words, the "disinformation" campaign pushed by the VM group has to be consciously identified if one is to get to the heart of the matter.

Political criticism of the VM group's strategy has already been published by *Mass Line* (Vol. 9, No. 7). We will not repeat it here. Rather, we will try to pinpoint the acute manifestations of this revisionist strategy as seen in the "Report," particularly, we will take up the questions of armed struggle, the caste question, and uniting the middle peasantry, since they are crucial aspects as yet unresolved by the revolutionary movement in India. We will also examine how the basic flaws in the VM group's theorisation of the transformations in Indian agriculture leads it to swing from right opportunism in "left" form to openly barefaced revisionism. The task is not an easy one since we have to sift out the truth from a maze of disinformation at each step. Yet it is fruitful since it helps us to deepen our grasp of what revisionism means today.

As we noted earlier, militant peasant struggles have long been a regular feature in Bihar. Yet the struggle initiated in the early 1970s in Bhojpur stands out among them. It was not just a militant peasant struggle, but part of an armed revolution for the seizure of political power. Apart from its contributions to developing tactics for carrying out armed struggle in the plains, this was the most important qualitative distinction setting it apart from other peasant struggles. And this distinction has been the most important factor in enthusing the oppressed peasantry throughout Bihar and creating favourable grounds for building up a broad peasant movement. Not surprisingly, this heroic struggle for power which provided the direct background for all contemporary developments in Bihar is dismissed with a few terse paragraphs in the long "Report." But these short paragraphs are sufficiently revealing.

In the words of the "Report," the intervention of Marxist-Leninists inspired by Naxalbari had only led "...to usher in a new phase of militant peasant movement." Or,

Bhojpur "... created a niche for itself..." due to "... the *militant, mass character...*" of the movement (p. 25, emphasis added). Armed struggle and the formation of revolutionary committees were nothing more than factors which gave rise to this "militant, mass character." Such is the summation of the VM group. These pages also inform us that the movement lost much of its "momentum" and "suffered serious setbacks" by the end of 1976. Though the "Report" is silent about the reasons which led to this setback, Vinod Misra deals with it in an illuminating paragraph of his introduction: "The independent course of the peasant struggle and the Party's attempt to import consciousness to it went through a peculiar phase of unity and struggle. The Party worked hard to develop communistic elements from among the peasant vanguards, always trying to check the spontaneous negative tendencies of the movement and give it an organised shape. There were, however, also strong attempts on the part of the Party to superimpose its set of dogmatic ideas regarding forms of struggle and organisation on the movement and, to be sure, these attempts proved counterproductive." (p. xxii) "The balance was restored" by "rectifying" these errors and ushering in the "new phase."

In order to understand this question of "dogmatism" and the real content of rectification, we must first note the aims attributed to the Party's "conscious" intervention — "developing communistic elements" and giving the movement an "organised shape." Truly, no trade union boss, not even Dange, could have expressed this better! This trade unionist rendering of the struggle for political power in Bhojpur is not at all incidental. It is a necessary premise for the claim of having rectified "dogmatist" errors. Naxalbari, led by comrade Charu Mazumdar, was born out of a revolt against the notorious revisionist assessment that the peasants of Telengana should not have struggled for power but should have only struggled for land. Given this history, any open criticism of the politics of seizing power invites an

immediate exposure. VM tries to avoid this by strictly stipulating that the dogmatist errors of the CPI(ML) related to "forms of struggle and organisation" and that the "balance was restored" by rectifying such errors only. His trade unionist rendering is a ruse to cover up the fact that the "Rectification campaign" of 1979 directly went far beyond such questions of form and dealt with throwing out the very content, the politics of seizing power through armed struggle itself. If the Party's task all along was no more than giving the movement an "organised shape," why bother with problems of line and strategy? VM has certainly learned some lessons. In the past, the revisionists could be more forthright. But now the times have changed and deception has to be more sophisticated.

