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Working Class And Bourgeois Parliamentary Democracy

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THE Congress (I) leadership is again at the game of canvassing for the presidential form of government for the country. Two senior ministers in the Union Cabinet have extolled the virtues of the presidential system and enumerated its advantage over the prevailing parliamentary system. The prime minister herself called for a debate on this issue, taking up the position that both are democratic systems and both have their own advantages and disadvantages. The Congress (I) leadership, during the emergency in 1975-77, had made serious efforts to impose the presidential form of government on the country.

Not only the left and democratic forces but the entire opposition including the non-Congress (I) bourgeois – landlord parties saw in this move the attempt to establish an authoritarian dictatorship. In today's Indian conditions the presidential system cannot be anything but such a naked dictatorship. Broad resistance was built up in the country and the ruling party had to retreat at that time.

While the ruling Congress (I) coterie wants to scuttle the parliamentary system because it comes in the way of its authoritarian designs, there are others, by no means advocates of authoritarianism, who are also questioning the utility of the bourgeois parliamentary system. These well-meaning people seem to be ascribing the ills of the bankrupt capitalist path of development on which the ruling classes have embarked to the parliamentary system and want the system itself to go. Their position is not the same as the Naxalities who are advocates of boycotting the parliamentary system. The "left" adventurists have taken the stand that the class which took over power in the country from the British is the comprador bourgeoisie. The only task left now is to throw out this comprador bourgeoisie from power through an armed struggle. They have no use for bourgeois parliamentary institutions, for an independent party of the working class, for mass organisations of the

workers, peasants and others, for day-to-day ideological, political and organisational work among the masses. This is not the place to discuss how they degenerated into making the CPI(M) their main enemy, how they organised the physical liquidation of CPI(M) cadre and how they broke into umpteen groups.

Those others who have become critical of the bourgeois parliamentary system also bewail that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has lost its revolutionary zeal and fallen into the category of a parliamentary party. The party is solely engaged in, or is concentrating mostly on parliamentary activities to the detriment of preparing the masses for the revolution. By its participation in parliaments and legislatures, and even more so by its participation in state governments, it is helping the bourgeoisie to work its democratic system. This creates parliamentary illusions in the masses, creates the belief in them that basic changes can be brought about through parliamentary institution instead of preparing them for the struggle to replace bourgeois democracy by socialist democracy.

All this is being said at a time when the bourgeois parliamentary institutions are again under threat from the main party of the ruling classes. Even though bourgeois parliamentary institutions have so far survived in India unlike in a number of newly independent countries, which have gone under dictatorships, even though India is capitalistically more developed than many of the newly independent countries, the fact remains that bourgeois democracy is not firmly entrenched in India, that its foundations are very fragile. When parliamentary institutions are under attack, it is all the more necessary for the working class to defend these institutions as they provide an effective auxiliary forum to the representatives of the working class to advance its cause. It is also part of the class struggle of the working class to go beyond bourgeois democracy. It is when it has become an important task of the party of the working class to protect the bourgeois parliamentary institutions that the idea of rejecting their use is being advocated. This idea only deprives the working class party of the opportunity to utilise these institutions to appeal to a wider audience and to pillory the authoritarian and anti-people policies of the ruling party. We will come back to this aspect later in this ruling party. We will come back to this aspect in this article. It is not only that the bourgeois parliamentary institutions are under as serious threat, the present period is also one in which the terribly discontented masses are moving rapidly, even though on their economic demands mainly. Reactionary forces

aided by imperialism are doing their all to divert the popular discontent into disruptive communal and separatist channels.

The ruling party itself is blaming the parliamentary system and advocating an authoritarian regime in the garb of presidential system to cure the country of all its ills. It becomes the task of the working class party to channelise the discontent of the people in the right direction so that the struggle against bourgeois – landlord policies, the struggle against attempts to impose an authoritarian regime gets strengthened. Here, again, effective use of parliamentary institutions facilitates the carrying out of this task.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) does not hold that the working class can win state power through elections or by the party's representatives participating in parliaments, legislatures and even in state governments. It has always held that electoral victories are only formal victories. But there are certain immediate political which the Party is trying to achieve-isolating the main party of the ruling classes, advancing the ideology of the Party, liberating the working class and the people, especially the peasantry, from the grip of bourgeois ideology, increasing the confidence of the people in themselves and against the bourgeois – landlord government led by the big bourgeoisie and so on. For this, purpose, while the struggle outside goes on, while the revolutionary ideological political work among the masses continues, parliament and legislatures are used as auxiliary forms for exposing the exploiting regime and the exploiting classes. In this the Party follows the Marxist-Leninist teachings about making revolutionary use of bourgeois parliamentary institutions. This is what the critics of the Party do not understand. They do not understand that revolutions do not materialise on command. On the contrary the physical revolution has to be prepared by the mental revolution and that entails educating the people. Bourgeois parliamentary institutions can be effectively used towards this objective.

