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Abstract

Unfortunately our communists in general and their academic lackeys are still in the habit of the mere memorising and repetition of formulas, like “old Bolsheviks”, some under the mesmerism of Lenin’s *Two Tasks of Social Democracy* and some, Trosky’s *Results and Prospects*. This note is hoped to demystify the issues at stake.

Demystifying Economicism

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‘Marxism requires of us a strictly exact and objectively verifiable analysis of the relations of classes and of the concrete features peculiar to each historical situation.....

‘To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those “old Bolsheviks” who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly *learned by rote* instead of *studying* the specific features of the new and living reality.’ (Lenin, *Letters on Tactics*, 1917)

History honours the intelligentsia in that they help progress history; history also abhors the intelligentsia in that they make history regress. The former enlighten, but the latter mess it up all. We come across a long chain of the latter, for example, from Baru (1988) to Patnaik (2008); [for a reply to Baru (1988), see Pillai (1988)]. This note is in reply to Patnaik (2008). The commentary by Professor Patnaik (PP) on ‘The Communists and the Building of Capitalism’ (that appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 2, 2008) is an unconvincing attempt at an unfortunate justification for

Nandigram-like episodes. It is unconvincing because it does not naturally flow from an objective assessment in the light of a correct Marxian grasp of reality, and unfortunate because it sounds as a forced echo of some outdated political strategy penned from pseudo-Marxian economicism. This note is hoped to demystify the issues at stake.

PP's main arguments that I try for a scrutiny may be summarized as follows:

1. Democratic revolution in India remains unfulfilled; it is the responsibility of the communist party to realize it through a people's democratic revolution. Hence the need for 'building capitalism'.
2. Communists while working within the capitalist system as the leaders of state governments have to make use of investments by capitalists for employment generation, lest the distress situation alienate the people from the communists.

The latter follows from the former, which takes us back to the heated debates on the stage of Indian revolution.

The Stages of Revolution

The debates on the stage of Indian revolution fervently waged some time back for determining the strategy of different communist parties in India all collapsed in a surprising sense of fraternity on *democratic revolution* with some cosmetic nuances only, such as national democratic revolution (CPI), people's democratic revolution (CPIM) and

new democratic revolution (Naxal groups). This strategy originated with Lenin's *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* of 1905.

The classical Marxist conception of the stages of historical development of the modes of production implies that the socialist revolution occurs only after the successful bourgeois-democratic revolution that stands to pave the way for the industrial proletariat to emerge as the majority class in society. This led to the formulation of the strategy of two-stage revolution accepted by the Bolsheviks.

Lenin acknowledged that 'it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation..... Such a situation existed in 1905 in Russia, and in all revolutionary periods in the West, although no revolution occurred in these instances. Why was that? It was because it is not that every revolutionary situation gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary *class* to take revolutionary mass action *strong* enough to break (or dislocate) the old government.....' (*The Collapse of the Second International*, 1915). In the *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, Lenin argued that the economic and social conditions in Russia were not sufficiently advanced for the 1905 revolution to be a socialist one; it ought to be bourgeois democratic in content: 'The degree of Russia's economic development (an objective condition), and the degree of class consciousness and organisation of the broad masses of the proletariat (a subjective condition inseparably bound up with the objective condition) make the immediate and complete emancipation of the working class impossible. Only the most ignorant people can close their eyes to the

bourgeois nature of the revolution which is now taking place.’ (*Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 1905). However, Lenin found the Russian bourgeoisie too weak to lead the democratic revolution the way the English bourgeoisie had done in the 1640s, or the French bourgeoisie in the 1790s. Hence the vanguard position of the working class in overthrowing Tsarism and establishing a democratic republic, which would facilitate to develop the subjective environment for socialist revolution, by building up a revolutionary party to carry out socialist propaganda. In passing it should be noted that Lenin was theoretically correct in this assessment, but the soaring temperature of the later events misguided him in correctly gauging the subjective situation and that largely explains the ultimate fall of the USSR (Pillai 2000).

