

SITARAM YECHURY

ON COMBATING SUBJECTIVISM

The question of strengthening the organisation of a Communist Party is a question that should engage the attention of a revolutionary party at every point of time. Needless to add, the organizational set-up of the Party and its priorities are determined by the important tasks and directions decided by the Party at any concrete point of time based on the concrete conditions, as contained in its political-tactical line. While strictly adhering to the established principles and methods of a revolutionary Communist Party organisation led by the working class, the Party organisation must be capable of activating the entire Party rank and file to discharge the current tasks. The organisation of a Communist Party, therefore, is a dynamic organism.

We have, for many decades, been repeating the Leninist dictum that the "concrete analysis of concrete conditions is the living essence of dialectics." This involves various aspects. First, to identify correctly the concrete conditions and, on that basis, to make a proper assessment of the impact or otherwise of such conditions on the advance of the class struggles and the revolutionary movement. Needless to add, correct assessment of the concrete conditions can only be arrived at through the scientific application of Marxism. Both aspects, i.e., proper examination of the concrete conditions and the consequent correct estimations, are an inseparable part of correctly assessing concrete conditions. If there are mistakes or shortcomings in correctly assessing the concrete conditions, then it is only natural that the analysis that follows would be faulty. Secondly, the analysis that follows such an assessment of the concrete conditions will have to be conducted on a scientific objective basis without the influence of subjective or pre-decided considerations. Thus, in order to correctly apply the Leninist dictum, a strict scientific Marxist methodology must be followed.

The history of all successful socialist revolutions of the 20th century shows that the Communist Parties that led these revolutions to triumph were constantly engaged in what is called "combating subjectivism." This is an ongoing struggle within the Communist Parties and in the realm of the individual consciousness of every communist, which determines, amongst others, the strength of its political-organisational capabilities.

An incorrect estimation of the concrete conditions, naturally, will lead to an erroneous political line and consequent tactical line. Even when the political tactical line is correctly evolved on a scientific basis, its translation

into actuality will depend on the strength of the organisation. As Stalin had once famously said that the political line may be 100 per cent correct but that has no meaning without an organisation capable of carrying this correct political line to the people. Party organisation, thus, plays a vital role in the Party's activities for developing people's consciousness and preparing them for a revolutionary upsurge. Amongst the various aspects of Party organisation, one important element is the constant struggle to combat the tendency of subjectivism, both in the appraisal of concrete conditions and in the conduct of concrete analysis of these conditions. And, on this basis, to sharpen the class struggles by larger and larger mobilization of the people.

To summarise, combating subjectivism is essential for a correct understanding of the concrete situation; for the evolution of the correct political-tactical line for advancing the class struggles; and for correct organizational methods that need to be applied to achieve the objectives. At all levels, subjectivism can prevent the advance of the revolutionary movement.

SUBJECTIVISM, AN IMPROPER STYLE OF STUDY

During the course of the Chinese Revolution, speaking at the opening of the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong says: "Subjectivism is an improper style of study; it is opposed to Marxism-Leninism and is incompatible with the Communist Party. What we want is the Marxist-Leninist style of study. What we call style of study means not just style of study in the schools but in the whole Party. It is a question of the method of thinking of comrades in our leading bodies, of all cadres and Party members, a question of our attitude towards Marxism-Leninism, of the attitude of all Party comrades in their work. As such, it is a question of extraordinary, indeed of primary, importance."

Our comrades in the Party School should not regard Marxist theory as lifeless dogma. It is necessary to master Marxist theory and apply it, master it for the sole purpose of applying it. If you can apply the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint in elucidating one or two practical problems, you should be commended and credited with some achievement. The more problems you elucidate and the more comprehensively and profoundly you do so, the greater will be your achievement. Our Party School should also lay down the rule to grade students good or poor according to how they look at China's problems after they have studied Marxism-Leninism, according to whether or not they see the problems clearly and whether or not they see them at all. (*Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, Volume III, pp. 36-38*)

Mao was clearly drawing from Lenin's teachings, both his philosophical studies about Marxism and in arriving at the correct conclusions about any

concrete situation. The latter is of utmost importance in successfully struggling against all sorts of deviations in the working class movement.

