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Forty Years of Indian Independence

The Independence of India was no doubt an earth-shaking event, giving a decisive blow to imperialism and the old colonial system. The events that have followed and the results flowing from the achievement of Indian freedom follow inevitable laws of social development, the policies and actions of various classes and interests involved in the background of the new world setting created by Soviet victory in the anti-fascist war. The achievements and the successes are to be judged first in terms of the historical opportunities opened by the new epoch — the change in the balance of world forces. Secondly, they are to be judged in terms of the experience and achievements of other newly liberated countries, in terms of the class limitations of the new ruling classes of the country.

The 1960 declaration of the Communist and Workers' Parties said. 'Our time whose content is the transition from capitalism to socialism initiated by the Great October Socialist Revolution, is a time of struggle between the two opposing social systems, a time of socialist revolution and national liberation revolutions, a time of breakdown of imperialism, of the abolition of the colonial system, a time of transition of more people to the socialist path, of the triumph of socialism and communism on a world-wide scale.'

UNREALISED OPPORTUNITIES

This was the background of the opportunities for free India after ending its enslavement. It is, of course, indisputable that the Indian people, the democratic and workers movement and free India could not utilise the grand opportunities opened by the new epoch. The Indian people's movement was unable to introduce radical social change to take the next step forward in the evolutionary struggle. The liberation struggle was delinked from basic agrarian changes, the agrarian revolution, with the result that the task of completing the democratic revolution remained unfulfilled and the social struggle could not move forward to the next stage — the struggle for socialism.

This was, of course, the result of the fact that the leadership of the liberation struggle and free India remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie in alliance with the landed interests. The alliance was not interested in the agrarian revolution but in the consolidation of

its rule, with whatever changes were necessary for its own interests.

In China, the situation was entirely different. During the course of the liberation struggle, the working class leading the peasantry occupied the leading position and after liberation, state power came into the hands of the working class in alliance with the peasantry. This enabled the revolution to complete the task of the democratic stage and move forward to socialism. The possibilities opened by the epoch were fully realised.

Four decades of independence in India have not led to qualitative changes in the class situation. It was not historically inevitable that the unfinished democratic revolution should require more than four decades for its completion. But the process got prolonged because of the weakness of the communist movement during the national liberation struggle and its consequent inability to organise the mass for an agrarian revolution and a direct assault on class power. Consequently, the bourgeois-landlord regime in India enjoyed a prolonged spell of stability.

NO SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO CLASS RULE FROM THE MASSES

Obviously, the task of completing the democratic revolution, the people's democratic revolution and opening the way to the next stage, socialism, could not be performed without the leadership of the working class, a strong Communist Party and workers' and peasants' alliance. The Programme of the CPI(M) states. 'The nature of our revolution in the present stage of its development is essentially anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly and democratic in the present era the proletariat would have to lead the democratic revolution as a necessary step-in its forward march to the achievement of socialism.'

The establishment of a People's Democratic State led by the working class, the elimination of exploitation and influence of foreign capital, and the agrarian revolution are the tasks before the democratic revolution. The core and the basis of the people's democratic front is the firm alliance of the working class and the peasants. This was the historical role of the working class in the present conditions of the epoch. A role which in India could not be fulfilled.

The CPI(M) also has, from time to time taken stock of its weaknesses to overcome them. The Communists and the left forces have increased their strength in recent years. The CPI(M) had to pass through severe repression, semi-fascist terror and virtual illegality (Emergency); it, however, succeeded in winning electoral successes in three states and widening its mass influence. But its strength is as yet inadequate to discharge its historic task.

In the absence of a revolutionary initiative, of an alternative

from the fighting masses led by the working class, the stage was occupied by the new rulers, the bourgeois-landlord alliance.

Day by day, the new rulers came into direct conflict with the aspirations of the masses, their democratic urge and above all, the urge of the peasant masses to get rid of feudal exploitation. The developments of the last four decades are the product of the conflict between the people and the ruling classes with imperialism and conflict between the ruling classes and the people.

PRESERVATION OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

The four decades reveal both positive and negative developments. The positive aspects consist of (i) maintenance of Indian independence; (ii) foreign policy of non-alignment; (iii) India's Constitution and the sustaining of parliamentary democracy, despite jolts, shocks and attacks; (iv) maintenance of the independence of the economy to a great extent through national planning and nurturing of the public sector, etc.

This is perhaps an extraordinary performance and achievement for any bourgeois ruling class of a newly liberated country. It stands in sharp contrast with developments in India's neighbouring countries and elsewhere in the world. In many of these countries, direct military rule or a fake parliamentary system prevails.

Open dictatorship is the lot of many countries. Many newly liberated countries have been drawn into military alliances with the imperialist powers, losing their economic and political independence. Some of these even proclaim allegiance to non-alignment while joining in a military alliance with the USA. Pakistan is an example of a newly liberated country whose people enjoyed very little parliamentary freedom after liberation and for years have been under military dictatorship financed and armed by the U.S. imperialists. The economies of such countries are dominated by western financiers, which compromises their political independence.

What is the reason for this qualitative difference between India and Pakistan? India and many other newly liberated countries? Why could India continue to maintain an independent foreign policy of refusal to join the imperialist bloc or alliance? How could she and her ruling classes embark upon a policy of economic independence and self-reliance and continue on that line in spite of zig-zags for several years?

This is due to the difference between the ruling classes of India and Pakistan, due to the economic strength of the Indian bourgeoisie and the firm anti-imperialist national traditions rooted among the people during more than a century of anti-British struggle. Before liberation, India was considered to be a more developed colony. Notwithstanding the restrictions of foreign

imperialist rule, the Indian bourgeoisie continued to grow.

The Tata-Birla plan announced during the Second World War revealed both its strength and ambitions. It had developed its resources during the Second World War, and with the prospect of State power falling in its hands, the big bourgeoisie saw itself as the real master of the economy, an independent economy free from all inconvenient foreign rivals and restrictions. The Party Programme says: 'Even before independence, the Indian bourgeoisie had secured a certain stature and had already established itself in certain branches of industry, such as cotton textiles, sugar and cement. During the Second World War, the bourgeoisie, mostly the bigger sections, amassed enormous fortunes and consequently enhanced their economic positions.'

The Congress leaders who took over State power and represented the interests of the national big bourgeois advance were also big mass leaders with a huge mass following. They had led the people's movement for freedom for decades, and they and the Congress had developed an immense influence over the Indian people. This combination of State power with immense influence over the masses of those who led the new State; and the traditional nationalist, anti-imperialist feeling, immensely strengthened the bargaining and fighting capacity of the bourgeoisie and its government vis-a-vis the imperialists.

It is this combination that led to the decisive difference between India and many other countries and Governments which could not boast of either a strong bourgeoisie or an immense anti-imperialist backing. Those who came to power in other countries on the basis of appeal to religion or tribal interests or vague nationalist, anti-imperialist sentiments and anger, unsupported by bourgeois development and modern bourgeois interests, could neither keep the people behind them nor get the support of the economy. They dared not introduce democracy, free speech or representative institutions. If introduced, they had to be hurriedly closed down. Above all, they could not tolerate the existence of opposition parties, regarded as the hallmark of bourgeois democracy. In India, therefore, the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and imperialism continued all these years. The bourgeoisie, with its strength and State power in its hands, saw no reason to compromise with the imperialists on their own terms and surrender. Its ambition to rear an independent economy, of exploiting a vast internal market under its control, repeatedly clashed with the urgent needs of the imperialists to penetrate and subjugate the economy. The imperialists miscalculated on many occasions.

