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Naxalbari

is not just the name of a village !

(Twenty-five years of the Naxalite Movement)

An AIRSF Publication



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**It they ask, mother, where is father
Tell them he has died a martyr for the people
In the war for justice
Tell them by singing as lullabies
The salutations offered to such heroes**

**Red salutes
to all the heroic martyrs
who laid down their lives
in the struggle**

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Naxalbari

is not just the name of a village !

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Part I

(1967-1972)

*... When my child
Returns from school,
And not finding the name of the village
In his geography map,
Asks me
Why it is not there,
I am frightened
And remain silent.
But I know
This simple word
Of four syllables
Is not just the name of a village,
But the name of the whole country.*



A Peal of Spring Thunder

April 22, 1992 ... Calcutta.

For the residents of the city it was a sight they had not seen in many years. Thousands of people marching through the streets. Adivasis armed with their traditional bows and arrows. Youths carrying large portraits of Mao and Charu Mazumdar. Cultural troupes in bright red costumes...

Down with Imperialism!

Out! Out IMF and World Bank!

New Democratic Revolution Zindabad!

Armed Struggle is the path to Liberation!

Naxalbari Ek Hi Rasta...

Through the winding lanes the procession slowly moved. And as it entered the historic Calcutta Maidan, and was converted into a massive public meeting, the loudspeakers came alive with strains of a haunting melody...

Communist Hum Hai. Hum Hai Communist

Marxist Hai, Hum Leninist Hai

On the stage the banner read "All India People's Resistance Forum' (AIPRF). But as the red flags fluttered boldly in the breeze and the thousands of those assembled joined in the chorus, it revived memories of another day, another public meeting...

May 1, 1969...

May day. International Workers Day. Historically the Day on which the working class celebrates its struggles, salutes its martyrs and pledges itself to continue the fight against 'oppression of man by man.'

At the same Calcutta Maidan, just below the Shahid Minar, thousands of workers and youth had gathered on the occasion. Amidst great Enthusiasm the crowd joined in the revolutionary chorus...

Arise Ye Prisoners of Starvation

Arise Ye Wretched of the Earth

The Earth will Stand on New Foundations

A Better World's In Birth

Truly for the oppressed masses of India, a better world was already in birth. Two years earlier the peasants of Naxalbari had lit the first sparks. By now the flames had spread far and wide. Srikakulam. Lakhimpur-Kheri. Mushahari. Debra-Gopiballavpur. Revolution seemed a reality. A new India appeared around the corner.

When Kanu Sanyal rose to speak there was a hushed silence. One of the leaders of Naxalbari. And his words created a new spirit. Unleashed a fresh enthusiasm. "With great pride and boundless joy I wish to announce today at this meeting that we have formed a genuine Communist party— the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)". He further added that the Communist revolutionaries of Assam, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal have all united under the new banner. And the strains of the songs reached a new tempo...

*Communist Hum Hai, Hum Hai Communist
Marxist Hai, Hum Leninist Hai*

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) i.e. the CPI(ML) had been born.

In another corner of the same maidan 'Comrade' Jyoti Basu was also addressing a rally. A Communist Party of India (Marxist) rally. A rally organised by a party in power. A Party that was one of the members of the ruling United Front government.

Clashes were inevitable. For the CPI(ML) had been born in confrontation with the revisionist leadership of CPM. Its leaders were earlier senior members of the CPM who had rejected the parliamentary politics being preached by Sundarayya, Ranadive and Namboodiripad. Its cadres were those who had faced lathis and bullets under the rule of Home Minister Jyoti Basu. Its followers were the peasants of Naxalbari who had rejected the pleas of 'Marxist' Agriculture Minister Harekrishna Konar not to 'forcibly seize crops and occupy land.'

But despite the attacks by the CPM cadres and the lathi charge and tear gas of the police, the CPI(ML) rally could not be disrupted. And long after the crowds had dispersed, the echo of their slogans hung heavy in the air.

*Chairman Mao Zindabad!
Charu Mazumdar Zindabad!
Naxalbari Ek Hi Rasta!*

It was the echo not only of the voices of the participants. It was also echo of the clarion call of the peasants of Naxalbari...

The First Spark

Two years earlier, under the leadership of communist revolutionaries, the peasants of Naxalbari had launched a liberation war. A war against the oppression of the Jotedars. A war for land. A war for state power. Comrade Babulal Biswakarma, one of the leaders of these peasants, symbolised all that their struggle stood for. As a young boy of 15, Babulal had become involved in an anti-jotedar struggle in his village. Injuries sustained from an attack by the jotedars' goondas and a term in jail did not deter him and he became a full time activist of the CPI in 1955. Soon he was elected as the Secretary of the Kisan Samity and the Joint Secretary of the Terai Tea Garden Workers Union. Along with the other revolutionaries he joined the revolt against the CPI and became a member of CPM in 1964. Three years later, disgusted with the collaborationist policies of the CPM leaders, he became one of the leading figures in the Naxalbari struggle.

On September 7, 1968, Comrade Biswakarma died in a four hour long gun battle with the police at Birsing Jete village. Thanks to his sacrifice, other members of his squad escaped.

It was sacrifices like this that became the hallmark of Naxalbari. That made Naxalbari not just a name of a village, but the beacon light for the oppressed masses of India.

The seeds of the struggle, sown over so many years, had sprouted on March 3, 1967. A group of peasants surrounded a plot of land in the Naxalbari region. Marking the boundaries with red flags they began harvesting the crop.

Two weeks later the Peasants Conference gave a call for "ending monopoly ownership of land by the landlords, redistribution of land through peasant committees, and organising and arming of the peasants in order to destroy the resistance of the landlords and the rural reactionaries". It added, "It is necessary to prepare for protracted armed resistance".

During March and April, over 60 incidents of land occupation and forcible harvesting were reported in the 274 square miles that covered the area under the police stations of Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa. The peasants in all the villages in these areas were organised. Committees were formed. Land was occupied. Records held

by the jotedars were confiscated and burnt. A mass awakening swept through the region. In all nearly 15-20 thousand peasants enrolled as full time activists of the Kisan Sabha.

Between May 23-25 the struggle assumed the proportions of a full scale war. First a clash between the tribal and the police, who had come to arrest some activists from the village left one Inspector, Sonam Wangdi, dead and some constables injured. In retaliation on May 25, the police attacked Prasadjote village in Naxalbari, killing seven women and two children. What Charu Mazumdar termed "the peasants' war of liberation" had begun.

The incident had repercussions throughout the state. There was widespread condemnation of the police firing. In Calcutta some leading members of the CPM and others formed a 'Naxalbari O Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samiti.' Posters, put up by the large number of the student supporters decreed, 'Murderer Ajoy Mukherjee must resign' (Ajoy Mukherjee was the Chief Minister of West Bengal). Throughout the country similar committees were formed.

The upheaval in the villages continued till July. The tea garden workers struck work a number of times in support of the peasants. Then on July 19, A large number of para-military forces were deployed in the region. In ruthless search operations, hundreds were beaten up and many arrested. Among these were Jangal Santhal, the tribal leader of the local Krishak Samity. Other leaders like Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal were forced into hiding. Still others like Tribheni Kanu, Sobhan Ali and Barka Majhi became martyrs. Shortly an apparent calm returned to the region.

Making an assessment of the struggle some weeks later, Charu Mazumdar wrote, 'Hundreds of Naxalbaris are smouldering in India... Naxalbari has not died and will never die.'

The Prairie Fire

Srikakulam

Peddagottili. A small tribal village in the Parvathipuram Agency area of Andhra Pradesh. Notorious for the misdeeds of its ruler, the money-lender cum land lord, Teegala Narasimhulu.

But on November 25, 1968 a different atmosphere prevailed. An atmosphere of celebration. That day over 250 Girijan tribal armed with traditional bows and arrows had raided Narasimhulu's house. They took possession of his hoarded foodgrains and property worth Rs. 20,000. Hundreds of documents— sale deeds, promissory notes etc. were burned. Late into the night the tribal peasants rejoiced over the smashing of the landlord's authority. They sang 'Utha hai Toofan, Zamana Badal Raha Hai' (A storm has arisen, the times are changing.) And the music resounded throughout the night. It was what Mao had called the "festival of the people".

A tribal belt in the North-East corner of Andhra Pradesh, the Parvathipuram Agency area of Srikakulam had begun to undergo a remarkable transformation just but a year earlier. The CPM leaders in the area were two school teachers, Vempatapu Satyanarayana popularly known as 'Gappa Guru' (elderly teacher) among the tribals and Adibhatla Kailasam. When the Naxalbari movement began they had already been leading militant struggles of the tribals in the area. Both supported the path of Naxalbari.

Earlier movements had led to an increase in wages for the labourers and a larger share of the crop for the tenant farmers. In mid 1967, apprehensive of further intensification in the conflict, the government employed a large police force in the region. The emboldened landlords asserted themselves. A series of clashes between the tribals and the police ensued. The whole of the Agency Area was tense.

October 31, 1967. A Girijan Sangham Conference was to be held in Jondemkhal. One group of Girijans was passing through Levidi village

The women, who were a majority, wore bright red saris, and the men had red arm bands. The arrival of Sangham leaders Kailasam and Rangachari was greeted with enthusiastic cries. "Girijan Sangham Zindabad". Suddenly a group of landlords goondas appeared. Shot rang out. Two peasant activists fell dead.

It was the spark that ignited a prairie fire. In hundreds of village people rose up against the landlords. A report in Liberation said, "the Girijan peasantry rose up in a big way against the enemy classes. (they) began to seize the property of the landlords, the Sangham began to solve all the problems in the villages. Wherever the people moved they moved heroically with arms in their hands."

As in Naxalbari, the call of the Srikakulam tribal attracted a large amount of support. Many came forward to join in the struggle. There was the poet and singer Subharao Panigrahi; the gold-medallist medical graduate Dr. Chagganti Bhaskar Rao; his colleagues D Mallikarjun and Ms. Jayamma...

Soon 'festivals' were being celebrated in hundreds of villages in the region. In one village an impromptu people's court was organised. The accused was a moneylender who tried to cheat the people by collecting more than was due to him. At a mass meeting he pleaded guilty. All the debts of the peasants were cancelled. His gold ring was confiscated as fine. And he was forced to publicly announce that he would obey the rules of the Ryothu Sangrama Samithi in the future. In some places there were clashes with the police, who intervened on behalf of the landlords or came to arrest activists.

Ballerguda. A hamlet in the Aviri area. On December 20, 1968 a large posse of policemen entered the area. The tribals hearing of the approach, retreated into the forests on the surrounding mountain slopes. Traditional drums and conches spread the message of the attack. Soon 500 armed peasants gathered at the spot. Arrows and stones rained down on the police party. They were unable to enter the village and were forced to retreat and flee...

The story was repeated in Palipatti... Dakshini... Santoshpuram...

As one poet wrote :

*Kal Naxalbari mein jo Hava gujari thi
Vahi Hava Aaj beh rahi hain Srikakulam mein...
(The storm that swept through Naxalbari yesterday
Is today sweeping through Srikakulam)*

Mushahari

*Aur Kal woh hava
Phail jayegi Desh ke kone kone main
(And tomorrow that storm
Will spread to all corners of the country)*

Mushahari. District Muzzafurpur. By 1968 the 'hava' of Naxalbari had spread to this region of Northern Bihar. A movement on economic issues quickly escalated into the beginnings of an armed uprising. Gangapur was the site of one incident, where the peasants drove away an attack launched by the goondas of a notorious landlord, Bijli Singh. Gangapur inspired the revolutionaries who led the Kisan Sangram Samiti. Going underground they helped to organise the peasants and prepare for increasing the militancy of the movement. On August 15, 1968 a call for the seizure of crops issued by the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) , greatly enthused the peasant masses. As they began to seize the crops, they prepared to resist the landlords with their traditional weapons. Clashes broke out. On August 23 in Harkesh village thousands of peasants fought a pitched battle with the police and succeeded in releasing some of their arrested comrades... According to one observer, "they succeeded in holding the locality under their control for three whole days."

Lakhimpur-Kheri

was the same story in Lakhimpur-Kheri area of Uttar Pradesh. Situated in the Terai on the Indo-Nepal border, it was soon engulfed in the flames of a peasant movement. Pilhibit Terai, Patian, Ghola, and Ibrahimpuri were all sites of clashes between the peasants and the police or landlord's goondas. In the month of July 1968 itself, over 1000 peasants occupied more than 20,000 acres of land belonging to the landlords.

By late 1968 the sparks of Naxalbari had spread far and wide. Besides Jharkakulam, Mushahari and Lamkhimpur-Kheri where the struggle reached new heights, various groups attempting to organise peasant revolts sprung up in various parts of the country. For them Naxalbari was the signal to revolt. To rise up against many years of socio-economic oppression. To boldly confront and challenge the armed attacks of the police and landlord's goondas. Naxalbari is no longer the name of a village...

The Road to Liberation

In fact conditions in Naxalbari... or Srikakulam, Mushahari or Lakhimpur-Kheri... were representative of large parts of rural India.

The Rural Poor

Take Naxalbari. A part of the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Situated at the food-hills of the Himalayas. The area is hilly and under thin forest. The population is mainly tribal—Santhals. Oraons and Rajbanshis. Severely exploited by the Jotedars under the 'Adhiar' system, where land is tilled on a contractual basis, nearly 70% of the tribal— all small and landless peasants— live on the borderline of poverty.

Srikakulam too is a tribal tract. Populated by the Savaru and Jatapu tribes. A hilly wooded area, and important form of livelihood was agriculture based on shifting cultivation, and collection of the forest produce. Most of the tribal were indebted to the moneylenders, and had been forced to surrender the small plots of land that they might have owned.

The peasants in Lakhimpur-Kheri were also tribal. Also in the foothills of the Terai, it is more densely forested than Siliguri. The peasants were largely migrants—Tharus, Rasikhs and others—who had cleared small plots of land within the forests and settled there under various Government Schemes. But by 1967, most of them had been illegally dispossessed by landlords with political connections, many of whom now owned plots of land ranging from 500 to 2,000 acres.

It is worth recalling that the tribals of India have a long and glorious history of waging armed struggles against their oppressors. Rebellions against the British Governments and their local agents—the landlords and moneylenders—took place time and again during the 19th Century. Some of the more widespread uprisings even succeeded in temporarily smashing governmental authority in their regions like the Santhals of Bihar/Bengal in the 1850-70 period and the tribal

Srikakulam under the legendary Alluri Sitamaraju in the 1920's. In fact even India's First War of Independence in 1857 was largely based on the mass upheavals that took place in the rural areas.

Besides the tribal, the other severely exploited section of rural India were the Dalits. Belonging to castes that had been declared 'Untouchable' by the Brahmanical Hindu order, their condition was often even worse. For combined with their economic exploitation, they also suffered from social discrimination. Movements against this double oppression have broken out in various parts of India, especially since the late 19th Century. In Mushahari in Bihar, the majority of peasants belonged to the dalit castes. Landlords, mainly from the upper castes, ruled over the region.

The CPI(ML) programme, which classified Indian agriculture as being dominated by "semi-feudal land relations", correctly understood the situation prevailing in rural India. Its description "... (the peasants) are the most exploited people of our country living in semi-starvation and pauperisation... the landless and poor peasants have to turn over 50-90% of their annual harvest in the form of rent to the landlord... eviction of peasants is the order of the day. Social oppression of Scheduled Castes including the lynching of Harijans, reminiscent of the middle ages, is continuing unabated", could have applied to any of the centers where peasant revolts flared up between 1967 and 1969. Analysing that "India has witnessed innumerable armed peasant revolts... (which)... failed as there was no scientific theory and no revolutionary leadership capable of leading them to victory," the Party hoped to fill this gap.

The crucial step that Naxalbari took in this direction was in drawing up a correct programme for the Indian revolution. The revolutionaries asserted that India would have an agrarian revolution and stressed that "the centre of gravity of our work has to be in the villages."

The villages of India by 1967 were like a stretch of dry tinder. Land ownership was skewed with even government reports admitting that 40% of the land was owned by 5% of the households, while 57.59% of households owing less than 2.5 acres each, operated only 7% of the land. Additionally the failure of the 5-Year Plans had led to severe food crises. Officially there was a shortfall of ten million tons in the food grain stocks. The government had declared large parts of Bihar, M.P., A.P., Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Punjab as famine stricken. Unofficially the situation was much worse. Deaths due to starvation

were growing and a number of suicides by desperate peasants had been reported. There were many instances of food riots—spontaneous looting and distribution of food stocks being held by the government or private hoarders.

The government sought to extricate itself from the crisis by appealing for foreign aid. Food grains and loans were forthcoming from America under the PL-480 Agreement in the short run, and encouragement to utilise Green Revolution technology in certain limited pockets to boost foodgrains production in the long run. But the former was part of a process by which the Indian economy has become indebted and was forced to adopt measures like devaluation of the Rupee in 1966, while the latter has unleashed different types of class antagonisms in rural India.

For the CPI(ML) neither of these steps would help alleviate the problems of the peasantry. Only planned development based on "Confiscation of all land belonging to the landlords and their redistribution among the landless and poor peasants on the principle of land to the tillers" could change this depressing reality. It would have to be the crucial step in the liberation of the Indian masses.

Is India Free?

Alongside feudalism, the other target of the CPI(ML)'s attack was imperialism. The revolutionaries asserted that in "the sham Independence of 1947... the British imperialists (merely) stepped into the background." In this they were aided by the Congress leadership who represented "the comprador bourgeoisie and the big landlords."

The CPI(ML) understood that the Indian capitalists were not interested in the independent development of a self-reliant India. The big Indian capitalists, who supported the Congress, were termed as 'comprador' because they clearly were dependent on foreign capital for their own growth and development. The first two Industrial Policy Resolutions of 'Independent' India had assigned an important role to foreign capital in the economy. Between 1948 and 1967, foreign investments in the manufacturing sector rose from Rs. 707 million to 6309 million. In this they were helped by the Indian Government's policies. The government declared a tax holiday on the first 6% of the profits for the first five years of production in foreign concerns, a development rebate which allowed foreign investors to deduct 120% of actual expenditure on plant and machinery as depreciation for Income Tax purposes, and

exemption of dividends from super tax in a range of basic industries. Not surprisingly therefore, the number of licences granted to foreign private investors to form new enterprises with Indian industrialists increased five times between 1957 and 1961. Even the public sector was built up with foreign collaboration, while as we have already seen, the loans and aid taken by the government had enabled foreign financial institutions like the World Bank to dictate the devaluation of the Rupee. Even the Green Revolution provided the multinational and foreign agri-business with a massive market to sell its fertilisers, pesticides and agricultural machinery.

It was in such a situation that the CPI(ML) programme stated, "the phenomenal increase in the total quantum of foreign capital, the heavy remittances of profits abroad, thousands of collaborationist enterprises, total dependence on imperialist 'aid, grants and loans' for capital goods, technical know-how, military bases and even for markets, unequal trade and PL-480 Agreements have made US imperialism and Soviet Social Imperialism the overlords of our country."

(The targetting of Soviet Russia, a supposedly 'Communist' country, by the revolutionaries may have appeared strange to many. But the CPI(ML) asserted that a process had begun after the death of Comrade Stalin in 1953 through which the leadership of the Soviet Union had passed into the hands of representatives of the 'state-capitalist' class. Thus in essence, over a period of time, their relationship with other countries had become exploitative, and the seemingly 'low interest' loans and aid to the Indian government were actually aimed at drawing India out of the ambit of the US and converting it into sphere of Soviet influence as an indirect fallout of the international 'Cold war'. The unequal trade with India and the Soviet military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were held up as examples of Soviet social imperialism.)

By the mid 60's urban India too was reeling under the impact of this type of development. The devaluation of the Rupee added to the industrial crisis and caused a severe industrial recession. Thousands of workers lost their jobs as a result of lay-offs or closures. They were thus added to the ranks of the impoverished in the cities. Already more than 90% of the urban population lived in one room tenements, slums or just on the footpath. Over two-thirds of people in the cities and towns lived below the average urban consumption level of Rs. 359 per annum. As for the rest, constantly rising prices ensured that they were

forever struggling to make both ends meet.

Few could have disagreed with the assessment made in the programme of the CPI(ML). It said "...the Indian people are weighed under the four huge mountains namely, imperialism headed by US imperialism, Soviet social imperialism, feudalism and comprador bureaucrat capital." Further the Party resolved to "overthrow the reactionary rule of the four mountains" and "establish the People's Democratic state...(which would be a)dictatorship of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and a section of the small and middle bourgeoisie, under the leadership of the working class."

Protracted People's War

The programme elaborated the method by which this New Democratic Revolution was to be accomplished. It said "Guerilla warfare is and will remain the basic form of struggle" which alone can expand the small bases of armed struggle to larger extensive areas.... of the countryside... (and eventually) encircle and capture the cities."

Thus the CPI(ML) concluded that the Indian revolution would resemble more closely the path that the revolution had taken in China i.e. be a long, protracted agrarian revolutionary war, rather than develop in the manner of the Russian Revolution i.e. long years of preparation followed by a short insurrectionary uprising in the cities.

Thus the Party which was born in Naxalbari made a clean break with the earlier understanding of the Indian communists on many questions. It brought armed struggle back onto the agenda of revolution in India. It rejected the corrupt, opportunist electoral practice of the parliamentary communists.

It ushered in a new era in the Indian communisst movement. But to understand its real significance, we will have to go back into history for a brief glance at the development of the Indian Communist movement.

The Indian Communists

The success of the Russian Revolution in October 1917 created a widespread enthusiasm for Communism throughout the world. In India Communist groups sprang up in different parts of the country. Many had their origins in the anti-British terrorist groups like Anushilan Samity, Yugantar etc. which had been active in the first two decades of the 20th Century. In 1925, these various groups came together and the first All-India Congress of the Communist Party of India (CPI) took place in Kanpur.

It was an important development in Indian politics.

At a time when the Congress Party was merely demanding Dominion Status for India, the CPI correctly gave a call for Total Independence in 1925. But after the Congress Party also adopted 'Purna Swaraj' as its ideal, the CPI trailed behind them and failed to build an independent mass base among the Indian workers and peasants on the basis of its own independent programme of action. They were unable to identify the compromising nature of the Congress leadership even though numerous examples showed that Gandhi's 'ahimsa' and 'satyagraha' were merely tactics to divert the workers, peasants and students away from militant mass struggles and a means to pressurise the British into giving concessions to the Indian capitalists, without ever posing a serious threat to their rule.

Any revolutionary party has to solve the basic questions of who are the friends of the toiling masses in their struggle for liberation, who are their enemies who control the reins of power, and what is the path by which power will be seized from them by the revolutionary classes. The CPI failed on all three counts.

