

FIEFDOM OF ILLUSION

Voters are all politicians—when they work, gossip, buy, pay taxes and vote. Political issues are active in their lives everyday and yet they are not politicians in real life. They talk about political change and possibility of changed power equation and yet they could not seriously influence power-game. Given the undeniable importance of politics, it is simply intriguing, if not frustrating, how mainstream reporters, expert commentators, and other insider types usually sell it in a jargon that can leave even the most intelligent lay person mystified and misguided. They can confuse ordinary voters in myriad ways and they are precisely doing that to save the status quo. Political parties, ruling and opposition, that continually battle for political space through ballot hardly offer a clear vision to the reality. It's not in their best interest. Foes become friends overnight though objective conditions remain unchanged. The marriage of convenience is nowhere so naked as in electoral calculus.

If communists, more precisely official communists are in power in two or three states today it is because they fought against anti-people, rather anti-poor and pro-rich, policies of Congress in the yester years. Things are pole apart today. The situation has reached such a stage that communists cannot think of survival without electoral support of the Congress party, albeit the reformed Gandhians as they are in Sonia Gandhi's Congress, find it difficult to retain their traditional vote banks.

For all practical purposes the systematic decline of the social-democratic left, both nationally and internationally, presents a panicky scenario for the major communist party—the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Having lost parliamentary polls in West Bengal, the ruling CPM is literally on the backfoot on every front despite its attempts to dub the setback as an aberration which it is not. In all probability they are going to lose power after the 2011 assembly election to their arch rival—Trinamul Congress, an offshoot from the Congress Party. Winds of change are blowing rather viciously producing violence and counter-violence, all the time. If they lose power in this most troubled state—they are already talking in multiple voices with a defeatist mentality—they might face the emergency terror of Indira days. So, panic has gripped the entire communist establishment. Ironically, given the stranglehold of the red party on business and politics, many in the toiling class are drawn to the Trinamul Congress and its anti-Government stance because they see the state Government and the red party that runs it as the oppressor. As the rightists are growing at the expense of the left, they in all fairness, are asking the very Right to save their skin-political and ideological distinctiveness doesn't matter. What matters is 3-decade-old privileged status. Money talks. And if there is no money their manipulative politics will vanish in the thin air.

Faced with the prospects of losing the only money spinning fiefdom—West Bengal, they are now asking Congress supporters to vote for the left, in an apparent bid to break the Trinamul Congress-Congress alliance which now looks formidable in the electoral field, particularly after their clean sweep in the recently-held bypolls in the state. And the appeal came from the veteran parliamentarian Jyoti Basu who was pressed into service despite his advanced and ill health, possibly in view of grossly tarnished image of present leaders who cut sorry figures these days.

Once bitten, twice shy CPM has long been trying to woo Congress, particularly in the context of Bengal polarisation despite their withdrawal of support to the first Congress-led UPA Government on the Indo-US nuclear deal. Very recently they supported the Congress to form the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Board with the clear message that they are their natural ally, not the Trinamul. They have no option but to play the second fiddle to the Congress because something is better than nothing.

Politically Congress-Communist United Front strategy cannot take off unless there is a common enemy. Given the changed power equation at the centre, it is unlikely for the Congress to treat Trinamul as a common enemy in the days to come.

Against the backdrop of vote-begging from Congress loyalists, the idea of Congress-Communist merger may have a good number of takers. As they have no agenda of revolution—basic change in social and economic relations—they can always justify their political exigency by way of theorising the extra-ordinary situation in which they are being compelled to live, thanks to “maoist menace”. CPM talks about saving an “ideal”, and what's incredible is that it's not clear whether Congress can save that “ideal”. □□□