

The End of Spring?

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There has always been a certain sanctioned and legitimate way of perceiving the naxalite movement and the state's response to it. These attitudes are not a mere reflection of the interests of the ruling classes but are born of the need to legitimise those interests and their protection in the eyes of such public opinion as matters, in particular in the light of the counter-legitimacy gained by the movement with that public opinion.

THE all-too-brief period of democracy appears to be coming to an end in Andhra Pradesh. Armed pickets staffed by AP Special Police and paramilitary forces borrowed from Karnataka are sprouting in the villages, the CRPF is patrolling the streets, and the Special Task Force of plainclothes killers are on the prowl once again.

The wise will say this was foreseen, and of course it was foreseen, but it will not do to miss the process for the foregone conclusion in the smugness of one's prescience; one can indeed be a little too smug and refuse to be educated by the process, which would be sad indeed. Why and how counterpressures are built to negate the pressures that forced a commitment to a minimum of democratic norms from the state should make quite a revealing enquiry. That the answer contains some uncomfortable home truths—though they are not of decisive importance—is not sufficient reason for shying away from the probing.

The establishment's answer is that the naxalites—and in particular the People's War group—have 'misused the freedom given to them by the state', an answer that is ridiculous on the face of it, and somewhat dubious in its elaboration. What is ridiculous is the arrogant notion that freedom is a thing that the state gives to the people and can take back upon its being misused; and what is doubtful is the meaning read into the word 'misuse'.

But this answer has quickly gained legitimacy. The quick acceptance and rapid spread of this argument is a good illustration of the means by which the interests of the ruling classes get converted into society's popular wisdom. From the beginning of the naxalite movement in the late sixties there has always been, at any given point of time, a certain sanctioned and legitimate way of perceiving the movement and the state's response to it: One could make quite an instructive analysis of the movement's vicissitudes based on the changes in the currently sanctioned attitudes of this conventional wisdom. These attitudes are not a mere reflection of the interests of the ruling classes but are born of the need to legitimise those interests and more particularly their protection in the eyes of such public

opinion as matters, in particular in the light of the counter-legitimacy gained by the movement with that public opinion. As the public whose opinion counts has gradually extended downwards to include hitherto irrelevant social groups, and as the strength, the achievements, staying power and nuisance value of the movement have attracted those social groups, and in addition impressed the always relevant opinion of the hitherto indifferent articulate middle classes and elite, the officially sanctioned perception has necessarily become more democratic, less virulent, and progressively less rabid. Straight forward expression of ruling class interests cannot play the role of a legitimising perception, for a perception that plays that role must necessarily express itself in terms of the values professed and the facts believed by those sections of the people whose values and beliefs can no longer be ignored. The establishment therefore acknowledges whatever can no longer be denied in popular awareness, but carefully picks up those elements of popular consciousness—usually residues of a long history of suppression that turns ideas upside down and stands them on the head—which can help to sustain its class interests, and therewith builds the society's collective conventional wisdom. The press and the universities pick up this perception and put it in currency, and soon you discover every well-meaning person repeating it.

UPSIDE DOWN NOTION OF VIOLENCE

In the beginning the perception was centred on the upside down notion of violence, whatever your aims, it was held, you should not use violence to achieve them. Violence is contrary to our culture, and contrary to our democratic polity. Popular consciousness no doubt perceived at one level that suffering, deprivation and inequality also constitute violence and it is not immoral to counter that violence with physical violence, but it was and is simultaneously permeated by certain traditional Hindu notions that come in handy for the state's purposes; the people believe for instance that the use of arms is the inherent prerogative of the rulers, and their use by the common people is an

act of intolerable effrontery that will naturally meet with retribution (the Gandhian notion that violence is contrary to our culture is merely the appropriate nationalist dressing for this traditional Hindu notion); the people also believe that one owes one's troubles to one's own karma for which one cannot blame, much less fight, others; they believe that those who have property have equally earned it by their conduct in previous existence and it is not right to seize the fruits of their karma by force; and they have also internalised the more modern idea that violence has no place in a democracy where any party can propagate its ideas, contest elections, and come to power. None of these ideas has an absolute hold on the people, and they co-exist with resentment against injustice, a secular concept of life, a rudimentary labour theory of value and a rational attitude towards violence, but they are all present in popular consciousness—even where an idea in its specific articulation through concepts like caste and karma is discredited, the spirit it engenders in popular consciousness remains alive and active and is expressed in more acceptable terms—and the ruling classes make subtle use of these residues to legitimise the repression they let loose on revolutionaries. It is precisely because popular consciousness, even when—indeed precisely when—it has something of its own to say and believe, is permeated every inch by notions contrary to the people's class interest, that the ideological hegemony of the ruling classes becomes possible. Such hegemony would be impossible if there existed a genuinely autonomous region—i.e., a self-consciously autonomous region, for an autonomy of consciousness would be a contradiction in terms if it were not self-conscious in its autonomy—in popular consciousness, as the subaltern theorists believe.

