

The Politics of Surrender

Several interviews given by Devji, erstwhile Politburo member of the CPI (Maoist), are now available on the net. They are in Telugu and Hindi. Its substance has also come in an interview published in the March 14 issue of the Indian Express (Mumbai).

Devji claims that he has not surrendered. He says he was picked up while attempting to relocate from the struggle zone. Hence it was an arrest, not a surrender. This reasoning is quite specious. What about their accepting the money granted by the Telangana government to surrenderers? There was also the sorry spectacle of their demanding a hike in that amount! Though he now admits it was a mistake, the very fact that such thoughts were entertained is rather revealing. Devji has tried to justify his arrest/surrender as something done in the interests of the revolutionary movement. The argument is as follows. If he had refused to accept the surrender proposal made by the State government he would have been locked up in jail. This would have cut him off from the masses. That would have been harmful since his active presence is needed to revitalise and reorganise the movement. Devji says that while going to jail was ethically correct, his choice was appropriate in view of the crisis faced by the movement. Is that so?

There are a number of examples of imprisoned communist leaders using ingenious methods to cut through restrictions of jail life and aid the party with their advice. When weighed against the demoralising impact of the surrender on the ranks and masses and the boost given through it to enemy propaganda, the limits imposed by incarceration are minimal. Moreover, refusing to surrender is primarily a matter of one's political stand as a communist revolutionary. The ethics of persisting in the face of torture, threat of death or imprisonment comes from this politics. Devji is erecting a false opposition between the moral imperatives that should guide a Maoist in enemy custody and the interests of the movement. Both are complementary, provided we are still talking about a revolutionary movement.

Devji has declared that he will be working among the people, rallying them on their immediate and basic issues. This is also cited as something that proves he hasn't surrendered. According to him, people who surrender do so to return to their private lives. But since he and associates will continue to be activists their action cannot be considered as surrender. Is that so?

Consider the notorious example set by an erstwhile founding member of the CPI (M-L), Satyanarayan Singh. After the withdrawal of Emergency in 1977, he encouraged comrades to give undertakings abjuring violence in order to get released from prison. Neither he nor many of those who came out of jails heeding his appeal gave up political activity. Yet this was denounced by those who stood firm on the revolutionary road as a betrayal. Precisely because it meant abandoning the Naxalbari path. What matters is not one's activism, or lack of it, but the politics one is proposing.

So what is the politics Devji and associates want to promote? In a written proposal made to the Telangana Chief Minister they have declared that they would operate entirely within the legal framework, if the ban currently imposed on the CPI (Maoist) was lifted. They also made it clear that they would immediately proceed to dissolve the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) if the party were to be recognized as a legal political entity. In his words, "the armed struggle would cease to exist."

Does this differ in any way from the capitulationist politics pursued by Sonu and Co.? Devji has tried to make a distinction. He points out that while they surrendered weapons he and those who arrest/surrendered with him did not. They have been left in the forest. All that is fine. But when the

armed struggle is decreed to have ended, when the PLGA is dissolved, they wouldn't have been of use anyway. Evidently, even if we take him at his words, that act is nothing more than a temporary measure. The only difference one sees is his position on participation in parliamentary elections. He continues to believe that the fundamental problems facing the people cannot be resolved through the parliamentary electoral path. But that is qualified — 'our stance thus far has been that'. Does this indicate that it too may be changed in the future? That would depend on what is seen as principal in the proposed 'revitalisation project'. If gaining and retaining legal status is accorded prime importance then a turn to the electoral path would most likely follow.

In the present situation, Brahmanical Hindutva fascism is aggressively seeking to realise its ambition of establishing a Hindu Rashtra. Will the RSS-led Central government easily agree to give legal status to the CPI (Maoist)? The way it responded to calls for peace talk with the murder of Basavaraj and many other comrades and the sordid spectacle of Sonu handing over his weapon in return for a copy of the Constitution from an RSS-man is indicative. The fascist Modi regime will not be satisfied with anything less than total subjugation. Its war to eliminate the Maoist movement is much, much, more than a matter of securing mining operations for an Adani or a Tata. It is pre-eminently political. Even more intensely than the counter-revolutionary wars waged by previous regimes. It is driven by an ideology that is most reactionary in our context, historically and in the present too. Revolutionary communism, as represented by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism today, is its nemesis. It seeks its total annihilation.

Conversely, the room for 'activism strictly within the legal framework' is already quite restricted, even for parliamentary parties. The Congress no doubt pursues its own interests in the surrender dramas being played out in Telengana. It seeks to project a 'humane' visage as opposed to the 'bloodthirsty' one pursued by the BJP. That gives room for wishful thinking about a revolutionary party acquiring legality in the present conditions. But this space is restricted and fleeting. Making it the cornerstone of efforts to overcome the present setback will be counter-productive. What ultimately matters is the Central government run by the RSS and the imperialist mentors.

