OISLAUGHT IN WEST BENGAL

While the eyes of the world were on the Indian invasion and "liberation" of East Bengal, the Government of India made an onslaught on a left wing group in its own country. During the week November 21 to 28 (when the invasion in fact began) half of India's political and army leaders deserted west Bengal to arrive in West Bengal. About 10,000 leftists were reported arrested. Under the Prevention of Violent Activities Act the Party's second anniversary and the political detainees may be held without trial for up to a year. Many arrested earlier have in fact been released because of the huge numbers awaiting trial. The Act is due to expire early in 1972 but new arrests will continue to remove political prisoners to special centres is ominous.

At Alipore jail on November 26th a massacre took place, the precise extent and circumstances of which are unclear and may remain so. Police and government have admitted six persons killed and 237 wounded, but according to some reports up to 50 were murdered outright, while many of the injured were arrested and brutalized. The authorities claimed an attempted jailbreak; bricks and tiles thrown by prisoners created the commotion. This is hard to credit: armed police were on guard outside the jail, making escape unlikely; no damage to gates or walls was reported. The victims were beaten to death with clubs. Alipore was the sixth major jail massacre during the past twelve months, and the fifth in terms of isolated or inadequately reported jail killings. Jail murders have been an increasingly common response to the attacks of the "Naxalites" or Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), the Maoist party formed in April 1969 and officially recognized by China. Since early 1970 party policy has concentrated on "mobilizing" individual landlords, businessmen, moneylenders, police, and political enemies, in the countryside of Punjab, Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, and increasingly in Calcutta City. Undoubtedly, arrested CPI-ML prisoners have been threatened and in some jails jail breaks have occurred: they glory in it and some of the jail battles have resulted from these efforts. On April 22nd, 1971, at Naxalite prisoners in Dumdum jail rebelled and hoisted the red flag on the police station tower. On May 15th, 50 prisoners managed to escape. Inside the jail a battle ensued between 150 Naxalite teen-agers and armed police and jail warders. Thirty-two of the juvenile prisoners were reported killed with clubs, and the rest severely wounded. Many of the dead were beaten to a pulp, their bodies unrecognizable by the relatives who came later to identify them.

More commonly, jail-breaks have apparently been staged. Prisoners are told they are freed on bail, are escorted to the gates, then shot when "freed." As a result, 20 prisoners were killed at Alipore. This is what happened at Midnapore jail on December 15th, 1970, where nine peasant Communist youth murdered, and at Bestallak in January 1971, where 15 student and industrial prisoners were killed. Similar incidents have been reported from Howrah, Birbhum, Cooch Behar, Kurseong, and three times from Alipore.

The CPI-ML has been the chief victim of these massacres. But the parliamentary Communist Party of India (Marxist), highly organized in Kerala and West Bengal, has also suffered increasing assault. The Party claimed 30 members shot in jail in the eight

Letter From Members of the CPI(ML)

Comrades and friends abroad,

In the light of what has happened in the South Asian region during the past twelve months, we wish to make some statements and ask some questions.

First, it should be immediately clear that the revolutionary forces in this country and are resolved to erase, through struggle, the 'nationalist boundaries' drawn up by Messrs. Patel, Nehru, Johnston and Stafford Cripps.

Second, what took place in East Bengal in the first quarter of 1971 was nothing but the bloody and genocidal suppression of a people's movement and an attempt to crush the democratic movement of fascist, obscurantist and utterly foul madmen—and every adjective is carefully chosen.

Third, a certain Foreign Office abroad, the only one which we expect to be a 'con- stipated' state, choose to represent black as white, to choose to hide from its people the true nature of its fascist friends, choose to depict a people's desperate struggle against bloody agress as an 'anti-China war plot', choose to use the terms 'rebels' and 'terrorists' as abuse(!) and choose not to interfere in the 'internal affairs' of Indian murderers—after having labeled the 'insurgents' in the 'battle' of Ceylon and Sudan—on behalf of the ichmahum murderers, of course.

Fourth, the clever reactionaries in India (who were killed publically last summer at Belghat), the revolutionary movement in West Bengal, Andhra and Punjab, and the national struggle against apartheid and racism, and the 'republic' and their Soviet well-wishers, caged in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and immemorially strengthened their position in the subsequent—partly, if not wholly due to the marvellous non-interference by the leaders of world revolution and the activities of their good friends, the Maoist mufflulls of Islamabad.