The armed struggle in Bhojpur up to the mid-1970s was a vindication of Charu Mazumdar's assertion that armed guerrilla struggle can be carried out in the plains. But, at the same time, it also brought out the flaws in the Party's military line, particularly in relation to the task of sustaining and developing armed struggle. The influence of dogmatic thinking was reflected in the absence of any thorough analysis of the centralised state structure in order to identify its weaknesses. Instead of trying to develop a military line suited to the specific conditions created by the presence of this centralised state structure, an absolutist emphasis was put on sticking to a small area of operation and fighting battles against overwhelming odds. Hence, despite its significant contributions, the struggle in Bhojpur failed to develop beyond the initial stage due to such dogmatist errors in military line, apart from other factors. As we have seen, the VM group claims to have overcome this and speaks of carrying out sustained guerrilla activities today. Apparently this claim is substantiated by the "Report." A number of armed units operate under the control of the group and they engage in combat with landlord gangs and state forces. But what is the line guiding these activities? The policy statement on armed units clearly

stipulate that their task is to act "in the interest of the mass movements..." (p. A-8) An account of ideological remoulding tells us of how a poor peasant fighter was cured of his "illness" of rendering "armed struggle... (as) ... the principal form of struggle." (p. 168) A section of ongoing efforts to overcome "weakness" of the movement tells us that one such measure consists of ensuring that, "Armed actions should be taken in direct and immediate relation to mass movements." (p. 123) All told, the armed activity of the VM group is strictly limited to serve its plans for building up mass economic struggles and movements. Its military tactics of operating over large areas and so forth serves this political aim. In the presence of rabid counterrevolutionary violence of the landlords and the state, even economic struggle has to take an armed form. But the state's attitude to armed actions meant to back up economic demands is radically different from its attitude towards armed struggle aimed at its destruction. In the former case, armed repression is only one option since reforms or granting of demands can also serve the purpose. While the necessity to continue some form of armed activity is given by the openly violent nature of present-day Bihar, its "sustenance" is based on the abandoning of the struggle for power. All the talk in the "Report" of efforts to build base areas taking up "hill, forest and plain areas as a single zone" is just that — loud talk without any content. Armed economism does not lead to base areas. Besides the strategy of "insurrection from above" does not call for such bases either.

The intervention of Marxist-Leninists led by comrade Jouhar in the mass movement led by Jagdish Mahto and others in Bhojpur had elevated it to a struggle for power. Errors in the Party line were an obstacle for further development. The rectification of the VM group was not an attempt to surmount this obstacle but a swing to right opportunism with "left" form in some aspects. Despite its attempts to cover up, the review of the "Report" shows up the inevitable

fruits of this rightist swing. According to the "Report," militant land struggles have given rise to some "problems." For example, despite the growth of the peasant organisation and struggle, a great majority of disputes have "... found their way..." (!) to the courts and legal illusions remain widespread. Or, after successful seizure of land and its distribution "... many recipients... often become the least interested in struggle ... (and) ... concentrate on securing government parchas... to legalise their hold..." (p. 116-117) (To the veteran CPI-CPM activist this lament will sound very familiar. After all, this inevitable outcome of economism has been repeatedly experienced in their movements, and has found a regular mention in their reports.) For the VM group all this has nothing to do with economism. It only calls for more "Rectification" with a bigger dose of rightism. Thus, according to the "Report," "... this problem reflects a serious gap in the thinking of many cadres in the Party.... Basing themselves on an *ultra-left premise*, they negate the importance of taking up *economic work in real earnest*, for they consider it to be a waste of time ... in the period of sharp class war when guns are roaring all around." (p. 117) (emphasis added) Not to elevate but to stifle the revolutionary urges of the masses — that is the essence of economism, armed or otherwise.

Perpetuation of Caste Domination

Let us now pass to the caste question. The failure to overcome caste structure was an important factor behind the setback in Bhojpur. Though not as acute as in Bihar, this problem is commonly faced by movements led by revolutionaries in different regions of India. Generally speaking, caste and class stratification are no longer strictly identical. Yet a predominant section of the agricultural labourers and landless peasants come from the Dalit castes. On the opposite end, the major chunk of the landlords or upper stratum of the rural exploiters come from the upper castes. The partial transformations in caste and class

relations have created new complexities, even while they have created new opportunities. As a result of such transformations, a not so small section of the agricultural labourers and poor peasants come from the intermediate and even upper castes. In this situation, common class interests provide a good basis to forge unity and transcend casteism. Yet the presence of different castes within the same classes also present an opportunity for the exploiters to split up the ranks of the exploited along caste lines. The successful resolution of this complex interpenetration of caste and class remains a pressing task before the revolutionaries in India. In the past, the communist movement had adopted a mechanical approach. It argued that the development of class struggle would more or less automatically lead to overcoming casteism. Today a number of ML groups and other progressive forces have abandoned this erroneous view. Some of them have even gone to the opposite extreme of viewing the caste struggle as more or less identical to class struggle and theorising the isolation of the movement among the most oppressed castes as a virtue. How does the VM group tackle this problem?