On many occasions, the Indian side had to retreat and had to accept shady compromises: The result was that the economy's reliance on the west was increasing. The ding-dong battle went on.

In the tussle to protect and advance its interests, the Indian bourgeois class made ample use of the existence of the socialist camp, socialist countries, to maintain its independence and drive a hard bargain with the imperialists. Though the working class of the country could not effectively utilise all the advantages of the new epoch, the Indian bourgeoisie was able to do so to protect their own interests. This it was able to do because it had already acquired the minimum strength required to start thinking of controlling the economy of the country, and further because it had the backing of huge mass support. Its opposition to imperialism, notwithstanding, its halting and compromising character, consistent with its class interests, coincided with the anti-imperialist democratic sentiment of the people.

This clash of interests ending in advance or compromise or retreat was also seen in the foreign policy pursued by the new State. It remained within the broad framework of non-alignment, although the policy had its zig-zags. Therefore, India did not ally with any imperialist power. On the other hand, the sharpening conflict arising out of the militarisation of Pakistan led to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

During the course of years, India's relations with the Soviet Union and socialist countries continued to develop. There was only one exception, the Indo-China conflict of 1962. For the rest, these relations became more and more friendly, and the Indian economy, in its struggle for self-reliance and independence, got valuable aid from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. The strategic industries in the public sector, without which independent industrial development was not possible, were based on Indo-Soviet cooperation. Steel, oil, machinery and other vital sectors were initially and largely helped by the Soviet Union. And finally, the cooperation was seen in the Indo-Soviet treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which strengthened India's security and contributed to the maintenance of peace in the sub-continent. In these years, there were also some vacillations and zig-zags dictated by the perceptions and interests of the ruling classes.

The developments of the last two years show that there are constant pressures on foreign policy, and new openings are being made, which may lead to its dilution. The new economic policy of the Rajiv Government, the opening of India to multinationals, the negotiations with the USA for defence equipment and light combat aircraft, the proposed American training for the executives of the public and private sector and Government services constitute developments that may lead to the erosion of the policy of friendship with socialist countries, the policy of non-alignment. The Calcutta Congress of the CPI(M) had already warned that in view of the economic policies pursued by the Rajiv Government, the non-

aligned policy could not be taken for granted. The people must keep a vigilant eye on developments and vacillations in connection with foreign policy.

BOURGEOIS DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION

It is really remarkable that the half-developed bourgeoisie of a liberated country should have had the courage to proclaim a constitution which declared fundamental rights, adult franchise, an elected parliament, the supremacy of parliament, right of free speech and organisation, freedom of conscience, etc. The feat is all the more remarkable because neither the bourgeoisie proper nor its intelligentsia representative thought of fighting, much less ending all feudal relations and privileges. Through the years of the freedom struggle, this policy had continued. Nor was the spread of capitalist relations and development so strong that this was an urgent requirement for their development. Besides those who framed the Constitution, those who formed the Constituent Assembly were elected on a restricted franchise under the earlier constitution given by Britain. It was not a Constituent Assembly directly elected by the revolutionary people in the course of their successful struggle against the overthrown regime. In fact, it was an assembly elected behind the back of the fighting people who were without franchise. In spite of this, the Constitution makers declared rights and democratic principles, which are historically associated with the victory of a revolutionary people over the old feudal order. This happened because the real power in the Constituent Assembly was the power of the victorious national movement represented by the Congress and its leaders. These leaders represented the general interests of independent capitalist development and were inspired and guided by the democratic outlook they propagated during the freedom struggle.

The Constitution, with all its faults and weaknesses, therefore, represented a big stride forward in expanding democracy and perhaps had very few parallels in newly liberated countries. The new leadership born out of the anti-imperialist struggle thought that the democratic rights of the people would enhance their own power over the people.

But, behind the declaration of fundamental rights and popular elections, the Constitution embodied the rule of the bourgeois-landlord alliance over a newly liberated people. This was its essence though it was accompanied by freedom and liberties that were not available under the colonial rule. The Constitution upheld the right to property as a fundamental right and subordinated the other fundamental rights to the need of maintaining public order and the security of the State. It was inevitable that with the passage of

time, with the growth of class conflict, the declared rights of the people should be more and more violated. The process ended in the abrogation of the Constitution under the Emergency rule.

This is how even the most democratic bourgeois constitutions are framed to meet the needs of class rule. As Stalin, in his speech explaining the draft Soviet Constitution of 1936, said, 'Further bourgeois constitutions tactically proceed from the premise that society consists of antagonistic classes, of classes which own wealth and which do not own wealth. That no matter what party comes into power, the guidance of the society by the State (the dictatorship) must be in the hands of the bourgeoisie. That a constitution is indeed for the consolidation of the social order, desired by and beneficial to the propertied classes.' (Problems of Leninism. pp. 5-9)

Of course, the Constitution makers hedged liberties and democratic rights with several restrictions and conditions. But adult franchise, elections, formation of ministries responsible for popular vote served to draw hundreds of millions in the democratic struggle, enhancing their consciousness.

In passing, it may be noted that the Constitution makers, apart from imposing restrictions and conditions on the operation of democratic rights, also showed weaknesses which were later to magnify into serious dangers to democracy and national unity. Firstly, there was no agreement on the question of official language, and English had to be accepted language, in reality, the sole official language. The British imperialists must have been extremely gratified at this development. It was a matter of shame for new India, and it also revealed the weaknesses in national unity and the incapacity of the new ruling classes to remove them on the basis of equality of all languages. Secondly, the Constitution framers decided to widen its scope beyond citizens and human beings and included cow protection in its Directive Principles. The protection given to the cow is nothing but a strong expression of the Hindu revivalist outlook that was part of the ideology of a very important section of the national leaders of the Congress. This was, of course, to be expected to some extent. The bourgeoisie and its representatives in colonial country compromising with feudal elements could not be expected to be completely secular. With the passage of time, this compromise with obscurantism was to create insoluble problems for the Indian people.

PROGRESSIVE MEASURES TO CONSOLIDATE CLASS RULE

Apart from the proclamation of the Constitution, the new rulers took some important progressive measures, measures vital for the unity of India and for ousting the influence of old friends of British rulers.

The absorption of Indian princely states virtually on the morrow of independence was of great political importance. In its absence, the Indian leaders would have truncated and further divided India to rule. The British had left the question of accession to the Indian Union to the will of the princely rulers. They refused to coerce the princes to join either of the two Unions — India or Pakistan. They allowed the princes the freedom to remain aloof from both and continue their independent existence. Indian independence would have remained a farce if the numerous princely states had been allowed to maintain their independent status. They would have acted as an imperialist knife against Indian freedom, a permanent fifth column. In fact, this was part of the original Coupland plan of the British Government to divide the country into three segments. Delay or hesitation would have permanently damaged the integrity of free India. The national leadership, seeing the danger, did not delay. While the Central

The government claimed to be neutral, the leadership aroused people in the states to demand accession, and the resistance of the princes crumbled before popular pressure ... After accession, the princes were given many concessions regarding taxation, privy purses, holding of property, etc. Some of them were made *pramukhs* of their states. But their political power was broken; the armed intervention in Hyderabad was, of course, necessitated by the rise of the Telangana struggle and the threat posed by Telangana to the bourgeoisie-landlord rule. The accession and absorption of the princely states was an event of great importance and gave a final decisive blow to the imperialist dream of political penetration through the princes.

