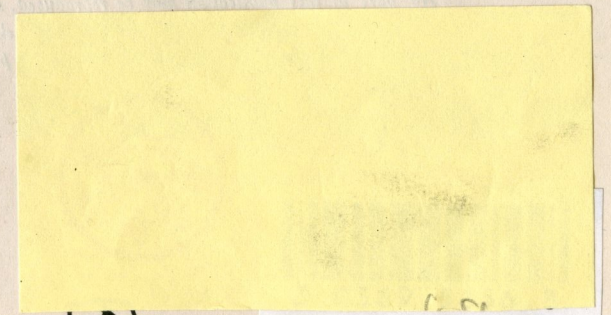


THE
NAXALITE
MOVEMENT IN INDIA
(Origin and Failure of the Maoist Revolutionary
Strategy in West Bengal 1967-1971)

Sohail Jawaid



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Aligarh
August 15, 1979

SOHAIL JAWAID

To
My Father
Professor Syed Nasir Ali

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Introduction

THIS work offers a broad understanding of *The Naxalite Movement in India*. The stronghold of the Maoist revolutionaries was the area of Naxalbari, which is located in the northern part of West Bengal. Because of its location the entire movement is known as the *Naxalite Movement*, which, within a short span of time, spilled and spread over to other areas of the country.

Because the *Naxalite Movement* was the end product of a series of splits which took place within the Communist movement of India during the past few decades, it will be useful in this Introduction to offer to the readers a short survey of these developments to enable him to orient himself in the maze of Communist parties, groups, factions, strategies and policies to which these splits gave rise.

The first split within the Communist Movement of India took place in 1964 when the Communist Party of India (CPI), the maternal body and matrix from which all subsequent Communist parties have originated, divided and gave birth to the second Communist Party of India, called Marxist, under the acronym of CPI (M). The split of the CPI stemmed from the internal history of the party and from issues that were largely indigenous to the Indian scene. The principal dilemma related to the tactics and strategy that should be adopted towards the Congress Party—the degree of accommodation or antagonism to be directed towards it. The fact that both the foreign and domestic policies of the Indian Government have won increasing approval from the Soviet Union between 1950-53 added further complications for the CPI. But overlaying these problems were certain basic indigenous considerations—the diverse origins of the party units in various States of India and the varying social origin of the party members—factors which contributed extensively to the differences between various State Party units. The CPI did not escape the pervasive influence of Indian regionalism, which affects every party in India. It also shared the problems of factionalism so common in Indian politics.

In an immediate sense, the single most important fact contributing to the breakdown of the CPI has unquestionably been the death of Ajoy Ghosh, the Secretary-General, on January 13, 1962.

For over a decade Ghosh succeeded in keeping in check the various contending forces within the party. His successor, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, clearly eschewed the extreme tendencies of both right and left and placed himself firmly in support of the pragmatic and flexible policies which had enabled Ghosh to rebuild the party after its post-independence adventurist period of 1945-53.

In spite of Namboodiripad's best efforts, the CPI was split into two parties in 1964, forcing Namboodiripad to ally himself, at least temporarily, with the leftists. Prime Minister Nehru's death in May 1964 had brought new leadership to the fore in both the Congress Party and the Government. The moderate wing of the CPI, now under S.A. Dange, justified its position of extending partial support to the Congress Party and the Government on the basis of their socialist policies and tendencies.

The origins of the 1964 split in the CPI predate both the Sino-Indian border dispute and the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict which emerged in the period of 1959-62, though an interaction of the two can be said to have hastened the split. The Sino-Indian border dispute was itself to become an issue in the Sino-Soviet ideological conflicts. Secondly, the Sino-Indian border dispute had a close parallel in the Sino-Soviet border dispute which was to escalate later and the Soviet leadership had every reason to fight to retain its influence over the CPI.

Thus the Sino-Indian border dispute and the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict together interacted on a complex pattern of differences that had already existed in the CPI. The dominant leadership of the CPI found in the Sino-Indian border dispute an occasion, and in the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict an *alibi*, for forcing a split to suit its interests.

At the time of the Chinese aggression on India in 1959 and in 1962 there was a heated controversy with regard to the attitude of the CPI towards China. A strong minority did not consider China as aggressor and justified all her claims. The result was that in 1964 at Tenali in Andhra Pradesh the party was officially divided between two distinct groups—Left and Right—each claiming to be true representative of the people and having the requisite revolutionary programme. The moderates retained the old name of the CPI, while the radicals adopted the name of the CPI (Marxist), or the CPI (M).

However, the process of division did not end there and history repeated itself with the Andhra group of the CPI (M) giving birth to yet another extremist and militant Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or the CPI(M-L).

This happened when the extremist groups within the CPI (M) at the meeting in Calcutta on November 16, 1967, took a decision to form a third Communist Party of India, the CPI(M-L), strictly on Maoist lines, known also as the Naxalite Movement, which would achieve a "People's democratic revolution through building militant rural bases and extending them to encircle the cities." They made it clear, both by their action and through their literature, that they would propagate Mao Tse-tung's thoughts and action to create more Naxalbaris. They were unanimous on one point that the *Naxalite Movement* which has been "betrayed" by the CPI(M) should guide all revolutionary action in rural areas, because the CPI(M) posed an obstacle in the way of revolution. They felt that by adhering to the parliamentary road the reformist Communist parties in India have allowed a formidable blood-debt to accumulate over the ages, and that the time has now come to settle this blood-debt by a new revolutionary action under the leadership of the new party.

Instead of selecting any other region of India for the study, I have decided to focus upon West Bengal to examine the causes of the revolutionary movement organized there by this new Communist Party of India, the CPI(M-L). The reason is that I have been deeply concerned with the socio-economic conditions of the people, particularly those who are living in the remote tribal areas in the hills. While other authors have focused upon the political and ideological aspects of the movement, I have concentrated upon the immediate problems of the people.

The study also emphasizes the socio-economic disparity which led these people to adopt the Maoist revolutionary strategy for solving their economic problems. While the Congress Government at the Centre was making every effort to help these people through a series of public policies and welfare schemes aimed at a gradual and peaceful change, the Naxalites rejected this and insisted that a Maoist revolutionary movement must be organized in order to overthrow the existing political system in the whole of India and replace it with a Chinese type of political system. However, while these revolutionaries failed to attain their main goal, their movement had the most profound impact upon the Congress Government at the Centre by forcing it to design far more radical and effective socio-economic policies to deal with poverty, hunger and inequality on an all-India basis. A great deal of my attention shall be focused upon the impact which the Naxalite Movement had upon the initiation of a whole set of new public policies devised by the Central Government.

A big surprise for me has been the realization that other authors have failed to give a comprehensive account of the problems faced by the tribes, the poor peasants, the landless labourers, the students and the youth in general. It seems to me that these authors have placed too much emphasis upon the theoretical and ideological aspects of the movement, and upon various interpretations of the Marxist theory, and that in fact they have failed to provide us with the real understanding of the actual social conditions existing in those areas, which really gave rise to the movement. My own approach, therefore, shall underplay the theory and ideology and, instead, concentrate upon the social and economic conditions as the material base of the movement.

This book is divided into six broad but clearly marked out chapters, each of them attempting to discuss the important aspects of social, economic and political developments in West Bengal.

The first chapter has been divided into four sections. The first section describes the policies of the Communist Party of India from the beginning of World War II (1939 to 1958). In this period the party's policies went through several stages of development. In the first stage, from 1939 to 1945, the leadership was making every effort to win popular support. In the second period, which began in 1945, the party decided to emerge as the main opposition force against the Congress Government. The third period was initiated in 1948, when under the leadership of B.T. Ranadive the party was seeking a "proletarian revolution", based upon Russian experience of 1917. When Mao Tse-tung overthrew the Kuomintang rule in China in 1949, the Communist Party of India adopted the Chinese model of revolutionary action and organized an "armed agrarian uprising" in Telengana, which marked the fourth period in the evolution of the policies of the party. The fifth period was initiated by instructions from Moscow in 1950 to the effect that the party should give up the armed struggle in the villages, emerge from illegality and adopt a new set of policies which would enable it to participate in the parliamentary processes and the first national elections, to be held in 1952. The most important decision was taken by the party leaders in 1956, which initiated the sixth period of the party's policies, a move towards peaceful transition to Communism. But there was a very strong opposition from a small number of the party members to this policy, which I have decided to cover in various sections of the same chapter.

The second section of Chapter I will highlight the causes of the rifts, which developed within the CPI. It will deal with the

problem of Revisionism *versus* Revolution, the disagreement between the Kremlin and Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the imposition of the Presidential rule upon Kerala, which, for the Communists, was a clear indication that the parliamentary method for achieving political power was not dependable. Finally, I will deal with the India-China conflict and its impact upon the policies of the CPI.

The third section of Chapter I will discuss the split of the party into two separate political groups, the new party calling itself the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M). I will discuss the effects of this split upon the Communists of West Bengal in a separate section. The fourth section will deal with the Communist policies in West Bengal, and with the influence which the Chinese Communists are alleged to have had on them.

The second chapter will discuss the social, economic and political dimensions of the problems in West Bengal. Other authors, for instance J.C. Johri, did not attempt to discuss the influences of external factors upon the Maoist revolutionary strategy, nor did he deal with the geographical location of the area and the problems of tribals, poor peasants and students. Also the programme of the Naxalites has received little attention in his study.¹ Almost the same pattern has been adopted by Mohan Ram in his work on the Naxalite movement.² The work of Biplab Das Gupta, who spent four months in West Bengal and completed a book entitled *The Naxalite Movement*,³ is also inadequate, because he did not focus upon the problems of the tribals and the peasantry, while these two were the basic components of the movement. He fails to raise the question as to why the Naxalite Movement was launched by the extremists. After examining these studies and other sources, I have decided that I will analyse the social base of the Naxalite Movement both in its agrarian and tribal aspects.

The third chapter will describe the establishment of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI (M-L). The failure of the Naxalites to adopt a viable and realistic political programme, as well as the reasons for the emergence of factional struggle, will also be my focal points.

The fourth chapter will attempt to close the important gap which exists in the above cited literature on the Naxalite Movement, and which is also evident in the recent study of Sanker Ghosh.⁴ My main efforts here will be to discuss the emergence of the Bangla Congress in West Bengal, to bring to the fore the electoral politics in that State, and the eagerness of political parties and some independent candidates to form a coalition government not

against the radical Communist elements but against the Congress Government. This chapter will point out the success which the revolutionary upsurge scored when the constituent parties launched competition to gain more popular support, and how this began to polarize these Naxalites in return. Although the study of Marcus F. Franda attempts to discuss the electoral politics, it does not, however, provide sufficient information on the Maoist revolutionary movement, because his main intention is to explain the history of the Communist Movement in West Bengal.⁵ Also Bhawani Sen Gupta devotes a small portion of his work to the Naxalite Movement.⁶ In view of this, my book will make an attempt to close this gap.

The fifth chapter will be devoted to the analysis of role of the Central Government in suppressing the Naxalite activities in the State. None of the above mentioned authors deals with this aspect. My treatment of this problem falls into the following sections: (a) effective use by the Government of political instruments; (b) the police operations and their contribution to the destruction of the movement; (c) the role played by the agrarian reform to control the problem through legal and effective distribution of land; (d) the main shortcomings of the agrarian reforms and how these shortcomings could be removed.

The sixth chapter will ascertain the reasons for the failure of the Maoist revolutionary strategy in West Bengal. The Conclusion will attempt to answer the question whether the collapse of the agrarian revolution in India is a temporary feature, and when and under what conditions this might be revived.

Finally, while a historical and descriptive approach has been adopted for the treatment of material from Chapter I to Chapter V, in Chapter VI an analytical interpretative approach is attempted in order to explain the interplay of various factors responsible for the failure of the Naxalite revolutionary movement in West Bengal.

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CHAPTER I

The Origin of the Communist Party in India (Marxist)

1. THE CPI AND ITS POLICIES

THE Communist Party of India (CPI) is one of the oldest Communist parties in Asia. Because adequate work has been done on its policies, personalities and growth in the early period,¹ this study will deal only with those policies of the party which relate to the origin of the Naxalite Movement.

The period in which the policies of the CPI became more significant in the political set-up of India began from 1939, when World War II broke out, the CPI's leadership declared that it was an "Imperialist War".² With the entry of the Soviet Union into the War they declared that it was a "People's War" and therefore India should cooperate with the British Government.³ Because of this, and owing to the CPI's support for the war efforts, the British Government lifted the ban which had been in force for nearly twenty years upon the activities of this party and encouraged it to take up arms and join war against the Fascists.

On August 9, 1942, when Mahatma Gandhi launched the "Quit India" movement for achieving the independence for the country through peaceful means, the Communist Party opposed not only this movement but also all Congress Party activities against the British.⁴ The Congress opposition to the Muslim League's demand for a separate homeland for the Moslems⁵ was characterized by P.C. Joshi, the Secretary-General of the CPI, as a "sectarian arrogance".⁶ As Bhawani Sen Gupta has said the party's stand on this issue was that "wherever the Moslems are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory", the right to "form their autonomous State, and even to separate if they so desire".⁷

A remarkable change in the CPI's policies took place in 1945, when the British conducted elections for the Provincial Assemblies and the party decided to contest. To give a clear expression to its policies, the leadership published an election manifesto. The manifesto said that India was a single political unit and it embraced the

idea of representative government. The leaders also believed that their party would replace the Nehru government by a People's Democratic Government through a parliamentary procedure in due course.⁸

When Joshi was engaged in building an image portraying the CPI as a patriotic force, the country was going through serious internal disturbances. These disturbances were the strikes of workers, communal riots between Hindus and Moslems, the mutiny in the Navy, etc.⁹

Because of these developments, some leaders within the CPI visualized that the existing climate was most suitable for the party to launch a revolution, for which strategy a conceptual framework was provided by A.A. Zhdanov.¹⁰ The leader of this revolutionary wing of the party, B.T. Ranadive, justified this revolutionary course, by saying that India had attained no real independence and that British rule was replaced by a new and far more effective colonialism in the form of Anglo-American imperialism.¹¹ In view of this he urged that the party must give up its pro-Congress policies, propagated by Joshi, and must use the strikes to transform them into revolutionary actions in order to break up the Congress Government.

The crucial change between these two policies took place during the Second Congress of the CPI, held in Calcutta from February 28 to March 6, 1948. Here, a large number of the party members hailed Ranadive's version and branded Joshi's policies as rightist revisionism.¹² Joshi was removed from the post of Secretary-General and B.T. Ranadive replaced him.

In formulating new policies for the party, Ranadive based himself on two factors. One, as we have seen, was the workers' strikes in the urban areas. The second factor was the Telengana (Andhra Pradesh) peasants' insurrection. The Communist-led movement in Telengana was essentially a nationalist movement¹³ against Princely rule in the State. When India struggled for her independence the attitude of the Nizam of Hyderabad was pro-British. By the time India won independent status the ruler refused to grant freedom and electoral franchise with the result that the people launched an armed uprising against him.

Anyway, Ranadive laid primary emphasis upon the struggle in the cities rather than in the countryside. Though he said that the revolution would be led by the proletariat in the cities based on Russian revolutionary tactics, this struggle would spill over to the villages where the peasantry would enthusiastically support it. He thus advocated a two-class alliance for launching revolution in India, an alliance between workers and poor peasants.¹⁴

However, Ranadive's strategy of two-class alliance failed because the isolated strikes in the country failed to merge into a general strike, and this failed to spill over into the countryside. But the revolutionary activity in Telengana took the form of a strong armed uprising.

By July 1948 the local Communists had liberated 2,500 villages and set up their own administration.¹⁵ On September 13, 1948, the Southern Command of the Indian Army marched into Hyderabad and took control of the State.¹⁶ After this operation, the Government of India published a booklet entitled *Communist Crimes in Hyderabad*, which provided details of the Communist activities in the State. It is stated that from August 15, 1946, to September 13, 1948, the Communists murdered nearly 2,000 persons, attacked 22 police outposts, seized and destroyed village records, manhandled a large number of village officials, burnt Customs outposts, captured 230 guns, looted or destroyed paddy and robbed cash and jewellery worth more than a million rupees.¹⁷

While the proletarian revolution in the cities failed, the relative success of the agrarian struggle in Telengana had a profound impact upon the Communist Party. At a meeting of its Central Executive Committee in May, 1950, Radadive was replaced as Secretary-General by R. Rajeswara Rao who argued that the revolutionary assault upon the government must be based upon the self-supporting agrarian armed uprising. Rao supported the Chinese "line" in revolutionary strategy. Under his leadership the Central Executive Committee adopted a resolution tendering an apology to Mao Tse-tung for "utterly wrong, irresponsible and slanderous criticisms" made by the old Political Bureau and withdrew these criticisms unreservedly.¹⁸

However, the struggle within the Communist Party was not over yet, because the new leader believed that it would be possible to win small bourgeoisie in the towns, and the middle class peasants in the countryside, for their participation in the revolution. It was during this confrontation between Ranadive and Rao that the CPI received instructions from the Communist Party of Soviet Union through R. Palme Dutt of the British Communist Party in the end of 1950.¹⁹ Dutt suggested in his letter that the CPI should change its policies and make every effort through which the national bourgeoisie could be brought into the party's fold. Moreover, the party should adopt parliamentary means to oppose the government policies. While these suggestions were welcomed by Ajoy Ghosh, Rao rejected them. Thus an internal crisis set within the CPI,

which could be solved only by an intervention from outside, as explained by Ghosh: "Today the reality is that nobody in the Indian Party can solve this crisis. It was the international comrades who pointed out our mistakes. Since we are not agreed on the interpretation, only they can help us."²⁰

Early in 1951, four prominent Communist leaders, S.A. Dange, R. Rajeswar Rao, A.K. Ghosh and Basavapunniah, visited Moscow for consultations. After returning home, A.K. Ghosh succeeded Rao as Secretary-General in the Spring 1951. The most outstanding feature of new policies was to call off the Telengana insurgency. Instead, the party decided to make use of the Indian parliament for opposing the 'Government's reactionary policies' and to achieve its objectives through electoral process. Victor M. Fic has rightly observed that "the CPI displayed a remarkable flexibility in visualizing that both the parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle were to be used for meeting its objectives."²¹

According to this new strategy it would be a four-class alliance of the workers, peasants, middle class and the national bourgeoisie which would replace the Congress Government by the People's Democratic Government,²² and accordingly, the CPI launched its electoral campaign in the first general elections of 1952 in independent India.

The results of the elections were surprising. In the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) the CPI won 26 seats, opposing the Congress Party which controlled 364 out of a total of 512 seats.

Also in the elections to the State Legislative Assemblies the CPI scored significant successes which indicates its increasing influence. The party established a People's Democratic Front in Andhra Pradesh. In Maharashtra it concluded the electoral alliance with the Left Socialists and with Kamgar Kisan Party. In West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa the party concluded an electoral alliance with the Forward Bloc (Marxist); in Uttar Pradesh with the Revolutionary Socialist Party; in the Punjab with the Lal Communist Party; in Tamil Nadu with the Toilers' Party and the rightist Dravida Kazhagam. In Kerala, the CPI organized the United Front of Leftists by enlisting the cooperation of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party.²³ Table 1.1 shows the CPI position in the State Legislative Assemblies.²⁴

Table 1.1

<i>State</i>	<i>Total seats</i>	<i>Contested by the CPI</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>
Andhra Pradesh	329	108	77	21.8
Assam	105	18	1	2.8
Bihar	318	22	0	1.1
Gujarat	158	8	0	0.5
Haryana	61	1	0	**
Himachal Pradesh	50	4	1	4.4
Karnataka	211	20	1	1.5
Kerala	128	N.A.	58	N.A.
Madhya Pradesh	338	22	0	0.6
Maharashtra	301	51	7	3.4
Orissa	140	33	7	5.6
Punjab	110	35	6	6.1
Rajasthan	189	5	1	0.7
Tamil Nadu	202	52	10	7.9
Uttar Pradesh	430	109	4	3.1
West Bengal	205	89	33	10.4

* Percentage of the total valid votes in the State polled by the party's candidates.

** Less than 0.5 per cent.

In four States—Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu—the CPI emerged as the second largest party in the Legislative Assemblies. It was in the light of these remarkable electoral successes that the leadership of the party reviewed its policies in the third Congress, held at Madurai, from December 27, 1953, to January 4, 1954. Here the CPI not only reaffirmed its policies of building the united front of the Leftist forces, but also decided to enlarge this united front by including the middle classes and the national bourgeoisie, in order to transform it into a broad People's Democratic Front. This front, the party believed, would be able to replace Nehru's Government.²⁵

During 1954, two important developments took place which convinced the leadership of the CPI that a broad People's Democratic Front, embracing also the national bourgeoisie, could really

be built in India. The first development was the intensification of the leftward trends in India's foreign policy; the second development was the initiation of the same trends in the domestic policies.

It was in April 1954 when the Planning Commission of the Indian Government requested all the State Governments to draw up five-year development programmes for villages, taluks and districts, with especial emphasis upon the increase of agricultural production and further growth of rural industries and cooperative associations.²⁶

Simultaneously, Nehru made noteworthy statements that his government would follow a policy of peace, neutrality and non-alignment, and in order to implement this policy he criticized the United States for building up a regional defence system in Asia, namely, SEATO.²⁷ On June 28, 1954, India extended hand of friendship towards China by signing an agreement of the "Five Principles"²⁸ and of peaceful coexistence in New Delhi. During his visit to China in the same year Nehru remarked that Mao Tse-tung was a "great warrior, a great revolutionary, a great builder and consolidator", adding that "may he now be a great peacemaker also".²⁹ During June and July 1955, Nehru received a warm friendly reception in Moscow. It was in 1955 that India and the Soviet Union signed an economic agreement to the effect that Russia would build the Bhilai Steel Plant.³⁰ As a condition it was agreed that the Plant would be under public sector to reduce the effectiveness of private sector.

At the fourth Congress, held at Palghat (Kerala) from April 19 to 29, 1956, the CPI carefully scrutinized the leftward trends in the domestic as well as in the foreign policies of the Nehru Government. By that time the Indian foreign policies were "certified" as progressive by the Soviet Union and China. Ghosh, who had just returned home from Moscow after attending the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in February 1956, proposed far more flexible policies to the Central Executive Committee of the CPI.

As a result, the party practically abandoned revolutionary approaches and proclaimed that it would strive for peaceful transition to socialism and then Communism in India. In order to attain this goal the party would place emphasis upon the struggle for "the strengthening of democracy in every sphere". It must fight for the democratization of the State apparatus and extension of the rights and powers of all popularly elected bodies, the local self-governments, district boards and so forth.³¹

Every possible attempt would be made by the CPI to polarize the forces both within the government and the Congress Party, splitting

them into radical and conservative wings, and then cooperate with the left wing of the Congress Party. As the next step the CPI would purge the conservatives from the front, saying that this development would open the way forward to the People's Democracy in India.