One of the salient features mentioned by the "Report" to substantiate its claims of a "new phase" is that caste struggles have been transformed into class struggle. According to it, the approach which led to such results are as follows: "... more denunciation of casteism ... is going to make absolutely no difference.... While sharpening of economic struggles would accelerate inter-caste class polarisation, simultaneously we have also got to work within various caste organisations so as to provide them with a progressive orientation and... we have to assert ourselves as a force capable of guaranteeing security to the weaker castes." (p. 106) Recognising the specific problems raised by caste and evolving policies to deal with it is no doubt necessary and correct. Some of the methods mentioned by the "Report," such as paying attention to the caste composition in an area of work and establishing links with progressive

elements of intermediate and upper castes, addressing calls to specific castes in situations of caste conflict and working within caste organisation to promote progressive elements, are notable. But all policy and tactics should serve the basic line of uprooting casteism and annihilating caste. Is this true in the case of the VM group?

A good example to analyse this is the "Call to the Kurmi peasants" given in the Appendix of the "Report." (p. A 20-21) The context of issuing such a call was the struggle to win over the Kurmi peasants away from the influence of the counterrevolutionary Bhoomi Sena. Since this reactionary Sena was utilising caste feelings to turn the masses from the Kurmi caste against the agrarian movement, a call specifically addressed to them is no doubt justified. The problem is the content of the call. Its whole thrust is not on winning over the Kurmi peasants by weakening their casteist feeling. On the contrary, it is precisely that of trying to win them over by reassuring their *casteist sentiment itself*. Thus the call starts with, "The Kurmi caste is well known as an *honest, hardworking and brave caste*" and, "Altogether *your caste is held in high esteem* in the whole society." With the acknowledgment the call demands of the Kurmis, "Do you want to *preserve the respect* the people have always shown towards *your caste?*, and states, if so you should "... isolate and smash this... gang." (all emphasis added) In other words, the Kurmi peasant is asked to turn against the Bhoomi Sena on the basis of the Party's acknowledgment of his caste position and its guarantee of preserving this position. The message, crudely put, is this — abandon the Bhoomi Sena and support us. We are reliable and capable of preserving your caste interests. Our struggle will not hurt your interests. Such tactics might help in isolating the Bhoomi Sena. But they certainly do so only on an ideological basis identical to that of the Bhoomi Sena — casteism remains untouched.

The policy statement "On Castes" given in the Appendix (p. A 18-19) speaks of mobilising peasant masses belonging to all castes,

giving priority to the most oppressed lower castes, middle castes and upper castes in that order. But significantly enough there is no mention at all of the central task of overthrowing casteism or tactics related to this task. Rather, "... utilising the contradictions of other *castes* with that *caste* (i.e. the particular caste of the landlords..." and developing *caste organisations* of lower castes stand out as the main features of this policy. Again in the measures listed out to overcome "problems" faced by the movement we come across such decisions as, "The Kisan Sabha should make it a point not to concentrate too much on questions of social oppression..." (p. 123)

Earlier we had noted the mechanical approach of the old CP on the caste question. Assuming that the development of class struggle would more or less automatically lead to the overcoming of the caste question apparently indicates a dogmatist attitude of closing one's eyes to social reality since it does not correspond to the textbook. But this dogmatism is in essence really a reflection of right opportunism. In our society, class does not exist as a pure category, it interpenetrates with caste. Class aspirations are both bolstered and hindered by caste aspirations. While the class position directly determines the relation to political power, caste plays a determining role in fixing social status. The overwhelming presence of upper castes in the bureaucracy and other sections of the ruling classes clearly shows the links of caste with political power. This link is also manifested in an indirect form. The Brahmin, Rajput, Reddy or Nair coming from exploited classes can still enjoy some measure of social status and at times even the patronage of power due to his caste position. But this is a possibility totally denied to the Dalit (Untouchable) coming from the exploited classes, precisely due to his caste position. Particularly in the more backward regions where semi-feudal relations still dominate, social position and thereby indirect linkages to political power in some measure is often more sharply expressed in caste terms rather than in

