

Exercise In Escapism

In hard times communists are left looking, sometimes rather desperately, for shelter. In post-election India as the official communists see it, shell is self-criticism, offering protection from the brewing storms in the ranks and allowing leaders to have breathing space. Self-criticism in communist culture as it is in India's troubled communist tradition, may well be described as self-deception. It's a nice device to pacify dissidents and subdue rebels in a regimented political establishment like CPM. What they call democratic centralism is simply ludicrous, if not farcical. The Bengal state leadership of CPM after a hectic review session over the poll debacle identified suicidal industrialisation policy, withdrawal of support to Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government over the Indo-US nuke deal and allowing Congress to team up with the main opposition at state level—Trinamul Congress—as the main reasons for the crushing defeat in an authoritarian regime where most people live under 'red' surveillance, and everyone is afraid to talk openly about this state of affairs.

Not quite unexpectedly, the state leadership passed the buck, at least on two counts, on the central leadership. At no point of time during the tussle over the nuke deal with the Congress, the state leaders of CPM looked eager to exhibit enthusiasm about the party's anti-American—or what they call anti-imperialist stance by way of vocally opposing the atomic agreement. In truth they were more interested in having a nuclear reactor in Haripur of coastal Midnapore and the controversial deal was in the main, about nuclear energy business. Also, maintaining good relations with the Congress was essential to run the state show and they tried their best to block the emerging alliance between Congress and Trinamul Congress.

As for suicidal industrialisation policy they didn't elaborate how the much talked about long march became a funeral procession. Not much was heard about forcible acquisition of fertile land for industrial purposes. Nor did they repent over what they did by unleashing terror on unwilling peasants in rural Bengal. It was fascism, rather red fascism—plain and simple. Not that harmless self-criticism would force them to shed arrogance and abandon notorious anti-people industrialisation drive. This exercise in escapism is aimed at buying time and burying the voter's anger as the 2011 assembly poll may witness the total eclipse of the left in this part of the globe. Also, their immediate concern is how to face elections in several municipalities in a month or so. After all, social democrats, as they are, are so election-oriented that their cadres always remain busy round the year to execute electioneering programmes for local bodies or assembly or parliament. They have no time to organise masses over popular issues. Nor can they successfully address the issue of providing a responsible and efficient governance. It's a tragedy that in rural Bengal, people are getting polarised on party lines in observing religious and traditional village festivals. The net result : people are being taxed doubly.

But it is not that easy to grill the central leadership for the poll disaster in Bengal and Kerala. Crisis managers know how to transform bad things into good. Many of their central leaders feel the Congress was forced, because of their

sustained pressure, to take some populist measures which in the end translated into votes—enabling the Gandhians to secure a remarkable victory in the recently concluded parliamentary poll. It was not their fault, rather the Congress won by default. The reverse was true. They enjoy power and they have capacity to shape 'reality' in their image.

Tragically, the left has no opposition on left, far left to be precise. The naxalities who are not in violent campaign anymore still think official left, particularly CPM, is a lesser evil which it is not. As a result their anti-establishment voices are so feeble that they do not attract ordinary people.

The idea of making the party open to public criticisms for rectification as they have decided at the all important self-criticism meet, sounds funny. A dictatorial party has no patience to hear from the masses, they are so accustomed with the top-down approach that they don't think they have anything to hear from the masses. Nor can they seriously implement the maoist dictum of 'from the masses to the masses' as they believe in dictatorship, rather party dictatorship. If they are lying low while presenting a mild face at the moment, it is because the possibility of replacement of this dictatorship by another one in the next assembly poll is very much real. They think they have divine right to lead the faceless and nameless multitudes who have no right other than exercising adult franchise at a regular interval.□