

Against ‘Reality’: The Maoists In South Asia

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In the essay titled *After the Orgy*, Jean Baudrillard the French post-modernist philosopher talks about the coming into circulation of revolutionary forces and ideas and their subsequent castration into another marketable social configuration or politically correct idea (Baudrillard, 1992). So lots of once-revolutionary ideas have today become part of daily parlance, completely punctured of not just their original force but also their meaning. Rather, the perverse recycling of these ideas into the melting pot of liberal discourse has gone on to provide it with an undeserved moral strength and legitimacy. Thus today, with everything from feminism and gay rights to post colonial discourse having gone on to serve the liberal multicultural consensus of global capital we see that we are living in a hegemonic world order where any attempt to go beyond and concretely envision another world is dismissed by invoking the spectre of 'totalitarianism': that any project for radical transformation of society will almost invariably lead us to totalitarianism.

In South Asia the Maoists in India and Nepal have been at the receiving end of such an attack, of their possible totalitarian ambitions. But such accusations are directed at the Maoists precisely because the Maoist intervention is not merely trying to intervene in reality: it is trying to redefine what counts as reality. They are trying to redefine the coordinates of current socio-economic and political matrix itself, even though they have achieved little success so far.¹ Based on Slavoj Zizek's Leninist-Lacanian analysis I will here try to make a few points that might help us in understanding Maoist politics which already has a chequered history in South Asia.

The Maoist project for socialism can be seen as the attempt to resist the subsumption of politics in the realm of ethics: it is based on a notion of the political wherein society is not seen as the agglomeration of disparate rational individuals making decisions towards their own ends and, when they are in communities, seeing whether or not it is compatible with individual rights.² It opposes the type of liberal thinking which takes politics as merely a manner of deciding what is good and what is not, and how the good can then be adjudicated in society.³ In other words it tries to show that a vision for a better society is not merely a question of abstract ethics, of what is the 'good life', but of concrete politics as well. In fact the Maoist project attempts to not just make the good life possible but tries to change the criteria which make a life good or bad. Questions of ethics therefore do not stand outside politics, outside class struggle.

While one may try not to foreclose production proper and really try to open it to radical restructuring, the point is this restructuring cannot come about without an accompanying political struggle. Mao's call for 'grasp revolution, promote production' should not be

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understood as only a reference to the socio-symbolic order but to the level of the production process itself (Hinton, 1972, 45-54). The subordination of an otherwise not so radically restructured production process to a political logic, no matter how revolutionary, leads to not just terror but also falls, in its internal dynamic, within the liberal treatment of the economy as autonomous from the political.⁴ Thus it is the relegation of the production process in the background and the privileging of the communicative and the symbolic or of the political bereft of the actual production process which, in its refusal to raise the question of production proper, leads to either the perpetuation of the present liberal consensus or, when a "revolutionary politics" is sought to be imposed, to revolutionary terror.

1. Rupturing Social Totality, Freeing the Real

The Real is more real than 'reality' itself, since it represents what is lost in occupying the symbolic world which characterises humans. Thus to capture the Real we must go beyond 'reality'. But to gain access to the Real we must go through a certain social process. As Lacan writes, "in order for there to be reality, adequate access to reality, in order for the sense of reality to be a reliable guide, in order for reality not to be what it is in psychosis, the Oedipus complex has to have been lived through" (Lacan, 1993, 198). But living through the Oedipus complex means that we irretrievably lose the mother's world, the maternal Thing. But at a more general level the symbolic entails more sacrifice. What is also sacrificed "is also our access to an unmediated level of need relating to all animal life. It is to the constitutivity of the symbolic in human life that we owe the fact that need becomes demand and instinct becomes drive and then desire. What is happening in all these transformations is the loss of a primordial level of the real" (Stavrakakis, 1999, 34).

But it is in order to capture the real which is lost that humans strive for. While it is impossible to completely restore the real, humans try to go beyond the given reality and reach for the Thing. Thus the authentically transgressive act uncovers the not-yet, that which is not positively given, for reality itself does not comprise what is merely positive but always includes that which is negative.⁵ But without the Real, that is, "deprived of the hard kernel of the Real, of that which *resists* simple integration into our common reality (symbolization, integration into our universe), reality itself turns into a malleable, indefinitely plastic texture which, precisely, loses the character of 'reality', and turns into a fantasmatic effect of discursive practices". (Zizek, 2001, 166)