Countering this two-stage revolutionary strategy, Trotsky in his 1906 work, *Results and Prospects*, argued for a direct socialist revolution. Although industry in Russia had not developed on the scale of Britain or Germany, where it did exist in Russia it was in a very advanced form. That is, capitalism in Russia was characterised by ‘combined and uneven development’. He hoped that the working class could sweep both Tsarism and the bourgeoisie away in a single blow. The revolution would therefore be a social revolution (i.e., an economic and political revolution), not simply a political (i.e., democratic) one. He wrote: ‘It is possible for the workers to come to power in an economically backward country sooner than in an advanced country. In 1871 the workers deliberately took power in their hands in petty-bourgeois Paris – true, for only two months, but in the big-capitalist centres of Britain or the United States the workers have never held power for so much as an hour. To imagine that the dictatorship of the

proletariat is in some way automatically dependent on the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of 'economic' materialism simplified to absurdity. This point of view has nothing in common with Marxism. In our view, the Russian revolution will create conditions in which power can pass into the hands of the workers – and in the event of the victory of the revolution it must do so – *before* the politicians of bourgeois liberalism get the chance to display to the full their talent for governing.' (*Results and Prospects*, 1906: Chapter 4). This has later led to the strategy of people's democratic revolution or new democratic revolution, formulated by Mao, to combine bourgeois democracy and socialism into a single stage of construction.

During the decade that followed the *Two Tactics*...., Lenin saw the rise of Russian capitalism, though still backward, to imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, and then heard (while in Switzerland) of her 'miraculous' transformation 'by the February-March Revolution of 1917' (*Letters from Afar*, 1917) 'from the first stage of the revolution to its *second stage*...' (*The Task of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution* or *April Theses*, 1917), that is from the democratic revolution to socialist revolution. The Bolshevik Party, still operating the perspective of *Two Tactics*...., was so aghast at his *April Theses* that at first he found virtually no support. So he set out first chastising them:

“Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action,” Marx and Engels always said, rightly ridiculing the mere memorising and repetition of “formulas”, that at best are capable only of marking out *general* tasks, which are necessarily modifiable by the

concrete economic and political conditions of each particular *period* of the historical process.’

and then explaining:

‘Before the February-March revolution of 1917, state power in Russia was in the hands of one old class, namely, the feudal landed nobility, headed by Nicholas Romanov.

‘After the revolution, the power is in the hands of a *different* class, a new class, namely, the *bourgeoisie*.

‘The passing of state power from one *class* to another is the first, the principal, the basic sign of a *revolution*, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of that term.

‘To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution in Russia is *completed*.

‘But at this point we hear a clamour of protest from people who readily call themselves “old Bolsheviks”. Didn’t we always maintain, they say, that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed only by the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”? Is the agrarian revolution, which is also a bourgeois-democratic revolution, completed? Is it not a fact, on the contrary, that it has *not even* started?’

‘My answer is: The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected.’ (*Letters on Tactics*, 1917).

The Stage of Indian Revolution

With this enlightening background, let us now consider the Indian situation. The question relevant here relates to the nature of the revolutionary strategy (whether it is bourgeois-democratic or socialist revolution), which in turn depends on the objective reality of the historical stage of the social-economic development of India (whether India is a capitalist or pre-capitalist economy, or to take a historical lesson of comparison, whether the Indian situation is *similar* to the post-1905 Russian/pre-1949 Chinese situation or to the post-1917 February-March Russian before the *socialist* revolution). I do not believe anybody would deny that India *is* a *free* capitalist economy, that in 1947 the political power in India was transferred to a new class, namely, the bourgeoisie. If so, taking the lesson from Lenin, we have to admit that ‘to this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution [in India] is *completed*’ and that ‘the specific feature of the present situation in [India] is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its *second stage*, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants’ (*April Theses*, 1917). Remember that Lenin did not hesitate to characterise Russia after

the February-March revolution of 1917 as a free capitalist state having ‘a maximum of legally recognised rights (Russia is *now* the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world)’ (*Ibid.*). Here he explains it in detail:

‘In a free country, the people are ruled only by those who have been elected for that purpose by the people themselves. At the elections the people divide themselves into parties, and as a rule each class of the population forms its own party; for instance, the landowners, the capitalists, the peasants and the workers all form separate parties. In free countries, therefore, the people are ruled through an open struggle between parties and by free agreement between these parties.

‘For about four months after the overthrow of the tsarist regime on February 27, 1917, Russia was ruled as a free country, i.e., through an open struggle between freely formed parties and by free agreement between them.’ (*Lessons of the Revolution*, 1917). Can we not apply this lesson to India then?

Now taking the cue again from Lenin, I would argue that India, like Lenin’s Russia of 1917, howsoever relatively backward it is, has already reached the last stage of capitalism, that is, imperialism. Lenin defines imperialism in terms of ‘the following five of its basic features:

‘(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this “finance capital”, of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from

the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.' (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916, Chapter 7). In the same book, he characterises Russia as a 'country most backward economically, where modern capitalist imperialism is enmeshed, so to speak, in a particularly close network of pre-capitalist relations.' (*Ibid.* Chapter 6).

And here is some more explanation:

'Everybody talks about imperialism. But imperialism is merely monopoly capitalism. That capitalism in Russia has also become monopoly capitalism is sufficiently attested by the examples of the Prodigol, the Prodamet, the Sugar Syndicate, etc. This Sugar Syndicate is an object-lesson in the way monopoly capitalism develops into state-monopoly capitalism.' (*The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*, 1917)

Now just consider the position and behaviour of Indian capitalism with reference to its membership in the international associations, and trade agreements, the monopolistic position of its banks, financial oligarchy and the export of capital and setting up of joint ventures in foreign countries. I do not believe anybody would now

deny the fact that Indian capitalism has already developed into imperialism in the Leninist sense.

Unfortunately, however, our communists in general and their academic lackeys are still in the habit of ‘the mere memorising and repetition of “formulas”’, like “old Bolsheviks”, some under the mesmerism of Lenin’s *Two Tasks of Social Democracy* and some, Trosky’s *Results and Prospects*. To some, the Indian state is ‘the organ of class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie’ (paragraph 56 of the programme adopted at the seventh congress of the CPIM), and to some others, India is only a stooge of imperialism, ‘semi-colonial, semi-feudal’ (quoted in *The Statesman*: 7 September 2005), just like the pre-revolution China! All the sections deny that India is a *free nation*; hence the need for democratic revolution, even though they have Lenin’s own assessment of such a situation, extensively quoted above. It is against such ‘mere memorising and repetition of “formulas”’ that Mao cautioned, while discussing with the representatives of the Communist Parties of Latin America in September 1956: ‘The experience of the Chinese revolution, that is, building rural base areas, encircling the cities from the countryside and finally seizing the cities, may not be wholly applicable to many of your countries, though it can serve for your reference. I beg to advise you not to transplant Chinese experience mechanically. The experience of any foreign country can serve only for reference and must not be regarded as dogma. The universal truth of Marxism-Leninism and the concrete conditions of your own countries--the two must be integrated.’ (*Some Experiences in Our Country’s History*, 1956).

So, what is ‘the concrete conditions’ of this country in the light of ‘the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism’? As India has become characterised as predominantly an agricultural economy, the existence of feudalism has been merely taken for granted – primary economy getting identified with feudalism! Or the misconception may have stemmed from taking the prevalence of the survivals of the superstructure for the existence of the corresponding economic base, the practice which Trotsky called the undialectical economicism, one of the hallmarks of Plekhanov’s vulgar materialist interpretation of Marxism.

