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The Political-Tactical Line of the 21st Congress

The 21st Congress was held at a time when the CPI(M) and the Left are facing a complex situation and serious challenges. There is a rightwing offensive underway since the BJP victory in the Lok Sabha election in May 2014 and the advent of the Narendra Modi led government at the Centre. The big bourgeoisie and foreign finance capital are the prime backers of the government's aggressive pursuit of neo-liberal policies. The RSS and the Hindutva forces see the present time as opportune to advance their communal agenda. The United States in its rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region has registered success in entangling the Modi government in this strategic venture.

All this is happening at a time when the CPI(M), the biggest party of the Left has suffered serious electoral reverses. It has been weakened by the severe attack on the Party in West Bengal, its strongest base. The Left as a whole has suffered losses.

The Congress therefore assumed special importance as it had to equip the Party with the correct political-tactical line (P-TL) which could help the Party meet this difficult situation and point the way towards renewing the Party and set it on the path of advance. In order to do so, the Central Committee had decided that first of all there has to be a re-examination of the P-TL that we have been pursuing. It was necessary to see if there were any defects or lags in the successive P-TLs and lapses in implementation that require correction.

REVIEW OF POLITICAL-TACTICAL LINE

The Review Report covers a period of 25 years. The starting point is the 13th Congress of the Party which was held at Thiruvananthapuram in 1988-89. The reason for this is that it is from then onwards that there were major changes in the international and national situation. The fall of the Soviet Union brought about a major change in the international correlation of class forces. It is from the beginning of the nineties that the liberalization process unfolded in India. It was also the period which saw the rise of the Hindutva communal forces.

The political-tactical lines adopted from the 14th Congress onwards in 1992, did help the Party to meet the immediate prevailing situation and to fight the Congress or the BJP, depending on the situation, as the main threat. It gave a correct direction to fight the communal and separatist forces, build Left unity and facilitate the formation of the Left-led governments in Kerala and Tripura and consolidate the Left Front government in West Bengal. The tactical line also helped in building the unity of the working class movement as seen in the 15 general strikes conducted by the Central Trade Unions in the last two decades.

RELEGATION OF LEFT & DEMOCRATIC FRONT

However, the growth of the Party has been confined mainly to the three states – Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura. The bulk of the Party membership and the membership of all the mass organizations are also concentrated in these three states. In states like Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, there has been increase in Party membership and activities of the mass organizations but there has been no worthwhile advance in terms of the mass base of the Party or its political influence. The review undertaken pinpoints certain shortcomings which are responsible for this. The first weakness in the P-TL has been the relegation of the Left and democratic front from a realizable slogan to a distant one. The struggle to rally the Left and democratic forces and build a Left and democratic alliance was not undertaken. Instead, a new intermediate stage or alliance was called for, which was the Left, democratic and secular alliance. This was posited first against the Congress at the Centre and later against the BJP.

This was later developed into a third alternative in the 16th Congress of the Party in 1998. Such an alliance was envisaged with the non-Congress secular bourgeois parties which are, in the main, regional bourgeois parties. The aim was to try and bring these parties together on a common programme or set of policies which could be projected as a third alternative to the Congress and the BJP. This could not materialize nor was it realistic since the regional bourgeois parties had themselves undergone major changes in the last two decades. The regional parties were not against the neo-liberal policies, given the class interests of the regional bourgeoisie, nor were they averse to joining hands with either the Congress or the BJP to share the power in a coalition government at the Centre, if it suited their interests. That is why the idea that they could be brought on an alternative platform of policies did not materialize and was unrealistic.

