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15th CPI(M) Congress

Harkishan Singh Surjeet

Every Party Congress is a great event for a Communist Party, because it enables the Party to assess its line and analyse how it was implemented and with what results. This enables the Party to see the mistakes committed in the implementation of the line and to draw the proper lessons. But the Fifteenth Congress of the CPI(M) will go down in our history as a unique event because it was held in the context of a very complicated situation at the international level and of great complexity at the national level.

Large sections of the people, even those outside party circles, were looking to see what answers the Party Congress would provide in this situation to the question of how a change in the correlation of class forces could be brought about in order to strengthen the Left and democratic forces in the march forward to the People's Democratic Front and ultimately achieve the People's Democratic Revolution. At the same time, the people were concerned with the immediate future in the Indian political scene which has entered a period of acute instability in the wake of the growing discontent against the economic policies and heightened communal danger threatening the country and its unity.

The Party had already circulated its document -- The Draft Political Resolution -- dealing with international and national issues for debate inside the whole Party. This time, Party units everywhere had taken a keen interest in opining on the resolution. This was evident from the large number of amendments and suggestions sent to the Central Committee in the pre-Congress discussions -- a total of 2772 amendments and 278 suggestions and comments.

It was not accidental that none of the amendments challenge the basic direction provided in the Resolution, but were intended to either further strengthen or elaborate on the formulations made. The reason for this unity was because since the 14th Congress, the

Party had been very active in intervening both in the international sphere, whether on the ideological front or in expressing international solidarity, as well as in the national situation to meet the two major challenges: the threat to national sovereignty arising from the economic policies pursued by the central government, dictated by the World Bank/IMF agencies, and the threat to national unity posed by the communal forces. The Indian working class and other mass organisations had been engaged in a struggle to meet these challenges. The Left forces led by our Party had taken an initiative in rallying wide sections on these issues. The active interventions by the Party over the last three years became the source of inspiration for the whole Party, because they vindicated the line worked out in the 14th Congress. This is what we call testing of the line in practice.

It was in this background that the Party Congress met in Chandigarh. Though the current political situation is extremely complex, the atmosphere inside the Congress exuded confidence and determination to strengthen the Left, democratic and secular forces to meet the challenges.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

As compared to the 14th Congress some changes in a positive direction in the international situation had taken place. The old euphoria at the so-called collapse of communism had receded into the background because of the prolonged recession in capitalist countries, the growing resistance among the working class of these countries -- both developed as well as developing -- and the increasing contradictions between the imperialist countries themselves.

The Congress reiterated that the central contradiction in today's world still remains between imperialism and socialism with the US imperialism doing its utmost to defeat the Cuban revolution. It was also exerting pressure on North Korea over the nuclear inspection issue and issuing threats to China on trade related economic issues. Despite the renewed US offensive, resistance is also developing. The international support and solidarity which rallied behind Cuba was a significant factor in thwarting US imperialist designs. Our Party trained in an international outlook, expressed its solidarity with the socialist countries. We too the lead in campaigning for solidarity with

Cuba initiated by the Cuban-Indian Friendship Society. Similarly, we expressed our solidarity with North Korea where the US, using the nuclear reactor issue, was trying to intervene.

On the ideological front, the Party took the initiative in convening a seminar in Calcutta with the participation of 19 parties to express opposition to the imperialist offensive questioning the validity of Marxism in the present-day world. After thorough discussion, the participants in the seminar concluded that the science of Marxism-Leninism remained as valid as before if concretely applied to concrete conditions in each country. The seminar renewed the confidence of all the participants in the future of socialism and enabled various contingents of the Communist movement to stand firm for the unity of scientific socialism.

In the international arena, the development of the past three years has reconfirmed that the theory of contradictions propounded by Lenin remains as valid today as then, for the advance of the struggle against imperialism and the capitalist system and for achieving the goal of socialism.