To say that parliamentary activities should be combined with extra-parliamentary work; that parliamentary activities should be subordinated to the revolutionary work among the masses is one thing. But to scoff at making use of bourgeois democratic rights to advance the cause of the revolution is to adopt a totally erroneous position. Marxism-Leninism not only makes it necessary but obligatory for communists to make use of bourgeois parliamentary institutions.

Marxist-Leninist Teachings

Marx and Engels in the 1840s, when they urged the working class to participate in the democratic revolutions of those days used to say that the working class, by its help to the bourgeoisie fights to abolish feudalism, and to win bourgeois democratic rights like freedom of the press, trial by jury, freedom of assembly freedom of organisation and popular representation, and thus indirectly also fights for its own proletarian interests. For the workers, it was necessary, in the struggle for democratic institutions, to create the conditions for the socialist transformation of society. With this proposal, Marx emphasised the close connection between the struggle for democracy and for socialism a principle that today as then belongs to the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary workers' party.

The German workers, Engels wrote, "supplied their comrades in all countries with a weapon, and one of the sharpest, when they showed them how to make use of universal suffrage" (Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 195). One of the sharpest weapons – that is how Engels describes the working class' use of universal suffrage. And it is this "one of the sharpest weapons" that our critics advise us to abandon.

Engels also wrote: "With this successful utilisation of universal suffrage however, an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly developed further. It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further opportunities to fight these very state institutions." (Ibid, p. 196)

In line with these teachings, and with the rich experience of the Russian revolutionary movement, Lenin makes it obligatory for the party of the working class to participate in bourgeois parliamentary elections and bourgeois parliamentary institutions. The freedoms obtained in the bourgeois-democratic order have to be used to combat these very institutions. "They (the social-democrats) have never been afraid of saying, and never will be, that they 'sanction' the bourgeois republic only because it is the last form of class rule, because it offers a most convenient arena for the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie; they sanction it, not for its prisons and police, its private property and prostitution, but for the scope and freedom it allows to combat these charming institutions."

(Lenin, "Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship", Collected Works, vol. 8, p. 300)

Lenin lashed out at parliamentary cretinism. He unmasked the class works- "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" and "The State and Revolution"- to unmask those who would make the working class forget the class character of the state, sing paens to bourgeois democracy and disorganise the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marxist- Leninists keel all these valuable teachings in mind to guard demanded that the bourgeois parliamentary institutions should not be boycotted as a matter of principle, that wherever the opportunity exists they should be used to further the struggle of the proletariat to expose their class character. Parliamentary activity should, of course, be an auxiliary form of struggle subordinated to the main form. But not to use it at all, to boycott it, would be a grave error, he had warned.

In his "Letter to Workers of Europe and America", Lenin writes, "The bourgeois parliament, even the most democratic in the most democratic republic; in which the property and rule of capitalists are preserved, is a machine for the suppression of the working millions be small groups of exploiters. The socialist the fighters for the emancipation of the working people from exploitation had to utilise the bourgeois parliament as a platform, as a base for propaganda, agitation and organisation as long as our struggle was confined to the frame-work of the bourgeois system" (Collected Works, vol. 28, p. 432). Further, "Prior to the capture of political power by the proletariat, it was obligatory (necessary) to make use of bourgeois democracy, parliamentarianism in particular, for the political education and organisation of the working masses....)"Draft Programme of the RCP (B), Collected Works, vol. 29, p. 106)

When the German "left" communists, in the post-first world war period, took up the position of no participation in bourgeois parliaments, because parliamentary forms of struggle have become historically and politically obsolete, Lenin had to tell them, "This is said with ridiculous pretentiousness, and is patently wrong." "Parliamentarianism has become 'historically obsolete'. That is true in the propaganda sense", he wrote.