ROLE OF REGIONAL PARTIES

The role of the regional parties had changed – a fact that we have been noting since 16th and 17th Congresses of the Party. Under the impact of globalization and in the phase of neo-liberal policies, sections of the regional bourgeoisie have joined the ranks of the big bourgeoisie. Further, the contradiction between the non-big bourgeoisie and the big bourgeoisie has become muted. This is the reason why the regional bourgeois parties have adopted the same neo-liberal policies when in government in the states. Further, the dominant regional parties also represent the rural rich nexus – the landlords, rich peasants, contractors and big traders. Therefore, their outlook towards the issues of the poor peasants and agricultural workers are different from what the Party and the Left stand for. In such a situation, the tactical line we have pursued of rallying them around a common set of alternative policies at the national level has been unrealistic and erroneous.

On the other hand, prolonged alliance with these parties in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Odisha and U.P affected the independent growth of the Party. The Party could not project its own political platform distinctly before the people, nor, set out a Left and democratic programme which is distinct and different from that of the regional bourgeois parties. Further, the efforts to project a national level alliance with these parties were mainly at the time of elections as none of these parties were willing to come for any sustained movements or struggles on people's issues or on policy matters.

UNITED FRONT TACTICS

For Communists, united front tactics are an essential part of the tactical line to increase the strength of the Party. United struggles and joint movements help the Party to have access to the masses following other parties and to influence them. However, the regional parties like the TDP, AIADMK, DMK, Biju Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party were not willing to come for joint struggles on people's issues. They would

only agree to some electoral understanding. With the independent strength of the Party and the Left not growing, it became more difficult to bring these parties into any united actions.

It is this experience which led to the dropping of the third alternative as a concept in the 20th Congress of the Party held at Kozhikode in 2012. The review concludes that there is no basis for forging a national alliance with the regional parties, projecting it as an alternative. Instead, joint actions on common issues should be pursued.

While ruling out an all-India line of a national alliance with the secular-bourgeois parties and implementing the same uniformly in the states, the review states that the Party can adopt suitable electoral tactics in the states for understanding with the regional parties. But this should be done within the framework of the overall P-TL and it should be governed by the Party's interests and the requirement of rallying the Left and democratic forces.

RESTORE PRIMACY OF LEFT & DEMOCRATIC FRONT

A result of this tactical direction of rallying the non-Congress, non-BJP parties as part of an alternative was also the failure to concretely address the task of rallying the Left and democratic forces in each state as against the bourgeois-landlord policies, whether it be advocated by the all India bourgeois parties or the regional parties. Thus, only in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura was there any advance towards rallying the Left and democratic forces and this had already taken place at the time of the 10th Congress held in 1978. The review, therefore, seeks to correct the shortcomings in the political-tactical line. It calls for restoring the primacy of the slogan of the Left and democratic alliance and the work to actually realize the building of such an alliance.

The concept of the Left and democratic front was first spelt out in the Tenth Congress in 1978. The Political Resolution of the Congress stated:

The struggle to build this front is part of our endeavour to bring about a change in the correlation of class forces, to end a situation in which the people can choose only between two bourgeois-landlord parties, and get imprisoned within the framework of the present system. By gathering all Left and democratic forces together for further advance, the Party makes a beginning to consolidate these forces which, in future, will participate in shaping the alliance for People's Democracy under the leadership of the working class. The left and democratic Front is not to be understood as only an alliance for elections or Ministry, but a fighting alliance of the forces for immediate advance – economic and political – and for isolating the reactionary classes that hold the economy in their grip.

The review reiterates that the Left and democratic front that we aim to build is an alliance of the classes we want to rally for the people's democratic front. This is a fighting alliance which has to be rallied around a programme which provides an alternative to the bourgeois-landlord policies. It cannot be an electoral alliance nor just confined to some political parties. The current tactical line should flesh out the parties, mass organizations and democratic forces who can be mobilized for the Left and democratic alliance. This concept of the Left and democratic front and the struggle to build it has not been on the current agenda of the Party despite it being the tactical goal in successive political-tactical lines.

