

HARKISHAN SINGH SURJEET

Scope of the Party Programme, Brief History and Evolution of the Programme

The most important document for the Communist Party is its programme.¹ Dwelling on the subject Lenin had stated that adherence to the programme is essential for a person seeking to join the Communist Party. It is on this basis that a person applying for membership of the Party pledges his or her allegiance to the Programme and Constitution of the Party.

The Programme of any given Communist Party should reflect the concrete application of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions prevalent in the country for the particular stage of the revolution. It remains valid till the revolution passes over to the next stage. It sets out the strategy for a particular stage of the revolution.

For instance, before independence, when the feudal landlords were allies of British imperialism, the immediate objective was national-liberation. The stage of our revolution was directed against these two classes. But since the working class was unable to acquire the leadership of the movement, a compromise was struck between Indian bourgeoisie and British Imperialism. This compromise resulted in the non-completion of the anti-feudal, ant-imperialist tasks of the revolution. Despite this, the stage of revolution changed with India becoming independent from British rule.

The new stage was that of the Peoples' Democratic Revolution. The Programme should define the stage and the revolution, the class composition of the front that would comprise the peoples' democratic front which would be led by the working class, and the tasks that are to be accomplished in this stage. Only the leadership of the working class would ensure that the unfinished tasks of the democratic revolution are completed. It would require a complete study of the concrete conditions prevailing, and on that basis work out the strategy and tactics to complete that stage. It is only after completion of the peoples' democratic revolution that we can enter the stage of the socialist revolution. How long the peoples' democratic stage would remain depends on various factors.

CLASS ALLIANCE DIFFERS FROM STAGE TO STAGE

The class alliance, however, will differ from stage to stage. The objectives will also vary from stage to stage.

During the stage of national-liberation, the main enemy was imperialism and its

¹ Education series on updated Party Programme, 2002, p. 1.

ally feudalism. Success of the anti-feudal struggle enables the working class and its allies to come to the fore. In countries where, along with the struggle against imperialism, the anti-feudal struggle has been carried forward to success, the stage of revolution passes over to peoples' democratic stage. The classes against whom the revolution is targeted also varies from stage to stage. In our country, in the first stage it was against imperialism and feudalism. In the second stage the revolution is directed against the big bourgeoisie, landlordism and its collaborator, imperialism, In the third stage i.e., the socialist stage, it is directed against capitalism as a whole.

Whereas in the first stage the bourgeoisie is an ally of the working class along with the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, in the second stage where the anti-feudal tasks remain unaccomplished, the classes targetted are the big bourgeoisie, feudalism and imperialism as the collaborator. The classes who have to carry through the revolution will consist of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and sections of the non-big bourgeoisie. It is, of course, necessary to understand that the role of these classes will be different according to their place in the production process. The working class has to lead the revolution based on its alliance with the peasantry. It has to carry along with it the petty-bourgeoisie and the non-big bourgeoisie as the revolution develops.

In the socialist stage it is the working class which has to lead the revolution and eliminate the remnants of the bourgeois society. These are the broad principles on which the Programme of the Communist Party is formulated.

The Communist International first enunciated these principles. It was based on these principles that after the October Socialist Revolution, many other revolutions succeeded in China, Vietnam and North Korea.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRAMMATIC DOCUMENTS

As stated earlier, these principles were enunciated by the Communist International. In the pre-independence period, the guiding role was provided by the Colonial Thesis presented by Lenin. The Thesis laid down the strategy and tactics for the colonial peoples fighting for liberation. M.N. Roy tried to project his alternative views in the form of a theory of decolonisation, i.e., as capitalist relations develop, the country will get decolonised automatically. Lenin and the Communist International rejected this view. Practice also proved the fallacy of this theory. El Browder, the leader of the Communist Party of USA, also came out with the thesis of automatic advance to the socialist stage, after the victory over fascism. This also was totally erroneous.

