

“DEPOLITICISATION” OF CPM

Rectifying Mistakes? Dipanjan Rai Chaudhuri

Would CPI(M) ever try to rectify its mistakes? The political content of the rectification would have to consist of a switch from neo-liberal policies to social-democratic ones, in harmony, in West Bengal, with its class support which has taken a battering, but is still very much there (they themselves claim an increase of 4% over their Lok Sabha share, but it is doubtful if this means more support in absolute numbers*). To an extent this support survives because the salaried middle classes do not know where the balance will finally stand between the populist rhetoric of the opposition leader and her ideological inheritance of 'hard-headed' Congress neo-liberalism. (It must be remembered that her espousal of the cause of the peasants' right to their land and its disposal was a finely calculated move to win the rural votes which were eluding her so far, and was realpolitik and realpolitik without ideological underpinnings.)

There are voices but there does not seem to be a body of opinion within the CPI(M) in favour of the political content of a switch. Even Rezzak sa'ab of West Bengal who again defies a party ban to say that the party is alienated from the people, and who will certainly oppose land grabbing from farmers for an almost free gift to some corporate (and may be the opposition leader, too, will go this distance), has not made it clear where he stands on the question of industrialization through big investments and minimal employment, that is, the jobless growth of Buddha-Nirupam. It is understandably difficult for anyone who has been deeply immersed in the CPI(M) environment to think of an alternative to jobless growth because the very air there breathes in TINA and breathes it out (There Is No Alternative). So, how will the CPI(M) rectify its mistakes?

Perhaps it has lain too many moons among the hungry stones of power sans purpose. Has the sweet touch of power in Delhi numbed its usually acute sense of self-preservation so much that it does not understand it is undergoing (just like another highly politicized, regimented, 'incorruptible' party after a period in Delhi) a rapid process of "de-politicisation" from the middle down and, make no mistake, even up from the middle.

It might have been thought that now, at least, the middle ranks, who actually run the party, would shed some arrogance and seek the indulgence of its previous supporters. But no change of attitude is visible.

The Karats might talk of the Bengal leadership's style of work isolating the party from the people, the Bengal leaders may criticize Karat's non-starting third front and break with the Congress, and the Patnaiks may indulge in their own version of "to be or not to be, that is the question", the middle ranker is contemptuous of even so minimal a political debate. He thinks the party is about vote management by judicious dispensing of favours and maintenance of a light terror, a veiled menace in urban areas and open oppression in rural areas. He requires three magic weapons : 1. Left-sounding slogans and hard-hitting speeches from the upper level, 2. Self-financing moderate and invisible-inaudible extortion and corruption (don't be caught, you may be disowned) at the lower

levels and, 3. Money to buy arms and maintain gangs in the towns and the city and Harmad armies in the countryside.

His post-poll analysis is succinct : this is what comes from allowing stupid people, who don't know their own good to vote without guidance. Can he be rectified? No, because in this time and place he cannot be sent to tend pigs in a pig farm.

Of course, this "de-politicisation" has the strongly political effect of stopping all possible discussion of the Manmohan-Montek-Buddha-Nirupam status quo, the corporate guided, investment-led jobless growth of globalization economics. The party is being transformed into the typical political machine of Western capitalism which never questions the underlying economic and political set-up, and which, in fact, has no political purpose except capture of electoral majorities. Is rectification possible?□

*[*The CPI(M) share of the 2010 civic poll votes in Kolkata, according to that party itself was 33.55%, while, for the Lok Sabha elections in 2009, the corresponding figure was 33.2%, supposedly a slight increase. Complacency is lost on recall that in the 2010 polls the voter turnout was 10% smaller than for 2009.]*