INDEPENDENT STRENGTH OF PARTY

The review report also calls for paying utmost attention to building up the independent strength of the Party. This can be accomplished only by the Party taking up the multifarious issues of the people and leading struggles and movements. Along with that, there has to be united actions with other political and democratic forces on burning issues of the people, their livelihood and rights. It is only when the class and mass organizations develop into powerful broadbased platforms that the Party and the Left can advance. Independent activities, building Left unity and growing united actions with democratic and secular forces

will help us to advance towards a Left and democratic alternative. There can be no national alliance with the regional bourgeois parties. Instead, electoral alliances in the states should be strictly governed by the interests of the Party and should help to rally the Left and democratic forces.

Parliamentarism is a reformist trend which is an obstacle to develop mass movements and building the Party organization and mass base. This trend can be checked if the P-TL pays due attention to strengthening the independent role of the Party and the building the Left and democratic front, which is a class based alliance and not an electoral front.

PHASE OF NEO-LIBERAL CAPITALISM

The neo-liberal phase of capitalism has brought about major changes in the socio-economic conditions. The neo-liberal policies have a deep impact on all sections of the working people. Without analyzing the deep changes and the impact on various classes, it is not possible to formulate correct slogans and tactics for developing the mass movements of the working class, peasantry, youth, students and other sections. The review notes that there was a lag in arriving at a comprehensive understanding of this phase of neo-liberal capitalism. In the working class, changes are there in the composition and the nature of work. For instance, there is increasing contractualisation of the workforce in the organized sector. The bulk of the workers are in the unorganized sector with varied forms of work. In the rural areas, there is a substantial work force which is engaged in non-farm manual work. The proliferation of the services sector has spawned various types of casualised work and self-employment. All these need to be studied and appropriate slogans have to be coined. There is a need for new organizational forms and methods to be devised. It is with this in view that the Central Committee set-up three study groups on agrarian relations, on the working class and the middle classes and urban areas. Their reports will be studied and whatever suggestions are relevant will be incorporated for the future tactics and slogans for the Party and the class and mass organizations. Only two issues of immediate relevance were taken up and incorporated in the Political-Organisational Report.

FIGHTING COMMUNALISM

The experience of the fight against communalism has been reviewed in the report. The Hindutva communal forces cannot be fought only by electoral tactics. Concrete steps to fight communalism in the social, ideological, cultural and educational spheres must be spelt out in the P-TL to be formulated. The review makes the important point that the fight against the impact of the neo-liberal policies should be integrated with the fight against communalism. Only then can the masses be drawn into the battle against the communal danger. In the fight against the Hindutva communal forces, we should strive for the broadest mobilization of the secular and democratic forces.

It is based on this critical review that the future political-tactical line has been adopted in the form of the Political Resolution.

II. POLITICAL RESOLUTION

The Political Resolution adopted by the 21st Congress sets out the political-tactical line to be pursued by the Party in the coming period. The Resolution analyses the international and national situation prevailing at present in order to formulate the current political-tactical line and the tasks to be undertaken by the Party.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

Some of the main features of the international situation highlighted in the Resolution are:

(i) The present phase of the systemic crisis is unfolding with the governments drastically cutting expenditure through “austerity measures”. This is a naked attack on the hard-won rights of the working people. This is resulting in heightened inequalities in all the capitalist countries. This sows the seeds of a future crisis, where the consequent decline in the people’s purchasing power will intensify this ongoing crisis.

(ii) In the US efforts to retain hegemony, military interventions in West Asia continue. After Iraq and Libya, the US is supporting the reactionary Arab states who are backing the Islamist rebels in Syria. The rise of the ISIS in Iraq and Syria is a result of this. The US is also backing the latest Saudi-led military attack in Yemen. The rise of the Islamist forces in the region is a direct result of this imperialist intervention.

(iii) The confrontation between the US and Russia on Ukraine is a result of the eastward expansion of Nato. The Ukraine conflict reflects the contradictions between major capitalist powers in Europe, the US-EU on one side and Russia on the other.

(iv) The new trade agreements being negotiated like Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) is meant to continue the US dominance in the economic sphere and such agreements would increase corporate power and make it more difficult for governments to regulate markets.