The point of the revolutionary act is therefore to be able to trace out the Real so that it goes not only 'beyond the reality principle'; "rather it designates an intervention that *changes the very co-ordinates of the reality principle*" (Zizek, 2001, 166-67). The Maoist attempt for a revolutionary transformation of society has to be thus viewed as the attempt not only to go beyond the reality principle but to change the very co-ordinates of what is reality, of what is possible. The Maoist attempt, therefore, explores the realm of the Real which is the real of 'reality' itself.⁶

In principle, as we saw above, the Real can never be reached, for the process of symbolisation and signification knows no end, a characteristic of the human condition. But the Real that can be reached within the symbolic universe of each society at any particular point in time would however remain outside of our horizon unless the totality is broken, unless the non-identical is identified at every level of our lives, and steps taken to fulfil it even as newer never-ending non-identicals are posited (on the notion of the non-identical and on what is called identitarian thinking, see Adorno, 1973). The Real can be attained or at least

approached only if we are willing to rupture the given symbolic and non-symbolic orders. But this involves breaking ourselves free from long-held beliefs and from cultural self-understandings of what we or others are.⁷

However the totality formed by these beliefs and self-understandings can only be shattered by first understanding them as forming a totality and then challenging them in their totality. Such an understanding is however used to argue that efforts at a revolutionary overthrow of the state and a revolutionary change of society are doomed to failure and lead to what is called totalitarianism. But one can wonder that if a revolutionary transformation of existing society invariably leads to totalitarianism there might be something totalitarian about existing society itself. Belief in a revolutionary transformation of society understood as the attempt to approach the Real, can in itself be a challenge to the social totality -- that this challenge would necessarily and by itself lead to totalitarianism is not true. Often it is the refusal of the old society to die away, as reflected in the persistence of the old state structures and commodity-system whose representatives are not willing to give up their power and position so easily, that leads to totalitarianism which is however often the mirror reflection of existing society.

Ordinary people suffer not because of 'totalitarianism' but because of the refusal of the old order to leave power in favour of the people. The association of revolutionary projects with totalitarianism is part of the standard ideological arguments often used by liberals and leftists in South Asia to counter the 'menace' of Maoist revolutionary politics know as the Naxalite movement. Such writings try to show the futility of the Maoist-led communist project in South Asia which have been around since the Naxalite movement started in 1967. Of late, however, with the movement in Nepal gaining momentum and strength like never before in South Asia there are new writings, mostly journalistic, that are trying to counter the Maoist 'threat'. The liberal attack is often couched in terms that show the ordinary people in Nepal as victims of a violence from both sides, from the state army as well as from the Maoists. In the same breath, warnings are often given of the impending totalitarianism inherent in the Maoist project.⁸

The Maoist movement in Nepal and the Naxalite movement in India in general have all along aroused empathetic rejection by the liberal intelligentsia of this subcontinent: the Maoists have a point but you see they go too far and do not realise that they are headed towards totalitarianism, as in Soviet Union, China leading to gulags and purges.... In fact some would even argue that Maoists are well-intentioned and while earlier the movement was good it is now become no more than a band of thugs who harass people and extort money from them. The inherent contradiction in such position is however never looked at or even brought out. For it is perplexing to know that people who are so well-intentioned now and who have a point has, or will, after coming to power, turn into a dictator, massacring innocent millions, as though the option for doing so does not exist for these people today by participating in and winning power through elections and becoming an Advani or a Modi or even a Buddhadev!

Such a paradoxical stance towards the Maoists is of course widespread. Their goodness and their badness obviously do not fit: hence they are a strange breed who 'go too far'. But why they go too far is something left unaddressed or otherwise they are presented as enigmatic as some strange minority cult-like breed. No wonder they are often likened to the fascists: weren't Stalin and Hitler both fascists?

There is certainly a deep flaw in this argument, a flaw which does not take away the moment of truth which it carries but nevertheless a flaw which reveals the fundamental untruth of today's liberal democratic multicultural consensus of the celebration of difference. Today we are told to either remain within what Bourdieu called the economic logic of the market (Bourdieu, 1998, 227) and accept capitalist globalisation as almost a natural process or we are supposed to counter this by taking a revivalist stance of talking about a more happier past or forgone culturalist essence which defines our true character. But these two positions do not really clash: they often coexist and this is where the present cohabitation between capital and assertion of difference has to be located.⁹

Question then is what does the Maoist movement represent? Wherefore has it emerged and what does it offer us? Is it worth only a reminder for the state apparatus to spend more on welfare and development of the people so that the Maoist menace does not ultimately spread to destroy our beautiful lives?

