



Naxalbari, India

1987 marks the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of armed struggle of the peasant masses led by communist revolutionaries in the village of Naxalbari, located in India's state of West Bengal, near the city of Darjeeling, not far from the borders of Nepal and what is now Bangladesh. Before 1967 this remote village was unknown beyond the surrounding Terai region in the foothills of the Himalayas. Today Naxalbari is known to scores of millions as the symbol of the people's war that will one day sweep imperialism and reaction off the face of India.

Before Naxalbari, the communist movement in India was dominated by revisionism. The Communist Party of India (CPI) had long before abandoned even the pretext of revolution in favour of the "parliamentary road" to power. Under the pressure of the criticism of revisionism begun by Mao Tsetung and the Communist Party of China in the early 1960s, a section of cadres and members of the CPI had split off and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or

CPM. In West Bengal, especially, a great number of genuine revolutionaries took part in the formation of the CPM as a result of the latter's vocal criticism of the CPI revisionist leaders.

But it soon became apparent that the CPM itself had not really broken with revisionism. On an international plane, the CPM tried to steer a "middle road" between Soviet revisionism and the Marxist-Leninist line that was represented at the time by the Communist Party of China. Although the CPM came out against Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and even made a show of "defending" him, and although the CPM had a so-called positive assessment of Mao Tsetung, it was unable to make the kind of radical rupture required with the long revisionist history in India and to assimilate Mao Tsetung Thought as the new stage of Marxism-Leninism and apply it to the conditions of India. On the practical front the CPM was content to uphold the necessity of armed struggle in words while making the "tactic" of participating in the

parliamentary arena its actual main focus of work.

That is to say the CPM (like most "centrists") kept two goods in stock: revolutionary posturing directed at the masses and real revisionism and class collaboration aimed at keeping these same masses forever enchained to the reactionary system.

It was in this context that in 1965 Charu Mazumdar began developing a revolutionary opposition to the revisionist leadership of the CPM and began training the cadre of the Darjeeling district committee of the CPM in a radically different line which would explode two years later in Naxalbari. These early writings of Charu Mazumdar became known as the "Eight Historic Essays." In them Mazumdar stresses that the revolution in India would follow the path of China — specifically the path of protracted warfare and of surrounding the cities from the countryside. This analysis went straight up against not only the revisionists' "parliamentary road" but also the earlier, secret so-called Tac-

20 YEARS SINCE THE CLAP OF SPRING THUNDER

tical Line which held that the revolution in India would follow neither the Chinese road nor the Russian road but be a combination of urban uprisings in the cities and what they called "partisan warfare" in the countryside. Although often cloaked in the garb of India's "particular conditions," this argument was in fact aimed at defeating those who wanted to uphold and apply Mao Tsetung's line.

In his "Eight Essays" and in a more developed way later on in other writings, Charu Mazumdar develops his thesis of the "area-wide seizure of power." This was of the utmost importance in distinguishing the Naxalbari struggle from the many militant struggles of the peasants in India which frequently went over into revolutionary violence. As Mazumdar points out, if such struggles did not aim at seizing power but remained merely struggles for land they would degenerate into "militant economism."

In 1968 a report was prepared by the communist revolutionaries in the Siliguri subdivision, in which Nax-

albari is located. Although this "Report on the Peasant Movement in the Terai Region" was signed by Kanu Sanyal, who later degenerated into a right opportunist, it can be said to represent, in the main, Charu Mazumdar's line at the time and the report still provides valuable insight into the Naxalbari movement as well as some of the thinking of those who led it.

The Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Comrade Mao Tsetung, was quick to recognise the importance of the Naxalbari movement. The political support given by the CPC, mainly through its radio and press, helped further fan the already spreading flames of the struggle. The articles in the Chinese press were also a means by which the CPC was able to indirectly offer comradely advice to the Indian communists (see the article, "Let the Red Flag of Naxalbari Fly Still Higher" reprinted in this issue, with its stress on the importance of guerrilla warfare.) Within a very short period of time Naxalbari-type struggles were taking off in many

parts of India: in Bihar, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala as well as in many regions of West Bengal where it all started.

The Naxalbari struggle dramatically reconfigured the political landscape on the Indian left. The revisionist CPI and CPM became thoroughly exposed as they openly sided with the central authorities who responded to the Naxalbari movement with widespread slaughter and terror. On the other hand, throughout the country young people came forward from within and outside the traditional communist movement to take up the banner of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and the armed struggle for power. Charu Mazumdar was at the centre of the efforts to group the genuine communist revolutionaries and his line became the basis for the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) on 22 April 1969.

While the centre of the revolutionary work of the CPI(ML) was in the countryside, the movement had profound effects on all aspects of Indian society, including the urban areas. This was particularly true of Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal.

Calcutta is infamous throughout the world for its despicable inhuman conditions and its teeming millions of slum dwellers. It was also, and remains, the stronghold of the CPM as well as an important intellectual centre in India.

