

Naxalbari Commemoration: Report from Punjab

By the Leading Committee, Revolutionary Communist Party, India

Punjab has a glorious tradition of revolutionary struggles. The revolutionary heritage of the people of Punjab to fight against all oppression and exploitation has manifested itself in an uninterrupted sequence of struggles and movements for self respect, dignity and independence.

When the bright red banner of armed rebellion was raised by poor and landless peasants in the Naxalbari area of West Bengal in the spring of 1967, the Naxalite movement spread across vast areas of India, including Punjab. The recent commemoration in Punjab of the twentieth anniversary of that rebellion made it clear that the Naxalbari spirit is still smoldering and threatening to leap once again into flames in this particularly turbulent region.

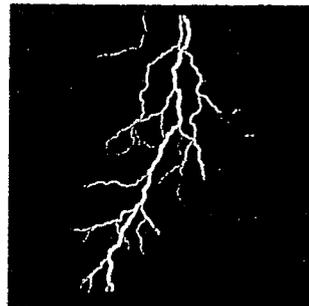
When the armed struggle broke out in Naxalbari in the spring of 1967, Punjabi students and youth especially joined this revolutionary stream in significant numbers in what was known as India's most "prosperous" state. Some pockets of armed struggle at the elementary level developed. The reactionary ruling classes unleashed a reign of terror in Punjab in an attempt to halt this tide.

CPI(M-L) activists and sympathisers by the thousands were subjected to brutal repression. The houses of prominent party members were ransacked and burned down and their families and relatives were harassed and worse by the police. Almost a hundred revolutionary communists were tortured to death by police. The reactionary authorities in Punjab initiated what was to become a widespread and

notorious method of eliminating revolutionaries. Arrested revolutionaries would be barbarically tortured and murdered in police custody. Then their blood-stained bodies would be taken to some lonely place and it would be falsely claimed that they had been killed there in an armed encounter with the police. Braving this blatant fascist onslaught by India's comprador-bureaucrat regime, thousands of revolutionary youth gave their lives for the emancipation of the exploited and downtrodden masses.

Though the reactionary rulers succeeded in temporarily suppressing the revolutionary armed struggle, the memory of that valiant rebellion and the spirit of selfless sacrifice and courage displayed by the revolutionary youth of Punjab is still kept alive among the people, especially the poor and oppressed masses. Now when Punjab is experiencing another upsurge of revolt and armed struggle, this time under the leadership of religiously-motivated Sikh militants, the situation provides the revolutionary movement under the banner of the proletariat with both some good opportunities and some obstacles to be overcome.

The ability of the Sikh militants to unleash and sustain their armed resistance in the face of high-magnitude brutal repression is testimony to the fact that favourable conditions do exist for initiating and advancing the armed struggle in Punjab, despite what is called the state's "economic prosperity" and the seeming might of the Indian central government. But the fact that these Sikh militants



have succeeded in striking deep roots among a large section of the people on the basis of their narrow religious appeal poses a serious problem for the Marxist-Leninists in their efforts to rally the people around the banner of the proletariat.

It was in light of this political atmosphere that the Leading Committee, RCPI decided to hold a campaign to commemorate Naxalbari in this "inflamed" part of the Indian Union, not as a formal exercise or ritual, but as part of preparing conditions for the practical unfolding of the revolutionary process, by grappling with the problems the revolutionary movement is facing in theory and practice.

The April issue of *Paigam*, the monthly organ of the LC, RCPI published in the Punjabi language, carried a proclamation by the Naxalbari Campaign Commission for a fortnight-long propaganda campaign beginning May 9 and culminating in a public meeting May 23, the anniversary of the day twenty years ago the peasants of Naxalbari signaled the outbreak of the armed struggle by attacking a police party that had come to arrest militant peasant activists. The campaign was to be concentrated in a particular area where the revolutionary movement is relatively better placed, and at the same time spread by every available means to every area possible.

In practically every nook and corner of the villages and towns of that area, there appeared large

wallposters upholding the great Naxalbari uprising and calling on the people to advance along the crimson path of Naxalbari. Village and town walls were painted red with slogans: "Naxalbari Zindabad [Long Live]", "March forward on the path of Naxalbari," "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," "Take up arms against the reactionary Indian state to emancipate the people from the exploitative clutches of Indian rulers and their imperialist masters," "To strengthen Hindu-Sikh unity put up a brave front against the communally-based rulers of India," "Kindle the flames of Naxalbari throughout the length and breadth of the country," "Forward along the path charted by Mao Tsetung" and so on. Thousands of copies of a four-page flier were distributed. *Paigam's* May issue published a comprehensive article upholding the role and contributions of the Naxalbari struggle while making a critical evaluation of it so that its lessons could help the revolutionary movement advance.