2. Beyond the Given: The Fantastic

The Maoist project is fantastic and incredible. But it is so only because reality itself is fantastic.¹⁰ Reality however is smoke-screened by such order of signifiers that the signified is always displaced away from what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*. This object which is the object of desire is never however accessible directly, in itself: it is available to us only in and through the order of signifiers. It is precisely because the object can neither be known nor accessed without this symbolic mediation that there is always this tension accruing from the individual's encounter with the world outside which is not a neutral but a traumatic encounter.

Our encounter with the world is mediated by activity but since the object of our desire is not directly accessible, this activity is a traumatic, enigmatic encounter marked as it is by the metonymic sliding of desire. This traumatic encounter which expresses the lack in us cannot however be grasped in a deterministic manner since it eludes symbolisation. "In short", Zizek writes, "while there is something, some hard kernel, which resists symbolization, this kernel is not the immediate Real of instinctual or some other kind of causality, but the Real of an indigestible traumatic encounter, of an enigma that resists symbolization." (Zizek, 2001, 58) This is the horizon across which the assertion about Maoists going too far should be viewed.

In the Third World, as everywhere else, we are living in a world which has lost touch with the body, with the finite or earthly and everything has to be mythologised or devalued at the altars of capital to be able to make sense and endure. There is always a restriction on experiencing the body directly, the object of desire is not only always symbolised but here the point of symbolisation is to dilute its status as the object of desire to impress on you that through it you are just fulfilling a social function.¹¹ When however the elemental desire, the body asserts itself, for example when a woman does not want to get burnt alive (*sati*), then the order of signifiers crumbles down. Modernism tried to find the mythical in ordinary life. Postmodernism makes the mythical itself ordinary. In South Asia however nothing is supposed to be ordinary: it is all mythical. But it is not just the world of beliefs and practices that are mythical. Reality, material reality itself is mythical, fantastic, hence unbelievable.

Can one really believe that hundreds of people do get massacred at the drop of a hat in say Nigeria, that hundreds of people were massacred by the Indian state in Nellie in Assam, that a constitutionally mandated government in the world's largest democracy actively colludes in killing off thousands of people without particularly earning condemnation and wrath from the international community, that the 'holy', mythologised cow gels so well with the Toyotas and Hyundais in Indian roads, that such opulence, vulgar display of wealth and power exists side by side such abject poverty and impoverishment. This 'reality': it is all very fantastic, but it is not mysterious. Hence if it is not mysterious, if it does not belong to the incomprehensible domain of the inner spiritual world of the native, that is, if it can be cracked, then one must ask: what is the Real of this 'reality'?

Going by the old Marxist saying that it is in the process of trying to change reality that we gain knowledge about it we can say that fantastic reality can only be changed fantastically: an infinite judgement has to be delivered on the curious mix between capitalism, feudalism and colonialism which grips this subcontinent.¹² Nepal's Maoist leader Prachanda therefore refers to the "bureaucratic capitalist illegitimate offspring born in the semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries out of the wedlock of feudalism and imperialism"(Prachanda, 2000, 11). Therefore in the semi-colonial, semi-feudal societies the socio-economic and political order is a complex mix of the accumulated but unsublimated specificities of society that emerged in the course of the tortuous and convoluted history of these societies.

But all these residual, unsublimated and unresolved social conditions are not the healthy, positive indicators of a diversity of social forms and ways of living in contrast to the monoculture sought to be imposed by global capitalism. Instead they go to show that tensions and contradictions in South Asian society did not see their logical resolution and instead got merely displaced: the old never died, so the new was never fully born. As Kosambi writes, "at every stage, in almost every part of the country, a great deal of the superstructure survived, along with the productive and formal mechanism of several previous stages; there always remained some people who could and did cling stubbornly to the older mode" (Kosambi, 1999, 23). This meant "the survival within different social layers of many forms", a result not really of any live and let live policy or of some intrinsic harmonious nature of Indians to accommodate diversity and peaceful coexistence, but of the overwhelming presence of superstition. "Superstition reduced the need for violence" so that "the older cults and forms were not demolished by force but assimilated" (Kosambi, 1999, 23). Thus it has often been the case that in India it is not the class which is progressive and forward looking but the retrogressive class that wins: "the class that gains by preserving the older form wins, in which case there is stagnation, degeneracy, or atrophy".¹³

The piling up of unsublimated and unresolved social and mythical forms therefore provides a perverse and fantastic depth, liked that of an old abandoned well with foul water: this abyss of the past has been mobilised by market capitalism and the rightist forces to disastrous effect in South Asia. To this has to be counterposed the abyss of the future; the tremendous depth of the moribund abyss of the past has been kept alive for too long. Nothing short of a revolution can free the subcontinent of its hold. It demands that we be realist and demand the impossible: we must be fantastically real, that is, as real as reality itself. The infinitely abyssal hold of the pre-capitalist and the capitalist calls for an infinite judgement to the social and symbolic order. It is, according to Zizek, precisely such an infinite judgement that the Maoists guerillas of the Shining Path were rendering in Peru. But looks like we in South Asia have something to learn from these guerillas, one of the most despised in the liberal, free world. But is not referring approvingly to Shining Path one of

the most far-reaching monstrosities that one can think of.¹⁴ And as Zizek himself points out the Khmer Rouge is also supposed to be doing something like this in Cambodia.

