

## *The Marxist*

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### ***19<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Changed Political Situation***

Within three months of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPI(M), there has been a major change in the political situation in the country. The Left parties withdrew support from the Manmohan Singh government on July 9, consequent to its decision to go ahead with the nuclear deal with the United States. The trust vote taken by the Congress led government saw the Left parties coordinating with a number of non-Congress secular parties to vote against the confidence motion. This has brought about the beginnings of a realignment of political forces in the country.

How does this relate to the political-tactical line adopted at the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party? How do we carry forward the tasks set out in the political resolution of the Congress?

The political resolution highlighted the danger of the strategic alliance being forged with the United States. The resolution noted that : “During this period, foreign policy issues and strategic relations with USA came to the fore due to the strong opposition mounted by the CPI(M) and the Left on the UPA government’s departure from the framework of the Common Minimum Programme. ... The Indo-US Defence Framework Agreement if implemented will convert India into a military ally of the United States.” It further noted that “India becoming a strategic ally of the United States would be a major gain for US imperialism. The Party decided to oppose the nuclear agreement as it was the cementing factor for such an alliance.”

The importance that the United States attaches to the nuclear deal was made clear by the top Bush Administration personnel. Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, called it a “strategic gain” for the U.S. Nicholas Burns who till recently was the Under Secretary of State and the main negotiator of the deal wrote : “There is a tremendous strategic upside to our growing engagement with India. That is why building a close US-India partnership should be one of the US’s highest priorities for the future. It is a unique opportunity with real promise for the global balance of power”.

What the “real promise” means is the gain the U.S. makes in tilting the global balance of power more in its favour by enlisting India as a strategic ally.

The Party Programme which was updated in 2000 had noted the growing collaboration of the ruling classes with foreign finance capital. The advent of

imperialist globalization and the enormous strengthening of the big bourgeoisie after liberalization laid the basis for the deepening collaboration with imperialism. As the CPI(M) Party Programme states: "The imperialist-driven globalization and the policies of liberalization adopted by the Indian ruling classes have heightened the imperialist penetration in all spheres in our country". This is finding a direct reflection in foreign policy. The determination shown by the Prime Minister and the Congress leadership in concluding the nuclear deal and forging the strategic alliance with the United States reflects this class reality.

It is given the vital importance of defence of national sovereignty, protecting an independent foreign policy and opposing imperialist penetration, that the political resolution set out among its current tasks that: "The Party will mobilise all patriotic and democratic sections to thwart the US imperialist designs to convert India into its strategic ally."

As the Congress party is the prime mover in the pro-imperialist course adopted by the UPA government, the CPI(M) and the Left will take this into account when implementing its tactical line. Just as the Party fought the BJP-led government's pro-American policies, so also the Congress will have to be defeated in the next Lok Sabha elections to ensure that the strategic alliance with the US does not go forward.

## **ECONOMIC LINKAGE**

The record of the Manmohan Singh government has been marked by efforts to push ahead with the neo-liberal measures and provide more concessions to big business and foreign finance capital. The political resolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress lists out some of the more important measures. Spell out. (para2.13) The resolution notes that "Many of these measures follow from the recommendations of the US-India CEO Forum".

This is an important linkage. The CPI(M)'s opposition to the strategic alliance is not only because of the nuclear deal but the strategic economic partnership which Manmohan Singh forged with Bush during his visit to Washington in July 2005. The way the Congress-led government has sought to push for FDI in retail trade, promote corporatisation of agriculture, open up the financial sector further to foreign capital and allow FDI in a whole range of sectors and services, the push for privatization in infrastructure through the PPP route and so on are all part of the blue print laid out in the US-India CEO Forum report.

A situation where the Left had blocked many of the neoliberal measures of the Manmohan Singh government became intolerable for the big bourgeoisie and its foreign collaborators. In the past four years, some of the pet proposals of the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister for the privatization of pension funds, the further opening up of the financial sector, the entry of FDI into retail trade and other sectors were halted due to the opposition of the Left.

The break with the Left also symbolizes the Congress leadership's resolve to pursue the neoliberal agenda without the encumbrance of the Left.

In fact, by 2007, the advocates of neoliberalism and the representatives of big business had begun to openly call for a compact between the Congress and the BJP to thwart the Left's opposition to the reforms and to press ahead with the rightwing economic agenda. That this was not a realistic proposal was another matter. What has been seen in the nineteen nineties too was the fact that a government at the Centre supported by Left is not what imperialism and the reactionary circles in India can countenance.

The economic growth which Messrs Manmohan Singh and P. Chidambaram gloat about reveals the class outlook of this government. The boast of 9 per cent growth translates itself into a record of having produced the highest number of billionaires. At no time has India seen such sharp disparities in income and wealth. The collective wealth of the 40 richest Indians rose to Rs. 14 lakh thousand crore in 2007. It is this enormous concentration of wealth and the super-rich who are influencing politics and politics in India. The manner in which this strata and big business brazenly intrudes into policies was seen in the way they opened their coffers to bribe and purchased opposition Members of Parliament during the trust vote on July 22, 2008. Their stakes in keeping this government alive was sufficient to finance the whole sordid operation.