Russian 'Model'

From the beginning the CPI leadership was of the opinion that the Indian Revolution would follow the Russian path i.e. seizure of power would be accomplished through an insurrectionary uprising in the cities with industrial working class not only being the leading class but

also the main force of the party. Concentrating their forces in the cities, they organised many militant working class struggles. 'Lal Bawta' (Red Flag) Unions became a thorn in the flesh of the owners and the government. But the wage struggles, while important, had their limitations and when the working class launched spontaneous political battles against the state after the end of the World War II, the CPI leadership had no correct and concrete programme of action. Important working class actions like the Mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy ratings and the immediate support struggles of the textile workers therefore collapsed due to lack of leadership.

The 'Russian model' thinking also prevented the CPI from sending its cadres to the countryside to organise the peasantry who were nearly 80% of India's population. Groaning under the shackles of oppressive feudal relations and bound down by the chains of the caste system, the peasants (as earlier history had shown and later experience once again proved) were a potentially explosive force. However even where Kisan Sabhas were organised, the CPI led movement rarely advanced to the level of an armed struggle for liberation.

Telengana

One glorious exception was Telengana. Ruled by the Nizam, the Telengana region was notorious for the brutal repression by the landlords. These doras who ruled over vast tracts of land were virtual tyrants. When the CPI launched its first struggles against their oppression they received enthusiastic support from the oppressed peasantry. It led to a great awakening in the region.

Crops were seized. Land was occupied. A social boycott of the landlords was declared. And when the goondas and the Nizam's forces— the Razakaars— attacked the peasant activists, the movement escalated into an open armed struggle.

By 1947 a guerrilla army of about 5,000 was operating in the region backed by powerful village level self-defence squads. The writ of the dalams ran in almost 3,000 villages and a population of nearly 3 million people were virtually liberated from the rule of the Nizam.

The power and sweep of the Telengana movement forced some re-thinking on the question of the path of revolution in India. The Andhra Secretariat of the Party, which was leading the Telengana movement, released a document which clearly stated "Our revolution in many respects differs from the classical Russian revolution, but to a great

extent is similar to that of the Chinese revolution. The perspective likely is not that of a general strike and armed uprising leading to the liberation of the rural side, but of dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of agrarian revolution, culminating in the capture of political power by the Democratic Front."

But this suggestion to build up Telengana type struggles in the vast countryside in different parts of the country as part of a protracted revolutionary war, was defeated in the CPI. Led by B.T. Ranadive, who was elected General Secretary in 1948, the Party leadership advocated preparations for a co-ordinated armed uprising simultaneously in both the rural and urban areas. Disgusted with the earlier indecisive leadership of P.C. Joshi, which had tailed behind the Congress during the momentous events of 1946, the cadres supported the call. But the plan for immediate uprisings proved incorrect. It had disastrous consequences. Hundreds of cadres died in attacks on police stations and government offices—a priceless loss to the movement.

The Ranadive Thesis had obviously failed and in 1950 when the leadership of the international Communist movement published a critique of the CPI's line in its organ 'For a Lasting Peace, for A People's Democracy' it hastened change in the CPI leadership. Basing itself on the international advice that the "path taken by the Chinese people..... is the path that should be taken by the people of many colonial and dependent countries in their struggle for national independence and people's democracy," one of the advocates of the Chinese line C. Rajeswara Rao was chosen as the new General Secretary of the party. However, the debate continued, with strong opposition coming from leaders like S.A. Dange and Ajoy Ghosh.

Meanwhile in September 1948, the Indian army entered Telengana under the cover of 'police action' against the Nizam. Thousands were jailed and many comrades were martyred. Tribal villages were burnt down and the villagers forced into concentration camps. A CPI leader describes the police action ... 'Mobilising 5 to 6 thousand soldiers and carrying out raids through encirclement of 5 to 6 villages, the army began eliminating our squads... many were wiped out in this fashion... people were... beaten with lathis and bayonets and tortured to the extreme... like peeling the skin in the design of the hammer and the sickle.'

Despite this, many heroic men and women continued the struggle and the army could not achieve total victory.

The 'Peaceful Transition'

But in 1951, they received help from the most unexpected quarters—the Rightists within the CPI. Ajoy Ghosh and S.S.Dange took control over the central leadership. Asserting that the revolution in India would follow neither the Russian path solely, or the Chinese path, they paved the way for the withdrawal of the Telengana struggle. And as the revolutionaries there laid down their arms and surrendered to the army, the new Tactical Line advocated by Ghosh and Dange paved the way for participation in the 1952 General Elections.

Years later Charu Mazumdar was to write about this period, "No assessment was ever made of the role of the peasantry in the democratic revolution. Thus the party ranks were alternately led toward Right reformism and Left sectarianism and finally dragged into the morass of parliamentarism and revisionism."

For the next 12 years the CPI engaged itself in endless debates over the nature of its parliamentary alliances, with the leadership even at times hailing the 'anti-imperialist' role of the Congress. Two groups advocating different parliamentary tactics emerged.

At this time the 'Great Debate' began in the international Communist movement. Rejecting the theories advocated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led by Khruschev, that revolutionary changes could be achieved through a "peaceful transition", the Communist Party of China led by Mao continued to uphold the understanding that revolution was not possible without an armed struggle as the existing ruling classes would not peacefully relinquish their position of power and privilege. One section of the CPI, led by Ghosh and Dange supported Khruschev's ideas, while another seemed to uphold the necessity of armed struggle. The debate sharpened and finally led to a split in 1964 when parallel Congresses of the CPI and the newly formed Communist Party of India (Marxist)-CPI (M)- were held in Bombay and Calcutta respectively.

The relatively more militant rhetoric of the CPM leaders and their seeming support for armed struggle attracted the revolutionary ranks towards the new party. But, some like Charu Mazumdar, who became the new Secretary of the Darjeeling District Committee, had their doubts from the very beginning.

Eight Documents

In the first few of his historic 'Eight Documents' written in 1965, CM (as he was popularly known) called on the party leadership to clarify its position on the role of the peasant movement, the preparations for armed struggle, the question of the 'parliamentary path', the need for an underground party and its assessment of Soviet Russia.

But these debates were avoided, and when CPM joined with the Bangla Congress and some left parties to form the United Front government in West Bengal in March 1967, CM was proved correct. The government called on the workers not to organise gheraos and even signed an agreement for industrial peace between the unions and the managements. The peasants were asked not to forcibly occupy land and were advised instead, to 'submit applications' for land transfers to the bureaucracy- a futile exercise given the close links between the landlords and the administrative machinery at the local level.

Charu Mazumdar had always argued that "the real fight against revisionism cannot be begun unless the peasant starts it through revolutionary practice", and a month after the Naxalbari struggle had begun he wrote the last of his 'Eight Documents' in April 1967. Entitled 'It is only by Fighting against Modern Revisionism that the Peasant Struggle will have to be Taken Forward' he gave a call to the cadres to rise up in revolt. He wrote, "In the post-election period, the party leadership has girded up their loins to prove our anticipations true... so it will be the responsibility of the Communists to expose before the party members and the masses the anti-class reactionary role of the leadership and move forward following the path of intensifying the class struggle".

Along with this political struggle against revisionism by Naxalbari leadership, there were some other groups also, which continuing their fight against CPM revisionism. One of these groups organised themselves through a secret organ "CHINTA". Later the same group formed MCC The founder leaders of MCC raised some fundamental questions to the party (CPM) leadership, prior to CPM's 7th Congress in 1964. These questions—the role of Khruschev and CPSU in international Communist movement, about the path of revolution i.e. armed revolution, agrarian revolution is the path of Indian People, Democratic Revolution, the secret party etc. To strengthen this ideological struggle within CPM they started to publish a periodical

"CHINTA" and began to distribute it secretly among the party ranks. Once again a section of Communists had emerged who advocated that the revolution in India would advance along the path of the Chinese revolution. But unlike in Telengana, this time there was no looking back and the revolutionaries in India gradually moved towards the formation of the new, revolutionary Communist Party.

The Revolutionary Party

While writing his 'Eight Documents', Charu Mazumdar enjoyed the support of virtually the whole of the Darjeeling District Committee of which he was the Secretary. Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal and others were not only enthusiastic supporters of his ideas, they also actively helped him in preparing for and finally implementing them in Naxalbari. Now with the outbreak of the peasant movement there, support for his ideas extended far and wide. Elsewhere in the state, leading members of various district committees and even some state committee members of the CPM became the leaders of the 'Naxalbari O Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samiti'. These included Sushital Roychoudhury, Saroj Datta, Parimal Dasgupta and others. Dissent with the leadership erupted within the student front as well.

Revolt in the CPM

In other parts of the country too there was widespread support for the line advocated by Charu Mazumdar. In Bihar, U.P., A.P., Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kashmir, and other places open revolts began against the CPM leadership. In the period of turmoil that followed more than 10,000 cadres are reported to have eventually left the party.

In November 1967, at a meeting of the representatives of various groups, an All India Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionaries in the CPM was formed. It was the body which began to discuss how to link the various areas of peasant struggles. One of its first steps was to continue the publication of Liberation in English and Deshabrati in Bengali as its organs.

By May 1968, the revolutionaries disassociated with the CPM and renamed themselves as the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) and by February 1969 concluded that 'the experience of the last one year has also made it amply clear that the political and organisational needs of the fast developing revolutionary struggle can no longer be adequately met by the Co-

ordination Committee. These struggles have to be led and co-ordinated in an effective manner... the party should be immediately formed." Finally on April 22, 1969, the 100th birth anniversary of Lenin, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was formed.

Difference of Opinion

The question of the formation of the party created the first dissensions in the movement. Opposition came from two sources—the leading committee of Andhra Pradesh¹, and the cadres belonging to the 'Dakshin Desh' group^{2 (a, b)} in West Bengal. Both groups were members of AICCCR, but their differences with Mazumdar and his colleagues were widely divergent.

The cadres in West Bengal, who later constituted themselves into the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) felt that the task of building the all India party should only be taken after deepening and widening the class struggle. They also felt that the CPI(ML) line was taking on the form of an overemphasis on annihilation and isolated guerilla actions. They however stressed that annihilation would be an inseparable part of any armed agrarian movement, and were otherwise unconditional supporters of the Naxalbari line. In fact from that time they began to develop a militant movement in the border region of West Bengal and Bihar, which has now grown into a vast area of struggle.

On the other hand the differences with the comrades from A.P. existed from the very beginning. Initially these comrades, who constituted the majority in the CPM state committee, hesitated to break their links with the party. While Charu Mazumdar, Saroj Datta and others were expelled from the CPM by June 1967, Nagi Reddy, Killa Venkaya, D.V. Rao and Chandra Pulla Reddy all attended the Burdwan Plenum and were expelled from the party in June 1968. They formed the Andhra Pradesh State Co-ordination Committee and from the beginning had their differences with the comrades who were leading the Srikakulam struggle, even though they finally merged with the AICCCR in November 1968.

But the unity was short-lived. On February 7, 1969 there was once more a parting of ways. Three basic areas of difference were outlined... on the attitude towards China, on the approach to the Srikakulam struggle and on elections and armed struggle. The Revolutionary

1, 2 (a, b) – See Notes

Communist Committee, as they now called themselves, felt that not sufficient emphasis was being paid to the question of mass struggles on economic issues in Srikakulam. They also opposed the approach to annihilation, maintaining that at the present stage armed struggle should take the form only of resistance to landlord attacks.

The RCC announced its 'Immediate Programme' in April 1969 and at once launched a series of actions in the Khammam and Warangal districts, raiding a number of landlord's houses. In Gummadidoddi village a landlord's house was attacked and property worth Rs. 1 lakh was seized.

In 1969 a report in Liberation acknowledged "In Mulugu taluk of Warangal some actions have been organised by a group of revolutionary cadres who do not yet belong to our party. In Kothagudem and Bhadrachalam taluks of Khammam, many guerilla actions have taken place under the leadership of our party as well as under the leadership of other revolutionary cadres", signifying the continued fraternal links between the two groups.

However the differences were deep and bordering on the basic. For the AICCR, the only way to fight back the repression by the police and the landlord's goondas was by going on an offensive campaign for the "annihilation of class enemies", but Nagi Reddy continued to emphasise "For us it is matter of resistance."

Combating the Encirclement

Meanwhile the principal "political and organisational needs of the fast developing political struggle" that the AICCR had talked about in its November statement centered around how best to rouse the peasants in newer areas, and what steps to take to counter the growing repression in the older areas of struggle. It was not a new problem since repression had begun in Srikakulam, Lakhimpur and Mushahari earlier itself, but was now posed afresh in Srikakulam with the beginning of 'police encounters'. On May 27, 1969, Comrade Panchadi Krishnamurthy was detained along with six others at the Sompeta railway station. The police did not bother about the legal niceties, and after interrogation, took them to Jalantarkota village, where they were bound to the trees and shot dead.

Naxalbari had failed to answer the question of how best to counter the police repression and advance the mass struggle to the stage of guerilla warfare. The Srikakulam revolutionaries tried to come up with answers.

In February 1969 they wrote." Recently we concentrated our main efforts on annihilating the class enemies. With the annihilation of landlords on February 6, 1969 and serious injury inflicted on a police agent, there is consternation among the enemies. Surging enthusiasm is seen on the people's faces." CM had visited Srikakulam in March 1969 and must have been impressed by these achievements of the revolutionaries for he wrote a report in Deshbrati entitled 'Srikakulam—Will it be the Yenan of India?' From all accounts, though Srikakulam was nowhere near a liberated area, the red-power of the peasant committees was much deeper and existed over a much wider area than in any of the other areas of struggle.

The Annihilation Thesis

Then in September that year he wrote, "Our experience also shows that we cannot wage guerilla warfare simply by acquiring sophisticated weapons; we must be able to bring up men armed with Mao Tse Tung's Thought to wield those weapons... and such men are brought up only through revolutionary class struggle, only through annihilating the class enemies.'

In November 1968 itself, a group of Communists from Kerala had tried to do just that. They launched an attack on a police wireless station at Pulpalli and a police station in Tellichery both within the Wynad forest area. The group was led by Kunnikal Narayan, and among others also consisted of his 23-year old daughter, Ajitha.

About a year later, the peasants of Srikakulam rallied to avenge the death of Com. Panchadi Krishnamurthy. At Akkupalli in Tekkali taluka almost 400 people, mostly women, participated in the action against one of the two landlords who had alerted the police about Krishnamurthy. A few days later at Loharjola in Pathapatnam area, hardly six furlongs from the nearest police camp, 1200 to 1500 people joined guerilla squads in a public trial of a notorious moneylender.

Against this background CM on December 12, 1969 wrote another piece entitled 'March Forward by Summing Up the Experience of the Revolutionary Peasant Struggle of India.' Here for the first time he concretely propounded his theory of annihilation, which was to become one of his most controversial tactics. Explaining how to start guerilla warfare, he said that it would be "started only by liquidating the feudal classes in the countryside. And this campaign for annihilation of the class enemy can only be carried out by inspiring poor and landless

peasants with the politics of establishing the political power in the countryside by destroying the domination of the feudal classes." Thus for him "annihilation of class enemies is the higher form of class struggle" and the "primary stage of the guerilla struggle."

In December he was however also pointing out that "the annihilation of the class enemy does not only mean liquidating an individual but also means liquidating the political, economic and social authority of the class enemy." His next article went on to explain the exact method by which this could be done.

"Once an area is liberated from the clutches of class enemies (some are annihilated while others flee) the repressive state machinery is deprived of its eyes and ears making it impossible for the police to know who is a guerilla and who is not. And who is tilling his own land and who tills that of the jotedars ... (now) ... the political units ... (must) raise through a whispering campaign the broad economic slogan 'Seize the crops of the class enemy.' This works like magic in the villages and even the most backward peasant comes forward and joins the battle. Thus, the fight for the seizure of political power initiated by a few advanced sections is nourished by the tremendous initiative of the masses and mass action..."

When he wrote that he could well have been thinking about the situation in Debra-Gopiballavpur, a border region of Bengal and Bihar, which had been the site of a militant mass movement led by the CPM. But with the formation of the CPI(ML) unit in the region, many cadres joined the revolutionaries. They began a series of attacks on various notorious landlords and moneylenders. Those who were not attacked fled to the cities.

Revolutionary Committees were formed in many villages in the region. New laws were framed. Moneylenders were required to return the mortgaged properties to the original owners. Wages of the labourers were fixed at 5 kgs. of paddy. Prices of essential commodities were fixed in the big shops. All debts that the peasants owed to the moneylenders were cancelled. This was described in Liberation as "the rule of peasant masses, the embryonic form of peasant political power".

Among the main organisers of the movement were two student leaders from Calcutta, Ashim Chatterjee and Santosh Rana, who had left their studies in response to CM's call to "integrate with the poor and landless peasants."

Satyanarain Singh, the leader of the Mushahari peasants also wrote,

"The purpose of our present phase of armed struggle is to build up revolutionary base areas ... can this be done without attacking individual landlords in the villages and annihilating them?" Thus the relative importance of 'annihilation' in the tactics of the CPI(ML) was growing.

It was not all smooth sailing. In Srikakulam more senior leaders were arrested and killed by the police. Dr. Bhaskar Rao, Subbarao Panigrahi, Nirmala Krishnamurthy all became martyrs. Severe repression was unleashed in the villages. Large scale arrests followed. The tribal were crammed in stinking cells of jails and held there indefinitely without adequate food or water. In April 1970, the Eastern Frontier Rifles, a para-military force, was deployed in Debra-Gopiballavpur. Many were killed, and hundreds arrested. In Calcutta the offices of Liberation and Deshabhrati were raided in the same month and sealed.

How to combat this encirclement was a question of pressing importance. While some comrades questioned the validity of the annihilation campaign as a tactic, CM continued to stress its significance. He exhorted his comrades to step up the campaign as it was "a higher form of class struggle" and the "start of guerilla warfare". "Without class struggle—without the battle of annihilation—the doors of initiative of the poor peasant masses can never be opened, the political consciousness of the fighters can never be build, only through carrying on the class struggle, the battle of annihilation. can the new man be born—the man who will defy death, and will be free of all self-interest. And with this contempt for death he will move up to the enemy, will snatch away his rifle, will avenge the murder of martyrs, and in this way the people's army will emerge." he advised his party comrades in May.

Pointing the world events like the US invasion of Kampuchea, the Soviet-Chinese border confrontation and the upheavals in East Pakistan he assured the party that "1970 has arrived with the possibilities of a disciplined people's force and widespread liberated areas." Urging them to "Turn this decade into the decade of liberation of the exploited and oppressed masses of India" he predicted that "the Red Army would march in the plains of India by 1975."

The Party Congress

At this juncture the CPI(ML) held its Congress in May 1970.

Garden Reach is a small suburb in the southern part of Calcutta. In

May 1970 a big house in the area celebrated a marriage of a South Indian couple. There was much celebration and music. A number of guests assembled to take part in the festivities. The priest arrived amidst great fanfare. It seemed a normal happening to the neighbours all around. Little did they know that the entire marriage was a charade, enacted to provide camouflage to the Party Congress of the CPI(ML).

In the Party Congress CM upheld annihilation as one of main forms of class struggle. Referring to those who opposed annihilation as "Enemies of the people" he emphasised the need to encourage the participation of the poor and landless peasants in all the actions. "If the guerilla fighters begin their annihilation campaign with conventional weapons, the ordinary landless and poor peasants will come forward with bare hands and join in the struggle," he wrote.

However, there was some debate at the Congress on the question of CM's authority. Emphasising the important role he had played in the Indian revolution, some Comrades demanded that the Congress should uphold his "Revolutionary authority". There was a polarisation, but Charu Mazumdar himself settled the controversy by asking the Congress not to vote on this question, but resolve it later in practice.

Upholding CM's view on annihilation, the report adopted at the Congress said, "We must realise and apply methodically the correct thesis that the annihilation of the class enemy is the higher form of class struggle and the beginning of guerilla war and people's war and realise that the class struggle i.e. this battle of annihilation can solve all the problems facing us and lead the struggle to higher plane... (it) liberates the people not only from the oppression of the landlord class and its State, but also liberates them from the shackles of backward ideas and removes from the minds of the people poisonous weeds of self-interest, clan-interest, localism, casteism, religious superstition etc."

Make the 70s the Decade of Liberation

Punjab

The annihilation campaign now spread far and wide. Punjab was one of the states where actions by guerilla squads became especially popular. For some time before the Congress, a large number of students from the colleges of Delhi had been working in the villages in Punjab and Harayana. The initial enthusiasm of the peasants received a new boost. In August 1970, when a Swatantra Party MLA, Basant Singh, was killed in a squad action, there was an intense police crackdown. Even in the repression however, the squads continued to be active. One action which was especially significant was the killing of a big landlord, Akali Dal leader and president of the Block Samity at Kokri Kalan village in Ferozepur District. This particular landlord had been a notorious agent of the British and had been awarded a jagir (estate) by the British for giving evidence against Shahid Bhagat Singh, who was hanged for his revolutionary activities in 1931. Between October 1970 and January 1971, several landlords and moneylenders were killed in villages in Ludhiana, Patiala, Sangrur, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Bhatinda districts.

Birbhum

Birbhum was another new centre of peasant struggle which exploded onto the scene towards the end of 1970. Once again it was the students, this time of the Sriniketan Agricultural College in Bholpur who played an important role in arousing the peasantry. Here too a series of individual annihilations created a mass upsurge, and brought forward a number of tribals to participate in the squads. The atmosphere that prevailed in the region is apparent from reports of different observers that appeared in Frontier, an independent left magazine published from Calcutta.

"On June 19, 1971 more than two hundred men entered Itanda, a

village in Bholpur police station. They had with them 25 rifles, six or seven revolvers, bombs and spears. They encircled the house of the Pynes, a leading landowning family of the village, dragged the head of the family out of the room, lined him up against a big mango tree and then knifed him to death. The Santhals who participated in the action were chanting the favourite slogans of the CPI(ML)."

"On the same day another party of 500 men some of them armed with rifles, muskets, pipeguns, bombs and spears entered Madhabpur village and raided the house of Tarapada Daktar, an LMF practitioner. He was also a big, notorious landlord... he was tied to the trunk of a tree in front of his house... the Santhals who were in the procession cried 'Death, death, he deserves death and nothing else.'

If these actions greatly enthused the tribals, they also caused intense terror in the minds of exploiters and police. One moneylender after receiving a notice of warning from the Party, put up a notice on his shop, "My clients are hereby requested to take back their deposits within 72 hours. They will not have to pay the interest on the loans. I have decided to wind up my business." Elsewhere when a police informer, responsible for the death of some comrades, was stabbed to death a few metres from the police outpost, none of the dozens of constables present dared to chase the attackers as they marched away shouting slogans. At Sural in Bholpur, the 'Red Army' consisting of Santhals and others armed with rifles and muskets, staged a 'Flag March'. Despite prior information, the police force did not arrive there. Birbhum, the centre of the famous Santhal uprisings which took place between 1855-57, was once again in turmoil.

