

Dynamics of the left forces in Asia - Pierre Rousset

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Outline of the lecture

Introduction

An immense subject : limits of the lecture and of the lecturer.
Does “Asia” as such exist?

- Its construction as viewed from Europe (the Orient begins in ... Morokko!).
- Historical diversity and the limits chosen here : from Pakistan to Korea (South Asia, South-East Asia, North-East Asia ...). No other region in the world is more diverse (Thailand and The Philippines).
- A geopolitical reality shaped by the 20th Century revolutions (Russia, China, Vietnam...), the partition of the British Empire (1947), the big counter revolutions (Indonesia 1965, South-Korea ...) – and “frozen” by the “division of the world” in two “blocs”.

1. Asia unbalanced

An unbalanced world ruled by capitalist globalisation. Two specific factors of this unbalanced situation concern Asia specifically:

1. The disintegration of the USSR (a Eurasian power) and the end of the blocs – an internal upheaval which Asia has only in common with Eastern Europe (the map of Europe has changed ...).

2. The emergence of the two main new powers : India and China which has no counterpart elsewhere.

⊙Asia has entered a period of geostrategic imbalances ... whilst being an important strategic zone (from maritime straits to economic issues).

First example: a view from Pakistan. No more secure alliances. The afghan front breaks up the state of Pakistan whilst the Indian front united it.

Second example: China, a regional power. From Burma and Afghanistan to the Korean peninsula. Archipelagos and maritime territories (don't forget India in South Asia).

Third example: the new Japanese nationalism

Fourth example : military redeployment of the US, including the guardianship of the Pakistani bomb, Vietnam, Mindanao, Australia, the Seventh Fleet ...

Interdependence of powers ==> no wars between powers. But the military play a growing role again in the relationships of power in Asia.

==> Importance of the anti-war struggles (Pakistan/ India ... Japan / Korea / Taiwan / China)

Safety seen through the eyes of the people: free all maritime territories (reverse the tendency of modern times ...), denuclearisation, struggle against the new xenophobic nationalisms

2. Some important questions

A. China

Understanding the paradoxical relationship between the success of the (1949) revolution and the success of the Chinese counter revolution.

Bureaucratic capitalism and the nationalism of power.

Corruption at the heart of the Chinese model and the beginning of a new period?

Social resistances, class consciousness ... but the

organisation? A political left?

B. Religious fundamentalisms and oppressions

The 1970's. Still the golden age of communist parties and of secular nationalisms. The example of The Philippines: CNL and MNLF.

The rise of fundamentalisms in a region of the world with very different cultures: what becomes of Pakistan? Radical Hinduism in India. The Buddhist extreme right in Sri Lanka .

The State, dominant religions and internal colonisations (Sri Lanka, The Philippines).

The “nested” oppressions. Lumads and Muslims in Mindanao. Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka ... “Indigenous peoples” and “forest people”.

The condition of women. Pakistan: Benazir Bhutto, the Taliban, wearing a veil and tribal “traditions”.

==> return to a strategic question: confronted with a divide and rule policy (conflicts between communities ...), how to unify?

C. Social disintegration and over exploitation of labour

Europe: social disintegration with a background of economic decline. Asia: also a social disintegration but caused by a brutal capitalist development.

We are not describing social formations but trying to approach the problems which must be solved.

Working class: hyper-exploitation in Pakistan. The closing of factories in The Philippines. Industrial fires (Thailand, Pakistan, Bangladesh, ...). 40 million workers from state owned companies in China are laid off or become pensioners (replaced by migrant “undocumented” workers from the countryside).

The rights of workers (and of unions) and also fundamental human rights ... The relation with and the organisation of urban poor and the organisation of the wage earners ...

The magnitude of the migrations. The dominant nature of migration in globalisation (no hope). The responsibility of the movements in the countries of departure (preparation, follow up of the families ...) and of the “guest” countries (obtained legal papers ...°).

The danger of the disintegration of the village communities. Expulsed for the establishment of industrial zones. Devitalised by migration. Fragmented by the market. The return to ecologic/organic farming as a method of active resistance.

The devastating impact of wars and humanitarian catastrophes (even in Japan). The aid policy (self organisation). The fight for keeping the victims rights – and form considering themselves as entitled to those rights.

Is the instability of the popular social structures a dominant characteristic? En how do we respond to it?

3. Asia of struggles

The revolution in Nepal is the latest . A revolution, a government ... and then?

Pakistan, territory of struggles and not only of wars.

Networks ... from the Peoples Forum of Asia-Europe, from networks against the debt, for social protection, to antinuclear movements and IIRE-Manila ...

A great political diversity in the left. The decline of the large “traditional” communist parties (West Bengal). The division and the evolution of the Maoist movements. “Anti-party” movements. The hard sectarianism of some and unitary openings of many (The Philippines)

The unexpected fate of the F.I. in Asia. It has become the

main region of the International with a big diversity of organisations.

Some results of the “fourth” radicalisation of youth in the 1970’s (Japan, Hong Kong) (the case of India).

Coming from other Trotskyist currents (Sri Lanka, Pakistan), from Maoism (The Philippines, Bangladesh, from a historical discontinuity (no-isme) (Indonesia), from pro-Moscow current (also in Pakistan) etc.

Very different situations. Three contrasting examples: the CPB-ML (Bangladesh); the RPM-M (Mindanao); LPP and now the AWP (Pakistan).