Then Lenin explains that parliamentarianism is "historically obsolete" form the standpoint of *world history*, i.e., the era of

bourgeois parliamentarism is over, and the era of the proletarian dictatorship had begun with the victory of the Great October Revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. That is incontestable, says Lenin. "But world history is counted in decades.... But for that very reason, it is a glaring theoretical error to apply the yardstick of world history to practical politics." Let our critics note the stress Lenin lays on participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum being obligatory on the party of the revolutionary proletariat as long as it lacks the strength among the masses to do away with bourgeois parliamentary and other reactionary institutions. In our country, only a very small minority of the people follow and vote for the CPI(M) and left parties, the vast majority, almost ninety per cent, including the majority of the working class, follow and vote for bourgeois-landlord parties, first and foremost the ruling bourgeois-landlord party. The Party has to use the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum to rescue this majority from the influence of bourgeois-landlord leadership, it has to use electoral battles to reach out to this majority, educate them and organise them. To ignore this task, even to neglect it, is to demonstrate lack of seriousness in preparing the masses for revolution.

Making use of parliamentary institutions is all the more obligatory in the present Indian situation. Vast millions of the Indian people had no voting rights under British rule. Whatever elections were held by the British regime were under limited franchise. When after independence, universal adult franchise was ushered in there was naturally exultation among the Indian people. That exultation may have waned to a certain extent due to the assaults made on the parliamentary institutions by the bourgeois-landlord classes themselves, but vast sections of the people still cherish universal adult franchise as a major right. In fact the demand is for the extension of franchise to those attain the age of eighteen instead of 21 as at present. It will be serious error to ignore this; it will also come in the way of the Party's efforts to raise the level of the consciousness of the backward masses.

Adjunct To Class Struggle

Our critics do not seem to understand, do not want to understand that while the real education of the masses cannot be separated from the class struggle, from their mass experience in the course of the revolutionary struggle, that while it is correct to say that it is the

duty of the communists to carry forward and develop the consciousness of the masses and not tail behind it, it does not mean that communists, in advocating their immediate tactical slogans, do not take into consideration the level of mass consciousness obtaining at a given time. These critics by slyly contrasting participation in parliament to class struggle virtually negate the use of this form of activity of the working class, confuse participation in the parliamentary struggle with reformist opportunism in parliament, with substituting the main class struggle by constitutional struggle. Thus they discard this important form of struggle and dispossess the working class of an important weapon to free the peoples of their parliamentary illusions and develop their revolutionary consciousness. They cannot grasp that a revolutionary use of the parliamentary forum is an adjunct to the class struggle and that it should not be contrasted with it.

How important auxiliary forums are to influence the masses can be seen from the teachings of Marxism-Leninism and the party's own experience of fighting electoral battles.

Engels had written: "In election agitation it (the suffrage) provide us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the masses of the people where they still stand aloof from us; of forcing all parties to defend their views and actions against our attacks before all the people; and, further, it provided our representatives in the Reichstag with a platform from which they could speak to their opponents in parliament, and to the masses without, with quite other authority and freedom than in the press or at meetings." (Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 196)

Party's Experience

What has been our party's experience? We have been fighting those seats where we have mass bases and building electoral alliances with other parties, including bourgeois-landlord parties, to isolate the main bourgeois-landlord party and inflict as heavy a defeat on it as possible. Election times see intense political activity, which very much influences the masses. To keep away from these battles is to leave the field clear to the bourgeois-landlord parties to keep the masses under their influence with spurious promises. On the other hand, participation in these battles enables the working class party to reach out to vaster sections of the people than it can do otherwise.

By utilising these election battles, the party can take to wider sections of the people than those who follow it in ordinary times the entire programme of the party, the programme of People's Democracy. It can unmask before millions the reactionary class character of the bourgeois-landlord state and government led by the big bourgeoisie. It can contrast its own programme to the programme of other parties. It can tell the people of the evils of the capitalist system-unemployment, poverty, exploitation, militarisation and so on in the imperialist countries-and in contrast, the achievements of socialism in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, thus bringing before the people the path they have to take for their own emancipation. The Party gets the opportunity to demand a straight anti-Congress vote from the people and inflict as big an electoral defeat on the Congress as possible so that the confidence of the people to plunge into further class battles is enhanced. It enables the Party to use the state assemblies and parliament to unmask the class character of the bourgeois-landlord state. These tactics have enhanced the prestige of the Party, expanded its influence, and increased its strength. Such electoral victories have enabled the Party to organise, bigger mass struggles, on its own and joining hands with others. This is the combination of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle being converted into electoral victories, and the electoral victories being used to further strengthen the mass struggle. In this process, the masses are educated, they get their own political experience and the ranks of the revolution get swelled.