Comrades associated with 'CHINTA' (later MCC) launched armed attacks in many places including Sonarpur, Bhangar, Sunderbans, Kanksa, Ausgram, Budbud areas and Calcutta, Hooghly, Howrah, Midnapur, Malda and Bardwan areas of W.B. In the initial stages of the struggle, the demands of the peasantry included seizing of landlord's lands, forcible harvesting and seizing of paddy from landlords' grammeries and govt. godowns etc. At the higher stage of movement jotedars, police agents goondas were either punished or annihilated, guns of landlords were seized and their confiscated. Hundreds of armed peasants participated in these programmes.

In other pockets of the country reports of actions in which notorious landlords moneylenders, dacoits and other oppressors of the people were killed came in.

The State Strikes Back

Meanwhile the state had began perfecting its tactics of dealing with the movement. Massive deployments of armed police, para-military forces or even the army would first unleash a reign of terror on the people. A wide network of informers would be trained, and even as the people were cowed down by the massive onslaught, the leaders would be arrested on information provided by the informers and either detained in terrible conditions, or simply shot dead.

By 1970, many of the earlier areas of struggle began to wilt under the police attacks. While Mushahari and Lakhimpur-Kheri had already gone dormant, the Srikakulam movement suffered its worst setbacks. Months after the Party Congress, its two leaders Vempatipu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam, now both members of Central Committee of the Party elected at the Congress were shot dead by the police. Subbarao Panigrahi and Dr. Mallikarjun too fell to police bullets. In the short span of a year, nearly 150 leading comrades were arrested or shot dead. Others were thrown into jails. By the end of 1970, the leaderless movement virtually ran aground.

In Debra-Gopiballavpur the deployment of the Eastern Frontier Rifles had caused some setbacks, with a large number of cadres falling to police bullets or being eliminated in fake encounters. The organisation collapsed, and according to a report from Ashim Chatterjee, "Of the 40,000 peasants who initially came with us, barring a few, the rest had been reduced to passive sympathisers... Inspite of our annihilating 120 class enemies, inspite of our ceaseless efforts, the number of landless and poor peasants in our guerilla band has not increased."

Initially the response of the CPI(ML) leadership to the martyrdom of the comrades was to see it as an example to inspire others. Charu Mazumdar advised the cadre, "Every wound inflicted on us is painful and from this pain are born the strength for greater sacrifice and the most intense hatred against the enemy." But gradually it became clear that annihilation of the class enemies could not be sole method by which the enemy attacks could be countered.

Annihilation— an Assessment

Later critics of Charu Mazumdar like Kanu Sanyal, Satyanarain Singh and Ashim Chatterjee sought to ridicule the whole concept of annihilation as nothing but "individual terrorism". But such a criticism

is often isolated from the context in which the tactic of annihilation emerged and evolved.

After long years of parliamentary battles, the communists in India were once again launching armed battles for political power. The taking up of arms, and launching of attacks on the most hated landlords, which was an inseparable part of any revolutionary peasant movement, were back on the agenda of the Indian revolutionaries after a long period. For the peasants it was like a beacon light on the road to liberation. For the youth it became a symbol of revolt and rebellion.

The first annihilations did indeed enthuse the peasantry. Early reports from Srikakulam speak about "surging enthusiasm in the people's faces." In Debra-Gopiballavpur, Lakhmipur-Kheri and Birbhum, thousands of peasants responded after the first armed actions. For them a symbol of centuries of oppression was suddenly no more. It was like a breath of a fresh air which swept away the fear of generations and replaced it with the intense feeling of class hatred and confidence. And for the urban youth it was a test of their ability to integrate with the peasantry and a renewal of their commitment and spirit. Among the exploiters it created fear and terror.

Many years earlier while analysing a movement of the peasants in Hunan Mao Tsetung had written about this phenomenon. "...The local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords have themselves driven the peasants to this... The most violent revolts and the most serious disorders have invariably occurred in places where the local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords perpetrated the worst outrages... Without using the greatest force, the peasants cannot possibly overthrow the deep-rooted authority of the landlords which has lasted for thousands of years..."

But where CPI(ML) erred was to see annihilation as the most important and sometimes even the only method of mobilising the peasantry for guerilla warfare. Toward the end of 1969 CM wrote, "The revolutionary peasantry has demonstrated through its struggle that neither mass movement nor mass organisation is indispensable for waging guerilla warfare" and "mass organisation and mass movement increase the tendency to open movement based on economism and expose the revolutionary workers before the enemy." As doubts about the annihilation campaign began to be raised he further stressed its importance arguing that "In every village of India guerilla warfare can be waged through the annihilation campaign." In this manner the

counterposing of mass movements and individual annihilation began, a mistake that was to prove fatal.

Annihilation may enthuse the masses, but can never be a long term substitute for mobilising the peasants in mass movements. In fact, as the later experience of the Naxalite movement has shown, the two have to be combined effectively if any lasting challenge has to be made to the attacks of the state. The mass movements not only mobilise all sections of the peasantry and help build a mass base for the guerilla squads among the people, they also provide a continuous streams of cadres for the ongoing armed movements. At another level they also provide a training ground for steeling of the masses to face the enemy repression which was sooner or later unleashed. But for the CPI(ML) a one sided emphasis on annihilation, only led to gradual isolation of the guerilla fighters from the people in the face of enemy onslaught, made them easy targets either to be arrested or shot.

The Epic of Liberation

However at that time the enthusiasm of the cadres was high and even in the face of the worst repression, a number of heroism bear witness to their spirit and commitment. In 1969 itself the stories from Srikakulam spoke of how the tribals withstood the worst police outrages. In Birbhum, immense heroism was evident in the cases of gun snatching to arm the peasant squads so that they could better face the enemy.

At Vinay Bhavan, Santiniketan, in Bolpur, the guerillas planned an attack on the armed guards there, "Arming themselves as traditional weapons, 11 guerilla comrades went out in the evening. Final investigations showed that there were four guards not two, and each was armed with rifles. Asked whether under the circumstances the guerillas should return without attacking, the guerilla commander said, 'There is no question of returning without making an attack—jump on them.' With traditional weapons the comrades jumped upon the guards. The other side started firing. Then began the hand to hand fight—a tug-of-war with the rifles. The guards went on showering bullets. But the indomitable guerillas, full of extraordinary courage, were also desperate—they were determined to snatch the rifles. Ultimately the guerillas seized rifles after annihilating three of the guards. One guard escaped."

Action like this reflected the high morale of the cadre. Even the leading

bodies constantly reassured the people that the repression could be overcome and the struggle would once more advance. The West Bengal-Bihar Border Regional Committee (WBBBRC) which led the Birbhum struggle, in an appeal to the peasant committees said, "If they (the state) seek to arrest the march of the struggle of Birbhum, will it not kindle the flame of revolution in Burdwan, Murshidabad and North Bengal? Will Bihar, Punjab and Andhra remain quiet?"

Now is the Time to Flare Up like Fire

But it was not Burdwan, Murshidabad or North Bengal that had come aflame. Instead the impact of the peasant movement in various parts of Bengal began to be felt in one of the most unlikely of places— Calcutta city itself. In the early days after the outbreak of the movement in Naxalbari, the students in the city colleges had organised widespread support. But since Charu Mazumdar had given a call in 1969 for the students and youth to 'Go to villages' and integrate with the poor and landless peasants, most of the cadres left the urban colleges to fan out into the countryside. Regular political campaigns however, kept alive the message of Naxalbari in the city. Slogans hailing the actions of the peasants in different parts of the state appeared regularly on the walls and soon one of the most popular messages that greeted the citizens of different localities when they woke from their sleep each morning was 'Make 70's the Decade of Liberation.'

The Colonial Education System

The initial CPI(ML) activity in the city made the educational system its principal target. A pamphlet issued by the University Branch of the party said, "The education system that the reactionary rulers have established is basically colonial... For 22 years this system fed the students and youth with the opium of careerism and prevented them from standing side by side with the poor peasants and fight a revolutionary war."

The first attempts to change the reactionary character of the system encompassed a wide variety of forms. The most common was the hoisting of the red flag atop college buildings followed by determined efforts to resist removal by the authorities. Alongside, the Naxalite students were successful in their demand for the inclusion of Mao's writings in the post-graduate Political Science course at Calcutta University and on a number of occasions they were also able to halt the screening of some anti-China films.

However soon the attacks began to get more violent nature. Question and answer papers, which symbolise the widely discredited examination system were the favourite target, but bonfires which were meant to symbolise the collapse of the decadent educational institutions, also included files and office records and the chairs and tables of the hated classrooms. A song popular among the revolutionary students many years later perhaps captured one aspect of the sentiment of the time.

*Nowhere do they teach you
Of the centuries of toil and sweat
Squeezed out of generations of workers
To construct your buildings, chairs and tables
And produce those grand volumes.*

The walls of the colleges and schools themselves spoke of the other aspect to these violent forms of demonstration. Adorned with large portraits of Mao Tsetung they screamed out the message that had spread among the peasants from Naxalbari to Debra-Gopiballavpur and Birbhum— "Political power flows out of the barrel of a gun."

'Forget the Past'

In many of these spontaneous outbursts, a popular target for the students wrath was the large portraits or statues of Gandhi, which are to be found in many educational institutions. Gandhi after all was a most hated symbol, the representative of those who led the Independence struggle along the path of compromise with the British. In time this became the most popular protest and ignited the sparks of a mini-cultural revolution. Reports were constantly pouring in from China about how the students were taking a lead in looking afresh at the country's history and re-assessing the role played by various historical figures. The attacks on Gandhi were a starting point; but soon others like 19th century social reformers Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Vivekananda fell victims to the students blows. Many were the localities where residents woke up in the morning to find that statues of these leaders had been beheaded or even completely demolished the previous night.

Some of the CPI(ML) leaders supported these spontaneous acts of the students. "Without destroying this colonial education system and the statues set up by the comprador capitalists, the new revolutionary education and culture cannot be created", opined Charu Mazumdar,

adding, "It is in the interests of the agrarian revolution that the students and youth have become restless, and they are hurling 'bombs at statues of those who have always tried to pacify the armed revolution of peasant masses with the messages of peace and reform." However he also cautioned the activists, "This struggle has certainly not begun with the aim of destroying the entire superstructure of reactionary culture as aimed at by the Great Cultural Revolution of China, nor can it be taken forward to that state".

But as the campaign intensified, some others, notably Sushital Roychoudhary questioned the rationale behind the attacks. He felt that a distinction should be made between Gandhi or the Congress leaders on the one hand and the writers and social reformers on the other. But both CM and Saroj Datta provided strong replies to his queries. CM questioned, 'Did these people.....ever speak of driving out the British?' and himself replied, 'They not only supported the First War of Independence of 1857, they opposed it. The reformist movement that they waged therefore, was resorted to them to divert the common people from the anti-British freedom struggle'. While Datta exhorted the cadres, "Forget the past, forget the old poets. It is the new revolutionary poets who have emerged from the peasants' struggle who are the fighting poets." It was one of the first rifts in the Central Committee of the party, and many more to appear shortly afterwards.

Political Power Flows From the Barrel of a Gun

In many of these actions the students clashed with police and had to face brutal repression. Alongside reports of the police brutalities were pouring in from the countryside. Against this backdrop a trend towards undertaking guerilla actions in the cities emerged. There were two types of actions—individual attacks and annihilations, and gun snatching.

The latter especially drew its inspiration from the Magarjun incident. Magarjun. A small village at the trijunction of three districts near Naxalbari. The site of a police picket. All of a sudden a group of peasant guerillas attack the outpost. 'Mao Tsetung Zindabad', 'Naxalbari Zindabad'. The cries fill the air and the policemen, too scared to put up a real fight, are quickly overpowered. The guerillas snatch the weapons, and proudly shouldering their newly acquired rifles march through the neighbouring villages shouting 'Charu Mazumdar Zindabad!' CPI(ML) Zindabad!'

Charu Mazumdar was quick to praise the action. Noting that the squad

consisted entirely of landless and poor peasants, and that with many of the leaders of the area in the jail, it represented their independent initiative, he hailed it as the "birth of the People's Liberation Army of the peasants of Bengal."

Inspired by this the cadres in the cities began to try and emulate Magarjun. The police were already a widely discredited force among the working classes. Their corruption and brutality had been well exposed on a number of occasions. And their onslaught against the movement in the villages and towns had made them both a hated and feared force. The guerilla actions against the police initially enjoyed some degree of popular support. Pickets of the local police as well as the BSF and CRPF jawans brought in for special duty were attacked. Between April and November 36 policemen were killed and over 400 injured in the cases of gun snatching, while 25 were killed and 350 injured in other types of attacks. Often the attacks would take place in the broad daylight and the triumphant squad would march away raising slogans, but the police were too scared to move. In fact a petrified top brass took the ridiculous step of ordering that all rifles should be chained to the individuals body !

Calcutta became such an important centre of activity, that police estimated that nearly half of the 10,000 to 20,000 cadres of the CPI(ML) were based in the city. In a short period of time the walls in almost all the towns of West Bengal bore witness to the presence of Naxalite students or youth. The writing on the walls clearly represented the sentiments of the youth—"Political power flows out of the Barrel of a Gun" and Turn the 70's into the Decade of Liberation".

The Iron Heel

But after the first few actions the police responded with such calculated brutality that they must be blamed for triggering off the violent reaction that followed. as the assault began on the Naxalite youth, their dreams that revolution was fast approaching were soon to be drowned in blood. The police were assisted by the Congress and CPM members, many of whom were well known goondas from their areas. A few selected reports give an indication of the brutal ruthlessness.

One correspondent wrote about a cold blooded killing of a popular Naxalite leader : "...On Wednesday night during the Kalipuja festival in the Masjid Bari Street (North Calcutta), police killed in cold blood the well known Naxalite leader, 22 year old Birendra Debnath. Observers told our reporter with one voice that Debnath was sitting in a chair, watching the festival while an announcement was being made on the mike. The police entered the pandal, fired point-blank at Debnath and he was seen sinking in the chair itself."

Another described the widescale wave of terror that was let loose. "Late night on November 17, a huge posse of armed police surrendered the CIT building at Beliaghata and carried out a ruthless search of each and every one of the 556 flats there. The police arrested over 100 young men, took four of them to a lonely quadrangle, made them stand in a single file and riddled them to death."

Two draconian laws were enacted to provide the police with a license for these unlawful acts. First was the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act, 1936—being used for the first time since August 1947. It was a British gift to the Indian rulers. The second was indigenous in origin—the West Bengal Prevention of Violent Activities Bill. Both gave wide power to the police to arrest without warrant and to detain without trial.

And as the battle continued there were victories and defeats on both sides. In Durgapur, between the end of October and November alone, squads of workers killed nine policemen. At Asansol a CRPF van was

ambushed...the Birhata police outpost at Burdwan was attacked....and there were actions in Nadia, Birbhum, 24 Parganas, Howrah, Midnapur....

Alongside however many cadres were killed and thousands more were tossed into jail.

Prisoner I May be, but not a Slave'

For the jailed cadres detention merely meant that the arena of the class struggle had shifted. Where earlier Communist leaders had availed of all available special benefits and lived separately from the ordinary prisoners to turn their jail terms into pleasant periods of relaxation, the Naxalite prisoners fought not for themselves but alongwith the other prisoners. Where earlier leaders wrote diaries and prison memoirs, the Naxalites now wrote protest slogans on the walls. Refusing bail and special amenities they explained their stand in the following manner : "When outside the jails comrades are taking forward the struggle by giving their lives, how can we take the path of saving our lives within jails? If we begin a struggle demanding division (political prisoners are entitled under the law to Division 1 classification, which enables them to avail of better amenities than the ordinary prisoners), it would mean forgetting the sufferings of the Indian people... we intensified the fight within jail. We began to write slogans—Long Live Mao Tsetung, Long Live Charu Mazumdar—on walls, utensils, all over the place....we never encouraged any fight for one's own amenities and privileges like food and other things, on the other hand we consciously organised fights against the prevailing regulations..."

Further, the revolutionaries within the jails began making plans for implementing the call issued by Saroj Datta to them : "Comrades outside the jails are waiting for the time when the jail comrades will begin to come out—not on bail or acquittal by magistrates but through other methods, in other words, the methods by which revolutionaries come out from jails during a civil war..." Thus on December 28, 1970, a police van carrying a CPI(ML) prisoner from the court to the prison was ambushed by a squad in West Dinajpur and the prisoner rescued. On January 30, 1971 three CPI(ML) prisoners escaped from Kurseong jail in Darjeeling. Five prisoners, although handcuffed, escaped from the police on the way from the Alipur Central jail to the Barasat court. And in the most daring action which took place on January 28, 1971, some imprisoned cadres from Rajarhat in 24 Parganas, while being taken

from Dum Dum jail to the Barasat Court attacked the armed guards in the van, seized from them two rifles and turned on the police officer. Seven of them jumped out of the running van, and five managed to get away. Finally on February 21, 1971, eleven activists including some leading cadre of the party escaped from the Siliguri Central jail. They attacked the gateman, snatched the keys and walked out of the jail gates in broad daylight.

The police panicked... and reacted with a predictable cold-bloodedness, shooting down unarmed prisoners. On December 17, 1970 at least 8 prisoners were killed and 60 injured when police opened fire in Midnapur Central jail... again on February 4, 1971 two were killed and 60 injured in another incident in the same jail... the next day in Presidency jail in Calcutta 24 were wounded ... and on February 21 in Berhampur 10 died and 62 were injured.

Rivers of Blood

In March 1971, election to the state Assembly were held. Fearing Naxalite violence, the Army was moved in. According to the Governor, "...the number of troops... is larger than the force in any single sector of the battle front during the war against the Pakistani aggression in 1965..." A minority Congress backed government was formed. But three months later it resigned and President's Rule was imposed. New tactics were adopted by the police force under the guidance of the centre and a horrible blood bath ensued.

Cossipore-Baranagar. A small industrial-residential locality in Calcutta. For one day the entire area was handed over to a bunch of government backed hoodlums. Policemen were given strict instructions not to interfere, and stood silently in their uniforms and watched as the armed gangs moved from house to house. Suspected activists were simply butchered. In other cases, relatives were chopped to pieces. It was a massacre virtually unprecedented in the recent history of urban Bengal.

One correspondent described the scene, "Dead bodies were everywhere— bodies with heads cut off, limbs lost, eyes gouged out, entrails ripped open... later they were carried in rickshaws and handcarts and thrown into the Hooghly... an old man above 60 was literally doused with petrol and burnt alive because he had failed to give news of his alleged Naxalite nephew. A school girl in her early teens had her arm chopped off because she did not know where her

brother was."

Similar massacres were carried out by these "resistance groups" through many urban centers of West Bengal. What were these groups? Who were they? A newspaper correspondent after detailed investigations reported : "They get protection money from business houses, they extort money from people on the pretext of defending the locality. They are on the pay role of the police for supplying intelligence about Naxalites... they are gangsters and murderers." In fact as a policy the government had decided to build up and encourage this network of local gangsters and goondas as an army against Naxalite squads, and in return were willing to turn a blind eye to all their excesses.

The brutal crackdown took its toll. Thousands were killed, and one by one even those leaders who continued to support Charu Mazumdar's views began to be liquidated. One of the biggest losses was the 'disappearance' of Saroj Datta.

On the night of August 5, 1971 unmarked cars surrounded a house in South Calcutta. Along with the owner, an old man was also detained in full view of hundreds of neighbours, who watched terrified from behind their curtained windows. The old man was Saroj Datta, poet, writer... later Editor of the CPI(ML) journal Deshabrati, Secretary of the West Bengal Committee of the Party and a member of the Politbureau of the Central Committee. The police claimed that they had failed to recognise the arrested person and released him a few hours later. But Saroj Datta never returned. Some days later a badly disfigured, unidentifiable body of an old man was found in Calcutta maidan. The police had killed Comrade Saroj Datta.

In a sense it symbolised the end of the youth upsurge, for Saroj Datta with his pungent style had provided the ideological support for many of the actions of the youth and had relentlessly attacked all their critics. By 1971, the youth movement had died down, drawing to a close one turbulent chapter in the CPI(ML)'s history.

What went Wrong?

During its peak it had shaken the foundations of the Establishment and created a virtually unparalleled mass awakening among the urban youth. But since the participants were... all from a petty-bourgeois background, it also displayed a number of negative features characteristic of that class. The romanticism in their approach to the 'cultural revolution' and the adventurism evident in their desire to

emulate the rural guerillas within the cities as well were both the hallmark and the weakness of the movement. In their enthusiasm to hasten the process of revolution in India, the urban fighters appeared to forget the CPI(ML)'s analysis that the revolution would be a 'protracted war' and an 'agrarian struggle'.

By the middle of 1971 even the rural movement was at an ebb. Questions were being asked everywhere. Answers were being sought. What had gone wrong with the plan to liberate India?

Many different opinions were voiced, but discussion finally centered around three or four central question—the estimation of the international and national situation, the annihilation of the class enemies and its relation to the mass movements, and an assessment of Charu Mazumdar's role in this period.

One section of the Party—led by Satyanarayan Singh and Ashim Chatterjee—questioned the existing understanding on all these questions. They argued that annihilation as a tactic isolated from the mass movement was "individual terrorism" and had "nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism". Through it allies of the revolution were being pushed into the enemy camp. They also argued that due to an overestimation of the favourable nature of the national and international situation, the leadership had given wrong calls and was responsible for the unnecessary sacrifices and losses. And the responsibility for all of these mistakes according to them lay on Charu Mazumdar's shoulders.

In November 1971, Satyanarayan Singh convened a meeting of the surviving members of the Central Committee without inviting Charu Mazumdar and Suniti Ghosh. The meeting endorsed all the above views, decried the existing practice of the Party as 'left adventurism' and expelled what they termed as the "Charu clique" whom they blamed for all the mistakes and failures. In effect they negated all the earlier practice of the Party as incorrect.

Among those who opposed Satyanarayan Singh there were two trends. One led by Mahadev Mukherjee, and later by Subroto Dutta, refused to make any self critical assessment, asserting that the understanding and methods adopted by the Party were one hundred percent correct. For them any questioning amounted to revisionism, and while at that time they were correct in opposing the moves by SNS, their failure to recognise any errors made it difficult for them to build up any sweeping mass movements.

The other view was that while the theory and practice of the Party was basically correct, there were certain serious errors that had crept in. Eradication of these mistakes was essential if the movement was to recover from the setback it had suffered and make fresh advances. A large number of comrades from different states supported these views, and developing on the ideas first expressed by Sushil Roychoudhary before his death in March 1971, attempted a self critical assessment of the movement. (After 1972, these comrades formed the Central Organising Committee—COC—under the leadership of Sharma from Punjab).