class terms. So long as the exploited classes are organised purely on the basis of their partial, economic interests, leaving out the question of establishing their power, the caste question can be more or less ignored. At best it will only come up as a hindrance to the task of uniting the class around the economic, partial demands. But the moment one breaks with economism and poses the question of mobilising the masses to seize power the whole scene will necessarily change. Establishing the power of the oppressed and exploited will call for nothing less than a total upheaval of all social relations. In India, this can never be achieved without a rupture with casteism. Willingly accepting the power exercised through a Dalit is a totally different proposition even for the landless peasant of an oppressor caste than struggling for partial, economic interests. It calls for a conscious break with casteism.

It is true that the partial economic struggle provides a good basis to eliminate casteism. But it is equally true that the masses can unite in such struggle without a basic rupture in caste outlook. Interpreting this as the "transformation of caste struggle into class struggle" actually serves to cover up the reality of continuing caste consciousness which might be temporarily suppressed and lie latent while the pressing circumstances of the struggle for economic interests remain. The revisionism of the old CP which limited its sights to economism was the real basis for its seemingly dogmatist approach of ignoring the caste question. The CPI(ML) did not achieve a conscious break from this outlook on the caste question. Yet its revolutionary theory and practice stressing armed struggle to seize power and insisting on establishing the leadership of the landless and poor peasants indirectly set it on a different course. Its radical rejection of all collaborationism, determination in the antifeudal struggle and revolutionary class line immediately found the greatest response from the exploited of the oppressed castes. Its politics of seizing power brought them to the forefront and gave a tremendous boost to their social status. This

positive contribution also had its impact on Dalit organisations by bringing forth a new radical orientation within them. The task of the Marxist-Leninists is to build on the heritage with a conscious grasp of the caste question and its implications for the New Democratic Revolution in India. Only then can the indirect gain be consolidated and developed in opposition to revisionist theory and practice on the caste question. In the case of the VM group its orientation is altogether different. The same approach of the old CP with its economist content is reestablished, though in a different form. The essence of its policies and tactics consists of a conscious effort to mitigate caste contradictions which hinder its work of mobilising the peasantry for partial economic interests. Its recognition of the caste question means reassuring the oppressor castes that these class interests will not be hurt. Beyond that it *consciously* ignores the caste question. Once again, the times have changed. The old Kisan Sabha experience of the CPI cannot simply be repeated in contemporary Bihar. Revisionism must stoop to even more degenerate forms to secure its aims.

Class Line Dropped To Win Middle Peasant

Any attempt to build up broad peasant unity for the New Democratic Revolution in India has to resolve the complicated question of uniting the middle peasant and neutralising the rich peasant or capitalist farmer on the basis of resolutely implementing the class line of relying on the landless poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The complexity of this question has some specific features in India. They arise due to the caste question and also due to the fact that in regions where semi-feudalism dominates, the rich peasantry and upper strata of the middle peasantry also carry out feudal forms of exploitation and domination. In regions where neocolonial transformations have taken place this problem comes up in a different form and with different content.

Here the agricultural labourer or poor peasant who sells his labour has to immediately confront even the lower strata of the middle peasantry to fulfill his just demands of wage rise. In the past the CPI(ML) under comrade Charu Mazumdar's leadership had refuted the revisionist theory of S. N. Singh who advocated unity with rich peasants at any cost. But its "left" errors prevented it from developing a correct policy on building up broad peasant unity. Later attempts at rectification by Charu Mazumdar himself didn't make much headway since the source of such errors was not identified. The VM group claims that the movement in Bhojpur developed in opposition to the revisionist line of SNS. This is certainly true of the earlier phase of the Bhojpur movement led by comrade Jouhar. But according to the "Report," the limitations of the earlier phase on the specific question of uniting the middle peasantry still remains unresolved. As usual, the reasons are left out. But some of the policies intended to "rectify" this situation give us a clear indication of the trend of thinking and the future prospects of the opposition to S. N. Singh's line.

