

“History in general, and the revolutionary movement in particular, is always more comprehensive, many-faceted, and complicated than even the most conscious vanguard of the most advanced class is able to imagine.”

[Lenin, Collected Works- Vol.31]

LENINISM OR DE-LENINISATION?

Thanks are certainly due to the SUCI leadership for having attempted once again to invoke, in the pages of their central organ Proletarian Era, 1 Jan, 1988, the authority of Lenin decidedly in support of their own understanding of Leninist model of party organization.

LENIN IN 1921

As the Editorial introduction notes inter alia: under the leadership of Comrade Lenin the third Congress of the Communist International was held in 1921. The Thesis on the Organization of the Communist Parties, drafted under the guidance of Comrade Lenin was passed at the Congress.

“The Organisation of the Communist Party is the organisation of communist leadership in the proletarian Revolution”- formulating this fundamental concept and elaborating it in the minutest detail Lenin as the teacher and leader of the international communist movement, provided invaluable guideline to the world proletariat.

On the occasion of the ensuing Historic First Party Congress of our beloved party the SUCI we like to reproduce the thesis in order to re-read, re-learn and thereby to further improve our understanding of the principles of party organisation.”

Following this introductory note is reproduced in the said organ the thesis referred to, entitled “Principles of Party Organisation”.

The SUCI would have deserved much more thanks, were they to have reproduced what Lenin said course of the review of this very thesis ust in the next annual congress [4th Congress of Comintern 1922] and that too, in an equally unequivocal manner. It is only in the interest of re-reading, re-learning and thereby to further improve our understanding “as the Editorial Board wants all of us to, that the author felt obliged to reproduce the relevant extracts from Lenin’s 1922 speech bearing on the 1921 thesis.

LENIN IN 1922

“At the third Congress in 1921, we adopted a resolution on the organizational structure of the communist parties and on the methods and content of their activities. The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions. This is its good point, but it is also its failing. It is its failing because I am sure that no foreigner can read it. I have read it again before saying this. In the first place, it is too long, containing fifty or more points. Foreigners are not usually able to read it, they will not understand it, because it is Russian. Not because it is written in Russian, it has been excellently translated into all languages- but because it is thoroughly imbued with Russian spirit. And thirdly, if by way of exception some foreigner does understand it, he cannot carry it out. This is

its third defect. I have talked with a few of the foreign delegates and hope to discuss matters in detail with a large number of delegates from different countries during the Congress..... I have the impression that we have made a big mistake with this resolution, namely that we blocked our own road to further progress All that was said in the resolution has remained a dead letter. If we do not realize this, we shall be unable to move ahead. I think that after five years of the Russian revolution the most important thing for all of us, Russian and Foreign comrades alike, is to sit down and study We must take advantages of every moment of respite from fighting, from war, to study and to study from scratch First of all, among other things they must learn to understand what we have written about the organizational structure of the communist parties, and what the Foreign comrades have signed without reaching an understanding. This must be their first task The resolution is too Russian, it reflects Russian experience. This is why it is quite unintelligible to foreigners, and they can't be content with hanging it in a corner like an icon and praying to it. Nothing will be achieved that way..... I am sure that in this connexion we must tell not only the Russians, but the foreign comrades as well, that the most important thing in the period we are entering is to study. We are studying in a general way. They, however, must study in the special sense, in order that they may really understand the organisation, structure, method and content of revolutionary work. If they do that, I am sure the prospects of the world revolution will be not only good, but excellent". (Lenin Collected Works Vol- 33)

A few Questions

Lenin is quite clear and emphatic here on what he wanted to convey on the question of party organisation, namely; [a] The Resolution of 1921 was thoroughly imbued with Russian spirit; [b] A Foreign Communist Party cannot carry it out; [c] The Resolution was a big mistake in that it blocked our road to further progress; [d] The Resolution remained a dead letter; and [e] The foreign comrades should sit down to study in a special way and evolve thereby afresh for their respective conditions the necessary and suitable forms of party organisation.