To start with, while some of our South Asian Maoists fully support the Shining Path whom they rightfully call the Communist Party of Peru, they have a good amount of reservations about the Khmer Rouge. However the latter is not rejected lock stock and barrel by them. But that, even someone like Chomsky or other Western scholars never did. Rather Chomsky and others cite evidence of a considerable mass base for what the Pol Pot was doing and try to debunk some of the misinformation campaign launched by the American state against the regime.(see Chomsky and Herman, 1979, chapter 6) Below we will try to address the question of what leads revolutionary movements to degenerate into what is called totalitarianism. Of course we disagree with the liberal viewpoint on this matter. Further, Stalinism will be seen to for example suffer from some of the same handicaps that characterise liberal thinking.

3. Radical Ambiguity of Stalinism: Not Going Far Enough

Of course the standard ideological position against delivering an infinite judgement, any thorough going revolutionary transformation, always expresses itself one way or the other in the stated need to fight any possible "totalitarianian" turn which society might take. The horrors of Stalinism and the Cultural Revolution in China are often cited as adequate examples to argue against not any attempt at macro-level societal changes but specifically against 'revolution'.

Quite contrary to the liberal and even some Marxist critiques that argue that Stalinism went too far, I would here argue that the problem is not going too far in transforming the realm of the production relations. The point that I am trying to make here is that totalitarianism which follows a revolutionary period as in the Russia and in China, for example, are not the result of the over-privileging of production over interaction or communication, of public over private, of state over society, etc.

Instead, it will be argued, the gulags, purges and other excesses result from precisely the under-privileging of the sphere of production or production relations in the course of revolutionary changes brought about in society, in the context of a powerful state which derives its legitimacy in the name of Revolution. The revolution undone, because of the inability or lack of political will to restructure the relations of production, is then sought to be outwardly rectified but actually, in practice, hidden through overt and ostentatious acts in the name of Revolution. The ghost of the failed (or abandoned) revolution haunts the people through the arm of the state apparatus which presides over the production relations that are far from revolutionised and that start, slowly but surely, reproducing class and power relations, leading to the emergence and formation of a new bourgeoisie from within the prevailing 'socialist' relations of production.

What appears as the imposition of politics, of Revolution from above by the state, resulting in terror and purges, is actually a reflection of the economy and it reified logic getting the better of the political, of revolution, of in fact the incipient emergence of a new bourgeoisie from within. Stalinism failed to come to terms with this dichotomy between the political and the economic, since it failed in practice to restructure the relations of production in a revolutionary manner. In being unable to get beyond the political-economic dichotomy

Stalin ironically (for him or for the liberals?) carried on the hallowed blind spot of liberal thinking as well.¹⁵ A critique of Stalin has to be a critique of liberalism as well.

Starting from the nub of the liberal critique of Stalinism which compares it to fascism but in contrast to the liberals who would often keep Stalinism at par with fascism, Zizek goes *further* than that, giving a far deeper critique. He starts by arguing that "precisely as Marxists, we should have no fear in acknowledging that the purges under Stalinism were in a way more 'irrational' than Fascist violence..."(Zizek, 2001, 127-128) But what does this indicate about the nature of Stalinism? It indicates that "paradoxically, this very excess is an unmistakable sign that Stalinism, in contrast to Fascism, was the case of a perverted *authentic* revolution".(Zizek, 2001, 128) This points "to the fact that at the origins of the regime there was an 'authentic' revolutionary project: incessant purges were necessary not only to erase the traces of the regime's own origins, but also as a kind of 'return of the repressed', a reminder of the radical negativity at the heart of the regime"(Zizek, 2001, 128).

What Zizek is trying to show however captures the paradox of Leninism itself. The radical negativity contained in the Leninist attempt to transform the situation rather than show complicity in it might therefore take a turn in which this revolutionary authenticity in the heart of the state might get displaced into the perpetuation of terror: a mere show of radical negativity in terms of purges and terror. Thus the inability to carry forward the revolutionary kernel, its entrapment in the attempts to cling on to and fabricate a revolutionary socio-symbolic order without any concrete steps towards that end, that is at the level of production relations, leads to the ultimate perversion of the revolutionary objectives of the new dispensation.