But as the naxalite movement gained deeper roots among the masses, its goals and achievements became better known and the land question and the problems of the tribal and rural poor, at the least, had necessarily to be acknowledged. A movement that worked among the masses and mobilised them in their lakhs could not be exclusively condemned on grounds of violence. Nor could it be tackled exclusively with 'encounters'. Police camps were being set up in the villages and the agrarian poor were being locked up, tortured, jailed on cooked up charges, their houses and fields were being destroyed, etc, and even if all this could be justified in the name of naxalite violence, it had got to be explained what it was that drove the wretched of this nation allegedly wedded to non-violence into the arms of violence. On the other hand, the concrete benefits to the poor from the naxalite movement, like occupation of forest land, increase in wages and the diminution of feudal atrocities, as well as the civil liberties campaign about faked encounter killings and torture could no longer be denied. At this stage cer-

tain new elements started entering the ideological justification of repression. It was acknowledged that the poor have a variety of problems, and that the problems had remained unsolved because of loopholes' in the law and lack of 'political will'; confessing to the failure of land reforms and other measures aimed at agrarian reform became quite a favourite with all who were responsible for implementing them. The naxalites, it was said, were 'using' these problems for their own ends, which is the capture of power by violent means in default of the ability to win elections; the state must necessarily defend itself against such attempts for otherwise civilised political discourse would become impossible, and it is the poor who are unfortunately caught in the cross-fire. If only the naxalites had had faith in democratic methods there would have been no need for repression by the state. The theme of 'innocent villagers caught between naxalite violence and state violence' became quite a favourite with conventional wisdom once it found that neither the centrality of the rural poor to the whole 'naxalite question' nor the well-publicised police excesses could be denied any longer.

'MISUSE' OF FREEDOM

But the argument of violence soon started losing its potency; there has been an unprecedented generalisation of political violence in Andhra Pradesh in the last few years, and naxalite violence has ceased to be anything special. This year, during the first five months—until the cyclone hit coastal Andhra and interrupted all normal life including political murders—about 60 murders took place in the district of Guntur alone, most of them attributable to Congress(I) TDP post-election clashes. Simultaneously the staying power of the naxalites and their capacity to cause nuisance to even the political establishment, the bureaucracy and the articulate middle class became evident. And as soon as repression was relaxed ever so little their undoubted popular support became equally evident. At the next stage, therefore, the perception moved further to the left. It was acknowledged explicitly for the first time in twenty years that the 'naxalite problem' was not a law and order problem but a socio-economic problem, and that it could not be tackled by brute suppression. Democratic opportunities should be given to the naxalites to propagate their politics and win mass support. They should be allowed to conduct public meetings, publish literature, lead democratic struggles for land or wages, enjoy the rights written in the Criminal Procedure Code if they are arrested and so on. But they should not 'misuse' this freedom. Once they misuse it, they lose their entitlement to it. Unlike other political parties, which enjoy constitutional freedoms as a matter of right, the revolutionaries have to earn them by behaving well, and they are on probation in perpetuity.

It appears therefore that during the last

six months of freedom everybody has been on the look-out for signs of misuse. The test for the misuse is surprisingly strict in a country where the public is known to be often irritatingly indulgent towards political misbehaviour—but then one presumes that depends on who is being judged and who is doing the judging. Everyone collects money to finance activity (the political parties for—or at least in the name of—elections and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the name of Ayodhya bricks) but if the naxalites collect money that amounts to misuse; everyone buys and uses lethal weapons for their private and political feuds, but if the revolutionaries buy weapons as part of their struggle to change society that amounts to misuse; everyone grabs other people's—especially poor people's—land, but if the naxalites encourage the rural poor to grab and occupy the surplus land of landlords, then that amounts to misuse; every political leader and village boss conducts arbitration of civil, criminal and social disputes day in and day out, but if the naxalite cadre do the same thing that too amounts to 'misuse'. Such an arbitrary definition of what amounts to 'misuse' of freedom, and the threat of forfeiture of freedom in the event of misuse, constitute the terms and conditions of the liberty granted to the naxalites by Chenna Reddy.