Theoretically, Lenin discussing Kant's philosophical positions in his writing, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, notes the need to struggle against subjectivism, i.e., of taking "up the data of experience one-sidedly". Lenin says: "by proposing and taking as valid experience not in its concrete totality but as example, and only in that direction which is serviceable for the hypotheses and the theory. Concrete experience being thus subordinated to the presupposed determinations, the foundation of the theory is obscured, and is exhibited only from that side which is in conformity with the theory." (*V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38, Philosophical Notebooks, p. 210*)

FORMATION OF THE CPI(M) – CORRECT EVALUATION OF INDIAN CONDITIONS

It was on the basis of such a scientific application of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete Indian conditions that laid the foundations for the formation of the CPI(M) in the first place. As the 20th Congress *Resolution on Some Ideological Issues* notes: "The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was founded on the basis of an intense battle against the revisionist deviation that had gripped the then undivided CPI, gravely threatening to derail the Indian Communist movement and, hence, the liberation of our people. Making a decisive break from revisionism after an intense inner-Party ideological struggle centered around the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution and a correct evaluation of the composition and character of the Indian ruling classes, the CPI(M) emerged to uphold the revolutionary tenets of Marxism-Leninism, committed to apply these to the concrete Indian conditions.

Soon after, the CPI(M) had to contend with the Left adventurist sectarian deviation and ideologically combat these trends that, once again, threatened to derail the Indian Communist movement. This ideological battle was accompanied by confronting and overcoming the vicious physical attacks in which many of our comrades were martyred.

The success of the struggles against these deviations, combined with our inheritance of the legacy of the glorious militant struggles of the Indian people, resulted in the emergence of the CPI(M) as the strongest and leading Communist and Left force in the country. This resoundingly vindicated the correctness of our Marxist-Leninist positions in these ideological battles.

The CPI(M)'s struggle against ideological deviations and its steadfast effort to uphold the revolutionary content of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism was based on a continuous joining of issues on all deviations – domestic and international – that manifested

themselves, often ideologically confronting both the international Communist giants of the time – the CPSU and the CPC. It is these ideological struggles that have steeled our Party to emerge not only as the strongest Communist and Left force but also capable of exerting pressure and influence on the course of India's national politics. (*Resolution on Some Ideological Issues, paras 1.5 to 1.8, 20th Congress of CPI(M), Kozhikode, Kerala, April 4-9, 2012*)

Among other factors, the deviations in the Indian Communist Movement can be ascribed to pre-conceived notions regarding the stage of Indian revolution; the character of the post-independent Indian ruling classes and the composition and nature of the alternative ruling classes; divorced from the concrete conditions then prevailing in our country.

LEARNING FROM RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE

Lenin had to contend, during the course of the Russian Revolution such tendencies. In his work on the *Objective Data on the Strength of the Various Trends in the Working Class Movement*, combating both Plekhanov and Trotsky's subjectivism, Lenin says: "At every step they try to pass off their desires, their views, their appraisals of the situation and their plans as the will of the workers, the needs of the working class movement." (*V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 20, December 1913-August 1914, p. 382*)

In fact, the very concept of the stages of the revolution that Lenin theoretically postulated had arisen from the objective study of the concrete situation. In his *Letter on Tactics* combating class deviations within the Russian revolutionary movement, he says: "But are we not in danger of falling into subjectivism, of wanting to arrive at the socialist revolution by "skipping" the bourgeois-democratic revolution – which is not yet completed and has not yet exhausted the peasant movement?" (*Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 24, p. 48*)

Let us examine the relevance of these observations of Lenin to our efforts at correctly estimating the concrete conditions. Combating subjectivism, as stated above, is a constant ongoing battle. There are occasions when we seek to fit the existing situation into our pre-conceived subjective theoretical construction rather than on the basis of a proper objective assessment of the situation. This leads often erroneous conclusions.