In the national sphere, four challenges faced the country: first and foremost, the economic crisis; secondly, the threat to national unity; thirdly, the separatist movements in the country; and fourthly, the rampant corruption, apart from the erosion of the democratic system and institutions. Since throughout we remained in struggle, making timely interventions in meeting these challenges, the whole atmosphere in the Party was charged with the spirit of unity behind the line, and the necessity to pursue this line keeping in mind the situation of instability prevailing in the country and its consequences on various political parties.

DEBATE ON RESOLUTION

There were two days of debate on the draft political resolution. With regard to the international situation, the main point highlighted was the failure of the Party to implement the assurance of an indepth study of the causes of the serious setbacks to socialism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Though the resolution on 'Certain Ideological Issues' which was discussed at the Madras Congress had provided sufficient guidelines for analysing the causes,

the 14th Congress had felt this was insufficient to enrich the ideological understanding of the Party ranks. We had at that time pointed out the mistakes made by all the Communist Parties that "the world crisis of capitalism had reached such a pass that the collapse of capitalism was imminent and the world was going over through the socialist stage" (1957 statement).

Naturally, this had an impact on our understanding the situation but that apart, what has to be understood is why such a system having tremendous achievements to its credit (in terms of the solution of various contradictions, giving firm support to the national liberation struggles and the world working class movement, its contribution in the struggle against fascism and the defeat of the latter which save the whole world, which in the construction of socialism was able to provide the right to housing, education, health and many other social security facilities) why such a system collapsed. Its achievements had inspired the Communist movement the world over, but inspite of its immense achievements the system collapsed. The question of why still remains.

Naturally, this requires proper study and answers. The Communist Parties are studying this question and we will try to draw our own lessons from such studies. At the Congress, delegates raised the question whether the stand taken by these parties on various issues leading to the distortions and deviations had any impact on our Party? The question is a correct one and we have to analyse how, on various occasions, their understanding influenced us and to what extent. Although we can claim that we sharply demarcated ourselves from their analysis of the Indian state and its class nature, it must be admitted that we too were affected by some other of their formulations.

ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

On the national situation, the Draft Political Resolution had presented a detailed explanation, supplemented by the review made of the tactical line. I would not like here to burden the reader with economic data to prove how dangerous are the economic policies of the central government and the impact of the World Bank and IMF policies have had on Latin American and African countries pursuing the IMF path. The collapse of the Mexican economy is a glaring example if one wants to draw lessons -- a 123 billion dollar debt

carrying 33 per cent service charges, and meet the latter another debt of 60 billion dollars from the US at 12 per cent interest carrying over the next five years. This loan from the US makes up half of the total Mexican debt to pay for which Mexico has had to mortgage all its oil resources.

Even though our ruling party is not yet prepared to draw lessons from these countries, the rising inflation, the growing unemployment, the rapidly increasing high prices have exposed the government's strategy as one to benefit only a small section of the population at the cost of the working class, agricultural labour and other toiling millions. We have conducted big movements against this. Our mobilisation, however, was limited to our Left base besides a small section of the working class. But the widespread resentment against these policies could be gauged from the recent Assembly election results which, with the solitary exception of Orissa, saw the rout of the Congress(I) everywhere--in the south, west and east .

This has also led to a deepening of the crisis inside the Congress which they try to dismiss as mere factionalism. When political issues are being debated, the economic policies and the threat to national unity -- the issues we raised from the beginning -- the ruling party is trying to project that nothing seriously wrong. Over the years, the Congress has faced and overcome many crises. But they fail to understand that the situation today is quite different. The crisis is deep and difficult to overcome, and the Congress will have to pay a heavy price if it pursues with the current policies.