Slogan Of Boycott

Those who call for the boycott of elections perhaps thinks they are advocating revolutionary tactics. Far from it. Their tactics only keep the working class away from a big political action like elections and leave the field clear for the parties of the exploiting classes. These tactics deprive the party of the working class of the opportunity to take its entire programme and policy and its critique of bourgeois-landlord policies to a wider audience.

The Russian revolutionary movement has rich experience of boycott of elections and the Bolsheviks have drawn very valuable lessons from it, which are lessons for all communists.

Lenin sums up this experience: "In 1908 the 'left' Bolsheviks were expelled from our for stubbornly refusing to understand the

necessity of participating in a most reactionary 'parliament.' The 'lefts'.... based themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott.

"The Bolsheviks ' boycott of 'parliament' in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that when legal and illegal, parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. It would, however, be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to *other* conditions and *other* situation. The Bolsheviks' boycott of the Duma in 1906 was a mistake, although a minor and easily remediable one. The boycott of the Duma in 1907, 1908 and subsequent years was a most serious error and difficult to remedy, because on the one hand, a very rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its conversion into an uprising was not to be expected, and on the other hand, the entire historical situation attendant upon the renovation of the bourgeois monarchy called for legal and illegal activities being combined. Today, when we look back at this fully completed historically period, whose convention with subsequent periods has now become quite clear, it becomes most obvious that in 1908-14 the Bolsheviks *could not have preserved* (let alone strengthened and developed) the core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat, had they not upheld, in the most strenuous struggle, and illegal forms of struggle and that it was *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institution hemmed in by reactionary laws (sick benefit societies, etc)" (collected works, vol. 31, pp. 35-36)

Party Work In Parliamentary Institutions

What does the Party do inside the Parliamentary institutions? The Party's groups in parliament and legislatures are one of the party organisation, functioning under the Party's discipline, with close connection with the party leadership, with their task, as that of the party outside, to carry on the work of criticism, propaganda, agitation and organisation. Communists in Parliament expose the class nature of the government's measures and proposals with particular attention given to those which affect the economic interests of the broad masses, especially issues of the labour and agrarian question, the budget, etc. These are issues, which are the most sensitive nerve of public life and at the same time the most

sensitive spot of the government. On all of them, communist members counters and policies in defence of the interests of the people. They carry into parliament the Party's struggle for the defence and extension of the democratic rights of the people, to bar the path to authoritarianism, for states' autonomy, against government repression of the struggle of the working people, for defending and improving the living standards of the people, against rising unemployment and the growing offensive of the employers against the working class, against landlord tyranny and the landlord-police-administrative collusion in the rural areas, for a better future for the youth, for equality of women, against the rampant corruption. Upholding the Party's proletarian internationalist outlook, its representatives in parliament champion the cause of peace against war, the cause of all people fighting against imperialism, neo-colonialism, zionism and racism. And the forum of parliamentary itself is used to dispel the constitutional illusions of the masses of the people. Thus the Party effectively using parliament as an auxiliary form contributes in a big way to the main revolutionary work in them masses.

It is as part of the work in parliamentary institutions that the Party is participating in governments in some states. The Party does not participate in every non-Congress state government. In 1967, the Party rejected the offer to participated in the state governments in Bihar, UP, etc. The reason is that the Party will participate in governments only where the left forces are predominantly in the legislatures, and among the left forces, the CPI(M) is a strong force. Otherwise, the Party is bound to become an appendage of other parties. In 1957, in Kerala, the Communist Party, with the support of some Independence put up by it, formed the state government. In 1967, the CPI(M) participated only in the state governments in Kerala and West Bengal where the Left forces were strong. Since 1977, Left Front in which the CPI(M) is the strongest force, have been in government in West Bengal and Tripura, and for a brief period in 1980-82, there was a Left and Democratic Front Government in Kerala.

Participation In State Governments

We are attacked for participation in these governments on the ground that whatever relief given by these governments to the people strengthens constitutional illusions among them and give

them the feeling that basic changes can be brought about through parliamentary means. The experience of these governments shows just the contrary. These governments have record totally in contrast to that of congress governments. It is only in these states that the repressive machinery of the state, the police, etc. is not used against struggling workers, to help landlords against agricultural workers and sharecroppers. These are the states in which full democratic rights, including the right to strike, are guaranteed to government employees. In these states, serious efforts have been made to implement land reforms in favour of the rural poor and curb the vested interests in the rural areas, the sharecroppers are given legal protection against eviction and ensured their share of the produce, the agricultural workers are helped to get the fixed minimum wages. At times of natural calamities, these governments try to give maximum relief to the people within their limited resources.