Though the Communist Party of India was formed in 1920, it was not until the Meerut Conspiracy Case that it succeeded in creating some influence. Communists existed as some groups in different regions of the country at that time but were not able to work out any programmatic document. The first programmatic document worked out was in 1930 — The Draft Platform of Action when the Meerut trial had started. After the release of the Meerut prisoners, the second document The Draft Political Thesis was adopted by the provisional Central Committee in December 1933. A centralised communist party came into existence only in 1933 after the release of the Meerut prisoners. The party set up a central headquarters and organised the units in different provinces of the country. The third programmatic

document Platform of Action was adopted in 1936. The earlier two documents had a sectarian approach based on the 6th Congress of the Communist International (CI). By the time the third document was issued the 7th Congress of the CI had taken place. It made corrections in the line pursued by the various communist parties all over the world. This Congress was held in the background of the rise of fascism and advanced united front tactics while keeping the basic positions of Marxism regarding different classes intact, in leading the revolutionary struggle.

It is only on the basis of this platform of action that the Communist International recognised the party as a constituent of the CI. Some basic formulations of the Programme were presented in 1921 and 1922 when the party was illegal. This was reflected in the raising of the slogan of complete independence in Ahmedabad and Gaya sessions of the Congress.

Again some broad indications of programmatic questions in the manner of guidelines was provided by the first Congress of the Communist Party of India.

DIFFERENCES OVER ASSESSMENT

In the middle of 1947 itself differences arose inside the Central Committee on the assessment of independence. A section argued that we had to pursue the same tactics which were pursued during the struggle for independence because the tasks remained unfulfilled. This resulted in the line pursued from the Second Congress which was elaborated in the document on strategy and tactics. It was a detailed exposition of the programmatic objectives to be fulfilled in our country.

But the following years were to see growing differences inside the party on this line. By 1950 differences saw the party divided into three groups. This was the period when the post-war upsurge was continuing and various anti-feudal struggles were being waged with the highlight being the Telengana armed struggle. Three schools of thought emerged in the party. The differences were on the question of strategy and what path the revolution in India has to take — whether it is going to be the Chinese path or the Russian path. The leadership at that time advocated the Russian path which meant that the working class would take the lead and the peasantry would follow. Another view was advocated by the Andhra comrades — that in India the revolution has to take the course of the Chinese path, the rural countryside has to be aroused and it would encircle the cities and the working class would join them.

The differences led to our seeking the help of the CPSU to resolve the issue. Following thorough discussions with the CPSU leadership, led by J.V. Stalin, the Indian delegation came back united with a draft programme. This draft advocated that the country is yet to be free and that imperialism remains the enemy and the nature of political independence was not properly recognised. On the path of the revolution, the document stated that it would take neither the Russian nor the Chinese path, but an Indian path.

At a special conference convened in 1951, this programme was approved, without dissent. The third Congress of the party held in December 1953-January 1954 gave its stamp of approval to this programme. This programme also was flawed in as much as the stage of the revolution was set out as anti-imperialist, leading to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie, including the big bourgeoisie was to be our ally.

Subsequent events after the adoption of the programme were to expose the erroneous understanding contained in the programme.

This led to serious inner-party differences which continued for ten years. This period saw intense debate and the widening and sharpening of the divide. Many programmatic documents were circulated and debated. These however failed to resolve the issue. At the fourth Congress of the Party the issue could not be clinched. At this Congress some paras concerning the programmatic understanding were incorporated in the Political Resolution at the instance of the section opposed to the revisionist understanding.

It stated:

While laying utmost emphasis on the task of building the broadest mass unity for immediate demands and for progressive policies, the Communist Party will also strive to make the masses realise, through their own experience, the necessity of bringing about basic transformations in our economy, in our social and state structure and the necessity of establishing a new government which can carry out these transformations.

Further,

In the course of its general propaganda and ideological political activity among the masses, the Party will systematically, concretely and constantly popularise the fundamental slogans of People's Democracy — basic agrarian reforms with distribution of land to the peasants gratis, the confiscation of British capital and establishment of a democratic stage — and emphasise the necessity of a Government of People's Democracy.