(v) In Europe, popular movements and working class struggles against the austerity measures have been going on. The victory of the Left party Syriza in the parliament elections in Greece is a significant development. How they are able to come out of the present crisis remains to be seen but the Greek people for the first time in Europe opted for a political alternative to the neo-liberal consensus.

(vi) The growing strategic cooperation between Russia and China; BRICS setting up the New Development Bank and China taking the initiative to constitute the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are steps which will strengthen the multi-polar trend.

(vii) The Left advance has been maintained in Latin America though Venezuela is facing serious challenge from the rightwing forces backed by the US. Cuba has won a major victory with the United States’ decision to reestablish diplomatic relations and releasing the Cuban Five.

(viii) In Bangladesh there is a critical struggle going on between the rightwing fundamentalist forces and the secular and democratic forces on the other. In Sri Lanka the defeat of the Rajapakse government in the election and the formation of a new government under President Sirisena has been a step to protect the democratic system. The new government has to take steps necessary for the settlement of the Tamil question.

The resolution extends support of the Party to all the anti-imperialist struggles going on around the world including the struggle of the Palestinian people. It expresses solidarity with the socialist countries and with the Left and revolutionary movements in Latin America.

Two aspects of the international situation have a direct bearing on this rightward shift. There has been only a tenuous and uncertain recovery from the 2008 financial crisis. This has led to international finance capital and imperialism pushing for more neo-liberal measures to be adopted worldwide. The Indian ruling classes are also seeking to overcome the difficult economic situation by pursuing such measures.

The US pivot to Asia and the re-balancing towards the Asia-Pacific region is meant to contain the growing power of China. In this US strategy, India is expected to play a key role. The closer strategic entanglement with the United States is also providing an impetus to the rightward shift.

RECORD OF MODI GOVERNMENT

The eleven-month record of the Modi government confirms that it will act at the behest of its main backer, the big bourgeoisie. The policies of opening up more on FDI in various sectors; greater

privatization such as the denationalization of the coal industry and helping the corporates to grab more land by amending the Land Acquisition law are all clear indications of the neo-liberal thrust.

The Modi government also believes in the neo-liberal prescription of austerity for the many in order to ensure the prosperity of a few. The squeeze on public expenditure and the cuts in the budgets on health, education and the social sector constitute a direct assault on the people's livelihood and well-being. The MGNREGA is being curtailed and the ICDS budget has been halved. Even the limited rights provided in the Food Security Act and other legislations like the Forest Rights Act are being undermined. The Modi regime is moving to curtail the rights of workers by amending the labour laws. The ordinance raj that is unleashed by the Modi government is an early warning of the authoritarian bent of the government.

In this eleven-month period, there has been widespread increase in the distress of farmers. There has been no respite for the common people from the price rise of food items and there has been an increase in unemployment for both the rural and urban poor.

The other feature of the rightwing offensive is the multi-pronged effort to advance the Hindutva project. There has been a qualitative change in the situation as the BJP government works in close coordination with the RSS. It is the RSS agenda which is sought to be introduced in the educational system in institutions of research and cultural bodies. At the ground level, the RSS and its various outfits are taking up issues such as cow slaughter, the so-called 'love jihad' and Bangladeshi infiltration in order to create communal tensions and provoke communal polarization.

FOREIGN POLICY: RIGHTWARD SHIFT

The rightward shift is manifested in the foreign policy of the Modi government too. The move away from non-alignment and the pro-US orientation in foreign policy has been unfolding since the phase of liberalization began in the early 1990s. The Modi government is carrying forward more vigorously the strategic ties forged by the UPA government with the United States. The Indo-US Defence Framework Agreement is being extended for another ten years. During Obama's visit in India, a Joint Vision Statement on the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region was issued which explicitly aligns India's "Act East" policy with the US pivot to Asia. Modi has sought to build and strengthen military cooperation with Japan and Australia. This ties in with the US approach for a quadrilateral alliance involving the US, India, Japan and Australia.