Even if we accede, for the sake of argument, to the mixed phenomenon of bourgeois-landlord state, Marxist-Leninist methodology determines the character of mixed phenomenon by reference to its predominant character. When the state power in Russia was handed over from the Tsar to the bourgeoisie, who were allied with by the ‘landlords’, Lenin did not hesitate (as already explained above) to characterise it as a bourgeois state, instead of dubbing it ‘bourgeois-landlord state’. The nature of an economic system is determined, in the Marxian sense, by analysing the prevalent production relations – simply speaking, the relationship between the hands that own the means of production and the hands that use them; in capitalism, it is the relationship between capital and hired (wage-) labour. Even a cursory look at the production relations reigning in the agricultural sector in India, where free labour is hired by the so-called landlords led by profit-motive, is enough to confirm the concrete reality of capitalists thriving in that field. The truth any serious study along the line of the Marxist-Leninist methodology perforce reveals is that the Indian economy, howsoever relatively backward

it is, has already shown the signs of imperialism, the highest and last stage of monopoly capitalism.

True, there is a tremendous influence of feudal ideas and practices in the superstructure, but *not* in the realm of economic base, in the relations of production. The survivals flourish because, as Lenin pointed out, it ‘is to the advantage of the bourgeoisie if the bourgeois revolution does not too resolutely sweep away all the remnants of the past, but leaves some of them, i.e., if this revolution is not fully consistent, if it is not complete and if it is not determined and relentless.’ (*Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 1905). Now what is the characteristic of the feudal relations of production? Stalin explains that ‘the basis of the relations of production under the feudal system is that the feudal lord owns the means of production and does not fully own the worker in production – the serf, whom the feudal lord can no longer kill, but whom he can buy and sell.’ (*Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, 1938). That peasants of India are no longer such serfs, I do not believe anybody would deny. It is the capitalist relations of production in India that have turned into fetters, that hold back the productive forces, not the feudal.

Capital – Generator of Employment or Engine of Exploitation?

Now let us look into the second of the PP’s arguments that capital is required to generate employment so that the common man is not alienated from the communist party in provincial power. This is an unfortunate statement to come from a communist,

expected by Lenin, to carry out ‘a strictly exact and objectively verifiable analysis of the relations of classes and of the concrete features peculiar to each historical situation’ (*Letters on Tactics*, 1917). What is capital? As Marx explains ‘capital is not a thing but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character’. (*Capital*, Vol. III, Chapter 48). It expresses the coercive social-production relations between the main classes of capitalism – the bourgeoisie and the wage workers. It just implies exploitation, because it is the value which begets surplus value as a result of the exploitation of wage labour. To a communist, then, capital is not a means of production, nor a source of employment. It is the engine of exploitation. Inviting capital in the name of development then amounts to opening the floodgates to exploitation. Hence the question: Can a communist party afford to facilitate exploitation of labour?

On the contrary, is it not the bounden duty of the communist party to make use of the opportunity for the furtherance of revolution by facilitating organization and mobilization of the masses in continuous struggles? The provincial government under a communist party too must become, as Lenin told about party cell and workers’ committee, ‘a “base for agitation, propaganda and practical organising work among the masses”, i. e., try at every step to push the consciousness of the masses in the direction of socialism, to link up every specific question with the general tasks of the proletariat, to transform every act of organisation into one of *class* consolidation.’ (*On the Road*, 1909). Is this what the communists in India are pursuing while in provincial power? If so, Nandigram in West Bengal or Vallarpadam in Kerala would not have

consumed so much media space. I do not understand how ‘the building of capitalism’ by setting up special economic zones, designed to promote realty and some capital-intensive technology-driven sophisticated industries that are immune from labour laws such as to enable monopolists to squeeze super profit from the unprotected workers and that render millions of poor peasants displaced from land to be doomed to an uncertain life, would serve the cause of revolution. It is not for building capitalism, but for bulldozing it that the communists are meant to come out.

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