With this broadly defined strategy the CPI entered the second general elections in 1957 and its electoral performance was as follows:³²

Table 1.2

<i>State</i>	<i>Total seats</i>	<i>Contested by the CPI</i>	<i>Won by the CPI</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>
Andhra Pradesh	300	230	37	29.5
Bihar	318	60	7	4.9
Haryana	61	1	0	**
Himachal Pradesh	12	4	1	8.9
Karnataka	208	20	1	1.9
Kerala	126	100	60	23.5
Madhya Pradesh	288	25	2	1.6
Punjab	86	50	3	17.7
Rajasthan	176	24	1	3.0
Tamil Nadu	205	54	4	7.3
Uttar Pradesh	430	90	9	3.8
West Bengal	252	104	46	18.3

* Percentage of the total valid votes in the States polled by the total party's candidates.

** Less than 0.5 per cent.

The CPI lost 40 seats in the Legislative Assembly in Andhra Pradesh, but added 13 in West Bengal. Remarkable success was attained in Kerala, where after obtaining 60 seats, the CPI formed a government under the Chief Ministership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

By the fifth Congress of the CPI, held at Amritsar in April, 1958, the leadership was confident that the parliamentary takeover as in Kerala could be attained also in other States. It was at that session that, for the first time, the party accepted the perspective of a possible peaceful transition to Communism in the country. The party declared that a situation in the entire world was created where, due to the phenomenal advance of popular forces and of the socialist camp, possibilities existed for a peaceful transition to Communism. There was no need for civil wars or insurgent movements to advance Communism in this world of the atomic weapons.³³

2. RIFTS WITHIN THE CPI

(a) *Revisionism versus Revolution*

The first sign of polarization in the leadership of the CPI appeared in 1945 when P.C. Joshi, the Secretary-General of the party, pleaded for a new set of policies. He decided that the party would contest the elections of 1945 for the Provincial Assemblies. This led to factional differences. One faction justified Joshi's assessment, while the other faction opposed the electoral strategy. Besides that, both factions had opposite perspectives for achieving power. They were agreed that the Indian parliament would be a bourgeois-dominated institution. But one held that participation in this would be useful, whereas the other contested it. The Communist electoral failure in 1945 probably enhanced the disenchantment of some of its members with the parliamentary process.

We shall recall that it was the time when the Congress Party's prestige was very high, and it was recognized as the major vehicle of nationalism with a long history of freedom struggle for the sake of the country's freedom. The CPI was, on the other hand, dubbed an agent of an external power.

The Muslim League simultaneously claimed to be the voice of the entire Moslem community of India. The CPI's position with regard to the Pakistan question caused it much embarrassment. It did not support partition but urged a federation of nationalities. This was acceptable neither to the Congress nor to the Muslim League. While the Muslim League denounced Communism, the CPI lost support in the nationalist camp by constantly urging Congress-Muslim League pact.³⁴

In that climate, B.T. Ranadive, G.M. Adhikari and Ajoy Ghosh carefully attempted to develop revolutionary policies for the CPI. But they failed due to the lack of revolutionary bases. Indeed, the question needs attention: that while the country was passing through a revolutionary situation, marked by strikes and the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny, side by side with the communal riots, why this could not lead to revolution? In this regard we needed a deep study to understand the specific nature of these disturbances. For instance, the communal riots greatly divided the working people and paved the way for partition and religious chauvinism in the country. The strikes were almost all for the economic demands of workers and such demands also underlay the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny. Wider political objectives were not involved.

Without rejecting Joshi's hypothesis, B.T. Ranadive, A. Ghosh and G.M. Adhikari perceived the solution in the Leninist framework

on the bourgeois parliamentary system. According to Fansod, Lenin said that, "as long as the masses had faith in parliament, Communists must engage in parliamentary activity, not to strengthen the parliamentary way, but to destroy it".³⁵ By this time the two opponents, Ajoy Ghosh and G.M. Adhikari, subscribed to Joshi's policies while B.T. Ranadive could not see eye to eye with his colleagues.

B.T. Ranadive seemed much impressed with the call of A.A. Zhdanov that the Communist parties of Asia should overthrow the governments of the newly-independent as well as not-yet-free countries through force or armed uprising.³⁶ Thus he put forward his standpoint by which India was fulfilling both the criteria that it was newly a so-called independent country. In the light of this argument he believed that the British domination was replaced by a new and far more effective neo-colonialism in the form of Anglo-American imperialism.³⁷ He emphasized that the immediate task for the party must be to overthrow the Congress Government as soon as possible instead of accepting the paths earmarked by the Congress to achieve political power.

Following these rifts, the Second Congress of the CPI at Calcutta which met from February 28 to March 6, 1948, appeared as a battle-ground for Joshi's group versus Ranadive's group on the issue as to what strategy should be adopted to achieve political power. There were two ways for the consideration of the leadership, (i) the parliamentary process, and (ii) proletarian revolution. Ranadive, who led a powerful group within the party, launched a successful *coup d'état* against Joshi and became the Secretary-General of the party. The victory of Ranadive was the victory of the tactics of proletarian revolution under the leadership of the working class. However, the role of the peasants was supposed to be auxiliary.

Within a short span of time, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 created confusion among the Indian Communist revolutionaries. The Andhra group within the party, led by P. Sundarayya and R. Rajeswara Rao, asserted that Mao's concept of "New Democracy" should be followed in India. It pointed out that "our revolution in many respects differs from the classical Russian Revolution; and was to a great extent similar to that of Chinese Revolution".³⁸ By this time the polarization had entered into a more crucial stage. P.C. Joshi, who had opposed Ranadive's policy, found himself in disagreement with the Andhra group. Yet within the party three groups had been formed—(a) Leftist, (b) Rightist and (c) Centrist. In May 1950 Ranadive was replaced as the Secretary-General by Rajeswara Rao. This represented a rejection of the Russian-type revolution in India

and acceptance of the Maoist revolutionary strategy for the CPI. To implement the Andhra Thesis, Rao constituted a new Central Committee of the party consisting of nine members of which four were to be from Andhra Pradesh.

Before the first general elections of 1952, the centrist faction was led by Joshi and S.A. Dange. It felt that conditions in the country were not ripe for launching Maoist revolutionary strategy. But the leftist faction led by Rao was still defending its thesis that the country was ready for the armed uprising based upon the Chinese revolution. The centrists attained strong position within the party, and replaced Rao by Ajoy Ghosh on July 1, 1951, as the Secretary-General of the party. The new leader had put forward his observations that the country was not yet ready for armed revolution³⁹ and emphasized that the party should wait for the results of the first general elections. The argument of Ajoy Ghosh became quite acceptable to the other members of the party when the party appeared as a second largest party in Parliament after elections.⁴⁰ The party's cadre saw that the most appropriate road for achieving political power would be through parliamentary means rather than armed revolution.

The third stage of evolution of the strategy of the CPI sharply intensified shortly after the adjournment of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, held at the Kremlin in February 1956. A difficulty was occasioned by the Kremlin line on the possibility of a peaceful transition to Communism in India and Moscow's outlook towards Nehru's government. The Chinese delegation led by Mao Tse-tung at the Congress had disagreed with the Kremlin's assessment and remained firm in the view that Nehru was the leader of the Indian bourgeoisie class. The Chinese saw that the transformation to Socialism or Communism in India would not be possible without overthrowing Nehru's government through a revolutionary strategy.

As the after-effects, however, the left faction of the party was not publicly committed to the Chinese thesis, but it stood far from the Kremlin position. The argument was raised by the left faction that the party may have chosen the road to Communism through the parliamentary process of the constitutional changes, but side by side the revolutionary forces must be ready to launch a revolution if the ruling classes resisted such change.⁴¹

It was the time when the second general elections were near, as they were to be held in 1957. The leadership of the party launched an election campaign in alliance with other leftist forces. As a result

of this the party gained dramatic victory in Kerala State and formed a coalition government led by the CPI. The following index shows the party position at the district level in Kerala.⁴²

Table 1.3

<i>Districts</i>	<i>Contested by the CPI</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>
Alleppey	13	9	43.0
Cannanore	10	7	42.7
Ernakulam	12	4	37.9
Kottayam	8	3	29.2
Kozhikode	12	3	17.1
Malabar	46	12	36.1
Palghat	14	10	40.8
Quilon	13	10	41.2
Travancore-Cochin	64	40	37.8
Trichur	8	6	32.1

*Percentage of the total valid votes in the State polled by the party's candidates.

Despite the party's electoral victory in Kerala, the left faction within the CPI continued to oppose the idea that in India peaceful transition to Communism would be possible. Ultimately, the conviction of the leftists became quite firm when the Central Government imposed President's Rule over the State and dissolved the Assembly on July 31, 1959. The reaction of the leftists was published in a Communist journal that, "this government cannot be removed by parliamentary methods. Let us follow the teachings of Mao Tse-tung".⁴³

(b) Attack of China upon India: 1962

The border line between India and China became a controversial issue in the late 1950s. The Chinese Government had claimed more than 50,000 square miles of India's territory as a part of China. Somehow, until 1959 the differences between the two neighbouring countries could not be carried to the battlefield.

In 1955 there was a minor revolt in Tibet, engineered and led by the Khampa tribesmen. The leader of the revolt was the Dalai Lama⁴⁴ who visited India in 1956-57 and sought political asylum but eventually he preferred to return to Tibet. After the arrival of the Dalai Lama in Tibet the revolt became more intensified in July

1958.⁴⁵ The Chinese Government suspected that the Indian Government was assisting the rebellious Tibetans to keep its hold over what it regarded as Chinese territory. Suddenly, and after signing the "Five Principles of Coexistence" Chou En-lai put forth his country's claim to about 50,000 square miles of territory in India's possession.⁴⁶

The first serious clash between the two countries occurred on October 20-21, 1959. The Chinese patrolling soldiers penetrating into Indian territory called Chang Chemo Valley in southern part of Ladakh. In this clash nine Indian police personnel were killed and 10 were captured by the Chinese.⁴⁷

The Indian Communists were now divided into two schools of thought, one led by Ghosh, justifying the Indian Government's standpoint, and the second led by R. Ramamurti, A.K. Gopalan and E.M.S. Namboodiripad, declaring that any India's "aggression" would be opposed by the party, should it take place.⁴⁸ A significant statement came from S.A. Dange in the session of the Lok Sabha (Lower House) on October 24, 1959, who said, "I want to tell my Communist Party friends in China that you are pursuing a wrong line and must revise it."⁴⁹ The disunity within the CPI was exposed by him in these words, "I do not want to conceal the fact that I differ from my party on this issue."⁵⁰

During this period the position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union supported India and on October 31, 1959, Khrushchev suggested that China should be generous in settling her dispute with India.⁵¹ Following the comments of the CPSU, the CPI called its session at Meerut on November 14, 1959, and adopted a pro-Government resolution. The leadership implicitly accused the Chinese of aggression and said that the "traditional border" in Ladakh should be accepted by China and the area of the MacMahon Line is now a part of India and should remain in India.⁵² This position was not the unanimous view of all the Communists present. Moreover, the West Bengal party unit brought serious charges against the leadership, pointed out flaws and vetoed the resolution presented by the Central Party leadership.⁵³

In the sixth Party Congress, held at Vijayawada on April 16, 1961, the leaders deliberately ignored the controversial Sino-Indian border issue. Though the leftists agreed with the approach of the party to conciliate all the opponents within the party, a large number did not appreciate it. Z.A. Ahmed, a member of the CPI's Political Bureau, said in a statement on July 20, 1962, "... the CPI was not in favour of describing the Chinese incursion into Indian territory as aggression."⁵⁴

It was much later, on November 1, 1962, that the National Council of the Party severely condemned the Chinese aggression. While the resolution was passed by overwhelming majority a group disagreed, and its three leading leftists, Jyoti Basu, P. Sundarayya and H.K.S. Surjeet, resigned from the Central Secretariat.⁵⁵

In mid-November 1962, the Government of India began a selective crackdown on the CPI left-wing, arresting over 957 top and middle cadres of the party in almost all the States by January 10, 1963. Significantly, Namboodiripad, who was taken into custody on November 22, 1962, was released one week later.⁵⁶ By mid-December 1962, there were indications that the CPI front organizations had for the most part either declined or disappeared.⁵⁷ From December 9, 1962, to January 6, 1963, Dange went abroad on an "explaining mission" in which he visited both Moscow and London. Reportedly, in Moscow, Khrushchev strongly criticized Dange for falling "easy victim to the chauvinism of the reactionary forces."⁵⁸

It is at this juncture, early 1963, that a radical transformation took place within the party. In the wake of the Chinese invasion, the West Bengal unit had been seriously affected by the large-scale arrests of its members. The Central Secretariat, therefore, took steps to create a Provincial Organization Committee which superseded the formal State Party unit.⁵⁹

On March 9, 1963, the Chinese Communist Party unleashed its strongest attack up to that point on the CPI. It published four editorial in *Peoples Daily* entitled "A Mirror for Revisionists."⁶⁰

It specifically charged Dange with: (1) replacing the theory of the class struggle by the slogan of class collaborationism; (2) replacing proletarian socialism by bourgeois socialism; (3) defending the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the landlords; (4) giving unconditional support to Nehru's government in its policies of hiring itself to United States imperialism; and (5) trampling underfoot the friendship of the Chinese and Indian people and acting as buglers for Nehru's anti-China campaign.⁶¹

3. THE SPLIT WITHIN THE CPI: 1964

The resignation of the three most important leftist leaders, Jyoti Basu, P. Sundarayya and H.K.S. Surjeet, was the first demonstration against the revisionist and anti-Chinese policies of the CPI. However, the split was not completed yet. It was a clear indication for the party leadership that the split would take place if the party would not abandon the way it was following—its pro-Kremlin and pro-Nehru government policies.

The death of the Secretary-General of the Party, Ajoy Ghosh, on January 13, 1962,⁶² added one more controversial issue to the problem of party unity. There was an apparent competition among three groups, the rightist, the leftist and the centrist, each of them trying to establish its hold over the party for the implementation of their policies and strategies. The controversy reached its climax regarding the organizational matters when the National Council called its session on April 29, 1962. It had amended the party's constitution to the effect that there would be a party Chairman and a Secretary-General instead of the Secretary-General as the case was before.⁶³

S.A. Dange, a rightist trade unionist leader, became the Chairman while the post of the Secretary-General went to E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a centrist leader of the party. He also took charge of the Communist party organ, the *New Age*, as the Chief Editor.⁶⁴ But soon, after having two important posts, he could not agree with Dange's rightist policies and resigned from both the posts, while retaining his membership in the Central Executive Committee of the party.⁶⁵ The post of Secretary-General remained vacant and the party moved towards rightist path under the Chairmanship of Dange.

For the leftists and for a number of the centrists there was no alternative except the removal of Dange from his office.

On April 11, 1964, when the National Council called its session at Delhi, the opponents made every effort to expel Dange from his office. Although the issue of Dange's letters was as the second number on the agenda, the opposite group insisted that it should be discussed prior to other issues.⁶⁶ Those letters which were to be discussed were written by Dange a long time ago in 1920s when he was in prison under the Kanpur conspiracy for attempting to overthrow the British and to establish a Communist government in the country. Dange assured the British authorities that he would be loyal to the government in case he was released from jail.

The *Current* weekly of Bombay published the letters, which were preserved in the National Archives of Delhi, in March 1964.⁶⁷ The anti-Dange group branded Dange a traitor. However, though the issue did not receive priority for discussion, the opposite group not only demanded that it should be taken in the first place but also demanded that before going into details Dange should vacate the Chair. Dange outright rejected both the demands. As a protest, 32 members of the party under the leadership of Namboodiripad walked out from the party meeting.⁶⁸ Disciplinary action was taken by the National Council against them by which seven members were

expelled while 25 were suspended from the party on April 14, 1964.⁶⁹

The dissenters called their first session at Tenali from July 7 to 11, 1964, and Jyoti Basu, on behalf of other members, declared that "We are the Communist Party of India—We do not recognize Dange's group as the Communist Party of India. We are out of it."⁷⁰ He also announced that the next session of the party would be held at Calcutta on October 31, 1964. Now the split had been completed and a new Communist Party emerged in India, which was named "the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—CPI(M)".

4. FORMATION OF THE CPI(M) IN WEST BENGAL

This topic of discussion needs a brief historical background of the Communist movement in West Bengal, particularly in the post-independence period.

It will be recalled that in 1947 the Secretary-General of the party surrendered to the Nehru government and made an appeal in favour of evolving a party line based upon an alliance with the "progressive elements" of the Congress Party. Strong opposition to this came out from the West Bengal party unit in the form of a resolution. The West Bengal Communists declared that the unit would not follow the instructions of the Central leadership and would re-establish link with people to fight the Nehru government.⁷¹ They had circulated a pamphlet in which they had instructed the Communists of the State to "turn your guns and bayonets on the Congress Fascists, arrest the hated officers, set fire to the whole of Calcutta and the whole of Bengal."⁷²

As we have noted in previous pages, after a couple of years the leadership of the party decided that the CPI would contest the general elections of 1952. This soft strategy was a challenge for the Communists of West Bengal who put forward a view that their party would not engage in the electoral politics.⁷³ While on this issue they could not secure a strong support, nevertheless, their party won a total of 38 seats in the Legislative Assembly in West Bengal, which made it the second largest party. The index in Table 1.4 indicates district-wise position of the party in West Bengal.⁷⁴

The results of the elections discredited the policies of the extremists of West Bengal and diminished their appeal for revolutionary activities.

The Sino-Indian border clash of 1959 became the source of confusion among the Communists, particularly when the Soviet Union gave its support to the Indian standpoint against a Communist country.⁷⁵ The conviction of Ghosh that a Communist country like

Table 1.4

<i>District</i>	<i>Contested</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>
Bankura	7	2	10.8
Birbhum	4	0	8.2
Burdwan	5	2	8.4
Calcutta	9	4	12.1
Cooch-Behar	2	0	7.1
Darjeeling	4	1	22.6
Hooghly	7	4	17.1
Howrah	6	2	8.3
Jalpaiguri	2	0	5.1
Midnapur	15	6	12.9
Murshidabad	1	1	0.5
Nadia	1	0	2.9
Malda	3	1	12.5
24-Parganas	19	8	14.6
Purulia	2	2	2.7
West Dinajpur	1	0	5.2

* Percentage of the total valid votes in the West Bengal polled by the party's candidates.

China could not commit an aggression⁷⁶ was weakening in its validity and by this support eventually, he diverged from his previous thesis and demanded that the Chinese should put an end to aggressive activities and incursive attitude towards India. The Communists of West Bengal branded the statement of Ghosh as representing the sentiments of only a section of the party.⁷⁷

In addition, in September 1960 the Central Executive Committee of the CPI, in its resolution without mentioning China by name, took the side of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The strong group minority attempted to refute the resolution on the ground that it did not represent the unanimous view of the Committee members. However, the group failed to do what it actually wished. After unsuccessful attempts its members called a meeting of the West Bengal unit on October 21, 1960, in which not only they demonstrated antagonism against the central leadership of the party but also they put forward the protest resolution which was then published in the Chinese Press.⁷⁸

The gulf between the central leadership and the West Bengal State Party unit became widest in 1960 when one of its members, Hare Krishna Konar, without the prior permission of the Central Executive Committee, visited China. The Central Executive Committee asked him to explain why disciplinary action should not be taken against him. A reply to this notice came from the party unit that if any action was taken against him, it would be understood to be a censure of the entire West Bengal State unit of the party.⁷⁹ Consequently, the central leadership would not censure him.

Now the time had arrived when the issue of "Dange's letters" was expected to be discussed in the CPI's National Council on April 11, 1964, where Dange refused to accept the demands of the party members. As a result the party unit of West Bengal adopted a rebellious attitude towards him, and Promode Das Gupta, Secretary of the West Bengal unit, declared that "his organization" owed no allegiance to the "rump" National Council and refused to recognize Dange's leadership.⁸⁰

After this statement the central leadership of the CPI sent Bhawani Sen Gupta to Calcutta in order to find a solution, but he could not make any progress.⁸¹ This incident led the central leadership to take action as the last resort and, eventually, the State unit was suspended by the Central Executive Committee. A new Secretariat was established under the Secretaryship of Bhawani Sen Gupta.⁸²

It was at a conference of the delegates of the CPI(M) at Calcutta on October 31, 1964, that the party elected a Presidium of three members consisting of Jyoti Basu, A.K. Gopalan and T. Naggi Reddy,⁸³ and declared that the meeting in fact represented the seventh Congress of the real Communist Party of India. Thus the split within the Communist Movement in India was completed and the CPI(M) was formally launched.

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CHAPTER 2

The Naxalite Movement

1. ORIGIN

THE Naxalite Movement in West Bengal was launched from a strategically located territory called "Naxalbari". It is a police station under Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district in West-Bengal.¹ This northern portion of the State of West Bengal is situated some 30 to 50 miles from Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan in the North, from Nepal in the West and from Bangladesh in the East. Before 1971, Bangladesh was the eastern wing of Pakistan and, obviously, it was governed by Islamabad until it achieved independence.

The strategic significance of this area of about 100 square miles lies in the fact that it is precisely located at the point of India's narrowest corridor, 13 to 14 miles wide which connects the main portion of India's land mass with its north-western States and territories of Assam, North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura.

There is sufficient evidence to establish the fact that this area has attracted the attention of external powers and adjoining States who wished to create difficulties for India externally as well as internally.

We shall take up, in the first instance, the role of the Pakistan Government in encouraging the Maoist revolutionary strategy in West Bengal. We can understand the intentions and motives of the Government of Pakistan by visualizing the war strategy of 1965. This area was strategically and geopolitically so important that it became a part and parcel of Pakistan's war plans in 1965. The plans of this Government were that should Indian forces attack on the western border of Pakistan she would open a battle front on the eastern border. In the eastern side two possibilities were expected by these military strategy makers. First, the Pakistani forces would be in an easy position to receive Chinese aid, and secondly, the Pakistanis would be able to cut the Indian territory into two parts at the narrowest corridor exactly in the Naxalbari area. The leaders of

Pakistan were sure that these developments would open the bargaining talks between the two countries on several issues, including the Kashmir issue.²

Although these plans of Pakistan did not materialize due to the differences of opinion and controversy between President Ayyub Khan and his Foreign Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the possibilities of executing this plan of Pakistan against India did not remain remote. The Moslem ideologically oriented State made every possible effort to find out weak points in India's defences. In view of this, it began to support and continued helping Naga and Mizo rebellions in Assam and Nagaland, and shortly thereafter in West Bengal.³ The support of Pakistan, a Moslem State, to the Communist movement was surprising because while the Chinese theories were a twinkling and guiding star, their implementation was coming in West Bengal through East Pakistan and Nepal. Though the Naxalite armed agrarian revolution was launched in the first week of March 1967, some clues indicate that it was in fact developing already in 1965. However, it would not be wrong to say that while the revolutionary Naxalite movement in the Naxalbari area became clearly visible only in 1967, as a radical ideology it had had a long history.

While dealing with the historical aspect of the movement we have to remember that early in 1965 the Indian officials seized Indian currency of more than Rs. 31,000,00 at the Raxaul check post from a Tibetan which were intended to assist the extremists in West Bengal.⁴ But this was not the last case, on grounds of solid evidences, that the Indian Intelligence Bureau informed the Indian Government that the extremists in West Bengal were being guided by the Chinese from the territory of Nepal and have been provided with arms manufacturing facilities there.⁵ Because of this, the Indian Government took precautions and firm measures all along the frontiers.