This was, of course, necessary in the urgent interests of the industrial bourgeoisie with their desire to exploit the huge Indian market. It was an anti-feudal step that the Indian leaders had to take to bolster and strengthen their own existence and rule. It also expressed the changed correlation of class forces. In their fight against the British, the Congress leaders refused to attack the feudal princes and discouraged all popular movements against them. They often referred to the princely states as Indian India in contrast to British India, the territory directly ruled by the British.

The second important progressive measure related to the abolition of statutory landlordism through legislation and compensation. In spite of the fact that much land was left with old landlord houses and compensation given to them, the political power of this class was reduced. The big feudal landlords lost their power, their tenants became voters, and their lands were distributed though not in a revolutionary way.

Bourgeois leaders soon realised that the fundamental right property guaranteed under the Constitution came in the way of

minimum land reforms required for bourgeois advance and protection of the peasants. A number of land legislations passed by the Congress Government were challenged in the courts, and their fate appeared uncertain.

To keep these legislations beyond the court's intervention, they were validated under 31 (b) of the Constitution and put in the IXth Schedule. The bourgeois Government told the feudals that their right to property was subject to the convenience of the bourgeoisie. Only the big brother had an absolute right to property. This was almost the last significant attack by the bourgeois leadership to tame and restrict feudal exploiters to make them adjust to the needs of bourgeois development.

ANTI-COMMUNIST STANCE

While the national bourgeois leadership took care of their interests vis-a-vis the feudals they took particular care to guard themselves against the Communists and the revolutionary working-class movement. In 1947, the Congress wing in the AITUC broke away at the behest of the National Congress to found a new trade union organisation, the INTUC. Sardar Patel organised the split, asking Congress trade unionists outside and inside AITUC to come together to form a new organisation. The bourgeois leaders of the Congress required a separate organisation to extend their influence over the working class and fight the Communists. It was a political necessity for the bourgeoisie to break away. This was made plain in the speeches delivered at the foundation session of the INTUC, which made it clear that the seceders wanted a policy of class collaboration to strike at the influence of the Communists.

In the inaugural address, Kripalani made clear the differences: 'in fact, there is an unbridgeable gulf between the sponsors of the new trade union and the AITUC. The new organisation will not hesitate to employ the weapon of strike if it were essential to promote the true interests of labour. But that weapon is to be employed after due consideration and the utmost caution. But it would, however, not only be a misuse of this weapon if it were to be employed for the attainment of sectional political ends... '. Familiar language both against strikes and the revolutionary working-class movement.

Gulzarilal Nanda put the matter more clearly: 'the policies pursued by the AITUC leadership under Communist leadership which functions in its name stands in sharp and total conflict with our aims. Their ways threaten the welfare and the security of the community and are inimical to the best interests of the workers themselves. The urgent need of the movement is, therefore, to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of those

who are in fundamental opposition to the Communists and the approach to the labour movement.'

And in his presidential address Sardar Patel said, 'In their blind opposition to the Government, the Communist leaders have thrown all regard for national welfare to the winds. The irresponsibility and recklessness of these people fails all understanding. Strikes are launched on all conceivable pretexts in utter disregard of workers' own interests and well-being. Nothing is achieved through these strikes except chaos and misery all around'

It is remarkable that the tirades and attacks against the Communists and the revolutionary working-class movement were begun even before taming the feudal princes and statutory landlords. The bourgeoisie lost no time and gave priority to the task of curbing the working-class movement. Its first step was to disrupt the unity of the working class and then bring it under its political influence. This was followed by the illegalisation of the Communist Party of India, widespread repression, mass arrests of Communists, virtual illegalisation of trade unions and other mass organisations and the unheard of repression and torture of Telangana peasants to crush their armed struggle for land. All this was done while the new leaders were busy hammering out a new Constitution proclaiming fundamental rights to the Indian people. Class fear and class struggle did not wait till the proclamation of the Constitution. The Constitution was tainted with the blood of the Telangana peasants and preceded by the curses of the Telangana peasant women.

Having taken care of the Communist movement for the time being, the new leaders proceeded with the task of widening their influence over the working class and winning it over with concessions. It was the time for capturing the vast home market, for satisfying the starved demand for goods, for starting new industries. Now fiscal and economic power was in the hands of India and her Government. This was no time for strikes. Proposals for industries were mooted. At the same time, seeing the winds of change and partly wanting to fulfil some of the reforms they had advocated, the national leaders introduced new labour legislations giving relief to a working-class who had known no under colonial rule. Legislation for an 8-hour day, for three weeks annual leave with full pay, provident fund, ESI, all these brought relief to the workers and employees and went a long way in creating an atmosphere favourable to the new rulers. Similarly, the extension of the system of a compensatory allowance against rising prices accompanied by better wages in new industries also helped to temporarily stabilise the situation for the bourgeoisie and restrict strike actions in a period when the industrialists were busy capturing the home market.

AGGRAVATION OF SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS

Notwithstanding the Constitution and the unification of India through the absorption of princely states, problems of unity and democracy continued to assail the Indian people and the ruling classes as the first flush of national victory faded. The social contradictions of Indian society, which were underplayed during the freedom struggle, now asserted themselves. The bourgeois leadership, which thought that the problem of national unity had been settled once and for all, began to receive shock, after shock. The problem of absorbing the minorities and creating confidence in them about common national life and about the equal status of all became increasingly unsolvable. Elimination of the princely states did not solve the problem of nationalities and of states claiming independent status, denying Indian unity. Khalistan, Assam, Mizoram and Gorkhaland delivered their challenge one after the other, with a paralysed Government unable to deal with it effectively. The imperialists became emboldened in their intervention and incitement of communal and divisive forces, and the bourgeois-landlord alliance continuously exposed its bankruptcy in dealing with this vital problem.

As years rolled by, the limitations of the capitalist path of bourgeois-landlord rule in solving the problems of the country became more and more evident. The results of planning for an independent economy, by-passing the agrarian revolution, have already been analysed in a separate article. The limitations were not confined to economic progress only. Every aspect of national life was affected. Democracy, the Constitution, national unity, secularism, integration — on every front, there was a slide back.

The Rajiv Gandhi regime, described in the August C.C. resolution as a government of national disintegration, is the only representative of a climaxing situation, whose roots lie in the historical incapacity of the Indian ruling class to solve the problems of modernisation of national life. The 1960 Declaration of Communists and Workers' Parties said, 'after winning political independence, the peoples seek solutions to the social problems raised by life and to the problem of reinforcing national independence. Different classes and parties offer different solutions... As social contradictions grow, the national bourgeoisie inclines more and more to compromise with domestic reaction and imperialism'. This is exactly what is happening and has been happening in India. With the growth of class contradiction in the country, those who produced the democratic Constitution became busy with restricting its operation and undermining it. Also, with the growth of these contradictions, with the inability to solve the economic problem on the basis of independence, there has been an

inevitable slide towards acceptance of the onerous conditions of the World Bank. Rajiv Gandhi's New Economic Policy, with its commitment to the liquidation of the public sector, is under constant pressure to dismantle controls and licences and regulations. This is the culmination of a process that has been going on for the last few years, with the bourgeoisie resisting direct demands for heavy concessions and surrender and at the same time increasing its reliance on the West. The advantages of balancing between two camps and the power of bargaining were more and more eroded by the constraints of building a capitalist society in a period when capitalism is on the decline. Today, therefore, after four decades, instead of being completely free from dependence on imperialism, the economy is getting deeper and deeper into the World Bank trap. In the last few months, there have been more pressures to make the Government move quickly in the direction of its New Economic Policy and give more concessions.