Some of the outstanding policies are as follows: "... guaranteeing that their (i.e. middle peasant) interests will not be hurt by *any means*," and "...taking care of their *caste sentiments*..." (p. 122, emphasis added). Along with these guarantees the main effort to mobilise them consists of "... raising with all seriousness certain burning issues concerning them directly and to pursue these issues till some success is achieved." (p. 122) On the one hand a radical declaration of taking work among the agrarian labourers, poor peasants and lower strata of middle peasants as the key link, a defence of this stand against critics who charge that they are splitting the broad peasant unity. On the other hand an openly rightist attempt at conciliation. What holds these contradictory views together? The class line of relying on the agrarian labourers, landless or poor peasants and establishing their leadership is directly related to the

struggle for power and beyond that of continuing the revolution in the new society. Leadership here means political hegemony reflecting the essence of the new political power. If this is left out and these classes are organised purely on the basis of partial, economic demands their struggle will only be a sectarian struggle — justified no doubt by their misery, but even then sectarian, since they do not take up the leading role in transforming society. For the middle peasant, such a struggle will only appear as unrelated to the class oppression he suffers. At the same time it will also appear as an added threat to his narrow economic interests and he will be alienated to the side of the exploiter. Once the "left" form of economism, of pushing only partial struggles of the rural exploited, reaches a blind end, it invariably turns into its opposite. The "error" is sought to be "rectified" by placating now the narrow class economic interests (in our case caste interests also) of the middle peasants and putting a brake on the struggle of the rural exploited. The middle peasant is sought to be won over on the sole basis of his economic interests, and the question of his accepting the hegemony of the working class, exercised through the rural poor, does not arise at all. Other interests and compulsions such as electoral prospects might hold off such a turn for some time. But the basic thrust of economism will inevitably make itself felt. This shift from the "radical" stand of mobilising economic struggles of the rural poor to that of openly placating the other classes is nothing new in India. It has already been demonstrated by the CPM practice in Kerala during the early 1970s.

In the case of the VM group, the conditions faced by it are basically different from those faced by the CPM in Kerala. In Kerala, neo-colonial transformation meant (and still means) that any raising of wage demands of the rural poor would inevitably hit the interests of the middle peasantry also. In Bihar, with all its complexities, the predominant presence of feudal landlords also means that broad sections of the peasantry can be

united against the direct oppressors since large sections of the middle peasants are also oppressed by them — i.e., if this unity is built up on the basis of the politics of destroying the landlords' political power. The economist outlook of the VM group evidently blocks this line of development. But that is only one aspect. A correct line on tackling the task of winning over the middle peasant has also got to take into account the specific features of the contradictions it has with ruling classes; contradictions introduced by imperialist penetration.

How Not to Look at Concrete Reality

The VM group is one among the ML groups which accepts that transformations have taken place in class relations. Its 1982 Congress even came out with an elaborate "Agrarian Programme" taking this into account. Yet the essence of its viewpoint is nothing more than a mechanical superimposition of some categories like "junker-type capitalist landlord" and "kulak rich peasant" borrowed from Lenin on the same old framework of semi-colonial, semi-feudal society. (Recently it has also started speculating on whether the big bourgeoisie can really be called "comprador" and if so to what extent, etc.) Lenin's categories of junker capitalist development were developed by analysing conditions in countries undergoing an independent capitalist development, however backward they have been. The junker path of development in Germany finally led it to the stage of imperialism. The reactionary essence of the transformation which has taken place in India consists in the fact that it *blocks independent capitalist development*. This blocking is not given by extraneous elements like caste and so on. It is given by the very nature of neo-colonial transformation. It means transformation and development carried out in the interests of imperialism and its local agents and implemented in accordance to its overall plans of role allocation for different regions. Even in the predominating semi-feudal condi-

tions of Bihar, particularly South Bihar, neocolonial penetration has started to make its presence felt. The increasing dependency of the peasantry on the market and the state for agricultural inputs and credit, growing production for the market, and transformation of erstwhile tenants (mainly middle and rich peasants of intermediate castes) into land owners are some manifestations of this process. The significantly slow momentum of neocolonial penetration in Bihar has led to a very complex agrarian structure. But the key to understand both the slow momentum and the agrarian structure is that of grasping the essence of the neocolonial pattern of development and control and the role allocation that has prevailed till now. The enforced backwardness of Bihar as compared to other relatively developed regions of India is mainly explained by this. Unless this is understood, the specific contradictions of the middle and rich peasantry can never be *politically* identified and an important basis for winning over the middle peasantry and neutralising the rich peasantry in favour of New Democracy can never be utilised.