SUBJECTIVISM, SOME INSTANCES FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

There are many examples to show such errors. Let us, however, consider, as an illustration, our Party's experience in 2008 and 2009 regarding the withdrawal of support on the Indo-US nuclear deal and the subsequent electoral tactics. The *Political-Organisational Report* that we adopted at the

20th Congress, April 2012, repeating the election review conducted by the Central Committee after the 2009 general elections, says: "The decision to withdraw support should have been implemented in October-November 2007, when the government had to go to the IAEA for talks. That was the time, any chance existed for blocking the deal. Not doing so at that time was a mistake. Given the deep commitment of the Prime Minister and the Congress leadership to the Indo-US nuclear deal and the strategic alliance with the US, they preferred to break with the Left rather than jeopardize the nuclear deal. The PB and the CC underestimated the determination and the capacity of the ruling classes and US imperialism to pursue the nuclear deal as part of the strategic alliance. We also overestimated our own strength and capacity to influence events. Allowing the government to go to the IAEA for talks and the expectation that the Congress would abide by an understanding not to proceed with the operationalisation of the deal was wrong." (*Political-Organisational Report, 20th Congress of CPI(M), Kozhikode, Kerala, April 4-9, 2012*)

Likewise, regarding the electoral tactics and the electoral-tactical line that was adopted at that time, the 20th Congress *Political-Organisational Report*, based on the review of the elections conducted by the Central Committee earlier, says: "The review pinpointed two factors. Firstly, the alliance forged with the non-Congress secular parties in three or four states could not be the basis for projecting a national level electoral alternative. Secondly, we should not have called for the formation of an "alternative secular government" and should have stuck instead to the call for strengthening the non-Congress, non-BJP alternative." (*Political-Organisational Report, 20th Congress of CPI(M), Kozhikode, Kerala, April 4-9, 2012*)

Consider yet another instance. The Party Central Committee and Party Congress self-critically accepted the mistakes and the mishandling that was done regarding the land acquisition in West Bengal for the Singur motor car project and the announcement for a chemical hub in Nandigram. These were not the first instances of land acquisition in West Bengal neither were these the last. However, the process of land acquisition in Singur was not preceded by the thorough homework that the CPI(M) and the Left Front usually do by discussing this issue of land acquisition with all the landholders and settling a mutually agreed compensation and rehabilitation package. One of the major reasons for not going through these processes in Singur was the fact that we had swept the elections to the Assembly in 2006 winning 235 out of the 294 seats. The Left Front had then polled 50.18 per cent of the polled vote. On the basis of this victory in the elections that were contested mainly on the issue of a rapid industrialization programme in West Bengal, the Left Front government proceeded with the land acquisition in Singur without the usual homework under the presumption that since we

won a massive victory, the people had endorsed our proposed industrialization programme.

However, as Lenin said, we only saw one side of this reality. The other side was the fact that as compared to the 2004 parliamentary elections, the voting percentage for the CPI(M) declined from 38.57 per cent to 37.13 per cent in 2006 assembly elections. Therefore, while we won nearly three-fourths of the number of seats in the Assembly, in terms of voting percentage, there was a marginal decline. If this was properly comprehended, then the importance of doing a thorough homework before proceeding for land acquisition in Singur would have been underlined. Unfortunately, this aspect was overlooked. In addition to not seeing the objective reality in its totality, there were also mistakes committed that compounded our alienation from the people.

Besides other factors, both national and regional, contributed to the consequent relative 'isolation' of the CPI(M) and the Left Front. The subsequent unprincipled gang-up of all the opposition parties, ranging from communal and fundamentalist forces to the Maoists with their accompanied politics of violence, that took place in the 2009 parliament elections and 2011 assembly elections resulted in a massive electoral setback for the Party. In a situation of near equality of the voter support between the Left Front and all the other opposition put together, in 2006, we lost a large number of seats under our 'first-past-the-post' electoral system.

Thus, apart from the mistakes and shortcomings in the handling of the land issue that the Party had self-critically noted in the Central Committee and the Party Congress, it is this "one-sided appreciation of the reality" that led to the subsequent erroneous decisions and methods.

The importance of arriving at objective assessments based on the concrete realities and not on the basis of subjective pre-decided conclusions is an important element in building the capabilities of the Party organisation and discharging current tasks.

SOME INSTANCES FROM CHINESE EXPERIENCE

The experience of the Chinese revolution, though separated both in context and time, provides us valuable lessons. The editorial team of the *People's Publishing House*, Beijing which published the selected works of Mao Zedong, commenting in their note while reproducing Mao's lecture entitled *On Practice* stated the following:

"There used to be a number of comrades in our Party who were dogmatists and who for a long period rejected the experience of the Chinese revolution, denying the truth that "Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action" and overawing people with words and phrases from Marxist works, torn out of context. There were also a number of comrades who were empiricists and who for a long period restricted themselves to their own

fragmentary experience and did not understand the importance of theory for revolutionary practice or see the revolution as a whole, but worked blindly though industriously. The erroneous ideas of these two types of comrades, and particularly of the dogmatists, caused enormous losses to the Chinese revolution during 1931-34, and yet the dogmatists cloaking themselves as Marxists, confused a great many comrades. "On Practice" was written in order to expose the subjectivist errors of dogmatism and empiricism in the Party, and especially the error of dogmatism, from the standpoint of the Marxist theory of knowledge. It was entitled "On Practice" because its stress was on exposing the dogmatist kind of subjectivism, which belittles practice. The ideas contained in this essay were presented by Comrade Mao Tse-tung in a lecture at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College in Yen-an."