It was on March 30, 1966, that the Intelligence Bureau provided evidence that large quantities of arms and ammunition have been smuggled into West Bengal through the territory of East Pakistan.⁶ The Indian Government tried to solve this problem on the governmental level through diplomatic notes by requesting cooperation, but this did not serve the purpose. However, a reply came on Radio Pakistan in Urdu language broadcast on July 2, 1967, which in fact sought to encourage the subversive activities of the Naxalites by saying that "the time has come when the Indian people would make their rulers stand in the criminal box and would

liberate themselves from slavery. The areas in revolt had completely separated themselves from the rest of India".⁷ In the meantime, another report came into possession of the Indian Government that the Naxalities had established strong contacts with the Maoists in Nepal. Consequently, New Delhi informed the Government of Nepal that the Naxalites were utilizing the privileges concerning the crossing of the common border in order to smuggle arms into West Bengal through Nepal's border. The Nepalese government, as a result, directed its district officials to prevent any movement of illicit arms across into India.⁸ It is, however, doubtful whether these protests and precautions intended to put a check and restrict such movements, had any tangible results. Thus the external and internal extremists continued to have frequent contacts to the detriment of India's security. Ineffectiveness of these measures can be judged by this case. When Kanu Sanyal was wanted by the West Bengal police on charges of having taken part in the Naxalbari uprising in 1969, he escaped from West Bengal and was given refuge in Jhapa by the Nepali Maoists,⁹ a place situated beyond the Indo-Nepali border.

2. REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE

(a) *The Tribal Unrest:* The primitive methods of cultivation have left the tribal people economically far behind in comparison with other peasants of West Bengal. Day by day the gap was becoming wider and wider, causing frustration among the backward tribal people. The only method to achieve better prospects in life was to welcome Maoist revolution under the leadership of radical Communists, who promised prosperity and justice.

It was in 1949 that the Communists focused their attention in a large measure on these disgruntled tribal people. They goaded the tribals to take an active part and play an effective role in building up a glorious future for themselves by eliminating economic disparity. The extremists emphasized the creation of a militant force to curb the authority and reduce the ill-gotten gains of the landlords. The tribals were urged to take part in the revolutionary drive against the landlords in West Bengal.

Needless to say, the frustration among the tribal people came to the fore in West Bengal when a large number of tribals became the followers of the extremists on the assumption that the line adopted by the radicals was the only cure for their economic maladies. The tribals and other backward people started launching

violent attacks on landlords in order to seize stocks of foodgrains and the Government's warehouses in the State.¹⁰

The Congress Government had never been unconscious about the existing political developments in the State. The Government enacted land reform legislation in order to improve the conditions of the weaker sections and provide proper opportunities to the backward tribals who were battling the untold misery. The West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1954¹¹ is one such example. Through this legislation the tea planting lands were exempted from the ceiling of 25 acres. The main occupation of tribes, precisely in the Terai area, had been the tea plantation. However, while the Government was implementing it, the Communists branded it a pro-landlord legislation which would not be helpful to the tribal people. The people whose condition it sought to improve would remain in the same condition as had existed before the enactment of this legislation. On the contrary, the nationalization of forests in the State left the tribals with very nominal privileges, and meagre resources, and restricted their right to collect forest produce as well as to cultivate land without obtaining prior sanction of the Government. In these circumstances, the faith of these tribals in the Government was constantly on the decline, while at the same time the Communists were firmly penetrating into the fold of tribes.¹²

Meanwhile, the intensive efforts of the radical Communists bore fruit and the tribal people became increasingly more conscious of their need to assert their privileges and rights. It was in the year 1959 that the landlords contemplated that it would be an appropriate time to design defensive tactics in order to do away with the hostility of the tribes. They found out one solution to water down the intensity of tribal demands. They began to evict them from the lands, which were allotted to tribes and peasants as *Bakhshish Khet*, for private use of the workers on plantations in reward for services. It was quite clear that the eviction would create open conflicts between the landlords and the tribals.

Once again, the Government tried to play the role of a mediator in the conflicts of landlords and the tribes and to give a concrete programme of assistance to the latter. When Government officials interfered in the affairs of the landlords and the tribes, they discovered that the land records were not properly maintained by the landlords. The most striking feature was that the tribes were not aware of the intricacies and implications of land legislation.¹³

Coming back to our initial discussion, the Government officials also noted that the tribes were under heavy burden of debt

borrowed from the landlords on exorbitant rates of interest, which it was beyond the capacity of the poverty-stricken people to pay back. The landlords also refused to return mortgaged land after the expiry of a stipulated period, which meant untold hardship for the poor people, particularly the tribals. While the entire peasantry was groaning under the burden of these hardships, the tribal people and the landless labourers realized the need for launching a land-grab movement in the Naxalbari area which eventually spread to other parts of the State like wild fire.

(b) *Quest for Land:* The immediate concern of the Government was to solve the existing problems which were the main source of mounting unrest in this region. Consequently, the West Bengal Government took urgent steps to adopt measures for the betterment of the economic conditions in these areas. The Government took stringent measures to take over excessive lands from the landlords on the recommendation of the Tea Advisory Board of 1964. As has been pointed out in the preceding pages that the landlords were not prepared to relish the idea of land reform legislation in respect of their lands. Instead of welcoming the ceiling laws they were engaged in safeguarding their own interest by circumventing and side-tracking the provisions of the law. They considered *Benami transactions* to be one way of solving their problems.¹⁴ (Benami transactions meant the illegal transfer of land to relatives to escape the 25 acres ceiling imposed upon the ownership of land). Thus the Krishak Samiti (Peasants Organization of the Communist Party) which was busy all the time in organizing poor peasants, agricultural labourers and tribals against the exploiting landlords since 1951,¹⁵ considered the year 1967 to be a suitable time for launching a full-scale Maoist revolutionary movement.¹⁶ A massive campaign for occupying lands was started by the *Krishak Samiti*. In the beginning the land grab movement did not pose any danger to the lives of the landlords. Though forcible means were employed by the leaders of the land grab movement, they could not go beyond certain limits. The members of the Samiti began making a survey of the lands of those landlords who were surreptitiously engaged in indulging into the *Benami transactions* and if they found out such cases they demonstrated in front of their homes. Up to this stage such demonstrations were peaceful and harmless. Occasionally, however, the members of the Samiti used to seize stored foodgrains and, whenever they found a piece of land lying vacant they grabbed it, began to plough it or felled a few trees or simply struck the red flag into the grabbed land.¹⁷

A significant departure from the existing situation took place when the Samiti members were demonstrating against the landlords on May 23, 1967, and when a small force of 20 constables led by police Inspector Sonam Wangdi arrived at a small populated area of Siliguri, a sub-division of Darjeeling district. The vanguard of the demonstrators consisted of women and children, while the Maoist revolutionaries stayed behind. The mob started shouting such slogans, as "Victory to the red flag". The police had no orders to open fire. "Snatch the guns" came the call from the crowd. Still the police did not open fire; but when the arrows from the mob wounded the Police Inspector the police opened fire.¹⁸

This incident provided the best opportunity to the Maoist revolutionaries in West Bengal. They tried to convince the people that since independence the policy of the Government had been to subserve the interests of the landlords. The recent orders for sending the police against them were given by the United Front Government, in which the portfolio of Police was held by the CPI(M), who took the ultimate decision. This incident compromised the position of the party, and the leadership of the CPI(M) soon realized that a blunder had been committed by the United Front Government, which would have long-range repercussions on the unity and solidarity of the party's cadre. These new developments in the State created favourable circumstances for the Maoists who thrived among the poor peasantry. The land seizure drive rapidly spread from one district to another. A stage had been reached when the land grab movement became militant and violent. Up to 1968 the *Krishak Samiti* was successful in creating a force of one thousand volunteer auxiliary groups at the village level and each of them consisted of five to 10 militants.¹⁹ Apparently, the purpose of these groups was to assist and accelerate the activities of peasants against the landlords. Their function was also to watch the activities of landlords and the behaviour of the police. There was a similarity between the approach and activities of these groups and those of Maoist guerrilla squads which will be examined in the pages that follow.

As far as the success of the land grab movement was concerned, the Samiti members, in a short period of time until 1969 had grabbed 60,000 acres of land in Midnapur district, 12,000 acres of land in Jalpaiguri district, 8,000 acres of land in Cooch-Bihar district and 8,000 acres of land in dinajpur district.²⁰

3. PROGRAMME OF THE NAXALITES

(a) *Influence of Peking:* The Chinese Communist Party left no one in doubt about its attitude towards the Naxalite movement. From

1967 to 1970 a series of articles were published in the *People's Daily* as well as the *Peking Review*.²¹ On July 14, 1967, the *Peking Review* came out with an article entitled "Spring Thunder Breaks Over India". In this article the Chinese severely attacked the CPI(M). The attack was also supported by broadcasts from Chinese Radio.

Quite understandably, the Chinese support to their cause made a tremendous impact on the leaders of the Naxalbari movement. They were now inclined to endorse the suggestions in which the Chinese said that the revolution should be rural in character, with peasants as its main component; the armed struggle in countryside should eventually encircle the cities which would be conducted according to the thought of Chirman Mao Tse-tung. They further stressed the need for studying the guidelines laid down by Mao while deliberating over the strategy of armed uprising and the theory of Revolutionary Base. The Indian Mao Tse-tung. Charu Mazumdar, raised the slogan to the effect that the "Chinese Chairman is our Chairman, the Chinese Path is our Path".²² The Naxalite leadership was busy in spreading the Chinese-oriented revolutionary tactics in West Bengal. In India, directives to the Naxalites were given by Mazumdar, Mao's Thought was published and circulated by Kanu Sanyal, who was convinced that the masses must be motivated for bringing about armed revolution. Keeping this in mind, he translated and published Mao's works in large quantities and distributed them amongst the people of West Bengal.²³ Drawing thus upon Mao's theories, the leaders of the Naxalite movement were laying emphasis on the establishment of the revolutionary bases in the country side as a first step to capture political power.

(b) *Theory of the Revolutionary Base*. The leaders of the Naxalite movement felt that the pockets of armed resistance must be established in the country side, because some 70 to 80 per cent people have been living there. The credit for such a strategy goes to Mao's teachings, and to the Chinese mass media which seemed to ceaselessly function to bring about a new zest among the radicals of West Bengal. It has been observed in the foregoing pages that while the Chinese were pleading the urgency of the establishment of the revolutionary bases in the country side, the Naxalites did not make any delay in carrying out these directives and establishing such bases. From these revolutionary bases they would be strategically in a position to launch frontal attack on the enemies of the peasantry and the backward classes. They would be thus dealing with class enemies, i.e., the police and its informers, the landlords

and money lenders who were considered the arch enemies of the people by the Naxalites. These revolutionary bases would be entirely under the control of the peasants, where these Naxalites would be having greater freedom and better opportunities of meeting together, unobserved by the police and their stooges, and striking at the opportune moments. This strategy was tried out with success in China itself from 1920 onwards.²⁴ Having a complete possession of the revolutionary bases, the Naxalites would be launching attacks on large villages and, eventually, guerrilla attacks upon cities. The encirclement of and entry into the cities would in itself mean a great victory of nationwide importance.

It was obvious that the application of the theory of Revolutionary Areas met with a limited success within some areas, and certain areas definitely came under the control of the Naxalites, and started to function as their strongholds. They did not permit the police or other government officials to enter these "strongholds". They had their own armed squads which controlled the administration, schools and other public activities in these localities, and People's Courts were administering justice.²⁵ In these strongholds it was the normal practice that Naxalites visited to the houses of their class enemies and took them to secluded open fields. Here the Naxalites assembled as a People's Court, brought charges against the kidnapped persons and when these so called crimes were "proved" these "enemies" were slaughtered in full public view. The next day the head of the slaughtered person was hung at a market or other crowded place as a warning to other members of the class enemy. These methods of taking decisions, and these ruthless practices, became the main cause of their unpopularity and led to the ultimate failure of the movement, in addition to their affective strategy.

(c) *Strategy of the Armed Uprising*: Charu Mazumdar, who had assumed the role of Indian Mao Tse-tung in the eyes of the Naxalites, formulated the strategy of the Armed Uprising in an issue of "Liberation".²⁶ This strategy consisted of the following elements:

1. Complete secrecy must be observed in forming a guerrilla unit. No inkling of such an activity should be revealed even in the party meetings. The cooperation should be between individuals on a person to person basis.

2. The guerrilla units must be small, well-knit and mobile consisting of about seven members capable of destroying the enemy by a sudden attack with traditional weapons.

3. It is necessary to keep every unit under a Commander.

4. We should arouse the hatred of the majority of the local peasants against a particular class enemy marked out by us.

5. Guided by the will of the majority of our people we should launch an attack on our enemy at best suitable time and place.

6. Special care should be taken in making arrangements for safe shelter of the guerrilla units. These shelters should be separated and located in different villages far removed from the place of action.

7. Name of the guerrilla, identity of a particular class enemy or the place of action should be kept strictly secret.

8. Guerrillas must rely on traditional weapons as choppers, spears, sticks, sickles, etc. Improved weapons snatched from the enemy should be kept in reserve for future use only when the quantity of such weapons is sufficient.

9. The guerrilla units must come from different directions pretending, as far as possible, to be innocent persons and gather at a previously appointed place, wait for the enemy and make a decisive attack when the right moment comes.

10. After the attack is launched the guerrillas must be ordered to disperse, go to their respective shelters and every clue must be destroyed.

11. The guerrilla units must be visited frequently, regularly and in a secret way in order to keep the morals of the fighters.

12. Guided by the advice of the masses and relying on the information provided by them, guerrilla troops must work out plans for further action aimed at the annihilation of the enemy.

The aim of this Naxalite strategy was the annihilation of the landlords, money lenders, police and its informers and those who would be preventing them from establishing a stronghold of peasants over the villages; ultimately, this strategy would lead to capture political power in the cities.

It was quite evident that in the initial stages their achievements were remarkable. The class enemies of the Naxalites were feeling insecure and the landlords, money lenders and other suspected persons left the village for fear of murder.²⁷ Those who remained in the Naxalite-dominated areas and revolutionary bases gave, apparently, full cooperation to the Naxalites under compulsion. But before long the victories of the Naxalites were on the decline. The reason for this setback was the lack of analytical approach and its correct application. In other words, they could not apply their strategy at proper time and against the right persons who were the real class enemies of the Naxalites. They soon became divided; contradictory opinions were expressed as to who were to be considered as the class enemies. This problem became particularly apparent during the period in which they launched attacks on police

official in order to annihilate them, because of most of those who were killed belonged to lower ranks, like constables. The officers belonging to higher ranks who gave directions to the lower personnel were spared or were beyond their reach. Another drawback of the strategy was that it affected all those persons who refused to give the demanded money irrespective of the fact whether the amount was big or small. All such persons were annihilated in the darkness of night. A large number of persons who were thus killed were not really their class enemies, and were killed on grounds of personal vendetta or revenge.

Although Mazumdar emphasized secrecy and unity of command, secrecy could not be maintained. Also the command was divided into several independent small groups with the result that factional struggle ensued. Moreover, though the Naxalites regarded Mao's thought as worth following, its meaning was interpreted differently by different factions.

When Mazumdar invited the students and the youth to go to villages to enforce the strategy and apply these ideas in practice a large number obeyed him. But on the other side many villagers saw that this annihilation campaign or strategy was nothing more than the murder of a co-villager by strangers from the cities when the students really were.

4. SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE NAXALITES

We shall discuss in this chapter the reasons for the prevailing ignorance of the poorer sections of the people under three sub-headings: (a) Tribal elements, (b) Poor peasants, and (c) Landless labourers.

(a) *Tribal Elements*: Tribes of West Bengal have been distinguished for their peculiar traditional pattern of life. They were divided into two significant entities not only within the urban sector but also in the rural sector. They did not wish to give up their distinct traditions.²⁸

According to the census of 1961 the population of tribes in West Bengal was: (a) Santhal tribe 1,200,000, (b) Oarans 297,000, (c) Mundas 160,000, (d) Bhumijas 91,000; other small communities, for example Tarai Gurkhas, Gondas, Hajongs came to about 37,904.²⁹ The same proportion existed in the Naxalite area. Thus since the proportion of Santhal tribe was comparatively large, the leadership of the movement remained in the hands of Santhal tribe. (It will be further elaborated while dealing with the leadership pattern of the tribal people.) Whenever conflicts took place within the leadership it clearly reflected the difference of opinion which varied between the rural and urban values and attitudes in West

Bengal. The peculiar nature of these recurring conflicts will be dealt with at the appropriate place while discussing the factional struggle among the Naxalites leadership.

The foregoing survey was confined to the boundaries of rural areas, more particularly to Sarbanapur of Birbhum district, but it holds good for a number of other similar cases. It has already been mentioned that the Santhal tribes comprised 87 per cent of the total population of the tribes, and that among these 87 to 89 per cent were directly engaged as agriculture labourers.³⁰

The occupation of tribes, more particularly in the Terai area, is tea cultivation, generally on the lands of the landlords. They could not cultivate on lands owned by them unless they seized those plots of lands forcibly and through violent means. They could not get enough for themselves and their families to consume because despite their hard labour they got only a share of the proceeds, which was hardly sufficient to keep them even on subsistence level. Under these depressive economic conditions they had no alternative but to join the Maoists who were pleading their cause and teaching them effective methods to emancipate themselves and "to expropriate the expropriators".

(b) *Poor Peasants*: Agrarian relations in India varied from State to State because there were no uniform laws governing them in the past. There were no customs or traditions either, and the landlords' sweet will determined the economic status of the poor peasants. The landlords were under no obligation imposed by the Tenancy Acts, 1954, the conditions of life for them depended upon the weight their demands carried. India is an agricultural country where 70 to 80 per cent of its population depends upon primitive tools and outmoded methods of production, and they produce barely sufficient to keep the bodies and soul of their people together. Out of this meagre produce a lion's share is misappropriated by the influential landlords with the active support or passive connivance of administrative machinery, which is under the control of rich peasant or politically influential landlords—the rural elite. Because of these factors the phenomenon which was common in these areas was that in this agricultural society the poor peasants and sharecroppers did not draw the attention of the society. Their interests were not protected from any quarters and they suffered in two ways: (1) the misuse of the labour by the landlords, and (2) insufficient facilities provided by the judiciary to the poor peasants against this exploitation.³¹

The usual practice which existed in West Bengal was that the *Jotedars* (petty landlords) cultivated the land of the big landlords

by leasing it out to sharecroppers on the contract basis, i.e., if the *Jotedars* would provide seeds, bulls and plough and manure, half of the production earned from that plot of land would be transferred to the sharecroppers and the rest would be retained by the *Jotedars*. There was one more alternative too, that is, in case the sharecropper accepted only the land and no other facility, he would be entitled to 60 per cent of the harvest for his own use.³²

The implementation of such contracts meant untold hardship to poor peasants in so far as there was no certainty whether the *Jotedar* would employ the same sharecropper also for the next season. This lack of security forced them not to see beyond certain limits.³³ Moreover, the sharecropper would be perpetually grateful to the *Jotedar* who was considered by him as the one who would give him the means of livelihood as his benefactor. In the long run, the sharecropper would depend upon the *Jotedar* and seek his sympathies in moments of crisis.³⁴ Whenever any sharecroppers were faced with a problem at the time of famine, flood or drought, the sharecroppers approached the *Jotedar* for obtaining loans, in cash or in kind, and a portion of produce in advance.

It was considered an easy way for the poor peasant to obtain financial assistance at a time when the multipurpose government banks were not in existence, as they are now. In those days they did not operate in sufficient numbers in rural areas and it was hard to get loan from them due to complicated formalities. As a matter of policy or a tactical move, these *Jotedars* welcomed these needs of the sharecroppers as they, in this way, or on such occasions, posed as their saviours.³⁵

The *Jotedars* of West Bengal served three purposes in village economy. First, they were absentee landlords; secondly, they were money lenders; and thirdly, they ultimately became political leaders. In all the three positions they could protect their interests against the disgruntled poor peasants as well as the land reform enactments of the government. When the harvest was ripe and about to be cut, the *Jotedars* were happy and the poor sharecroppers felt miserable. The *Jotedars* went about collecting their debts with interest in the form of cash, seeds and foodgrains, and became prosperous, while the sharecroppers had to pay back the loans with exorbitant rates of interest and were unhappy.³⁶

It may also be noted that all contracts and other relevant papers and legal documents were prepared by the *Jotedars*, the sharecroppers being utterly ignorant. The sharecroppers were made to affix their thumb impression at the place pointed out by the cunning

Jotedar. He read out the terms and conditions of these loans and charged whatever he wanted. In these circumstances the *Jotedar* became the sharecropper's master. The *Jotedar*s refrained from using fertilizers as they thought it was not in their interest. They wanted to keep the sharecroppers at subsistence level. It was estimated by the Adviser, Programme Administration in his tour report,³⁷ that by applying Rs. 20 worth of ammonium sulphate the return of extra harvest would be Rs. 35 per acre. If the sharecropper was to give away half of this increase as *Jotedar's* share, he would get a net return of Rs. 17.50 as an investment. The *Jotedar* considered it unnecessary to invest extra money which might bring greater profits to the sharecropper.

As the harvesting time approached in October 1968 the cleavage between the peasants, the *Jotedar*s and the absentee landlords widened. Mazumdar exhorted the peasants "to seize the next harvest."³⁸ The call was enchanting for the poor peasants in the depressing atmosphere. A general belief among the peasants was that since all possible methods for eliminating disparity had failed to improve the economic condition of the poor peasants, and no hopeful results were visible even in the long run, there was no alternative to adopting violent methods. In view of this, there was no harm in accepting Mazumdar's directives. Apparently, the poor peasants were confident of their past achievements, and therefore they thought that if forcible methods were used and new methods vigorously launched for cutting down the resources of rich landlords and transfer of land to the poor peasants more benefits would accrue to them. While these poor peasants hitherto working on lands of the landlords were enriching the treasury of the landowners, their own return was on increasing poverty. There were no hopes for the future either. In this atmosphere, the strategy of Mazumdar to collect more poverty-stricken people around the Naxalite movement was the only alternative remedy. The call that he gave was that "economic struggle against the feudal class was necessary not only in the present but in the future also".³⁹ In these words he gave a long-ranged concrete programme to the peasants, and no doubt, thus gained their favour.

(c) *Landless Labourers*: The landless labourers in West Bengal, who constituted 15.3 per cent of the total population in 1968, can be classified into two categories:⁴⁰ (a) those who were born in the landless families, and (b) nominal landholders who gave up their rights on land under the circumstances which have been narrated above in the previous sections on tribal unrest and poor peasants.

These workers could not obtain mortgage plots from money lenders or the absentee landlords and were engaged on their lands on meagre wages. According to the report of the *Agricultural Labour Enquiry Commission*, the labourers were mainly drawn from local tribes and were generally indebted to their employers from whom they obtained loans when they were urgently in need of money. The Enquiry Commission also stated in its report that some employers allotted one *bigha* of land to attached workers on the condition that they would work in employer's field during the busy season on daily wages, which came to less than As. 8 (approx. 5 cents).⁴¹ The way in which these labourers were treated inevitably led them to the acceptance of the Maoist revolutionary strategy. In this situation a new era arrived in which the conflicts between the rapacious landlords and agricultural labourers would remain no more unresolved. Consequently, the landless labourers launched a series of demonstrations. By August 1969 there were 346 separate incidents of forcible occupation of land which were reported to the police in West Bengal.⁴²

The landless labourers were so desperate that they did not worry about the dire consequences which could be expected as a result of resorting to the Maoist revolutionary activities. The basic reason for this was that they thought that for them there was not much to lose. On the other hand, they were confident that in the event of the emerging victorious they would be able to acquire lands and reduce the influence of landlords and put an end to their cruel deeds. With this predominant concept in their minds they became a very important component of the Naxalite movement.