The most crucial but at the same time the most disturbing [disturbing even now to many of his 'self- styled progeny] revelation Lenin made here is the cruel truth that "Foreign Comrades have signed it without reading and realizing it".

The questions that naturally emerge in the wake of even a course reading of Lenin's aforesaid observations are; [a] Do the SUCI leadership not continue still the practice of following a document "without reading and realizing it" even after more than six and half decades of its rejection by Lenin himself ? [b] What they have done specifically to 'read and realise' it ? [c] What they have done to rid the document of its 'Russian spirit' and thereby indigenise it ? [d] How they think that a thesis which blocked the road to progress way back in 1922 can reopen it in 1988 ? [d] Have they analysed the reason as to why the thesis remained a dead letter? [e] If it could not be carried out then as Lenin admits, how can it be today ? (f) What they have done to study and 'study from scratch' and 'study in a special way'?

And above all, they should explain, why should we not take, it at all we have to, Lenin of 1922, instead of Lenin as in 1921 as the authority on the question of party organisation?

LIMITATIONS OF 1921 PRINCIPLES

As is well known, the Communist Internationale [or Third Internationale] founded in 1919 in Moscow was originally conceived to be the World Communist Party itself, of which the

communist parties of different countries would serve as branches. The third international emerged as it did following the split in the Second Internationale over the question of attitude to the imperialist world war versus revolutionary civil war, it had ipso facto to be more restrictive, discriminating, centralised and monolithic than the usual in its composition and structure right from beginning in its determined bid to disallow any kind of chauvinist, reformist and revisionist tendencies inside it, which characterised the Second Internationale. Even lukewarm sympathizers as of such tendencies were sought to be prevented from entering into this new forum. Both 'Resolution on 21 conditions of Entry' and 'Resolution on Principles of Party Organisation' as passed by Comintern in 1920 and 1921 respectively, do bear, therefore, and rightly so, considering the time in question, the obvious thrust on rigidity, centralization, monolithicism and so on, and, reversely an underplay of free, open and democratic principles of party organisation. Speaking retrospectively, these two Resolutions were meant more to serve the momentary, specific practical organizational needs of the Comintern at that particular juncture of history than as a universal, long-term party model for different countries of the world. This is its first limitation.

Lenin's reference to the Russian spirit as pervading all through the 1921 Principles deserve some amount of clarification. Firstly, the Russian Communist Party having been developed mostly as in the peculiar illegal conditions imposed by Czarist coercion, was ipso facto organized more along centralized lines than through democratic procedures, as except of course the short lived periods when the Party had to return to more or less normal democratic life thanks to the persistent struggles inside it. The Russian 'spirit' and 'experience' as referred to by Lenin meant here nothing but this thrust on centralisation which was peculiar till then only to the history of the Russian Communist Party. Secondly, the very moment when the Comintern passed the 1921 Resolution was a peculiarly trying moment for the Russian Communist Party itself. Rocked as it was by the challenges of the Left Opposition, Democratic Centralist Group and Workers Opposition, among others, from inside, the Russian Communist Party had to pass the Resolution on Party Unity banning all factions [Mind it, right to form blocs, factions and platforms inside the party was a well-acknowledged right till then and Lenin had earlier made it an indispensable condition for a true communist party, calling it the right of the minorities. Lenin himself continued to practise it till his death as one of his last letters as addressed to Trotsky calling on him to form a bloc with him as against Stalin to fight together on national question, shows]. The party at home was returning to a new more rigorous phase of centralization which was but inevitably reflected in the 1921 Comintern 'Principles'. Here was the second limitation.

The third limitation, last but not the least, was what Lenin admitted, the foreign comrades signed it without reading and understanding it. As a matter of fact, unlike as on other issues, there was no debate at all on this resolution, since as was natural on their part the foreign comrades took for granted the Russian Party's experiences to be more reliable at least on organizational questions than their own.