Points of programmatic conversions (the fight for socialism). An International who respects the identity of each national organisation (see on the contrary the fear of the PSM in Malaysia). A common involvement in for a and networks at a global and at a regional level...

Lessons to be generalised for other sectors of the radical left in Asia.

Repression. Solidarity. Internationalism.

Questions for discussion

1. For those who are not coming from Asia: what is common and what is different in relation to your region of the world? For the comrades from Asia: can left movements create a common a “pan-Asian consciousness”?

2. Can we (already) say that China is a capitalist power? Or even (already) an imperialist power?

3. Or you, in your countries, confronted with the instability of social environments (instability of industries, disintegration of agrarian communities and “indigenous”, massive migrations, consequences for indebtedness ... which makes it difficult to build stable social roots and stable roots in social movements? How do we deal with this problem?

4. Asia is a typical example where several “forces” are at work. Should we choose the “least” dangerous power (“campism”) or should we build the independence of social movements against all those “forces”? How would you characterise internationalism today?

China: bureaucratic capitalist?

Terry CONWAY Loong-Yu AU

Terry Conway interviewed Au Loong Yu, the author of the forthcoming book *China’s Rise Strength and Fragility* (Resistance Books, IIRE, Merlin Press)

Terry Conway: Can you explain why you have developed the term bureaucratic capitalism to describe China today and what you mean by that term?

Au Loong Yu: I did not invent the term. It was first used, ironically, by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the 1940s to depict the kind of capitalism that the Guomindang had created under its rule.

Maurice Meisner defines bureaucratic capitalism in his book *The Deng Xiaoping Era – An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism 1978-1994* as a term to refer to the use of political power for private pecuniary gain through capitalistic or quasi-capitalist methods of economic activity. He adds that although this is not new in history, the form of this in China today is more prominent than the others.

I would also add that today Chinese bureaucrats at all levels of government run companies, profit from them and rarely get prosecuted, because the bureaucracy has completely monopolised state power and this enables it to rise above all classes. One could even say that the bureaucracy has privatised the state.

Marx once remarked that the bureaucracy see the state as its private property. Where Marx considered this as an entrenched tendency within the bureaucracy, it is only in present day China that this evolution has been fully completed. Entirely unchecked, this bureaucracy have now been fully bourgeoisified.

A recent example is the Chongqing Security Group, founded by the Chongqing police force – which was headed by Wang Lijun until his arrest after he defected to US embassy to escape from a plot by former head of Chongqing, Bo Xilai – and run by its leading officials. This company recently applied for listing in China, disregarding the legal ban on police departments running security companies.

What has discredited socialism in China is the fact that the CCP, which made a revolution against the bureaucratic capitalism of the Guomindang ended up embracing the same thing. It is quite common today to interpret the term revolution in its original meaning: things that move in an orbit and therefore always return to the same point of departure. In fact the original meaning of the Chinese term for the word revolution (geming) means a change of heaven’s mandate of a dynasty, and therefore also suggests a change only in the rulers but never the dynastic social order – in fact, the mission of a geming is precisely to restore dynastic peace. Many intellectuals today do see the 1949 revolution in that perspective and therefore argue against the idea of revolution.

I do not agree that the 1949 revolution can be interpreted in that way. Even if bureaucratic capitalism is brought back by the CCP which once eradicated it, some fruits of that revolution are still largely intact, for instance, the independence of the nation, and the collective ownership of land by the peasants. There are more and more serious attempts to erode the latter through land grabs by local government or their cronies are, but the peasants are also making use of their constitutional rights to defend these lands. And industrialisation and break neck speed promoted by the CCP also fundamentally modernises the economic and social structure of China which, ironically, also nurtures the social forces which will eventually challenge the thousands years old tradition of despotism. Bureaucratic capitalism enables the bureaucracy to plunder the country on a terrible scale but at the same time creates a new working class from rural migrants and potentially brings together other social forces such as the peasantry and students to make common cause with this against the bureaucracy.

TC: Could you tell our readers what role the CCP has played in the reintroduction of capitalism in China and how it has benefited from this?

ALY: The top leaders of the bureaucracy have made a conscious chose to restore capitalism. Deng Xiaoping was already feeling his way in 1984 when China signed an agreement with the Britain over Hong Kong which said that laissez faire

capitalism would to be maintained for fifty years after being handed over to China – in complete contradiction with socialist principles of course.

Later he was reported as saying that capitalism in Hong Kong should allowed to continue even beyond that timeline.

In 1987 he told an African delegation “do not follow socialism. Do whatever you can to make the economy grow.” His subsequent crackdown on the 1989 democracy movement signified his party had decisively and qualitatively transformed into a capitalist party.

However it is utterly unconvincing when some Maoists try to put all the blame on Deng Xiaoping alone, however. The fact that Deng encountered no significant opposition, but on the contrary received enthusiastic response from the bureaucracy, implies that he was just doing what they wanted. This should not be startling for any socialist.

Even in Mao’s era when the bureaucracy was fiercely anti-capitalist, it was also highly privileged as a ruling elite. They monopolised the right to distribute the social surplus through monopolizing the running of the state. They, like any other ruling elites, were never content with their salary – which was ten to 30 times that of ordinary workers – and always wished to appropriate still more social surplus.. Their fundamental interest lay in restoring private property rather than being a faithful public servant defending common ownership indefinitely.