There was recently a demand from foreign interests represented by the Assocham that foreign companies owning 51 per cent equity capital should be given national status along with all the facilities and concessions that indigenous concerns have. At present, companies whose foreign equity capital does not exceed 40 per cent are given such status. It was argued that an increase in equity holding and national status would ensure the flow of the latest technology from abroad. This was a blatant demand to obliterate all distinctions between foreign and Indian companies, seeking equal treatment for the former to take advantage of the measures that the Government may take to protect Indian industry.

The Government, though committed to the New Economic Policy and free flow of foreign capital, was unable to accept the demand in toto. At the same time, it dared not reject it out of hand. It, therefore, argued that, while it was opposed to a blanket demand of this type, it had never been rigid in the implementation of the 40 per cent condition and had allowed relaxation as the need arose. Its case-by-case flexible approach should largely meet the demand of Assocham, and the people should be prepared for a further increase in the extent to which foreign capital is given indigenous treatment.

The Government has prepared a blueprint for a new industrial policy which, of course, is qualitatively different from earlier policy resolutions, some of which also were marked by a retreat on certain positions. The proposed resolution promises to be a break with earlier years when national leaders had dreamt of a thriving Indian economy with the public sector occupying a commanding position. Further, it is meant to fulfil the deregulation demand of the World Bank. The World Bank Report, December 1986, attacks the regulation of production capacity of industrial concerns. The new policy is reported to call for the dismantling of the licencing system,

relaxing controls on monopoly houses, giving more encouragement to foreign investments and import of new technology. As a result of the proposed document, only 200 to 300 of the larger companies would, for the time being, be subject to control.

The World Bank Report on India concerning industrial regulatory policy (December 1986) demands the following: 'Immediate removal of licencing barriers for capacity growth, considerably narrowing the number of industries subject to capacity licencing, and simplifying the procedure for technology and foreign investment licence, and increasing focus on firm conduct and restrictive trade practices, and reduced concern with individual firm size and some of the structural features of the industrial market. A shift away from the reservation policies for the small scale industries and towards the promotion of growth and modernisation of small firms increased expediency of shedding activities, the transfer of assets and the redeployment of labour (with mandatory compensation) in the context of stricter lending guidelines, a fully implemented Government commitment to avoid taking over sick units and progressive decontrol of industrial prices and a greater focus on the impact of price regulation upon investment, innovation and competitive behaviour. In addition, improvements are needed in trade and fiscal policy to stimulate export activities to allow greater import competition.'

While the World Bank is pressurising the Government, the U.S. Government also is intensifying its pressure. The supercomputer deal, the deal for advanced technology for Indian combat aircraft, have run adrift. They are not moving because of the onerous anti-national conditions accompanying them. The concessions of the New Economic Policy, the compromise of deregulation and the liberalisation of trade are not sufficient for the USA to release the supercomputer and combat aircraft technology. The US pressure on our economy and other spheres continues to increase. This is a measure of the distance we have travelled from the earlier years of independence.

But the growing danger of dependence is not the result only of Rajiv Gandhi's policies. His policies, his foolish acceptance of an open the door to multinationals to increase the competitiveness and cost-effectiveness of Indian industry have certainly accelerated the process and are creating new dangers every day. These policies are far removed from the focus and objectives of earlier years. But the process was already on. The reliance on western capital was inevitable when the capitalist path was chosen. The inability of the capitalist path to reorganising the economy of a backward country in the midst of the crisis of the capitalist system was historically given.

The advance of the Indian economy under the capitalist path was

further stalled by the refusal of the bourgeois leadership to overhaul the agrarian relations, free the peasants and end-all feudal relations and disabilities. After a few initial steps to curtail the political and economic power of feudal princes and landlords, all further encroachments on their privileges were virtually stopped. Besides, under Indian conditions, the land distribution which took place after the abolition of statutory landlordism hardly affected the mass of the toiling peasantry. It was appropriated mostly by erstwhile tenants, some of them well-off and coming from upper-caste echelons, leaving in the lurch the mass of lower orders, Harijans and other castes. This was bound to happen in the absence of a revolutionary peasant movement seizing land and distributing it, irrespective of caste. The result was that caste domination, and caste oppression actually increased in the villages, keeping in existence one of the worst props of feudal relations of domination. The subsequent land distribution programme of the Central Government and the bourgeois leadership proved to be a fake. The landless tribals and Harijans hardly got any land. Soon the Congress(I) Government at the centre stopped talking about land distribution, and in the 20-point programme during the Emergency, only house-sites for the landless were' proposed.

The result of the land legislation of the Congress Government was a denial of land to the mass of the rural population and extreme concentration of land in the hands of a few (4 per cent landholders holding 26 per cent of the land). Denial of land meant denial of jobs, denial of the means of subsistence, of livelihood. Coupled with the rapid ruination of traditional industries and occupations, it resulted in the deterioration of the countryside. The rural areas growingly witnessed vast masses of unemployed and destitute people. Apart from contracting the market for products of modern industry and exercising its veto on its development, it created an explosive situation in the rural areas. This is the genesis of the monstrous atrocities on tribals, Harijans and backward classes and the peasantry, which has been increasing in every year of independence. These atrocities take place with the local police fully cooperating with the landlords and landed gentry. The police force, often drawn from the same upper-caste background as the landlords (at least the officers belong to the landlord class), lets loose terror and murder on the dissatisfied and fighting peasantry among these sections. In Bihar, it is quite clear that the police force is privatised and often acts as the instrument of landlord terror. The oppression of the rural mass is often presented as caste conflict, having nothing to do with class oppression. This situation obtains in large part of the country except where Left Front governments exists to control it.

It is little realised that during the last few decades, the rural

masses have been virtually reduced to the position of bonded labour without civil rights. In certain parts of Bihar, they are not even allowed to exercise their right to vote. The agents of landlords generally arrange to cast their votes in favour of the landlords' candidates.

INCREASING DENIAL OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

What chance have democratic or fundamental rights in the face of all this? The land reforms of the Congress have reduced the guarantees of the Constitution to a farce. Who can think of implementing fundamental rights in the midst of discontentment in the rural areas? To suppress these rights, to deny them, to reduce them to nothing but a scrap of paper is a life and death question for the rural gentry ruling the countryside during Congress rule. The earlier confidence that the democratic and fundamental rights of the people bring only strength and glory to the ruling class, not danger, is now gone.

Besides, the leaders of the Congress and the Government are no longer the old leaders who carried tremendous influence and whom the mass considered as their own leaders. The Congress(I) no longer enjoys the same influence with the mass as in the earlier days and is unable to control and restrict its activities. In the absence of ideological and political influence to wean away from the mass from class actions, its democratic and fundamental rights have to be suppressed. The rural mass in large part of the country is virtually without any democratic right except the right to vote.