(d) *Students*: Before taking up this topic for detailed discussion, we should keep in mind the problems of students in general and those of West Bengal in particular. Such a survey would help us in appreciating their growing interest in the Naxalite movement. According to official statistics 1,75,000 graduates were unemployed in the countryside in West Bengal until 1968, while another survey revealed that 50 to 83 million youth were jobless in India. In West Bengal out of one hundred, 52 employable persons were without work and in 1971 the number of educated unemployed job seekers there was 3,70,547.⁴³

Not only that employment was not available; the students were becoming frustrated, indulging in subversive activities as they had a lot of time at their disposal to go about taking part in such lawless activities out of sheer despondency. What they actually felt can be perceived by an interview which their representatives gave

to the Press in which they said: "How do you expect a sensitive person to remain non-violent in a situation where people live and die on the streets, where laws are made only to be broken, where government exists only with the help of police force, where to be a non-conformist is a sin".⁴⁴ These emotions were to be found in the youth throughout India in almost all the States, though they varied in intensity and vigour. In some States the students were divided into several groups and among different political parties; in West Bengal, where the Communists (Leftists) were better organized and wielded greater influence, the bulk of the students joined their fold. Their main objective was to find out a solution of their economic problems which, according to them, was possible only through revolution. They thought that by revolution they would overthrow the present exploitative economic system and establish a more egalitarian political system on the Chinese model.

The involvement of West Bengal students in the Naxalite movement can be evidently linked with a short trip of their representatives to Nepal in 1965. The Naxalite Movement did not start in that year nor is it a fact that the movement was the result of a sudden upsurge. Some students of Calcutta crossed the border under the leadership of Saibal Mitra and visited Nepal to meet the Chinese Ambassador.⁴⁵ What issue was under discussion is difficult to visualize. However, it must have something to do with Chinese assistance in carrying out their mission in India. The Maoist philosophy impressed them greatly and they were evidently inspired by Maoist revolutionary movement. They brought back some slogans, "Negotiate a boundary settlement with China", "Mao Tse-tung zindabad" (Long Live Mao Tse-tung).⁴⁶ Until 1966, the rigorous attitude of the students and the manner in which they tried to direct the attention of the authorities towards the problem remained within the limits of demonstrations, sending deputations to the University administration as well as to the government. The situation took a serious turn when in 1966 several students of the Presidency College, Calcutta, were suspended or expelled for taking part in the protest strike. These students so punished joined the leftist group within the CPI(M).⁴⁷

These revolutionary students of Calcutta directed their attention to Debra district. In that area the movement began in the form of economic struggle as early as 1967 under the CPI(M) against black-marketers and hoarders. On the question of wages, the agricultural labourers joined the movement. In 1968 the leadership of Debra district switched its allegiance over to the CPI (M-L), but it

was not until Mazumdar propagated his policy of annihilation that the CPI(M-L) could register a significant progress.

Meanwhile, Mazumdar, who seemed to be a well-wisher of the students, declared that "they should not take part in the students' union elections and concentrate on revolutionary work".⁴⁸ He did not agree with the existing courses and the methods of teaching. He thought that the prevailing system of education and mode of teaching would not be helpful for the students in building a prosperous future. In his opinion the universities were giving irrelevant, unrealistic, wrong and defective education. He thought that instead of wasting energy in the union elections and receiving wrong education for building up the nation but one of developing feudal-bourgeoisie mentality against the poor masses, they should go to the villages for the dissemination of Mao's thoughts there.⁴⁹ A large number of students shifted their activities to the villages and instigated the villagers so as to bring them into the fold of Maoism.

An interesting phenomenon of this migration from cities to villages was that the propagators of Maoism were not confident as to the nature and future of Maoism. The Naxalites themselves were not sure of their stand, and a survey made in this regard made it clear that very few of them had ever read Mao's works. Out of the 300 cases of Naxalites examined by the police, 20 per cent were college students, and about 16 per cent were dropouts; only 7 per cent were of 30 years of age, and half of them were below 20. It was also revealed by police reports that 27 per cent of them had previous criminal records.⁵⁰ There was no mature guidance along with vigorous efforts on the part of the youth engaged in these revolutionary activities. The result was that the energies which could be utilized for constructive purpose were directed into destructive channels and not much was achieved by indulging into misguided enthusiasm. Since there was lack of proper guidance, enthusiasm tilted towards destruction of life and property.

While there were several factors which can be attributed to the decline of the movement, the participation of the urban Naxalites had contributed to a large extent to the gradual downfall and the ultimate disappearance of the movement. When these urban youth infiltrated into the villages and operated in the countryside, they carried with their urban style of living. They could not mix well with their rural counterparts and lacked that revolutionary zeal and habits of hard life which were essential for making any movement to succeed. Moreover, they came from diverse social groups, varying class background and different political affiliations. Hence they were

finding it very difficult to adjust themselves to rigorous village life. The villagers were getting modernized but the pace was slow and halting. The pace of progress towards modernization in the cities was comparatively faster. Hence the cleavage between the urban and rural sectors of Indian society. In these circumstances the urban Naxalites were becoming completely segregated, isolated and alienated from the rural peasant-oriented Naxalite movement.⁵¹ The result was that when they got poor response from the villages they withdrew to the cities and launched the movement in Gopi Ballavapur on August 21, 1969.⁵² From early 1970 the teenagers joined the students. They launched a series of attacks on the memorials of national leaders, smashed Gandhi Centre in Jadavapur University and killed the Vice-Chancellor. They even destroyed the laboratories and openly went about shouting that Chairman Mao says that "If you read more you become more foolish".⁵³ The Naxalites disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the educational institutions and repeatedly called the youth to go on strike. Most of the Naxalite students abstained from appearing at the examinations, and believed in Mazumdar's direction and shouted the slogan "Boycott the examinations".⁵⁴ The professional criminals who lived along the railway lines chose this opportunity for their nefarious activities. When they broke open railway wagons and committed dacoities they shouted the slogan "Mao Tse-tung Zindabad (Long Live Mao Tse-tung)".⁵⁵

The above survey goes to establish the fact that Naxalite movement in the cities was the movement of anti-social and criminal elements rather than the Maoist-oriented sections of society.⁵⁶ It was based upon self-interests and not on the interest of the masses. The Naxalites generally indulged in lawless activities. Looting, arson and violence were their daily routine. Innocent persons, sometimes, bore the burnt of their nefarious activities. Whenever the Naxalites considered it opportune they threw home-made bombs on the innocent groups of people busy in their normal daily chores,⁵⁷ leading to senseless loss of life in cold blood, and thus disturbing the peaceful life in Calcutta. Such activities alienated the sympathies of the common man, and their political or ideological screen was too thin a cover to conceal the criminal nature of their misdeeds. They indiscriminately threw bombs on the busy markets, cinema houses and crowded streets without rhyme or reason, only in order to wreak vengeance on the owner or show the strength of their movement. They would stab a shopkeeper after a heated argument, or kill a traffic constable on duty, because he represented the authority of the government.

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Party of China was in session under the personal guidance of Chairman Mao Tse-tung.⁸

2. POLICIES OF CPI (M-L)

The newly born Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) rejected the parliamentary procedure for attaining political power. In an issue of *Liberation*, Mazumdar said that "today the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party cannot opt for the parliamentary road to achieve political power".⁹ Thus instead of elections, class-war was emphasized, and instead of ballots, bullets were proposed to be used according to Mazumdar's Manifesto, as Mao Tse-tung had asserted in his famous saying, "Power comes out of the barrel of the gun".¹⁰ The CPI (M-L) declared that the Congress Party cannot differentiate between the United Front of West Bengal, which betrayed the national freedom struggle to serve its own narrow reactionary class interests by becoming imperialist agent for ruling the country.¹¹ As far as the United Front Government in West Bengal was concerned, the CPI (M-L) speculated that while the Congress Party was the main political party of the ruling class, it could no longer deceive the masses:¹² The CPI (M-L) called the United States of America an imperialist and the U.S.S.R. a social-imperialist, which were trying to fit India into counter-revolutionary military strategy, to harass and weaken China and put out the flames of agrarian revolution in India.¹³

An attempt to find out the economic policies of the party bore no fruit. No clear conception on this issue existed in the party manifestos or programmes. The approach was entirely sloganish and emotional. In other countries of the world political parties survive and thrive on their socio-economic programme, more particularly in the underdeveloped and developing countries. The CPI (M-L) did not offer proof of any such responsibility. Its real object was confined to a violent, subversive movement having its goal set upon the seizure of State power.

It would be more appropriate to say that the CPI (M-L) was a para-military organization and not a political party; the reason is that the use of political strategy and economic reconstruction on the one hand and of the gun on the other are two opposite and contradictory means to gain an objective; both are appropriate modes but in two different fields. Their purposes were also diametrically opposed to each other. Moreover, the CPI (M-L) rejected outright the utility of trade unions' participation in the movement. It proclaimed that in the initial stages the workers' struggle in

CHAPTER 3

Formation of the CPI (M-L)

1. ALL INDIA COORDINATION COMMITTEE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

THE idea to form a Maoist revolutionary political party occurred to the Naxalite leaders on receipt of a message of greetings from the Communist Party of China addressed to the revolutionaries inside the CPI(M). The message said that the revolutionaries should unite with a view to spreading the flame of armed revolution among the peasants. The great task of completing this process would be possible with the formation of a "genuinely revolutionary party of Marxist-Leninist and according to Mao Tse-tung's thought."¹ This was included in the manifesto of the Communist Party of China.

The impact of Chinese ideas was evident in a plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPI(M), which was held at Burdwan (West Bengal) from April 6 to 11, 1968. In this session one separate document brought in by the Naxalite leaders condemned the policies of the CPI(M), but they failed to get their document approved by the other members of the session.² The Naxalites of West Bengal continued to group themselves under a State-level Coordination Committee of the Revolutionaries within the CPI(M)³, and eventually in May 1968 changed its title to the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (A.I.C.C. C.R.) which signified a complete break from the CPI(M)⁴. Nevertheless, the Committee did not change itself into a full-fledged party even though it urged upon the revolutionaries, who believed in armed revolution, to unite with the objective of forming a Maoist Party in India.⁵

On May Day 1969 (that day being the one hundredth birthday of Lenin), a large procession congregated to celebrate Lenin's birthday in the Maidan Calcutta. At this public meeting Kanu Sanyal announced the formation of the third Communist party in India, namely, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)⁶ which would propagate and inculcate Maoist thought among the Indian people.⁷ He announced that "when our party (CPI M-L) was born the historic 9th National Congress of the great Communist

India would be continued on two lines: (a) the conventional line under the leadership of the revisionists (CPI and CPI-M) and the so-called socialists, and (b) on new lines under the leadership of the CPI (M-L). It repeatedly asserted that for the purpose of accomplishing revolution the party will take the road of relying on peasants, establishing base areas in the countryside, of persisting in protracted armed struggle and of using countryside to encircle and finally capture the cities.¹⁴ But what economic policies it would adopt after the establishment of the Maoist type of government in India was not declared by the leadership of the party, because the leadership itself was vague and uncertain on this very important point. It manifested the immaturity and wavering objectives of the party. When it rejected the value of even the trade unions, it showed that the party did not have concrete economic policies at all and, therefore, was incapable of making any progress towards bringing prosperity to the common man.

3. LEADERSHIP

We have seen in the foregoing survey that the most important and dominant component of the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal were tribes, peasants and students. A large section among them were young and energetic but lacked maturity, organization and discipline. The leadership, however, was confined to these elements—the young, disgruntled and frustrated enthusiasts.

However, one outstanding leader was Kanu Sanyal, of the Naxalbari area, who after spending several months in prison along with many other left-wing Communists for their pro-Chinese sympathies after the 1962 border war with China, joined the newly formed CPI(M) after the CPI split in 1964. Originally Kanu Sanyal, who belonged to a middle class family of West Bengal, decided in 1967, at the age of 35 years, to relinquish his claim to his ancestral property.¹⁵ His sacrifices gained for him the ample support and admiration from the tribals and the downtrodden poor peasants. This Brahmin peasant leader remained active in this area since 1959.¹⁶

Later on he organized meetings of the revolutionaries in West Bengal, and led many demonstrations against the Government and landlords, together with several other close associates and Jangal, the latter being a professional militant from Santhal tribe. Sanyal contested several elections as a candidate of the Communist Party for the West Bengal Assembly, but was always defeated,¹⁷ which apparently became the cause of mounting frustration in his mind diminished his faith in parliamentary means for winning power. He

was, later on, found guilty of violence and dacoity and sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment in April 1968,¹⁸ when the State was under the Presidential Rule; the second United Front Government released him in 1969.¹⁹

While Kanu Sanyal was the uncrowned king of the Naxalbari area, Mazumdar, the second most important leader of the movement, became leader at the sub-divisional level. Although his reputation did not travel beyond the United area, he soon became a policy-maker of the Naxalites. He was a difficult leader to deal with. He could not carry on with other prominent leaders due to his rigid attitudes, inflexible views and obstinate approaches to tackle complicated issues. Like Sanyal, he came from a well-to-do peasant family and relinquished his rights on his ancestral property.²⁰ From the initial stages of the movement his role was remarkable. He made a great contribution in organizing peasants and spared no efforts in party building in Siliguri and Jalpaiguri towns, situated in the northern part of West Bengal.²¹

The third most prominent leader, Khukan Mazumdar, was a member of a Moslem peasant family, which had migrated from Barisal district of East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh) to Darjeeling district before 1947. Since the time of his arrival in West Bengal, he was associated with revolutionary groups. In his early boyhood he had worked as a ward-boy in a hospital in Darjeeling, but he was dismissed in 1948 due to his revolutionary affiliations. From that time onwards he joined Sanyal and cooperated in the work of peasant organizational activities.²²

The other important leaders, Ashim Chatterjee and Santosh Rana, represented students' participation in the Naxalite movement. They were expelled from the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1966²³ and subsequently in early 1967 joined the Naxalite group within the CPI(M). They gave a good account of themselves by organizing and activating Naxalite movement in Debra and Gopiballavpore.²⁴

Another student leader who was involved in the Naxalite revolutionary activities was Sushital Roy Choudhry. He was a member of the West Bengal State Committee of Revolutionaries with CPI(M) but later on, with the formation of the All-India Coordination Committee of the Communist Revolutionaries (A.I.C.C.C.R.), became its convener.²⁵

The above survey goes to show that the Naxalite leadership consisted of well educated people who were frustrated in one way or other, came from well-to-do peasant families and cast their lot with the poor and downtrodden peasants of the area. They thrived

on slogans and did not have any well defined political or economic programme.

4. FACTIONAL STRUGGLE

From 1969 onwards some controversial issues had cropped up within the leadership of the CPI(M-L). It has already been observed that they did not have any clearly defined programme or well defined objectives which they intended to achieve through Maoist revolutionary strategy. Their methods of achieving their aims were so confused that even the inner cadre of the Naxalites was not sure of their objectives. They did not have any concrete economic programme for improving the condition of the masses, and it appeared to the common man that their activities were an exercise in futility. When they failed to launch a successful Maoist revolutionary movement in West Bengal, they started blaming their colleagues. Inner bickerings came to surface and mutual incriminations started, which are revealed by the statements of Ashim Chatterjee. When he was arrested by the police in July 1972, he is said to have remarked, "it is a great pity that we had not been able to finish off that man", meaning Charu Mazumdar.²⁶

One of the main causes of the mounting rift was the implementation of the theory of annihilation.²⁷ Asit Sen and his supporters had branded it as Guevarism,²⁸ i.e., individual terrorism which would not receive the support of the masses who consider it as senseless, causing the death of innocent people and serving no purpose. But Mazumdar disagreed with his colleagues and defended his own views on annihilation programme and contended that whereas "Guevara" was waging his struggle with the support of petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals and weapons, the Naxalites relied on the cooperation of the masses for the success of their endeavours.²⁹ Such an approach can be characterized as an inflexible one and an immature way of thinking because there was virtually no social link between the Naxalites and the masses living in the Naxalite-dominated areas. Mazumdar's thesis on the annihilation programme was also characterized by Sushital Roy Choudhry as "indiscriminate killing". He, however, also agreed that though he did not subscribe to it he can only go to the extent of suggesting that it should be confined to three classes of the enemy, i.e., the money lenders, the landlords, and the police and its informers.³⁰

The second issue which came up for discussion within the ranks was the call for "the boycott of elections".³¹ The West Bengal Naxalites did not have contradictory views on this issue, but the

Andhra Naxalites were divided into two groups on this issue.³² While one group held that the parliamentary procedure might be helpful in some circumstances for the achievement of political power, the other did not agree and preferred violent annihilative activities.

The third issue related to the prospect of giving participation to the trade unions in the Naxalite Movement. Mazumdar was strictly opposed to the idea of giving any place to the trade union in the revolutionary movement of the Naxalites on the ground that (a) the Naxalite movement was solely based on the agrarian revolutionary movement, and (b) it was not their task to organize trade unions or worry about trade union elections.³³ Mazumdar's assertion is significant, and deserves our attention. Because it was introduced by the General Secretary of the Electricity Board Employees Union, Primal Dasgupta, who belonged to the CPI(M-L), and believed in the intra-party organization of the trade unions. This shows that there were conflicts among the Naxalite leadership on this issue, and that there was a section which rejected Mazumdar's thesis on elections. The result was that Primal Dasgupta along with an associate, Pramode Sen Gupta, formed a rival committee, *Naxalbari Krishak Sangram Sahayak*. He also criticized the CPI (M-L) leadership in a document for ignoring the cities and for refusing to grant participation to the trade unions in the movement,³⁴ supported Asit Sen's viewpoint on the theory of annihilation.³⁵ It was Asit Sen who, among others, criticized Mazumdar and announced the formation of a new organization called *Maoist Communist Centre* in November 1969.³⁶

The liberation movement in Bangladesh in 1968-70 brought in an additional controversy between Mazumdar and Ashim Chatterjee. While Mazumdar visualized that the liberation movement in Bangla Desh could be transformed into an armed struggle under the leadership of Mohammad Taha (a Maoist leader of Bangla Desh), Ashim Chatterjee denied it and said that the liberation movement was an imperialist conspiracy to have yet another anti-China base in the Indian subcontinent. Actually, the assessment of Chatterjee was based upon the speculation that the Government of Yahya Khan was having friendly relations with the Chinese Government and that any drive for separate State would in fact harm the Chinese interests in the subcontinent. Furthermore, the Naxalites in West Bengal and the Maoists in East Pakistan would lose the privileges which they were enjoying under the shelter of friendship between the two countries. Sticking to his standpoint,

Chatterjee tried to convince Mazumdar of the urgency of giving the Naxalite support to the Pakistani military junta in their efforts to suppress the independence movement in Bangladesh.³⁷ But Mazumdar did not agree with the viewpoint of Chatterjee. Eventually, Ashim Chatterjee formed a parallel organization named the CPI (M-L)'s West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa Regional Committee.³⁸

5. IMPACT UPON THE CPI AND THE CPI (M)

After the formation of the Naxalite Movement, the CPI (M) faced the problems of retaining its own influence over the membership which it took away from the CPI after the split in 1964. While the CPI (M) regarded the CPI as revisionist, the Naxalites in turn regarded the CPI (M) as neo-revisionists, betraying the positions held by the Marxist-Leninists. On the other hand, the Naxalite movement was considered by the CPI a danger for the Indian Communist movement and a sheer wastage of revolutionary energy in the useless activities.³⁹

The formation of the Naxalite movement had a profound effect upon the maternal body, the CPI (M), and as a result the main theses and policies came under review. Moreover, the CPI(M)'s leadership was busy in endeavouring a reconciliation with the radicals to retain the unity in the cadre without which its effectiveness in the United Front Government in West Bengal could not be achieved. In order to maintain the unity in the rank and file membership, the leadership of the CPI (M) allowed the Naxalites to remain within the fold of the party.⁴⁰ Throughout the year of 1967 and up to 1969 frequent trips to Siliguri had been made by the party leaders and their agents during which they tried to convince the Naxalites that the revolution can be successfully accomplished only under the leadership of the CPI (M) and in the cooperation with the proletariat.⁴¹ The CPI (M) leadership condemned the police action which was taken in the Naxalbari area in May 1967.⁴² But simultaneously the CPI (M) leaders launched a propaganda campaign within the party through journals, pamphlets and inner party discussions against the extremist approaches to seize power.⁴³ The reason for such a step was to demonstrate the sympathy of the party with the peasant's cause, while on the other hand to fix a certain limit for the Naxalite activities so that these might not go beyond the party's control.

In August 1967 the leadership of the CPI(M) had admitted that 4,000 to 8,000 party members were backing the Naxalite movement.⁴⁴ To curtail the influence of such a big number of Naxalite supporters

in the party, the leadership issued a statement which while favouring the agrarian movement in West Bengal, they tried to ignore the slogans calling for seizure of power, which created further dilemmas for the party. For example, if the policy of the immobilization of the police would continue there was a real danger of a police revolt and, eventually, of a breakdown of the United Front Government in which the CPI(M) was the leading factor; in fact, this danger became a reality in 1969. The police could no longer tolerate partial policies against the insurgents and on July 31, 1969, a group of 500 policemen entered the State Assembly where they smashed furniture, broke microphones, destroyed papers and shouted slogans against the United Front Government, especially against the Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister, Jyoti Basu, and his policies of not intervening more effectively in the Naxalite movement. This, however, he could not do, because he was attempting to win the Naxalites to return to the parliamentary road.⁴⁵

In the meantime, the CPI(M) was attempting to resolve the new complex developments. They considered it an opportune time and a suitable occasion to regain their lost influence over the masses which were slipping under the influence of the Naxalites. Consequently, they declared in a resolution of 1969, as a tactical move, that the CPI(M) was adopting the weapon of physical annihilation for achieving political power.⁴⁶ But in fact, the annihilation policy had already been launched by the Naxalites and the resolution came too late. By the time the CPI(M) resolution was finalized the formation of the CPI(M-L) had taken place and its objectives of armed struggle could be no more influenced.

The formation of the CPI(M-L) had a profound impact upon the two other Communist parties, the CPI and CPI(M), which began codfronting each other on the issue of the Naxalite movement. The organs of these two parties, *New Age*⁴⁷ and *People's Democracy*,⁴⁸ were placing the responsibilities for assassination of their party workers on the shoulders of each other, which was in fact a form of competition to win the support of the Naxalites. However, the Naxalite leadership was almost adamant and all issues of the *Liberation*,⁴⁹ the Naxalite organ, asserted that both Communist parties had stabbed the workers and peasants in the back at a time when they were facing fierce attacks from the capitalists and landlords thus paralysing all their revolutionary activities.⁵⁰ The mutual bickerings between the two parties, the CPI and the CPI(M), made it possible for the Naxalites to pursue a terrorist and ruthless movement in West Bengal. Though both parties were making a determined

effort to win the Naxalites to their side, none of them received any acknowledgment from them. In the meantime, the popular support for the United Front Government in West Bengal was declining. Because of this, and also because the Front could not effectively deal with the agrarian unrest fomented by the Naxalites, the Central Government dismissed the United Front Government on March 16, 1970. While the elections were held in 1971, no party individually, or in coalition with others, was able to form a new and stable government, and therefore, barring a small interlude, the President's Rule continued in the State. Eventually, in the elections of March 1972 the Congress Party obtained an overwhelming majority and formed a new stable government in West Bengal after many years of turmoil.