In the late 1980’s, price reform created the so called *guandao*, or officials who engaged in speculation. Meanwhile nearly all level of state departments set up different kinds of companies to make money. The bureaucracy was beginning to transform themselves into capitalists as well. This enraged the people who rose in protest against the government in 1989. The CCP’s crack down crushed all opposition to capitalist reform, and this alone is sufficient prove that it had decisively transformed from an anti capitalist party to one which embraced it.

Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 tour to the south signified that the CCP had taken another big leap forward again, towards full integration with global capitalism. To make the leap successful the terror of the aftermath of 1989 crackdown was not longer enough. It was imperative to inflict more defeat on the workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) by privatisating these enterprises and thus sacking more than 40 million workers.

TC: Can you explain how a new working class has been created of migrant workers from the countryside and in what ways the consciousness of that new class differs from that of the ‘old’ working class in the state sector?

ALY: A positive side of capitalist restoration in China – as opposed to what occurred in former Soviet Bloc – is accelerated industrialisation. As a result the number of China’s wage workers is constantly increasing; they now comprise half the working population and account for one-quarter of industrial workers in the world. Most of them are rural migrant workers.

Being at the centre of production and distribution makes them a potentially phenomenal social force. For the moment they are still a class ‘in itself’ rather than ‘for itself’, though.

There are deeper reasons for the difficult birth of a new labour movement beyond than state repression. Although rural migrant workers, now numbering 250 million, have not experienced the devastating defeat of SOE workers, neither do they possess a collective memory as a class. They are *nongmingong*, literally peasant-workers, more peasants than workers, not because they really till the land – in fact, most of them do so rarely – but because the *hukou* system of household registration, acts as a

form of social apartheid, barring them from raising families in the cities and sinking real roots there. No matter how long they stay in the cities they aware that it is bounds to be temporary. Hence a sense of true class identity is hard to forge.

But neither are they entirely passive. Rural migrant workers have staged numerous spontaneous strikes against their bosses and local authorities. These spontaneous strikes often win partial victories, and they are so common that the authority’s *de facto* ban on strikes broke down long ago, to the effect that local government has to learn to live with that. Organizing is still very difficult, though. The next stage of struggle will likely be one to defy the ban on organisation, though this is going be a long term and uphill struggle. Yet even today it is possible to form activists’ network, which can act as a transitional platform for future organising.

TC: Can you talk about some of the recent struggles of workers which have raised questions of democracy as well as opposed privatisation and/or fought for improved conditions in the workplace

ALY: Two cases should be of particular interest . The first and most recent one was 700 workers at the Ohms Electronics Shenzhen Co., which is the business partner of the Japanese TNC Panasonic, struck for three days from 29-31 March 2012 over unsatisfactory wages and working hours. They also demanded re-election of their workplace union, so that their interests would be better represented. The workers complained in their open letter on 26 March that the chairperson of the union was appointed by the management and was a manager, which violated the laws on trade union and the charter of the official trade union. The strike was successfully launched when part of the lower ranking management and also the security guards joined in. The workers also used the Chinese version of Twitter, *weibo*, to spread their demands over the internet. Although later the management was able to divide the lower ranking management from the striking workers the action was still able to force concessions to the economic demands of the workers and also and an agreement that the local trade union would hold a re-election of the workplace union leadership. The election was held between end of April and early May, and although the old chairperson lost the election, the newly elected chairperson is a workshop manager, and there were reports which suggested that there were manipulation and frauds in the election. Despite this, allegedly half of the members of the new union committee were workers who had gone on strike. Due to censorship and harsh repression, it is difficult to verify the information.

This case stands out as rural migrant workers, even if they do take a lot of strike actions, do not often have awareness of the importance of reclaiming trade unions for themselves in a democratic manner as they do not have strong collective identity.

I am not sure if the workers at Ohms were inspired by the Honda Foshan strike in 2010. But anyway that strike is considered to be a milestone in the development of consciousness of rural migrant workers. In May 2010 1,800 Honda Foshan workers took action, calling for higher wages and the reorganisation of their workplace trade union, triggering off a wave of strike action by workers in foreign-owned car plants that summer. In an open letter by worker representatives they condemned the branch trade union saying, ‘We are outraged by the trade union’s appropriation of the fruits of the workers’ struggles. We insist that the branch trade union of the factory shall be elected by the production line workers’.

The reasons that letter gives for their struggle are noteworthy:

the workers were not just fighting for their own interest but were also concern about the interests of working people throughout China. Such a broad vision is very rare among rural migrant workers. The strike lasted for more than two weeks and only ended after regular workers at the plant had been offered a 35% pay increase and those working as interns at the factory had received a raise of more than 70%. Later the management also agreed to the re-election of the workplace union. The local trade union soon announced the election of the workplace union at the company in late August 2010, it turned out that this was only a by-election, where only part of the workplace union leadership was open to election and the original chairperson, who was very much resented by the striking workers, kept his seat. A little more than a year later, the election of a new leadership of the workplace union was held in November 2011. This was not genuinely democratic either, as the outgoing leadership monopolised the nomination of candidates of the incoming leadership, such that members of the management were elected as members of the leadership, while the activists who led the strike in 2010 were pushed out altogether. Despite this, the strike shows that workers do have power to improve their situation.

These two cases of workers' action and their call for a rank and file controlled union, they provide an alternative image of workers fighting for their rights to one which merely sees worker as a vulnerable social group who need outside help but who cannot resist injustice on their own, like the Foxconn workers who killed themselves.

TC: Could you say something about how the reintroduction of capitalism in China is deepening the environmental crisis in the country and what struggles there have been which have reacted to these effects?