Mass meetings and rallies were organised on a wide scale as RCPI activists fanned out throughout the area. The main points of discussion and propaganda were: the global and local conditions that led to the eruption of the Naxalbari uprising; the movement's aims and objectives; the reign of terror let loose by the ruling classes and their political representatives of various hues, including the revisionists; some shortcomings and mistakes of the movement and its leaders and how this contributed to the serious setbacks it suffered; the need to uphold the positive lessons and contributions and their relevance in the present situation; the enhanced need to raise higher the banner of armed struggle under the leadership of the proletariat and the path of people's war as the only way to achieve the emancipation of the people of India; the sharpening of contradictions on a world scale rapidly pushing the imperialist blocs towards another world-level collision and the vast possibilities opening up for the sudden eruption of mass revolutionary movements in the bastions of imperialism; the

need to strengthen the unity of the genuine Marxist-Leninist forces not only on an all-India level but on a world scale; the significance of the formation of the RIM and its *Declaration* in this context; the correct approach in the concrete conditions of Punjab towards the spontaneous outbursts of militant mass revolts arising from the sharpening of various kinds of objective conditions; the need to form an alliance of all struggling strata and sections of the people against the common enemy and the interests of the proletariat to be pursued through these alliances; etc.

On May 23 over 600 people singing revolutionary songs, shouting slogans and carrying red banners and placards converged on the sprawling grounds of an educational institution at Sunam, a subdivisional headquarters deep in the Malwa region of Punjab. More than 80% of the participants were youth, most of them teenagers with a burning desire and zeal to transform the world in a revolutionary fashion. In front of the audience were full-sized photos of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao and of dozens of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives to kindle the flames of Naxalbari in Punjab during 1970 and 1971. Before the formal opening of the meeting, the audience stood in silent homage to all the martyrs who died for the cause of revolution, not only in Punjab or India but the world over. Amid the raising of fists and the roaring of slogans, the 600-strong revolutionary gathering, including a good number of women, expressed its resolve to rekindle the spirit of Naxalbari in this turbulent part of India.

The RCPI spokesman emphasised the historic role of Naxalbari in putting the question of armed revolution back on the agenda when the revisionist renegades then at the helm of the Indian communist movement had tried their level best to bury the revolutionary teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao under the dust of parliamentary cretinism. He emphasised the need to take up the task of making energetic preparations to rekindle the flames of armed struggle in Punjab and raise the

distinct banner of the proletariat amidst the strong and complex winds now blowing in the "land of five rivers." He also elaborated upon the correct approach to be taken towards the Sikh militants who have taken up arms against the reactionary Indian state out of pent-up resentment against the communally-based and repressive policies of the Indian ruling classes. He criticised the mistaken notion that these religiously-motivated fighters should be considered the immediate enemies and targets of the revolutionary movement by characterising them as "equally reactionary" or "fascist lunatics." Such an utterly erroneous approach, he said, would ultimately end up sparing the reactionary Indian state from the assault of the revolutionary movement, and inevitably lead to siding with the reactionary state in its vicious campaign against those whom it labels "terrorist" and "secessionist" forces. This is already happening in Punjab. It is a matter of shame for the revolutionary movement that the same reactionary authorities who drenched their hands in the blood of "Naxalite" youth are now showering praises on some former "Naxalites," and that these former "Naxalites" who once snatched arms from the state are now gladly being presented with them by the state to use in their misdirected crusade against "Khalistani terrorists." [Khalistan is the independent Sikh state some religious fighting forces seek to establish. —AWTW]

The RCPI spokesman made it clear in no uncertain terms that the interests of the proletariat demand that even while temporarily uniting with such social forces in the struggle against the common enemy, no concession or flexibility should be shown in the ideological struggle against reactionary ideology and erroneous politics sometimes fraught with serious deviations. The revolutionary standpoint of the proletariat should be forcefully projected in sharp opposition to the reactionary objectives of such forces.

While the RCPI speaker was addressing the meeting a large crowd, consisting mostly of peasants on a

routine visit to town, gathered on the front road and listened to the hour-long speech with keen interest. So much so that a heavy posse of armed policeman specially dispatched to keep a vigilant eye on this untrustworthy kind of "Naxalites" also began to display keen interest in the speaker and the situation. The pin-drop silence and the interest shown by these peasants showed how eager many people are to hear what the "Naxalites" have to say on many questions that concern them deeply. The fresh reign of terror the state has unleashed against the Sikh militants and especially the reappearance of the barbaric method of eliminating them through fake "encounters" has filled people with anger, so that they are even more receptive to the politics of armed confrontation against the hated Delhi regime.

At the end of the conference, the audience adopted a number of resolutions, including one expressing solidarity with the armed struggle in Peru against the bloody regime of Alan Garcia and the imperialist powers of all brands.

The reactionary authorities refrained from intervening during the fortnight-long campaign, apparently hoping to make people believe that they no longer harbour any ill feelings towards the "good-mannered Naxalites," in contrast to the "uncivilised zealots," i.e. the "Khalistan" fighters. But as a matter of fact this propaganda campaign stuck in their throats. Immediately after the public conference, they launched a vigorous search to try and arrest the coordinator of the Naxalbari Campaign Committee, and sought intelligence about the RCPI spokesman and other activists connected with this different kind of "Naxalites." As Mao says, if the enemy does not attack you, there is something gravely wrong with your line.

Ironically no other major "Naxalite" group in Punjab bothered to commemorate this historic event, even in the most formalistic way. Perhaps they are so engrossed in their vicious campaign against the "Khalistan terrorists" that they could not spare the energy for such a "useless exercise"! □