In 40 years of independence, large sections of the Indian masses have been progressively defrauded of their democratic rights. The assault on the Constitution continued to grow during these years. One by one, the accepted norms of the Constitution were violated, making it clear that they were unsuitable for the bourgeoisie of a newly liberated backward country. The trappings of democracy borrowed from the west with a complete anti-feudal revolution began to pose dangers to those who were working in alliance with the landlords.

The first assault came after the formation of the EMS Com-munist Ministry in Kerala in 1957. This was the first challenge by a mal class force and had to be nipped in the bud. The electoral verdict of the people was disregarded, and an open revolt in alliance with communal forces, the Muslim League and the Catholic church, was started, with the participation of the Congress and the encouragement of the Central Government. And all this was planned under the guidance of Nehru, the democrat. Class interests proved supreme and were placed above the Constitution, principles and democracy. But unlike in the latter years, the ministry was not

suddenly dismissed. The ground was prepared by launching a liberation struggle demanding the ousting of the ministry.

A number of socialists and others thought that this was medicine prescribed by the Congress only for the Communists. Some of them even welcomed this step to save the country from Communism. International reaction certified that under Nehru, India would have a stable Government, meaning thereby that the Communist challenge would be met by any means, constitutional or unconstitutional.

Later developments revealed that this weapon of arbitrary dismissal was to be used against other opposition bourgeois parties also. This was an attempt of the ruling party to maintain its monopoly of power at the cost of the Constitution and the elective principles. Notwithstanding the high declaration of the Constitution, the main representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie considered it to be an instrument of one-party rule. The opposition parties, which constitute an essential element of the bourgeois parliamentary system, were considered as mere decoration with no right to compete for political power. If they have succeeded despite this, and if there are now three Left Front governments along with ministries of other opposition parties, it is solely due to popular resistance and struggle. The assault against the Constitution continues year after year. Every year sees new legislations for curbing the freedom of organisations, strikes and trade unions; several legislations have been passed for preventive detention, making a farce of personal liberty.

Simultaneously, deaths in police custody, murders committed by the law-and-order authorities have been multiplying, but the murderers are rarely brought to book. People, especially in the rural areas, spend 10 to 20 years in prison without trial, and no one is punished. The abolition of untouchability under the Constitution is witnessed in the burning of Harijan homes and the rape of Harijan women. The Directive Principles, as well as fundamental rights, continue to be ignored and violated. The class interests of bourgeois-landlord rule come more and more in conflict with the rights of the people. The Constitution is made to function as the direct instrument of the bourgeois-landlord alliance.

The declaration of Emergency and the abrogation of the Constitution were the results of this continuous assault. They showed that whatever the Congress did to stifle mass discontent, it could not prevent its isolation and inner conflicts or maintain its monopoly of power. It should be remembered here that the Emergency was declared not because there was immediate danger of mass revolt or revolution beyond the confines of the parliamentary framework. It was proclaimed because the rising mass discontent was isolating the Congress(I) was opening the

possibility of Indira losing her majority in the Lok Sabha. The bourgeois representatives of the ruling party did not recognise the right of any other party to rule the country, observing parliamentary norms. The establishment of one-party authoritarian rule was the objective, and the Constitution was misused for the purpose.

The isolation of the Congress(I) from the people, the powerful democratic urge of the Indian people and the tradition of the national movement all combined to defeat this nefarious game. Indira was forced to order new elections, and she and her party were routed. This showed the maturity of the Indian people and their will to protect democracy. Such a rebuff to authoritarian pretensions has hardly ever been witnessed in any other newly liberated country. Here the country's traditions and the progressive declarations of the Constitution themselves played an important part in defeating the Congress(I).

In these years, there was also a continuous fight against the attempts to reduce the Constitution to an instrument of the ruling party. At first, the attack by the ruling party was concentrated only on the Communists and the CPI(M) and semi-fascist terror was unleashed in West Bengal to crush the CPI(M). The CPI(M) at one time had to fight these attacks single-handedly. More than 1000 party cadres and followers were killed during those days of semi-fascist terror. But soon, the attacks against constitutional rights were extended to other parties, the bourgeois opposition parties. Under Emergency, leaders of all opposition parties — bourgeois opposition parties, CPI(M) and others were imprisoned. The period saw the emergence of a wide front of united action among the parties opposed to the Emergency. Till then, there had been hardly any understanding between the left and the oppositional bourgeois parties for common action. This common activity led to the victory of the Janata Party in the 1977 elections. This was a big victory of the opposition and left forces against the authoritarian party. Unfortunately, this victory could not be consolidated because of the class limitations of the Janata Party leaders who represented the same class as the Congress(I) leaders. Their prevarications, their reliance on the hardcore of the RSS, their refusal to take radical steps in favour of the peoples and against vested interests, and finally, their unprincipled dissensions quickly isolated them from the people, and the Janata was defeated at the ensuing election. It could not remain in office for its full Constitutional term.

LIMITATIONS OF BOURGEOIS PARTIES

Indira Gandhi returned to power with a big majority. It almost appeared as if the masses thought that the vote for Janata in the previous election was an aberration which they corrected in the

1980 election. The unbecoming performance of the bourgeois opposition parties in power emanated from their conservative character and outlook. As a party representing the same class interests as the Congress(I), the Janata could not have a programme radically different from its predecessors. But it did not even speak or suggest radical solutions in favour of the masses. The Congress(I), with its anti-poverty programme, its advertised solicitude for Harijans, etc... appeared to be closer to the mass of the people. And the upper-caste bias was too much in evidence in the Janata Party outlook and leadership. Besides, the party, in spite of J.P.'s patronage, could not successfully claim national traditions, the traditions on which the Congress (1) has always banked. No party which concentrated its attack on Nehru could successfully claim the heritage of the National Congress.

All this showed the limitations of the bourgeois opposition parties in Indian conditions. Lacking the benefit of national traditions, these parties are also unable to inspire the mass with radical psychology and outlook in their fight against the Congress. Intent on winning over large sections of vested interests from the Congress, they are always afraid of making a radical appeal to the people and therefore yield place to the Congress. The politics of these parties consist of avoiding direct class issues, making vague criticism of the Congress, exposing Congress misdeeds and twaddling about value-based politics. These parties are unable to play the role of a national party of the bourgeois-landlord alliance because of their restricted outlook. They themselves lament the absence of an all-India opposition but are unable to understand that unless the opposition parties are able to overcome their limited outlook and their inclination to make a reactionary appeal, they will not be in a position to form a real national party. They are therefore always in search of an unprincipled combination of several disparate parties, including the communal BJP. Some of these parties are able to maintain their ministries in the states backed by sections of landed interests and bolstered by a local feeling of injustice at the hands of the centre.

Nonetheless, even after the debacle of the Janata Government, a joint understanding in actions against the Congress rule continued. The left forces, now united, took a prominent part in this and the result of the two meetings at Srinagar and Calcutta helped forward the process of common understanding and action. Unprecedented unity of oppositional and democratic forces was witnessed on the question of the dismissal of the N.T. Rama Rao and Farooq ministry. Though there are ups and downs in joint activities and understanding, the process of greater understanding cannot be stopped.