The Maoist understanding was that Stalin failed to apply dialectics to the concrete situation.¹⁶ That is, Stalin failed to carry forward the revolution and the class struggle and hence ended up perversely displacing the radical negativity from which the regime derived its very legitimacy into terror. Thus the contradiction inherent in the consolidation of a state power which is itself based on radical negativity into something bureaucratized and ossified meant that this basis of legitimacy of the regime had to be re-enacted. As Zizek writes, "This inherent tension between the stability of the rule of the new *nomenklatura* and the perverted 'return of the repressed' in the guise of repeated purges of the ranks of the *nomenklatura* is at the very heart of the Stalinist phenomenon: purges are the very form in which the betrayed revolutionary heritage survives and haunts the regime"(Zizek, 2001, 129). The purges have to be therefore understood not as the continuation of the revolutionary legacy but as the consequence of the failure to continue it.

Zizek shows the falsity of the liberal-humanist argument which tries to show Stalinists as 'pure', ruthless and self-obliterating Communists. He argues that, "on the contrary, the problem with the Stalinist Communists was that they were *not* 'pure' enough and got caught up in the *perverse* economy of duty: 'I know that this is heavy and can be painful, but what can I do? This is my duty...'" (Zizek, 2001, 111). This meant that the Stalinists had a completely undialectical sense of historical duty and need to be unwavering, thereby reducing oneself and by extension the entire party to a "pure instrument of the big Other's Will"(Zizek, 2001, 112). Herein lies the key burial of the Leninist insight of transforming the situation through revolutionary acts and the inauguration of the Stalinist *jouissance*. The *jouissance* lies in the subject "subjectively assuming this 'objective necessity' - by deriving *enjoyment* from what is imposed on him"(Zizek, 2001, 112).

The crux of the problem then really lay in the imposition of a political logic which was divorced from the production conditions that were not sufficiently restructured to go with the politics. Without taking into account the actual existence of classes and the persistence of the material conditions for the re-emergence of dominant or ruling classes from within 'socialism', the attempt to impose radical negativity only at the level of the political leads to not just the undoing of the revolution itself but to terror. It is of course agreed that collective mass action in order to change the social relations of production cannot happen without an accompanying political mobilisation. But the inability to identify the struggle in the all-important field of production relations means doing exactly what is needed to scuttle the revolution: not going too far.

It was in this sense that Mao attacked Stalin for not going too far: the very opposite of the liberal critique which accuses Stalin of going too far. In not going too far in the proper realm of production, and advancing the political logic along with it, in tandem with the changes in the social relations of production, Stalin lost the support of the overwhelming majority of the people leading thereby to terror and avoidable killings.

Herein in this context we have to take account of Mao's thesis or call to 'grasp revolution, promote production'.¹⁷ By emphasising on revolution this Maoist insight changes the very coordinates of the Stalinist socialist project, characterised as it was by the productivist logic of achieving socialism through the development of the productive forces. For Mao, the revolutionisation of the social relations of production is the crucible of socialism. The need for revolutionisation of the relations of production is often emphasised by Maoists in their emphasis on class struggle under socialism and the possibility of emergence of a bourgeoisie from *within* the so-called socialist society.¹⁸ The revolutionary restructuring of production meant that there was no imposition of the political logic from above, abstractly, but was the result of the unprecedented mass revolutionary participation by millions of enthused people fired by revolutionary zeal in transforming the relations of production.

However the revolutionisation of the relations of production could not for long go along with the overemphasis on increasing production in China, of catching up with the advanced capitalist countries.¹⁹ Thus the revolutionary restructuring of production itself was carried out under Mao in China through genuine mobilisation of the masses who overwhelmingly asserted their agency in the process; however this revolutionisation of the relations of production was, to a considerable degree, compromised by the emphasis on raising the production levels a bit too high and faster in order to catch up with the advanced capitalist countries' production levels.

Maybe it was this compromise which led Mao to give the call to 'grasp revolution, *promote production*' (italics mine). This formulation which might seem to be no more than a mere simplistic and crude slogan, was in fact a huge theoretical leap forward in comparison to Stalin's thinking which over-emphasised on the development of the productive forces. But practical considerations and the problems related to building 'socialism in one country' meant that the revolutionisation of the relations of production carried out by Mao also got harnessed, to a large extent, for achieving treacherously high production targets. This tendency to increase production levels was further reinforced by strategic geo-political reasons of developing an industrial base in order to counter a hostile, imperialist world order given the Soviet Unions' capitulation on the road to capitalism and hostility to China by the 1960s.²⁰

It would, however, be too simplistic to say, look even Mao suffered from the productivist-modernist logic of instrumental reason. Rather it is the opposite which holds true: the field of production and labour relations, at the end of the day, got far less attention than it deserved so that what could not be but should have been done through the restructuring of production relations was sought to be done through the imposition of a political logic. But perhaps more than anyone else it was Mao himself who could clearly see this in his theoretical formulations.