It is interesting that the one recent development in naxalite politics that honest critics *could* have regarded as misuse (except that the notion is itself nonsensical) of freedom has not been treated as such—or at least not on par with the other instances listed above—by the ruling classes and their press. This is the murderous assaults the naxalite groups have been making upon each other. While all of them are killing and getting killed, the biggest aggressor has been the People's War group, and the principal sufferer the C P Reddy group. In total they have killed about 30 of each other's cadre in the period January to May, a number well in excess of the number of 'encounters' that ever took place in a comparable lime period even during the worst days of repression. It is customary for militant groups to exhibit political intolerance towards each other the moment their existence is reasonably secure, but the situation in Andhra Pradesh has got exacerbated by the sudden flush of popularity and morale and the increase of weapon power of the naxalite groups, especially the People's War group. As a consequence of considerable pressure mounted by democratic public opinion this group's leadership has recently given a public commitment that it will strive to put an end to such attacks, and there has been a perceptible decline in inter-group casualties.

But anyway this is not the misuse the establishment has been complaining about. It is indeed perhaps happy at heart that the revolutionaries are getting killed at each other's hands without any need to dirty its own fingers. What is complained of as misuse is principally the collection of huge

amounts of money, the conduct of People's Courts allegedly under duress, and the forcible occupation of the surplus and benami land of landlords.

The collection of party funds could not have been used as an accusation against the naxalites, but for the fact that the activity has acquired unsavoury connotations in the eyes of the public; it is perhaps ironic that the persons who are responsible for giving the unsavoury reputation to that activity are precisely those who are now using it as an argument against the naxalites. As for the rest, while parties in power and those that are likely to come to power collect funds from the rich with the promise of illegal and improper favours in return, revolutionaries can only collect from the rich by taking recourse to some degree or other of intimidation, and all communist revolutionaries have always done so, for they cannot survive on the donations of the poor. But it has also constituted a fecund source of criminal cases against them, on grounds of extortion, criminal intimidation, etc.

LAND DISTRIBUTION

The real problem however has arisen with the conduct of People's Courts and the distribution of landlords' lands. In both the cases the People's War group cadre have certainly committed a lot of mistakes, but the mistakes are only the excuse for the furor. It is the actions themselves that are found objectionable. Until recently the naxalite movement had not taken up the distribution of landlords' surplus land as a major activity. It had encouraged tribals to cut down and cultivate reserved forests for their livelihood, and an estimated 4 lakh acres have thus been occupied, Adilabad and Khammam being the most severely affected districts. The Khammam occupation is nearly a decade old but in Adilabad it is during recent years that about 80,000 acres have been occupied by tribals. In addition to this the naxalite groups have led struggles for occupation of cultivable wastes and for the return and recovery of land grabbed from the poor by the landlords. This year, for the first time, the focus shifted in a major way to the occupation of surplus and benami land of landlords. A scary atmosphere was immediately whipped up in the press, alleging that in Nizamabad district the People's War group had set up its own ceiling limit amounting to 10 acres of irrigated land, and was taking over and distributing the rest. At the time of that group's Rytu Coolie Sangham's Third Conference at Warangal on May 5 and 6, whose finale was attended by about 7 to 8 lakh people, it was seriously believed that an 'official' announcement to that effect would be made by that party's leadership. No such thing happened but the word was out that the poor could occupy the lands of the well-to-do. The party's cadre themselves led many struggles for land-grab after mid-May, and unlike in the past when no concern was shown for technicalities like

registering the occupation, this time in many places they brought lawyer and revenue officials and got the occupation registered. Where the cadre were not very mature, there was encroachment on even the land of middle peasants. And in many places, especially in Warangal district, inspired by the call and more so by the rumours, the poor themselves went ahead and planted red flags in whatever patch of land they thought they could occupy and hold with ease, which naturally turned out to be the land of neighbouring poor peasants. These 'excesses' have been shown as the excuse for abusing the land occupation, but what has scared the ruling classes is the occupation itself. Within two weeks of the start of the movement, the Telugu daily *Eenadu*, the most politically conscious organ of the regional elite of the state, reported that 3,000 acres of land has been occupied in the districts of Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Warangal and Mahbubnagar. For another six weeks thereafter the occupations continued unabated, especially in the western talukas of Adilabad district, and have only now ground to a halt after the setting up of armed police camps and the large-scale arrests of the landless poor who have participated in the occupations. The overall achievement in terms of acreage occupied is quite modest by all accounts, and the scare it has created among the, exploiting classes is less a measure of the achievement than an indication of the impossibility of a peaceful resolution of the land question.