The victory of the CPI(M) and the left forces in West Bengal and

Kerala in the 1987 elections raised expectations and strengthened the urge for greater coordination and joint activities. V.P. Singh's revolt against the Congress has led to further expectations, and there is a keen desire among the people that all secular and left forces should unite to fight the anti-democratic and anti-national policies of Rajiv Gandhi. Thus, along with the assault on the Constitution launched by the ruling Congress(I) Party, the battle against it has also developed and intensified. The democratic forces have been successful in rebuffing and defeating the attack of the ruling party on a number of occasions. And now, in the 40th year of independence, to protect democracy, the Constitution and national unity, people are demanding the resignation of Rajiv Gandhi and a new poll. The battle goes on.

DANGEROUSLY GROWING POWER OF BUREAUCRACY

One important and dangerous feature of development since independence is the growing power of the bureaucracy in the State machinery and its increasing stranglehold over administration. With the rising mass discontent turning against it, the Congress began to disintegrate. It was split into two sections in 1969. It lost its monopoly of power in the states. Local bosses and chief ministers became more powerful than the national leaders. The states began to clamour for greater attention, and the Congress chief ministers were not far behind in criticising their central counterparts. This was the situation more than ten years back. It has further deteriorated, and the Congress organisation is in complete disarray. The result has been a tremendous increase in the power of the Indian bureaucracy, a section of which is notorious for its corruption, jobbery, anti-people outlook and the propensity to sell itself to the highest bidder.

The bureaucracy was already powerful when India became independent. But initially, it was obedient to the Congress rulers who possessed wide influence with the masses. But the waning influence of the Congress, the inner-party squabbles, constant changes in ministries and finally, the necessity of firmly dealing the forefront and enhanced its capacity for mischief against the discontent of the masses have brought the bureaucracy to democratic forces.

Now under the Rajiv Gandhi regime, the bureaucracy has become still more powerful. The complete concentration of power in the hands of one person — the Prime Minister, the frequent changes in portfolios, the appointment of incapable persons to ministerial jobs, the low image of the Congress(I) and Rajiv Gandhi among the people after the Bofors scandal and the complete absence of expertise among ministers have put the country at the mercy of the

bureaucracy. The party leadership which runs its party affairs bureaucratically without holding elections relies all the more on the bureaucracy to manage affairs of the State. The bureaucracy, on its part, has taken full measure of its ministerial bosses and is able to carry out its own designs with the consent of the ministers.

Today under the Rajiv regime, both the people and the Constitution are held at ransom by the bureaucracy. The job of the elected ministers is now restricted to a defence of bureaucratic misdeeds in the Parliament.

THE BOURGEOIS-LANDLORD ALLIANCE UNDER STRAIN

It is obvious that in these forty years, the ruling bourgeois-landlord alliance should also feel the impact of big changes taking place. In fact, a tussle has been going on inside the alliance all these years. The junior partner, the landlord, accepted his fate without murmuring in the earlier days because of the intense popularity of the Congress. But later on, he started protecting his position first by inviting the protection granted to property under the Constitution and later on by sabotaging land legislation. The 1969 judgement of the Supreme Court, which declared that Parliament has no right to change the basic structure of the Constitution, was really a verdict in favour of protecting the property rights of the landlords from interference by the Government. The Supreme Court judgement barred parliamentary jurisdiction in relation to the fundamental rights, which meant that no radical change in property rights could be expected.

But after this, the landlord lobby, a partner in the State, decided to sabotage all land legislations while advertising its implementation. The result has been a certain shift in the alliance in favour of landed interests. The landed gentry, the landlords, the new rural elites all have thrived as never before under Congress rule. Notwithstanding the series of land acts that have been passed, their land monopoly has not been appreciably affected. The Congress agricultural programme has benefited them the most, and they have amassed great wealth. They are the most powerful elements in most of the states, dominating the state governments. They take full advantage of this, and agricultural taxation being a state subject, refuse to tax themselves. They resist any attempt on the part of the Central Government to introduce taxation on land with the help of the courts. A few years back, the Punjab and Haryana High Court declaration foiled the Central Government's attempt to levy wealth tax on agricultural land.

At the same time, with the loss of Congress influence over the people, it is this class that holds the key to the rural votes. Without support or support from an important section, the ruling party

cannot win any election.

To counteract the influence of this section, the Congress(I) Party often uses its anti-poverty programme, its appeal to backward classes, Harijans and tribals, especially provision of reservation for jobs. In Gujarat, it has succeeded in forming a ministry that mostly depends on representatives of the lower rural orders and which is therefore in perpetual conflict with vested landed interests. These latter organise huge agitations and bandhs to bring down the ministry, and in a recent agitation, one of their demands was the withdrawal of the minimum wage legislation for agricultural workers. Supported by these lower orders, the Congress(I) Party in Gujarat recently swept the Zilla Parishad and panchayat elections, routing all other political parties. But at the same time, it lost in a big way in municipal and corporation elections in the cities. The conflict within the alliance is seen sharply in Gujarat, where the landed gentry is directly fighting the Congress(I) ministry.

The Congress(I) tactics of bypassing radical agrarian reforms and appeasing the backward sections with mere reservation of jobs lead to the unleashing of caste conflicts. With jobs becoming scarce, the landed elements and those who are in alliance with them are easily able to sway the middle class and other youths to take a stand against reservation and conflict with the downtrodden sections. In all states ruled by bourgeois parties resorting to reservation and increasing the number of reserved seats is becoming an instrument with which to divide the people.

The emergence of the rural vested interests as a powerful political force is also noted by foreign writers: 'The broad penetration by the large landowners of the second stratum into the political superstructure and, above all, into its major element, the system of State power, is a new process, the conditions for which arose during the period of independence when colonial political structures were eradicated.'

'In the first 10 to 15 years of development after India gained independence, a new bureaucratic stratum which gained control of a number of links of the State apparatus (primarily at the level of districts and states) arose from the rural elite. Through a ramified system, welded together by different ties of relatives and fellow caste members, people from wealthy landowning families seized posts in the army, the police, the judiciary and other punitive agencies of the State. They penetrated into the legislative assemblies of states in order to influence State policy in the countryside. The measures to set up rural self-government bodies, initiated at the end of the 1970s, opened up a new wider front of struggle for influence over the State, and it is the large landowners and the wealthy upper crust of the dominating castes that, in most cases, won key positions in these bodies.'

'The fact that the large landowners who reside in the countryside have become an independent political force which bolsters up in India's political arena the groups and parties upholding the policy of advantage to them is an extremely important result of post-war development.'

The Congress(I) Party, no longer in possession of its former influence over the masses, have to growingly rely on this lobby for its electoral success. The Congress Party's inability to deal with errant chief ministers, the Central Government's refusal to take notice of the excesses against Harijans in Bihar or Orissa or of open swindling of funds have arisen from this change of correlation of forces in the alliance. The Congress(I) Party and its leaders at one time directly controlled the rural votes, bypassing the landlords. Now the party must seek landlord middlemen, and it is these middlemen who also decide the choice of candidates who mostly come from the families or caste of the ally. In fact, some recent changes in the state Congress leadership were manifestations of the increased strength of the landlord lobby in the party itself. The replacement of some earlier national leaders, described as Brahmins, by new leaders described as Rajputs, was part of this process.

This certainly affects the smooth functioning of the bourgeois-landlord alliance, the raising of financial resources for economic planning and the political approach towards several problems, especially the problems of casteism, communalism and untouchability. The influence of this new rural lobby is conservative, and its growth explains many recent developments regarding caste, untouchability and communalism, which were unthinkable in earlier years in connection with the Congress. The bourgeois leadership of the alliance is under constant pressure from its ally for concessions and acceptance of its demands which obstructs bourgeois manoeuvring against the masses.