Notes and References

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2. Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968), p. 39; and Gupta, D.C., *Indian Government and Politics* (Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: Delhi, 1972), p. 330.
3. See, Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers: Calcutta, 1974), p. 31; and Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), pp. 151-52.
4. "Declaration of AICCCR", *Liberation*, Vol. I, No. 8 (June, 1968).
5. *Ibid.*
6. "Third Communist Party Formed in India", *Eastern Sun* (May 3, 1969); Franda, F.M., "India's Third Communist Party", *Asian Survey*, Vol. IX, No. 11 (November, 1969); Ram, M., *Maoism in India* (Vikas Publications: Delhi, 1971); Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971); *Link* (July 23, 1972).
7. "Communique of the AICCCR", *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (May, 1969); "Naxalism and its Metamorphosis", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 49 (December 6, 1970), p. 9; *The Hindu* (May 2, 1969) have dealt with aims and objects of the CPI (M-L).
8. "Historic May Day Rally in Calcutta", *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (May, 1969).
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11. "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountain", *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February, 1968).

12. The comments of the CPI (M-L) on the Congress Party and the United Front Government of West Bengal can be seen in, "United Front: Reaction's Weapon to Oppose Revolution", *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (May, 1968); *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (January, 1968); and *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February, 1968).
13. S. Guna, "Is India Really Independent?" *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (August, 1968); *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (November, 1968); Manab Mitra, "The Revolutionary Path is the Only Path", *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (May, 1968); *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (July, 1968); and *The Hindu* (May 9, 1968) are adequate to ascertain the views of the CPI (M-L)'s leadership towards the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and China. Moreover, how the leaders viewed the two Super Powers failed against China is also clear from the above sources.
14. A good account of the CPI (M-L) policies toward peasantry as perceived by Charu Mazumdar is "Our Party's Task Among Workers", *Liberation*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (March, 1970); "Undertake the Work of Building a Revolutionary Party", *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (October, 1968), and *The Hindu* (May 2, 1969).
15. *Link* (August 15, 1967).
16. *Link* (May 26, 1969).
17. See, Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers: Calcutta, 1974), pp. 3-4; and also Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), p. 155.
18. Gupta, D.C., *Indian Government and Politics* (Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: Delhi, 1972), p. 330.
19. See *n 10*.
20. Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968), p. 24.
21. Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers: Calcutta, 1974), p. 4.
22. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), p. 155.
23. Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers: Calcutta, 1974), p. 28.
24. See Chapter II, *n 52 and 53*.
25. Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers, Calcutta, 1974), p. 4.
26. *Link* (July 23, 1972), p. 11.
27. The Annihilation Strategy of the Naxalites can be seen in S.N. Singh, "Building up to the Proletarian Party and Agrarian Revolution", *Liberation*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November, 1969); "Agr-

- arian Revolution and Crisis within the Reactionary Classes", *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (September, 1969); Charu Mazumdar, "March Forward by Summing up the Experience of the Peasants Revolutionary Struggle in India", *Liberation*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (December, 1969).
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29. See, Charu Mazumdar, "On Some Current Political and Organizational Problems", *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (July 1969); and "Our Path: Guerrilla Warfare" *Liberation*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November, 1969).
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32. "Report on Peasants' Armed Struggle in Srikakulam", *Liberation*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (May, 1969).
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36. *Ibid.*
37. A good account of discussion on the Naxalites' outlook towards the liberation movement in Bangladesh can be seen in Charu Mazumdar, "Pakistan and the Role of the Communist Party", *Liberation* (June, 1971). For discussions of the demoralizing impact of China's Bengal policy on the Naxalites in 1971, see Ram, M. "Polycentric Maoism", *Economic and Political Weekly* (June 3, 1971); Ali, T., "The Struggle in Bangladesh", *New Left Review* (July-August, 1971); "Maoist Struggle", *Far East Review*, (December 16, 1972).
38. Johri, J.C., *Naxalite Politics in India* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1972), p. 80.
39. The CPI's views on the Naxalite movement can be seen in, "Naxalites Now Have Their Party", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 19

- (May 11, 1969), p. 2; and "Militant Mass Movement Only Answer to Naxalbari", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (January 5, 1969), pp. 3 and 11.
40. "Build United Mass Movement: United Front and a Strong Party", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (January 9, 1969), p. 1.
 41. "Naxalbari Leader Attacks on Adventurism", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 25 (June 22, 1969), p. 3.
 42. The incident of police firing left the CPI (M) in a very awkward situation. Hence, the leadership of the CPI (M) adopted a roundabout way of expressing its resentment over the incident putting blame on some extraneous factors. The West Bengal units of the CPI(M) Secretariat on May 30 issued a statement saying that it is convinced that behind the peasant unrest in Naxalbari lies a deep social malady, mala fide transfers, evictions and other anti-people activities of Jotedars with the backing of some parties. In such situation it was important to look at the Naxalbari peasant unrest as a "simple law and order problem", and to try to solve it by police measures is bound to have disastrous consequence which would strike at the root of the United Front Government. See, *People's Democracy* (June 4, 1967).
 43. See, "Against Anti-Party tendencies", published in six instalments from July 2, 1967, to August 10, 1967, of *People's Democracy*; and also see, "Our Party's Stand on Naxalbari", published in *People's Democracy* (June 19, 1967).
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 47. The attacks from the CPI's leadership upon the CPI(M) can be seen in, "What is Happening in West Bengal", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 37 (September 13, 1970), p. 4; "Who Killed Them?", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 48 (November 29, 1970), p. 1; "Competition in Murder", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 48 (November 29, 1970), p. 10; "Campaign Against Political Murder and Police Terror", *New Age*, Vol. XIX, No. 1

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48. The CPI(M) blamed to the CPI that it was assassinating its party members in collaboration with the Naxalites. See, "Political Murders in West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 35 (August 30, 1970), p. 14; "Murders of the CPI(M) Workers Continue", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 27 (July 5, 1970), p. 5; "Last Week in West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 40 (October, 1970), p. 10; "To Defend Gains: Win Demands and Repulse Attacks", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 7 No. 13 (March 28, 1971), p. 3; "Martyr Till Reaches 206", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (March 7, 1971), p. 1515; "Class Politics Behind the Murderous Attack on Jyoti Basu", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 45 (November 9, 1969), pp. 3-4.
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50 See n 47.

CHAPTER IV

United Front Government in West Bengal

1. SPLIT OF CONGRESS PARTY IN WEST BENGAL: 1966

THE strained political relations between two Congress Party leaders in West Bengal and followers of Gandhian ideology, Ajoy Mukherjee and Atulya Ghosh, came to the fore in July, 1965.¹ Apparently the differences in the views of these two leaders represented the protest of a large number of party members from Midnapur, which is the second largest district of West Bengal. It had the second largest number of the elected members in the State Assembly as well as in the Central Parliament, who discharged with the manner in which the pro-Ghosh members were being enrolled in the Congress Party. Ajoy Mukherjee, as President of the Congress Party in West Bengal, dismissed its Secretary-General Nirmalendu De, a close associate of Atulya Ghosh.² However, Atulya Ghosh was so deeply entrenched as the party boss in West Bengal and also as an influential member of the powerful syndicate of the Congress at the central level,³ that he could never expect that such a decision would be taken against his close associate. In retaliation, he moved a Mukherjee resolution, censuring the President of the party at the meeting of its Executive Committee which was adopted. But Mukherjee did not accept this decision, as he was confident that the central leadership would favour him because of his value for the party's future, particularly in Midnapur district, and refused to resign. The State Congress Executive Committee passed a new no-confidence motion on January 20, 1966, by 296 to 40 votes, calling upon him to resign from the office. Once again he refused to accept the decision of the Committee and was consequently expelled from the party's membership.⁴

2. EMERGENCE OF THE BANGLA CONGRESS

One phase of struggle and completion ended with the purge of A. Mukherjee, but it marks the dawn of a new era in West Bengal politics. Party politics in the State entered into a new phase which was totally unexpected.⁵ However, A. Mukherjee began a Statewide

tour and made efforts to convince his sympathizers as to the injustices done to him by the Congress Party. He placed before the people the facts and figures regarding the malpractices of the Congress Party. He also claimed that he had exposed the wrong food policies with which he disagreed, and that was his only fault. According to him, the Congress Party did not remove these malpractices and placed no importance upon the suggestions made by him. He claimed to be the first person who brought to light these shortcomings of the Congress Party and placed them before the public.

Within a short span of time Mukherjee realized that in view of uncertain political environment a new political party could be formed which might protect the interest of the section to which he himself belonged. The landlords and millowners were not happy with the policies of the Congress Party which favoured heavily the poor peasants and small farmers and workers. These landlords and millowners found a genuine leader who would protect their existing interests. When the support of these two classes was certain, Mukherjee did not ignore the poor peasants too. No newly emerging party could afford to neglect the peasants who accounted for the majority of the population. Midnapur district appeared as a citadel, and as a territorial base, for the prospective political party. Eventually, on June 15, 1966, Mukherjee announced the promotion of this new party in West Bengal, to be known as the Bangla Congress.⁶

3. ELECTIONS OF 1967 AND 1969 IN WEST BENGAL

These two general elections (1967 and 1969) in West Bengal had a significant impact upon the vicissitudes in the post-independence history of West Bengal. On the one hand, the Congress Party had lost its dominating position and was not able to form a new government in this State, contrary to its victories in 1952, 1957 and 1962 elections.⁷ On the other hand, the parties, which were claiming to be socialist and communist in policies and programmes, had now got a chance to translate their manifestoes into practice.⁸ It was difficult for the people to decide during the elections as to which party would be in a position to meet their requirements and fulfil their demands and carry out their promises without any further loss of time.

Under the inspiring leadership of Ajoy Mukherjee and Humayun Kabir, who represented the Bangla Congress, it was evident that the elections of 1967 would prove quite uncomfortable for the old Congress which would not be able to secure absolute majority as easily as heretofore. Consequently, the CPI(M), the Bangla Congress and some other parties which had already come closer to each other through

several mass struggles carried out jointly during the preceding years. The negotiations, however, failed due to the intransigence of the Bangla Congress and the exaggerated claims made by the CPI(M).

After the failure of negotiations for the proposed grand alliance, the opposition parties in West Bengal divided themselves into two broad camps: one dominated by the CPI(M) and the other by the Bangla Congress and the CPI. Finally, two leftist fronts emerged for the purpose of contesting elections of 1967. The United Leftist Front (U.L.F.) included seven parties, viz., the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Revolutionary Socialist Party, Samyukta Socialist Party, Socialist Unity Centre, Peasants Workers Party, Revolutionary Communist Party of India, and Forward Bloc (Marxist). The second electoral alliance, the People's United Leftist Front (P.U.L.F.), included the Communist Party of India, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc, Praja Socialist Party, Gurkha League, Lok Sewak Sangh and some independent candidates.

With the announcement of the results of the elections the Congress Party had not merely ceased to be the dominant party in West Bengal, but for the first time since independence suffered the most devastating and humiliating defeat at the polls. Many a head which previously counted rolled in the dust. Even the Chief Minister, P.C. Sen, and the top party boss, Atulya Ghosh, most unexpectedly lost to their rivals. Index I (Appendices) shows the position of U.L.F. and P.U.L.F.

While the Congress Party was still the single largest party in the Assembly, it announced its decision to go into the opposition in view of its having failed to secure an absolute majority.⁹ But if we go deep into the matter and closely examine the causes of this decision, we would be able to find that it was a long-perspective decision of the party. If the Congress Party had formed any third coalition, or joined either the U.L.F. or the P.U.L.F., then it would be sharing the responsibilities for the policies of the new government which eventually caused its downfall, a course which would have profound effect upon the elections of 1971 and 1972 by diminishing the chances of the Congress to return to power. Anyway, the victorious parties immediately forged a workable alliance in order to form a coalition Ministry. The crushing defeat of the Congress Party candidates, the huge victory processions and the wild scenes of joy and enthusiasm were taken to be a clear expression of the electorate's verdict in favour of a non-Congress Government.

In February, 1967, leaders of the two left fronts and independents met in a conference in Calcutta and formed a United Demo-

cratic Front (U.D.F.) of 14 constituent parties and Ajoy Mukherjee was elected leader of the U.D.F. The U.D.F. leader then addressed a letter to the Governor, Padmaja Naidu, informing her of its absolute majority in the Assembly and its ability to form a non-Congress Government in the State. As a result, Ajoy Mukherjee was invited by the Governor to form such a new government on March 1, 1967 (the composition of which can be seen in Index II—Appendices).¹⁰

In November, 1967, this United Front Ministry was dismissed by the Governor on the grounds, *inter alia*, that it had lost its majority.¹¹ The United Front started a resistance movement, including a programme of civil disobedience against the verdict of dismissal.¹²

Ultimately, in February, 1969, a mid-term election took place in the State with the result that the United Front secured an absolute majority in the Assembly and formed a government in West Bengal. Index I (Appendices) shows the number of seats won, percentage of votes, number of Ministers; and Index II (Appendices) shows the names of Ministers, their parties and portfolios.¹³

4. FORMATION OF THE UNITED FRONT AND ITS POLICIES

After assuming the charge of the office, a guideline of policies was adopted by the United Front on March 11, 1967, entitled as the "Eighteen Point Programme".¹⁴

In this declaration the Government recognized the right of workers, peasants, teachers and employees of all categories to form unions and associations with a view to voicing their just demands and grievances. Furthermore, it assured that it will not suppress democratic and legitimate struggle of the people.

However, the new coalition government made quite clear that it did not have any intention, whatsoever, to rely solely on the administrative machinery for implementation of its policies and programmes, and that it would be seeking active cooperation and association with the people in all matters. This was more than manifested by the United Front Government. Indeed, it was for the first time that an attempt was made by the State Government to reduce the indispensability of the highly capable and knowledgeable bureaucrats, even though when the newly elected members of the House and nominated Ministers were quite ignorant of the nature of their jobs. They, however, needed the help and assistance of highly qualified experts to tackle the complicated administrative problems. The United Front's intention to do away with the support of bureaucracy and not to rely on these experienced and qualified

people, was beyond all comprehension. No democracy, however representative and competent it might be, can afford to undervalue the role of bureaucrats.

After its first breakdown, and when the United Front alliance returned to office as a result of the mid-term poll of February, 1969, it adopted, comparatively speaking, more radical policies, particularly in the three politically crucial areas of food supply, land reform and labour welfare. These radical policies were reflected in a declaration, made at a public meeting by Mukherjee, to the effect that "the Kisan (peasant) who produces food and the worker whose two hands turn out goods for the people must be given their due. The landlords and the capitalists must recognize these inalienable rights of the workers and peasants."¹⁵

In April 1969 the Chief Minister, A. Mukherjee, had instructed the police that it should not intervene in the labour disputes without prior consultation with the Minister concerned.¹⁶ In order to reduce the dominance of the police force, the United Front Government reduced the total budget of the police by Rs. 4.8 million.¹⁷ It also declared that it will make every possible effort to stop the eviction of the peasants, and promulgated an ordinance on May 10, 1969, requisitioning empowered unused land for the cultivation of foodgrain. Thus the Government was to take possession of any cultivable land left unused by its owners for one year. In the first instance, such land would be taken for one agricultural season, but the Government was entitled to hold it for three consecutive years, during which 25 per cent of the produce of such land would go to the owners, 10 per cent to the Government and the rest to the cultivators.¹⁸

When the administrative machinery was discouraged from interfering in land and labour disputes, the peasants became free to launch land recovery movement in the entire State. The State Government became helpless as the administrative agencies were thus paralysed. The consequences of this lack of authority on the part of officials was that the peasants started a land grab movement. Through this unrestrained activity the peasants seized 60,000 acres of land by July 1969, and within two months this figure reached 300,000 acres.¹⁹ The Government of West Bengal itself distributed only 230,000 acres of this *benami* land among poor peasants and families belonging to landless labour, free of cost, and granted remission of land revenue of holdings of three acres and less.²⁰ While efforts to bring about the implementation of these policies on a larger scale remained, however, on paper, the Ordinance opened out fresh avenues for the constituents of the United Front to penetrate

deeper into the countryside and gather the support of the peasantry. As a result, new confrontations started to take place between the constituent parties, each of them considering itself as gaining a great support from the countryside and making renewed bids to surpass the other. Thus a polarization within the United Front was taking place on account of this competitive activity among the peasants from its very inception.

5. POLARISATION WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT

In addition, soon after taking over the charge, many issues, such as distribution of portfolios, enlargement of Ministers, law and order situation in West Bengal, and varying attitudes towards the Naxalite movement in particular, was bringing about a sharp polarization between the different constituent units of the United Front. The SSP which had one Minister in the Cabinet gave ultimatum to the United Front that it would withdraw from the Ministry unless a member of the Scheduled Caste was included in the Cabinet by June 10, 1967. The threatened dejection, if it came about, would topple the coalition Government. After prolonged deliberations the United Front decided in favour of expanding the Cabinet to 19 by including one member of the Scheduled Caste. It is, however, worth recording here that despite all internal dissensions and stresses and strains, no constituent unit of the United Front really appeared willing to quit the alliance, or stretch their differences to the breaking point. They seemed determined to fight from within, and if necessary, from without, to retain the advantages of offices. In such a political environment the Central Government had imposed President's Rule and dissolved the Assembly on November 21, 1967. The declaration of the President said that since no party, or coalition of parties, had the majority and was in a position to form a government, President's Rule was called for.

After the mid-term poll of February 1969, the first controversy which cropped up was about the party which should hold the Chief Minister's office. Both the CPI (M) and Bangla Congress were equally desirous of having the office of the Chief Minister. Somehow the conflict was settled when both parties agreed that the Chief Minister will be from the Bangla Congress in lieu of some important portfolios to other constituent parties.²¹ Another controversy took place on the appointment of Dharma Vira²² as Governor of West Bengal. The Deputy Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu (CPI-M), and Somnath Lahiri (Forward Bloc) complained that they had learnt of the appointment of Dharma Vira from the newspapers, even though the

Chief Minister admitted that he had been consulted by the Central Government.²³

To avoid such bickerings in future, to maintain unity and to take uniform decisions, all the constituent parties of the United Front sat together and adopted a 32-point programme on February 23, 1969. The main purpose of this programme seemed to have concerned itself with the Naxalite movement and the ways and means whereby the constituent units could assist the peasants to achieve their objectives.²⁴ Now with the help of the 32-point programme, the CPI (M) was in a fortified position to advance its own policies with its own interpretation of that programme. In the light of these considerations the CPI (M) emphasized class struggle of the landless and poor peasants.²⁵

In order to accomplish this task, the CPI (M) Land and Land Revenue Minister, H.K. Konar, felt the necessity of enlisting active help from the landless and poor peasants for searching out the *benami* lands. We can here recall the first speech of the Chief Minister after forming the second United Front Government in which he expressed his views regarding injustice to the peasants.²⁶ But divergence of opinion²⁷ emerged between the Chief Minister and the Land Revenue Minister, when the latter expressed the view that the CPI (M) was working towards building a broad and strong base in the villages for bringing about revolution in the near future.²⁸ In response to this, the Chief Minister disapproved his policy and agreed that a real change could be brought about by peaceful means based upon Gandhian teachings. The rest of the parties of the United Front would not agree to the policy adopted by the CPI (M) and, therefore, launched their land grab movement under their own leadership. Had these parties launched the land grab movement under the banner of the CPI (M), it would have been difficult for them to secure their own support among the peasant masses, especially at the time when their political future depended on practical work in the rural areas.

It is worthwhile recalling here that while the Bangla Congress was avoiding the support of landlords and millowners, Mukherjee attempted to tackle the problem without losing the favour of these powerful groups. In this way he posed as real admirer and true follower of Gandhian ideology. He tried to handle agrarian problem in the light of Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship.²⁹ Subsequently, when the CPI (M) began to implement the land grab movement expecting that this would open a road to the revolution, Mukherjee tried to place obstacles. He asserted that if such a lawlessness, as was

inherent in the land grab movement, were not stopped the Bangla Congress would be forced to build up resistance movement on Gandhian lines to end this intolerable situation.³⁰ This statement of Mukherjee was regarded by Jyoti Basu not only as a non-cooperative gesture, but one that was likely to cause immense damage to the interests of the landless and poor peasants. Jyoti Basu could not appreciate the arrogance revealed in the assertion that each and every constituent party was obliged to accept all decisions which came from the CPI(M), the largest component of the United Front.³¹ Thus when the CPI (M) vigorously launched its own land grab movement irrespective of the wish of the other constituent units of the United Front, the CPI, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc and Socialist Unity Centre mounted their own movement too. However, the Bangla Congress changed its course soon and started to protect the landlords. Consequently, several clashes took place in the rural areas between the Bangla Congress on the one hand and the CPI, Forward Bloc and Socialist Unity Centre on the other.³² This infighting weakened the tempo of the movement. The clashes which were taking place in the rural areas could not remain confined to the villages and countryside, and their repercussions could be seen in the Assembly, particularly when Mukherjee declared that the United Front was an uncivilized and barbarous government.³³ In fact, Mukherjee said that if Jyoti Basu could not make the police end the looting and seizure of land, he should resign from the Government,³⁴ and further observed that the portfolio was given to Jyoti Basu for running the administration properly and not for raising party funds by looting paddy.³⁵ Thus those and similar statements which the Chief Minister made from time to time, sometimes in public meetings and sometimes at different places and on various occasions, strained the 32-point programme which was formulated by the unanimous consent of the constituent units of the United Front Government. Basu retaliated by saying that "the Chief Minister should not criticize the Government without the prior consent of the Cabinet or the United Front".³⁶

This process of polarization amongst the partners of the United Front reached its climax on March 16, 1970,³⁷ when once again the Central Government imposed President's Rule upon the State on the plea that the United Front had lost its majority in the Assembly and therefore could not continue to function as a coalition Government.

6. SPLIT OF THE CPI (M) AND THE MERGER OF THE LEFT WING WITH THE NAXALITES

In the second half of 1966 the national leadership of the

CPI (M) decided that the party should launch a campaign for the elections to take place in West Bengal in 1967. Although the declaration of the intention to participate in the forthcoming elections was binding upon all State committees of the CPI (M) in the country, a notable amount of disagreement over the question of whether to participate or not was exhibited among the members of the West Bengal Committee.