Such were the limitations of the 1921 principles which in all probability Lenin kept in mind while qualifying and critiquing it as in his 1922 speech.

KNOW-HOW FOR A NEW MODEL

Much water has since flown down the bridge. The Comintern, the author of the 1921 Resolution was itself dissolved in early forties, as giving way to Cominform, in a way its diluted version,

which eventually disappeared altogether from the scene since mid-fifties. While dissolving the Comintern, it may be noted in parenthesis, Stalin had categorically told that the world had already outgrown the organizational framework of Comintern as laid down in early twenties. Numerous experiments big and small as in the field of party organisation just as in all other fields have already been witnessed all over the world including above all India- and every experiment being an exercise in invaluable lessons, positive or negative or both. And the bourgeoisie, here and abroad, have grown thousand times wiser and more sophisticated than what they were in early twenties, in respect of treating the Communists by absorbing, accommodating, nay, even, incorporating quite many a principle of communist party organisation .. during all these decades. No model whether propounded by Marx or Lenin, Trotsky or Rosa, Mao or Ho, Kim or Castro can match the specific, concrete and ever more critical tasks as of today. These authorities may at best serve as mere points of reference. Today's model of party organisation as for India can be built up only on an exhaustive stocktaking of global experiences and an in-depth, 'special study' of India's concrete totality. Or else, any exhortation, however zealous and well-intentioned, to the authority of Lenin, or, for that matter, to his Russianistic 'Principles' of 1921 as in search of a party model here is sure to result in a 'dead letter' as Lenin said.

IGNORANCE/PREVERSION OF LENINISM

The SUCI leadership have reproduced in their central organ the 1921 Principles with much fanfare. But why do they keep secret from public view the Draft-Constitution (and also other two drafts) which they are going to pass in the forth coming 1st Congress of the Party? If the party insists on as it does always, collecting money from the public, calling on the people as through colorful wall-posters to join in the open session as audiences and make the 'historic' Congress a grand success, why should they not let the same people know and analyse their Draft-Constitution (and also other two drafts) which they are going to pass in the forth coming 1st Congress of the Party? Such were the questions that the author had raised while inside the party before his resignation in September last.

What was Lenin's theory and Practice on this score? Lenin was invariably in favour of laying bare the whole gamut of inner party polemics and proceedings however controversial before the common people, the non-party masses, so as to draw them ever closer into the theoretical and organizational struggles waged inside and outside the party and thereby to build up and reinforce the organic tie as between party and masses. As a result, both party and people were benefited in terms of ideological enrichment. (Lenin Collected Works Vol. 13)

Contrary to this well-grounded Leninist practice, the SUCI leadership confines the theoretical exercises as over the Congress documents only to the selective party circles.

Assuming that the SUCI leadership are just in deriving their party understanding from Lenin's (or Lenin-rejected?) Principles (1921), how does their draft-constitution compare with it? The Principles of 1921 provides for two kinds of members (candidate member and member). The Draft-constitution introduces, beside these two, a third category i.e. staff member. Who is a staff member? He is the so-called Professional Revolutionary. How is he placed inside the Party? Not by virtue of election by members below, but by the sanction of the Central Committee above. The draft-constitution which says on the one hand that all posts are elective, goes at the same breath to deny the right of the non-staff Members to be elected to the posts of Central Committee, Secretary of the Staff Committee and even of District-Committee, on the other. The

Staff Members thus enjoy ex-officio prerogatives which are denied to the general members. Such a constitutional inequality as between one kind of members and another is foreign to most of the Communist Parties.

So far the question of Professional Revolutionary is concerned, Lenin had hit upon this idea at a particular juncture of time and in a peculiar set of Russia's circumstances, as far back as the turn of the present century. He abandoned the idea of professional revolutionaries as forming the core of the party organisation as soon as the circumstances changed for a freer atmosphere (see, Lenin's "Preface to the Collection Twelve Years, 1907 Vol- 13). Though he continued to pay his glowing tributes, all through till his death, to the role of professional revolutionary as in the chequered career of Russian Revolution, he never pleaded for a separate statutory position for same (SUCI's Staff Member) in the Party Constitution. As we have already noted, the 1921 'Principles' does not refer at all to such species called Professional Revolutionary.