The block is no longer satisfied with influencing the Congress policies from within. In some states, it is now openly organising itself in opposition to Congress(I), posing as the champion of ordinary peasants on demands like remunerative prices. In effect, it is demanding a bigger share in political power and the power of veto on policies concerning the rural sector. The rise of Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra, similar agitations in Gujarat and elsewhere and the Kisan Morchas they have organised are signs that the most conservative section of Indian society is entering the field to shape and distort the country's policy. And this force can be easily beguiled into compromise with anti-national foreign forces.

RISE OF REVIVALISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

In the background of these developments, it is no surprise that there should be a rise of revivalism and fundamentalist agitations and that their appeal should temporarily sway large sections of the masses. The conservative developments in the rural areas sustain caste and religious sentiments and ideology and offer an invitation to the revivalists and fundamentalists to spread their mischief. To reap electoral and other advantages, the ruling party under

Rajiv Gandhi often stoops to utilise this revivalist appeal, as in the case of Ram Janam Bhoomi, and the surrender to Muslim orthodoxy on the Shah Bano judgement. And with an administration packed with conservative ideology, what chance is there for justice and protection to the minority, especially the Muslim minority? During the last few years, the challenge of Hindu and Muslim communalism has become strident, with the ruling party having no policy except that of suppressing the minority during the riots. The horrible happenings in Meerut and Maliana have shocked the consciences of patriotically minded people, but the Congress Government has not drawn any lesson nor shown any repentance.

There is no effective check on rising Hindu communalism which cannot pretend to fight for any genuine grievance. And there is no effort to understand the disabilities under which the Muslim minority mass suffers, nor is there a sincere attempt to remove them. The Muslim mass is handed over to mischievous fundamentalists who are working in collaboration with and are financed by foreign forces, like their Hindu counterparts. Things would be easier and proper steps would be ensured if it is realised that in spite of the guarantee of equal treatment under the Constitution, the Muslim is a second-class citizen in this country. And because of this, problems like unemployment and poverty, which he shares in common with the rest of the toilers, are considered by him as his special disability. Over the last forty years, this process of alienation has been going on with the bourgeois-landlord government unwilling to do anything except talk about banning religion from politics and indulge in occasional verbal rallies in praise of national unity and integrity.

The communal problem has become a danger to the integrity and unity of the country. The failure of the common class movement to soften its impact, to neutralise it at least to some extent, has further exacerbated the deterioration. Once more, we come to the conclusion that neither the Congress(I) nor any other party swearing by the capitalist path can solve the problem and save the nation. To prevent the situation from further deteriorating, it is absolutely essential that the masses and the left parties intervene decisively. What the CPI(M) and left can do when supported by the masses is seen from the following statement: 'The swift and decisive action that the West Bengal government took last weekend, first in Calcutta's Garden Reach suburb and then in the

Manirka area of Malda district, may well have saved the state from the horror of communal conflagration such as is becoming distressingly common in parts of northern India. By doing so, the Left Front government has once again proved that the only way of tackling a situation that can lead to such violence is to come down with a heavy hand on the trouble makers, protect potential victims and enforce public order. Such action often invites criticism, especially from those with vested interests in lawlessness, but what is important is the confidence of responsible citizens and not the opinion of lumpen elements. It must be said to the Left Front's credit that the administration it leads has always laid considerable stress on maintaining and strengthening communal unity. That this constructive policy has paid rich dividends was again evident last year during the controversy over the Babri Masjid/Ram Janam Bhoomi issue; while riots broke out in U.P. and several other states, West Bengal remained undisturbed. Nor did the state suffer any repercussions of this year's riots in Meerut and Delhi... The Left Front commitment to secular principles has avoided the usual communal polarisation.' (Statesman, Editorial. September 10).

The CPI(M) Central Committee's resolution dated 10th August describes the Rajiv Gandhi Government as a government of national disintegration. It is Rajiv's misfortune that his regime is witnessing the culmination of a process set in motion in earlier years by his predecessors when they chose the capitalist path. The failure to reckon with the existence of distinct linguistic nationalities in India, to understand the importance of creating a sense of equality and justice in relation to progress and development, to take concrete steps to integrate these units all played into the hands of the secessionist elements financed and incited by foreign imperialist agencies. The result is that in the 40th year of our independence, India faces a serious secessionist challenge. It is the hope of certain U.S. circles that India will be divided again by the Punjab national unity is being challenged and attacked by compromise the year 1999. From the North-East — Assam and Darjeeling divisive secessionist forces. Notwithstanding the compromise in Assam, the secessionist forces continue their activities unhindered. The demand for secessionist separate states continues to be pressed. And in Punjab, the armed struggle of Khalistani terrorists has been continuing for more than three years. Similar challenges have been faced by many newly liberated countries and men, were forced to retreat before them. It will be a great shame for the Indian people if they show their inability to protect the unity and integrity of the country against these forces

DANGER OF DISINTEGRATION

But the performance of the Congress(I) Government . . . and the Congress(I) party leaders leave no doubt that they seem to be totally unaware of the danger of disintegration facing the country. It is known that U.S. agencies were behind Operation Brahmputra, that they financed the secessionist movement in Assam. The Khalistani insurgency is also financed, armed and trained in Pakistan with the help of the CIA. The Church missions in the North-East have been openly instigating secessionist activities. Imperialist forces have started intervening in India in a big way to disintegrate her unity and divide her.

Is there any awareness among the people of this great danger? The ruling party and the opposition bourgeois parties very rarely link the secessionist danger with imperialist conspiracies against India. On rare occasions, the ruling party does refer to the foreign hand, but the opposition bourgeois parties refuse to mention imperialism in this connection. Both join in presenting the problem as merely a law and order problem and, in relation to Punjab, as a communal problem. The reality is that the battle is a political-ideological battle to isolate the secessionists, whether in Punjab, Assam or Darjeeling is deliberately ignored. None of these parties, including the Congress(I), calls upon its following in the affected states to enter into a political battle with the anti-nationals. Only the CPI(M) and CPI bear the brunt of the battle in Punjab, and only the CPI(M) and its mass organisations carry the burden both in Assam and Darjeeling. The tea garden workers of Darjeeling, under the leadership of CITU and the CPI(M), are playing a heroic role in defending unity, just as their counterparts in Punjab and Assam are doing.

To understand and assess the situation after 40 years of independence, all the positive and negative factors must be taken into consideration. The positive factors are the maintenance of Indian independence. India's independent foreign policy, national planning and the development of strategic industries, many of them with the help of the Soviet Union, which has prevented the economy from going under the domination of western imperialist countries. The parliamentary system, adult suffrage, elections and opposition parties still remain, though exposed to jolts and attacks. India has refused to join in a military alliance with any big power.

Notwithstanding these positive features, India, after 40 years of her independence, finds herself in a very dangerous situation. Firstly, though national planning under successive five-year plans prevented the subjugation of our economy, it has levied a heavy price on our people. Industrial progress under this planning on the capitalist path is extremely slow and only prolongs the agony and sufferings of the people. The capitalist path did not require the complete elimination of feudal land relations and the freedom of the

peasant. The life of the Indian peasant and agricultural labourer is more akin to the life of a bonded labourer than that of a free peasant and worker. Unemployment in rural areas is estimated at 40 million. The working class is faced with closures, lock-outs, mass dismissal and unemployment.