The leading figure in this controversy was Kanu Sanyal, who was representing within the CPI (M) in West Bengal, the Krishak Samiti (Peasants' Organization) of Darjeeling district.³⁸ He spoke for the Left Wing of the party, which demanded that the party implement a revolutionary strategy based upon peasant masses. However, because the leadership of the State Committee would not commit itself to this stand, the Krishak Samiti organized a separate convention in March 1967,³⁹ in which the State unit of the CPI (M) was not represented. Under leadership of Kanu Sanyal, this Convention decided that the Left Wing would follow revolutionary methods in spite of the fact that these were contrary to the views of the majority of the CPI (M). In the Convention Mazumdar and Sushil Roy Choudhry jointly circulated a document criticizing this majority stand and demanded that the CPI (M) should not take part in the electoral process and follow revolutionary strategy.⁴⁰ They were not alone in holding such views inside the CPI (M). From its very inception the CPI (M) contained quite a good number of members who wanted the party to commit itself to the Communist Party of China in its battle with the Communist Party of Soviet Union and to adopt a programme which would reflect the views of the Communist Party of China in Indian situation.⁴¹ But when the Central leadership of the CPI (M) refused to make any concession, they became disappointed.

After this Convention, the CPI (M) in West Bengal was making efforts to bring back the leftists to the party's fold. It pledged in an 18-point programme of the United Front Ministry "to recognize the rights of workers and peasants to voice their just demands and genuine grievances", not to suppress the democratic and legitimate struggles of the people", and that "the United Front will not depend upon the Centrally-appointed administrative machinery". By these formulations the CPI (M) intended to give understanding to the dissidents that the party was not entirely opposed to the revolutionary approaches. However, these attempts were not successful, as is evident from the fact that the membership of the party went down from 22,000 to 17,000 at the end of May,

1967.⁴² Simultaneously, however, the membership of the Krishak Samiti leaped from 5,000 to 40,000. Some 15,000 to 20,000 peasants were working full time to transform peasants' committees into armed Village Defence Groups.⁴³ As a result, the left faction of the CPI(M) split away to form its own group, which, eventually, formed a new revolutionary Communist Party claiming to represent the genuine Marxism-Leninism as contained in the thought of Mao Tse-tung.⁴⁴

The confrontation between the leftists and the leadership of the CPI (M) took place at a plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPI (M), which was held at Burdwan (West Bengal) from April 6 to 11, 1968. The leftists submitted their own document in which they severely criticized the CPI (M) and said that its leaders have been adopting neo-revisionist policies; however, this document of the left faction was rejected with a large majority of votes.⁴⁵

With these new developments the CPI (M) leaders seriously engaged themselves in finding out some formula by which they could maintain their influence over the entire Krishak Samiti. Promode Das Gupta, Secretary of the West Bengal Committee and a member of the Political Bureau of the CPI (M), in a conference of the West Bengal Krishak Samiti (which was held from June 6 to 8, 1969, at Contai), said that "though the extremists were vociferous about agrarian revolution they very significantly avoided the question of its leadership".⁴⁶ He further remarked that "the revolutionists do not want the working class to lead the revolution".⁴⁷ A suggestion was given by him to the extremists to the effect that the possibilities of success in revolution would be much greater if the agrarian class would submit to the leadership of the working class. Hare Krishna Konar, Minister of Land and Land Revenue, observed that the United Front Government of 1969 during its brief tenure of office helped the deprived peasantry to stand erect for the first time and, consequently, the United Front was voted into office again by peasant support in 1969.⁴⁸ The purpose of this statement was to suggest that the CPI (M)'s position covering the parliamentary means of struggle had been receiving support from a large number of peasants. In these circumstances, revolutionary strategy had very little support among the peasants and a small chance of success.

Despite all these efforts, the leadership of the left wing would not listen, as is evident from the statement of a peasant leader named K. Banerjee who belonged to the Naxalbari area. He said that he tried to impress the CPI (M) strategy upon Kanu Sanyal's group by pointing out that the strategy based upon Maoism was wrong; but the Leftists did not pay any heed; they put their faith in the leadership of Kanu Sanyal, only to reap treachery later.⁴⁹

Notes and References

1. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), p. 142; and also see, Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968), p. 2.
2. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), pp. 142-43.
3. *The Hindu* (October 4, 1967).
4. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), pp. 143-44; and also see, *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVII, No. 33 (August 13-19, 1966), p. 7234.
5. See, n. 7.
6. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), pp. 143-44.
7. A good account of study of elections, with statistics, can be seen in these sources: Pal, S., "The Leftist Alliance in West Bengal", *The Indian Political Science Review*, Vol. 1, Nos. 3 and 4 (April-October, 1967), pp. 169-90; Mathur, R.N., "Midterm Election in U.P., Bihar, Punjab, Haryana and West Bengal", *The Indian Political Science Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (April-Sept., 1970), pp. 189-90; Sarbadhikari, P., "Populism and Representation: Some Tentative Observations on the Congress, United Front and Congress(R) Governments in West Bengal", Lakehead University: Thunder Bay, Ontario, No. date?, p. 8-13.
8. The Deputy Chief Minister of West Bengal and a member of the Political Bureau of the CPI(M), Jyoti Basu, had said that the United Front Government would protect the interests of those who constituted 90 per cent of population. See, "The Contai Conference of the W. Bengal Krishik Sabha", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 25 (June 22, 1969), pp. 3, 9 and 11.
9. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), p. 126.
10. Indexes can be seen in Appendices.
11. A discussion of this issue can be seen in Section 5 of this Chapter.
12. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XIV, No. 5 (January 29-February 4, 1968), p. 8143.
13. See, n. 10.

14. See, Johri, J.C., *Naxalite Politics in India* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1972), p. 12; and Irani, C.R., *Bengal. The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968), Appendix.
15. "West Bengal Today: India Tomorrow", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 9 (March 2, 1969), p. 7.
16. "United Front in the Past and Present", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (March 7, 1971), p. 4.
17. Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968), p. 53.
18. "Ordinance on Unused Land", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 20 (May 18, 1969), p. 2 and "Policy for Harvesting", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 47 (November 23, 1969), p. 2.
19. "Land Labour Unemployment", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 36 (September 7, 1969), p. 12.
20. "Exemption of Small Holders from Land Revenue", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 36 (September 7, 1969), p. 12.
21. Ghosh, S., *Socialism and Communism in India* (Allied Publishers: Bombay, 1971), p. 378.
22. Dharma Vira's appointment from June 1, 1967, as the Governor of West Bengal in place of Miss Padmaja Naidu, was announced by the President of India on May 26, 1967.
23. Kashyap, S.C., *The Politics of Defection* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1969), p. 340.
24. "Call for Vigilance", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 12 (March 23, 1969), p. 5.
25. The emphasis on the revolutionary bases in rural areas, as given by the CPI (M), can be seen in these sources: "West Bengal: Peasants' Initiative to Implement U.F. Programme", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 18 (May 4, 1969), p. 4; "U.F. Government Act Helps", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 48 (November 30, 1969), p. 5; "U.F. and Divisive Trends", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 26 (June 29, 1969), pp. 6-8; "Lurid Picture", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (January 18, 1970), p. 8; "Open Session", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 25 (June 22, 1969), pp. 3 and 11; "West Bengal: CPI (M) Review Post-Election Situation", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 12 (March 23, 1969), p. 5.
26. See n 13.
27. The disagreement of the Bangla Congress with the CPI (M) in respect of the Land Grab Movement can be seen in "Forcible Harvesting: Jotedars' Cry", *People's Democracy*, Vol.

- 5, No. 52 (December 28, 1969), p. 13; "Bengal Congress Obituary Right Communists Gave of Disruption", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (February 23, 1969), p. 10; "Party Leaders Condemn Murders", *The Hindu* (February 20, 1971).
28. See n 23.
29. Mahatma Gandhi wanted the rich to be the trustees of the poor. He asked the trustees to earn money and amass wealth but they should hold this wealth in trust for the needy. He also believed that the Princes and the peasants cannot be equal by cutting off the Princes' heads, nor can this process equalize the employer and employee. As he contemplated, if the State suppressed capitalism by violence it would be caught in the coils of violence itself and fail to develop non-violence. The detailed study of Gandhian thought can be seen in 8 volumes of *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (printed by Pyarelal Shah at the Times of India Press: New Delhi, 1953), written by Tendulkar, D.G.
30. "West Bengal: New Tension Among United Front Parties", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 43 (October 26, 1969), p. 2; and also see, *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (January 15-21, 1970), p. 9339.
31. "CPI (M) Will Stand by the People; Protect Unity of United Front", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 42 (October 19, 1969), p. 2.
32. These sources have highlighted severe clashes among the constituent parties of the United Front Government: "SSP-Owners Attacks on Red Flag Workers", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 46 (November 16, 1969), pp. 3 and 11; "Jotedar Attacks on Peasantry", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 49 (December 7, 1969), pp. 14-5; "Organizational Advance", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 43 (October 26, 1969), p. 12; "West Bengal: CPI(M) Reply to RSP", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 17 (April 26, 1971), p. 8; "Inter-Party Clashes", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 27 (July 6, 1969), p. II; "Bengal UF: New Steps to Overcome Differences", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 44 (November 2, 1969), p. 8; "Bengal U.F.: Bid to Avoid Inter-Party Clashes", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 23 (June 8, 1969), p. 1; "Five-Party Accord to Stop Inter-Party Clashes", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 29 (July 20, 1969), pp. 3 and 13.
33. See, "Absurd Demand", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (January 18, 1970), p. 9; "Triple's Seeks to Exploit Bengal United Front Dissensions", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (January 18, 1970),

- pp. 8-9; "West Bengal United Front Still in the Wood", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (January 25, 1970), pp. 8-9; *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 18 (April 30-May 6, 1970), p. 9519.
34. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (January 15-21, 1970), p. 9338.
35. *Ibid.*
36. See, "Lurid Picture", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (January 18, 1970), p. 8; "Holding CPM Responsibilities", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 43 (October 26, 1969), p. 10; "Ajoy Mukherjee Evades All Issues: Joyti Basu's Lecture of February 3", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (February 8, 1970), pp. 1-2 and 11; "Dissolve the Assembly and Arrange for Polls in May", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 13 (March 29, 1970), p. 1.
37. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 18 (April 30-May 6, 1970), p. 9518; "People Do Understand", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 13 (March 29, 1971), p. 3.
38. Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971), p. 159.
39. *Link* (August 15, 1967).
40. "Against Anti-Party Tendencies", published in six instalments from July 2 to August 10, 1967, in *People's Democracy*.
41. See, *People's Democracy* (June 25, 1967); *People's Democracy* (July 2, 1967); *People's Democracy* (July 9, 1967).
42. *Link* (June 4, 1967).
43. Ram, M., *Maoism in India* (Vikas Publication: Delhi, 1971), p. 67.
44. These Left-Communists called the CPI(M) members "running dogs of the foreign and Indian reactionaries and the Soviet revisionists". See, *Liberation*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (July, 1968).
45. Roy, A.K., "Ideological Bases of the CPI(M-L)", Ed. Kashyap, S.C., *Indian Political Parties* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: Delhi, 1971).
46. "Open Session", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 25 (June 22, 1969), p. 3.
47. *Ibid.* 48. *Ibid.* 49. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER V

Response of the Central Government

PRESIDENT'S RULE IMPOSED UPON WEST BENGAL

EVENTUALLY, after the breakdown of the second United Front on March 16, 1970, it was the most appropriate time for the Central Government to promulgate President's Rule over West Bengal again. Consequently, on March 19, 1969, the nineteenth promulgation since the operation of the Constitution of Indian Republic came into force within a period of 20 years. As Article 356 of the Constitution provided, the Central Government proclaimed that since no party was in a position to present a majority sufficient to form a government, the Central Government was constrained to take over the administration of the State. The State Legislative Assembly was suspended as a result of this proclamation and all legislative and executive powers were taken over by the Central Parliament. S.S. Dhawan, the then Governor, became an agent of the Central Government.¹ The new administration was approved by the two Houses of the Central Parliament on March 30 and 31, 1970. Moreover, the Parliament gave its assent that legally and constitutionally President's Rule may continue up to March 18, 1973.² The Governor became solely responsible for the establishment and maintenance of law and order in the State.

The Governor consulted the military authorities as to the ways and means of suppressing grave incidents of lawlessness. The deteriorating law and order situation was causing genuine anxiety to the civil as well as military authorities. To deal with massive violence which disrupted the law and order situation and vitiated the peaceful life in the State only the army could be used effectively. But the military authorities suggested that for them it would be difficult to deal with the Maoist elements with their limited powers. The Governor, therefore, considered the feasibility of reviving the Act of 1932, namely, the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrage Act, which provided that all literature which was calculated to encourage the extremist activities will be banned. Any person infringing the laws will be taken in the police custody for 24 hours

for interrogation.³ Since the approval of the President was necessary for reviving the Bill and bringing it into force, the Governor sent the draft of the Bill to the President for this purpose.

On November 22, 1970, the President gave his assent after the Bill was duly altered and amended to suit the new situation. The amended Bill provided that any person found indulging in or instigating violence, promoting an ideology to overthrow or overawe the Government established by law or bringing about a change in the Constitution, would be liable to severe punishment. Not only this, if a person had previously been found guilty, he would be tried and awarded punishment and jailed for a period of three years.⁴ The Governor proclaimed the imposition of Sections 144 and 107 CrPC to take severe action against the Maoists.

As a result of these actions and in a short span of time more than 70,000 suspected persons were on the list wanted by the police. But only 7,000 suspected Naxalites, and several Marxist members of the State Assembly, were arrested.⁵ As a matter of fact, there was no proof that a person taken into custody on mere suspicion was really active in the Naxalite movement, because the figure of suspected persons listed by the police was 70,000, while the total membership of the Krishak Samiti was far below this number.⁶ Moreover, not all members of the Samiti were Maoists. Even if we include the leftist students, the figure would not reach 70,000. Most probably, the same calculation was made by the parties in the opposition, particularly in West Bengal. The Communists in the State, and others, started criticizing the Central Government alleging that the police was arresting all the critics of the Government policies. The attitude of the Central Government towards West Bengal was considered undemocratic and directed towards crushing the legitimate rights and freedom of the people. But the authorities of the Central Government were confident that actions taken by them were fully justified although the then Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, in a statement, clearly admitted the fact that some of those arrested may not be Naxalites.⁷

Let us look in some detail at the policies pursued and the police strategy adopted by the West Bengal Government, under the direction of the Central Government, and the extent to which they were successful.

MILITARY AND POLICE OPERATIONS

Under President's Rule the first attention was given to the police budget, which had been reduced by the second United Front

Government⁸ in 1969. In 1970 the Central Government doubled the expenditure keeping in view the need for additional police force and the presence of the army in West Bengal. Again in 1970-71, there was an increase of more than Rs. 10 million.⁹ This enhanced expenditure was incurred on account of nine battalions (each battalion consisted of 900 personnel) of the Border Security Force and the State's own police force numbering about 71,000.¹⁰ These additional forces were working in two spheres. First, the bulk of the Border Security Force was posted on the borders of West Bengal. Secondly, a large portion of the police force was posted in key points in the city areas and villages which were considered to be the main trouble spots. More arms were supplied to the police stations in the State. As far as Calcutta was concerned, 18,000 military and police personnel were posted there.¹¹

According to these statistics one policeman was posted for every 600 persons only in Calcutta city.¹² These forces started combing the area from all directions in the northern part of West Bengal on March 19, 1970. Their operations showed some amount of success when in August 1970 two prominent Naxalite leaders, along with some of their colleagues, were arrested in Singijohora Tea Estate, about 18 kilometres from Siliguri.¹³ Here we may recall that Kanu Sanyal was released by the second United Front Government on April 9, 1969.¹⁴

In the Debra-Gopiballabhpure, in Midnapur district which was the Naxalite belt, the local people whole-heartedly supported the police in these operations. With the help of the local people the police arrested the top-ranking leader of the area, Gundhar Murmu, along with 550 other Naxalites on April 30, 1970.¹⁵

Usually the police was launching operations very carefully, in fact, tactfully. Wherever they intended to raid, they surrounded the area, before making house-to-house search, without giving even the slightest indication. Broadly speaking, the raids of police were comparatively well planned as compared to secret raids of the Naxalites under the command of Charu Mazumdar.¹⁶ But as a result of such carefully executed operations the police unearthed hundreds of bombs and other weapons, the estimated value of which was nearly half a million rupees,¹⁷ and a weapons factory in Calcutta.¹⁸ The most significant achievement of the police campaign against the Naxalites, and an irretrievable setback for the movement, was on July 16, 1972. On that day Charu Mazumdar was arrested from his house in Entally, a Calcutta suburb. In this raid on his house the police recovered some most important documents which subsequently guided the police towards the arrest of other Naxalites.¹⁹

Some attempts were made by the police to arrest the Naxalite students of Jadavpur University on July 24, 1970.²⁰ This campaign was led by the University students who had opposed the movement from its very beginning, but were in a weak position to do anything about it.²¹ When the police entered the University with the intention of arresting the Naxalite students, a strong resistance from the student side took place. The police then resorted to *lathi-charge* (beating by sticks), and when this proved ineffective, opened fire on the students.²²

On August 10, 1970, another Naxalite leader, Jangal Santhal, was arrested in Chapra village in West Dinajpur.²³ While these operations were continuing, the CPI(M) leaders demanded that the police must end its ruthless activities, and that an inquiry commission should be set up to investigate police excesses and the causes of firing at Jadavpur University. These demands were rejected on October 28, 1970, when the West Bengal administration decided not to hold any inquiry into police operations for at least three months.²⁴ The administration believed that any inquiry at that stage would reduce the efficiency of the police in maintaining law and order in the State, even though the Home Minister at the Centre confirmed that all the victims of the police operations may not have been Naxalites.²⁵

Thousands of Naxalites were behind the bars, many died, but many remained free. It is alleged that some Naxalites were killed by the police when in the middle of night they were pasting pro-Mao posters or painting slogans and pictures on the walls in Calcutta.²⁶ Although costly in human terms, the police operations were remarkably successful in political terms and soon the Naxalites started to paint slogans in praise of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi instead of Mao Tse-tung.²⁷

AGRARIAN REFORMS

While the police operations continued in order to meet the challenge of the Maoists in West Bengal, the Central Government had set up a Central Land Reforms Committee in 1970 to defuse the tense situation in the countryside. Its Chairman was Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, the then Union Minister of Food and Agriculture. The basic purpose of the Committee was to review the progress of the previous land reform measures, to identify the weaknesses and gaps in the land laws and their implementation and to make recommendations for improving the land policy.²⁸ On the recommendations of this Committee the Central Government approved "The West Bengal Land

Reforms Act of 1970" on January 28, 1970. The new land reform Act laid down that a ceiling would be imposed on more than 12.4 acres of land in irrigated areas and 17.3 acres in other areas. It would not apply to individuals but to families. The holdings of a husband, wife, minor sons and unmarried daughters would be considered as family holdings, but their number should not exceed five. Special provision was made for relaxing the ceiling in cases where the number of family members would exceed five. Nevertheless, there would be an overall limit of 17.3 acres in irrigated areas and 24.13 acres in other areas. If the sole surviving adult person is unmarried, he would not be entitled to keep in his possession more than 6.2 acres of irrigated land and 8.62 acres of land in other areas. The Government also declared that any person, or group of persons, would not be permitted to take forcible possession of any plot of land. It proposed to undo the forcible occupation of land came out by the Naxalites in the following three types of categories: (a) where the persons who forcibly occupied the land held more than two acres of land and it did not belong to the eligible category, (b) where forcible occupation of vested land had displaced and ousted another person genuinely belonging to the eligible category who had been cultivating the land under a Government licence, and (c) where the land occupied belonged to an individual who had been holding it peacefully within existing ceiling.

In the first two cases the Government had decided to take immediate action under the appropriate law for the eviction of the trespassers, but in the third case it would set the law in motion to redress the wrong done to them.

It was also proclaimed by the Government that the sharecroppers who provided necessary inputs would be entitled to 75 per cent share of the crop as against 60 per cent which they were entitled to in the past. Where the sharecropper contributed only labour and other inputs were provided by the landowner, the earlier share of 60 per cent would continue.

PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND REFORMS

There were gaps in this land legislation and defects in its implementation, and the purpose of the land reforms could not be achieved if these loopholes were not plugged. In the following pages we would highlight the defects of this legislation and the shortcomings in its implementation, and show as to how these laws served the purposes of the landlords instead of providing some benefits to the poor peasantry and the sharecroppers.

In the previous land reform legislation the tanks and fisheries were exempted from the ceiling limits upon land holdings. The result was that the landlords surreptitiously converted thousands of acres into fisheries in order to evade the ceiling.²⁹ Moreover, the land legislation did not give any hard and fast rules for the family holdings,³⁰ and under the clause in which the number of the members of the family was enhanced the landlords soon entered into *benami* transactions in favour of their unborn babies.³¹ An incredible case was brought to light in which a leader of the Congress Party, a member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, kept property in the name of one Fatik which turned out to be the name of his horse.³² In *The Statesman* of July 18, 1970, it was reported that one landlord had registered 75 acres of land in the name of his dog.³³ If the community had surplus land, such steps could be taken by landowners with some justification, but when the pressure on the land was high and the people were living much below poverty line such vagaries were most unjust and the evil-doers should have been taken to task. Again, much confusion arose due to lack of precise definition of the family. There were complications also due to lengthy procedure in the court of law where these disputed cases were to be decided. Nearly 100,000 acres of agricultural land was locked up in 68,000 civil suits pending in the lower courts of West Bengal. Until these cases were finally decided no steps could be taken to distribute the surplus land among the landless and poor peasantry by the State Government.³⁴

Moreover, it was quite obvious that no land reform was possible without the efficient working of the administrative and judicial machinery. The blame for inefficiency could not be put exclusively on impersonal bureaucracy. The reason is quite a few high-ranking and influential bureaucrats sat tightly on the files and would not allow the machinery to move, because they served the interests of the landlords. Self-seeking politicians also contributed their share in making land reform a failure. Such vested interests were in abundance and clogged the progressive realization of the land reform. This was admitted by the then Congress Minister of State for Home in West Bengal when, in a public meeting, he said that "It was bureaucracy which helped corrupt landlords as well as some police officials who had been placing obstacles in the way of implementation of land reforms."³⁵ Another important representative of the Congress Government, Mr. C. Subramaniam, former Finance Minister of the Union Government of India, said in the Lok Sabha on August 4, 1975, that he painfully agreed that the money-lenders³⁶

have been using unfair means to promote and protect their selfish interests.³⁷ In spite other rules and regulations in this behalf the money-lenders were crafty enough to exploit the poverty-stricken masses. This was frankly admitted by the Government and they admitted their helplessness in this regard.