The attainment of political freedom by India and the leading position of the bourgeoisie in the Indian State do not alter the basic objective and basic strategy of the Indian revolution. It is the establishment of a Government of People's Democracy — which includes all the democratic classes, including the national bourgeoisie, and is led by the working class — that will bring the democratic revolution to completion. The People's Democratic Government will not only complete the tasks of democratic revolution, but also put the country on the path to socialism — the only correct path, in the present epoch, for the advance of every country. Therefore, while resolutely fighting for every progress that can be made under the present conditions, the Communist Party will carry on mass propaganda in favour of People's Democracy and Socialism.

The differences, however, continued and by the time we went to the 6th Congress at Vijayawada, the Party was sharply divided. Two separate draft programmes were circulated at the Congress. The holding of the 1960 conference of world communist parties and the adoption of a common document averted the split for the time being. We hung on to the hope that the understanding of the international movement would help us in resolving the programmatic issues. The basic formulation contained in the document pertained to socialism becoming a decisive factor. The 1960 statement of 81 Communist and workers parties said: 'the world socialist system and the forces fighting against imperialism, for a socialist transformation of society, determine the main content, main trend and main features of the historical

development of society.’

CPI(M) FORMED

The ruling class, with the aim of weakening the movement, was keen to exploit the differences within the Party. A section of the leadership was arrested and put behind bars on the pretext of being pro-China on the Sino-Indian border dispute. The other section tried to use this opportunity to capture the Party machinery at all levels without caring for the unity of the Party. The leadership that was jailed and was to constitute the CPI(M) later on, remained in prison for one year. The released leaders made a proposal that a special congress be convened on the basis of the membership at the Vijayawada Congress. It also made it clear that the decision of the Congress would be binding on all. The other section however refused to yield to this request leading to a situation where 32 members of the National Council walked out. They were clear that they had no other option but to reorganise the party on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. The formation of the CPI(M) took shape.

The Tenali convention decided to convene a Party Congress which should concentrate on adopting a programme for the party. Taking up the task seriously, a draft was prepared by M. Basavapunnaiyah, P. Sundarayya and Harkishan Singh Surjeet which was circulated among the delegates for discussions. This document became the basis of the programme for the CPI(M). After thorough discussions the Party Congress adopted it. It must be known that at that time we had not yet clinched the ideological issues being debated in the world communist movement. We deferred a discussion on the issue as it was not possible for the Congress to handle such a heavy agenda. Moreover, the primary task was the adoption of the programme. Ideological issues were later taken up at the Plenum at Bardhwan in 1968.

PROGRAMME OF 1964

The split in the Communist Party in the country was the result of a prolonged struggle within the communist movement which continued for a decade. On some very basic issues, particularly relating to the class collaboration and class struggle, and the concept of national democracy versus peoples’ democracy, the Programme formulated in 1951 was found to be incorrect in relation to both the stage of the revolution and the class alliances. It would not be wrong to state that our Party from the beginning was working not on the basis of the Programme but certain documents which combined the immediate and ultimate objectives without referring to the particular stage of the revolution. It was only in the Seventh Congress when the CPI(M) was formed, were we able to formulate a proper programmatic document.

The basic direction of the Programme adopted at the 7th Congress in respect to the stage of the revolution, the class character of the Indian State and the class alliance to be forged, remains valid even today. However, developments at the international plane that had taken place by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the decade of 1990, necessitated a reappraisal of the situation and our understanding. It is in this context that the 14th Congress of the Party held at Chennai (then Madras) adopted a resolution to ‘update’ the programme. We did not think that the programme

needed a revision. It only needed to be updated taking into account the developments in the international and national scene.

We had been working up to the Fourteenth Congress on the basis of this Programme adopted in the Seventh Congress in Calcutta. However, the strategy was based on the assessment provided by the 1960 Statement of the International Communist Movement adopted by eighty-one Communist and Workers' Parties. It was natural that this assessment had bearing on our Programme. The 1960 Statement noted: 'It is the principal characteristic of our time that the world socialist system is becoming the decisive factor in the development of society.' It goes on to say: 'The world capitalist system is going through an intense process of disintegration and decay' and 'Socialism entails more and more the use of the achievements of science and technology in the interests of social progress' and that 'time is not far off when socialism's share of world production will be greater than that of capitalism. Capitalism will be defeated in the decisive sphere of material production.' The Statement continues: 'A new stage has begun in the development of general crisis of capitalism' and talked of 'the growing instability of the entire economic system of capitalism'. Based on this understanding it concluded: 'The restoration of capitalism has been made impossible not only in the Soviet Union, but in the other socialist countries as well'.