ALY: China's crazy speed of industrialisation has caused the twin problems of water shortage and water pollution. Today 400 out of 660 cities in China do not have sufficient fresh water, and among these cities, 136 of them are experiencing severe water shortages. About one-third of China's population lacks access to clean drinking water. 70 per cent of the country's rivers and lakes are polluted. Over 25,000 large dams nationwide are causing ecological damage and the forced migration of millions of people.

The lax enforcement of environmental laws means that the pollution resulted from this industrialisation had not been checked at all. Increasingly, however, the people find the pollution in air and water so serious that they begin to take matters into their own hands.

An interesting example is the protests against the building of PX factories across the country. Paraxylene (PX) is an important chemical in the production of fibre and plastic bottles. Unverified report suggests that there are at least 13 PX plants across the country, which had caused serious health problem for local residents. The first widely reported protest took place in 2007, when local residents of Xiamen demonstrated against a PX plant and eventually succeeded in halting construction there. This obviously inspired the 2011 Dalian local residents when more than 10,000 protesters gathered to demand the closure of a PX facility, forcing the mayor to promise that he would shut it down. Later reports have since suggested that the Dalian factory may have been reopened, although much of the news reporting on the plant's resumption on mainland websites has since been removed.

Despite this, the struggle against PX was triggered off again just days ago, this time in Ningbo. On 24 October 24, 2012, the Ningbo government announced the new PX project, it was

immediately followed by protest the next day, and it continued to Sunday 28 October 2012 which drew more than 10,000 protestors taking to the street. The action forced the government to suspend the decision. Whether this is a lasting victory is hard to tell now.

What is significant of these struggles, however, is that they may reflect a gradual change in people's mentality. There had been complete demoralisation after the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement. That fear overwhelmed the SOE workers, stopping them from launching any effective struggle against privatisation. This fear also spread across the society as a whole.

Yet in recent years the fear seems to be beginning to recede. Workers' economic strikes are rising and they are more likely to win partial concession. The same is true for peasants' defence of their land and local residents fighting against polluting projects. Although not yet political, these kinds of struggles and partial victories encourage the people to overcome their fear. Hopefully they may also help to change the conservativeness of the intellectual's fear of any kind of popular rebellion.

Rising extremism, war on terrorism and women's lives in Pakistan

Bushra KHALIQ

Sixty two years ago at the time of Pakistan's birth in 1947 as a result of partition of United India, the majority of the population in this part of the world was not fundamentalist. The state structures, though weak, nevertheless had chances to grow as a democratic country but on account of repeated interferences by Military regimes, the state started adopting Islamic ideology, giving maximum space to religious extremist forces to promote their non-democratic agenda in the country.

Many religious political parties and sectarian groups were pampered and encouraged to grow by military regimes. Millions of petro dollars were poured in by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to strengthen these parties and groups under direct state patronage. The Islamist forces had a quiet walk over democratic and progressive forces, to consolidate their socio-political spaces in the country. Religious schools (madrassas) were set up to groom and recruit jihadis. These madrassas emerged like mushrooms across Pakistan particularly in tribal areas, which served as real breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism.

The Constitution of country was injected with pro-Islamic clauses, imposing restrictions on women rights, curtailing their mobility to participate in social life. Burka culture was promoted and women were pushed inside the four walls of the house. Segregation on basis of gender was introduced at all levels in the name of Islam. Military dictator Gen.Zia-ul-Haq enacted discriminatory laws against women to please religious forces. Parallel Islamic courts were established by Saudizing the constitution. Under Evidence Act women's' evidence was declared half in comparison to a man. Burden of proof of rape was shifted on woman, while in case of unwanted pregnancy as result of rape, victim was used to subject to punishment by lashes, prison and stoning to death. Women movements and progressive forces though in their limited capacity reacted to these barbaric state measures but could not stop the ugly onslaught of extremist forces.

War on Terrorism

After 9/11 attacks and subsequent US war on terrorism, madrassas continued to grow and so were the influence of extremist forces. Though madrassas are only about 7 per cent of primary schools in Pakistan, their influence is amplified by the inadequacy of public education and the innate religiosity of the majority of the population. Right now there are more than 15,000 registered religious seminaries in the country catering over 1.5 million students and more than 55,000 teachers. This lot of religious proponents has spread in every nook and corner of the country, clamoring for Jihad against everything which, to them, is non-Islamic.

This unchecked growth of religious fundamentalism was not only result of the US war on terrorism or that of Pakistani intelligence agencies policies, but it was also the complete failure of civilian and military governments as well to solve any of the basic problems of the working class in Pakistan. Successive regimes remained unsuccessful to break the socio-political-economic grip of feudalism and absolute exploitive nature of Pakistani capitalists.

The on-going US “war on terror” has proved counter productive and further fueling religious fundamentalism in Pakistan. The heavy price of war against Taliban is being paid by civilian population. Thousands of innocent people particularly women and children have been killed in Drone attacks and operations by Pakistani army. About 2 million people had to flee from conflict zones of Swat valley in 2009. Women were the worst sufferers among internally displaced people (IDPs). By many in Pakistan it is seen as a war on Muslims, rather a war on terrorists. It is really difficult situation for left and progressive forces to convince the people that war on terrorism has purely long-term capitalistic agenda.

Thus the war on terrorism not only helped grow further extremism but also created non-conducive atmosphere for the progressive and women rights forces to work in. The agenda of women rights is relegated to large extent. Any body talks about women rights is branded as anti-Islamic and pro-west. The imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan provided the religious fanatics a political justification to promote their agenda of further religiosity of state and society.