In the discussions that followed it appeared that Charu Mazumdar favoured the latter view. Since 1971 he had been writing and speaking about these issues. On June 9, 1972 he penned what turned out to be his last writing. Entitled 'It is the People's Interest that is the Party's Interest' he began it by saying "We have suffered a setback after the armed struggle reached a stage". According to him, the economic and political crisis was bound to get more severe. The growing discontent of the people would "cause spontaneous explosions in different places". Admitting that the Party was not in a position to lead the upsurge, he stressed the need to participate and try to give it a direction. "The struggle in those particular areas where we have our Party's own leadership, will serve as an example to other areas which lack Party leadership...". Emphasising that it was necessary not to elevate all disagreements to the level of splits, he concluded, "It is the people's interest that today demands united struggle. It is people's interest that is the Party's interest".

Weeks later Charu Mazumdar was arrested by the Calcutta police on July 16, 1972. Twelve days after that the police announced that he was dead, claiming that ill health was the cause. It was one more blatant falsehood, because the health of a man who had lived through the rigours of an underground existence for all these years could not have failed so easily.

The man who had given thousands of youth and peasants the vision of a revolutionary new dawn was no more. His Party lay shattered under the police onslaught. Some of his one time comrades had launched vitriolic criticisms on him. Confusion prevailed among many of his followers.

Perhaps the Indian state hoped that CM's dreams would die with him. Still they took no chances. CPI(ML) activists and sympathisers

continued to be arrested and tortured. Those in jails were given the most inhuman treatment. By 1973 the number of CPI(M) activists and supporters in jails in different parts of the country was 32,000. In West Bengal alone there were 17,787, among them 12,016 were youth, 1,399 below 18 years of age. Most of them were held without trial.

Two case studies taken from the Report of the Association For the Protection of Democratic Rights issued in 1973, serve as illustrations of the conditions of these prisoners.

"Azizul Haque— Presidency Jail— Cell No. 1/72. In custody for three years. Age— above 30. On being arrested, he was mercilessly beaten at the Beniakpur police lock up. While in the ward named 'Sathkuta' of the same jail in 1970, there was an alarm at the Presidency Jail. At midnight, Haque along with other political prisoners was dragged out of his ward and blows upon blows of batons rained upon them. His already broken hand was pound to pieces. Available medical facilities in jail were totally inadequate for such severe injury... at present... blood vessels of his hand are getting dried up.

"Ramal Ray Choudhary— Presidency Jail. Arrested in October 1970. On being arrested he had his share of inhuman torture in police custody resulting in serious injury to his left hand and head. Severe pain in head followed... at jail hospital while fighting death he was suddenly released for some unknown reason. The following day he died."

Of cases like this the revolutionary poet Cherabandaraju wrote :

*Every drop of my blood
I scatter like a seed
To liberate my country.
Though Battered and broken
Like a wage of the sea
I will be born again and again."*

In 1972 it could have been a fitting epilogue to the bravery and heroism of the cadres who were no more. In 1992 it reads like an accurate prediction of how the movement was to rise once again from the ashes...

Part II

(1972-1977)

***They Can Kill All The Flowers,
But They Will Not Hold Back The Spring***

Retreat And Reorganisation

New began a dark period in the CPI(ML) history. 1972-1977 were bleak years for the Communist revolutionaries. The leadership of the Party was decimated. Thousands of cadres were in jail. Those outside of custody were on the run. Their mass base shattered, for many of them survival itself was often a problem.

Disorganised and directionless they were not able to take advantage of the "countrywide upsurge" and the 'spontaneous explosions' which Charu Mazumdar had predicted would take place.

The 'Countrywide Upsurge'

A wave of protest swept over the country. In Bihar and Gujrat there were massive student movements against corruption and unaccountability of the government. In Maharastra, severe drought conditions sparked off unrest and agitation in the rural areas. In the cities, especially in Bombay, women rose up in protest against the ever spiralling prices. The All-India strike by the railway workers in 1974 brought the economy to a virtual standstill. To top it all even sections of the police launched unprecedented revolts against the government.

The ruling class was in disarray. They found themselves unable to contain the people's anger. Each new day brought fresh reports of one more attack on the system. Yet in the absence of a conscious intervention by a well organised revolutionary party, the spontaneous challenge of the people was once more sought to be diverted into Parliament. Though Jayprakash Narayan, the well known Socialist who became the symbolic leader of the revolt, promised to bring about a 'Total Revolution', he had no programme either for radical land reforms, or a total ban on foreign capital, the two major obstacles to the development of the Indian people.

Emergency !

But the mass following of his movement threatened the ruling Congress government, and finally on June 26, 1975, they decided to declare an internal emergency. It was the signal for a massive crackdown. The 'midnight knock' sounded on thousands of doors throughout the country. Over night almost all the opposition to the government, including some dissenters within the ruling Congress, were put behind the bar. Press censorship was imposed, and under the dreaded Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) all forms of popular protest were banned.

The black days of the Emergency made things even more difficult for the revolutionary Communists. Many groups affiliated to the CPI(ML) were virtually banned, and activists under detention were brutally tortured. The case of a Naxalite student organiser, Rajan, who was tortured to death by the Kerala police, became one of the popular symbols of the Emergency excesses, that were highlighted in the later days.

Earlier attempts were being made to unite all those revolutionaries who agreed with Charu Mazumdar's understanding that mistakes committed by the Party had to be analysed and eradicated if the movement was to advance once more along the basically correct path of Naxalbari. They had formed the Central Organising Committee (COC) headed by Sharma from Punjab. But under the repressive conditions of the Emergency days, such attempts could not make much headway, and were temporarily given up at the all-India level after 1975.

Andhra Pradesh

But in some areas local party units continued to be active.

In 1975, under the leadership of the A.P. State Committee of CPI(ML), the Radical Students Union (RSU) had been formed. On the day that the Emergency was declared, they organised mass student demonstrations in Warangal and conducted propaganda in other centers. In many villages in Warangal and Karimnagar, and in the towns of the Singareni coal belt, active youth and students continued to organise local struggles. The state continued its brutal assaults....

Days after the Emergency was declared a large part of the RSU leadership was detained, some under the dreaded MISA. Among them was the popular leader from Regional Engineering College, Warangal,

Comrade Surapaneni Janardhan.

He, along with three other youths, was taken to a Dakbungalow in the Giraipally forest. From the screams that emanated from within it was evident that the worst tortures were being inflicted on them. Then late on the night of July 25, they were driven deeper into the forest. Their mangled bodies were tied to tress, and they were shot dead. Janardhan, Murali Mohan, Anandrao and Sudhakar the heroic martyrs of Giraipally, became the first of the members of the Radical Students Union to lay down their lives.

It was also the first of the Emergency encounters in A.P. Later, in 1978, a Commission of Enquiry headed by V.M. Tarkunde, a former judge of the Delhi High Court was to come up with the findings that 468 more people had killed in a similar fashion in A.P. alone.

In West Bengal the revolutionary movement in Kanksha of Burdwan district was continuing in the period of emergency and was brutally crushed by the govt. armed forces. Thousands of cadres of CPI(ML) party continued to languish in jails.

Bhojpur

But in Bhojpur, Bihar, the Indian state was being warned that the movement could not be crushed so easily.

The Stone river flows through Bhojpur district. Thanks to its waters, some areas—like the Sahar block—had been irrigated and become prosperous. Other regions however, continued to be dry and barren. But a common factor that ran through the whole district, whether in the irrigated areas or otherwise, was the social oppression. The district has a large Scheduled Caste population, and the Ahirs, Dusadhs, Mushahars, etc. were victims of the atrocities perpetrated by the predominantly Rajput landlords. Their women were repeatedly raped, but no one was allowed to question. Their men had to bow low whenever the upper castes passed by. Their crops were seized, and they were cheated out of their land. During election time, not a single one of them was allowed to go anywhere near the polling booths. In the past, movements led by the Triveni Sangh, and the CPI, had taken up some of these issues, but thanks to their parliamentary orientation, were unable to challenge the might of the Rajput landlords. Till Naxalbari...and the CPI(ML) cadres came to the region.

They were dedicated revolutionaries and fearless fighters. Men like Jagdish Mahto and Butan Mushahar, both school teachers, were

lovingly referred to by the people as 'Master'. And there was Rameshwar Ahir. A landless peasant who had rebelled against oppression and taken to crime. Now 'reformed', and on learning who his true enemies were, willing to fight. They were joined by Dr. Nirmal, a medical graduate, whose experiences of casteism even among his educated fellow students had shown him that that it could be eradicated only after a sustained and organised fight. And Subroto Dutta 'Jawahar', as he was popularly known, was the secretary of the CPI(ML) group which worked in the region. They believed that 'annihilation' was the best way to mobilise the peasants.

Annihilations rocked the district from 1971. Notorious landlords. Upper caste peasants who had raped dalit women. Goondas of the landlords. Dacoits. All fell victims to the blazing guns of the revolutionaries.

Brutal massacres were carried out by the landlords with police backing. Whole dalit bastis were set on fire as in Chauri in 1973. But the burning huts only fanned the anger of the peasants. The flames of revolt continued to flare up. And the guns refused to fall silent. In 1975, Bhojpur was still burning.

The declaration of the Emergency emboldened the police. Now assisted by the Central forces, they launched fresh campaigns.

On June 29, days after the Emergency had been declared, they surrounded Bahuara village. Of the 143 families there, 60 were ahirs. The CRP and the Jat Regiment were aided by approximately three hundred heavily armed Bhumihars. The attackers set the whole Dalit Tola on fire. But the Ahirs too were organised. Led by the CPI (ML) cadres they fought back. The battle raged for three whole days. Finally after 96 hours of heavy fighting four men made an attempt to break out of the heavy encirclement. Two, including Dr. Nirmal escaped. But a wounded Butan 'Master' could not. He was arrested in the next village and shot dead.

A few months later, a police party raided the house of Sakaldip Chamar in Babubandh village. The people inside put up a brave resistance. As the police opened fire they attacked back with choppers and axes. After the smoke had cleared, many lay dead. Among them was Dr. Nirmal. It was November 29, 1975. 'Doctor' was only 27 years old.

Among those who escaped from the attack was Jawhar. But the Secretary of the CPI(ML) was severely wounded, and died a few hours later. The Mushahars did not allow the police to capture the body. They carried it away secretly through the fields. The police never found it.

Others too became martyrs. Jagdish Mahto. Rameshwar Aahir. The clashes between the activists supported by the dalits and the police upper-caste combine continued throughout the Emergency. It was the one area of struggle that proved that Naxalbari could not die.

A New Line

But after the lifting of the Emergency, the new leadership of the CPI(ML), widely known today as the CPI(ML) (Liberation), headed by Vinod Mishra, began advocating drastic changes in approach. Decrying the tactic of 'annihilation' that had characterised the Bhojpur movement at its peak, they proposed the formation of broad based mass organisations. In 1980 when Indira Gandhi was returned to power at the centre, they called for the formation of a Front against Indira Autocracy, aiming to unite all those who opposed the Congress (I) but were now searching for an alternative leadership after the total exposure of the Janata Party.

During this period they convened a meeting of revolutionary parties from different parts of the country, hoping to win support for their new line. This '13 Party Meeting' however failed to make much headway due to the widely divergent understandings of many of those who attended. In fact critics of the new line, who argued that it represented a deviation away from the politics of armed struggle were proved correct by later developments. The Front against Indira Autocracy, actually emerged as the Indian People's Front (IPF), moved towards electoral politics, and gradually became the central focus of the Party's work. By 1989 they had revised many of the formulations of the CPI(ML) programme. Contrary to the earlier understanding of the Soviet Union as a social imperialist country, they now rediscovered 'socialism' in that country, and became supporters of the Gorbachev reforms, they disbanded many of their armed squads, discovered 'left' allies in the CPI and CPM, and even argued that 'revolutionaries' could come to power in some states through elections. Now in 1992, they have given up all practice of armed struggle, and perhaps over enthused at having sent the first 'Naxalite' MP to the Lok Sabha in 1989, have decided to disband the underground party apparatus, with the whole leadership coming overground to participate in legal struggles.

The Provisional Central Committee headed by Satyanarain Singh, analysed that the Emergency was Soviet backed, and had called for the formation of an interim Government. In the March 1977 elections they

decided to support the Janata Party, and later themselves fought elections, with one of their leaders, Umadhar Singh, being elected an MLA. Today they enjoy some limited support in pockets of Bengal and Bihar. But, enmeshed as they are in electoral politics, they have moved far away from the path of armed struggle advocated by Naxalbari, and are no longer a major force. The same is true of the groups led by Kanu Sanyal and Ashim Chatterjee, both of whom are better known for their historical role during the 70s, than for the mass base that they enjoy today.

Kerala

In Kerala, the late 70's saw a fresh spurt in the influence of Naxalite politics. K.Venu and others were released from jail in 1978 and reorganised the Communist revolutionaries in the state. Uniting with the other groups of revolutionaries in different states, they formed the Central Reorganising Committee, i.e. CRC, CPI(ML). Initially upholding the 1970 line and practice, they built Red Guard type organisations among the urban students and youth, and set up Peoples' Cultural Forums (PCF) in many places. A few struggles against corruption in government run institutions were taken up and some of the more notorious officers were brought for trial in people's courts. As a result the popularity of the organisation grew immensely.

But from the early 80's onwards they began to introduce changes in their line, and reformulated some of the original stands taken by the CPI(ML). Most significant was their argument that feudal land relations were no longer the social prop of imperialism and that India had now turned into a 'neo-colony' of the imperialist powers. Still later, in the early 90's Venu argued that the Communist movement had failed to properly understand the nationality question, and that the Indian revolution could only advance as an ensemble of the revolutions of different nationalities. This led to differences within the organisation, and a section of the Party, now known as the CRC, CPI(ML) (Red Flag), differed over these proposed changes in the 1970 Programme and left the organisation. After the collapse of the state capitalist regimes in Soviet Russia and East Europe, Venu advanced the theory that the nature of the state in socialist societies should be 'proletarian democracy' rather than 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as formulated by Lenin.

The CPI(ML) (Red Flag) is active in parts of Kerala and has a presence in some other states, but the group led by Venu is virtually defunct.

Punjab

Punjab saw a brief resurgence of mass activity under Naxalite leadership also in the late 70's. Under the leadership of Prithipal Singh Randhawa, the Punjab Students Union became a powerful state level force. The group was affiliated to the UCCRI(ML), the followers of Nagi Reddy. Besides being an important force on the campus, in one big agitation against the bus fare hike, they even mobilised thousands of workers and peasants alongside the students. Another major struggle was against blackmarketting of cinema tickets in Moga town. The agitation grew into a massive confrontation with the goondas and the state, and seven students were killed in police firing.

But two events in the early 80's left the movement in shambles. First was the cold blooded murder of Prithipal Singh Randhawa by goondas of the ruling Congress. The party leadership was unable to formulate an adequate response to this and other incidents of violence against the movement. As a result many of the militants who had been earlier attached were growing disillusioned. It was then that the movement of the peasants began. Initially the revolutionaries opposed the Akali Dal demands, terming them as communal and part of an intra-ruling class skirmish. A large number of youth, inspired by nationality sentiments and attracted by the militancy propagated by Bhindranwale, moved away from the revolutionary movement towards terrorism. Unable to come up with a clear analysis of the situation within the state and evolve suitable tactics to participate in the ongoing movement most revolutionary groups have become marginalised, while some others, on the basis of ' combating communal terrorism' have virtually become supporters of the state.

Elsewhere, however the Nagi Reddy group could not build up any significant mass movements. In A.P. the main group of Telengana cadres, led by Chandra Pulla Reddy, had joined with Satyanarain Singh in 1975, only to part ways again in 1978 when the latter advocated support to the newly formed Janata Party. Further splintering has weakened the influence of both these groups in A.P.

CPI(ML) (People's War)

It was the reorganised A.P. State Committee of the CPI(ML) which, in fact, rebuilt the movement in the state. After attempts at all India co-ordination under a new COC had failed, the A.P. comrades reorganised

the local work and set about building up wide mass movements among different sections. Surviving the brutal onslaught of the Emergency, in which they lost some leading cadre, they were soon a force to reckon with in the districts of Karimnagar, Adiabad and Warangal. Simultaneously they made fresh attempts to resume the All-India unity, holding talks with the CPI(ML) (Unity Organisation) and the Tamil Nadu State Committee of the CPI(ML). In 1980, the T.N. and A.P. committees united to form the CPI(ML) (People's War) with Kondapalli Seetharamiah as Secretary, and it is this party which is today one foremost Naxalite organisations in the country. The T.N. work had begun afresh in 1978. The work in North Arcot and Dharmapuri, begun earlier by the legendary Appu, was restarted. Among the leading cadres was Balan, a M.Sc, student from Madras who gave up his studies to join political activity. Soon the two districts witnessed large peasant mobilisations and a series of squad actions. Then in 1980, the police launched a brutal assault in the region. Many leading activists were killed. Balan himself was arrested from a public meeting and held in illegal custody for a few days. The brutal tortures inflicted on him led to his death. The movement in the two districts subsided shortly afterwards.

Bihar-Bengal

In Bihar-Bengal, the revolutionaries were split into a number of groups. In the early 80's, the CPI(ML) (2nd CC), led a series of actions in Nadia district, but also suffered severe setbacks following the arrest of many of its senior leaders. The CPI(ML) (Party Unity) which was constituted with a large number of cadres released from jail in 1978, took roots in the Jehanabad-Palamau region of Bihar. And in Gaya-Aurangabad, the Maoist Communist Centre, which had stayed out of the CPI(ML), also built up a strong support base for its Krantikari Kisan Samitis among the peasants.

In fact of the many areas where Marxist-Leninist parties are active, only two regions have been able to build on the legacy of Naxalbari—A.P.-Dandakaranya where the CPI(ML) (Peoples War) has built up a strong armed movement among the tribals in the forests, and Bihar where MCC and the CPI(ML) (Party Unity) are leading militant peasant

movements in different parts of the state.

These two movements are the real offspring of Naxalbari....the real challenge to the reactionary Indian state and the beacon light for the oppressed masses of India.

Part III

(1977-1992)

***Time is progressing
It does not stop
Revolution is blazing
It does not die
The crescent moon kid of the movement
Will grow up and write
The epic of new life
It is inevitable***

Land to the Tiller All Power to the Peasant Committees

Gaya-Aurangabad

February 4, 1980. The news spread through the Hazaribagh-Giridih region like a storm. Comrade Jeeblal Mahto was no more. The one who had inspired the peasants, guided them, led them in their struggles against the landlords had been killed. Kidnapped by the landlord goondas and beaten to death by the police.

Jeeblal was born in a poor peasant family in Kariri village of Gomiy police station area in 1935. Economically exploited and socially oppressed, he was attracted to the struggles of the CPI. In the 60's he along with many others from the area joined the party. But when the flames of peasant struggle erupted in Naxalbari, Jeeblal left the CPI to plunge into the armed agrarian revolution. He joined the Maoist Communist Centre and became a full time organiser in 1972. He was arrested in 1974 and remained in jail until the end of the Emergency. After release, he once more went deep among the masses to lay the foundations for the revolutionary peasant struggles that are raging today in Gaya-Aurangabad. Now he was no more...

Soon the shock of the peasants gave way to anger. A wave of protest swept through the region. 'Comrade Jeeblal Amar Rahe' and 'Zulmi Police-Zamindar raj Murdabad' (Long Live Comrade Jeeblal and Condemn the oppressive police-landlord rule). The slogans resounded throughout the countryside.

Medieval Rule

Bihar is regarded by many as India's most backward state. Certainly it has some of the worst examples of landlordism. The list of the biggest landlords sounds shocking in a country which boasts of its Land Ceiling Acts. The Mahant of Bodh Gaya—40,000 acres ; Satyendra

Singh—4,300 acres ; Anzar Hussain—3,650 acres ; Main Singh—2,900 acres.

Not only are their landholdings vast, but they also rule like mini-medieval kings. Ramvilas and Rameshwari Singh, who owned a few hundred acres of land, were feared throughout Nawada. Young women had to answer their every pleasure, and the poor, scheduled castes had to make regular offerings of milk, chicken and goats to keep the brothers satisfied. Another notorious individual was Jagdishwar Jeetsingh Manwar of Manatu, better known as the 'Man-eater of Manatu' because he used to feed rebellious labourers to his pet tiger. The 'man-eaters' writ ran through more than half of Manatu's 165 villages where he owned over 6000 acres of land. Begar (forced, unpaid labour) is common throughout the area.

Most of these landlords belong to the powerful upper castes, the Brahmin, Bhumihar or Rajput communities. Though there are a few smaller, middle caste landlords—especially among the Yadavs and Kurmis—the bulk of the OBC and Scheduled Castes are small and landless peasants. Since the landlords wield enormous political clout through their social, caste-based influence, the peasants are constantly facing different types of discrimination. Given these factors, Bihar was a natural setting for intense agrarian conflict.

Since the days of Naxalbari it had been an important centre for struggle. Lakhimpur-Kheri and Mushahari gave rise to Bhojpur, but none could survive in the face of the landlord-police onslaught. By 1977, the network of the Naxalite organisations had been considerably weakened. In fact during 1972-74, it was not the Naxalite movement, but the 'Total Revolution' of JP which had influenced a large number of students and youth. JP had also toured Bhojpur districts at the height of the movement to try and bring about radical land reforms by appealing to the big landlords on moral grounds. But by 1978 it was clear to many of the students, youth and others who were released from jail that landlordism would have to be smashed by the peasants themselves as no 'change of heart' was possible while they continued to control huge tracts of land and wield social and political influence.

Maoist Communist Centre

These sections of people were attracted to the revolutionary ranks who began to reorganise in Bihar in 1978. One of the active groups was the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC).

Cadres belonging to the 'Dakshin Desh' group in the AlCCCR had begun to work in South Bihar in the late 60's. As observed earlier they were supporters of the Naxalbari line, but had differences with the CPI(ML) over certain tactical questions and the method of party formation. Hence they remained outside the CPI(ML) in 1969, and formed the MCC on October 20 that year. Since then they had been organising the peasants of Hazaribagh-Girdih. But the initial wave of struggles they had built up in the early 70's had subsided due to various errors. Among the crucial aspects of the failure those highlighted by the MCC were "Due to the failure to build different types of organisations, other than the Party units and the armed squads, among the masses, the Party had to handle all the responsibilities ... also... (we were unclear) over the nature of the primary and secondary steps to be taken to establish organs of the people's political power." During emergency though their movement was at its peak in Kanksha of WB, in other areas it was at a low webb.

Krantikari Kisan Committee

The release of many cadres like Jeeblal, in 1978, provided a fresh impetus to the peasant struggle. The MCC, analysing its earlier mistakes, decided to build mass fronts and give the peasant movement a specific organisational form. From village to village the peasants were organised. In the preliminary stages a 'Krantikari Kisan Sangarsh Nirman Committee' (Preparatory Committee for Revolutionary Peasant Struggles) was formed. As the peasants rallied in larger numbers under this banner, these committees were developed into full fledged 'Krantikari Kisan Committees' (Revolutionary Peasant Councils).

