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Editorial

The CPI(M)'s opposition to the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal and the associated efforts to draw India into a US-dominated strategic partnership has, naturally, led to a violent reaction from the ruling classes and its media voices. Through these columns, over the past couple of years, since the first joint statement on strategic partnership released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and US President George Bush in July 2005, we have been drawing attention to the dangers of India being turned into a supplicant of US imperialism. Apart from negating the consensual declared objective of pursuing an independent foreign policy, such a partnership with US imperialism has consequent serious implications on India's defence and security concerns. These issues and such concerns will continue to be debated in this issue and subsequently in these columns. Hence, these arguments are not being repeated here.

However, the important point that merits consideration here is that instead of meeting our criticism of the deal and its consequences, our detractors are mounting a scurrilous campaign against us. US imperialism's cheer leaders and the drumbeaters of the Indian ruling classes are advancing absurd reasoning of the CPI(M)'s opposition to the deal instead of contesting what we publicly state.

One such reasoning is that while the government is engaged in this deal for increasing the electricity generation capacity in the country to benefit our farmers and poor people, the CPI(M) is opposing it at the behest of China. This is not unusual for the ruling classes to resort to such obnoxiously low level arguments when their analytical bankruptcy to contest the CPI(M)'s point of view is exposed. Further, the resort to such tactics is also to conceal their unabashed eagerness to ally with US imperialism at the expense of exposing the country's sovereignty to greater vulnerability.

Let us take up the issue of augmenting India's energy capacities and generating more electricity. There can be no two opinions on the need to expand our capacities to generate more power. As India develops further, energy augmentation is of utmost importance. The moot question, however, is whether the nuclear energy expansion is the only option, or, even the best option that we have at the moment.

As of 2005, nuclear power generation was 3,310 MW or a mere 2.5 per cent of India's total power generation capacity. Now, if this were to increase to 10,000 MW by the year 2,015 as planned, this would still be only 5 to 7 per cent of India's projected capacity generation then. Thus, this deal and the attendant

consequences to India's sovereignty and foreign policy are being undertaken for such a miniscule part of our power generation.

This, apart, is nuclear power generation the most cost-effective? On the contrary, it is the most expensive option. As compared to coal, nuclear energy would be one and a half times more expensive. Compared with gas, nuclear power would be twice as expensive. So is the case with hydro electricity. Therefore, by all counts, nuclear power is the most expensive.

The National Hydro Power Corporation has estimated that India has at least 50,000 MW of untapped hydro potential. They have estimated that in Nepal, the untapped potential would be higher at 83,000 MW. On the basis of our friendly relations with Nepal and through international agreements, the tapping of such huge hydro potential will not only augment our energy capacities at half the cost of nuclear energy, but will also tame these rivers which regularly consume the lives of hundreds of people through torrential floods. This year's floods have been described by the United Nations as 'unprecedented' in human memory.

In addition, India is indiscriminately allowing the export of coal and other non-renewable mineral resources. Instead, if this coal were to be utilised for generating electricity, it would cost us much less than producing nuclear energy.

Given this, the government's arguments that the Indo-US nuclear deal is to augment our energy resources and to provide electricity to the farmers and poor sounds, indeed, hollow. On the contrary, it appears that as a consequence of this deal, huge commercial orders running into thousands of crores of rupees for the purchase of nuclear reactors would be placed on US and other advanced countries corporations. The profit bonanza to multinational corporations is there for all to see with the attendant benefits to sections of corporate India. Is India then actually going in for this deal to bolster US economic interests? Can we allow this to happen under the false propaganda of benefit to the Indian farmers? If the same amount of resources were to be spent on generating power through hydro or thermal electricity, as would be spent on the purchase of nuclear reactors and nuclear fuel, India's energy augmentation would be many times higher. Thus, the nuclear deal not only exposes India to greater vulnerability on various scores, it drains a huge amount of our scarce resources and, thus, prevents India from exploiting fully its available less expensive energy options. These are the facts.

The more bizarre disinformation campaign is that the CPI(M) is opposing the deal at China's behest. This charge, however, does not apply to the BJP presumably, for its opposition of the deal. The reason for the BJP's opposition, of course, is entirely different from that of the CPI(M)'s. Given the BJP's track

record when in government, the current opposition is a mere posturing and smacks of a 'hurt' that such a deal ought to have been concluded under its government and not under the UPA government!

Be that as it may, those who know of the CPI(M)'s birth and history will know that for nearly two decades both the international Communist giants – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China – opposed the CPI(M)'s policies from different perspectives. The CPI(M)'s policy directions are determined by its own perceptions of what is in the interests of India and its people. Those who are willing to eagerly surrender India's sovereignty to US imperialism should be the last ones to dole out unsolicited advice and certificates of patriotism. If our detractors are worthy of character and substance, then they ought to meet our arguments on their merits rather than take recourse to such perfidy.

We heard similar arguments when the CPI(M) opposed Pokhran-II. In fact, the then NDA's Defence Minister, George Fernandes, publicly announced that the nuclear tests were necessary to meet the Chinese challenge. Once Pakistan responded by its nuclear tests, India's huge advantage in conventional warfare vis-à-vis Pakistan was wiped out in a single stroke. Far from enhancing India's security and defence potential, the BJP/NDA through Pokhran-II reduced us to the level of Pakistan's capabilities. The BJP today argues that the Indo-US nuclear deal limits our strategic programme which can only be to China's and Pakistan's advantage.

Who, may we ask, is vigorously pursuing this Indo-US nuclear deal which, we are told, will limit India's strategic capacities, thus, providing advantage to our neighbours? It is those who are propagating and supporting the deal who are, thus, by this logic, acting at the behest of China and Pakistan!

While the pen-pushers of US imperialism and the Indian ruling classes continue to spread canards exposing their complete incapacity to meet the CPI(M)'s objections on merit, the Indian people, surely, will not allow India to be reduced as a US supplicant.

In the 60th anniversary of our independence, the 150th anniversary of 1857 and the 250th anniversary of the battle of Plassey which heralded the colonial rule over India, we cannot allow any erosion of our hard won sovereignty and independence. On the contrary, we need to strengthen it.