PEOPLE'S COURTS

This was one of the instances of 'misuse' of freedom complained about. The other concerns the People's Courts, and here too there is considerable cause for complaint. So long as the arbitration is confined to instances of gross and evident injustice perpetrated by the rich and the powerful, there is little likelihood of things getting derailed. And many such wrongs have been set right in the last few months in the villages of Telengana. But any political movement working in villages is forced to decide upon a variety of much less clear and much more subtle problems. For the masses at large, an efficient and just adjudicative mechanism is a necessity, and what they have had till now is a variety of informal local courts—landlords' panchayats, caste panchayats, adjudication by new-found political leaders, and of course the police and courts introduced by the British. None of them is particularly efficient or just, and hence the constant search, for a satisfactory alternative. The very fact that a large number of people do bring their problems to the naxalites' People's Court is proof of the efficacy and integrity of the arbitrators, or at least the people's faith in them; but that faith is not enough, for the problems that are brought before People's Courts range all the way from family disputes to property disputes between kins; from problems of caste and

kinship to criminal offences such as theft, assault and murder. Some of the problems are burdened with an intricate and undecipherable history, and some with a complex conjunction of oppressive traditions and deep-rooted feelings. On the other side, the new-found adjudicator, the local organiser, is more often than not a young man or woman—much more often a man than a woman—in the twenties, not particularly versed in the intricacies of human relations, nor possessed with a full-dimensional understanding of human liberation. What these organisers possess is a deep-seated anger, and a certain new-found sense of power. Having been excluded totally from power in all its aspects to the point of being reduced to a political non-entity all these days—for invariably they are from a dalit background—they today suddenly find themselves in a position where they can dispose of people's lives and happiness. What ensues immediately is not revolutionary justice but plebian justice, a curious mixture of the medieval and the Utopian, for the person dispensing it is as likely as not less a moulded revolutionary than its raw material, a plebian rebel. It is an acknowledged fact that a sizeable chunk—perhaps a majority—of the rural militants of the People's War group, known all over Andhra Pradesh by the English word 'radicals', are the raw material and not the finished product of revolutionary organisation. This has always been so, but is particularly true today with that party breaking out of five years of ruthless suppression and suddenly discovering itself flooded with aspiring revolutionaries.

When people who have been deprived of power for centuries suddenly discover themselves in possession of some amount of power appropriated from hitherto powerful classes, almost invariably there is a tendency to appropriate the *symbols* and the mode of exercise of that power too. To what extent this tendency is actualised in a given case depends upon how spontaneous—in the sense of the opposite of political—the liberation is. To the extent that the liberation is apolitical, it is precisely the appropriation of the symbols that constitutes a self-evident break in the power relation. And so a woman takes to smoking, drinking, profanity and the proclamation of a cynical attitude towards sexual morality—all of them quintessential attributes of manliness; a black nation takes to speaking English or French and wearing uncomfortable western clothes; a tribal takes to speaking the tongue of the dominant non-tribals of the region, eating their food, wearing their clothes and cultivating their crops; and similarly the dalit youth in the villages who have broken through the traditional power relation have a natural tendency, if it is not politically checked, to exercise it in the manner of the landlords: call all village disputes to one's court, summon big and small alike, decide the matter summarily and with no qualms

about natural justice, treat all demands for a just procedure as an affront to one's integrity, and award a fearsome punishment against which there is no appeal to anyone—this is how the landlord's court functioned, and this is how the plebian People's Court functions unless it is politically moulded into a truly revolutionary court. Such moulding takes some time, and unless the political leadership decides to postpone adjudication till that time, what we have up to the point is a curious mixture of egalitarian idealism, hatred of oppression, yet a subordination to traditional social mores, and a proclivity for medieval forms of violence. Nevertheless, whether it is thus moulded or not, the People's Court is an essentially *political* phenomenon, a *political* form of struggle, for it constitutes an appropriation of the substance and form of landlords' power, and its notion of right and wrong is the reverse of the landlords' notion, at least as far as property and caste are concerned. Even a spontaneous liberation is at one level a political act, and what makes it a political at a higher level is the lack of a vision of its own future, lack of a self-conscious identity of its own. In this sense, the fact that the People's War Group has taken up People's Courts as a major activity—and indeed all the CPI-ML groups have been doing so for many years—is disproof of the allegation frequently heard in Andhra Pradesh these days from dissident revolutionaries that the naxalite movement has only an economic content and no political content.

It is in any case not true that the People's Courts have been committing only excesses; indeed, on the contrary, there have been a large number of cases where disputes have been resolved and justice rendered in a fair and humane way. But enough instances of excesses have taken place to give the ruling classes a chance to talk about the 'misuse' of freedom. But what they are really worried about is not the misuse but the use itself. The arbitration of rural problems by dalit youth with a working class political outlook—however incompletely digested—is not only a threat to property and power, but is an affront to our cultural mores which endow only grey-haired upper caste men of property with the wisdom and authority required for such acts of adjudication. And it further deprives political bosses of an important source of power and influence. Most political leaders at the local level maintain their hold on the villages by appropriating to themselves the sole authority of arbitration, and the loss of this authority is a loss of political power. Finally, for the policemen the activity of the People's Courts means that no disputes come to them, and that deprives them too of power, influence, and opportunity for graft. The excesses committed by the People's Courts in some places then constitute a ready excuse for denouncing this threat to the power and authority of all concerned.