To sum up, capitalist collapse was advanced as a possibility around the corner. It was this serious error that prevented a concrete study of the changes that were taking place in capitalist countries and the ways in which it was adapting to meet the challenges arising from the socialist countries. Apart from that, all the resolutions adopted by the Party, including those about the trade union movement, the peasant movement, the mass organisations, including our political approach to various issues confronting the Party and the country, had traces of this understanding.

Subsequent events proved this understanding wrong. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in the countries of Eastern Europe brought about a radical shift in the international correlation of class forces as well as in the national situation. This, therefore, necessitated an updating of the Party Programme taking into account the changed realities. It was against this background that the Fourteenth Congress adopted a resolution in this respect.

After having gone into the wrong assessment of the situation prevailing at that time, and commensurate with the changes in the country, changes were made in the programme. We have to understand what are the major points of departure from the earlier formulations.

We have stated earlier that the factors necessitating the changes arose from the wrong assessment of the international situation as well as the setbacks to socialism with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in the East European countries. From a bi-polar world, the US remained as the sole superpower intent on imposing its hegemony the world over.

As far as the internal situation is concerned, important changes have taken place since the Programme was first adopted in 1964. For instance, the liberalisation drive has brought about a new phase in the capitalist path of development. The one party dominance of the Congress at the Centre came to an end; there have been dissensions in the ruling classes. In the absence of a strong Left movement, the loss

of monopoly of power by the Congress has been exploited by the communal and divisive forces. The growth of the communal danger had to be properly estimated especially after its taking over the Central government in 1998 which is posing a serious challenge to national unity, and the Left and democratic forces.

The 1964 Programme had nine chapters: 1) India Attains National Independence 2) The Bankrupt Path of Capitalism Leads to Growth of Monopolies and Danger of Neo-colonialism 3) Balance Sheet of Bourgeois Agrarian Policies 4) Foreign Policy 5) State Structure and Democracy under Congress Rule 6) Conditions of the People 7) Programme of Peoples' Democracy 8) Building of Peoples' Democratic Front 9) Building of a Communist Party.

The first three chapters of the 1964 Programme, i. e., India Attains National Independence, Bankrupt Path of Capitalism, and Balance Sheet of Bourgeois Agrarian Policies have been replaced by the Introduction, Socialism in the Contemporary World, and Independence and After in the updated Programme.

The new Programme has eight chapters. Certain details in the first chapter are not found relevant in the present situation, and second and third chapters have been combined and dealt with in a single chapter in the New Programme. Chapter three of the New Programme titled 'Independence and After' incorporates the understanding and spirit of Chapters 2 and 3 of the 1964 Programme. (Bankrupt Path of Capitalism and Danger of Neo-colonialism, and Balance Sheet of Bourgeois Agrarian Policies).

THE PROGRAMME UPDATED

The programme as updated in the year 2000 has an introductory chapter giving an outline of the history of the Communist movement. The purpose of this chapter is to give the newer generation of Party members and supporters an idea of the historical role of the Party and its important contributions both in the struggle for independence and towards achieving the objective of People's Democracy.

The Second Chapter, is also new one. It analyse the struggle against imperialism in the 20th century; the victory of the October socialist revolution, the defeat of fascism; how the struggle for socialism and against imperialism developed and the state of world capitalism today in the era of imperialist-globalisation. It also deals with the four major social contradictions and how they are operating.

The Third Chapter traces the path of capitalist development pursued by the ruling classes in independent India; the dual character of the Indian bourgeoisie; the development and subsequent dismantling of the public sector; and the phase of liberalisation after 1991. On the agrarian front, the failure to take anti-feudal steps, the development of capitalism in agriculture and the current pursuit of the policies of liberalisation in agriculture. While the 1964 programme dealt with the first one and half decades, the programme updated it to the current industrial, agrarian and economic policies of the bourgeois-landlord State.