These are all benefits for which people in the Congress-ruled state are fighting and the CPI(M) and other opposition forces are leading struggles. The people are asking for some relief from the growing burdens that are being imposed on them. Is it necessary that the Left Front Governments of West Bengal and Tripura try to relieve the economic distress of the people to some extent? Does this limited relief solve any of the basic questions? Or does it make the people realise more quickly that unless the entire set-up is changed, no radical improvement can take place in their condition, and, with the confidence of protection from the Left Front Governments, carry on the struggle for the basic aims with even more determination?

The CPI(M) itself has been constantly telling the people not to expect much from these state governments as real power is in the hands of the bourgeois-landlord classes and not in the hands of the working class and its allies. The Left Front Ministries can only be the instrument of people's mobilisation and struggles and not of solving basic problems. The people are themselves learning this from experience. When the West Bengal bill for a comprehensive land legislation which will benefit the rural poor, is held up without being given assent by the center, the people see from their own experience where real power lies. When they find that the center is concentrating more and more financial resources in its hands starving the state governments of the finances they need to give even limited relief to the suffering people, the people again see where real power lies. When the center interferes with an entirely state subject like law and order, sending its own police forces into the state, etc. when the center erodes more and more even the

;omitted powers of the states, again it is education for the people with regard to the source of real power.

In West Bengal, the influence and strength of the CPI(M) has grown very much. This growth in the Party's strength can be seen in the massive membership of 5.6 million members in the Kisan Sabha. The CITU has expanded, and the influence it wields in the trade union movement was seen in the recent jute workers' strike. The SFI has a membership of 1,105,630 in West Bengal and the DYFI 3,328,000. the Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti is the biggest women's organisation in the state. The main bourgeois-landlord party, the Congress (I), which rules at the center, has been defeated in successive elections to parliament, assembly, municipalities and panchayats. Similar is the advance of the Party and the mass movement under its leadership in Tripura, where in the recent panchayat elections, the Party again inflicted a big defeat on the Congress (I). This is the political advance in the masses, especially the rural masses, which the Party has been able to register in this period by correctly using the parliamentary institutions and combining parliamentary work with the work outside in the masses.

What is also not seen is that this record of the Left Front Governments enables the Party to approach the broad masses in the states where the Party is weak, and popularise the basic slogans of the Party exposing the class character of the protest state.

The entire experience of participation in parliamentary institutions and Left Front Governments has proved that the tactics followed by the Party-of fighting elections, of sending its representatives to the legislatures, of forming electoral fronts or making electoral adjustments without compromising the independence of the Party, of popularising the Party's entire programme, its basic slogans-has been proved to be correct. The growing strength of the Party and its influence proves it. This is an effective contribution to the advance of the working class movement towards its revolutionary aims.

Any reformist understanding in regard to the utilisation of bourgeois parliamentary institutions by the party of the working class will lead to serious opportunity mistakes, as it happened in the case of the Communist Party of India. It was after a long-drawn struggle in the united Communist Party of India on the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution that the party spilt two decades ago. The CPI took the programmatic position that the national democratic revolution it

envisages and the new state that comes into existence will not be under the leadership of the working class but under the joint leadership of the working class and the bourgeoisie. CPI leaders also declared that the parliamentary path was the only path for the Indian revolution. This had its won consequences.

Though they had been saying that right reaction was the main danger and had to be fought as the main enemy, when in 1967, the Congress was defeated in a number of states, the CPI joined hands with precisely these reactionary forces-the Jana Sangh, Swatantra, et al-to form coalition governments in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. At a time when the main party of the ruling classes, the Congress, had been isolated and temporarily defeated, the CPI could not give the leadership to carry forward this mass upsurge, because it was a participant in these coalition governments along with bourgeois-landlord parties. It could not influence the policies of these coalition governments. Instead, in the eyes of the people, it became party to the anti-people, pro-vested-interest policies of the dominant bourgeois-landlord partners of these state governments. When communal riots took place in Ranchi in that period, which the Jana Sangh, a constituent of the coalition, had organised, the CPI remained helpless, unable to come out against the Jana Sangh immediately and carry on the fight against communalism.