Women as punching bag for extremists

The rapid rise of religious extremism has made the lives of women in Pakistan more miserable and oppressed. The few freedoms and democratic rights earlier available to women are being crushed by the extremist groups. They banned Girls’ education declaring it as “western conspiracy”. More than 300 girls’ schools were burnt, destroyed or closed down by local Taliban in Swat. Women have also been banned from markets and shops. A strict dress code was imposed. In North West Frontier province of Pakistan, a woman must be fully covered, from head to toe. Even girls of eight-nine years have to follow the dress code. Women are not allowed to take part in the political activities and are barred from voting in elections. Women have become an invisible community in the areas controlled by the fundamentalist religious groups. Even after flashing them out of these areas by military, situation for women remains same.

Women have become a punching bag for local militant groups, attempting to impose their own brand of Islam on them. They want to establish Taliban style government in Pakistan. They have been attacking and bombing the music shops and girls’ schools, scaring women to remain in their homes. They

banned female workers in the public and private sectors.

Women in Pakistan are already deprived of their basic democratic, political and economic rights. In many parts of the country, they have to confront centuries-old traditions and customs. Honor killing, social and economic discrimination, repression, domestic violence, discriminatory laws and sexual harassment are common issues being faced by women.

Musharraf regime made tall claims about legislation to protect women rights. The “Women’s Protection Bill” in reality helped little to improve conditions for working class and poor women. The new PPP government also made similar statements to improve women rights conditions but women have little hope with regard to materialization of these statements. Though it has recently introduced legislation against sexual harassment at work place, obviously a welcome step, but what needed is a constitutional package covering socio-economic and political rights of women, in order to mainstream them.

Extremism & Feudalism one against women

In patriarchal Pakistani society, women are mere a symbol of family honor and dignity. Female members of the family are considered as private property. Under the prevailing feudal culture women are confined to home to “save male honor and dignity”. It is strongly believed that if women are allowed out of the home to receive education, to do shopping or a job, the society will become “immoral and vulgar”. Even a common Muslim male, who does claim not to be a fundamentalist believe that outspoken and rights-demanding women are responsible for promoting immorality and vulgarity in society.

The extremists are bent upon imposing their code of ethics on women in the name of Islamic teachings. While feudalism implements its code of morality in the name of “tradition and custom”. Both are one to crush women rights and unfortunately they are in abundance in Pakistan. About 70 percent population of Pakistan lives in rural areas, where poor masses, particularly women have no control over lives. They do not have right to choice marriage. Girl education is strongly discouraged and women are told to tolerate oppressive norms in the name of morality. The nefarious nexus of feudalism and religious militancy is virtually driving their lives. Their influence is no more confined to the most backward areas of the country. It also gaining ground in the big cities and towns as well.

Though state introduced some laws to stop the practice of inhuman traditions and customs, but these legislations failed to stop the practice of anti-women traditions, particularly in rural areas. For instance a piece of legislation was introduced in 2005 which declared honor killing a heinous crime and the death penalty was imposed as punishment under this law. But this strict law and capital punishment failed to reduce the number of honor killings. There were more than 800 such cases reported in 2007. The number of unreported cases was many times higher. While customs such as ‘swara’ and ‘vani’ are banned by law, they continue to take place. The ‘swara’ and ‘vani’ are practiced in some parts of southern Punjab and NWFP.

These customs allow young girls to be offered to settle the dispute between rival families. For example, if a person is accused of murder, wants to settle a dispute with deceased family, they can offer their daughter or sister to ‘absolve’ themselves of the crime. Young girls, two or three years old are simply passed to the rival family. This custom is used to settle all sorts of disputes, without involving the country’s law or police. Other traditions include child marriage, exchanged marriage, Forced marriage and marriages to the Holy Quran also continue, despite

the existence of the laws and widespread social consensus against them.

The marriage to the Holy Quran is a custom that exists among the feudal families of Sindh. Under this custom, the male members of the family refuse to allow the female members to marry and declare that they have been married to the Quran. The main reason behind this custom is to safeguard part of the land which, otherwise, will go away with marriage of daughter or sister. In the presence of the laws, these barbaric and inhuman traditions and customs are still flourishing. The rising wave of fundamentalism, coupled with results of war on terrorism are making the lives of women more miserable, curbing their fundamental and universal rights.

What is really needed is a united class-based struggle against the rotten system of capitalism, which is directly encouraging religious extremism and feudalism to continue. Capitalism, coopting with feudalism and extremism can not create the conditions in which women can enjoy full rights, freedom and equality. The need for a democratic socialism, providing guarantees of equal rights and opportunities to women is the need of the hour. Women in Pakistan can only enjoy full liberty and freedom in a true socialist society, free from all exploitation, repression and discrimination.

The Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPM-M) and the Left in the Philippines

Pierre ROUSSET

The RPM-M held last August its second congress. Implanted above all in a zone where the "three peoples" of Mindanao cohabit, it occupies an original place in the Filipino Left - a radical Left where the question of unity remains unresolved.

The Revolutionary Workers' Party (Mindanao) - or RPM-M to use its Tagalog initials - held its congress in the Philippines, in a guerrilla camp, under the protection of a few dozen combatants. Not out of old-fashioned romanticism, but of necessity: its members are threatened by many armed groups. It is impossible under these conditions to meet like anyone else in a city, even in a discreet meeting-room; the danger is too great.