The Fourth Chapter on foreign policy summarises the main trends in foreign policy into three phases. The updating involves the third and current phase which began with the shift in the economic policies of liberalisation and the collapse of socialism. This pro-imperialist turn has become nakedly manifested with the BJP coming to power. The reversal of the non-aligned foreign policy and the open quest

for becoming a strategic ally of the United States became clear. The need to fight for an anti-imperialist non-aligned independent foreign policy has to be emphasised.

In Chapter Five, while adhering to the basic characterisation of the Indian State as the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords led by the big bourgeoisie, the various aspects of the State structure have been updated in the light of the experience of the last three decades. The threats to national unity through separatist and divisive movements in the North-East and Kashmir have been added. The problems of caste system and caste oppression have been elaborated. The status of women and gender oppression have been highlighted. The various instruments of State power, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the armed forces — their role has been updated in the light of recent experience. The positive content in parliamentary democracy despite the class limitations have been highlighted and the need to defend democracy and democratic rights underlined.

In Chapter Six, the goal of People's Democracy and its programme has been listed. Here, necessary changes have been made in the People's Democratic Programme keeping in mind the experience of the socialist countries and the socio-economic developments in the country. The nature of the political system under people's democracy is dealt with including the provision of a multi-party system.

Chapter Seven, analysis the role of the various classes in Indian society. It identifies the main exploiting classes and characterises the stage as essentially anti-feudal, anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist. The leading role of the working class is asserted with the worker-peasant alliance being the basis for the People's Democratic Front. The specific role of different strata including the middle class based on the recent experience have been formulated. The perspective of participation in governments both in the states and Centre have been clarified in the light of the experience of the past decades.

The last chapter, Eight stresses the necessity for building a powerful Communist Party based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN THE PROGRAMME

While laying down our ultimate objective of socialism, after achieving People's Democracy, the Programme has adhered to fundamental positions:

1. Adherence to Marxism-Leninism not as a dogma but to be concretely applied to the concrete conditions prevailing in our country in the context of world situation.
2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat: The term means exercising the leadership of the working class over the State as against the bourgeois hegemony over the State. Proletarian statehood is the aim for which we are working.
3. Concept of proletarian internationalism: At the time of dissolution of the Communist International in 1943 the resolution made it very clear that a situation had arisen where the Communist Parties cannot be guided from one Centre and they have to work out their own programmes. At the same time, all of them remain part of the international communist movement with the common objective of achieving the ultimate aim of communism. But this

resolution subsequently was sought to be undermined in the form of various organisations like the Cominform and International meetings of the Communist Parties laying down the programme for the various Communist Parties in the world. We ourselves had to come in confrontation with some of the formulations made in such international conferences on national democracy and non-capitalist path. We must understand that in the present situation there cannot be such conferences which can be binding on various parties. But there has to be exchange of opinions on various issues of common interest like those of peace, struggle against imperialism and solidarity with the working class and the Communist movement. There have to be conferences to exchange views even on certain important theoretical questions because Marxist-Leninist theory is not a static one; it is constantly being enriched. Therefore the concept of proletarian internationalism means unity and solidarity with the working class movement, the national liberation struggles and with the communist movement the world over.

4. Democratic Centralism: The Party should function on the principles of democratic centralism. Sufficient emphasis should be given on the democratic rights of Party members and various units for free expression of views. But once the policy is finally decided by the Party Congress, CC or the concerned Party committees, it should be binding on all for implementation. Without this no revolutionary work can be carried.
5. Our programme properly places the question of peaceful and non-peaceful path. Our programme says that the CPI(M) will strive to achieve the establishment of People's Democracy and socialist transformation through peaceful means.

'However, it needs always to be borne in mind that the ruling classes never relinquish their power voluntarily. They seek to defy the will of the people and seek to reverse it by lawlessness and violence. It is, therefore, necessary for the revolutionary forces to be vigilant and so orient their work that they can face up to all contingencies, to any twist and turn in the political life of the country.'

I have dealt with only a few basic aspects of the Programme. There are many other important features of the Programme which have to be studied and understood properly.²

² Education series on adopted Party Programme, 2002, December, p. 1.