

Extracts from Political-Organisational Report, 20th Congress, April 4-9, 2012, Kozhikode, Kerala

Relations with Non-Congress Secular Parties and the Third Alternative

The political-tactical line of the 19th Congress had provided the direction that as against the Congress and the BJP we should strive to build a third alternative. For this the Party should work for joint actions and build united struggles with the non-Congress secular parties on commonly agreed issues.

In the current tasks set out in the political resolution of the 19th Congress it was stated:

“The Party will maintain relations with all the non–Congress secular parties for developing united struggles and joint actions on common issues. The building of a third alternative must be undertaken. The Party should take the initiative for this and strengthen Left unity to facilitate this work.”

Earlier in the 16th, 17th Congress and 18th Congresses too we had set out the tactical goal of building a third alternative as against the Congress-led alliance and the BJP-led alliance. In the 17th Congress, summing up the experience of such third formations being attempted, it was stated that it should be based on some common programme. The process of formation of such a third alternative as distinct from electoral understandings for specific elections must begin by drawing the non-Congress secular bourgeois parties and other democratic forces into campaigns and struggles on common issues.

In the 19th Congress we further clarified that a third alternative will materialize only when there is a change in the stand of the political parties which are today either with the Congress or the BJP. As far as economic policies are concerned, most of the regional parties adhere to the policies of liberalisation. Without affecting a change in the outlook of these parties it will not be possible to form an alternative political combination. This can be brought about only by building big movements and unleashing struggles which can bring about change in these political parties. The resolution stated: “It is only through such movements and struggles that the masses following these parties will be influenced so that the shift will take place”.

We have to review the experience of our efforts to forge such a third alternative in the past one decade. We have been noting the change in

the character and role of the regional parties since the 16th Congress in 1998. The regional parties represent mainly the interests of the regional bourgeoisie and the rural rich. As such they are not against the liberalisation policies which have benefited the regional bourgeoisie too. They may oppose some of these policies while in the opposition but adopt the same when they are in state governments. Further, with the advent of coalition politics at the Centre, the regional parties aspire to be in the central governments in order to strengthen themselves in their states. This has led to their taking opportunist positions. They join hands either with the Congress or the BJP whenever it suits them and they can be in the central government.

We have to keep these factors in mind while striving to have joint actions and joint platforms with these parties. The regional parties have a substantial mass base. The Congress and the BJP seek to rally these parties into their all India alliances – the UPA and the NDA. It is necessary for us to maintain relations with the non-Congress secular parties which include the regional parties. It is possible to have joint struggles and united actions with some of these parties on people's issues to widen the mass movements. At the national level our experience has been that on some issues like price rise, farmers' issues and Centre-state relations we can join hands with these parties. We did so in the anti-price rise movements. The joint calls given by the 13 Left and secular non-Congress parties for the April 27, 2010 hartal and the subsequent hartal on July 5 are such examples. We had given also a joint call against corruption and on the Lokpal Bill with some of these parties in August 2011. Inside parliament, we have been cooperating with the non-UPA, non-NDA parties like the TDP, AIADMK, BJD and the JD(S).

At the same time, we have to note the vacillations and the opportunist changes in the position of these parties, both the Samajwadi Party and the RJD, while they participated in the all India hartal on price rise, backed out when it came to the question of supporting the cut motion on the Union Budget in 2010. The RLD led by Ajit Singh joined hands with the Congress on the eve of the UP Assembly elections. The AIADMK has recently distanced itself from participating in joint campaigns and struggles outside parliament and is keeping its options option before the next parliament elections.

The other experience in the states is that many of the regional parties are reluctant or averse to joint actions and struggles in any consistent way. The 19th Congress resolution had said that it is only by joint struggles and campaigns with these parties that we can influence their mass and build pressure on these parties to bring about a shift in their policy positions. But such sustained struggles and joint movements with these parties are not happening. Further, as many of these parties are in a position to

come into state governments, it is difficult to forge a common programme which they will adhere to once they are in government.

Moreover, as it was pointed out earlier in the 16th Congress, the formation of a stable third alternative can come about only when the Left gets further strengthened at the all India level. Without this, such combinations are short term measures. In the present situation where the Left has not been strengthened it becomes all the more difficult to rally these parties and to retain them in any stable formation.

At the time of elections it may be necessary to have electoral understanding with some of these parties. But as pointed out in the review of united front tactics with bourgeois parties in the 17th Congress, it should be confined to the election concerned and should not be extended to a long term one.

Given all these circumstances it is not feasible or practicable to project the slogan of a third alternative with these parties. It is not possible to have a third alternative based on a common programmatic platform with these parties at the national level and to expect that it will emerge through building widespread united struggles and movements with them.

Not putting forth the political slogan of a third alternative does not mean however that there is no need to maintain relations with the non-Congress secular parties. In the present situation, particularly when serious efforts are on to isolate the CPI(M) and weaken the Left, we should strive to maintain relations with these parties.

In the present situation our attitude to the non-Congress secular parties should be as follows:

We have to strive to draw such parties into joint actions and struggles on people's issues which will help us to widen the movements and help us to have access to the masses following these parties. There are other issues such as the defence of secularism, Centre-State relations and defence of democratic rights on which joint actions are possible. Along with this, it is important to coordinate and maintain relations with the non-Congress, non-BJP parties inside parliament. During elections, whenever possible we may enter into electoral understandings with some of these parties depending on the Party's interests.

We have been setting out the Left and democratic alternative as the real alternative to the bourgeois-landlord policies. Since the tenth Congress we have been putting out the tactical goal of building the Left and democratic alliance. This should be our main focus. In the course of our efforts to build the Left and democratic alliance, we may have to forge joint platforms with some of the secular, non-Congress parties from time

to time. But this should help us in our endeavours to rally all the forces which need to be brought into the left and democratic front.

In the present situation wherein the CPI(M) and the Left have suffered electoral setbacks and the key to overcome our weakness and to strengthen the Party's influence lies in the expansion of the Party's independent role and activities, we must ensure that our tactics of entering into electoral understanding and joint platforms with these parties should not hamper or blur the Party's independent identity and activities among the people.