Mao explains here how party comrades need to work to overcome falling victims to subjective considerations: "If a man wants to succeed in his work, that is, to achieve the anticipated results, he must bring his ideas into correspondence with the laws of the objective external world; if they do not correspond, he will fail in his practice. After he fails, he draws his lessons, corrects his ideas to make them correspond to the laws of the external world, and can thus turn failure into success; this is what is meant by "failure is the mother of success" and "a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit." (*Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, Volume I, pp. 296-297*)

Comrade Mao here is making another important point. During the course of discharging party responsibilities comrades may commit mistakes. Committing mistakes is not a mistake, but not learning from the mistake is a mistake; not understanding why that mistake was committed and hence to ensure that such a mistake will not be repeated again is a mistake. Finally, not correcting the mistake and persisting with the wrong understanding is a mistake. Stalin had once famously commented that only those comrades who do not work at all, do not commit mistakes. While discharging their work, Communists may commit mistakes, the importance lies in correcting them and ensuring that they are not repeated.

This only underlines that a comrade must be totally prepared to undertake a task at hand. In a similar context, Mao says: "I am not sure I can handle it'. We often hear this remark when a comrade hesitates to accept an assignment. Why is he unsure of himself? Because he has no systematic understanding of the content and circumstances of the assignment, or because he has had little or no contact with such work, and so the laws governing it are beyond him. After a detailed analysis of the nature and circumstances of the assignment, he will feel more sure of himself and do it willingly. If he spends some time at the job and gains experience and if he is a person who is willing to look into matters with an open mind and not one who approaches problems subjectively, one-sidedly and superficially, then he can draw conclusions for himself as to how to go about the job and do it with much more courage. Only those who are

subjective, one-sided and superficial in their approach to problems will smugly issue orders or directives the moment they arrive on the scene, without considering the circumstances, without viewing things in their totality (their history and their present state as a whole) and without getting to the essence of things (their nature and the internal relations between one thing and another). Such people are bound to trip and fall". (*Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, Volume I, p. 302*)

From all this, it is clear that a proper study of the concrete situation is based, in turn, on the capabilities of each individual comrade can attain. In turn, this is crucially based on the self-study that comrades need to undertake continuously, in addition to the Party's structured programme of study classes and schooling. This again is a continuous process for the comrades all through his/her life. Without this it is not possible to efficiently discharge the current tasks at hand.

LEARN FROM THE MASSES

Liu Shaoqi, in his *Report on the Revision of the Party Constitution*, published as a booklet 'On the Party' says: "The people make their own history. Their emancipation must be based on their own consciousness and willingness. They select their vanguard, and under its leadership they get themselves organized and fight for their own emancipation. Only thus can they make conscious efforts to secure, retain and consolidate the fruits of their struggles. The enemies of the people can be overthrown only by the people themselves. It cannot be done in any other way. Without their own genuine consciousness and mobilization, the efforts of their vanguard alone will not suffice for the people to win emancipation, to make progress or to accomplish anything. Even tasks which concern the immediate interests of the people such as the reduction of rent and interest, or the formation of labour-exchange teams and co-operatives will result in pseudo-reduction or formal, empty things, unless, instead of being bestowed on them or organized for them by other people, these tasks are taken up voluntarily and consciously by the masses themselves."