Under the impact of the peasant upsurge in the countryside the influence of the "Naxalites" grew in Calcutta by leaps and bounds. A powerful movement developed amongst the youth and students against the comprador educational system; statues of Gandhi and other pro-imperialist, anti-national misleaders of the people were destroyed. The movement spread to the slums as well, where large numbers of the workers and the urban poor saw the CPI(ML) and the armed struggle it was waging in the countryside as the road to eliminate their oppression. Charu Mazumdar, while hailing and

supporting the movement in the cities, continually called upon the revolutionary youth to go to the countryside, integrate with the peasants and in this way help propagate the armed struggle. In fact, many hundreds heeded his call.

As the armed struggle was raging in the nearby countryside different armed activities began to develop in the cities themselves. It seems that this may have been spontaneous in origin, but became more systematic as revolutionary youths and slum dwellers sought to participate in the CPI(ML)'s "gun-snatching" campaign aimed at seizing weapons from the reactionaries and their armed forces, to provide the armament for a people's army. While large numbers of arms were seized and a considerable number of policemen and other reactionaries were wiped out, the reactionary forces, aided by the CPM, were able to unleash a vicious onslaught of white terror that eventually restored "order" at the cost of thousands of lives.

From the beginning the fledgling party faced gigantic tasks as it fought to lead forward and direct the unprecedented storm of revolutionary struggle that Naxalbari had unleashed and as the reactionaries stepped up their attacks on the Party and the revolutionary masses. In a remarkably short period of time a wealth of experience in waging revolutionary struggle was accumulated and a series of important two-line struggles developed within the party in which Mazumdar's line was opposed. Comrade Mazumdar himself continued to fiercely battle revisionism within as well as outside the party.

Since the time of Naxalbari Comrade Mazumdar has often been slandered by revisionists and opportunists as a "Guevarist" or even a "terrorist," which is a complete reversal of right and wrong. In fact, Charu Mazumdar constantly stressed the need to mobilise and rely on the masses of people, especially the poor peasantry, in all areas. He sharply criticised those who argued that revolutionary warfare could only be waged by relying on modern weapons and argued that the peasants could and must be mobil-

ised to fight with their traditional weapons while, at the same time, striving to seize guns from the reactionaries themselves. He saw guerrilla warfare as the main form to mobilise the entire strength of the people against the enemy — and argued that revisionist-led mass movements could never do so. And, in fact, in some areas the CPI(ML) was able to lead the poor peasants in establishing guerrilla squads on a wide scale — it is estimated that several thousands were mobilised in such squads in 1970 in West Bengal alone.

He argued that people's war must be waged on the plains as well as in the more inaccessible mountain and forest regions in order to rely on the broad masses of the peasants. He constantly stressed the need to mobilise the peasants to establish their own rule through revolutionary committees, named after the organs of political power established in China in the midst of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

In particular, Charu Mazumdar has been widely denounced for his policy of "annihilation," the term he used in India to describe the execution of class enemies, especially feudal tyrants in the countryside. Mazumdar held that annihilation is a higher form of class struggle and the beginning of guerrilla warfare. He saw the execution of the most notorious tyrants who had long sucked the blood of the peasantry as both a continuation of the peasant struggle to a new level and as necessary to further unleash the enthusiasm of the masses. The guerrilla squads would often carry out these "annihilations" after public trials in front of hundreds of people, and where this was not possible they would always take into account the sentiments of the masses. Nor should it be forgotten that in the countryside where the "annihilations" were carried out, the feudal tyrants and their armed thugs ruled over the peasants and, as one CPI(ML) report put it, had "an exclusive right to murder, which they enjoyed for ages." These tyrants were also closely linked to the overall reactionary state apparatus.

The genuine communists in India have long debated the knotty

problems of the relationship between such "annihilations" and efforts to launch and develop people's war. But such questioning has nothing in common with the hysteria of the bourgeoisie and its apologists in the face of the "Naxalite violence." As Mao put it, "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."

Does this mean, then, that communist revolutionaries of India did not make any mistakes or that Comrade Mazumdar solved all of the problems of the Indian revolution? Obviously, such a situation would be unlikely in any revolutionary movement and all the more in the case of a movement that erupted so suddenly that in the space of two or three years it was affecting millions of people. Furthermore, although Comrade Mazumdar was a long-time communist (he had taken part in the historic *Tebhaga* peasant movement in north Bengal in the aftermath of World War 2, drawing important lessons from it), the great majority of the comrades were new to the communist movement, and the party itself had just been formed in the crucible of the struggle.

Under such circumstances, it would seem that some mistakes were inevitable. Many have called attention to the fact that Charu Mazumdar did not develop a policy for work in the urban areas or in the trade unions. Similarly it is often said that in insisting that the armed struggle is the main form of struggle and that all other forms were subordinate to it he had a tendency to lose sight of the importance of mass struggles as a means of winning broader sections of the masses to the revolutionary position. It is generally believed that the Communist Party of China, while upholding the CPI(ML) under the leadership of Comrade Mazumdar, had made some important criticisms along these lines (for example, it was pointed out that it is one-sided to say, as implied in the "Report on the

Peasant Movement in the Terai Region," that the peasants are struggling for political power and *not* for land.)