Soon the calls of the Committees was reverberating through the region. 'All Land to the Real Tillers' and 'All Power to the Peasant Committees' were the two principal slogans raised by the movement. It sent a shiver down the spines of the landlords. From village to village struggles were taken up. A central issue was the rape and molestation of the peasant women, hitherto an unchallenged right to the landlords. Resistance movements were organised to protest against every instance. At the same time the Kisan Samitis also began to deal with the notorious dacoits who used to terrorise the villagers. The third, and later the most important issue, was the forcible harvesting of crops planted by the landlords on gair-mazrua land. These were taken over and distributed by the Kisan Committees.

Thus in the short span of two years after the Emergency was lifted, the Krantikari Kisan Committees began to emerge as powerful bodies, intervening in and settling all types of disputes at the village level. Since they were often supported by armed Red Defence Corps, or even self defence squads of the village youth, these Committees were often in a position to enforce their directives on certain issues against a section of the landlords. During the earlier phase of the revolutionary peasant movements the main activity would be actions carried out by the party led squads, but now even different types of mass organisations to lead various struggles of the people came into existence alongside the Committees.

This was the background in which Comrade Jeeblal Mahto was martyred. It was one of the first encounter deaths in the post-Emergency period in Bihar.

Now was a crucial moment for the revolutionary leadership. How should they react? Would squad actions against the guilty landlords be satisfactory method of preparing a resistance movement of the people? Or should something be done to counter the encirclement and suppression campaign and take the mass awakening towards a guerilla war?

A Storm Arises

In 1969 the MCC had argued against the CPI(ML)'s thesis that 'annihilation' was the best response. Now they tried to further develop those ideas. They decided that widening and strengthening the peasant movements was the best step in the circumstances. It would challenge, and eventually smash the social, economic and political power of the landlords. A massive propaganda campaign was launched. Kisan Committees were established in more villages. A number of struggles against economic and social exploitation were built up. Red Defence Corps were formed out of the most militant of the peasant youth.

Inspired by Jeeblal's sacrifices, thousands came forward to participate in the movement. Landlords were challenged, not just in the older areas of Hazaribagh-Girdih where he was killed, but in Gaya and Aurangabad as well. The sweep and intensity of the peasant struggle increased tremendously.

Nawada. For years people had trembled at the sight of the zamindar Rameshwar Singh. His worst atrocities had to be suffered silently for who was there to complain to? Weren't the Superintendent of Police and

the Block Development Officer often seen feasting at his house? That was before the Kisan Committee was formed. Before the Red Defence Corps was organised. Now the peasants could look the zamindar in the face. Could challenge his worst outrages. On Jan. 6, 1983 several of them gathered at his 'Kacheri', Rameshwar Singh was arrested and tried in front of them all. The verdict was unanimous death. But that was not all. His 'Kacheri' house, that symbol of authority, towering over the neighbouring huts too had to be finished. It was hard work. But the years of silent suffering provided the energy and enthusiasm. As the whole village watched the house went up in flames. It was a simple lesson the power that an armed, organised peasant committee could wield. Already the importance of combining annihilations with mass movements could be seen. In the years to come it was this which provided the conscious mass base for a guerilla war.

Everywhere the landlords were brought to trial before the people's courts. The most notorious were sentenced to death. Those guilty of less grievous crimes were given milder punishments. A public beating. Being shaved and paraded through villages with a blackened face. A few even seemed to repent, and want to change—after some punishment they were given a chance under the watchful supervision of the local Kisan Committee. Almost everywhere however the dreaded 'Kacheris' were razed to the ground. And now nowhere in the district was it like the old days. The dark days. A new hope was rising ...

The stories came in one by one. Mohan khan of Kadirganj in Gaya.... Madhumati Sing of Balia... Suraksha Singh of Pothma... Satyendra Sing of Pachmi... Main Singh the owner of 2900 acres in Pipra... the Mahant of Bodh Gaya.

The words "Utha Hai toofan Zamana Badal Raha Hai" (a storm has arisen, the times are changing) no longer remained a song.

Jehanabad— Palamau

The story was being repeated in the neighbouring Jehanabad-Palamau region. Work had been started by the cadres of the CPI(ML) who had opposed the analysis put forward by Satyanarain Singh in 1971. They also struggled against the uncritical approach of Bhojpur till 1977. Many cadres were released from jail in 1977 and helped to reorganise the work in the region. Renaming themselves as CPI(ML) (Unity Organisation) in 1978, they too decided to utilise the post-Emergency

period to build up a sweeping peasant movement. [Later the Unity Organisation merged with a large section of the COC, CPI(ML) to form the CPI(ML) (Party Unity) in 1983]

Jehanabad-Palamau is one of the backward regions within Bihar. In addition to cultivation, the peasants are forced to rely on collection of forest produce like firewood, mahua, beedi leaves etc. The upper caste landlords, mainly Brahmins and Rajputs, monopolise this trade utilising their political and social connections to gain the collection rights. Among the more powerful of them are Bhishma Narayan Singh, Congress leader and former Governor of Assam, and Jagadishwar Jeetsingh Manwar, the notorious 'Man Eater of Manatu'. It was another region where the landlords writ ran unchallenged. The entry of the CPI(ML) cadres brought the first winds of change.

Learning from their errors, the Unity Organisation activists paid special attention to building up mass movements so as to create a conscious mass base for the activities of their armed squads. A peasant organisation—Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS)—was formed.

All the old practices began to be questioned. The landlords right to cultivate Gair-Mazrua land was challenged. Struggles for the increase of agricultural wages broke out. The Scheduled Castes and women began to stand up against all forms of social oppression. But by far the biggest conflict arose out of the auction of the forest produce, one of the most lucrative businesses in the region. The newly formed peasant committees demanded that the contracts be handed over to them rather than the landlords. Within a short period of time, a powerful movement developed. Comrade Krishna Singh was one of the activists of the MKSS, which led the peasants in all these struggles. He became one of the powerful mass leaders of the peasantry.

May 1984. The Palamau Aurangabad Regional Committee of the MKSS was holding its Conference at Japla on the 19th and 20th. It was attended by thousands. The atmosphere was surcharged with struggle. Plans were made for a fresh round of attacks on the landlords authority. It was then that the landlords decided that Krishna Singh, now Secretary of MKSS would have to die. He had become a symbol of the mass movement that threatened their power and prestige.

Like so many others born into peasant families, Krishna Singh faced extreme economic hardships. He struggled to complete his school education but was forced to give up his dreams of a degree. He went to Calcutta and found a job as a casual labourer in a jute mill. Later

returning to Bihar he worked as a conductor in the State Transport Corporation in Aurangabad. It was the early 70s. The call of Naxalbari which he had first heard in the city, further attracted him. Getting actively involved in the peasant struggles of Aurangabad, he also organised the workers of the Japla cement factory before being imprisoned. After his release in 1978, Comrade Krishna Singh continued his work with the peasants and was elected General Secretary of the MKSS.

On June 17, 1984 he was conducting a meeting of the MKSS at Jharha in Palamau district. The local landlord tried to disrupt it, but the peasants stood firm. The landlord fled but returned with a horde of goondas and opened fire on the meeting. The peasant activists were forced to flee. But the gang pursued them and finally surrounded them near Jharghara. Comrade Krishna Singh stood up and began to deliver a speech. Almost immediately he was shot dead. But by his heroic action he had diverted attention long enough for his other comrades to escape.

Gloom descended over the region. However as the activists of the MKSS began a widespread campaign, the gloom gave way to rebellion. On June 25 a massive demonstration was held in Daltonganj, the administrative centre. It was followed by a spate of protests in village after village.

Once again the power of an organised mass movement to challenge the landlord's atrocities became apparent. While in the 1967-72 period, mass resistance to such attacks had hit against the landlords, now even the government was pressurised by the widespread propaganda.

The anger of the peasants forced the state to retreat. Over 35 Rajput landlords and their henchmen involved in the murder were arrested and charged. The impossible had happened. The mighty had been challenged and they had fallen. For the peasants there was no looking back. The old struggles were relaunched with a fresh enthusiasm. MKSS units began to spread throughout the district. Mass mobilisations increasingly undermined the landlords power. And village defence squads and armed guerilla units led them in actions against some selected, notorious class enemies.

Both these movements were now at stage where in peasant struggles of the 1967-72 period had faltered. What methods of resistance should be adopted? What was the best perspective for advance? The respective leaderships had to steer along a difficult path combining militant mass

resistance struggles with selective guerilla activities and building up the power of the peasant committees as lasting alternatives to the authority of the landlords. A dear perspective on how the Party would advance the guerilla war and what was the immediate stage in the process of seizure of power was required. The two organisations had many similarities in approach but stressed the relative importance of different aspects. The MCC leadership called on the Kisan Samitis and Red Defence Corps to build the region into a "Red Resistance Area" while widely mobilising the people to ensure mass participation in military actions. The CPI(ML) (Party Unity) too had a perspective of building up a guerilla zone and at their party Congress in 1987 outlined the following tasks "We are tackling the steadily increasing armed onslaughts of the state through mass resistance. But gradually the squads too will have to come forward to participate in this resistance. At the phase of confiscating all lands of the landlords and on the eve of building up the guerilla zone, the activities of the squads will be the main aspect of the people's resistance against the armed attacks of the state."

Immediately in both regions campaigns were launched to occupy surplus and government lands and to break the military power of the landlords. In Gaya-Aurangabad a call was issued for all landlords to deposit their weapons with Kisan Committees. Those who refused found their houses attacked and their weapons seized. Occupation of land continued both here as also in Jehanabad-Palamau. With the new mass awakening, with the active participation of the masses in struggles, the movements were able to withstand this round of repression and move forward once again.

Caste Based Senas and Class War

In the intense agrarian conflict that followed, the ruling classes adopted a two-pronged strategy to deal with the peasant upsurge. First was a onslaught by the police/para-military. Second was the approach of encouraging the landlords to form their own private armies consisting of goondas and dacoit groups. These are built along caste lines so that the landlords can try and mobilise their fellow castemen among the middle and poor peasants by portraying the peasant movement as a caste war. Thus the Rajput landlords formed the Kunwar Sena, the Sunlight Sena and the Krishak Sangh; the Bhumihar landlords formed the Brahmarshi Sena and the Savarna Liberation Front; the Yadavs have their Lorik Sena and the Kurmi landlords formed the Bhoomi Sena.

Most often these bodies enjoy the open patronage of the state. According to a document of the Bihar Police entitled 'Extremists and Sena Activities in Bihar' brought out in 1986, "The very emergence of the Senas is an abdication of the effective role performance by the police. In fact there was a tendency among police functionaries to encourage the defence groups (!) to organise themselves in order to fight the Naxalites." If at all this was a gross understatement for "encouragement" either took the form of issuing them with licenses for a large number of guns or joint attacks on the villages where the peasant movement was strong, with special fury reserved for the dalit bastis from where a large number of peasant activists come.

Brutal Massacres

These attacks and the pogroms that followed have become a special feature of the class struggle in Bihar.

Ramanand Yadav is a notorious dacoit of the Paliganj area of Patna district, with a long police record...33 murders, 12 rapes, 13 dacoities and several other offences. A leader of the Lorik Sena, he enjoyed the

Congress backing because of his booth capturing activities at election time. On a number of occasions he had threatened activists and sympathisers of the peasant movement.

February 20, 1986. A massive public meeting was held in Kinjar in Jehanabad. Over 10,000 peasants were present. Amidst sounds of "Lorik Sena Murdabad" the MKSS demanded the immediate arrest of Ramanand Yadav.

In the months that followed Yadav increased his activity. Encouraged by the inaction of the police he attacked and killed some MKSS activists. Then in March the peasants reacted. Over 5,000 people marched to his house, destroyed his property and planted a red flag on top of his house.

On April 13 the dacoit hit back. At midnight the people of Jeenpura were suddenly awoken with the sound of gunshots and screams for help. When the 30 odd dacoits left a few hours later, six people were dead. Three were young boys barely 13 years old... the others were old, feeble men.

Another feature of these attacks is the blatant police participation ... It was just turning dark when the Sunlight Sena attacked the Dalit tola of Kuari village in Majliaon. They surrounded the area and kept upto an intermittent firing. After dark they descended on the village. Women were raped, children were beaten, the men were killed. When the attackers left they resorted to large scale arson and looting.

As the huts burned, the police arrived. It was the next wave of attack. All those who had been injured earlier were now arrested and charged with attacking the Sunlight Sena! This pattern was repeated everywhere... Kansara, Nonhi-Nagwan, Damha-Khagadi, Dariapur, Tishikora, Mein-Barasimha, Sawanbigha...

After each attack, a large number of politicians descended on the affected villages and shed copious tears over the 'caste-war'. But, most of them support the armies because they are useful to indulge in booth capturing at election time. The latest addition to the electoral field is the CPI(ML) (Liberation)-led Indian People's Front. They have increasing links with dacoit gangs and have indirectly aided some of the massacres as well. A number of peasant activists of the revolutionary organisations have been killed by these 'Sarkari' Naxalites.

Two senior leaders of the CPI(ML)(2nd CC)— Ramachandra Thakur and Jassiya Roy—fell to their bullets. Both came from small peasant families in Vaishali district in North Bihar. Thakur completed his ITI in

1965 and was recruited by the Tata Steel Company. Just then a struggle broke out against the local landlord. Thakur gave up his job and became a leader of the local peasants. Soon after he became an activist of the CPI(ML) and led the squads in a number of actions in North Bihar. During the Emergency he was forced to flee to Nepal, where he was arrested while leading a struggle of the rice mill workers. Even in jail he was ever active leading many struggles against the authorities. After his release in 1978, Comrade Thakur returned to India where he became a leader of the Vaishali District Committee of the CPI(ML)(Liberation). But as the Party moved into the parliamentary arena and gave up the armed struggle, Comrade Thakur criticised the new line, left the Party and joined the CPI(ML)(2nd CC). He was a member of the Central Committee, when along with Comrade Jassiya Ray he was murdered.

The media has tried to portray these clashes as a 'caste war' thus obscuring the class antagonisms within each caste, because often the attackers and victims belong to different castes. But this is not always the case. On November 7, 1990, the house of a Rajput peasant, Master Singh in Kuvari village was attacked by the Sunlight Sena, a Rajput army. He was not at home, but his brother's children Annu Kumari, Babloo Singh and Dabloo Singh, aged 10, 7 and 2 were. After the attackers left the three were found... their throats were slit. Master Singh, the intended victim, was an active member of the Jan Mukti Parishad.

The Peasants Response

Different types of struggles have been launched against these landlord-dacoit attacks. One of the important forms has been wide mass mobilisation to pressurise the government into taking action. After the murder of Comrade Krishna Singh the government was forced to arrest 35 landlords and their goondas. The Krishak Sangh was virtually closed down. Similar campaigns have been launched after each major massacre. Teams of civil liberties activists have visited the sites of the attacks and done extensive all-India propaganda through well documented fact-finding reports. Local mass mobilisations too are a common method of response. The CPI(ML)(PU), which is strongly based among the landless poor feels that importance must be given to the political isolation of the most notorious landlords and their armies before they are attacked. In 1987 they wrote. 'The policies practised by

us are as follows : Concentrate attacks against feudal lords and the reactionaries belonging to the economically, politically and socially dominant castes in a given area and against their private armies. At the same time... we unite with... the remaining section of these castes." Thus after intense political campaigns, they may attack some notorious individuals, as in the case of Ramanand Yadav mentioned above.

However the MCC, finding that mass pressure and propaganda, combined with selective individual annihilation was not a sufficient response since the state was often in open collusion with the Senas, decided to retaliate in a different manner. After one landlord massacre in 1987, they planned a counter attack. Mobilising hundreds of peasants mainly from the backward castes, they attacked the Rajput families of Dalechak-Baghaura village, most of whom were activists of the landlord armies. What was the background to the incident?

Aurangabad is one of the strong feudal centers in Bihar. Its landlords claim that they are kings, some tracing their ancestry to Rana Pratap. Among the more notorious landlords at the district level are Satyendra Narayan Singh and Ram Naresh Singh alias Lootan Babu. Triveni Singh, Samresh Singh and Abhan Singh were the local landlords of Dalechak-Baghaura. All of them had ruled unchallenged for many years. But recently after the peasants in the district had set up powerful Krantikari Samitis in many villages in the area, their authority was under attack.

Specifically tension had developed over some ongoing disputes in the neighbouring villages and the landlords launched an attack on Sheshani village on April 19, 1987. There were three immediate causes. Firstly the Krantikari Kisan Committees had banned the selling and buying of 150 acres of land owned by the Mahanta of Janibigha village. This land was bought by Lootan Singh who kept it under his control. But after the Kisan Committee destroyed the office of Babu Lootan Singh in Salupora, his tractors were burnt and his henchman Krishna Kahar was killed. The red flag was hoisted over the land. Thus Babu Lootan Singh was already enraged.

Secondly the land around Ajan and hundreds of Mahua trees were owned by the Kisan Samiti. And the landlords in this area were eager to hit back.

Thirdly a clash which had occurred in October 1986 had disturbed the landlords and they wanted to take revenge on the Maoist Communist Centre for that incident.

It was well known that the activists of the MCC and the Kisan Samiti used to come and stay at Sheshani very regularly. Some of the Kisan samiti leaders also came from the same village therefore the landlords launched a pre-planned attack on Sheshani. Eight people were killed and seven were injured including a two year old child and an eighty year old man along with some women. Many houses were burnt down. Following this Red Defence Corps led the counter attack on Dalelchak-Baghaura. The target was the Rajput landlords responsible for the killings in Sheshani. Forty-four people were killed in the action. The landlords were fear stricken. The peasants overjoyed at their ability to hit back.

The incident created an uproar in the media and a shock among the landlords. But once again they tried to over emphasise the caste nature of the attack, while failing to explain the class antagonisms that led to the killings.

Following this there was a temporary lull in the landlord attacks. But by 1990 they had restarted and in 1991 two massacres were carried out in quick succession by the Savarna Liberation Front (SLF). This led to the second retaliatory attack in 1991 in Bara village. It was the headquarters of Ramadhar Singh alias 'Diamond', the 'Commander' of the SLF, which had recently perpetuated the massacres in Main-Barasimha and Sawanbigha. Thirty seven Bhumihars, all members of the SLF were killed in the action. Significantly peasants from all castes including some Brahmins and Bhumihars, were mobilised by the MCC. This disproved the claims that it was a 'caste killing'. This time the victims were all members of the SLF, unlike in Dalelchak-Baghaura where some family members of the landlords had also died. The Bara killings dealt an effective blow at the power of the SLF, even as it served as a warning to the other landlord armies over the power of the peasants.

Building The Red Resistance Areas

While supporting the landlord armies on the one hand, the state has turned almost the whole of South and Central Bihar into a virtual police camp. Large contingents of BSF, CRPF and the Gujarat Armed Police are stationed in special camps along with the Bihar Military Police. Raids on villages are a routine affair. Houses are searched and utensils and grain damaged. Many people are arbitrarily detained. Women are molested and raped. These operations go under various names— Operation Rakshak, Operation Black Panther etc and have increased in width and intensity as the peasant movement advances. By far the worst of the police atrocities was the one perpetrated at Arwal.

Arwal

Jehanabad was a sub-division of Gaya district till April 1, 1986. On the day it was declared a separate police district in response to an assurance given by the Chief Minister of Bihar to landowners of the area that "the Naxalites" would be firmly dealt with. On April 16, C.R. Kaswan was appointed Superintendent of Police (SP), Jehanabad. He had mission to kill.

Arwal is a small town in Jehanabad. For some months earlier there was a dispute between nine Backward Caste families led by Bharat Sao and one Razak, an engineer of the Irrigation Department, over a small plot of land. While the families claimed that they had developed the land and acquired rights by virtue of living on it for many years, the engineer Razak produced a (possibly forged) 52-year old document claiming that the land belonged to his brother. Though Razak came from a Scheduled Caste background, as an engineer he was able to manipulate the local authorities and secure an order in his favour. In February therefore he build a wall around the disputed site, blocking both access and drainage facilities to the huts of the nine families. As the harrassment

grew, Bharat Sao contacted the MKSS.

On April 19, 1986 a large public meeting was organised by the MKSS at Arwal. The peasants from the nearby villages who had all assembled demolished the wall, planted red flag and helped the nine BC families take possession of the land. Then they moved on to the Gandhi Pustakalaya Maidan, a ground enclosed on three sides. The meeting was in progress and songs and slogans filled the air. Another struggle appeared to have been successfully accomplished.

Then at 4 p.m. SP Kaswan arrived at the site. With police surrounding the maidan on three sides, he parked his jeep at the gate. Suddenly all hell broke loose as he ordered the police to fire. Bullets whizzed through the maidan. The crowd ran screaming. But there was virtually no exit except a small hole in one of the walls. After 20 minutes of firing 11 lay dead (another 12 of the injured were to die later). Many more were injured. It was 'Independent' India's own mini-Jallianwalla Bagh... Arwal caused a national outrage. In Bihar, the Arwal Narsanhar Sangarsh Morcha, (Struggle Front against Arwal Massacre) which convened many public meetings and one massive gherao of the Bihar Assembly launched a massive campaign for the dismissal of the policemen involved. Throughout India also there was widespread condemnation of the incident. Arwal became a symbol of police lawlessness in Bihar and elsewhere.

Besides massacres like this, the police regularly attack the peasant activists. Many comrades have fallen to police bullets or just been liquidated in fake encounters. The lives of many of them have been closely linked to the development of the peasant movement.

Comrade Kamdeo (Dara Singh) Yadav... the son of a middle peasant... leaving college to work as a railway labourer... later an activist of the Forward Bloc (Rahi) from 1967, which raised revolutionary slogans in favour of Naxalbari. But after Rahi surrendered to Indira Gandhi, Dara became a 'real' Naxalite... he joined the MCC... and with his talents as an organiser as well as a singer he became an important organiser. On August 7, 1984 he was surrounded by the police while holding a meeting of the KKS. With his hands tied behind his back, he was shot dead by the DSP Suresh Paswan. His dying words were, "Long Live Agrarian Revolution".

Comrade Rameshwar (Bachhan) Yadav... the son of a middle peasant who left school after the 8th. In his job in the collieries of Shahbad and as a milk vendor in Tatanagar, he often clashed with the local goondas.

This brought him in contact with the MCC in 1976 and he soon emerged as an important peasant leader especially renowned for his skill in leading armed actions. Comrade Bachhan was shot dead by the Bihar Military Police while conducting a meeting in Lenjoa village in Hazaribagh district in 1985. Ironically the date was January 26...

After the Bara incident mass terror was unleashed in the neighbouring villages. Hundreds were arrested and over 180 people were charged with the offence of murder. The trial has been speedily completed (no one has yet been convicted for any of the numerous massacres of Dalits all these years) and seven activists have been sentenced to death. But the police have their own way of dealing with those exonerated by the courts— in April this year Comrade Akela an area commander of the MCC was shot dead and just three days after the judgement, Comrade Ram Naresh Yadav another area commander, who had been released by the court, was also murdered in an encounter.