Notes and References

1. The appointment of S.S. Dhawan as Governor of West Bengal was officially announced in New Delhi on August 6, 1969.
2. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVII, No. 18 (April 30-May 6, 1970), pp. 9517-18.
3. The Central Government revived the Act of 1932 on the suggestion of the Governor to meet with the Maoist challenge in West Bengal. See, "Move for P.T. Act", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 45 (November 8, 1970), p. 3; "Naked Police Terror Stalks President-Ruled West Bengal", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 41 (October 11, 1970), p. 3; and "West Bengal Bandh", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 50 (December 13, 1970), p. 1.
4. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 42 (October 15-21, 1970), p. 9808.
5. A large number of persons were arrested by the police on the ground of suspicion. See, "Butchery of Democracy in West Bengal in Part of Attack on Democracy in India", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 46 (November 15, 1970), pp. 6-8; "Land Struggle—Greatest National Events", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 35 (August 30, 1970), p. 1; "Peasants' Harvest in Occupied Land in West Bengal", *New Age*, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (January 17, 1971), p. 8; "West Bengal Government's Challenge Will Be Met", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 35 (August 30, 1970), p. 5; "Atrocities During Land Struggle", *New Age*, Vol. XIX, No. 5 (January 31, 1971), p. 11; *The Hindu* (February 20, 1971). 6. See, Chapter IV, n 41.
7. "No Law, Only Orders to Shoot and Kill", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 48 (November 15, 1970), p. 7.
8. See, Chapter IV, n 13. 9. *Link* (December 27, 1970).
10. *Link* (February 14, 1970).
11. "Wages of CPI's Sin: Police Coming on Top", *People's Democracy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 40 (October 4, 1970), p. 16.
12. *Link* (August 2, 1970).
13. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 40 (October 1-7, 1970), pp. 9782-83. 14. See, Chapter III, n 18.
15. The police operations which were led by the local people can be seen in "Police Already on the Rampage in West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 13 (March 29, 1970), p. 12; "New Forms of Resistance in Rural West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 32 (August 9, 1970), p. 10; *The Hindu* (February 19, 1971). 16. See, Chapter 11, *The Theory of Armed Uprising*.
17. "West Bengal: CRP on the Rampage", *People's Democracy*, Vol.

- 6, No. 32 (August 9, 1970), p. 4.
18. *New York Times* (March 27, 1970).
19. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVIII, No. 31 (July 29-August 4, 1972), p. 10901.
20. The police operations against students can be seen in, "Licence to Kill: Police on the Rampage", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 45 (November 8, 1970), p. 3; "No Law, Only Order to Shoot and Kill", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 40 (November 15, 1970), p. 7; "Growing Resistance to Attacks on Democratic Movement", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 50 (December 13, 1970), p. 4. 21. See, *Chapters II and IV*. 22. See, n 20.
23. *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XVI, No. 44 (October 29-November 4, 1970), p. 9836. 24. See, n 22. 25. See, n 7.
26. "No Law, Only Orders to Shoot and Kill", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 46 (November 15, 1970), p. 7.
27. Gupta, B.D., *The Naxalite Movement* (Allied Publishers: Calcutta, 1974), p. 93.
28. The Central Government set up a Central Land Reform Committee. See, *India: A Reference Annual* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: New Delhi, 1974); "Land Law Amendments", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 26 (June 26, 1970); "Land Reforms", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 39 (September 27, 1970), p. 3.
29. Mitter, S., "Sonarpur: A Peasant's View of the Class War", *South Asian Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (July-October, 1975).
30. "For Effective Land Reforms", *New Age*, Vol. XIX, No. 8 (February 21, 1971), p. 5; and also see, *India: A Reference Annual* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: New Delhi, 1974).
31. "For Effective Land Reforms", *New Age*, Vol. XIX, No. 8 (February 21, 1971), p. 5. 32. *Loc. cit.*
33. See, Khanna, G.L., "This Land is Mine", *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (October 5, 1970).
34. Roy, A., *Garibi Hatao* (Naya Prokash: Calcutta, 1973), p. 39; and also "Land Reforms", *New Age*, Vol. XVIII, No. 39 (September 27, 1970), p. 3.
35. See, Khanna, G.L., "This Land is Mine", *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (October 4, 1970); and Roy, A., *Garibi Hatao* (Naya Prokash: Calcutta, 1973), p. 42.
36. See, Chapter 11, *Poor Peasants*.
37. "Speech of the Finance Minister", *The Turning Point* (The Government of India Publication: New Delhi, No date?), pp. 75-6.

CHAPTER 6
*Reasons for the Failure of the
Naxalite Movement*

NARROW SOCIAL BASE OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

WE have seen in the preceding pages that the revolutionary activities began in a narrow area in the north of West Bengal, in Naxalbari region, from which it bears its name. A summary of the reasons for the failure of the movement is outlined below.

The entire revolutionary movement was characterized by exaggerated expectations which were not borne out by actual achievements. This is a common trait of all features of Indian politics, but it is much more marked in the Naxalite movement. The Naxalite leaders presented an unrealistic and exaggerated picture of their activities and achievements. The growth of the movement was not even, while the discontent of the militant cadre became increasingly intensive. As a matter of fact, the cadres did not fully realize the extent to which the peasantry was not prepared to participate in such activities. The sympathizers were very few, the active supporters even less. The villagers were not wholly in favour of participating in such a hazardous movement. They were afraid of the hostile environment and thought that they were not at all prepared to face the mighty political and administrative machinery which was opposed to them. The Naxalites thought that whatever they achieved was sufficient to bring about agrarian revolution in the countryside, but the brutal violence which accompanied them isolated them in fact from the masses. As Kanu Sanyal said, "Our failure in establishing the revolutionary land reforms blunted the edge of class struggle".¹ He also expressed his doubts about the prospects which future had in store for them.²

Another glaring mistake committed by the Naxalites was that they confined the first stage of their revolution to the countryside,³ and believed that because the class enemy in villages was unprotected, it would be possible to defeat him. They forgot that the

traditional kinship, particularly in the villages, has a significant status with the result that the relatives of the class enemy who were members of the movement would not tolerate any harmful action against their relatives. Consequently, when Mazumdar launched his annihilation strategy the Naxalites divided themselves into several groups over this issue. In the meantime, however, the class enemy reorganized himself, or began to seek help from outside, which permitted the heavy interference of the Government machinery in the struggle against the Naxalites. Through the mass media the peasants were aroused against the Naxalite activities and indirectly supported many repressive measures of the Government.

At the time when the Central Government started interfering in the so-called liberated areas, the Naxalite leadership was rather over-confident that the untrained personnel of the People's Liberation Army equipped with 60 rifles and 200 pipe-guns would create some dent in the well-trained and well-equipped Government forces.⁴ Moreover, while the Central leadership decided to keep their activities strictly secret, and the party apparatus was to remain underground, it was not so in fact. The preliminary conference of the party took place openly and the birth of CPI (M-L) was publicly announced at a meeting held at Calcutta Maidan on May 1, 1969.

Moreover, emphasis should be appropriately placed upon the romantic and dramatic aspects of the Naxalite leaders. These made them pedantic and, as has been observed earlier, unrealistic in their claims, which in fact antagonized the majority of the peasants. This is particularly clear from the boastful statement of Charu Mazumdar that "From the foot of the Himalayas in the north to the river Estuary in the south and the sal forests in the south-west, West Bengal's countryside was resounding with the footsteps of brave peasant guerrillas".⁵ Within two years of proclamation of Mazumdar's footsteps, his movement lay in ruins, his People's Liberation Army could not "march on the sprawling plains of West Bengal by the beginning of 1971, if not in 1970."⁶

According to Gupta out of 56,000 villages of India, only 200 villages of the country were in the grip of the movement.⁷ They were spread over a vast area, without any regular facilities through which the Naxalites could convey their messages efficiently without being intercepted by the Government. While the Naxalite leaders believed that the secret instructions would be transmitted clearly from person to person, the fact was that these instructions were not

complete and were frequently confusing. In many cases written plans were disclosed in the course of transmission from one place to another. These documents then became immensely helpful to the police to mount successful operations in which many Naxalites were rounded up or weeded out.

FACTIONAL STRUGGLE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT

While the areas under the influence of the Naxalites shrank, within the brief span of five years the leadership split into several factions such as: (1) Asit Sen's Maoist Communist Centre; (2) Swadesh Mitra's Lal Jhanda Dal; (3) Parimal Das Gupta's Proletarian Party; (4) Amulya Ganguli's Communist Group; and (5) Ashim Chatterjee's CPI (M-L)'s Regional Committees of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa for launching Maoist strategy in the country.

Although there were several issues which divided these groups, the most crucial was the question of forming a party. One view was that a party should develop naturally from below and should not be imposed from above. It should be based upon the day-to-day experience of the Naxalites in actual struggle. But the formation of CPI (M-L) in May 1969 apparently marked the victory of those who opposed a loosely organized movement. When criticism of Mazumdar's policies became severe, he retaliated by saying that today many groups pay only "lip-service to Chairman Mao Tse-tung and even to the Naxalite movement".⁸ Another issue which divided the revolutionaries was the question of strategy of annihilation. Furthermore, a good deal of confusion arose with regard to policy towards trade unions and elections. On these controversial issues Mazumdar fought his rivals vigorously, warning them that the various groups that have united to oppose his "battle of annihilation by using the name of Chairman Mao",⁹ are bound to fail in their attempts.

As we have mentioned earlier, instead of formulating a united and effective strategy on how to defeat their class enemy, the Naxalite leaders hatched plans to do away with those sections of the movement which opposed them. They were thus frittering away energies and wasted resources in annihilating rival factions instead of the class enemy. They thought that the survival of one group depended on the weakening of the other. One faction wanted another faction to wither away and leave the arena exclusively to the disposal of the former. Thus, the onset of the factional struggle marked the turning point in the Naxalite movement. These developments were more than enough to dislodge the leaders from their

strongholds, and toppled the organization of the Naxalites in a very short time. Thus, the avowed objective of the Naxalites was not only the achievement of political power but also the removal of the other Maoists from the revolutionary movement. It is significant that Ashim Chatterjee went to the extent of expressing his grief that he could not perform the important task of annihilating.¹⁰ This self-defeating spirit of revenge did not only open the road for the Government to interfere effectively with the movement, but also placed insurmountable barriers in the way of the land grab movement. For all practical purposes, the onset of internal rivalries signalled the beginning of the end of the movement.

LAND-GRAB MOVEMENT MISFIRED

The Land-Grab Movement was positively the most fruitful activity of the Naxalites. But the success of the movement was not entirely due to the operations launched by the Naxalites, nor was it the consequence of the achievements of the Maoists. In fact, it was the result of the reasonable demands made by the poor peasantry from time to time which created in turn a general political climate of pressure conducive to the effectiveness of such a movement. This movement exercised pressure on the Government, which had no alternative but to pass the land reform laws and thus partially accept the demands put forward by the Naxalites with regard to distribution and redistribution of land. As a result, significant changes were made by the Central Government also in the land reform policies in favour of poor peasants.

However, the central question to be answered is, why did the Land-Grab Movement of the Naxalites misfire when the circumstances were so favourable? Perhaps, the main reason was that the Naxalites functioned as a house divided against itself. The infighting among the Naxalite leadership increased the effectiveness of the already mighty power of the Government and continued to weaken the movement. Consequently, they could not decide as to who was the class enemy and what was the appropriate method to deal with him. Because of this, they recruited into their ranks many people—who were in fact hidden enemies. Moreover, the peasants who were socially under the influence of traditional rural elites refused to accept the leadership of the urban Naxalite. The students who entered the villages under the direction of Mazumdar retained their white collar habits and could not become popular. The villagers did not subscribe to the idea of annihilation of their co-villagers, and hence did not cooperate with the urban-oriented youth from the cities who

were real strangers to them. Gradually, a large number of peasants and tribals dissociated themselves from the land-grab operations, which was a contributing factor to the failure of the movement. This desertion by poor peasants provided strength to the argument of the Government that in fact its purpose was merely to eliminate criminal activities, crush anti-social elements and eliminate violence which had taken incalculable toll of lives of innocent people. The *Times* reported that under this pretext the Government rounded up some 3,000 peasants on charges of indulging in illegal and anti-social activities which jeopardized the peaceful atmosphere of these areas.¹¹ It was significant that all charges brought against them were proved by the Government and evidence published to make sure that the people would not consider them innocent and glorify their misdeeds. Thus the people saw eye to eye with the Government, which spelled the doom of the Naxalites.

COLLAPSE OF THE UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT

After examining the two short periods when the two United Front Governments were in power, one would note the vast difference in their attitude towards the Naxalite movement. While in the first period the movement was sympathized with and was allowed to flourish as a popular mass movement which championed the cause of the downtrodden, during the second term it was suppressed as a pernicious aberration which specialized in terrorism and violence and thus forfeited the confidence of the peasantry. The cold-blooded and indiscriminate murder of the many innocent people gave rise to the suspicion that these trigger-happy Naxalites were concerned more with grabbing political power for themselves than grabbing land for the poor. Although the most important portfolio of Police and Home Affairs was assigned to the CPI (M), the United Front Government did not relish the idea of murder of political opponents, nor did it agree to the deviationist approaches of the Naxalites. Throughout the two United Front regimes there was no ban on Naxalite literature or its organizational activity, but its moves were closely watched and those who were found guilty of penal crimes were severely dealt with.

It may be recalled that all political parties in the United Front were responsible for perpetual intricacies and intra-party clashes which significantly intensified particularly when the CPI (M-L) started the Land-Grab Movement. Apparently, the motive of each constituent party was to enlarge its own bases in rural areas and thus enhance its sphere of influence. Initially, they did not

even criticize or oppose the Naxalites in the areas where these parties wielded some influence, and in fact provided shelter to the Naxalite revolutionaries.

Curiously enough, up to March 16, 1970, even the then Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee, a Gandhian leader and a believer in the theory of non-violence, was tolerating all violent activities in the State. He simply said that he would resign from his post if these violent activities were not stopped by the Communists. In the meantime, he was engaged in consultations with other parties, including the Congress Party, as to how to replace the United Front Government by an alternative coalition so that he may quit office. These efforts of Ajoy Mukherjee continued till such time as the law and order situation had gone completely out of the control of the United Front Government. On the eve of his resignation he explained why he was constrained not to quit office earlier, justifying his staying in office by saying that he was not at all prepared to allow China to take over the administration of the State during chaos created by the Naxalites.

After the dissolution of the United Front Government due to the promulgation of President's Rule by the Central Government on March 19, 1969, the ever increasing lawlessness due to the free hand of the Naxalites came under check. While the Naxalites who took shelter under the umbrella of different political parties were now isolated, it did not mean that all Naxalite activities came to an end. After the declaration of President's Rule the Naxalites shifted their scene of action from the countryside to the cities, but now their activities were limited to small areas where they could be easily tackled.

EFFECTIVE MEASURES OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

One of the reasons for the debacle of the Naxalite movement was the timely intervention of the Central Government. With the promulgation of President's Rule on March 19, 1969, the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police and West Bengal's own police force walked into the so-called "Liberated Areas" in massive strength.¹² In a very short period of time the hold of the Naxalites over the few pockets was crushed. The *Link* described the harsh measures taken by the police to crush lawlessness in these areas in these words: "You do not know when there will be curfew and you may be hit by a police bullet,¹³ when you would be coming home." In this battle against the lawless elements thousands of Naxalites, or those suspected as such, were taken into custody on alleged charges of looting, arson, murder and dacoity.

While they were in jail, the most prominent and active leaders who opposed the non-violent means started seriously examining and reviewing their previous stand. A change was witnessed in the attitude of leaders like Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal, Kadam Malick and Mujibur Rehman. In contrast to their previous revolutionary strategy they adopted the Gandhian strategy of hunger strike in order to get first class treatment, previously given only to very important political prisoners.¹⁴ Thus the Maoist strategy was replaced by the non-violent Gandhian strategy with the only difference that Gandhi had never struggled for selfish ends or personal benefits as the Naxalite leaders were now doing. This remarkable change became soon apparent everywhere, particularly when those Naxalites who were free and not jailed replaced the slogan of "Long Live Mao Tse-tung" with the slogan "Long Live Indira Gandhi".

Moreover, the Naxalites lost almost all their leading personalities. While Sadhan Sanker, the Secretary of the Maoist faction, and Ashim Chatterjee were in jail together with Saroj Dutt, Editor of *Liberation*, Dr. Roy and A. Mukherjee, the latter three leaders were suspected to have been killed there.¹⁵ But the movement received its gravest shock when Charu Mazumdar died. This also totally broke the backbone of the Naxalite movement.

REFORMS

As soon as the police operations defeated the insurgency and when the United Front Government had collapsed on March 16, 1969, and was replaced by President's Rule, the next important task for the Central Government was to satisfy the large sections of peasantry which was economically backward and lived much below the poverty line. In order to achieve this purpose, the Government devoted itself to introducing reforms both in urban and rural spheres. The statistics given by the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, S.S. Roy, in an interview to the *Link*, shows the following picture:

"The Government had distributed land amongst 799,745 agriculturists of whom 282,000 belonged to the Scheduled Caste, 273,000 to the Scheduled Tribes, 129,000 to Moslems and 213,000 to others.¹⁶ Further, he said that the total area of the land distributed was 562,023 acres out of which homestead lands have been distributed amongst 269,424 homeless families. Of these 120,000 families belonged to Scheduled Castes, 46,000 families to Tribals and 44,000 to Moslem families.

According to a sample-survey conducted by the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics of the Government of West Bengal, the Central Government initiated a special employment programme in 1972-73, with generous assistance from the Central Government. In the first period it was Rs. 21.8 million to be increased in subsequent years.¹⁷

In the case of those educated unemployed who preferred to work in private or joint enterprises, or other semi-government institutions, the Government agreed to provide with stipends to acquire skills. Anyhow, though the stipends would not be too attractive, the person concerned would have acquired the requisite skill so that he may be a useful hand in case some vacancies occur. Thus the responsibilities of imparting skill and providing the job would now be equally shared by the Government in the form of stipends and by the institutions in the form of providing training and experience and giving first preference in job openings to such qualified hands. The employment programme of 1972-73 provided relief also to those persons who would like to be engaged in their own business. It would provide additional incentive to the people to undertake self-employment in the countryside in the form of private small business and cottage industry. It was hoped that this would increase production and in turn provide more job opportunities and contribute to the thriving of the economy. It was decided by the Government to finance those desirous to employ themselves in small industries loans amounting up to ten per cent of the financial outlays, while the banks would provide loans up to 90 per cent. Under this programme many people in the State were enabled to establish cottage and small-scale industries and create employment avenues for a large number of educated unemployed. It was stated that the disgruntled unemployed youth would thus be diverted from fruitless and destructive political activity to more constructive economic channels, increasing the productivity of the country on the one hand and improving their own economic condition on the other. The Government established 2,128 units in the underdeveloped areas to supervise the progress of work in this field so that there might be increased returns due to better supervision and coordination.

Further, the West Bengal suffered from a poor transportation system. The Government formulated and adopted a transportation scheme which, besides providing additional employment and job opportunities, improved the transportation facilities in the State. Through this scheme a large number of auto-rickshaws, mini-buses and trucks were put on the roads with financial assistance from the

Government. It provided job opportunities to 23,851 unemployed young men in the State.¹⁸ It gave them self-confidence and discouraged them from indulging in lawless, destructive and violent activities.

GREEN REVOLUTION

The Governments of various States adopted scientific tools and techniques for bringing about increased rate of growth and maximum production of foodgrains. They were largely successful. This process was known as the Green Revolution. The Punjab and Haryana were the pioneering States in bringing about such a revolution. These States were largely successful because they had highly developed system of irrigation and the rivers neither overflowed causing floods in the rainy season nor did they create a situation of drought in the summer. The farmers did not have to depend entirely on treacherous and uncertain monsoons because the State built dams and reservoirs which kept the supply of water steady and well regulated throughout the year. The farmers were quite prosperous and in a position to purchase the necessary items in order to increase output. Moreover, the land was fertile and the peasants were hardy.

Examples of these two States tempted the farmers of West Bengal to adopt the same methods. They built up high expectations and were convinced that the adoption of new scientific techniques would be instrumental in ensuring higher production. The result of this would be that economic disparities between the rich and poor farmers would eventually decrease.

But soon after introducing these scientific methods and new scientific techniques they realized that the results were not very encouraging. The basic reason for this failure was that 64 to 70 per cent rural population was living below the minimum subsistence level and in poverty.¹⁹ The people depended upon monsoons and rivers and did not have a well regulated system of irrigation. The farmers faced floods in the rainy season and afflicted with droughts in the summer. They did not have sufficient funds to provide inputs.

Some other ill-effects of the anticipated Green Revolution were that the advantages of the high yielding varieties flowed in the direction of rich farmers. Owing to increased profits accruing to the big farmers, more and more lands were brought under their own cultivation, thus depriving the small peasantry of these advantages by rendering them jobless. It caused widespread unemployment and eviction of the agriculturists. Because of new techniques and labour saving devices, the small farmers became tenants, the tenants became

agricultural labourers and agricultural labourers became unemployed villagers.

Having visualized the grave economic repercussions of the Green Revolution in West Bengal, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, former Union Home Minister, observed that "Unless the Green Revolution is accompanied by a revolution based on social justice, I am afraid the Green Revolution may not remain Green."²⁰ Such views expressed by the colleagues of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and others had great impact on the Central Government which was obliged to design some other solution of the West Bengal problem.²¹ The most important problem, according to them, was the development of the rural sector and need to provide employment to the evicted labourers. For this purpose the Central Government allocated Rs. 60 million, which would be spent on exploring new job opportunities for the labourers so affected.

Apart from providing financial aid, the Government launched a campaign against the elements who played a considerable role by misusing their power, authority and influence. They wielded great power by virtue of the fact that they served as linkages between the higher strata of the Government servants and the farmers. The Government discovered that in certain cases the officials who were assigned this function played a dirty role. One example was the construction of a canal in a village which was supposed to have been dug under the supervision of local self-government authorities. When the Divisional Officer was on tour in the area and inquired about the canal and checked the records, he found that additional funds had been spent on closing some wrongly dug canal. In fact, the canal was never dug and the old canal was never covered up. It was one case among many cited by the Congress Government Ministers from time to time, some of which have been referred to in the foregoing pages. Although actions were taken against the guilty, in a number of cases these were not prompt or effective enough to put a stop to such activities. Severe punishment was provided against the adulteration of food by a strict application of the Food Adulteration Act of 1954. Though life imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 5,000 was provided in the Act for selling adulterated food injurious to health and likely to cause death or grievous hurt,²² there were only a few actions actually taken under this law.

Large areas of land were brought under irrigation and cultivation by providing water supply in unirrigated areas. The State Irrigation Minister proposed more effective measures by introduction of additional and more diversified targets and more inputs into the

production. To attain these objectives a Central Monitoring Organization for irrigation projects was proposed to be set up and the State Government has been asked to initiate urgent action to set up similar monitoring cells at the State level.²³

The Green Revolution could not be effective and fruitful without massive supply of fertilizers. This job was taken by the Central Government and 30 per cent more fertilizers were rushed to West Bengal,²⁴ to be distributed by Government agencies, like Rural Development Banks. The Field Officers of R.D.B. would personally contact the farmers on their farms and find out the amount of fertilizers which they would be needing and the way they would be profitably utilized.

It is clear from the above discussion that instead of discouraging the use of tools and material for bringing about the Green Revolution, the Government was taking every possible step to remove obstacles from its way and aid and assist the farmers. It is obvious that the Green Revolution is now becoming a reality and making the farmers more prosperous and progressive. The total produce in the country has increased, making the economy self-reliant; in fact, India has become self-sufficient in foodgrains, which is a major achievement.

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Conclusion

IS ARMED REVOLUTION POSSIBLE IN INDIA?

IN the foregoing pages of our study we have presented the functional approach for analysing the socio-economic complexity in Indian rural society. While our problem is *The Origin and Failure of the Maoist Revolutionary Strategy* for which we selected the most strategically located State of the country named West Bengal, the main purpose of discussion in this conclusion is to explore the future prospects of the revolutionary strategy in diversified cultural setting in India.