Rajiv Gandhi's New Economic Policy, with its emphasis on liquidation of the public sector and an open invitation to multinationals, undermines the self-reliance of the economy and opens it to the exploitation of foreign capital and danger of foreign domination. Unless the policy is changed, our foreign policy of non-alignment will come under constant pressure.

The second negative and dangerous development is in relation to democracy. Though the parliamentary system formally remains, the rights of citizens are attacked with impunity: strikes are suppressed. There is no justice or rights for the common man in the villages; no protection against police gangsterism and murder: one by one, the norms of parliamentary behaviour and system are being attacked. Journalists who expose police high handedness or bureaucratic corruption stand in danger of arrest, torture and even murder. The common man has to face corruption from top to bottom, and the corruption scandals of the Rajiv regime have completely exposed the Congress(I) and its government. The ruling party concentrates all powers at the centre and reduces the federal Constitution to a farce. Governors arbitrarily dismiss elected ministries, and certain reactionary parties claim the same powers for the President in their factional fight against Rajiv Gandhi. The imposition of Emergency warned the Indian people that the parliamentary system and the Constitution would continue to be under attack under the capitalist path. The warning has come true. There have been attempts to vamp the judiciary with sycophants, and its independence is being attacked every day. Congress governments and police often disobey the directives of the courts. There is a growing collapse of the administration. The jails have become dens of vice and corruption with no protection to those who resist illegalities. The ruling party defending the interests of capitalists and landlords violates parliamentary and democratic norms. Recently this was evident when there was a confrontation between the President and the Prime Minister. Within the class alliance, there is tremendous push and pull, with the landed interests increasingly becoming more assertive and going on the offensive.

Equally dangerous is the 40-year record in relation to national unity. The unity of the Indian people was nurtured and achieved through more than a century-long struggle, through sacrifices, a unity before which the British had to retreat, has been eroded under the Congress rule. The British gave a parting kick to Indian unity

when they divided the country. It was then thought that now at least, there will be no problem in relation to national unity. But today, every divisive, secessionist and sectional force is dividing the unity of the country, mobilising large sections in the name of religion, language and region. The Khalistani challenge in Punjab, the Gorkhaland agitation in Darjeeling and the divisive movement in Assam constitute secessionist challenges to the unity of the country. Side by side, the rise of Muslim and Hindu fundamentalism, the rousing of passions on issues like the Shah Bano case and the Babri Masjid/Ram Janam Bhoomi controversy assail the unity of the country. All these agitations are heavily financed from abroad by U.S. agencies.

This is the balance sheet of the last 40 years of Congress(I) rule, the rule of the bourgeois-landlord alliance, wedded to the capitalist path.

HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY OF LEFT AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES

No doubt, in these years, the democratic forces have waged a continuous battle to defeat the depredations of the bourgeois-landlord rule, to defeat policies that weaken Indian unity. Above all, there have been many successful struggles to defend the democratic rights of the people and their economic well-being. The defeat of Emergency rule was an outstanding achievement of the unity of democratic and popular forces.

With all this, it is clear that the popular forces have not been able to stop a slide back in policies and tackle the growing danger of disunity, destabilisation, communalism, and growing economic distress. Here the weaknesses of the bourgeois opposition parties become manifest. Neither on the question of destabilisation, communalism, or foreign policy do they possess a correct understanding or orientation. Some of them would prefer a manifest pro-western tilt in our foreign policy. Almost all of them are silent on the question of liquidation of the public sector. On the main issue of defence of national unity, they all take ambivalent positions.

The responsibility of the CPI(M), of the left and democratic forces, is therefore very great. These forces have a correct orientation on the problem facing the nation, and their increasing strength and influence in national politics will help the people to growingly combat the reactionary forces, the challenge of imperialism, the consequences of the capitalist path, the policies of the Rajiv Government and the Congress(I) ruling party. To meet the immediate situation, the CPI(M) and the left forces must seek joint action and understanding with all secular opposition parties to isolate and defeat the ruling party. This is essential. Such a combination will present a secular image to the people to fight the

forces of communalism. The all-in-unity combination sacrifices the secular image of the opposition and is only an invitation to reaction to create division among the people. However, certain opportunist bourgeoisie politicians are busy precisely hatching this reactionary combination.

The joint mass campaign and agitation for the resignation of Rajiv Gandhi, for intervention and drought relief changes in the economic policy, defence of national unity and the immediate demands of the people will release new mass forces impelling the democratic movement forward and leading to a change in the consciousness of large sections of the people, especially inspiring confidence in the minority mass.

But the maladies affecting the nation, the danger facing it, demands deep changes in the consciousness of the people and their material conditions, beyond the conception and outlook of bourgeois parties. They will have to be championed and worked out by the left forces on their own independent initiative. Left unity and continuous initiative, and independent activities by the left forces are a vital necessity in the struggle against the current dangers.

Though the growth of the Communist movement and the left forces have been inadequate considering the demands of the objective situation, still the sacrifice and the struggle of the CPI(M) and the mass activities of the left parties are growingly impressing larger sections of the people hitherto inaccessible to their influence. The consecutive defeats of the Congress(I) in West Bengal and Tripura, the Kerala victory of 1987, the victory of the Left Front headed by the CPI (M) and the performance of the Left Front ministries have drawn the applause of large sections. Above all, friends and critics alike appreciate the concern for national unity, for fighting anti-national communal forces, shown by the Left Front ministries. The left forces now occupy an important position in the nation's politics; the Left Front ministries are more and more considered the advanced outposts of Indian democracy and unity.

The historic responsibility of combating the challenge rests on the left and democratic forces. Armed by the growing confidence of the people in them, guided by the correct outlook, supported by the increasing strength of the mass organisations led by them, they should be in a position to discharge the task combining all secular forces at each stage and never leaving their independent grip over the situation.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which heads the left forces, bears a special responsibility in this titanic task facing our people. Its cadres in Punjab, Assam, Tripura and Darjeeling district, by courageous sacrifice, have already set an example to others in the struggle for national unity. In the coming years, there will be a greater need for widespread sacrifice, heroism and personal

courage. Wedded to the correct line of the CPI(M), its line of left unity, its line of broader understanding with secular parties and guided by the spirit of Marxism–Leninism, the CPI(M) will be in a position to meet the demands of history

The experience of the last four decades shows that the continuance of the capitalist path of the bourgeois-landlord regime means preparing for disastrous consequences for the country. The failure to complete the task of the democratic revolution is threatening the country with repression, loss of independence, unity and even neo-colonial enslavement. It will be ruinous if the CPI(M) and the left parties confine their attention to the demand for Rajiv's resignation and forget that the movement must gradually move forward to demand basic changes. A basis must be created in the course of a gigantic movement for the immediate resignation of Rajiv Gandhi, for a new correlation of class forces, a correlation favourable to the basic masses. The planned struggle against immediate dangers and for ousting Rajiv must teach the masses to look beyond the present framework and create an urge for moving towards finishing the urgent task of the democratic revolution and towards a people's democratic revolution based on the worker-peasant alliance. The failure to create this urge and mobilise the masses for this purpose has been the main weakness of the last four decades, endangering the future of our country and our people.

(Marxist, April–September 1987)