The brutal might of the state was exemplified in the treatment handed out to revolutionary poet Veerendra 'Vidrohi'. Soon after the Damha-Khagadi massacre of dalits in 1988 the CM of Bihar came to visit the villages. He made the usual assurances, but this only angered the people. After all the same CM had come and given the same assurances at the neighbouring villages of Nonhi-Nagwan just two months earlier. 'Vidrohi' in anger, smeared the CM's face with black soot. In return he was jailed— charged under Section 124-A (Sedition) and 307 (Attempt to Murder) IPC. 'Vidrohi' remained in jail for many years.

The Peasants Fight Back

The repression however has not gone unchallenged. Instances of mass resistance indicate that the peasants are being mobilised in the war against the state. On March 24, 1986 the police arrested Jagdeo Sharma, an activist of the MKSS at Chattanpur. The peasants came onto the streets in large numbers. As cries of "Jagdeo Sharma ko Riha Karo" (Release Jagdeo Sharma) rose in the air, a number of the peasants gheraoed the police van and snatched Comrade Sharma out of their clutches. In this act of heroic resistance one young activist, Comrade Siddhi Ram was martyred.

The scene was repeated in village Bhawardah of Panki block in Palamau in 1988. A police party which had repeatedly raided the villages in search of activists involved in the struggle for mahua rights, was surrounded by hundreds of women. The cornered policemen

attempted to fire, but the militant women could not be cowed down. They snatched the guns from the police and beat them up severely. One policeman was killed while the others ran away....

Whether in Bara or Bhawardah as the organised people learn to resist, the words of the revolutionaries of Birbhum uttered so many years ago must be causing nightmares to the rulers, 'if they try to arrest the revolution in West Bengal, will Punjab, Bihar or Andhra remain quiet...?'

The response of the Bihar peasants is loud and clear. And as the waves of struggle continue to sweep the area, the whole of South and Central Bihar is aflame with the fire of revolt. The lessons of Naxalbari have been learnt and as the mass movements are combined with actions by the armed guerilla squads, the plan to establish a 'Red Resistance Area' in Bihar no longer seems a distant dream.

The MKSS was banned after Arwal...and so was the MCC. But both continue to advance. The MKSS was reorganised secretly, and new mass fronts to lead the peasant struggle are being set up. With the support of a powerful movement of poor and landless peasants the CPI(ML) (PU) has begun to organise fresh struggles and by taking up the demands of the rich and middle peasants like irrigation and power is laying the basis for building the united front among the peasantry. Its armed squads too have taken up actions against hated landlords and powerful dacoits which symbolise the increasing power of the people.

The MCC, which had been built as an underground party from the very beginning, has also withstood the ban and continues to advance. Under its leadership the Krantikari Kisan Committees are wielding increasing influence in the villages, supervising land distribution and in some cases even production. Recently the armed squads of the Party have launched some military type attacks on the police and para-military forces. The peasants war of liberation is advancing steadily forward.

In recent years, attempts at co-ordination between the two organisations leading these struggles and also with other revolutionary groups have begun. Demonstrations in Patna under the banner of the Lok Sangram Morcha and the Jan Suraksha Sangh have brought almost a lakh of peasants onto the streets. Just as the "spectre of communism" once haunted Europe, the movement in Bihar must be causing nightmares to the Indian rulers.

The Flaming Fields and Forests

They were in the midst of a discussion when the warning shout came. The lookout, a 12 year old boy from the village, had raised the alarm. 'Police!' The members of the squad decided to try and get away. They made a dash towards the Pranhita river which was flowing just 200 metres away. On the other side lay the A.P. forest, and safety. As the police jeep entered the village they were just beginning the dash through the open fields. So when the shots rang out and the bullets hit one of them in the back, he was still 50 metres from the river. His dying cry was 'CPI(ML) (People's War) Zindabad!'

It was afternoon on November 2, 1980. The village—Moinbinpetta. Taluka—Sironcha. District—Gadchiroli. Maharashtra. The martyr's name was Peddi Shankar.

His home was Betampalli in the Adilabad district of A.P. It was a part of the Singareni coal belt, and Peddi Shankar had grown up amidst scenes of extreme poverty due to miserable wages ; of sudden deaths due to accidents in the underground pits, of violence and rape by the contractors and their goondas. It disturbed him, and so when his friend Gangaram (who himself was martyred later on) told him about the Naxalites, it was only natural that he got involved in their activities.

discontinuing his studies in 1977 he plunged into the work of building up the Radical Youth League in his home town. He led struggles against slum demolitions, for refund of the Compulsory Deposit Scheme and one mass agitation against the police following a case of rape by the nephew of one of the contractors. In 1978 he was elected as State Executive Committee member of the RYL and received a Mao Badge from the organisation for his heroic participation in these struggles. And in 1980, responding to the call of the Party, he crossed over the borders to begin organising the peasants of Gadchiroli. By then Karimnagar and Adilabad districts of A.P. were aflame with peasant struggles and it was this message that he carried across the Pranhita river....

Analysing the Past

The Srikakulam movement had suffered a setback by 1971 and through sporadic actions were being carried out in Telengana, the tempo of the peasant struggle had subsided. The majority of the old leadership had been killed, the remaining few were in jail. Mistakes had obviously been committed and regrouping and giving a new direction to the movement was a daunting task. Attempts at reorganising were begun by, among others Comrades, Kondapalli Seetaramiah, Satyamurthy, Raoof and Appalasuri, some of whom were veterans of the Telengana days. The first task therefore, before the new reorganised committee, was an assessment of the reasons for the setback that had been suffered. The next was to draw up a plan for advancement.

By 1973-74 the broad outlines for both had emerged (though the two documents containing the understanding—'Self Critical Review—Ten Years summing Up' and 'Tactical Line' were only finalised and formally adopted at the formation of the CPI(ML) (People's War) on April 22, 1980). In essence the AP State Committee assessed that the period 1967-72 was of crucial significance for the Indian Communist movement. It marked the break with the parliamentarism and economism that had dominated during the CPI and CPM days and had brought armed struggle back onto the agenda of Indian revolution. Hailing the sacrifices of the hundreds of martyrs mainly from among the youths, the document emphasised that by evolving a correct programme for the Indian revolution, Naxalbari had been both a decisive turning point and an inspiration for the Indian masses. Though mistakes had been made, the positive contribution of that period far outweighed its negative aspects. Criticising the approach of those like Satyanarayan Singh, the A.P. Committee felt that in the future the Party must build on the positive aspects of the past while getting rid of the negative ones. What were the main weaknesses? Firstly, there was an incorrect assessment of the era and of the national and international situation, leading to many overestimations.³ Thus assessments like those that the Third World War had begun, or that India will be liberated by 1975 were made, which were proved to be incorrect in practice. Secondly, a neglect of the mass line resulted in the failure to mobilise the people effectively and build strong and functioning mass organisations and a conscious mass base for the

3 – See Notes

armed struggle. Thirdly, due to an incorrect understanding of 'annihilation' as the highest form of class struggle, the guerilla warfare could not be properly built up and many potential allies were pushed into the enemy camp. Other political and organisational weaknesses and steps for a rectification campaign were also outlined so as to further advance the armed agrarian revolution.

The Road Forward

The 'tactical Line' which emerged from this understanding became the basis for the new practice that was implemented in A.P. and later on in the other units of the CPI(ML)(People's War). It envisaged the need to combine the building of militant mass movements on the partial issues of the people with the long term political task of completing the New Democratic Revolution. Alongside mobilising the peasantry in mass struggle on immediate issues and implementing the slogan of 'Land to the Tiller', it was also necessary to form armed guerilla squads and local village selfdefence squads under the leadership of the Party. Thus, stage by stage, the armed struggle could be advanced so that the CPI(ML)'s perspective of building guerilla zones, establishing liberated areas, surrounding the cities from the countryside and thus capturing power in the process of a protracted people's war could be achieved.

As a first step the Party began the task of building up mass organisations to lead the movements of the people. Student groups which were already working under different banners in the districts of Warangal, Hyderabad, Vishakapatnam and Tirupati were united under a single banner—the Radical Students Union (RSU). At its first Conference held in 1975, the RSU clearly rejected the wrong understanding of the student movement being propagated by other revolutionary groups and became the pioneer of the many revolutionary student organisations that grew up in different states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Delhi, Bihar and in later years, united under the banner of the All India Revolutionary Students Federation.

But before other mass movements, or mass organisations could be established or the student movement gather any momentum the Emergency was declared in 1975. Over 60 activists of the RSU were detained under MISA and six student comrades were martyred. Organisational work also continued secretly in the villages of Karimnagar and Warangal with local struggles against landlords or the government. In the Singareni belt too, the activists of the party

attempted to force close links with the workers struggles. Braving the repression, Radical students and youth conducted propaganda campaigns and supported all the worker's struggles. But under the dark veil of the Emergency there was hardly any hint of the mass awakening that was to shortly follow.

The lifting of Emergency, and the coming to power of the Janata Party with its programme for 'restoring democracy', provided a chance to the Communists. The revolutionaries in A.P. were quick to seize it. Combating the wrong trend which hailed the electoral defeat of Indira Gandhi almost as a revolution, and also that which failed to realise the significance of the lifting of the Emergency, the A.P. comrades decided to take full advantage of the relative lull in the repression. A massive campaign for the release of political prisoners was taken up. Widespread posterizing, huge public meetings and a mass torchlight procession at Godabarikhani all heralded the willingness of the people to come out into streets and battle for their rights.

At this juncture the A.P. State Committee issued their Resolution of August 1977 which called for the temporary suspension of the armed struggle. The Party argued that due to various factors the armed squads were now continuing the armed struggle only in name. Given the temporary lessening of the repression and the awakened democratic consciousness among the people, it was necessary to utilise the opportunities to the full and build wide mass movements. In this way a conscious mass base and support for the armed struggle could be created to enable the Party to advance the agrarian revolution along the path of a protracted people's war.

The mass struggles of this period transformed the movement and shortly turned Karimnagar and Adilabad into areas of intense peasant struggle.

Jagityal 'Jaith Yatra'

The first rumblings of the explosion that was to follow in these regions was heard in mid 1977. A 'Go-to-the-Villages' campaign was organised by the Party. Dividing into small teams, a large number of students and youth fanned out in the villages of Karimnagar with the messages of 'Boycott Elections' and 'Join the Agrarian Revolution'. The call to reject the false assurances of the parliamentary parties and launch widespread struggles against every form of social and economic oppression was a grand success.

The peasants, especially of Jagityal and Sircilla taluks, responded with great enthusiasm. Whenever the organisers went, they were able to form committees and start struggles against the local landlords. Strikes for wage increases, campaigns for the release of bonded labourers, resistance against different types of caste and gender discrimination became the order of the day. In many villages, units of the Ryothu Coolie Sangham (RCS) were formed. They started social boycotts of the most oppressive landlords, and soon all the exploited and labouring sections of the village responded to this call. Simultaneous by praja panchayats (Or people's courts) were set up as parallel bodies to the landlord dominated ones which had hitherto ruled over the village.

Another 'Go-to-the Village' campaign the next year following the 2nd State Conference of the RSU provided a further impetus to the peasants. Thus, when the newly formed Radical Youth League ((RYL) held its first State Conference at Guntur in June 1978, almost 7,000 youths from these two taluks attended.

Greatly inspired by the Conference, the peasant youths returned to the villages for a fresh wave of struggles. Landlords were forcibly brought before praja panchayats and made to answer for their crimes. Over 800 acres of land was occupied and lakhs of rupees collected as refunds by the landless peasants in 30 villages of Jagityal alone. In this setting, the Sangham gave a call for a rally in Jagityal town on September 8, 1978.

The first mass rally of the peasantry in many years the 'Jaith Yatra' was a resounding success. The sight of 35,000 peasants marching under the banner of the Sangham created panic among the landlords. Some fled to the cities hoping to pressurise the government to take action against the activists. Others were more brazen and decided to take the law into their own hands. A few days after the rally, the landlord of China Metupally along with his nephew, opened fire on a peasant demonstration injuring 20. The peasants retaliated by destroying his crops and razing his nephew's house to the ground.

The government was waiting for such an incident. Decrying the Naxalite activity in the talukas, it declared both Jagityal and Sircilla as 'Disturbed Areas' and set up a large number of police camps in landlords' houses throughout the region. Over 3,000 people were implicated in false cases and more than 800 jailed.

Rather than entering into a headlong confrontation with the police at this stage, when the peasant movement was still relatively weak, the

Party decided to expand into the neighbouring regions. Those youth who fled from their villages to escape the police repression were sent to the neighbouring taluks to spread the message of their experiences in Jagityal. By the time those arrested were released on bail, the movement had spread to the Adilabad district. Soon Jagityal was being re-enacted in all the taluks of Karimnagar and Adilabad.

Peddapalli, Manthani, Luxettipetta, Khanpur, Asifabad—the Sangham banner was being hoisted everywhere. Frightened landlords tried to sell off their lands, but the Sangham issued a decree banning the sale on the ground that all the landlords' lands actually had been illegally seized from the peasants and would one day be confiscated back from them without compensation.

Two major sources of income for the forest contractors who were very powerful in the Adilabad region were, the tendu-leaf collections and the arrack sales. The contracts for each area were auctioned annually by the government, and private contractors made crores of rupees in the process. The Sangham intervened in both these trades. Organising the labourers who collected the tendu leaves from the forests, they were successful in getting the wage rates increased from a meagre Rs. 3 per 100 bundless to amounts between Rs. 15 to Rs 18. The Sangham also began overseeing the distribution of arrack contracts. Formerly the government collected an excessively high revenue from the contractors, and local landlords also demanded their hefty tributes, so the price of arrack was unreasonably high, though the plight of the labourers who manufactured the liquor was miserable. But after the Sangham's intervention, the government's share was reduced, the landlord's levy abolished and the price of arrack drastically reduced. It was another blow at the social authority of the landlords.

Simultaneously, the land struggles continued either with the harvesting of crops planted by the landlords on village land, or for the regularisation of the plots being cultivated by the tribals in the forest. Much of the land taken over from the tribals by the Forest Department for cultivation was forcibly reoccupied.

Indervelli

Thus when the First Conference of the Girijan Ryothu Coolie Sangham was planned to be held at Indervelli on April 20, 1981, it was widely expected that thousands of tribals would attend and it would be a grand success. Like Karimnagar before it, Adilabad too was becoming a

centre of intense struggle.

On the previous day itself, the town presented a colourful sight. Red flags flew everywhere and red banners proclaimed 'Girijan Ryothu Coolie Sangham Vardillali' (Girijan Ryothu Coolie Sangham Zindabad). The large police presence caused some tension, but the activists took it in their stride. For, by now, it had become common at all peasant gatherings.

But, as daylight dawned, it became obvious that this was not going to just another day. The police seemed as if on battle alert, and even machine gun posts had been set up in a couple of trees near the main road. Then the news spread like wildfire. The Conference had been banned.

The Girijans however could not be deterred. Thousands had come, walking long distances for the meeting. As the defiant tribals braved lathi charges and marched towards the Conference venue, the police opened fire. It was a massacre. The exact casualty may never be known, but at least 60 people laid down their lives that day.

A reign of terror followed. As wounded survivors recounted tales of horror in village after village, the police sealed off the entire district. No reporters could enter, no teams of civil liberties activists were allowed in. For the next few days the tribals lived in fear and virtual isolation. But shortly a team of doctors under the People's Doctors Association, entered the villages and moving among the Gonds, organised both relief camps and May Day meetings.

Some time passed before youth and students could once again take up wide campaigns in the district and help the local organisers reorganise the tribals. But the sustained efforts that were put in bore fruit and even in the face of severe police harassments, the following year on April 20, 1982, a huge martyrs memorial was erected at the site of the firing at a well attended public meeting.

Thus, in the short span of a few years, a strong movement of the peasants had developed in the districts of Karimnagar and Adilabad.

The 'Guerilla Zone Perspective'

While the local struggles were being built up, the A.P. leadership was also trying further for the process of all-India unity. As noted earlier, in the post-Emergency period efforts to reunite the groups who had been a part of the COC in 1973 were attempted, but failed to make much headway. Finally, in 1980, the A.P. and T.N. State Committees merged

to form the CPI(ML)(People's War)

Meanwhile in 1979, the A.P. State Committee had presented a plan for the development of a military perspective for their movement, what has come to be known as the 'Guerilla Zone Perspective'. The party called for the building up of armed squads and turning the four Northern Telengana districts of Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam into a guerilla zone. Drawing lessons from the experience of the Telengana struggle, they argued that it was necessary to make plans to develop some work in the forest areas surrounding these regions so that the mass base there could be useful as a rear area for the squads to retreat in the face of severe enemy attack in the plains. Based on this, in 1979 one-third of the leadership i.e. one third of the members of all Party Committees were redeployed to work in the forests.

The work begun in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, Bastar in M.P. and Koraput in Orrissa under this perspective was extremely important. For, not only was it the necessary extension of the Karimnagar and Adilabad struggles, but in later years it attained a central importance in the All-India strategy of the Party. The sweeping response that the squads received from the tribals helped the speedy development of the armed struggle and today the CPI(ML)(PW) is working with the perspective of building a Guerilla Zone in Dandakaranya—the forest belt of central India.

The Guerilla Zone perspective made it crucial for the Party to sustain its work in the forest areas of Adilabad. But there was also another important lesson from the experience in the first round of struggle. It was the ability of the mass movement to sustain itself in the face of repression.

Prior to 1978, the peasant movements had always floundered in the face of severe repression. The response of the revolutionaries earlier had been to increase guerilla attacks and annihilations both of the class enemies and the police forces. But now the events in Karimnagar and Adilabad demonstrated that the mass movement and even some level of legal mass organisations could be sustained and effectively used to combat the police attacks.

In fact at this stage, guerilla attacks were virtually not a part of the Party's tactics. In the plain areas, the organisers moved in small squads of three with concealed weapons, mainly for self-defence against the landlord's goondas. Occasionally attacks on aggressive landlords and police informers were carried out, but the primary task of the

organisers was building up the mass movement.

The squads in the forest areas as well were primarily entrusted with the task of building up the mass movement though they moved about in military uniforms and with weapons, at the primary stage their military role was limited. Aside from propaganda, in fact, they too only occasionally used their weapons in actions against police informers or for self-defence.

Though the forest areas of central India cut across various states, there is a remarkable similarity in the whole region. The inhabitants are largely Gond tribals, and though there is some level of agricultural cultivation, the tribals largely live on their earnings from the collection of forest produce. Tendu leaves (used for manufacture of beedis) and bamboo are the two major products which are collected from the forests. While the former was till recently dominated by private contractors (who still operate in some of the districts), the latter is controlled by the two large paper mills in the region, one at Ballarshah in Maharashtra owned by the Thapars, and the other at Sirpur Kagaznagar in Adilabad. Both made enormous profits previously by paying the tribals who are engaged for collecting or cutting, extremely, poor wages. But that was till the entry of the squads, and the formation of the tribals' own mass organisations.

Gadchiroli

Sironcha, Aheri and Ettapalli are there southernmost taluks of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra bordering on the Adilabad and Karimnagar districts of A.P. It was the first region outside that state where the struggle spread. The killing of Peddi Shankar could not deter the squads which had entered Maharashtra, and they continued the work of building the Adivasi Kisan Shetmajoor Sanghatana (AKSS). From 1980 onwards massive struggles for the increase of tendu leaf collection rates were launched. And the tribals achieved immediate success. Where once the contractors had paid Rs 2 and Rs. 3 per hundred bundles, now under the Sanghatana the tribals demanded and got much more. In the first year itself the rates were increased to Rs. 11 and in the areas where the AKSS was strong it went as high as Rs. 17 and Rs. 18. It helped to further popularise the movement among the local people.

The forest movement also developed in Bastar and Koraput and in newer districts of Andhra Pradesh like East Godavari by taking up

issues of the oppression of the tribals by the contractors and the forest officials. But Gadchiroli was the first district outside A.P. where an active mass organisation was set up and local youths came forward to take the initiative in leading the mass struggles. The AKSS grew from strength to strength and in 1984 it decided to hold its First Conference at Kamlapur in the Aheri Taluk. But once more the police banned the Conference and hundreds of those on way to attend it. The tribals however, were undeterred and even as the police took over the main roads and the Conference venue, they gathered in thousands in the forest around Kamlapur. Ultimately, though the Conference could not be held at the official venue, it was observed both in the forest around the villages and atleast in two jails in the region where the arrested activists were being detained.

The banning of the Conference, in fact, became big news in many districts of Maharashtra and focussed attention on the entry of the Naxalite movement to the state. The government was shaken and responded by scrapping system of auctioning the Tendu contracts. The trade was nationalised in the belief that even if the government incurred losses, if they refuse to hike the wage rates this year, then the popularity of the squads would be diminished. However, even this tactics failed to break the support base of the movement and the message of the struggle continued to spread like wild fire.

[Years later when the movement had not only spread to whole of the district, but even in the neighbouring states where mass peasant organisations were also formed, the tribals movement was reorganised and brought under a common banner The Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sanghatana (DAKMS).]

'Tell Them He Has Died A Martyr For The People'

Meanwhile the movement in Telengana continued to grow with struggles on a wide variety of issues. Then in 1982-83, the police repression took a new turn. Under the Telugu Desam regime of N.T. Rama Rao, 'encounters' began once again. Within a short period, some of the leading peasant organisers were shot dead— Devender Reddy, Palle Kanakiah, Haribhushan.

Each of their lives was a glorious example of the hard work and sacrifice that had gone into building the peasant movement.

Comrade Karnakiah came from a toddy tappers family in Karimnagar. He was drawn towards the revolutionary movement in 1974, and even during the repressive Emergency regime, organised the people in his native village against corruption of contractors implementing a housing scheme under the 20 Point Programme. Organising Go-to-the-villages campaigns in 1977 and 78, he led a large group of youths from the Huzurabad taluk to the first RYL State Conference in June 1978 and was elected as the State Committee member from Karimnagar. In the struggles that followed, Kanakiah was always at the head of the peasants. Soon repression forced him to go underground, but he was arrested in 1980. Torture and jail worsened his deteriorating health (Kanakiah suffered from heart and respiratory problems), but after release he helped enthuse the peasants even in the face of police attacks and taught them to resist the repression. During this period, he moved to Chennur taluk in Adilabad to work among the tribals. After escaping police bullets twice before, Comrade Kanakiah was finally shot down in Pinnaram village in Chennur in 1983.