The fight against the neo-liberal policies which has such a deleterious impact on the livelihood of the working people, is therefore intrinsically connected to the anti-imperialist task of fighting against the strategic alliance with the United States. The Party Congress called for the stepping up of the struggle against the neo-liberal polices and defending the interests of the working people. The struggles of the peasantry and agricultural workers in the face of the agrarian crisis, the movement against privatization and erosion of the hard won gains of the working class and the struggle against privatization of public services and curtailment of the public distribution system are all to be seen as part of the fight against the pro-imperialist neo-liberal policies.

In this vital struggle, the Party has to campaign among the people that both the Congress and the BJP advocate similar policies and it is necessary to fight the economic policies of both these parties, whether at the Centre or in the states.

## **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST BJP-RSS COMBINE**

Ever since its defeat in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, in the period after, the BJP fell back on its hardcore Hindutva agenda to regroup. This is clearly seen in the manner in which the BJP-RSS combine has raised issues in the past four years. The Sethu Samudaram project was converted into the Ram Sethu issue by the RSS and the VHP. The terrorist attacks in various parts of the country are utilised to make anti-Muslim propaganda. The Amarnath Shrine land issue has provided another opportunity to make communal capital. It is in the states

where the BJP runs government that the full-fledged reactionary agenda manifests itself — the communalization of the administration and the educational system, the targeting and attacks on minorities and the pursuit of rightwing economic policies.

As per the Party Congress direction, the CPI(M) will consistently fight the communal politics of the BJP and the Hindutva agenda of the RSS. While doing so, it should be kept in mind that the recent electoral successes of the BJP have been due primarily to the failures of the Congress. Firstly, as the Party Congress resolution points out, the Congress and the UPA government's support has eroded due to the price rise, the agrarian crisis, unemployment and the failure to ensure that economic growth benefits the common people. The BJP has cashed in on the discontent engendered by the policies of the UPA government and those of the Congress state governments. This resulted in the BJP's success in the assembly elections in Punjab, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh where there were Congress state governments. In Karnataka too, the BJP has for the first time formed a government on its own where earlier the Congress had a short-run coalition government with the JD(S).

This erosion of support of the Congress should be seen along with the now familiar characteristic of the Congress party. It refuses to take a firm stand whenever the Hindutva forces go on the offensive. This is evident in the way the Congress leadership decided to backtrack on the Sethu Samudaram project. It is also seen in the manner in which the Ghulam Nabi Azad government went along with the Governor on the Amarnath Shrine land issue initially.

The CPI(M) and the Left have to mobilize the people to fight against the price rise and other anti-people policies of the Manmohan Singh government. This is necessary to ensure that the discontent among the people is channelised around a secular platform. At the same time, it will be wrong to think that the BJP and the RSS combine can be combated solely on the plane of economic issues. The vigorous defence of secularism requires the exposure of the divisive and communal character of the BJP's politics. The political-ideological struggle against the Hindutva ideology needs to be carried out more systematically especially when many of the secular parties refuse to take on such a task due to opportunistic electoral compulsions.

### **THIRD ALTERNATIVE**

The political-tactical line spells out the need for strengthening the independent basis of the Party. This is essential for both building the Left and democratic movement and for rallying the forces necessary for creating the third alternative. As noted in the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party, without increasing the independent strength of the Party and the Left, it is not possible to develop a stable third alternative. The third alternative envisaged by the Party Congress is one which is a policy based alternative to the Congress and

the BJP. A common platform of policies should be evolved based on a consistent anti-communal outlook, a set of pro-people economic measures and defence of national sovereignty and an independent foreign policy. It is through joint campaigns and common struggles that a third alternative will emerge based on a common programme. The Party Congress had pointed out that the third alternative cannot be created as a mere electoral alliance to meet current exigencies. While the work for the third alternative will be carried on, if elections come in the meantime, the Party will seek to have electoral adjustments and alliances wherever required. Based on the political line worked out in the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress, we have to concretize our tactics in the new situation after the withdrawal of support to the UPA government.

In the Central Committee meeting held on 19-20 July, assessing the new situation, the following approach was decided: firstly, the Party should work to isolate the BJP and the communal forces. Secondly, the Congress party which has pursued a pro-imperialist policy and anti-people economic policies has to be opposed. Thirdly, the Party and the Left should rally other secular parties who can take a stand against the nuclear deal and against the anti-people policies of the UPA government while taking a firm stand against the BJP and the communal forces.

The Congress party by pursuing the line of forging an alliance with the USA and advocating economic policies which are pro-imperialist and neo-liberal in content has forfeited the right to lead any secular coalition. The fight against communalism cannot be carried forward by compromising with US imperialism.

Since the third alternative has not yet taken shape through joint movements and by forging a common platform, in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections whenever they are held, the Party should strive for a combination of the non-BJP, non-Congress parties which can present an immediate electoral alternative.