The cause of the Communists is the cause of the people. No matter how correct our programme and policies may be, they cannot be put into effect without the direct support and sustained struggle of the people. With us, therefore, unless everything is dependent on and determined by the people's political consciousness and willingness to act, we can accomplish nothing and all our efforts will be to no avail. With our reliance upon their political consciousness and willingness to act, with their genuine awakening and mobilization and with the Party's correct leadership, we will assuredly win final victory in all aspects of the great cause of our Party. Hence, when the masses are not fully awakened, the duty of Communists, the vanguard of the people, in carrying out any kind

of work is to develop their consciousness by every effective and suitable means. This is the first step in our work and it must be done well however difficult and time-consuming it may be. Only when the first step has been taken can we start on the second step. (*Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi*, Volume I, p. 347)

And, "If, instead of learning from the masses, we think ourselves clever and try to develop the consciousness of the masses and guide them by devising a set of schemes out of our own imagination or mechanically introducing a set of schemes based on historical or foreign experiences, the attempt will certainly prove futile. In order to keep on learning from the masses, we must not stand apart from them for a single moment. If we isolate ourselves from them, our knowledge will be extremely limited and we will certainly not be clever, well-informed, capable or competent enough to give them leadership." (*Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi*, Volume I, p. 349)

RECTIFYING PRACTICE

Subjectivism can affect organizational decisions in a manifold manner. An improper objective assessment of the strength and weaknesses of an individual cadre can lead to wrong assignments to such comrades. In the absence of such assessments, subjective considerations will lead to strong likes and dislikes affecting the proper evaluation of cadre which can have disastrous consequences for Party organisation. Remember, Stalin who had once said that the value of a good organizer lies in giving the 'right job to the right comrade'. Subjectivism prevents this from happening resulting in grievous consequences.

This phenomenon of strong likes and dislikes on the part of the leadership produces its natural counterpart of encouraging sycophancy and a behaviour of 'pleasing the leadership' on the part of the cadre. This tendency leads to a dangerous phenomenon of reporting from lower levels being guided by 'what the leadership wants to hear' rather than giving a proper objective description and assessment of the situation.

From our own experience during the last decade, we have seen how such a reporting from below has led to subjective overestimations, including from our outposts of Bengal and Kerala regarding the assessments of electoral results. Even after the polling was over, based on the reports sent by our booth committees, assessments were sent to the Party centre regarding our performance. The actual results of these elections, however, show that our assessments were completely off the mark. This was based on either subjective overestimations, or, dangerously, conveying assessments given from the lower levels on the basis of what the 'leadership would like to hear'. Clearly, this means that our assessments were determined subjectively on the basis of reporting from below that were made without realizing that our links with the mass of the people have so weakened, buttressing such wrong

assessments. The reporting from below may also have been based on those whom we thought were our own sympathizers upon, whom we relied, and who had simply deserted us, about which we had no inkling. It could well have been due to a combination of these, or/and many other factors.

Subjectivism, in terms of our organizational work, can also lead to many grave distortions in terms of lack of comradely behaviour, individualism, unhealthy competition of 'one-upmanship' amongst comrades etc. Such manifestations inevitably lead to wrong assessments of the concrete situation, as well as further weakening our links with the people.

Under these circumstances, there is an urgent need for us, in the Party, to combat subjectivism at all levels. It needs to be combated in order to arrive at a correct objective assessment and estimation of the changes that are occurring in 'concrete conditions'. Subjectivism needs to be combated in order to conduct a scientific evaluation of these concrete conditions to arrive at a correct Marxist-Leninist 'concrete analysis' and the consequent organisational methods and measures.

The evolution of the Party's political-tactical line is crucially dependent on this. Any errors committed in this process can lead to an erroneous political and a tactical line and make the Party more vulnerable to deviations of either variety – right revisionist or Left adventurist.

It is, thus, incumbent upon us, as an inseparable part of our efforts for the success of the struggle for socialism in India through the successful completion of the people's democratic stage of the Indian revolution to make a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the present day developments, importantly, combating subjectivism at all levels, in order to change the balance in the correlation of class forces in our favour. This is imperative to advance our struggles to accomplish our revolutionary strategic objective in our country.

The CPI(M) has, after proper deliberations, adopted the current political-tactical line of the Party at our 21st Congress. However, the decisions that we shall take at the Organisational plenum will determine our capacities to effectively execute this political and tactical line. This in turn, is crucially dependent on undertaking the required organizational decisions to strengthen the Party's links with the masses. This is our task at hand.

Hence, at all three levels – the correct estimation of concrete conditions, the scientific foundations for concrete analysis and the correct organizational methods and decisions that will strengthen our live links with the mass of the Indian people – combating subjectivism in the myriad ways in which it manifests is an urgent task that needs to be undertaken by the Party as a whole.