In their critiques of Stalin's over emphasis on the development of productive forces, Mao and the Shanghai School pointed out that mere abolition of the private ownership does not lead to socialism and that production relations should address the question of not just ownership but of control as well.²¹ This raises questions of mutual relations within production and the system of distribution of the social product.(Delman, 1981, 5) Thus even if ownership is legally collective, control and leadership over production and its fruits might in practice be in the hands of a bourgeoisie in disguise. Thus Mao had, by the early 1970s, the insight to consider "leadership-power – which belongs to the category of mutual relations within production – as being a constituent element of the ownership system". (Delman, 1981, 9) Thus revolution is a question of really changing the relations of production at all levels and all dimensions and not just the level of ownership; for, after all, all these dimensions and levels however comprise a totality.

Failure to thus restructure production relations in such a revolutionary manner would then lead to the imposition of a political logic from above given the presence of a state apparatus whose very *raison d'être* is the revolution itself. Presiding over production relations that spontaneously generate a new surplus-extracting class, a new bourgeoisie, the 'revolutionary' state's attempts to usher in a classless society might then lead to violence and repression. It is this imposition of the political logic from above in order to make revolution which backfires, and worse, leads the state apparatus to play an increasingly repressive role.

This political logic does not, however, take an innocent form but comes in the compulsive form of "historical necessity", in the name of the Revolution leading to measures that seek to impose Revolution from above. This leads to widespread terror and the dilution of the Leninist insight to rupture the given and transform the situation through a revolutionary act or event. Failure to do that, to break from this "historical necessity", and keep alive the proletarian subject, leads to what Zizek calls the Stalinist *jouissance*, whereby the proletariat is supposed to be the mere foil for the onward march of History.

4. Conclusion

In precisely what manner the Maoists in Nepal would understand the need to "grasp revolution, promote production" is yet to be seen.²² Mao was clear that the task of restructuring production, that is the actual revolutionary process, is a long-drawn out process which might take generations. In the meantime however, you have a *Communist* Party in power, while even a properly socialist production system might not be in place. As preliminary Maoist economics tells us, the law of value not only prevails under socialism but, further, "by letting the law of value regulate production the bourgeoisie can subordinate the production of use-values to the production of values".(*People's War*, 1999, 36)

At the most fundamental level, the question comes down to whether the amount of labour time spent on social production and where and how it is spent, is determined by reified structures, autonomous of the democratic self-control by the workers, or whether it is decided by the workers themselves through workers' committees or councils according to some overall rational plan for society as a whole. The 'economy' which is the realm of abstract labour, which monopolises over society's concrete labour power and therefore decides where and how this labour time -- society's collective energy and its overall transformative capacities -- is to be allocated: this very mechanism reifying society's transformative potential into something extra-social and reified has to go. The point is therefore to have a society where, as Marx wrote, "*use* will no longer be determined by the *minimum time* of production; but the *time* of production devoted to an article will be *determined* by the degree of its *social utility*". (Marx in Meszaros, 2001, 746) This would of course require that production relations be organised by the self-activity of the associated producers, which is of course Marx's vision of a communist society.

Such self-activity by the workers is however not achieved, as the late Mao showed us, solely through the state or collective ownership of the means of production; questions of the leadership and control of the means of production and the actual production process are as important, as the possible site of the emergence of a new bourgeoisie from within the prevailing production relations. Thus it is in the field of production where a radical restructuring has to take place in order to carry out a genuine revolutionary change; this is required in order to change not just reality but its very coordinates.

Failure to do so, that is failure to carry out the revolution, leads to a situation where the 'revolution' is then carried out in the name of Revolution, in the name of History, as we saw above. This closure of the revolutionary process, of any possible revolutionary act, leads to the refusal to make any *new* rupture in the society, so that the admittedly difficult task of restructuring the production relations in all its dimensions is soon given up. What remains, as we saw above, is only the original claim to revolution which the existing regime swears by and derives legitimacy from. But it is precisely in the name of advancing this 'revolution' that all the killings and murders take place.

