

LIMITS OF SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY

CPI(M)'s 'Philistine Realism'

Bernard D'Mello

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF India (Marxist)'s [CPI(M)] Draft Political Resolution for its 20th Congress to be held in April at Kozhikode—adopted by the party's Central Committee at its meeting in Kolkata last month—proposes to work towards the emergence of a “left and democratic alternative” to the Congress Party and the proto-fascist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Now the Left, in the party's reckoning, is itself, the CPI, the All-India Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, but the question as to who are the “democratic forces”, is not difficult to fathom. In fact, the draft resolution states that “it may be necessary to rally those non-Congress, non-BJP forces which can play a role in defence of democracy, national sovereignty, secularism, federalism and defence of people's livelihood and rights”. So the Indian electorate is in for another round of the party desperately trying to stitch together alliances with right-wing, regional, caste-based outfits, all in the name of keeping “communal forces out of power”. The party congress will nevertheless witness the prominent display of banners proclaiming “Workers of the World Unite” and the portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin will adorn the venue, with the implied claim that the CPI(M) is the legitimate heir of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist tradition in India. Sadly though, the draft political resolution does not even suggest an intention to take the revolutionary road that was hoped for, way back at its 7th Congress in 1964.

One will, of course, have to wait for the political-organisational report at the 20th Party Congress in April, but, going by the draft political resolution approved by the CPI(M)'s Central Committee, there is not even a faint hint that the government it headed in West Bengal for 34 years had progressively degenerated beyond all reasonable expectations. As far as the people of the state were concerned, the last straw was the party-government's resort to bloody violence on 14 March 2007 to crush peasant resistance to the grabbing of their land for a special economic zone at Nandigram which was to be developed by the Indonesian Salim business group.

Was the party acting in the interest of the “basic classes” or in favour of the “big bourgeoisie, which has compromised with imperialism”? To be brutally frank, like any other ruling class party, the CPI (M)-led Left Front government relied on the armed police when the interests of the ruling classes came into open conflict with the interests of the exploited masses. It used armed police to repress a popular movement.

Now, everybody knows that ordinary policemen and women who are ordered to rain bullets upon their own class brethren themselves hail from the peasantry and the working class. Here was a party calling itself communist politically manipulating these sons and daughters of peasants and workers to act on behalf of the exploiters against the poor protesters at

Nandigram. How can the CPI(M) then hope to lead peasant struggles against land alienation in other parts of the country when it has completely lost its credibility because of what it did at Nandigram? Without seeking pardon from the people, the draft political resolution calls upon its members “to expand the influence and base of the party in other states”, but with its credibility in ruins, this sounds utterly hollow.

Further, the text of the draft political resolution gave not a hint that the party considers outfits like Jayalalithaa’s All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Chandrababu Naidu’s Telugu Desam Party (TDP), H D Deve Gowda’s Janata Party (Secular) as “non-Congress, non-BJP forces which”, it is necessary to repeat, “can play a role in defence of democracy, national sovereignty, secularism, federalism and defence of people’s livelihood and rights”. But the reality is that the CPI(M) allies with such “democratic” outfits. The AIADMK, it may be recalled, even sent kar sevaks in 1992 to assist the Sangh Parivar in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Its sole leader, Jayalalithaa not only flaunts her allegedly ‘ill-gotten’ wealth, but even revels in the worst forms of sycophancy, and has, not once, but repeatedly made common cause with the BJP. As for Chandrababu Naidu and his TDP, also a former partner of the BJP, not long ago he was, in India, the “poster boy” of the World Bank, who along with the International Monetary Fund is the fountainhead of neo-liberalism. Naidu is credited with relentlessly pursuing the neo-liberal agenda for two consecutive terms in office in Andhra Pradesh. And, Deve Gowda, whose party’s name flaunts the “secular” brand, is famous for his thoroughly corrupt coalition governments in Karnataka, starting with the Congress party and ending with the BJP. These then are a sample of the so-called non-Congress, non-BJP “democratic forces” that the CPI(M) runs after.

What then of the CPI(M) and its draft political resolution? As Hiren Gohain has said (Economic & Political Weekly (EPW), 17 September 2011), “the large-scale infiltration of opportunist middle-class elements into [the] party ranks” may have changed “the class-character of the party” leading to what Prabhat Patnaik (EPW, 16 July 2011) has called, its “empiricisation” (in ordinary language, as one infers, this means straying from the revolutionary road) and, in turn, its “alienation from the basic classes”. The party justifies its participation in governments before the advent of the “people’s democratic revolution” with the plea that it will implement a “modest programme of giving immediate relief to the people” and “strengthen the mass movement” (the party programme of the 1980s), but, in practice, it has been working with the “big bourgeoisie” and the “bourgeois-landlord” state as part of state governments, and, at the centre, debating with that bourgeoisie’s political representatives in the Congress Party about alternative public policies, even as it lectures the people of India about the need for “people’s democracy and socialist transformation”. The CPI (M) might argue that, given the economic and political situation in India today, this is all that is really possible, but this has been its practice over the last more than two decades. Smacks of “philistine realism”, doesn’t it? But given the local collaborationist role that the CPI (M)’s harmads (armed goons enforcing the party’s writ) played in supporting the Joint Forces (the occupation army) in Jangalmahal from mid-June 2009 to early May 2011 during the CPI(M)’s tenure in power in West Bengal, and the

party's collusion with the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government in counterinsurgency operations against the Maoists, "the spread of counter-revolutionary ideas, not only in a crude and direct form, but also in a more subtle form, namely, the growth of philistine sentiments"* in the top echelons of the party is only to be expected. □□□

Note : * V I Lenin in the first sentence of a text published in *Proletary*, No. 6, October 29, 1906. See his *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 11, at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/oct/29b.htm>.