The Indian civilization has a long, continuous and chequered history of nearly 5,000 years. It has, in the course of its long history, absorbed elements from settlers like the Aryans, the Greeks, the Moslems and the British, and presents a rich variety of regional cultures in the process of adjustment and change through the ages. The traditional culture of the people has been a product of centuries of coexistence of many faiths; it has been enriched by a constant process of give and take at all levels. In the past, on account of paucity of communication, regional cultures were largely diversified. But today the people have a close and effective communication through mass-media as well as dependence upon each other. It is becoming increasingly difficult for an individual or a group of individuals to live in segregation, separated from others. Mutual dependence, political as well as economic, is the order of the day. These new developments are not diminishing the firm convictions of the various people of India in matters of belief, but are opening avenues of mutual understanding of their respective cultures in a dynamic society. If political scientists or sociologists still believe that Indian society presents the type of plural society which cannot harmonise, it is a wrong assumption which demonstrates a lack of understanding of the infrastructure of the Indian society. A thorough examination of the various facets of the present-day Indian society would reveal that there are examples of inter-caste, inter-religious and inter-regional marriages. In a number of cases the married couples do not change their religion, customs and traditions, their mores,

usages and their lores. The only phenomenon which places an accent upon the reconciliation between two or more than two factors is the economic status. If the people are economically well-off the society would remain a plural society without conflicts and resultant chaos.

It would be worthwhile that while discussing the background of the developments in India one takes into account the peculiarities of Indian culture. One cannot ignore the genesis of the Indian scene before independence, as the present is mostly the continuum of the past. The hallmark of Indian struggle for freedom was that it was peaceful. The two main features which characterized the freedom movement were:

- (a) to retain the separate entities in India without attempting to blend them together, and
- (b) to promote the economic development in the country peacefully.

These developments could be attained by subscribing to the view of an omnibus political party named the Indian National Congress, which was for decades in absolute majority. The Congress Party claimed to be egalitarian, socialistic, secular, democratic and liberal in its approach. The Communist Party of India, which splintered from the Congress, formed a part of the socialistic block. It desired quick changes in the economic conditions of the poor and downtrodden by peaceful means if possible, or by means of violent revolution if necessary. They took inspiration from local conditions under the guidance of local ideologies and Soviet intellectuals. Brezhnev's visit to India in 1971 had a great impact on the CPI making the party to give up its opposition to the Congress. The third important party was the Jana Sangh which was short-sighted and communal in its approach and preferred *Akhand Bharat* (United India) and *Rama Raj* (the Sovereignty of God). It did not believe in Gandhian non-violence as to them it was outdated. This did not suit the philosophy of the Jana Sangh, which considered the Gandhian way of life too secular to be practicable. Nor did the Communist ideology totally suit them, as it was anti-religious, extremist, revolutionary and therefore alien to India's genius.

From 1917 onwards the Indian society divided itself into two major camps: (a) pro-Congress affiliations, and (b) pro-Communist affiliations, on the basis of socio-economic stratification. However, soon after independence, the Congress Party began stressing its secular policies as well as economic policies, and the struggle was diverted towards the feudal-cum-capitalist class. The weaker sections

of society could no longer attribute their trials and tribulations to the exploitative behaviour of the British. Also the Communists changed and started showing their liking for parliamentary processes and economic development through democratic methods. Due to these political changes the prospects of revolution receded in the Indian subcontinent. The people were convinced of peaceful changes through constitutional devices. While the Communists promised to continue their struggle for the welfare of the weaker sections through parliamentary methods, the Congress launched schemes of planned development, nationalization of key industries and increase in per capita income so as to ameliorate the condition of the rural poor. Thus the chances of armed conflict among the rich and poor dwindled and with this the possibility of bloody revolution became remote.

Indians have, by and large, a docile nature. It is very difficult to arouse them to action. Their religions, customs and culture keep them reconciled to fate and the ill-luck; they prefer an atmosphere of contentment. They have lived in the surroundings of poverty for centuries. They are not accustomed to "desperate remedies". Mahatma Gandhi exhorted them to remain non-violent even in the most provocative of situations. They thought that if they could perform the feat of achieving freedom by peaceful means and snatch political power from such a mighty empire by the weapon of non-violence, they can snatch away economic power also from the capitalists and the feudal aristocracy. The political parties, including the CPI after 1958, did not adopt violent devices. The political parties, electoral processes and the parliamentary system which they preferred kept them far away from violent tools and revolutionary devices.

The CPI (M) and the Naxalites were neither so powerful nor so well-knit as to create an atmosphere in which revolutionary devices could thrive. The Naxalites were ill organized and scattered and could not make a common cause with the people. They came from so many diverse elements, castes, tribes and social strata that they could not unite to withstand the onslaught of the mighty power of the State, with its modern devices of detection and coercion. Even the Maoist strategy failed to create any dent on their enemy, i.e., the feudal lords and capitalists who were better organized and had the unswerving support of the Government and the sympathies of public opinion which hated the murder of innocent persons.

Moreover, the sympathizers and supporters were unevenly distributed throughout the country. When in 1967 some parts of

West Bengal became strongholds of the Maoist revolutionary strategy and peasants began to assemble under the banner of the Naxalites, these peasants failed to understand that the Naxalites lacked cohesion and had nothing in common with the peasants with regard to religions, cultures and languages so much so that the language of the urban Naxalite elite and the rural people differed profoundly. It was not true only for West Bengal. The Naxalites were active in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Northeastern area of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir. But their position was weak in Western Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. In all those areas, where the economic condition of the people was better, the influence of the Maoist revolutionaries was very weak.

The utmost that the West Bengal Maoist revolutionaries could do was to exercise influence on the Government on a limited scale. The plural nature of the rural society and its infrastructural tensions made it very doubtful that any consistent and abiding change in the outlook of the peasants would come about, hence the policies of the Government against the Naxalites were successful. The Government machinery was perturbed and the masses were disturbed at the cold-blooded murders of not only innocent people, but also of those involved in the economic emancipation of the poverty-stricken rural population.

When the revolutionary activities were in full swing in West Bengal and some other States in 1969, the ruling Congress Party was engaged in futile intra-party conflicts. A large number of party members were not willing to make any concessions to the lawless elements, because such a policy would be inconsistent with the democratic rights of the other people. Eventually, the Congress Party was divided into two separate parties known as the Congress Party (Old—Organization) and the Congress Party (New). Almost all prominent members of the party opted for the Congress(O), while the young and those disillusioned by outdated outlook joined the Congress (N). It was evident that the ruling party was losing its hold over the country, and even though it still held power, its position had weakened considerably to enforce any leftist programme effectively.

It is thus clear from the foregoing survey that all said and done, a leftist revolution would not be possible in the prevailing Indian situation, through the Congress or the parties of the left. The leftist parties could do little as they were a house divided

against itself. They have no sense of direction and, in those circumstances, no revolution was even remotely possible.

The Congress Party, though totally averse to a violent revolution because in its opinion it would do more harm than good to the Indian masses, was prepared to draw up policies which would any way bring about a profound social change. It preferred a strategy of change to be attained through amendments of the Constitutional changes in laws. The abolition of privy purses and privileges of the princes, the nationalization of 14 banks and General Insurance business, more and more development programmes, all these affected those sections of society who were economically dominant. During the discussions in the Lok Sabha these programmes and policies were criticized by the Congress(O), the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party, while they were enthusiastically welcomed by the general public. The result was that in the general elections of 1971 the Congress secured a most significant victory, while the parties opposing its programmes and policies suffered serious losses.

The Indian electorate did not only reject the policies of the rightist parties, like the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra, but also rebuffed the leftist extremists wedded to foreign ideologies and hence unpalatable to the majority of people who take pride in their indigenous modes of thinking and ways of life. By and large, they did not appreciate the Marxist or Maoist way of thinking, whatever the source or channel might be. The majority of Indians preferred peaceful and constitutional methods to achieve their aims and unequivocally and categorically abjured violent means. In these circumstances it was quite obvious that a large-scale revolution based on Maoist ideology was neither feasible nor possible.

Apart from the inherent belief of the Indian elites and their commitment to constitutional reform through parliamentary processes, the increasing financial assistance in the form of loans and subsidies weaned away the rural population from adopting violent methods. In 1950-51, the short and medium term credits for the peasants had been no more than Rs. 24 million, but in 1971-72 the figure had gone up to 608 million.¹ All these factors contributed in a significant way towards defusing the social pressures which lead to the creation of a revolutionary situation.

NEW LEGISLATION AGAINST LANDED ARISTOCRACY

Besides this, the Government took steps to enact legislation against landlords. Abolition of bonded labour was one of the significant acts of the Congress Government; now the landlord will refrain from

this inhuman exploitation. In case he did it, he was to be punished severely.² After the adoption of this legislation the money-lenders and the landlords started returning voluntarily the property of the tribals and the peasants which they had mortgaged against loans advanced to them on usurious rates of interest.³

But whether these steps will be adequate to abolish poverty which was the main cause of revolutionary unrest is an open question. If in spite of these reforms the problem is whether the peasants would take advantage of them and make them effective. In order to resolve this problem the Central Government issued comprehensive instructions to the States to expedite the development of the tribals' and poor peasants' areas.⁴ The long-term aims of such plans were: (a) to narrow the gap between the levels of development in tribal and other areas, and (b) to improve the standard of life of the tribal communities. The States have been asked to select senior officers to be incharge of the programme in the State as a whole. Qualifications prescribed for the posts in tribal areas have been revised with a view to affording more opportunities to local people to gain employment. These programmes were intended to suppress the evil designs of the landlords in the areas concerned and thus indirectly reduce the social unrest and revolutionary tendencies of the tribals.

LEGISLATION AGAINST SOCIAL DISABILITIES

Besides such legislation which the Government passed in order to ameliorate the economic condition of the people, their social disabilities were sought to be removed by schemes of social reform. Under fresh policies for more rights for women the Government took steps to encourage widow remarriage, even though their religion and society prohibited it. Those unfortunate women who lost their husbands at a young age and were left without any means of support, and had no desire to remarry, would be given financial assistance from the Government sources,⁵ so that they might stand on their own legs.

Legislation against child marriage was another social reform. It was generally the practice that children were united in wedlock even from before their birth. Small children were married even before they knew the implications of marriage. This had significant implications in the plural society of the country. It had a two-dimensional effect upon the backward community: (1) this practice was against the wishes of the persons concerned who would be compelled to pass their future life together, and (2) it was one of the

main causes of failure of the policy of family planning in India. The Government, therefore, enacted legislation against these malpractices. The inter-ministerial panel recommended that the Child Marriage Registration Act should be amended to raise the age of marriage for girls to 18 years and for boys to 21 years.⁶

The socio-economic reforms would be incomplete if the policy makers do not have the capacity to mobilize public opinion in favour of reformatory steps. Keeping this fact in view, the ruling party launched a series of debates on these evils of the society. The custom of dowry was one such evil, besides the unbearable expenditure on marriage ceremonies. The ill-effects of these customs were obvious. Laws were enacted to prevent the expenditure on a wedding from crossing the limit of Rs. 5,000.⁷ Dowry was completely banned. The stern action of the Government provided relief to a large number of people, but the custom-ridden society could not be cured of these evils so easily. Loans on usurious interest were taken from the *Mahajans* and landlords to meet the surreptitious demands made by greedy parents of the bridegrooms. The meagre lands were mortgaged in this process, and the parties, particularly the family of the bride, had to bear the brunt of it for the rest of their lives.

The question now arises as to why the Government became so sympathetic towards the poverty-stricken masses. The motive was mostly political. They wanted to blunt the weapon of the revolutionaries by declaring themselves as the saviours of the poor masses. Moreover, it was not only a social problem. The major issue of the law and order was also involved. If the Government abstained from launching a multi-pronged attack on the revolutionaries, the law and order situation would be worsened and no Government could hope to survive unless it tackled the law and order situation with a strong hand. Moreover, the Congress professed to be a socialist party and was pledged to the formation of welfare of the poor.

Maoist revolutionary strategy was not appreciated by the Indians in a big way. They abhorred the murders of innocent people and joined hands with the Congress Party, which besides being in power was more resourceful and well-organized. Its propaganda machinery was more powerful. Its political influence throughout the country was much more widespread. The impression that the Naxalites had extra-territorial loyalties also went against them, and their "hit and run" policy brought them in disgrace. The cumulative effect of all this was that the Naxalites lost the sympathy and support of the people even in the land of their birth, and prospects

of Maoist type of revolution receded. The CPI (M) also adopted parliamentary processes, and ultimately won majority of seats in West Bengal, through the instrumentality of the ballot box. The Naxalites, who were rounded up and jailed after the declaration of emergency, became totally ineffective. No finger was raised in their support, alienated as they were from the CPI and the CPI (M). Because there was no love lost between the Communists, moderates as well as extremists, the bid for revolution by the Naxalites was bound to fail.

THE NAXALITE PROBLEM UNDER THE JANATA GOVERNMENT

After the victory of the Janata Party in the general elections of March 1977 the bulk of the Naxalites have been released on an assurance that they would not resort to violent methods. Moreover the Janata Government declared that it would not be vindictive against the peace-loving Naxalites merely on grounds of their ideology or policies.

The Janata Government released those Naxalites who were behind the bars for political reasons only, as there was a general feeling that the Naxalites would change their stance. Miss Sunder Navalkar, who is also the President of the Workers' Revolutionary Council, while addressing a Press conference at Kalahpur, declared that "the hard core of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) cadre will not deviate from their chosen path of waging a protracted people's war, notwithstanding the recent change of government in the country." She said that the "people's war" was in essence the peasants' armed struggle wherein violence is inevitable under certain circumstances to usher in an era of real Indian Socialism.⁸ Miss Navalkar further maintained that the State apparatus under the Janata rule was still controlled by feudal lords and bureaucratic capital and that any let-up in the resolve of the Naxalites would only encourage the imperialists (USA) and social-imperialists (USSR.) to further exploit the Indian masses.

Miss Navalkar was of the view that what Janata leaders wanted was merely to replace Mrs. Indira Gandhi and some other individuals and not to change the Congress policy, which, according to her, served the interest of bourgeoisie, big landlords and monopolists.

She further remarked that Satyanarain Singh and his supporters have now ceased to be connected with the CPI (M-L) as they had adopted collaborationist and capitulationist stand.

"Thousands of Naxalites who for years had undergone torture and imprisonment under fictitious criminal charges could not give

up 'our tactical and strategic party line' for the sake of obtaining release from the prison",⁹ Miss Navalkar asserted. It was, therefore, no surprise that hardly 40 of over 2,000 Naxalites in West Bengal prisons secured their release by giving undertakings to the Government to abandon revolutionary strategy.

Ashim Chatterjee, one of the founder members of the CPI (M-L), expressed his views on May 21, 1978, at Calcutta that Mazumdar's theory of individual annihilation has caused degeneration of the CPI (M-L) into a terrorist party. Addressing his first formal Press conference since his release from jail on March 4, 1978, Chatterjee, a former member of the Central Committee of CPI (M-L), stressed upon the need of formation of "a new Communist revolutionary party . . . free of the ideology of annihilation . . . formed of honest Communist revolutionaries".¹⁰

Denouncing the theory of individual annihilation, Chatterjee believed that the CPI (M-L) like all terrorist parties frittered away its energy by dividing itself into different groups. According to him, the CPI (M-L) was not a Communist party. At the initial stages people felt elated at the murders of some landlords, and the mistake of the Naxalites was that they failed to realize that this was only a passive support of a people suffering from exploitation. Even when the people's repression started and had been continued throughout the ages of the Naxalite movement, there was no support of the people. Not only this, in several instances it so happened that the people chased away CPI (M-L) members from their areas. The Naxalite Movement, instead of healing the class struggle, weakened it. The party was isolated from the people.¹¹

Another important segment of the Naxalite movement under the leadership of Ram Pyara Saraf has denounced the Communist Party of China as revisionist in the second issue of the quarterly, *A Revolutionary Viewpoint*.¹² Saraf has presented a 64-page theory under the title, *It is high time to challenge the tide and face the storm*, in which he has said that the way of judging the nature of the present official Chinese leadership is to seriously look both at its theory and practice. It has already become clear that the Chinese leadership's sayings and doings were characterized by a big gap which has been and is a peculiar feature of revisionism. Obviously, under these new political developments the Indian revolutionaries would most probably not follow those guidelines which would be given by the present Chinese leadership.

There is, however, no denying the fact that since the inception of the Janata Government, thousands of Naxalites have been relea-

sed on one ground or the other, and wind has been taken out of their sails. The sharp edge of their opposition has been considerably blunted, and it would be unthinkable for them to launch previous strategies based on Maoist lines.

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Appendices

INDEX I The position of the United Fronts and the Independent candidates in the elections of 1967 and 1969 in West Bengal.

S. No.	Political parties	Seats won in 1967	% of votes	No. of Ministers	Seats won in 1969	% of votes	No. of Ministers
1.	CPI (M)	43	18.1	3	80	19.6	8
2.	B.C.	34	10.4	3	33	6.0	4
3.	CPI	16	6.5	2	30	6.8	5
4.	F.B.	13	3.9	2	21	4.5	3
5.	S.S.P.	7	2.1	1	9	1.8	—
6.	P.S.P.	7	1.74	1	5	1.31	—
7.	R.S.P.	6	2.1	1	12	2.8	2
8.	S.U.C.	4	0.7	1	7	1.5	2
9.	G.L.	2	0.5	1	4	0.5	1
10.	R.C.P.I.	—	0.3	—	2	0.4	1
11.	P.W.P.	2	0.3	1	2	0.4	1
12.	F.B.(M)	1	0.2	—	1	0.2	—
13.	L.S.S.	5	0.7	1	4	0.7	1
14.	Congress	127	41.1	—	55	40.4	—
15.	Jana Sangh	1	1.3	—	—	0.8	—
16.	Swatantra	1	0.8	—	—	0.1	—
17.	Ind.	11	9.1	1	15	9.3	1
Total		280	100.0	18	280	100.0	30

Index I

Index I has been based upon the following sources:

"Big CPI Victory in West Bengal", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 8 (February 23, 1969), p. 7; "Mid-Term Elections", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (February 23, 1969), p. 5; "Great Victory in West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (February 16, 1969), pp. 1 and 12; *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XV, No. 14 (April 2-8, 1969), pp. 8853-54; Baxter, C., *District Voting Trends in India* (Southern Asia, University of Columbia: New York, 1969); Kashyap, S.C., *The Politics of Defection* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1969); Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971); Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968); Sarbadhikari, P., *Populism and Representation: Some Tentative Observations on the Congress, United Front and Congress (R) Governments in West Bengal* (Lakhead University: Thunder Bay, Ontario, No date?).

Appendices

INDEX II

Composition of the United Front Ministry (1967 and 1969) in West Bengal

S. No.	1967			1969		
	Name	Party	Portfolio	Name	Party	Portfolio
1.	A. Mukherjee	B.C.	Chief Minister, Home Affairs, General Administration.	A. Mukherjee	B.C.	Chief Minister, Finance, Home, Animal Husbandry, Social Education
2.	J. Basu	CPI (M)	Deputy Chief Minister, Finance, Transport.	J. Basu	CPI (M)	Deputy Chief Minister, Constitution, Electronics, General Administration, Police, Press
3.	S. Lahari	CPI	Information, Parliamentary Affairs, Local Self-Government.	L. Lahari	CPI	Local Self-Government, Planning & Development, Housing
4.	P.C. Ghosh	Ind.	Food & Agriculture	K. Bhatta-charji	F.B.	Agriculture (except the portion given to Mukherjee of the CPI)
5.	H.K. Basu	F.B.	Public Works & Housing	B. Mukherjee	CPI	Irrigation & Waterways

(Index II Continued)

6.	J. Bhatta-charya	PWP	Education	S. Ghosh	F.B.	Cottage & Small Scale Industries
7.	N.K. Konar	CPI (M)	Land & Revenue	H.K. Konar	CPI (M)	Land & Revenue
8.	N. Bhatta-charyya	RSP	Health	N. Bhatta-charyya	RSP	Health
9.	N.S. Gupta	CPI (M)	Relief & Rehabilitation	N.S. Gupta	CPI (M)	Relief & Rehabilitation
10.	J. Kabir	B.S.	Planning & Development	S. Dara	B.C.	Commerce & Industries including Agri-Industries Cooperation P.W.E.
11.	S. Banerjee	SUC	Labour	S. Banerjee	SUC	Community Development
12.	S.K. Dara	B.C.	Commerce & Industries, Community Development	C.M. Sarkar	B.C.	
13.	B. Mukherjee	CPI	Irrigation & Waterways	R. Chakra-verty	CPI	Cooperation & Social Welfare
14.	D.P. Rai	G.L.	Scheduled Caste and Tribal Welfare	D.P. Rai	G.L.	Scheduled Caste and Tribal Welfare
15.	K.K. Maitra	SSP	Small Scale & Cottage Industries, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries	J. Chakra-verty	RSP	Parliamentary Affairs and Chief Whip
16.	A. Chakra-verty	F.B.	Law & Excise	P. Mukherjee	SUC	Road & Road Development
17.	N.N. Kundu	PSP	Relief & Cooperation	B.B.D. Gupta	LSS	Panchayat

(Index II Continued)

18.	B.B.D. Gupta	LSS	Panchayat & Welfare	J.B. Bhatta-charjee	PWO	Information & Public Relations
19.	—	—	—	S. Kumar	RCPI	Food & Supplies
20.	—	—	—	R. Chatterjee	FB (M)	Sports
21.	—	—	—	B. Soren	B.C.	Forest
22.	—	—	—	S.P. Roy	CPI (M)	Education
23.	—	—	—	A. Rasul	CPI (M)	Transport
24.	—	—	—	P.C. Roy	CPI (M)	Fisheries
25.	—	—	—	K. Ghosh	CPI (M)	Labour
26.	—	—	—	K.C. Haldar	CPI (M)	Excise
27.	—	—	—	G. Yazdani	Ind.	Passport & Civil Defence
				(Supported by CPI (M))		
28.	—	—	—	Mrs. R. Chakravarty	CPI	Cooperation and Social Welfare
29.	—	—	—	A. R. Khan	FB	Judicial & Legislature

Index II has been prepared with the help of following sources:

"CPI (M) Ministers of West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 9 (March 2, 1969), p. 12; "List of Successful CPI (M) Candidates in Mid-Term Election", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (February 16, 1969), p. 11; "Big CPI Victory in West Bengal", *New Age*, Vol. XVII, No. 8 (February 23, 1969), p. 7; "Mid-Term Elections", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (February 23, 1969), p. 5; "Great Victory in West Bengal", *People's Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (February 16, 1969), pp. 1 and 12; *Asian Recorder*, Vol. XV, No. 14 (April 2-8, 1969), pp. 8853-54; Baxter, C., *District Voting Trends in India* (Southern Asia, University of Columbia: New York, 1969); Kashyap, S.C., *The Politics of Defection* (The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1969); Franda, F.M., *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (The MIT Press: London, 1971); Irani, C.R., *Bengal: The Communist Challenge* (Lalvani Publishing House: Bombay, 1968); Sarbadhikari, P., *Populism and Representation: Some Tentative Observations on the Congress, United Front and Congress (R) Governments in West Bengal* (Lakhead University, Thunder Bay: Ontario, No date?).

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