Nine years after its foundation in 2001, the RPM-M thus held its Second Congress, in the mountains of Mindanao, a big island of in the south of the Filipino archipelago. As its name indicates, it is indeed above all a "Mindanaoan" party: it acts in the most militarized region of the country, marked in particular by a very long conflict between the government and the militant organizations that are implanted in the Muslim populations, the "Moros". Rather than go back over the congress itself - for that I would refer readers to the above-mentioned report already published on this subject -, I would like to try to explain what makes the originality of the RPM-M within the Filipino left.

The rebellious offspring of the CPP

The first element of explanation is to be found in the contradictory heritage of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). This party, Maoist, was in the 1970s the only party capable of organizing resistance to the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos. Because of this it profoundly

marked a whole generation of activists. However it proved unable, at the beginning of the 1980s, to understand that the dictatorship would be overthrown by a new combination of majority mass mobilization and minority military rebellion, and not as a result of an offensive of the guerrilla forces, as envisaged by the leadership of the party.

The armament of a combatant of the RPMM/RPA who is protecting the delegates to the congress: a grenade launcher attached to an assault rifle.

The heritage of the CPP is deeply ambivalent. It incarnated a great revolutionary and militant tradition, but also very bureaucratic orientations and practices. It experienced terrible internal purges, fed by a paranoiac fear of infiltration. Whereas a full-scale revaluation of its references was becoming urgent, its leadership refused to organize a debate in the party by holding a congress, causing many people to leave the party and leading to several splits in the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, the party has embarked on an ultra-sectarian trajectory, going so far as to assassinate cadres of other movements on the left.

The majority of the present-day currents of the radical Left in the Philippines, including the RPM-M, come from the Communist Party. All of them have been confronted with the same challenge: to preserve the revolutionary traditions of the past while profoundly modifying the political and programmatic conceptions inherited from the CPP. Some of them have taken up this challenge with more success than others. The RPM-M is one of the organizations which have best succeeded.

A new pluralist Left

The second element of explanation lies in the form taken by the crisis of Filipino Maoism. Initially, a space emerged which allowed very minority components of the Filipino Marxist Left, non-Maoist, to establish their existence outside its ranks and to enlarge their audience. Ten years later, ruptures occurred within the CPP. However, in a clandestine party and in the absence of debate organized on a national level, the splits took place in a disorganized fashion. In addition to the individual departure of many members, various structures of the CPP declared their independence. This was the case of commissions (united front...) and secretariats (peasant...), but also of important territorial, regional organizations, in the North, the centre and the South of the archipelago.

The crisis of the CPP thus gave rise to several revolutionary organizations, often coming from a regional history. Since then there have been attempts at regroupment (some are underway at present), but still today, to understand what are the various components of the radical Left in the Philippines, you have to know where they come from: from what region? from what sector of activity?

The RPM-M comes from the regional organization that was responsible for the party's work in the centre of Mindanao (thus its name, at the time: Central Mindanao Region or CMR). This region broke en bloc, in 1993, with the leadership of the CPP, taking with it all the structures that were under its responsibility: the underground party, the guerrilla forces (which took the name of Revolutionary People's Army, RPA), mass work, legal organizations... The essential characteristic of the CMR was that it had the responsibility for the "link" between the "three peoples" of Mindanao: the "majority nationality" in the Philippines ("Christians" for short), the Moros (Muslims) and the Lumads (mountain tribes), the latter still constituting one of the principal social bases of the RPM-M, which is quite original.

A new generation of activists

The third element of explanation is the question of the transition between generations of activists. Even more than in many other countries, this constitutes a challenge in the Philippines. The “historic” cadres of the revolutionary Left fought under the Marcos dictatorship, overthrown in 1986, a situation that the majority of today’s activists never experienced. The congress of the RPM-M showed that this transition between generations was well underway: the majority of the members of the new national leadership are “young” (in the sense of “post-dictatorship”).

Between the period of the CPP and today, the current which constituted the RPM-M has undergone a profound political evolution. Internationalist and in search of an alternative to Maoism, it joined the Fourth International where it is playing a growing role. New sectors of activity have been developed, such as the electoral field. The conception of the armed struggle has changed. The “democratic question” has become a central preoccupation in the functioning of the party, in relations with the social movements and in the recognition of the right to self-determination of the tribal communities... However, the RPM-M cannot escape the constraints imposed by the situation in Mindanao. The peace talks with the government have not been fruitful. The party must always protect itself from many armed threats. So even though stress is laid on legal mass activity, there remains a clandestine party equipped with a guerrilla force with a “defensive” role.

An uncertain situation on the left

The fourth element of explanation relates to the difficulty of constituting a party on the level of the whole archipelago. Most of the Filipino organizations are mainly implanted in a limited number of provinces and social sectors, according to their origins, even if they have broadened their political networks. The RPM-M is conscious of the problem and impelled a regroupment with other regional structures coming from the CPP. But this fusion was a painful failure. It is now the turn of the Power of the Masses Party (PLM) to attempt a regroupment, in the region of Manila. The question of unity is posed and will be posed in the future with other formations of the radical Left, such as the Workers’ Party (PM), again in Manila, or the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP), originating in Central Luzon.

Akbayan - the Citizens’ Action Party -, a legal formation, has become one of the main components of the Filipino Left. The influence of currents which were never in the Communist Party, like Bisig, is dominant there, even though it also includes former members of the CPP. At the time of the recent presidential elections, Akbayan supported the candidature of “Noynoy” Aquino, who won. Some of its cadres today have semi-governmental responsibilities, while knowing that the new regime will not break with the elites. This “cohabitation” should in theory finish fairly quickly, once the experience has been gone through, with the risk, if not of opening a crisis within the party, of weakening the militant Left as a whole.