RULING CLASS CONFLICTS

In the political conditions obtaining in India at present, these tensions and pressures can take effect only in conjunction with intra-ruling class conflicts; the people's movement is not yet strong enough—though in Andhra Pradesh it has for the first time in twenty years moved from the periphery to the centre of political life—to be reckoned independent of intra-ruling class conflicts.

The conflict within the ruling classes continues to be at the stage of aimless jostling, with V P Singh demonstrating for even his admirers to see that he is no more capable of resolving it than his less mature and less principled predecessor. In the regions, the aimlessness is more acute, for even if the hope or supposition that a solution to the crisis would emerge from the 'regional parties' like TDP is not misplaced, given the firm commitment of all concerned that the solution should not disturb the 'unity and integrity of India', the resolution can only take place in Delhi. But that is not to say that there is no substance to regional politics; there is. Even as those sections of the regional elite that sponsored parties like TDP begin to think that perhaps such creations have served the purpose of making their point and they can now enter—in many cases re-enter—the Congress from a position of strength, but are simultaneously assailed by the fear that that murky ocean called the mainstream of Indian ruling class politics may find them a little too much out of depth and out of sorts, the TDP leaders are out to fight for their existence, to prove their continued relevance and viability both to their original constituency and to the people at large. In the meanwhile, the (mostly Reddy) landlords and contractors of the Telengana and Rayalaseema districts, hungry for power after having been excluded for nearly seven years by the (mostly Kamma) new-rich gentry of coastal Andhra, are not altogether satisfied—and understandably so—with the arrangement made for the sharing of spoils through the instrument of Chenna Reddy's cabinet, seven months ago. And so sections of these landlords and contractors are as unruly as the TDP leaders, leading to dissidence within a few months of Chenna Reddy coming to power. Put together—though as yet they can be added only arithmetically and not politically—the TDP opposition and Congress dissidence constitute quite an irritant for Chenna Reddy.

The TDP got a heavensend in the form of the unusually severe cyclone that hit the Andhra coast right at the mouth of the Krishna river on May 9. The devastation caused by the cyclone on either side of the river—Krishna district to the north and Guntur district to the south—has given the TDP a chance to re-establish itself with the people of the Krishna delta. It was the gentry of this region that fashioned the TDP and it was the peasantry of this region that

voted for it en bloc in the first elections. But the gentry were not particularly satisfied with NTR's performance as a spokesman for their interests in the nation's politics, and the peasantry, barring those of the kamma caste, were soon put off by his administration's inefficiency, corruption, nepotism, and quite blatant casteism. With the unsentimental hard-headedness that befits a green revolution heartland, they deserted the TDP quite fast, and thus it happened that NTR lost the Krishna delta well before he lost the state. With the cyclone he and his party have tried—with some success—to regain their foothold, with the help of the quite unsurprisingly corrupt and inefficient administration of cyclone relief by the Congress government.

The cyclone is estimated to have caused a loss of 1,000 lives, and destroyed property worth about 1,000 crore rupees. All the national leaders of all the parties toured the affected areas, and an amount well below 10 per cent of the damage caused was sanctioned as relief. The way the relief was distributed is a good commentary on the nature of Indian politics and administration. The district collector directs the local revenue staff to prepare lists of houses destroyed. The local administrator does not inspect the villages house-by-house, for such a procedure would yield him no graft and the political leaders no advantage. Instead he sits in the gram panchayat or municipal office and asks for lists of damaged houses to be submitted. Invariably two lists are submitted, one by the local TDP leaders (or its friendly opposition parties, the CPI, CPI(M), BJP, etc) and the other by the local Congress leaders. At the first round the revenue staff merely add up the lists and send it up to the collector. But it soon transpires that the political leaders have inflated the lists a little too much, and the sanctioned relief would not be adequate to give even the proposed Rs 500 per house destroyed. And so the government sends back the lists for 'revision'. What happens in the revision is that the TDP list is pruned much more drastically than the Congress list. This naturally creates resentment among a section of the cyclone victims, and provides the TDP with a good occasion to organise the people and agitate. Add to this the more common phenomenon of the revenue staff and political leaders swallowing the money meant to be distributed as relief—some of them are known to have made lakhs within a couple of weeks—and the TDP and its friendly parties have a good cause for agitation. This heavensend has been further aided by the rapid increase in people's awareness of their rights. The people today have come to regard cyclone relief as their *right* and not a dole provided by the state in its munificence, which has the concomitant that they are not willing to put up with corruption and maladministration of relief. This combination of factors led to a volatile situation in the green revolution heartland of the Krishna delta. There were daily incidents of