Comrade Mamidala Haribhushan too had been active in the student movement in 1974. Coming from a dalit family in Warangal district, he organised the village youth to fight against the oppression of the local landlord Kamlakar Rao during the Emergency. Participating in the Go-to-the-villages campaign in 1977 and 78, he became a popular peasant leader. When arrest and repression forced him to go underground, (during one period in jail he was severely tortured and his leg was broken), he devoted special attention to organise the Lambada tribals in Warangal. The liquor contractors, who were notorious exploiters, trembled at his name. On April 16, 1983, while he was resting at Chandragiri Thanda, a tribals hamlet, a group of innocent-looking frog catchers arrived. They were actually a special 'anti-Naxal' squad of the police in disguise. Surrounding his hut, they began to fire indiscriminately. The peasant movement lost one more of its glorious sons.

With every encounter there was a spate of protests. Each funeral turned into a massive demonstration, each fake encounter became one more chance to expose the police brutality.

More importantly, each sacrifice inspired a hundred more.

The peasant movement continued to spread, and by early 1985 virtually every district of Telengana was aflame. Struggles broke out everywhere. Brutal repression was unleashed and many comrades were

martyred. By now, the struggle had moved into an open confrontation with the state.

Under the impact of what was happening in the villages, workers and students too began to be mobilised in increasingly large numbers...

Lal Bano, Gulami Chodol

The Early Beginnings

In the early 70s, in Regional Engineering College, Warangal, a number of students were attracted to Radical politics— among them were Comrade Janardhan (later to become a martyr at Giraipally) and Comrade Gajjela Gangaram. A native of Belampalli in Adilabad, Gangaram joined the Engineering Course on a government scholarship. He became one of the active radicals and during every holiday began organising the youths of his native town. Soon they were a tight group —Gangaram, Peddi Shankar, Puli Madaniah, Gangarajam. It was the Emergency, but they built up small struggles of the people in different pockets. Gangaram was arrested, tortured and detained in jail...

Bellampalli is one of the many mining towns in the Singareni coal belt which stretches across Adilabad, Karimnagar and Khammam districts. It is rich in coal deposits, but its people are badly exploited. The miners have to work in hazardous conditions and never know, when they enter the underground mines each day, whether they will return alive. Crowded together in ramshackle slums, their lives are constantly threatened by goondas and contractors. Years of the 'trade unionism' of AITUC, INTUC, CITU and BMS had done nothing to change the situation. After all, most of them were virtually agents of the management.

But the conditions forced the workers to fight. Spontaneous militant battles. For wages. For better working conditions. Against harassments. Even the Emergency, in which hundreds of workers were arrested and many killed in police firing, could not bring a calm to the region. Like Gangaram, others were active in other towns... Mancherial... Godavarikhani... Kothagudem.

When the Emergency was lifted, there was a big campaign for the release of political prisoners. A huge public meeting on July 16, 1977, at Godavarikhani ended in a militant torch-light procession. Many

came out of the jails, among them Gangaram.

He plunged into the struggle immediately. On August 7, 1977 a Betterment Committee was formed by the management and some local merchants. They began a spate of slum demolitions, but the workers stood resolute and won their demand for alternate accommodation. Then a series of struggles broke out in the pits. The first widespread strike was against the failure of the management to give full refund of the funds collected under the compulsory Deposit Scheme as promised by the Government. The movement grew despite the hesitancy or even opposition from leadership, grew despite the hesitancy or even opposition from leadership of the established unions and after a month achieved victory. Another confrontation with the management broke out over the issue of restoration of bonus. In all these actions, the Radicals were active. Propagating extensively about the issue, they helped to organise many militant actions. Most of the initial contacts with the workers was made at their residential, rather than work spots. Gradually units of the newly formed youth organisation, Radical Youth league, were set up in the bastis.

The first State conference up in the RYL at Guntur was attended by a large delegation of young workers. At the conference, Comrade Gangaram was elected Vice-President of the RYL.

The Burning Coals

Greatly enthused by the conference, the workers began fresh battles in the mines. The party understood that no lasting organisation could be formed among the workers without building units at the workplace as well. Since the bureaucratic leadership of all the central Trade Unions refused to take up regular struggles against the management, the Radicals now evolved the method of bypassing the Union leadership, building pit committees and taking up immediate struggles on every small issue. It was hard....and dangerous work. They had to confront the management, the police and local goondas, Gangaram and others faced arrest many times. But a number of struggles were bravely fought out, and many victories were won. Each victory gave a fresh impetus to the activists and widened the mass support for the Radicals.

But the experience of the CPI was a constant warning against the danger of doing only trade union work. So the workers were being trained to wage solidarity struggles as well. In April 1978, a successful

one-day bandh was organised against the rape of Rameeza Bee by the police in Hyderabad. Thus there was already a high level of awareness, and when a rape incident occurred in Bellampalli itself, the protests were unstoppable. Rajeshwari, the wife of a coalmine worker, had been raped by Raghu, the nephew of a local contractor, and then hung to death. The police registered a case of suicide, but the real story spread quickly. A huge crowd gathered at the police station—men, women, children—and demanded that Raghu be produced before them.

The police, in open collusion with the culprit, opened fire. Four workers were killed. A massive wave of repression began. Gangaram, peddi Shankar, Gangarajam, puli Madaniah were forced to leave the area...each continued-to build peasant struggles in different regions... By 1981 Gangaram, Peddi Sankar and Gangarajam became martyrs... while after many escapes Puli Madaniah was shot by the police in 1985.

SIKASA

But in foundations that had been build by them could not be washed away. Combining solidarity struggles with trade union type of mobilisation, the work of the Radicals in Singareni continued to grow. Then in April 1981, a small struggle began in mandamarri division which soon burst into a massive explosion. An injured worker was arrested by the police for allegedly abusing the doctor who certified him fit despite an accident. A spontaneous strike began, and the issue appeared, settled when the worker was released late in the night. But when his colleagues reported back to work the next day, they were informed that they were to lose wages for the 'illegal' strike. In fact an old Act of the British Government was invoked—the infamous Defence of India Rules under which wages for 8 days could be deducted for each day of 'illegal' strike. The workers once more put down their tools and within days other pits followed suit. The strike spread throughout the coal belt and when the workers achieved victory 56 days later, more than 60,000 had participated in the strike rejecting both the threats of the management and the corrupt leadership of the AIRTC, CITU, BMS and INTUC. During this historic battle, the Singareni Karmika Samakhya (SIKASA) i.e. Singareni Workers Federation was formed.

This was indeed a significant breakthrough for the Naxalite movement. Though workers had participated in actions in the earlier period and secret groups were built up in many factories, there was a

negative attitude towards the economic struggles of the working class. In later years some Naxalite parties had formed trade unions, but none of them could build up any widespread political influence among workers. But by beginning RYL units in the residential localities as a precursor of forming the trade union SIKASA, the CPI (ML) (PW) was successful in developing a militant trade union which consciously supports the politics of Naxalbari. SIKASA was to become a shining example of an embryonic form of the alliance between the working class and the peasantry that the CPI(ML) had resolved to build up many years earlier.

One of the organisers in this battle was Comrade Katla Mallesh, popularly known as Ramakant, an important leader of the Singareni workers for many years before he was murdered in the wave of repression that began in November 1991.....

But, before that, a brief glance at the student movement which threw up heroic organisers like janardhan, Gangaram, Haribhushan and so many others is necessary....

Go-to-the-Villages

Between 1967-71, hundreds of students had left their studies to join the peasant movement. Though Naxalbari inspired many in this manner, nowhere could a powerful student movement be built up. In the early 70s, students began to be organised under the banner of the Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU). But the PDSU leaders opposed any direct links with the peasant movement and saw their task as mainly doing solidarity actions.

Thus when the Andhra Pradesh Radical Student Union was formed in 1975 with the aim of building the student movement as part of the New Democratic Revolution, it was a historic first step. The RSU clearly stated that it followed the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought; that the students would work to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution; and that campaigns like 'Go-to-the Villages' would be undertaken by its members so as to arouse and help mobilise other sections of society. The police attacks on the organisation both before and during the Emergency where six activists were killed, 60 leaders detained under MISA and over 500 members put into custody, prevented much growth initially.

It was not till after the Emergency therefore the RSU could get properly functioning. Having rectified the earlier wrong understanding about the

student movement, the organisation operated on two levels. Firstly the partial struggles in which wide masses of students participated, and secondly, in propaganda campaigns to help organise other revolutionary classes.

From 1978, the RSU played a role in all student struggles throughout the state. In 1978 it initiated and led the state wide ITI and polytechnic students' struggle; the latter became almost an annual feature eventually culminating in a historic successful 104 days strike in 1984. Other struggles like the Homeopathic students strikes and the agitation by students of the Jawaharlal Nehru Technical University made RSU popular. And with the agitation of the Social Welfare Hostel Students, against capitation fees in Engineering Colleges, as well as numerous local issues, the RSU emerged as the most militant student organisation virtually throughout the state.

These partial struggles were combined with regular campaigns for propaganda or to mobilise other sections of the people. Widespread political propaganda on a number of issues and participation in activities like the agitation during the Rameeza Bee rape case in 1978, for nationalisation of the bus service in Vishakapatnam, against increase in bus fares and hotel rates in Guntur, alongside the hotel workers of Mehbobnager soon gave the RSU a popular image among the broad masses as well.

But by far most significant of the RSU activities was the 'Go-to-the Villages' campaigns. This was most concrete form by which the student movement could integrate with the peasantry, and had played a crucial role in helping to build the peasant movement in the state. These campaigns also helped to train the hundreds of students who gave up their studies to become full time peasant organisers and clearly made the RSU different from all other student organisations.

In fact, the peasant movement in Telengana had inspired and been helped by the growth of the RSU as a militant student organisation, especially in the schools and colleges of the region. The students' struggles made RSU a powerful force on campus, and many college functions and programmes were effectively used to propagate the message of the struggles among the wide masses.

At the same time the Go-to-the-Villages campaigns had earlier helped to build and now expand the peasant movement. The campaigns of 1977 and 1978 had built the peasant organisation in Jagityal and Sircilla and had helped to mobilise the peasants for the Jagityal rally. A

look at some of the statistics related to the 1984 village campaign provides an idea of just how popular and effective they were. That year over 1,100 students and youth, including 105 women participated. They covered a population of 50 lakhs spread over 2, 419 villages, led the peasants in land struggles to occupy 861 acres of land and built units of the RYL in 200 villages. This was accomplished in the face of severe harrassment by the police and landlords. At least 20 squads were arrested and some were badly beaten up in custody.

As the RSU activists became a thorn in the flesh of the landlords, the latter began supporting the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students wing of the BJP. Soon the ABVP was the main organisation for the landlords sons and their henchmen. As the ABVP goondas went around the colleges writing 'Lal Gulami Chodo' the RSU cadres replied 'Lal bano Gulami Chodo' But soon the verbal and ideological attacks gave way to a brutal onslaught against the revolutionary activists. Students in Hyderabad, Warangal, Jagityal and other places were physically attacked and in the early hours of December 4, 1982, Comrade Seshiah, a State Committee member of the RSU, was brutally murdered by them as he cycled around Nalgonda town doing his part time job of delivering papers. Invariably, the ABVP received supports from the police in all their attacks or often acted as informers leading to the arrest of leading cadres. Despite this open collusion with the authorities, however, ABVP found it extremely difficult to win any student elections in Northern Telengana.

By 1983, When the Fifth State Conference of RSU was held in Tirupati, its units were active in nearly all the districts of the State. In Warangal town, and in many other parts of Telengana, the popularity of the RSU leaders was so immense that they college elections in 1983 even when candidates were being illegally detained by the police. AS a result in 1984 the government banned all elections to the students councils in Kakatiya University and opened a police station in the Campus.

Even in the face of repression, the RSU led by valiant comrades like Nageshwara Rao, Swarnalatha, Vijaykumar and others continued to grow.

"My voice is a crime because I do not sing to their tunes"

No history of the Naxalite movement in A. P. would be complete without

a mention of the cultural movement and the mobilisation of intellectuals.

While many like the guerilla poet Subbarao Panigrahi were martyred, a new cultural army, Jana Natya Mandali (JNM) was being set up. It was to write and sing the songs of revolution and contribute in no small way to the mass awakening in the village of Telengana. No public meeting was complete without cultural pogrammes of the JNM and the haunting melodies of songs written and sung by the singers like Gaddar gained a tremendous popularity among the youths.

An especially striking feature of the JNM was the fact that it used the traditional folk art forms for its music. The Oggukatha and Burrakatha were used to telling effect to narrate the stories of the Giraipally martyrs, of Indervelli and Karamchedu. And in a three hour ballad "Ragal Jhanda" in a dance drama form the JNM singers described the whole story of how the tribals were mobilised by the forest squads.

The other side of ther cultural movement was the mobilisation of poets and writers under the banner of Viplava Rachityala Sangham (VIRASAM)-Revolutionary Writers Association (RWA). Poets like Cherabanda Raju symbolised the commitment of the writer to the revolutionary movement. In the 70s he had been implicated in two conspiracy cases. But even in jail he continued to write challenging words against the government. Harrassed and hounded by the police, Cherabandaraju lost his job, and was in and out of jail uptill 1980. Repeated detentions took a toll on his health, but in 1981 when he died of cancer he had lived up to his words.

"Live where I may

I remain a song dedicated to revolution."

Cherabandaraju was only one of the poets and writers who sought to capture the drama of the movement and convey it across the country. Many like Vara Vara Rao faced detention and harassments but continued to write the poetry of protest.

Besides writers, many other intellectuals were mobilised into the civil liberties movement that developed alongside the peasant struggles. From the post Emergency period when the civil liberties activists documented the large number of encounter deaths, almost all cases of so-called encounters were investigated and proved to be police murders. So effective were the propaganda campaigns of the civil liberties activists that the real meaning of the word encounter became

well understood in the Telugu press. In the 80s even the civil liberties activists became targets for the police, but that could not deter the large number of lawyers, doctors, teachers and others from continuing to do their bit.

By 1984 the movement in A.P. had emerged as an example to other revolutionary parties in the country. After the initial stress on building up a mass movement had succeeded in mobilising thousands of peasants, the party once again began to take up armed actions. Landlords who opposed and attacked the peasant activists, goondas who operated as the agents of the landlords and police informers were attacked by the armed squads. Some of the more notorious elements were annihilated, while others were given lesser punishments. The mass movements and squad actions were both combined to develop a movement with a wide mass base and militant image.

The forest movement however from the beginning had armed squads at its core. The dalams as they were popularly known, moved in full military dress and openly carried arms. Initially they were mainly propaganda squads with weapons used only for limited actions against landlords goondas or police agents but from the beginning, the party understood them as the embryonic forms of the Red Army.

In this manner, the party attempted to solve the questions that had remained unanswered in the practise of Naxalbari and Srikakulam. The wide mobilisation of different sections of society as well as the mobilisation of peasants in partial struggles, meant that there was a constant barrage of propaganda against the government's repressive polices. At the same time, squad actions were never way ahead of the consciousness of the people or the level of the movement and the organisation so that the people could both understand and readily withstand the repression that followed as the struggle intensified.

Both factors were tested in practice after 1985 when an intense period of repression virtually drove all the mass organisations underground.

Like Fish in the Water

Where public activity was banned in Telengana since 1984, after the conclusion of the AIRSF Conference at Hyderabad in 1985, there was a virtual ban on all activity of the Radicals throughout the state. Thousands were arrested and thrown into jails and the whole of the Northern Telengana was turned into a massive police camp. Mass repression—raids on villages, beatings, destruction of houses and foodgrains became a common practice. In the East Godavari district over 600 houses in different tribals hamlets in the Chintapalli forest areas were burnt down in mass raids. A large number of encounters took place as the police were given blanket permission to crack down on the Naxalite organisers. Almost 150 activists and sympathisers were gunned down, done to death in police lock-up or murdered by goondas with police backing. Students, peasants and workers—all became martyrs. Even the civil liberties movement was not spared—Dr. Ramanathan, Vice-President of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) and a popular paediatrician was gunned down in broad daylight in his dispensary by a group of plain-clothe policemen and Gopi Rajanna, an advocate from Jagityal was stabbed to death by the activists of the ABVP. Dr. Balagopal, Secretary of the APCLC, was implicated in false cases and thrown into jail and even the well known poet Vara Vara Rao was put behind bars. Cultural activists of JNM too were forced to go underground.

Organisers everywhere had to adopt newer methods to keep the mass organisations intact. Student comrades like Nageshwara Rao in Warangal and Ramakant in Karimnagar became adept at mobilising students secretly. Not an issue passed without RSU posters or pamphlets appearing in the town, and the number of seemingly spontaneous protests by students in different colleges was proof of the fact that RSU units continued to function from the underground. Peasant organisers took up the task of building village units secretly and began setting up an underground structure of village-level squads

of militants to fight back the police attacks. In Singareni, the activists would mingle with the mass of workers on their way to and from shift duty so that their movements remained invisible to the police spies. In all these areas, the organisers strived to maintain close links with the people, doing widespread propaganda and mobilising them under new names and joint fronts with other organisations.

Anti-Caste Struggle

Shortly after the repression began, Andhra Pradesh witnessed a big anti-reservation movement. This was led by the students of the upper castes organised under the banner of the Nava Sangarsh Samiti (NSS). This front was led by the Congress(I), TDP and BJP parties. The Dalits and other progressive organisations came together to defend the right to reservations and formed the Sama Sangram Parishad (SSP). Though the leadership of this front was in the hands of the Dalit leaders, in most of the districts the RSU cadres took over the leading role at the local level. While organising the students under the banner of SSP, they regularly brought out pamphlets explaining the stand of the revolutionaries on the issue, and distributed them widely through many secret but innovative methods. The long drawn agitation gave the RSU cadres some experience of working under different fronts, and similar types of steps were taken to build many local struggles under different names.

Thanks to their uncompromising role in the agitation, the Radicals had developed a good support base among the Dalits. Thus when the landlords of Karamchedu, the village of NTR's son-in-law, and also one of the richest villages in A. P., massacred a number of Dalits, they were once again able to mobilise the dalit youths and demonstrate in practice the seriousness with which the Naxalite movement was waging a battle against caste oppression. Though the movement against the Karamchedu outrage was led by an organisation called Dalit Mahasabha, a number of leading revolutionary cadres were in the actual forefront. Though there was a mass awakening and many huge public rallies, events demonstrated that the dalits could expect no justice from the courts. But the reformist leadership was unwilling to lead a bitter struggle against the criminals and finally when it was clear that no headway was being made in the police case, a squad of the CPI (ML) (PW) carried out the execution of Chenchuramiah, a relative of NTR and the landlord who had unleashed the violence in Karamchedu..

The action greatly enthused the dalit youths, for it was one of the few times that the killers had been punished. So when another ghastly caste pogrom took place on August 16, 1990 in Chundur village, the dalit youths were willing to respond militantly. Inspired by the fact that the Naxalites were participating in the struggle, they organised a mammoth funeral procession for those killed, which turned into a militant counter attack against the houses of the upper caste landlords. The militancy of the spontaneous outburst among the dalit youths after Chundur was partly a reflection of the involvement of the Naxalites in the agitation.

These are some of the more well known examples of how the CPI(ML) (PW)-like some other ML parties in other parts of the country are seeking to rectify the earlier mistakes made by the CPI of ignoring and even opposing the anti caste struggle. A hundred of other battles are being fought in each of the villages every day.

This provided them with the support base for the militant mobilisation against the anti-Mondal agitation in September-October 1990. The party called for a number of actions to oppose the casteist demands and slogans being raised by the agitators, including an immensely successful state wide bandh. A.P. was one of the few states where the anti-Mondal agitation was given a fitting reply.

Resisting the Onslaught

From 1983, many comrades had fallen as martyrs to the police bullets. In village after village memorials had been constructed in their name to keep alive the memory of their sacrifices. For the people these columns were rallying points, a constant inspiration even in the face of the worst repression. The police therefore began a systematic campaign to demolish these memorials and prevent the holding of memorial meetings and other such gatherings. Public protest was difficult in the face of this police onslaught, though wide propaganda followed each such attack.

Under these conditions, new forms of resistance arose. The squads of the Party, hitherto used only in self-defence against the police and to attack goondas and police agents now began to assume a new role. Though in the overall balance of forces, the movement was clearly on the defensive against the massive attacks, selective actions against the state machinery were launched. Notorious police officers, especially those known to have inflicted brutal tortures on arrested activists or

been directly responsible for the killing of well loved leaders were chosen as targets. In secretly planned and smoothly executed operations, squads annihilated a few Inspectors and even one DSP. Such attacks helped show up the fact that the police force could be tackled and the movement could hit back when attacked.

In the forests too, there were a limited number of planned ambushes against raiding police parties. The squads would concentrate their forces for a particular attack and often succeed in wiping out a whole group of policemen. The actions in Allampalli and Darragadda were executed with a precision and efficiency that revealed their sound understanding of military tactics. In both cases, the squads had mined the roads deep in the forest along which they knew a police raiding party would be approaching and lay in wait to open fire after the mine had done the initial damage. For the youths who were otherwise cowed down by the beatings and torture, it was an inspiring happening, for it revealed that with correct tactics, even a superior force could be humbled by the peasant guerilla squads.

Though these actions helped to restore the confidence of the people in the ability of the Party to hit at the state, they were of a nature which could be carried out only by armed and trained squads. Thus it was that another form of resistance, which developed more spontaneously, became even more popular among the masses and many of them tried to emulate it as well. That was kidnappings which began in Gurthedu in December 1987.

'Arrests' by the People

The squad had just finished its meal when the news reached them. Comrade Chandramouli, member of the East Godavari Divisional Committee and six others had been arrested in a series of police raids in the cities. Not only was the arrest of a senior comrade a serious blow organisationally, it also gave the police a chance to go on a propaganda campaign and score a moral victory. Everyone unanimously agreed that something had to be done. But what would be the most effective means of replying?

Only earlier in the day they had been discussing another important local happening—the visit of some IAS officers to a village nearby in connection with some tribals welfare schemes. Among them was S. Sankaran, a senior Secretary of the State Government. No one could say what made them connect the two incidents or how the idea

emerged, but suddenly the answer occurred to them "Let's arrest these fellows and bargain with the government for the release of our comrades."

Hectic preparations began. And early next morning as the jeeps carrying the government officials slowed to a halt to circumvent a 'fallen' tree, they were suddenly surrounded by a squad of armed guerillas. There was no resistance because the IAS officers had refused police escorts, knowing that the presence of the hated men in uniforms and police jeeps would only alienate them from the tribals. One of those arrested by the squad was sent off to hand over the demands for the release of the seven comrades from jail.

By evening the news had hit the headlines, and all across the country, people watched with bated breath, many marvelling at the sheer simplicity and audacity of the action. The government was caught in a trap. Though it summoned a crack commando battalion from Delhi, it was too scared to precipitate any action that may cause harm to the IAS officers. If that happened they would incur the wrath of the bureaucracy. As the drama carried on, it became clear that the government had been outmanouvre. Finally, they were forced to release the arrested comrades.