Thus totalitarianism is not the consequence of the logic of emphasising too much on the production process and treating people as though they are no more than public automatons for hard labour, always made to socialise in utter denial of their private lives and needs -- the consequence of the denial of negative liberty, as liberals like Isaiah Berlin would argue. It is rather just the opposite: totalitarianism is the consequence of not putting adequate emphasis on the production process and relations as the fulcrum-field of the revolution and instead trying to impose revolution from without (not necessarily from above). The problem is not positive liberty, too much of Party intervention in people's lives, but intervention in the wrong places and too little of freedom to the people to carry out the revolution at the level of the production relations.

The Real of totalitarianism itself is then the reification of the economic processes and production relations that take over the most comprehensive attempts at revolutionary change and generate from within a dominant class that then rules in the name of either the revolution or universal human rights: the classic example of this is of course capitalism which is itself a totalitarian society and transmits its seeds to any post-capitalist society. That's why Mao once commented that the task of achieving socialism might take

generations, that class struggle is an ongoing process even after the abolition of private property in the means of production.

To what extent the Maoists in Nepal will ultimately succeed to take account of this one cannot say for sure: but from all indications they are perhaps willing to make a serious attempt and are open to learn from past experiences.

Notes

¹ In the current context in Nepal we can see how the Maoist intervention sort of dislocates the petty bourgeois and royalist politics of the mainstream parliamentary parties. In the aftermath of the recent royalist coup, which affected all opportunist parties that had reposed faith on the 'democracy' in place in Nepal in spite of Maoist protestations about the weak and pro-royalist tilt of this democracy, Baburam Bhattarai's call upon otherwise democratic parties which says, "you accept republicanism, we will accept multipartism" has the power to redefine the coordinates of the current political choices and prevailing situation. In any case, this statement suddenly exposes the *real* character of the mainstream parties vying for constitutional power so much so that in the process they even make compromises with the monarchy. In Lacanian terms this rupturous *act* exposes the Real and the underlying grid of the compromises and collaboration of parliamentary parties with the royalists (Bhattarai, 2002, 4610).

² Zizek, for one, is against the reduction of politics to ethics. He argues for an intervention, for an act in the 'Lacanian sense' where "the distance between the ethical and the political collapses" (Zizek, 2001, p. 157). See also Badiou, 2001.

³ As Kymlicka writes, liberal theory assumes that we have an "essential interest in leading a life that is good". But since people have different interests and different beliefs about these interests, "government treats people as equals, with equal concern and respect, by providing for each individual the liberties and resources needed to examine and act on these beliefs. This requirement forms the basis of contemporary liberal theories of justice" (Kymlicka, 1991, 13).

⁴ Critiquing the treatment of the economy as autonomous of the political, Wood writes that "the social relations in which this economic mechanism is embedded – which indeed constitute it – are treated as somehow external. At best, a spatially separate political power may *intervene* in the economy, but the economy itself is evacuated of social content and depoliticized" (Wood, 1995, 21).

⁵ It is this negativity in reality which creates the conditions and possibilities for freedom. Zizek writes, that the "only way to account for the status of freedom is to assert *the ontological incompleteness of 'reality' itself*: there is 'reality' only in so far as there is an ontological gap, a crack, at its very heart" (op. cit. pp. 174-5). The Maoist act therefore not only challenges reality but the very manner of conceptualising it: it is an act of freedom in so far as it explores the gap, the not-yet which however has a basis in our own symbolic positing.

⁶ See also on this Zizek's "Repeating Lenin" at

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ot/zizek1.htm>

⁷ When writers like Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee are talking about taking our "innocence" or "inner spiritual domain" into account in projecting a future for India, they forget Lacan's point about the human striving for *jouissance*, that culture and the order of "signifier is cause of *jouissance*". In failing to recognise that it is in our striving for a pre-symbolic Real, for something which is pre-cultural that culture itself has to be understood, they end up attributing a culturalist (indigenist?) essence to India and hence inaugurate cultural particularism both for the West and for India, completely ignoring the rein of abstraction imposed by capital. For, even the "inner domain of cultural identity from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out" was a means by which indigenous elites could, one, maintain their hegemony over the people (subalterns?) to which they

not only belonged but which they thought owed allegiance to them and, two, increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the colonial power. In order to really grasp the internal dynamics that brought about the distinction between the outer material and inner spiritual domain we must however be able to ground it in the manner in which production was being restructured during the colonial period. Nandy's and Chatterjee's basic approach is of a piece with the denial to talk of the realm of production proper and always refer to the cultural or the level of the signifier thereby arriving at not just civilisational traits but actually civilisational essences of usually the West versus the non-West, as though the categories of the West and the non-West have fallen from the sky. The point is not that they do not exist in the minds of social actors. Of course they do. The point is to show how they came to be what they are, not take them as points of departure, as self-explanatory. Thus, there is in reality no strict opposition between the outer material domain and inner spiritual domain to which Chatterjee refers. They are in so many ways part of the same process: it is their conjunction which defined the process of colonial domination in India. Looked at this way, the radicality and disruptive potential of Bhagat Singh and now the Naxalites' project is to be found in their questioning of this conjunction and tacit sharing between the native elites and the imperialists: imperialism cannot be effectively challenged without destroying its niches in the inner pre- and proto-modern, structures of oppression and domination. Refer Chatterjee, 1994, and Nandy, 1988.