The enforced neocolonial backwardness of Bihar and its interpenetration with specific internal features of Bihar society have to be analysed thoroughly to really identify these contradictions. Yet it is clear that this enforced backwardness has cut short the upward mobility of the rich peasants and middle peasants. Unable and unwilling to take up the risks of struggling against this barrier, these classes perceive struggle of the classes below them as a threat to whatever advance they have made. They see the main possibility for increasing surplus and even retaining their economic positions in the more ruthless exploitation of the rural poor. This is what underlies the phenomenon of the erstwhile backbone of the Kisan Sabha now playing the same role for the reactionary Sena after having been transformed into land owners. For these changes the most important barrier is no more that of semi-feudal domination, though they too might suffer from it. In present con-

ditions, the basis of uniting the middle peasantry and neutralising the rich peasantry in such areas has to be mainly sought in the anti-imperialist struggle (which takes the form of antistate struggle in neocolonial conditions) rather than in the antifeudal struggle. Raising "burning issues" concerning these classes will be productive for building up broad, revolutionary unity of the peasantry, only if such "raising" serves the central task of the political struggle to smash the tentacles of imperialism, and the broad peasantry is made conscious of this task. Unless the two levels of political struggle — the main and immediate anti-feudal struggle given by the predominant semi-feudal structure and the anti-imperialist struggle related to the more basic factor which enforces backwardness are grasped and taken up, the task of building up broad peasant unity either will be sacrificed to "left" sectarianism or will be carried out on the rightist basis of placating the rich and middle peasants. The VM group's mechanical superimposition of borrowed categories neither helps it in political analysis nor does it help it in the task of building broad peasant unity.

This bankruptcy of theory and the dead-end reached by armed economism stands out in sharp contrast to Vinod Misra's boastful contentions in his Introduction. In his view the movement led by the group represents an East Wind, as opposed to the West Wind of Sharad Joshi. We have already seen the real nature of the wind raised by the VM group in some of its salient aspects. VM only underscores them by revealing his total blindness to the reality of India. Nothing other than this can explain the claim that the agrarian structure of India is typical of India or his ignoring the sharp and striking differences between rural Bihar and rural Maharashtra — differences which set the form of the movements which have come up in these two States. One understands reality to change it, but where there is no desire to change it, but only aspirations of finding a slot to accommodate oneself, such blindness is inevitable.

Today the agrarian revolution in

Bihar is at a critical juncture. The state has already declared its intentions to drop all pretence of neutrality and enforce landlord domination through the Arwal massacre and the banning of the MKSS. The success of the peasant movement in facing this attack and spreading as a People's War calls for greater heights of revolutionary determination and sacrifice. The oppressed peasantry of Bihar have already demonstrated that they are capable of this. But success in resistance is not the whole answer to tasks faced by the movement in Bihar. Along with this the vanguard has to break out of dogmatist theoretical fetters. These fetters obstruct the thorough analysis of the complex class-caste structure of Bihar. It prevents the movement from successfully integrating the anti-imperialist and antifeudal tasks of the struggle in order to broaden the scope of the struggle and isolate the enemies. It also prevents the movement from successfully tapping the national contradictions which exist due to the artificial integration of different societies into a composite State. At this juncture the "Report" from the VM group is a good teacher by way of negative example. It shows us the other possibility, the path of toning down the struggle and shifting the main focus to the parliamentary arena. After thoroughly pleading its case for right opportunism, the "Report" aptly concludes thus: "forging a strong unity among communist revolutionaries, winning over the middle strata of the peasantry and the democratic ranks of parties like the CPI and Lok Dal, skillfully utilising the contradictions among different political parties and factions so as to isolate the principal adversary, the ruling Congress... the *survival* of the movement depends much on a proper handling of these aspects of *practical politics*." (p. 176, emphasis added) The West Wind is puffing and blowing. But the fighting peasantry will never let it beat down the flames of the fires they have lit in the plains of Bihar — the sparks have come from Naxalbari. □