In 1969, the CPI broke away from the united front in Kerala which led to the fall of the CPI(M)-led Government in that state. The CPI then formed an anti-CPI(M) front and government first with the support of the main bourgeois-landlord part, the Indira Congress, from outside and then with that Congress as a partner in the coalition. In West Bengal also, they broke helped the Congress. Not only did they not condemn the semi-fascist terror unleashed by the Congress against the CPI(M), the CPI also joined the attack on the CPI(M). The CPI later had electoral adjustments with the Indira Congress. The Culmination of all this was the support which the CPI gave to the internal emergency which Indira Gandhi imposed in June 1975 to establish her authoritarian regime. The emergency struck a big blow to parliamentary institutions, but the advocates of the parliamentary path lent support to Indira Gandhi's action the Marxist-Leninist teachings on bourgeois parliamentarianism are no longer the guide, when warnings against its pitfalls are ignored. In such cases, instead of making revolutionary use of parliamentary institutions, parliamentary activity becomes the most important activity of the party and the party itself is reduced to a parliamentary party.

Experience Under Dictatorships

Those who call for boycott of elections and parliamentary institutions also forget what is happening in countries under military and other reactionary dictatorships. The Indian peoples see what is happening across the border in Pakistan. Except for a brief period in the beginning and a brief spell in between, that country has been under the heels of military dictatorships for most part of its life after independence. The most oppressive of these successive military dictatorships is the present Zia-ul Haq regime. All political activities are prohibited under this regime. All the political parties remain illegal. All civil liberties and democratic rights of the people have been scrapped. The working class is denied its trade union rights, other sections of the working people the right to organise and struggle. In the name of Islamising the country, barbarous crimes are committed on the people. Women are being dragged back to the medieval ages. With no political opposition allowed against the regime, with no parliament or legislature to which he is responsible dictator Zia-ul Haq is making Pakistan a client state of US imperialism, the arch enemy of all people. When against all those crimes of the military dictatorship, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy arose; it was with Savage repression and butchery. Witness of all this, the Indian people naturally want to protect the bourgeois parliamentary system they have.

Bourgeois parliamentary institutions have to be defended and properly utilised even to advance to the higher stage of socialist democracy. As stated earlier, it will be foolish to think that the bourgeois parliamentary system is firmly entrenched in India. Any such illusion should have been shattered by the emergency that was declared in June 1975. it should not be forgotten that in 1977, West Bengal was subjected to semi-fascist terror and this terror was being extended to Kerala and Tripura. These are the three states where the CPI(M) is a strong force. The emergency that was imposed saw a totally authoritarian regime in power. Parliament, though it was not dissolved, was reduced to impotency. Many of its members were put behind the bars, the speeches of opposition members who were not arrested could not be legally publicised. There was stringent press censorship, not a line, which was not in favour of the emergency regime, could appear in print. The powers of the judiciary were so emasculated that it openly declared its helplessness to guarantee the security of life of individuals. An attempt was made to put the authoritarian leader of the ruling party above the law and the

constitution was being tampered with to perpetuate the authoritarian regime. All civil liberties and democratic rights remained abrogated. But, because of the tradition of democracy, born out of the long-drawn freedom struggle, unlike in Pakistan, a powerful popular movement in which all the opposition parties joined could put an end to this dark phase of the emergency in two years. But the danger to bourgeois parliamentary institutions has by no means disappeared. The ruling party continues to remain authoritarian and is again making attempts to replace the parliamentary system with the presidential system. Authoritarian trends exist in other bourgeois-landlord parties also as was seen during the brief Janata Party regime. The constitution itself has anti-democratic provisions-to impose central rule over states, to declare emergency in any area, to declare any area as disturbed and hand it over to the army, for preventive detention, etc. the repressive organs of the state are freely used against the struggles of the working people.

And in a period of intense economic crisis, the ruling party finds an authoritarian regime move convenient that the parliamentary system. The danger of imposition of authoritarian regimes by the ruling classes is always there. As the Programme of the CPI(M) warns, "The threat to the parliamentary system and to democracy comes not from the working people and the parties which represent their interests. The threat comes from the exploiting classes. It is they who undermine the parliamentary system; from within and without, by making it an instrument to advance their narrow interests and repress the toiling masses. When the people begin to use parliamentary institutions for advancing their cause and they fall away from the influence of the reactionary bourgeoisie and landlords, these classes do not hesitate to trample underfoot parliamentary democracy as was done in Kerala in 1959. When their interest demands, they do not hesitate to replace parliamentary democracy by military dictatorship. It will be a serious error and a dangerous illusion to imagine that our country is free from all such threats." (Para 72)

It is the interests of the working class to defend parliamentary institutions as they provide facilities, which an authoritarian regime denied, to advance the revolutionary struggle. That is why the CPI(M) at its last two Congresses gave an important place to the struggle against authoritarianism among its immediate tasks.