The inner crisis of the revolutionary movement in South Asia is the subject matter for a different discussion. But what did the 'revolutionary leadership' of our party (now split in the tradition, no doubt, of 'one divides into two') do with regard to the Indo-Pak crisis? Since their proclaimed first principle is 'loyalty to the CPC[Communist Party of China]-not loyalty to the masses or Marxism-Leninism, but to the CPC—they naturally proceeded with the holy task of relations with the opportunistic leadership of the Chinese Foreign Office. A quantitative (or is it qualitative) development of Mao Tse-tung's thought was most significant in the person of one leader who proclaimed that Yamaha Khan was a 'national bourgeois' (sic!).

We have betrayed, comrades and friends, and we know that this is a strong language. The 'proletarian headquarters' has indulged in nothing but out and out opportunism and big power chauvinism and we, who are ardent 'Maoists' until recently, say this with the deepest sorrow and dismay. We ask the Maoist missionaries—do you expect us now to quote the Red Book at common people murdered by Chinese bullets? Do you expect us to preach armed struggle to people whose just armed struggle was faced with Chinese tanks? We shall not give up revolution gentlemen, as you have, but we have learned a very bitter and yet very basic lesson—the loyalty of a revolutionary party is to the people, to Marxism, and certainly not to this or that party. And we shall not accept the selling out of proletarian internationalism to the Yankee imperialists, to the 'dirties' and 'dirty tricks' of the world. From Stalín onwards, the Soviet leaders have sacrificed world revolution at the altar of their chauvinist foreign policy. We cannot allow this to happen over and over again. Perhaps Allah will teach us why our great helmsman steer our ship onto the rocks and then abandoned us. But, as someone said once, great men need no reasons, they leave them to the creative hands of their apologists. 'Sham is sham, and the mask must be stripped off—it's the same damning truth that we have to strip the mask off the Chinese leadership.

Some Indian Comrades of CPI(ML) [Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)]

prisoned criminals carry out the executions, often after sadistic torture. They are paid in perquisites from the prison food stores.

To dwell on jail killings would, however, mislead, for individual and mass murders of alleged 'rebels' have continued for months outside the jails as well. In addition to silent killings in the night, whole groups were murdered publicly in accidents defending the CPI-ML but even of betraying its cadre to the police, and there have been interrogations and torture of the two parties. Now, however, the chauvinist hysteria of the war has provided the government with an ideal opportunity to 'get' the well organized parliamentary CPI-M as well. The left is proceeding apace in West Bengal. Massive attacks on CPI-M bases jointly by armed police and armed congress bands, point-blank murder of leftist boys and girls, inhuman atrocities on detained men and women, and cases of people burnt alive are the same orders of magnitude. A call of 10,000 armed police and 10,000 black-majors have been declared. A sad contrast 1938, when the ailing Bengal poet Tagore, aged 90, led the Congress to protest the British shooting of two detainees in the Hijli detention camp. Today the heirs of Gandhi indiscriminately recruit hoodlums and murderers into the ruling Congress Party, no doubt to get rid of their opponents in good time before the West Bengal elections, scheduled for February. Even the pro-Moscow Communist Party of India was constrained to issue a lengthy protest—while jointly organizing a West Bengal delegation to Calcutta with the Congress Party to greet the "Liberation" of Bangash Das. On the day after the Pakistani forces surrendered, Indira Gandhi said of the government of India and Pakistan, in a plea for negotiations: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." And the "socialist world!" Most heart-renting! In April the government of China gives $100 million as a "liberation loan" and a dictatorship at the height of its massacre of East Bengal intellectuals, revolutionaries, and youth activities. In December, the Soviet Union arms the Indian government and covers for it in the Security Council while India commits foreign aggression and nips off East Bengal to the Awami League: no doubt partly to defeat a leftist shift in the revolution that was underway; partly to cover up its own slaughter in Eastern India; perhaps also to stake a claim to the Indian Ocean on behalf of Soviet bid to encircle China. The victims are the revolutionaries and the people; the government of India and the CPI-M merely knows this. Its slogans, "Yahya Khan-Indira Gandhi Ek Hai" (Yahya Khan and Indira Gandhi are the same) echoes Mrs. Gandhi's propagandists. The government's response to the onslaught was to form a united front with the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc to supporting the multiparty elections in Burdwan, West Bengal. Soon, however, it will have to fight back or go under.

FOOTNOTES


The French version of this article was published in...