⁸ See for example the articles and reports on the Maoists in the magazine *Himal South Asia* published from Kathmandu.

⁹ See Badiou's critique of Deleuze's fetishizing of difference in Badiou, 2000.

¹⁰ Cf. "Contemporary India is a fantastic mosaic of fishing boats and trawlers, of cowherds and milk-processing plants, of paddy fields and rubber estates, of village blacksmiths and steel mills, of handlooms and nuclear reactors" (Gadgil and Guha, 1).

¹¹ In the 'post-modern' societies, in contrast, the body and desire are supposed to provide the criteria for personal preferences and choices. Richard Sennett writes, "part of the modern technology of the self consists in using bodily desire to measure whether or not a person is being truthful... Subjectivity has become yoked to sexuality: The truth of subjective self-consciousness is conceived in terms of measured bodily stimulation" (Dworkin, Miller and Sennett (Eds), 1982, 6).

¹² Zizek says that the Sendero Luminoso and the Khmer Rouge were trying to start from Ground Zero, the 'infinite judgement' they were trying to render on the global capitalist system in contrast to the 'inherent negation' of say Islamic fundamentalism (See Zizek, 993)

¹³ Let it be noted here that Kosambi provides a solid materialist interpretation of the so-called peaceful nature of Indians (read Hindus) in the face of the supposed barbarity of the foreign invaders. For Kosambi the causes for Indian society's degeneracy lies not in foreign invasions but in its internal structural specificity or weakness which in turn facilitated the success of those invasions: "The early maturity and peculiar helplessness of Indian society against later invasions bears testimony to this general scheme" (Kosambi, 1999, 12). It is such an understanding which can help us make sense of and contextualise India being a wounded civilisation or what are supposed to be Hindu traits of quietism and withdrawal from the world, of karma. See Naipaul, 1979.

¹⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa after a fact finding tour to the Shining Path 'affected' areas in Peru tries to give an idea of the 'demented radicalism' of the guerillas when he casually writes, "The models of socialism that they support are Stalin's Russia, the Cultural Revolution of the 'gang of four', and Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia". For Llosa then 'true radicalism' lies in defending "the achievements of democracy – freedom of the press, elections, representative institutions". It is true therefore that the Maoists intend to end the spell such a 'true radicalism' (Llosa, 1996, 182 & 199)

¹⁵ One such blind spot is the apolitical treatment of the economy, as referred above. See Wood, 1995

¹⁶ "In his way of thinking, Stalin departed from dialectical materialism and fell into metaphysics and subjectivism on certain questions and consequently he was sometimes divorced from reality and from the masses" ("On the Question of Stalin", *Second Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU* by the Editorial Department of *Renmin Ribao* and *Hongqi*, September 13, 1963. Reprinted in *The Great Debate*, 1994, 91).

¹⁷ Shining Path guerrillas of the Communist Part of Peru explicitly uphold this slogan of Mao. See "On Marxism-Leninism-Maoism", *Document from the PCP First Party Congress*, Released early 1988 posted at <http://www.csrp.org/pcp-mlm.htm>.

¹⁸ One document of the Nepal Maoists argues that Mao sought "to elevate the Marxist-Leninist principles regarding the class struggle in a socialist society to a new height in order to prevent the restoration of capitalism" (*A World To Win*, London, no. 27, 2001, p. 52).

¹⁹ Mao, for example, would repeatedly emphasise on catching up with and even surpass the advanced capitalist countries in steel production.

²⁰ Look at the debate between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties on the questions of the USSR's so called re-evaluation of Stalin and its subsequent slide towards a policy of "peaceful co-existence" with the capitalist-imperialist bloc. See *The Great Debate*.

²¹ The Shanghai School refers to the group of scholars active along with Mao during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s around Shanghai and who had new insights into the question of class struggle under socialism. Refer Christensen and Delman, 1981

²² Indian Maoist groups like the CPIML (Peoples War) approvingly refer to Mao's concept of 'grasp revolution and promote production' (*People's War*, Jan-Jun 1999, 36).

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