The SUCI leadership pass off as Leninism (nay, unique contribution to Leninism) certain of their party practices of last 40 years such as non-holding of the Congress, no election of party bodies at any level, no written constitution embodying the rights and obligations of members, non holding of conference or formal debate embracing the whole party, non-accountability of the central committee before the general members, absence of any regular, formal norms for disposal of funds and management of party documents and publications, absence of a body for disposing of complaints against the Central Committee [similar to Control Commission] etc. Have these practices any resemblance with Lenin's? Right from the formation of the Bolshevik Party [1903] did Lenin insist all through on democratic principles of party organisation such as regular holding of Congress and election etc. If there were any lack of regularity in these practices, it was, as Lenin said, due to the un-favourable conditions created by Czarist autocracy, but never as a matter of principle. [see Preface to the Collection Twelve Years LCW VOL-13] Why such democratic principles are so important for a proletarian party? The party which aims at promoting the leadership from below in the society as in contrast to the bourgeois parties, must into practice this supreme principles of below first inside itself. For Lenin the proletarian democracy is not the negation of the democratic aspect of the bourgeois democracy, but rather its fullest possible flowering and realization, which the bourgeoisie are not capable of ensuring. Lenin's formula was 'quantity leads to quality', that is democracy which is truncated, half-hearted and too partial in nature as under the bourgeoisie, if extended to its further most limits, consummates in proletarian democracy. [Lenin: State and Revolution]. For the SUCI leadership, democratic principles are not indispensable for a proletarian party, but all too dispensable and manipulable as and when party's top brass desire so. Whereas for Lenin, every major policy of the party should be decided by all the members, the SUCI leadership have been formulating the so-called party line during last forty years on all policies major and minor for the rest of the members, the latter's task only being to propagate and carry it out among the masses. Whereas for Lenin the party organs should serve as free and open forum for all the opinions, criticisms and even parallel lines upheld by the cross sections of party membership [as Pravda did, for instances, on one between Lenin and Trotsky, Lenin and Bukharin, Lenin and Kollontai, Lenin and Stalin etc.], the SUCI leadership have been monopolising the Central organ's publication and publicity only for the Central Committee. These can be called the organs of the Central Committee, but not of the party as whole. Whereas for Lenin, the party should review from time to time its own performances in the presences of all members, and freely expose its own mistakes and shortcomings as through the party organs and forums, the SUCI leadership rest contented with the blind assertion that the correct line as formulated by the Party back in 1948 has not undergone any 'substantial change' [see SUCI Draft theses on National and International

situation]. Whereas for Lenin, the autonomy of every unit of the party is to be guaranteed, the Draft-constitution seeks to render every unit of the party organisationally dependent upon its higher committee. For instance, the District Committee cannot hold its conference without prior consultation with the state committee and without a representative of the State Committee being present in the conference.

