

Is There Another Way?

After communal partition in 1947 the worst thing happened to the people of West Bengal was the installation of CPM-led Left Front Government in 1977. If the traumatised people of Bengal can conceive of an administration without CPM—without everything CPM stands for and everything it does in the name of people and development in the most backward state in terms of officially recognised parameters, then people have already taken great strides and begun to send the message that to think of a regime change even in a fascistic environment is possible. While reacting to the unprecedented drubbing in the recently-held assembly poll, one CPI veteran was candid enough to admit that they failed to learn a lesson from the collapse of the mighty Soviet Union. But communists never admit mistakes—only setbacks are available in their dictionary. As their road to hell cannot be linear, they think setbacks are quite logical. There is nothing to worry about them. How the Soviet Party changed its class character over the decades is being hardly discussed. So is the case with CPM. They abandoned the path of revolution even before their official birth in 1964. In other words when they used to work in the undivided party—CPI—as left communists, rather as a left clique, they tried to cash in on the past mass movements while vaguely identifying revisionism with the Dange-ites. Even then they were not in favour of revolutionary change, they were not serious enough to mobilise those who had been condemned to an early death or a life of misery and brutality, whom the system had destined for oppression and oblivion. They were more interested in maintaining the status quo with some reformist colouring here and there. As for participation in parliament they used to keep the restive rank and file on check by uttering few extreme jargons and that too occasionally.

They engineered the split in the communist party and the broad left movement as well on flimsy ideological grounds. In truth there were no substantial ideological differences between the two dominant groups within the CPI. Stand on India-China border conflict was an excuse and China played its card well in hastening the process of split giving it a somewhat international twist. China played its catalytic role in breaking the CPM as well in 1968—just four years after its birth—to further its national interests, not proletarian internationalism. In those days of Mao-Lin orthodoxy some CPM stalwarts were described in the Chinese communist media as running dogs of imperialism. Things are pole apart today. From one extreme to another. That disintegration of CPM without parliamentary privileges is an irreversible process is a fact of life. That is no longer a point at issue. More it becomes election-oriented more it runs the risk of getting alienated from masses. Why the far left failed to challenge the CPM-led left despite their prolonged misrule is a matter of concern to the poor and underprivileged of the society. Everything positive that was achieved in the past on the broader left spectrum, has literally been annihilated over the last 3 decades under the able supervision of the CPM leadership.

Not that Marxist left has suddenly become the apologist of the rich. Their betrayal to the people's cause is as old as their existence as a distinct political force. Some old timers once failed to crack a riddle that Birla factories in the state of West Bengal never really faced any militant trade unionism even when communists were too vocal to talk of militancy to defend the interests of workers. When they made the historic compromise is not known but that they decided to maintain the status quo at any cost long before they made their presence felt in parliamentary politics was as clear as anything else.

Looting the *bheris*—fisheries—in the Sunderbans started in the late sixties, albeit party bureaucrats became the real owners in no time in place of old owners. Workers got a paltry

increase in daily wages and that too on conditions of total loyalty to party bosses. But wetlands were never distributed to the landless and marginal farmers. Owners behave in their own way, it doesn't matter whether the owner is a party dictator or a notorious individual without any party affiliation.

Barring Maoists—the CPI (Maoist) to be precise—CPM never faced any political challenge from any segment of the vast, otherwise disoriented, naxalite camp. Faced with massive state repression, Maoists these days are at best a band of rebels with carbines on their shoulders, roaming in the jungles but still isolated from broad masses. As for naxalites without guns they always treated CPM as a lesser evil which it was not and never made any significant steps to oppose CPM's anti-people policies. In reality they made the historical blunder and missed the opportunity to consolidate themselves.

Evil is an evil. It has no colour. It's ludicrous to dub CPM as a lesser evil as they don't differ from the right in executing operation green hunt and wooing the multinationals to cripple whatever remains of sustainable development. □□□