It is essential that the rich experience of the Naxalbari period be correctly summed up so that the genuine communist revolutionaries will be able to build on the achievements of that period as well as to avoid the mistakes of the past. It is important that the standpoint upheld in the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* be used to guide this process:

"In the 1960s and early 1970s Marxist-Leninist forces in a great many countries, under the influence of the Cultural Revolution in China and as part of the general worldwide revolutionary upsurge, joined with sections of the masses in waging armed revolutionary warfare. In a number of countries the Marxist-Leninist forces were able to rally considerable sections of the population to the revolutionary banner and maintain the Marxist-Leninist party and armed forces of the masses despite the savage counter-revolutionary repression. It was inevitable that these early attempts at building new, Marxist-Leninist parties and the launching of armed struggle would be marked by a certain primitiveness and that ideological and political weaknesses would manifest themselves, and it is, of course, not surprising that the imperialists and revisionists would seize upon these errors and weaknesses to condemn the revolutionaries as "ultra-leftists" or worse. Nevertheless these experiences must, in general, be upheld as an important part of the legacy of the Marxist-Leninist movement which helped lay the basis for further advances."

It is certainly true that, in the case of India, the revisionists have repeatedly seized upon weaknesses of the Marxist-Leninist movement — real or imagined — to condemn it. Often these condemnations have taken the form of virulent and hysterical attacks against Charu Mazumdar, attacks which can only bring to mind Mao's famous statement that "It is good if we are attacked by the enemy, since it proves that we have drawn a clear line of

demarcation between the enemy and ourselves. It is still better if the enemy attacks us wildly and paints us as utterly black and without a single virtue: it demonstrates that we have not only drawn a clear line of demarcation between the enemy and ourselves but achieved a great deal in our work." Most of those who have led the charge against Comrade Mazumdar quickly revealed their own revisionist nature. Many, for example, became followers of Deng Xiao-ping and supporters of his infamous "three worlds theory." There is evidence that Charu Mazumdar himself was struggling to correct some of the weaknesses of the movement. In one of his last articles before his death he called for the party to lead a struggle of the peasants to seize crops and specifically pointed out, "This is the first time that we are leading a mass movement since we started our armed struggle. . . . Without conducting this mass movement we can in no way realise our objective of making every peasant a fighter. Otherwise, the all-embracing character of the people's war can in no way be attained."

On 16 July 1972 Charu Mazumdar was arrested in Calcutta; on the night of July 27-28 he died at the hands of the police. After the death of Charu Mazumdar serious political differences and the attacks of the enemy led to the collapse of the organised centre of the party and the movement suffered a setback.

No proletarian internationalist can be indifferent to the development of the revolution in India. Its immense population, the intensity of the class contradictions, its existence as a weak link in the world imperialist system all mean, as we pointed out in the first issue of *A World to Win*, "if you're talking about world revolution, you're talking about India."

India is not only *objectively* ripe for revolution, it also one area of the world most profoundly marked by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. Although in India, as elsewhere, revisionism has grown stronger as a result of the loss in China and the crisis of the Marxist-Leninist movement, the vast reservoir of support for a genuine com-

munist revolutionary position, the widespread understanding that only Mao Tsetung Thought can point the way for liberation, is very much a part of the political landscape. That this is still the case today is testimony to the lasting impact of Naxalbari.

The experience of the Marxist-Leninists in India who dared to kindle the flames of revolution, an experience paid for at the cost of thousands of martyrs including Comrade Charu Mazumdar himself, is an important part of the heritage of the international communist movement. Summing up this experience is part of an important debate going on in the Indian communist movement. The outcome of this discussion will have far-reaching effects on the future of the movement and is bound to intertwine with similar questions under study in different countries and at an international level. Today the comrades of the Central Reorganisation Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and the Leading Committee, Revolutionary Communist Party, India, both participating organisations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, are struggling against revisionist attempts to bury the role of the revolutionary storm and Charu Mazumdar in charting the road to revolution in India, while engaged in serious efforts to critically evaluate this whole revolutionary heritage as part of forging a correct political line and programme for revolution in India. The fulfillment of this task, given the complexities of the terrain in India compounded by the interplay of contradictions on the national and international level, would be of great significance for the communist movement in India and worldwide. Today these comrades, and all of the genuine Marxist-Leninists in India, are preparing a new phase of Spring Thunder. It is certain that the next high tide of struggle will not be a mere repetition of the movement of the past — it must and can be deeper, richer and more powerful still. But it is also certain that when the saga of the liberation of India is finally completed the songs of Naxalbari will be among those that fill the air. □