The all-powerful state had been humbled by the squad of poorly-equipped guerillas. Not only was it a slap in the face to the authorities, it also revealed a weak link in the state apparatus, a fact which other militant movements elsewhere in the country have also made use of.

This kidnapping and later swapping of the 'prisoners of war' soon became a popular form of protest throughout the state. Sometimes the actions were carried out by the party squads and effectively used. When in 1989 the North Telengana Regional Secretary Comrade Iliah and Comrade Rayamulu were arrested, the Party carried out a whole series of kidnappings. Though Iliah and Rayamulu had already been killed the actions forced the government to order an enquiry into their 'disappearance'. Similarly when Comrade Mallik, a member of the A.P. State Committee of the CPI(ML) (PW) and known for the popular poetry he wrote under the pen name of 'Agnitha Surudu' was captured by the police in 1991, his release was secured by arresting Sudhir Kumar, Youth Congress leader and son of the Union Minister, P. Shiv Shankar. The most common targets in other such actions were Mandal Panchayat Presidents, and other senior government functionaries, though lower level officers and men were sometimes kidnapped on the

initiative of the village level militants.

Destruction of public property— government offices, railway stations, buses etc. —also became another popular form of protest. Such property is often the only symbol of the government which is hated as the authority perpetrating atrocities against the movement. Thus its destruction both helps to highlight particular issues and also is an expression of the people's anger. Initially such actions were limited, but when Daggu Rayalingu fell to the police bullets in 1988, the wrath of the people exploded. Militants everywhere went on the rampage. For Rayalingu, then the North Telengana Regional Secretary of the CPI(ML) (PW) was a leader widely loved by the masses.

Rayalingu was a 'gumasta' in the coal mines at Godavarikhani when he was attracted by the struggles of the workers and peasants in the region. Giving up his job in 1978, he became a full time peasant organiser in Karimnagar. Rayalingu was one of those who took the lead in organising social boycotts of the landlords of the region— a tactic that was immensely successful in smashing their authority. Within a few years he had led many struggles of the peasants and his name was popular in many villages of Karimnagar. When Comrade Devender Reddy was martyred, Rayalingu led the peasants in the face of severe repression. Serious sinusitis could not stop him from helping spread the peasant movement to newer villages. In 1985 Comrade Rayalingu was elevated as a member of the Karimnagar District Committee of the CPI(ML) (PW) and rose to lead that Committee after two Secretaries— Khairi Gangaram and Sayani Prabhakar— were murdered by the police. The brutal repression did not deter him and he led the party squads in many daring actions. His abilities led him to be promoted to the North Telengana Regional Committee... where he became the Secretary and was well known as a resolute fighter till his death in 1988.

The People's War

While the press and the government used the kidnapping and the bus burnings to allege that the Naxalites had been isolated from the people and were now resorting to acts of individual terrorism and the mobilisation of lumpen elements in their activity, events in 1989 quickly disproved these claims.

Food Raids

In April that Adilabad was hit by a severe famine. Even as cases of suicides and deaths due to starvation were being reported, the RCS and the RYL re-emerged in public limelight in a big way. In hundreds of villages, thousands of people participated in the 'food raids'. The operation was simple. Government depots and private godowns of hoarders were raided and the accumulated food stocks were distributed among the people. Small traders who were found to be indulging in black marketeering were penalized and their grain sold to the people at the official ration rates. The governments falsehoods stood fully exposed.

Then in November that year, fresh elections took place and a Congress (I) government led by Chenna Reddy was voted to power. Castigating his predecessor, NTR, for wrong handling of the Naxalite problem, Chenna Reddy outlined a new approach. All undertrials were to be released. The unofficial ban on public meetings and rallies was lifted. The government announced that it was ready for 'talks'.

Responding to this latter offer, the Party expressed its willingness to participate provided the government withdrew all police and para-military forces from the region. Obviously, there was no response from the government. But the mass organisations quickly convened a series of public meetings and rallied.

The people's response was overwhelming.

Mass Meetings

The first two gatherings were public meetings organised by the RWA and JNM. Over a lakh of people gathered to witness the first public performance of a JNM troupe led by Gaddar in nearly four years. After that the mass meetings spread far and wide. Siddipet, Narsapur, Nizamabad, Kamareddy, Godavarikhani, Bellampalli, Indervelli—everywhere the workers, peasants and youth responded in massive numbers. Then came the historic Warangal Conference of the RCS.

On May 4 and 5 the town was swept by a deluge. The flood of people that gathered on those days will remain one of the high points of the movement's history. For miles on end on all sides of the stage there was no place to more. Many may have not heard the Resolutions adopted at the Conference, but it was clearly evident in each of the over 10 lakh faces which one could see... Land to the Tiller, All Power to the People's Courts.

A Storm has Arisen

A typhoon swept through the region in this period. A mighty storm that swept before it every type of oppression. As the new atmosphere created an immense enthusiasm, the plains of Andhra and the forests of Dandakaranya witnessed an enormous outburst of struggle.

There were peasant movements for water and electricity and thousands of peasants and agricultural labourers took part. The movement was especially strong in Nizamabad and Kamareddy.

March 3, 1990... over 8,000 peasants had gathered at Jakranpalli near Chandmiya Bagh. They were to march to the office of the Electricity Board. The police intervened and arrested four leaders, but the peasants gheraoed the police station and got them released. Angered by the police response, the demonstration turned into an impromptu rasta roko. The police made a number of attempts to disperse the crowds. But even a lathi charge failed to scare the peasantry who wanted an immediate response to their memorandum. Then the police suddenly opened fire on the peaceful demonstration. Comrade Srinivas, the peasants leader was shot dead, and another two activists were wounded

'Jakranpallis' were taking place all over the region. But the main thrust of the peasant movement was centered around the issue of land. Already in the 12 years since the first struggles broke out in Jagityal,

thousands of acres of forest, banjara, common and excess lands had been occupied. On the one hand the RCS now demanded that the government legalise these occupations which were often sanctioned by its own laws. A memorandum to this effect was presented to Chenna Reddy.

Land Occupation

On the other hand the peasants once more decreed that no fresh land transactions could take place without the approval of the peasant committees. The people themselves began to sit in trial and settle the issue of land disputes. Often the peasant committees took the lead in occupation of the landlords land. The stories of that period are too numerous to relate, but a few have been documented as examples of what was really happening...

Ellavaram. Additigalla Mandal. East Godavari. The land of the village was totally monopolised by eight families. Most of it had been illegally seized from the peasants over the years and was now used for the plantation of dates. The families were called before the 'Praja Panchayat' and both sides were heard. Eighty five acres belonging to two families and 36 acres belonging to another were taken over after the Panchayat decreed that they could easily survive on their remaining 20-25 acres. Another landlord paid a fine of Rs. 10,000. The next day a massive morcha gheraoed the Collector's office and forced him to give an undertaking on stamped paper regularising the decision of the committee.

Veerabhadran village in the same district. Ruled by TDP member Barapulla Subbarao. Thirty three acres of land seized from him was redistributed among 67 landless families. The manager of the nearby public sector bank was forced to sanction immediate loans for seeds, fertilisers and implements to each of these families. Kongar Babji, the landlord of Jaddangi village in East Godavari was an old adversary of the peasant committees. In 1984 a large portion of his 300 acres of land had been forcibly seized from him. But taking the help of the police he had re-occupied it in 1985 and gradually mortgaged off large amounts to finance his election campaigns. In 1990 he was brought before the committee once more and forced to hand over the remaining non-mortgaged portion of 45 acres.

People's Courts

The land occupation movement greatly enthused the people. They began to bring all of types cases before the praja panchayats. In the tribals villages of Bastar, various types of superstitions and medieval rituals continue to exist. One such case came before the people's court in Karamagar. The priest Badkham Guruji's son was ill. Instead of taking him to the doctor, the Guruji decided to make a child sacrifice to the Gods to save his son. He sacrificed his servant. As the real story came out the angered tribals dragged the Guruji before the Panchayat. Initially he was obstinate, but later confessed to his crime. The people decided to shave his head, smear his face with chalk powder and after parading him in all the villages to expose the misdeeds being committed using old superstitions the Guruji was sentenced to death.

With the penetration of filmi culture into even the remotest regions, the physical abuse of women has grown even in the tribals villages. An incident was reported to the people's court in Kannan village in Gadchiroli district. Two youths who had harrassed many women were brought before the Panchayat and identified by two of the victims. The youths refused to accept their crime, and were soundly thrashed by the people. Only later they agreed to accept the Panchayat's ruling and apologise. As punishment they were asked to slap one another on the faces and then rub their noses on the ground over a distance of three bamboo lengths. Their bleeding noses are a warning to all potential criminals in the future.

As the people asserted their power through the Panchayats, some of the most notorious zamindars were brought to trial.

The landlord of Ankushpuram village in Mahadevpur area of Warangal is Mehboob Baig. In 1990 he was in possession of over 300 acres of land, much of it illegally seized from the peasants. For many years he had dominated the villages in the area collecting fines from the people, and terrorising them to such an extent that his permission had to be got even to enrol one's children in school or college. Now with the mass upsurge in the neighbouring villages, the peasants of Ankushpuram too were enthused. Over 700 of them, including people from the neighbouring villages gathered at his 'gadh'. He was dragged out and produced before the Panchayat where he was beaten up, garlanded with chappals and paraded throughout the area. The pent up anger of the people was released and hundreds of them spat on him to express

their venom. Incidents like this were occurring everywhere, and the landlords authority, exercised in the past few years with the might of the armed police once again crumbled before the people's onslaught.

'Underground' Struggles!

In nearby Singareni also, the fruits of continuing to maintain living links with the workers in the face of the earlier repression were beginning to show. None of the established unions had taken up the issues of implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth Wage Board which had suggested that the management should also bear the responsibility for the worker's housing, sanitation and health, as well as for their childrens' schooling. The SIKASA formed an all union Co-ordination Committee to negotiate with the management, but the talks failed to produce any results. The SIKASA called for a strike.

The management called in the SRP and the CRP, a prolonged strike could cause a shortage of coal... a drop in electricity generation at the nearby thermal plants... and affect the movement of goods by train. Workers were arrested and tortured, but the movement spread from Godavarkhani to Bellampalli and soon to the whole Singareni belt. Almost 80,000 workers joined the battle... and after six weeks when the accumulated losses amounted to nearly Rs 1,000 crores the management finally gave in to the worker's demands. It was another remarkable victory, for throughout the strike period the leaders of the SIKASA were severely hounded by the police, and could not participate in all-Party negotiations with the management due to this !

The Ban on Liquor

Throughout Dandakaranya-Telengana the Radicals now launched their anti-liquor movement. In virtually the whole region all types of bars and liquor shops were shut down. Mass awareness campaigns were conducted everywhere and the evil practice of drinking, long encouraged by profiteering liquor contractors came to a halt. Ironically, to break the back of the movement, the police set up shops within the police stations themselves, and unemployed youth from the neighbouring states suddenly found themselves employed in 'Police Station Bars'! The enthusiasm for this campaign and its enormous success later prompted the Maharashtra government to declare prohibition in Gadchiroli. In A.P. it laid the foundations on which the

present day anti-liquor campaign being supported by virtually all the Opposition parties, has been built.

The Police Crackdown

The temporary break in the repression has been widely misunderstood by many outside the state. Many thought it meant that the police just stood by as silent spectators while the peasant movement raged on, and that democracy really ruled. Far from it! Already an instance of police firing during a rasta roko has been described and raids, lathi charges and arrests continued. Only their intensity and ferocity lessened when compared to previous years though it was still much than in the non-struggle areas.

Between June and November 1990, at least ten people 'disappeared' from police custody in the Northern Telengana districts. In Medak district 65 villages were raided... houses and foodgrains were destroyed and mass beating took place. In September, a rally in Hyderabad against encounters was banned, and in Karmareddy Section 144 was declared at the proposed site of the public meeting. However thousands of people assembled for both programmes braving a police lathi charge. In Madanpalli, a meeting of RYL being held with police permission was attacked and three activists killed.

The Narmetta incident which occurred on December 5, 1990 was an example of the continued police brutalities. A popular leader of the RYL, Chandramouli had been arrested by the police the previous day. On December 5, people gheraoed the police station demanding his release. Over 5,000 people were chanting slogans and singing songs when the police guns began to fire. Even those fleeing to safety were shot at. At least 12 people were killed, and more than 40 injured.

Similar attacks began to be launched everywhere. Twenty thousand armed policemen were deployed in the villages and a 1,000 strong group of the Special Security Force (the new name for the now 'disbanded' Greyhounds Regiment) moved into the forest. Many of them moved disguised as the People's War squads, calling themselves 'Annalu' and anyone who was deceived and offered them food was at once taken in for interrogation!

The story of the events that followed is best related in the words of a local youth : "The first major raid on his village took place in November. He was asleep at that time, it was well before daylight, and he was awoken by vague sounds that he could not place, for they were not

the familiar sounds of daybreak. He had opened the door and looked out. He saw hundreds of policemen running up and down the streets swinging their sticks at any villager they saw. They would stop randomly at houses, kick open the door and without a question or a comment they would ransack the house and smash everything. Pots, pans, bowls, chairs, cots, clocks and transistor radios would all be smashed to bits with axes or boulders. Foodgrains would be thrown out and doused with kerosene. At the end they would selectively pull down the roofs of the houses of the most active youth... (then)they would gather all the villagers at the panchayat office, or perhaps under the banyan tree near the Hanuman temple, thrash every man, woman and child of them, and separate the youth such as himself for special treatment, perhaps even an encounter..."

An Occupation Army

Then in November 1991 the state declared all out war. The BSF and the ITBP were deployed and in the plains and forest people felt as if they had been occupied by an invading army. What followed was a nightmare.

"...(later)... the Border Security Force arrived in Warangal and the killings started. Youths were picked up and killed everyday. The killings were spaced and timed with deliberation, and with a clinical precision..."

There was Pagideru. 'Thirteen Armed Naxalites Killed' was the police version. But the truth soon made it to the papers. Twelve unarmed youth including a woman, were travelling in a tempo towards Bhadrachalam. The van was stopped, and the twelve shot dead in cold blood. Later the only witness, the driver was also killed, and the van pushed into a ditch along the highway...

On December 15, they killed Comrade Ramakant... Katla Mallesh, an organiser of the Singareni workers for the last thirteen years... and now Secretary of the Party Committee for the coal mine belt. Gunned down as he was walking down the road in Godavarikhani town... Tears rolled down the faces of even the most hardened workers as they remembered his struggles and sacrifices... as they recalled his determination that led them to hold out during the long 42 day battle the previous year... this dynamism and sweep that had mobilised thousands, including women into the vast sweeping anti-liquor struggles.

Comrade Jyoti was a tribals woman from Nizamabad. A few years ago

she had joined the movement and soon proved by her courage and capabilities, that she was as able a fighter as any other. Shortly she was made the Commander of the Sinnapalli dalam and became a legend among the people. On February 6, while conducting a meeting in the Mamidapalli forest area, she was surrounded by the BSF and shot dead.

Many others were martyred. Comrade Anil Kumari, RSU organiser of Karimnagar town who was murdered in October 1992 and Comrade Sheikh Aziz, the RSU organiser from Mehboobnagar town who was shot dead on December 19, 1992 even as preparations were underway for the Third Conference of the AIRSF. Both served as continued inspiration to other students.

Repression Begets Revolt

The forest movement had now reached the state where there was increasing local participation. Everywhere, in fact, the tribals were flocking to join the squads. A number of them had been made commanders or deputy commanders.

Now, more and more the agrarian conflict in A.P.-Dandakaranya is taking on the form of a People's war, a war of self defence against the armed onslaught of the state. More and more instances of mass resistance are being reported from different parts of the region.

The Secretary of the DAKMS Comrade Devidas is a resident of Jappi village in Dhanora taluk of Gadchiroli division. The police were searching for him and on hearing that he was in his village, over 60 armed members of the SRP surrounded Jappi. As they spied Comrade Devidas they raised their guns to shoot, but Devidas ran amidst the people. Hearing his slogans hundreds of them emerged from their huts. Children, old men, women. As the police tried to disperse the crowd, it was the women who came boldly forward— "Whatever you want to ask him, ask him now". Finally the power of the women triumphed (after all it reflected the power of the recently formed Dandakaranya Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan-DAMS) and even as hundreds of more people moved towards Jappi from the neighbouring villages to protect their leader, the police were forced to return empty handed. The people had won one more battle.

Elsewhere too there were similar victories, small steps forward in the war of liberation.

Finally in May 1992, a desperate A.P. government declared a ban on

the CPI(ML) (PW) and seven other mass organisations including the Radical Students Union and the All India Revolutionary Students Federation. But the movement continued to make rapid advances, as the squads launched bigger military type attacks on the police, and the village militants, now organised into Gram Raksha Dals (Self Defence Squads) often provided their own impromptu and improvised resistance.

For the ruling classes it is a living nightmare as the seeds of Telengana and Naxalbari begin to bear fruit.

"Naxalbari Cannot Die..."

Nineteen ninety two marked the completion of twenty five years of a movement that began at Naxalbari in 1967. Twenty five years of ups and downs, in which the movement that had once shaken the very citadels of power had suffered a setback, only to rise up again, broader and more powerful than ever before.

Today the area encompassed by the armed peasant struggles is probably larger than at any other time since 1947. With many of the nationality movements too adopting the path of armed confrontation with the state, the challenge to the power of the ruling classes is stronger than ever before.

But the lack of a centralised party leadership is a serious handicap and as the AICCCR had once said many years ago, the political and organisational needs of the developing revolutionary struggles will require a strong centralised leadership even today.

In this context the growing fraternal relationship between parties that are deeply rooted in the class struggle and share some common perspectives about the national and international situation and the methods of developing the armed peasant struggle is a positive sign.

At the local level, this takes the form of joint actions by the mass fronts, as for example in Bihar, where the Lok Sangram Morcha representing the Jehanabad-Palamau struggle and the Jan Suraksha Sangh which encompasses organisations involved in the movements in Gaya-Aurangabad region have come together on a number of issues.

At the all-India level, it has resulted in the formation of federations like the All India Revolutionary Students Federation (AIRSF), the All India League for Revolutionary Culture (AILRC) and the All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF), where organisations linked to different parties have united under a common banner.

Simultaneously the national situation is worsening. As the economic crisis deepens, more people are being pushed towards struggle by problems like price rise and unemployment. The IMF loan taken by the

Narasimha Rao government has only worsened the situation for the Indian people. And the shadow of fascism looms large and dangerous.

The struggling peasants of A.P. Dandakaranya-Bihar have already proved themselves to be the only consistent anti-feudal forces in the country. Now it is becoming increasingly clear that they are also the only movements which can lead the people to resist the attacks of the IMF and flight back the onward march of the fascist forces.

Indeed as CM had written "Naxalbari cannot die..." And today more than ever before, Naxalbari

"... is not just the name of a village
But the name of the whole country."

Notes

Some different opinions exist on certain aspects of the history of Naxalbari movement, especially on the composition of AICCCR and the polemical debates existing at that time. Between this interval of the two editions, AIRSF could not come to any conclusion on these aspects. Meanwhile the reprinting of this booklet is long overdue and we think it should not await further. The different opinions are complied here as notes to the original text. After completion of our study, the version which will be proved to be correct, will be incorporated in the original text in a next edition.

(1) Rejoinder by Suniti Kumar Ghosh (The then member of AICCCR and later CPI(ML) Central Committee) :-

Prior to its joining the AICCCR in October 1968, differences existed between the Andhra Committee and the AICCCR on several issues. But the question of the formation of the party was not raised during the talks between the representatives of the two committees nor was it raised at the October 1968 meeting of the AICCCR when the AP committee became one of its state units. Nor was any objection made on this issue by the representative of the A.P. Committee who attended the February 1969 meeting of the AICCCR, which unanimously decided to form the party and prepare the political and organisational resolutions.

(2a) Rejoinder by RSL (W.B) :-

There was a polemical debate in the co-ordination committee with the Dakhin Desh comrades.

(2b) Rejoinder by Suniti Kumar Ghosh :-

It is wrong to say that the 'Dakshin Desh' group left the AICCCR because of its differences on the issue of immediate formation of the party, for this group had never joined the AICCCR. There were several important issues, besides the formation of the party, on which the 'Dakshin Desh' group and the AICCCR differed.

The AICCCR had only state units which represented entire states, like the Bihar State Co-ordination Committee, the A.P. State Co-ordination Committee and so on. The AICCCR did not recognise any group with a separate identity like the 'Dakshin Desh' group as its constituent. No representative of this group was a member of the West Bengal State Co-ordination Committee or of the AICCCR.

At the AICCCR's penultimate meeting in February 1969, it was unanimously resolved to form the party immediately. If 'Dakshin Desh' was a member of the AICCCR, what was its role at this meeting? When did 'Dakshin Desh' leave the AICCCR— before, during or after the meeting? At the April 1969 meeting, the AICCCR dissolved itself after unanimously adopting the POR, on the basis of which party was formed and after unanimously electing the central organising Committee of the CPI (ML). Did the 'Dakshin Desh' group remain a member of the AICCCR until this meeting?

(3) Rejoinder by RSL (W.B.) :-

Though the correct formulation of the era—the era of total collapse of imperialism was made, but there was an incorrect assessment of the era by some people and of the national and international situation, leading to many over and under estimations.



AIRSF

The All India Revolutionary Students Federation (AIRSF) was formed at its inaugural Conference held at Hyderabad in February 1985. Prior to that, a number of student organisations from different states had come together in a meeting held in September 1981 at Madras to form Revolutionary students' Organisation Co-ordination Committee (RSOCC). Since then it has been active in various states all over the country and successfully held its second Conference and at Madras in December 1989 and third Conference in Bombay on January 1992.

The AIRSF asserts that the present education system in India is elitist in nature and unscientific in method and content. Though the student movement will fight for the creation of genuinely scientific and democratic education system such a change is not possible without fundamental transformation in the semi-feudal, semi-colonial nature of Indian society. The AIRSF therefore stands for a student movement which will integrate closely with the workers and peasants movements to form an integral part of the New Democratic Revolution.

The constituent organisations are : Andhra Pradesh Radical students Union (APRSU), Vidyarthi Pragati Sanghatana (VPS)-Maharashtra, Pragatipara Vidyarthi Kendra (PVK)-Karnataka, Tamilnadu Radical Students Union (TNRSU), Progressive Students Union (PSU)-Goa, Revolutionary Students league (RSL)-Bihar, Progressive Students And Youth Front (PSYF)-Bihar, Democratic Students Union (DSU)-Delhi, Viplav Vidyarthi Sangathan (VVS)-Kerala, Democratic Students Union (DSU)-Bihar, Revolutionary Students league (RSL)-W.B., Radical Students Association (RSA)-W.B. and Revolutionary Students Federation (RSF)-W.B.