The resolution calls for stepping up the anti-imperialist activities and struggles.

CENTRAL THEME

The Resolution's central theme is how to counter the rightwing offensive and the tactical line to be pursued in this regard. The tactical line emphasizes the need to develop mass struggles and movements by the Party and the mass organizations on the problems and issues affecting different sections of the people. The resolution provides direction for the development of the struggles and movements in the various mass fronts, working class, kisan, agricultural workers, women, youth, students, dalits and adivasis.

FIGHTING COMMUNALISM

The Resolution gives importance to the fight against the Hindutva forces and communalism. The Review of the Political-Tactical Line had pointed out the need for concretizing the tactics to combat the communal forces in various spheres – social cultural, ideological and educational fields. Based on this, the Resolution sets out five tasks in these spheres to be undertaken by the Party and the class and mass organizations. They include mobilization of the intellectual and cultural resources of the Party for the

ideological fight against communal forces; intervention in the educational system to protect democratic secular education; organizing social and cultural activities particularly in the working class residential areas; developing cultural and social activities to counter the pernicious casteist and obscurantist values purveyed by the communal forces and finally developing the organizational work in the adivasi areas and among the dalits to counter the work of the RSS outfits.

POLITICAL LINE

The political line sets out as the main task, the fight against the BJP and Modi government's policies. It calls for an integrated struggle against the neo-liberal policies and in defence of the people's livelihood which should be combined with the fight against communalism and the political-ideological struggle against the BJP-RSS combine.

While the main direction of the struggle is against the BJP, the Party will continue to oppose the Congress as it pursues neo-liberal policies. It is the Congress-led UPA government's anti-people policies and corruption which helped the BJP to come to power. Therefore, the political line precludes having any understanding or electoral alliance with the Congress.

The political line has added a new direction, i.e., the struggle against neo-liberal policies being pursued by the state governments including those run by the regional parties. The line also entails opposing the bourgeois –landlord politics and policies of the regional parties in order to organize the working people and mobilize them around the CPI(M) and the Left and democratic platform. This is an outcome of the review of the political-tactical line pursued so far.

The political line entails giving maximum importance to developing and building the independent strength of the Party. In the present situation where the Party and Left forces have suffered reverses, it is of crucial importance to restore and expand the independent strength of the Party. United struggles and joint movements are a necessary component of the endeavour to increase the independent strength of the Party. Such united platforms and mass movements on people's issues, defence of national sovereignty, States' rights and against imperialism should be conducted with other democratic forces and non-Congress secular parties. The purpose of united actions of the class and mass organizations is to seek to draw the masses following the Congress, BJP and other bourgeois parties into joint action.

The political line requires work to rally the Left and democratic forces and to realize the Left and democratic front step by step. The electoral tactics of the Party should be guided by the interests of strengthening the Party and rallying the Left and democratic forces.

Increasing the independent strength of the Party, widening and strengthening Left unity and working to forge the Left and democratic alliance constitutes the core of the political-tactical line.

INDEPENDENT STRENGTH OF PARTY

Independent expansion of the Party requires the emphasis on developing the class and mass movements. The development of sustained struggles on local issues provides the links with the struggle against the neo-liberal policies. The Party must directly intervene and take up struggles on social issues. The expansion of the independent strength of the Party also means the overcoming of the reverses suffered in West Bengal and the erosion in mass support. The Party has to overcome the adverse situation by struggling for the defence of democracy and resisting the violence by the TMC, mobilizing the people on the issues of their livelihood and countering the rising threat of the communal forces. The Party also has to consolidate its mass base in Kerala and strengthen the LDF. In Tripura, the Party has expanded its mass base and the good work done by the Left Front government has helped to expand the influence of the Party. Steps should be taken to consolidate this influence and there should be vigilance to defend the Left Front government from the attacks by the BJP government at the Centre.

