

In Search of a 'Line'

AS PEOPLE ARE FED UP WITH mainstream politicians and the innumerable parties they represent, any independent initiative for mass mobilising at the grassroots level is watched with great interest among different segments of civic society. People's movements developing somewhat spontaneously as a response to massive dislocation in social equilibrium in rural India, are searching for 'alternative politics' to spread the message across the country that there is an alternative. All is not over. Whether this alternative politics can be defined within the existing legal framework is altogether a different question. Confronted with a suffocating situation as it is today—maybe it is the second emergency without official proclamation of emergency—the very idea of alternative politics coupled with alternative economic model of development, has been a source of debate among liberals, democrats and political individuals without any party affiliation, for quite some time. And expectedly the 7th bi-annual conference of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) held in June this year in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, evoked a lot of enthusiasm among those who still think a revolutionary change is possible.

NAPM debated "alternative politics" without really drawing any firm conclusion. They posed the question whether their opposition, their struggle were sufficient to create an alternative political space or an alternative social system. Finally their debate culminated in discussion of whether to participate in election or not. They are now caught in dilemma as to how to develop mass initiatives without participation in election or how to straightaway contest election without jeopardising mass initiatives. If they want to influence politics through electoral participation they in all likelihood, would go the official left way of compromising with the status quo-ists. And if they solely depend on localised mass initiatives to address people's problems, they could hardly break the regional barrier.

Without a general line of approach to the emerging crisis and without a specific goal to reach through mass movements developing out of sheer desperation, people cannot really recover what they have been so longing for—change.

For one thing NAPM stressed the need for value-based politics. True, only value-based politics can demarcate a boundary with established mainstream politics which is out and out corrupt and incapable of making any revolutionary swing.

What appears from the NAPM discourses is that they have a massline but they are still in search of an all embracing political line that can really make the idea of "alternative politics" convincing. □□