

A Long way from the Reality

A mass movement always moves forward or falls back. As for the communist left of India a movement always stands still. So once again they are talking about third front. But third front means no front. That is precisely the message from the recently held 19th party congress of CPM. Their periodic threat to the ruling dispensation at the centre at worst succeeds in making their anti-Congress stance a synonym for hypocrisy.

Official marxists are in deep trouble as they cannot maintain their marxist identity simply by paying lip service to anti-neoliberalism while assuring everybody 'secular' that their main enemy is saffron power. Those who hawk third front are in reality indulging in pressure politics for better bargaining in the post-poll re-arrangement. The Left-UNPA protest over price rise is all about wooing middle class voters who fail to cope with mounting inflation in an oppressive situation in which even reasonable wage demands are unthinkable. As for the rural poor doles will deliver. The root cause of sky-rocketing of price rise of essential commodities, particularly food grains, lies in the systematic dismantling of Public Distribution System (PDS). They did not protest in the yester years and now it seems too late to reverse neo-liberal policies that demand total abolition of PDS.

People are left at the mercy of almighty market. Even union ministers prove themselves helpless before market vagaries as they can no longer advocate state intervention, in a bid not to antagonise investors. And with-out state intervention all high-sounding measures to curb price-rise are bound to fail.

Globalisation has eroded whatever sustainability of the economy had even a decade ago. In principle no party, left or right, is seriously in favour of state intervention to tame the market. That the gospel of high growth will fade away soon is recognised even by the captains of industry. They are afraid of the prevailing US recession which is soon going to translate into a global phenomenon. The teeming millions of India need right to food, they do not bother about intricacies of controlling inflation. Some partners of the Left in their anti-price rise agitational business are the notorious apologists of 'reforms'—they are in the class of third world reformers dancing to the tune of 'economic miracle' touted by the West. They are not making as much noise as they should on a long-term strategy against neo-liberalism. The short-term critical approach with harmless criticism will vanish after the general election.

Meanwhile, eight states will go to assembly polls shortly and so the issue of price-rise is hitting the headlines.

And the ruling marxists of Bengal, once bitten twice shy, will have to face the rural electorate in a fortnight in the ensuing 3-tier panchayet poll amidst popular resentment against their anti-peasant policy.

For the Congress and major political parties price-rise is more like a double-edged sword. Those who finance elections need money. And to them price-rise makes sense. It's not their concern that in India 300 million people survive on \$1 a day, and 600 million just exist on \$2 a day while 30 percent of children do not receive any education. Election means huge investments and if market operators

remain dissatisfied election coffers will suffer. These days even the left does not depend on people's small contribution to finance poll. They too have big financiers. Money talks. Given the electoral compulsions, cosmetic measures as propounded by the Union government to curb inflation and price-rise, are unlikely to deliver. Emergency assistance to prevent a possible melt-down may not work in India.

Political parties know well how to sidetrack main issues. Secularism—or danger from communal right has been a staple for most parliamentary political groupings, regional or national, for long. But they never fought economic policies associated with communal right. With limited purchasing power of the vast majority declining rapidly, even the registered advocates of secular polity find it difficult to continue their game of escapism.

During election times the politics of growth does not sell, though the western experts are in all praise of Indian liberals. They think India and China will continue to grow more rapidly than the global economy despite the on-going recession in US. In other words New Delhi's reformers have every reason to get noticed by Wall Street. And they cannot destroy their world of privilege by going back to welfarism. Despite the all pervading crisis affecting almost all segments of the society nobody sees any evidence today of growing left power. The left cannot even hope to recapture even partially, past glories. Despite some new permutations and combinations in electoral arena voters have really no choice but to rally to old guards who promise nothing new but old promises. □□□