The radical Left of the Philippines remains the most important in South-east Asia, but it has lost the political initiative over the last twenty years – due to a considerable extent to the ultra-sectarian course of the CPP. No one organization can respond to this situation on its own and the question of unity remains sharply posed.

Simplified outline of the Filipino political left

The Filipino Left includes a large number of organizations and currents. To simplify things, let us regroup them in three “families”.

The Communist Party.

Although weakened, it remains the main underground organization, and the best armed. It embarked after the splits in 1993 on an ultra-sectarian course. It leads the New People’s Army (NPA), the National Democratic Front (NDF) and an important “bloc” of legal forces called “reaffirmist” (RA), because they “reaffirmed” the validity of the orientations laid down in 1968 and in the principal programmatic documents of the CPP. The “reaffirmists” have elected members of Parliament.

The “Rejectionists” (RJ).

These are the currents, within the CPP, who “rejected” the line of 1968 and demanded a re-evaluation of the party’s orientation. They split in 1993 and often combine an underground party and a legal electoral party (or front). In the region of the capital, the splits gave rise in particular to the Party of the Power of the Masses Party (PLM) and the Workers’ Party (PM); in the Visayas to the Revolutionary Workers’ Party-Philippines (RPM-P); in the central region of Mindanao to the Revolutionary Workers’ Party-Mindanao (RPM-M). The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP) comes from a later split in central Luzon. There exist other smaller organizations that we cannot mention here.

The “independent” Marxist and socialist Left.

Various Marxist currents never belonged to the Communist Party. They came together for the most part in 1985-1986 to give rise to the socialist organization Bisig. Today this organization plays a big role in the legal “citizens’ action” party Akbayan! some of whose components also come from the CPP. Akbayan! has elected members of Parliament.

A unitary framework brings together all the organizations apart from the CPP and the “reaffirmists”: Struggle of the Masses (LnM), but this coalition at present lacks dynamism.

Asian links

Today links are being strengthened between radical parties in Asia - and the network of Asian contacts from which the NPA in France benefits is broadening accordingly.

IIRE-Manila.

The experience of the very young International Institute of Research and Education in Manila is from this point of view very interesting. The parent institute opened its doors in 1982 in Amsterdam, organizing educational courses intended for activists from all continents. It has just seen the birth of two offspring in Asia: firstly in Manila (Philippines) and then, even more recently, in Islamabad (Pakistan).

Last August, IIRE-Manila held its second educational course. We lived, ate and met on the rather cramped premises of the Institute, even though it meant removing tables and chairs, then putting pouffes on the floor to make room for the 22 participants and lecturers (some of whom were not able to remain for the whole three weeks of political exchanges).

Even though some Europeans were there (Dutch and French),

most of those present came from eight countries of Asia, which were, in addition to the Philippines: Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Run by activists who are close to the Fourth International, IIRE-Manila is open to the different components of the Asian Left. The organizations present were of varied origins, including four Filipino currents who were invited to provide participants or lecturers.

IIRE-Manila thus contributes to the development of regional links between a growing number of parties. A relatively long educational course ensures a quality of exchange that short conferences do not permit. Thanks to such activities, some organizations which have known each other for a long time are starting to collaborate, more closely than in the past, in a common political project. The sessions also make it possible to invite other organizations with which relations have remained tenuous (this was the case for Indonesia) or even to invite organizations in countries where until very recently there was no contact (this was the case for Bangladesh).

Regional network of parties.

Thanks to an initiative taken on this occasion by the Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) - the only significant far-left organization in that country -, a new regional network of radical parties is gradually coming into existence. It benefits from the previous experience of the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference (APISC) which was organized for about ten years by the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Australia. When the DSP went into crisis and finally split, the Conference lost its dynamism. The new network is trying not to depend too much on the engagement of only one national organization, to provide a better guarantee that it will be lasting.

Visit to Paris.

At the beginning of October, the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) met in Brussels. Following the meeting, ten Asian delegates came to Paris to get a first-hand impression of the struggles for social rights that were taking place in France. They came from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. They were able to meet researchers, the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), the Lebreton Centre, the organization Right to Housing (DAL), Roms and Asian migrants, Ritimo (an information network specialising in international solidarity) and activists of Attac, the Emmaüs charity and the Solidaires trade union federation. The NPA also had the occasion to meet with them at length.

The exchanges were all the more interesting because the French "social climate" is attracting very lively interest in many countries and because we had never up till then met some of these organizations (Indonesia), or had not yet had on the opportunity to receive them in France (Malaysia, certain Filipinos). The NPA has today more or less regular contacts in a dozen Asian countries, sometimes with one political organization in a given country, sometimes with several.

Movement Struggles in Bangladesh

Danielle SABAI

Bangladesh, (East Bengal before its independence in 1971) is a country with a strong tradition of struggle. Struggles of workers and peasants have always been very widespread and combative there and the Left, although weak and divided, remains powerful, with considerable mass support.

The Bangladeshi Left was profoundly marked by the international division between the Maoist and Stalinist currents. The Communist Party of East Pakistan (Bangladesh since 1971) itself was divided between a pro-Moscow wing and a pro-Beijing wing. These two currents took radically opposed positions during the war of liberation in 1971. The pro-Moscow current, the Bangladeshi Communist party (CPB), supported the war of liberation and the establishment of socialism in Bangladesh by the parliamentary road. This orientation led it to move closer to the Awami League [1] which came to power after the war of liberation.

