

Everything But Leftism

The world around the poor and marginalised is virtually exploding and yet no political party has any faith in an action plan aimed at creating an alternative. One may call it political dysfunction or it may be a deliberate strategy of inaction on the part of the left. Left parties have so far failed to exploit people's growing anxiety over the perils of runaway 'development'. Nor are they serious about exploring the possibility of a truly workable alternative acceptable to broad masses. For good reason or bad Leftism these days is measured only in terms of electoral defeat or win. Where the left holds power as in Bengal and Kerala, it is under attack. Where it is not in power it is divided and listless. The main problem for the official left is how to define leftism. In Europe even British Labour Party is regarded as left though in India it simply sounds ludicrous. Casteist outfits led by Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP are viewed as socialist because these people had once Lohiaite connection. In a situation of agonising economic crisis, mounting unemployment and ever declining living standards, ordinary people look passive, if not reluctant in seeking electoral solutions. Just when one might think unprecedented attack on the toilers would breathe new life into the Indian left, it's looking increasingly fragmented and tired. Maoists are not growing in vacuum—objectively it is an intolerable situation people are being forced to live in.

Those who are allowed to exercise their adult franchise, are unmistakably abandoning the so-called mainstream parties, not excluding the rightist parties, while fuelling an even more striking rise on the regional right than there has been on the regional left. Desperation, Destitution, Development Mirage, Casteist and Ethnic Discrimination, sub-nationalisms—all stand in the way of advancing people's initiative and consciousness. The dangers of untamed markets and unchecked globalisation are there for all to see. And leftists would like to downplay those dangers. In truth they would like to distance themselves from leftism under one pretext or another. For decades socialists have been distancing themselves from socialism, even of their kind and communists from communism.

Barring the far left, no traditional left establishment in India advocates a radical redistribution of wealth and power. 'Relief socialism' is all that they can think of despite their dwindling electoral fortunes. For one thing the politics of relief has so far failed to produce encouraging trends in voter turnout. After all landslide victory for a political party doesn't mean windfall gains for voters.

Left has been in the parliamentary circuit for more than five decades only to discover at this critical juncture that they are too insignificant to be counted by the right. People in this part of the globe have, rightly or wrongly, stopped looking for left alternative even in terms of parliamentary equation. The traditional left like the traditional right is in favour of concentration of wealth. In other words they no longer think they are morally bound to oppose this trend in a meaningful way. They simply allow it to happen and then crow about it being an illustration of the rightist onslaught. They still derive comfort from being called left and lose no chance to collaborate with the right to undermine people's rights.

And their strategy of inaction is one reason workers and peasants are so helpless today. Crisis is there but then that's always been the case.

Despite reasonable growth-song round the year and record profits in almost every branch of the industry, labour is being continually singled out for punishment. Labour organising remains as difficult as it was in the 1980s when liberalisation began to take its firm roots. Production is not hampered anywhere due to labour unrest and this is precisely the cause why labour organising is still so difficult. Employers understand only the language of production loss—or in effect declining profits. Industrial workers in India to a large extent acquired dual character because of their non-separable rural connection. Of late this dual character is crumbling. Village can no longer absorb the retrenched workers of mills and factories located in the cities. Also, the myth of worker-peasant alliance has been shattered as there is no reason for the rural poor to sacrifice for the organised sector—or unorganised sector workers. When peasants resisted neo-liberal machinations of grabbing agricultural land in their own way of understanding the tragedy across the country even organised sector workers who have still rural roots failed to capitalise on the prospects of building worker-peasant alliance, to further their own sectarian interests in industrial arena. Summer or winter, communists continue to chant the slogan of worker-peasant alliance as a routine knowing full well it cannot be achieved without a common cause.

Peasant mobilisation for radical change is not on the agenda of the left and yet they think they are in a better position to offer an alternative. The reality is otherwise. The seeds of alternative lie in people's initiatives developing independently outside the ambit of the traditional political control. □□□