LEFT UNITY

The strengthening of Left unity is the other task set out in the resolution. This necessitates widening the ambit of the Left united platform by bringing all the Left parties, groups and individuals on to a common Left platform. At present, six Left parties have come together for joint actions. This needs to be taken forward to forge a broad Left platform.

LEFT AND DEMOCRATIC FRONT

The Resolution has spelt out the contours of the Left and democratic front that has to be forged. The resolution, for the first time since the 10th Congress, has described this as follows:

At present, the nucleus of the forces that can be drawn into the Left and Democratic Front are of the Left parties and their class and mass organisations; Left groups and intellectuals; socialists scattered in various parties and democratic sections within the non-Congress secular parties; democratic organisations of the adivasis, dalits, women and minorities and social movements which are taking up the issues of the oppressed sections. Only by drawing all these forces on to a joint platform based on a programme that is distinct and opposed to the policies of the bourgeois-landlord parties can the movement towards the Left and Democratic Front take a concrete shape. A step in this direction would be to build a common platform with all the various class and mass organisations with a common charter of demands.

The struggle for building Left and democratic unity will proceed differently in different states. Various types of Left and democratic combinations will emerge in the states but they will contribute to the building of the Left and democratic front at the all India level. The resolution spells out the Left and democratic programme which includes the immediate demands of the working class, peasantry, agricultural workers, rural labour, middle classes and the intelligentsia. The Party and the Left should be able to conduct struggles and movements around these demands to rally the various classes and socially oppressed sections.

The Party Congress adopted a Resolution on Convening a Plenum on Organisation by the end of this year. This review of Party Organisation and the mass organisations will gear up the organization and revamp it to be able to implement the line of enhancing the independent strength of the party and enabling the advance to build a Left and democratic alliance.

The Resolution concludes with eight tasks to tackle the rightwing offensive and to advance the struggle against the neo-liberal policies, communalism and imperialism.

- i. The fight against the rightwing offensive must be taken up squarely. The BJP government's economic policies which are part of the neo-liberal drive should be stoutly opposed. All manifestations of the neo-liberal attack on the working people should be resisted by organizing and mobilizing the different sections of the working people.
- ii. The Hindutva agenda of the BJP-RSS combine must be fought politically and on the ground by the Party and the mass organisations in the social, cultural, ideological and educational spheres. The broadest mobilization of the secular and democratic forces against the communal danger and in defence of secular values should be undertaken.
- iii. The Party should consistently take up the anti-imperialist agenda. This includes mobilizing the people against the growing strategic ties with the US and the ruling classes succumbing to US pressures. Support should be extended to all anti-imperialist struggles world wide.
- iv. The Party should step up its efforts to defend the interests of the socially oppressed sections, dalits, adivasis and minorities. The Party has to directly intervene to defend the rights of women and to fight against the growing attacks on women.
- v. Fighting against the authoritarian danger posed by the rightward shift by a broad mobilization in defence of democratic rights, artistic freedom and opposing curbs on parliamentary democracy.

vi. The struggle to defend the Party and the Left from the violence and attacks on democracy in West Bengal must be supported by an all India campaign to defend democracy and democratic rights. The Left and democratic forces should defend the Tripura Left Front government from attacks by reactionary forces and hostility of the central government.

vii. The Party should give utmost attention to expanding its independent role and enhancing its strength and mass base. The Party should stress on united actions on class and mass issues. The class and mass organisations should provide the thrust for united struggles and movements to draw in the masses following the bourgeois parties.

viii. Building and widening Left unity, rallying the various classes and working people around the Left and democratic programme so that progress can be made towards forging the Left and democratic front.

(Para 2.91)

The main direction of the political-tactical line of fighting the rightwing-communal forces and the BJP government's policies, of integrating the fight against the neo-liberal policies and communalism, provides the CPI(M) with a great opportunity to enhance its independent strength and mass influence.

Building a strong CPI(M), widening Left unity and moving forward to rally the Left and democratic forces, so that we can advance step by step, towards forging a Left and democratic front is the spirited call which emanated from the Visakhapatnam Congress.