One must also consider this whole 'arrest/surrender' drama from another angle, the angle of the enemy's Low Intensity Warfare strategy for counter-revolution. Why has the Modi government allowed the Congress ministry in Telangana to go ahead with it, even in the case of highly wanted people like Devji? Is it related to the mixed results of its Sonu/Satish move? True, they inflicted a heavy blow on the movement in the Dandakaranya. But it miserably failed in the rest of the country. Not just that, it led to an all-round re-energisation of the broad ranks of sympathisers and activists all across the country. The Sonu/Satish clique was roundly condemned as traitors. So now, in place of that discredited lot, we have a set of 'honest' leaders. They claim they haven't surrendered, haven't handed over weapons and still swear by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM). And they go around seeking support for their 'legalist' project. The abandoning of armed struggle is presented as a matter of tactics, which is necessary to overcome the setback. The enemy would surely see the value of this package in spreading ideological confusion and weakening the support base of the Maoist movement. Whether unconsciously becoming a tool of the enemy due to misguided ideas about 'revitalising' the movement or consciously siding with it, the fall out of the arrest/surrender of Devji and associates will be far more pernicious than that of the Sonu/Satish clique. Pointing to the possibility of consciously siding with the enemy is not mere speculation. The presence of an external agent guiding Devji's responses during the interview with the TV9 channel was already a

matter of concern. Now there are reports about his visiting comrades in jails, accompanied by police officers, and the strenuous efforts he has made to get them to abandon armed struggle.

Finally we must also raise this question — what right do they have to take such decisions, like making the party open and dissolving the PLGA? It is a well known principle of a communist party that members lose their membership the moment they are arrested or captured by the enemy. It may be restored after they become free, depending on their conduct in custody. Devji and his associates are no exception to this. Besides, and most importantly, one Politburo member and perhaps some Central Committee members are still active in the Bihar-Jharkand region. Pockets of armed struggle still persist in Dandakaranya. When he is so critical of Sonu and others for violating democratic centralism, shouldn't he have considered these hard facts before making unilateral declarations on 'making the party a legal entity', 'dissolving the PLGA', 'ending armed struggle' etc.? As he himself admits this was never on the agenda in committee meetings. The erstwhile secretary, martyr comrade Basavaraj had rejected a similar proposal made by Sonu. It is true that conditions in Dandakaranya have worsened even more since then. But that is no justification for abandoning the revolutionary orientation of the party, the Naxalbari path of armed struggle, aimed at the seizure of political power.

Let us remind ourselves of the reasoning behind adopting this path. The necessity for armed activity emerges from the nature of our society. From the raw violence that is omnipresent in it, particularly in the rural areas. This is one of the concrete manifestations of semi-feudalism in our country. The norms of bourgeois democracy— rule of law, civil rights, responsible government etc.— are a facade barely covering up the hideous presence of caste-feudal relations and values. The moment a mass struggle starts confronting any vital interest of the exploiters, the armed goons of the local landlords, of the ruling class political party dominant in that area, or the armed might of the state, swing into action with all brutality. This is the norm in rural areas. Even in urban centres, the 'rule of law' is something reserved for the better off layers of the middle class and members of the exploiting classes. The masses are well aware of this. Ruling class violence is ever present in their lives. Its threatening presence is getting amplified as Brahmanical Hindutva fascist forces become increasingly aggressive. The agenda of violence is preset by the ruling classes. Those choosing to stick to the revolutionary road cannot but reckon with it.

The pioneers of the revolutionary movement launched by Naxalbari were well aware of this essential feature of our situation. Their choice of the path of protracted people's war factored in this aspect too. The leaders of the Telangana armed struggle had arrived at it through the course of that struggle. They succeeded in imposing it over and against the Trotskyite sabotage of Ranadive. But, they failed to stand firm and persist on that path despite the overwhelming support of the ranks and the testimony of practice. This teacher by negative example was both a warning and lesson for the pioneers of the new, Maoist, revolutionary movement in the 1960s. Hence they consciously chose the path of protracted people's war, firmly anchored in class analysis. India as a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country. New democratic revolution as the stage of revolution. Working class as the leading class and the peasantry as the main force. These were the essential elements informing their choice.

To conclude, "The turn to MLM by the pioneers of the new revolutionary movement didn't come from bookish knowledge. It was driven by the firm conviction that the sole reason for their existence as communists was to make revolution, to end exploitation and oppression. Integrated with the masses they had been thirsting to take up this task since long. That is why they

enthusiastically rallied behind the leaders who came out against the revisionism of the CPI. The ranks waited in keen expectation for decisive steps from the leadership to take the revolutionary road. But the leaders of the new party, the CPI(M), were engaged in desperate moves to divert the ranks from that road by all means. This is where the ideological clarity offered by MLM proved to be decisive. It helped the revolutionaries see through the centrist guises of the neo-revisionists. It helped them realise that nothing short of a total rupture would do. Thus the way was cleared for Naxalbari.”

“There is an important lesson for us here. First and foremost, we must firmly grasp our calling as communists – to serve the people, to be the torch bearers of revolution. The setback the Maoist revolutionary movement is facing today certainly calls for serious analysis and necessary rectification. But what is most important and primary is to stand firm on the revolutionary road.”