not only dharnas and rasta roko agitations—which, as the CPI leader Chaturanan Misra has noted, have become inefficacious to the point of being almost a waste of time—but also abduction and confinement of revenue staff by the cyclone victims with the demand that either they get their due or the abducted man stays in confinement indefinitely. The government, as usual, had no response but to send in the police, and there were frequent incidents of lathi charge, firing and house-by-house raids by the police. At the village of Appapuram near Bapatla in Guntur district, two middle class farmers were killed in police firing, and at Kanagala near Repalle in the same district, in an early morning house-by-house raid by more than a hundred armed policemen on a predominantly Muslim locality, a 16-year old girl called Pyaari Jaan died of lathi blows. Though these were the only fatalities, dozens of villages experienced police raids, lathi charge and firing, and hundreds have been charged with rioting, abduction, illegal restraint and assault on public servants. The prosperous villages of paddy, tobacco, cotton and sugarcane growing delta of the Krishna river, a show-piece of agrarian prosperity, witnessed the peculiar sight of armed police pickets, nightly raids on villages, and prosperous farmers as well as labourers hiding in the fields at night to avoid arrest, a scene more appropriate to the 'naxalite infested' Karimnagar or Warangal districts. Naturally, many of the victims were or could be claimed as TDP voters, and the TDP leaders camped in the area for nearly a month and campaigned vigorously against the Chenna Reddy government for its callous attitude towards the cyclone victims.

However, for both the TDP and the Congress dissidents, what has really come in handy as a target for attack is Chenna Reddy's liberal policy towards the naxalites. In the initial stages, when the policy revealed the hitherto deliberately ignored popularity of the naxalites and thereby impressed the people as an exercise in realistic politics, the opponents soft-pedalled their criticism on this score. But as the continued extension of naxalite activity became a little too troublesome, and the argument of 'misuse' of liberty came into vogue, the opponents stepped up their campaign. The TDP, helped by its friends in the BJP and CPI(M) started the attack, and as soon as Chenna Reddy left for the US for medical treatment—as all chief ministers appear to do within months of coming to power—the Congress dissidents took up the attack, though they have not mingled voices with the opposition. The principal dissidents, curiously, are not from the worst of the naxalite-affected district: the nine Telengana districts. That Chenna Reddy himself is from Telengana, and his most trusted lieutenant Samarasimha Reddy is also from Telengana, has meant that the landlords of the Telengana districts are a little wary of expressing their dissatisfaction with Chenna Reddy's 'naxalite policy' in the form of dissidence since that may result in

the chief ministership going out of Telen-gana. The only exception has been transport minister G V Sudhakar Rao, one of the big landlords of Adilabad, the district worst hit by naxalite-led land occupations. The main dissidence has come from Rayalaseema, a drought-hit region dominated by landlords and contractors whose political geneology goes back to the warlords whom the British called 'Polegars' (Palegadu in Telugu), who dominated the Rayalaseema districts after the fall of the Rayas of Vijayanagar. For these predators, whom drought has robbed of the possibility of agrarian enterprise and all its lucrative after-effects as evidenced by the plush markets of Vijayawada and Guntur, and who have no more aptitude or opportunity for industrial enterprise than any section of India's rural gentry, public works, irrigation and excise contracts and lobbying in the corridors of the state secretariat are the main sources of income; exclusion from power at Hyderabad is therefore a serious matter for them, and yet excluded they have been for nearly seven years of TDP rule. Now they are understandably not very willing to wait in the wings for five full years and may be watch power revert to N T Rama Rao. It was therefore expected that they would give trouble to Chenna Reddy, and they have been quick to do so, picking on his 'naxalite policy' though that does not affect them directly except to a limited extent of about four or five talukas of the whole of Rayalaseema. Their dissidence is, however, of not much inherent strength, firstly because warlords are notoriously incapable of uniting in a common cause, and secondly because it is built around two individuals who are not particularly formidable: Janardhan Reddy of Nellore about whom nobody has ever said a single nice thing, and Rajasekhar Reddy of Cuddapah who has a slightly better personal reputation. It is the latter who has donned the mantle of chief dissident, and a lot of others have been guardedly supporting him. In Chenna Reddy's absence he went around the state holding public meetings criticising the absentee chief minister's rule, especially his 'naxalite policy' and a section of the Telugu press, the whole of which is now completely political and takes sides quite visibly in the internal squabbles of the landlord-contractor-businessman elite of the state, has been giving him considerable publicity. But his unlikely adventure has come to a halt for the present with Rajiv Gandhi during one of his inexplicable visits to the state chiding him and declaring his support to Chenna Reddy's rule, naxalite policy and all. It is not certain that the campaign will not be resumed—in which case the 'naxalite policy' will again come up as campaign material—for it is not certain what games Rajiv Gandhi is playing. In the meanwhile it is perhaps Chenna Reddy's good fortune that he can step up repression against the naxalite movement, as he has to do in any case given the logic of his social base and the interests that

any administration in a state like AP must necessarily serve, but put the blame for it on the pressure exerted by the TDP opposition and the dissidents in his party.