In electoral terms, the political line of the Party Congress warned against the consolidation of two combinations one led by the Congress and the other led by the BJP. While it may not be possible to present a full-fledged third alternative at the time of the Lok Sabha polls, the joint stand and campaign taken by the Left, the TDP, BSP, JD(S) and others should be able to present an electoral alternative.

## **BUILD INDEPENDENT STRENGTH OF PARTY**

The Party Congress has called for giving priority to develop the independent strength of the Party and expanding its political base. This can be accomplished by the Party taking up the class and mass issues to develop movements and struggles. The Party's work among the basic classes particularly the working class including unorganised sector workers should be stepped up. The Party has to give priority to organising the peasantry and the rural poor who are badly affected by the agrarian crisis. In order to widen

the political base of the Party, the Party Congress has set out the specific task for the Party to champion the cause of the dalits, tribal people, women and minorities. It has emphasized taking up social issues and the social charter as part of the Left and democratic programme.

The coming period should see the initiation of local struggles on the whole gamut of neo-liberal policies which are affecting the lives and livelihood of the working people. The example of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh where tenacious struggles were conducted on the demands of the peasantry and for land distribution and house sites shows how taking up the urgent problems of the people meets with a big response. The Party should take up social issues ranging from caste oppression, women's oppression and obscurantist social practices. The commendable steps taken by the Party in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu against caste discrimination should be followed in other states.

### **THE CPI(M) – TARGET OF ATTACK**

The opposition of the CPI(M) to the strategic alliance with the United States and its determined struggle to check the UPA government's neo-liberal measures came to national attention because the UPA government was dependent on Left support. This twin role of the Party against imperialism and policies of liberalization made it the target of a vicious campaign in the corporate media and by the ideologues of the ruling classes. This campaign has been intensified after the withdrawal of support by the Left. The CPI(M) will not shirk away from meeting this political and ideological offensive. The Party Congress had enjoined us to counter this offensive with equal determination by taking up the class issues, by the firm stand against the communal and divisive forces and standing firm on the anti-imperialist platform. The Party should be able to take its campaign deep among the masses.

### **ROLE OF LEFT-LED GOVERNMENTS**

The Congress also discussed the framework in which the Left-led governments should function in a situation where there are severe constraints in implementing pro-people measures and putting in place alternative policies. The record of the successive governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura over the decades has expanded the mass base and influence of the Party in these three states. In the current situation where the Central policies are inimical to Left-oriented pro-people policies, the Left-led governments have to strive hard to ensure that they fulfill the minimum commitments made to the people and find ways to implement policies which provide relief to the people.

Issues such as industrialisation, consolidating agricultural development, employment generation, maintaining and protecting public services like the health and educational systems and provision of social welfare measures in

the face of the neo-liberal onslaughts and growing encroachment of state powers were discussed in Part II of the Political Organisational Report. The document: "On Left-Led Governments: Experience and their Role in the Present Situation" adopted in the Congress is being printed in this issue of *The Marxist*.

In the present situation, the role of the Left-led governments of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have a vital bearing on the prospects of the Left and democratic forces in the country. The Party has to rally all the democratic forces in defence of these governments.

## **ORGANISATION**

The CPI(M) is the strongest contingent of the Left with a Party membership of 9,82,155 in 2007. There was an increase of 13.18 per cent in the membership between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Congresses. The membership of all the mass organisations in which Party members work stands at over 6 core 17 lakhs. This represents a 25.6 per cent growth in the same period.

The Party membership has a class composition as follows: working class 32.36 per cent; agricultural labour 23.76 per cent; poor peasants 18.93 per cent and middle peasants 10.25 per cent. 75.06 per cent of the Party members are from the working class, agricultural labour and poor peasants.

As for the social composition, members from the scheduled castes constitute 19.93 per cent; scheduled tribe 6.43 per cent; women 11.93 per cent and Muslim minority 10.22 per cent. The women membership has registered a slight growth but it is still not satisfactory.

How to expand the Party in the weaker states and new areas? For this, the Congress set out certain organisational tasks. The work in the priority states needs more attention. There has to be a correct approach to Party and mass organisation relations. Until we are able to develop broad-based mass organisations, the Party cannot grow. At the same time the Party Congress has stressed the necessity to maintain the standards of membership of a Marxist-Leninist Party. A call for initiating a rectification campaign to cleanse the Party of wrong trends, factionalism and corrupt practices has been given. The work of Party education has progressed, but the gap exists in covering the entire membership which is expanding and consists mainly of entrants after 2000.

The Central Committee has been entrusted with the work of bringing out an ideological document and an updated report on the rectification campaign. Both these tasks are important for the ideological and organisational strengthening of the Party.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Congress has infused confidence in the Party that it is prepared to meet the challenges in the coming period – political, ideological and organisational. The entire Party must be equipped with the political-tactical line and the organisational tasks, so that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) can go forward to become a strong all India Party.