The majority of the pro-Beijing wing, following Mao's position of being opposed to the partition of Pakistan, did not support the war of liberation. It denounced it as an "Indo-Soviet machination" designed to favour Indian expansionism in the region and Soviet hegemony. The Maoist current paid a high price for going against the current in a war that was supported massively by the population. After 1971 it split into innumerable factions and was durably weakened.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a succession of military dictatorships accentuated the difficulties of development of revolutionary and radical parties, reinforcing tendencies towards division. Today the Bangladeshi Left is divided into two distinct blocs. Parties like the CPB and the Workers' Party have chosen to collaborate with the Awami League when it is in power [2].

Outside the circles that are close to the government, some left parties sought to overcome their divisions by launching in September 2007 a national coalition, the Democratic Left Alliance, with the objective of fighting for a democratic Bangladesh and for the emergence of a credible opposition to the two principal parties which alternate in government [3]. This alliance, which consists of ten parties of the radical Left, is clearly in opposition to the political parties of the Establishment but also in opposition to the left parties which take part in government. Discussions are underway to reinforce the alliance and widen it to other opposition forces [4]. Although the parties forming the coalition can have appreciably different ideas, they agree on a minimum program which enables them to intervene on the political scene on a national level.

On the ground, in spite of its divisions and its numerical weakness, the radical Bangladeshi Left remains strong. Thanks to a long tradition of struggle, it has won mass support among workers and peasants. Most of the political parties of the radical Left have built mass organizations which have made possible the development of spectacular struggles, with significant results. For example, the CPB-ML leads the Krishok and Kishani Sabha federations, two peasant organizations which represent Via Campesina in Bangladesh and have two million members. Several political parties, such as the Revolutionary Workers' Party and the Revolutionary Democratic Party, have built trade unions in the textile industry. The parties of the radical Left have

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also developed work and built mass organizations aimed at students and women.

We find those mass organisations and trade unions in many of the struggles which have developed in recent years and which have met with a certain echo at the international level. In 2010 several strike waves broke out in the textile industry. This sector accounts for 80 per cent of Bangladesh's exports and employs more than three million people. The workers, mainly women, work for starvation wages in medieval conditions for Western customers, who order large quantities of textiles at low prices. Between 19 and 23 June, 2010, 800,000 workers stopped work to demand a wage increase. In July and August, nearly 700 factories were affected by strike waves, always on the question of wages. In December, new mobilizations took place to obtain the payment of the wage increase that had been won in August and had still not been paid by November. Mobilizations are severely repressed by the riot police and it is not rare for workers to be killed during them. But in spite of the repression and the intimidation of trade-union activists, the struggles remain very strong.

Other struggles, just as significant, have developed, in particular on environmental questions. For example, in the district of Phulbari, the local communities have mobilized against a project for an opencast coal mine by a company based in England, GMC Resources plc, supported by pension funds and private banking. If this project materialised, 500,000 people could be displaced and the effect on the environment would be very damaging. The mobilization has been supported by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources and Ports (NCPOGMRP), a collective consisting of experts, researchers, political parties and individuals. This collective constitutes "a new form of socio-political movement with its working experience on national interest, especially against bad deals with the MNCs" [5]. The movement in Phulbari is unprecedented, both in the extent of the revolt and the consciousness that it has developed in the local communities. So far, it has succeeded in preventing the implementation of this project.

Peasant struggles are also particularly important. In Bangladesh, 80 per cent of the population works in the agricultural sector and 70 per cent of peasants are landless. The Krishok and Kishani Sabha federations have led big struggles for the peasants to have access to land, in particular by organizing land occupations. Since the 2000 decade, these organizations have also developed the mobilization of peasants on the questions of climate change and food sovereignty, two fundamental questions for Bangladesh, which is already affected by global warming.

Notes

[1] The Awami League was in the forefront of the struggle for the independence of Bangladesh. The principal pillars of the party's ideology are secularism, nationalism, socialism and democracy. In fact, the Awami League has evolved towards the centre and has actively implemented the liberal policies dictated by international organizations like the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank.

[2] Although the Awami League has again been in power since the 2009 elections, the CPB is now in opposition. It has been replaced by the Workers' Party, which has allied itself with the Awami League by participating in a 14-party coalition.

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the Awami League by participating in a 14-party coalition.

[4] The alliance is made up of: the Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD)- the Bangladesh Socialist Party – which is a split from the Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), one of the parties of the governing coalition; the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB-ML), a split from the Communist Party of Pakistan, formed in 1976; the Revolutionary Workers' Party, a split from the Workers' Party, the latter being at present part of the governing coalition; the Democratic Revolutionary Party, founded by the fusion between the Biplobi Oikya Front (which comes from the CPB-ML) and an underground party, the Shramajibi Mukti Andolon; the Ganosanghati Andolon, a current that comes from the Jatio Mukti Council, a split from the CPB-ML; the Jatiya Ganofront; the Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Mahbub), a faction of the BSD; the Bangladesher Samajtantrik Andolon; the Bangladesher Workers' Party (Pumargathito), another faction of the Workers' Party, which has recently joined the Democratic Left Alliance; and the Ganotantrik Majdur Party.

[5] 'Development', Capitalism, NGOs and People's Movements in Bangladesh: an Interview with Anu Muhammad