PRESSURE FROM POLICE ESTABLISHMENT

To the silent pressure of the affected landlords and political bosses, given vocal expression in their own interests by the opposition and the dissidents, must be added the pressure exerted by the police establishment. A repressive response to political movements is not only a policy after a policeman's heart, given the training in political understanding he receives, but is also of material advantage to him. It enhances the importance of the police establishment and therefore its bargaining power with the government. It is in the name of suppressing naxalism that the AP police have got many things from the government—from a multiplicity of posts at the top level to ensure satisfactorily speedy promotions to officer-rank cadre, to as many police stations as they want, all the automatic weapons they want, all the unaudited funds they want, all the vehicles and sophisticated communication equipment they want, and above all the immunity from what they like to describe as 'interference' from the civil administration and the judiciary that they have always not just wanted but positively coveted. This increased importance has meant among other things the chance to make a lot of money by extortion from the poor and in the form of bribes from the landlord—quite apart from plain misappropriation and quite a few of the policemen concerned with the suppression of naxalism in the state have become quite rich, they do not want to give up this importance very easily, whatever the predicaments of the party in power. Add to this the fact that many police officers come from the urbanised landed classes or the socially conservative brahmin bureaucracy, and the picture is complete.

It is in Adilabad, the district most seriously affected by systematic and large-scale land occupation by the landless poor and the tribals during the last two months, that some CRPF companies brought in from Tamil Nadu have been first deployed. There have been hundreds of arrests of the poor who participated in the land occupation movement, and of course all of them have been booked under TADA—for what else if not terrorism is the occupation of landlords' surplus land by the landless poor? People's Courts are being suppressed similarly. Since the adjudication can only take place after prior public notice, the police are the first to arrive in large number; they swarm the place and prevent people from attending or conducting the court. For past instances of arbitration the participant as well as the organisers are being arrested and charged with assault, abduction (of the 'accused'), forcible restraint, rioting, etc, and sent to jail. There was a case in Wanaparthy in Mahbub-

nagar district, where a women's organisation allegedly close to the naxalites, Stree Chain-tanya Sravanti, 'tried' a man for brutally harassing his wife; he was found guilty and fined 70,000 rupees. He paid half of it, agreed to pay the rest later, and committed suicide a couple of days later out of a feeling of humiliation. The police have arrested the organiser of the People's Court, a telephone operator by name Jayamma, and charged her with abetment of suicide (sec 306 IPC). Civil liberties organisations and women's organisations are well aware of how difficult it is to persuade the police to use this section against husbands who harass and drive their wives to suicide, or-proprietors of establishments and government officers who drive their employees or subordinates to suicide.

REVIVAL OF 'ENCOUNTERS'

Predictably enough, there has been a revival of 'encounters' and other forms of extra-legal killing. The first 'encounter' took place on May 8 at Obulanayanipalli in the police station limits of Dharmavaram, Anantapur district, the one Rayalaseema district where there is a sizeable presence of naxalites. The village is split into two factions, one of them allied to the MLA of Penugonda, a Congress(I) man, also coincidentally Chenna Reddy by name, and the other opposed to him. This other faction is electorally pro-TDP, but is not averse to taking the help of the 'radicals' if need be. On the night of May 7, a bunch of youth of this group, one of them a 'radical', Keshav Naik, a tribal of the lambada community, smashed six agricultural motors of farmers of the MLA's faction. When the police of the local picket tried to arrest them the next morning, the youth ran away and climbed a neighbouring hillock half way up and sat there out of reach of the police. The local police then called in the SI of Dharmavaram, who first had a word with the MLA and then started for the village. He went straight to the hillock and started climbing it, firing from his revolver as he climbed. Keshav Naik asked his unarmed companions to run over the hillock to the other side, and himself turned back and returned fire in self-defence with his not particularly effective country-made weapon. After about one hour of hiding and darting and intermittent firing, Keshav Naik was hit below his heart. He climbed up the hillock, fell down on the other side, and bled to death.