Yes, the SUCI leadership can and do, very often, in fact, claim to their credit, one important innovation in the field of Leninist Party Organisation. According to Shibdas Ghosh, the decisive proof as to whether there is democratic centralism operating inside the party or not can be gained only if and when there is the presence [or rather emergence] of a leader in the highest organ of the party [Central Committee] who is the personification of the collective leadership, that is, collective knowledge, of the party [no matter, the collective itself may be a small group], who is not a traditional elected leader, but a beloved leader, teacher and guide of the party, and who is, so to say, the leader of the leaders. The presence of such a leader, as Ghosh says, is the concrete physical expression of the collective leadership, which remains otherwise only a shapeless abstraction. Whereas for Lenin, the concreteness or otherwise of a party leadership is achieved if and to the degree the masses think alike as the party does, Shibdas Ghosh by his theory of 'leader of leaders' completely overturns this well-grounded Leninist discourse on revolutionary praxis through shifting the focus as from the masses down below [the real concrete] to the Central Committee and its top most leader high above [the real abstract]. It is no strange therefore that Shibdas Ghosh himself allowed and openly promoted during his lifetime the personality cult around him (mind it, he had criticized Stalin for it) through such practices as the play of a song on him [virtually the party anthem] from the party rostrum on every occasion, that too, with equal dignity as given to Internationale, building of his Statue [still kept in Calcutta office], display of his photograph beside that of Marx, Engles, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, mention of his name in hold letters in party publications, use of adjectives such as eminent Marxist thinker of the era, great leader of the proletariat etc., use of eulogies such as our 'beloved leader, teacher and guide', wearing of the badge of his photo, launching of a party fund after his name [G.S. Fund], guard of honour paid to him in martial style by the uniformed volunteers of the mass wings of the party and last but not the least, profuse reference to Shibdas Ghosh Thought [still undefined]. In all probability, the cult of Shibdas Ghosh has far surpassed the cult of Stalin, Mao, or Kim Il Sung or of any other person practiced anywhere in the left world. And the cult has been so much institutionalized that whoever questions it from inside the party, is immediately cautioned on his indisciplinary conduct [among many such cases, author's experience is a recent instance]. Not to speak of Marx and Engles, even Lenin who was allegedly so much a votary of centralization and authority, was simply intolerant of any reverence shown to his person. As is well known, he obstinately refused to attend his 50th birthday meeting which was organized despite his stiff resistance, by the Petrograd Bolshevik Committee.

Whether Shibdas Ghosh was in the know of all this concerning the Leninist model of party organisation, it is difficult to conclude. Be that as it may, if he erected his brand of Leninism as out of ignorance, the present day party leadership can well remedy the situation by subjecting the whole gamut of Ghosian understanding to a radical and comprehensive critique in the light of an exhaustive study of Lenin and post-Lenin revolutionary praxis as at home and abroad. Or else, if the party leadership still persists in the cult of Shibdas Ghosh calling it as it does, the highest understanding of Marxism- Leninism in the present-day world, we shall but term it the worst perversion of Leninism.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

1] There are genuine revolutionary-minded individuals in every workers' party/ group [not excluding SUCI], however bureaucratized the top party leadership may be. Such individuals, if they do not wish to be co-opted into the bureaucratized party structure as the party leadership wants them, cannot but have to raise the banner of revolt against the bureaucratic deformation of their respective party organizations and the consequent ideological-theoretical dogmatization and vulgarization as implicit in the so-called "only correct base political line" of the party. Only through constant inner-party ideological struggle can we ever retain the measure of freshness, open-mindedness and magnanimity of vision and spirit which revolutionary Marxism demands of us as a *sin qua non* of our quest for world's truth.

2] Those individuals who want revolution but have not joined any bureaucratized party as such, do have one decisive advantage over the so-called partymen in the fact that they can directly relate them through action and reflexion, to the numerous problems and issues that the people are involved in all around, without of course, the *via media* of bureaucratized Marxism. There is no doubt, the effort of such individuals, groups however isolated, unorganized they may be at present, shall culminate sooner or later into a collective praxis.

3] No model whether sanctified by Marx or Bakunin, Bernstein or Kautsky, Lenin or Luxemburg, Stalin or Trotsky, Mao or Ho, Kim or Castro, Tito or Hoxha, new Left or Far Left, can serve us here and now, as the model one, though each of them can contribute by way of lessons positive or negative, to the task of evolving our own concrete Organisational praxis.

4] For the alternative revolutionary praxis to emerge, what we as Parties/Action Groups/Individuals can do is to facilitate an unbiased exchange of discourses among/between us on one hand, and established and promote links both vertical and horizontal with the problems and issues of the workers and of subaltern masses, on the other.

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