The next victim was Anti Reddy, known to the tribals of Warangal as Sathenna. He was a communist of long-standing, having been active in the CPI(M) before Naxalbari. Later he spent most of the active years of his political life organising the tribal and non-tribal peasantry of the Godavari valley forests of Warangal district. At the time of his death he was with the CPI-ML group led by Phani Bagchi. He was trapped and abducted by the police from Hyderabad in the night of June 6, killed on the night of 6th or on the 7th, and in the early hours of the

9th his dead body that was well on the way to decomposition was thrown on the roadside within the limits of Vangara in Mulkanur police station limits, Karimnagar district. It is no doubt only a symbolic coincidence that Vangara is the village that former external affairs minister P V Narasimha Rao belongs to and where his people still have plenty of land, and indeed the rocky banjar where the body was thrown is in all probability part of the land given away by that family during Bhoodan. While this is only an amusing bit of information, the way the police behaved subsequently is truly bizarre. On the morning of June 9, the SI of Mulkanur received a wireless message from the special branch at Karimnagar stating that they had received an anonymous phone call informing them of the presence of the dead body of one Anki Reddy at such and such a spot, and directing the Mulkanur police to go there and recover the body. The Mulkanur police however heard the name as Anki Reddy, took him to be a resident of a neighbouring village, Gatla Narsingapur, where there had been some incidents of violence recently, made enquiries and found that there were no Reddys at all in that village, and therefore did nothing much thereafter to find the dead body. The next day they received their reward in the form of a memo from Karimnagar stating in so many words that while they had been told the previous day that the dead body of Sama Anti Reddy s/o Sama Venkat Reddy, naxalite leader, lay at a particular spot, they had failed to recover it, and therefore they had to explain their failure. This immediately spurred them into action. The SI of Mulkanur and the circle inspector of Huzurabad rushed to the spot, taking with them the government doctor of Huzurabad who had earlier worked in the forest area of Warangal and had seen Anki Reddy. The body was badly decomposed and the doctor could not be absolutely certain but he nevertheless felt more than 50 per cent sure it was Anki Reddy. If the whole story of an anonymous telephone call had not been a concoction, the Karimnagar police, keeping in view the importance of Anti Reddy, would have made this public and called in his relatives or comrades to identify the body. They did no such thing. They merely got the post-mortem conducted, buried the body, and gave a press release on the 13th saying that an unidentifiable dead body had been found at such and such a spot, and the police had no clue about who it could be. It was only when Anki Reddy's comrades, who had been worried about his disappearance from the 6th night, became suspicious upon reading the description of the dead body's apparel as given by the police and started making enquiries that the whole story, including the memo issued to the Mulkanur police, came out.

An equally blatant killing—of three persons this time—took place at the village of Madanpalli in Nizamabad district on the

morning of June 11. The superintendent of police, Nizamabad, one Raghuvir Prasad Meena, is one of the police officers who have been openly critical of Chenna Reddy's liberal policy towards the naxalites. With the gradually tightening grip on the naxalites' activities, he seems to have decided to take one step more and watch the reaction. In the early hours of June 11, a hundred strong police party armed with automatic weapons and led by the deputy superintendent of police, Nizamabad, raided the village of Madanpalli. The police went to the house where two wanted activists, Prasad and Narsakka, were sleeping, and forced a neighbour to call them out. As soon as Narsakka opened the door the police moved in and took hold of her as well as Prasad. This Prasad had earned the ire of the SP of the district since once during the worst phase of 'encounter' killings he had saved himself by surrendering to the SP, renouncing his politics, and obtaining pardon; but had later gone back and rejoined the 'radicals' once the situation eased a bit; that had naturally hurt the ego of the policeman. Anyway, the police took hold of Prasad and Narsakka, made them march to a spot at the other end of the village where there is a statue of Mahatma Gandhi; Prasad was beaten there and made to sing revolutionary songs and give slogans. Then they were marched back, brought to the same house by about 5 am, and taken in and shot dead.

Then the police went round the village in their jeep announcing the death of Prasad and Narsakka and demanding that all the rest of the 'radicals' should surrender immediately. About ten of them did. One who did not was Swamy, brother of Narsakka. He hid in a house. The police searched for him house by house, caught hold of him and shot him dead straight away.

Though incidents of repression had started about a month or so prior to this, it was this killing that somehow caught the attention of the public, and was widely seen as signifying a return to old methods of tackling the naxalite movement. The government, for its part—both Chenna Reddy from long distance, convalescing in the US, and his revenue minister Samarasimha Reddy whom he had left here to keep his *gaddi* warm—took care to unconditionally justify the killing as a genuine encounter but simultaneously stress that it signified no change from the policy of "allowing all democratic activity and dealing firmly with illegal activity". This response accurately sums up the present state of the establishment's dilemma, for it can neither really stop repression nor go back in toto to old methods of brutality, for the revolutionary movement has if nothing else exploded the myth carefully nurtured all these days that it is the madness of a handful of terrorists unsupported by the masses.

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