In the absence of a strong Left and democratic movement in the country as a whole, and the weakness of other secular forces, the discontent of the people is sought to be utilised by the communal forces. The victory of the BJP in the most industrialised western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra -- the BJP in Gujarat and the Shiv Sena -BJP alliance in Maharashtra -- poses a very serious danger to the future of democracy as well as secularism which form the basis of Indian unity. Already the SS/BJP government has started talking of a permit system to control entry into the city of Bombay, and in the name of expelling all Bangladeshis and Pakistanis has started attacking the minorities. The danger from these communal forces can be underestimated only at a heavy cost, since, taking the country as a whole the BJP has emerged as the second biggest party in the country bidding for power at the Centre. Under no circumstances will the BJP be allowed to capture power at the Centre and we must

rally all the Left, secular and democratic forces to oppose this.

If this force is allowed to grow it will disrupt the unity of the working class, peasantry, agricultural workers and other toiling sections. Without doubt the compromising role of the Congress is mainly responsible for this growth of the BJP. While the Left has carried out a consistent struggle against the communal forces by arousing the people to be on guard against this danger and appealing to their patriotism, the Congress has always encouraged and placated these forces. The role of the Congress in the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi controversy and its ultimate betrayal are clear examples of this.

The Congress today has lost its commitment to the cause of secularism and its only objective is to remain in power, by hook or by crook. Both the Congress and the BJP ignore the fact that the Indian people are basically patriotic, and will not tolerate machinations weakening the secular ideology.

THE SEPARATIST THREAT

As regards separatist movements, the ruling party has failed to go to the roots of the problems of Kashmir, Assam and the north-east. Their only solution is administrative measures, using the paramilitary forces and the army to suppress the terrorist activities. The Congress has also failed to utilise the discontentment of the people against the extremists and is instead pursuing a course which will only lead them into the American camp.

The Party Congress pointed out that the only solution to the problem in Kashmir lies in protecting the identity of the Kashmiri people, and this can be done by strengthening Article 370 and ensuring the autonomy of Kashmir. The same applies for the north-east. The government should draw the necessary lessons and fulfil the aspiration of the people of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam, and stop wasting public money mainly on the armed forces to deal with the situation.

THE ISSUE OF BACKWARDNESS & UNDERDEVELOPMENT

An inevitable result of the capitalist path of development pursued by the ruling classes is not only the growing disparity between the rich and poor but also uneven development across regions. Certain areas in the country have remained neglected and backward. This has resulted today in their urge and demand for separate states. The government must realise that unless the backwardness is overcome and their aspiration fulfilled, no solutions are possible. Their demand can be met through the setting up of autonomous councils in each of these regions -- Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Bastar.

The tribals are suffering in similar fashion; misled, the repression against them continues. The Congress has decided that our Party must concentrate on the problems of the tribals along with those of the Scheduled Castes, to defend them and demand autonomous councils in the contiguous areas where the tribals reside.

A good debate also took place on the OBCs. In recent years there has been a new awakening among them to overcome their backwardness. The Party has endorsed the 27 per cent reservation as recommended in the Mandal Report. It has also stated that the creamy layer should not avail of this concession at the cost of the poorer sections. If, however, vacancies remain, they must be filled, if necessary even from the creamy layer.

There are certain political forces, however, who in reflecting the demand of the OBCs are distorting it to perpetuate the caste division among the toiling people. This will prove very dangerous, because it not only disrupts the unity of the toiling people, but also because all those belonging to the upper castes are not well off. They include poor sections as well, for example the so-called upper castes of Uttarakhand who are mostly engaged in menial jobs. The Party Congress warned against perpetuation of caste divisions and disruption of the democratic movement which will only provide a strong base for communal forces like the Shiv Sena.

In the Organisational Review Report, certain major issues came up for discussion. Firstly, the situation in Kerala and the attitude of the Party to the Indian National League. The issue of majority versus minority communalism was debated and clinched in the Twelfth Party Congress in Calcutta. Analysing the role of the minority communalism which complements and supplements majority communalism, the Party had concluded that it would have no truck

with either. It was on the basis of this understanding that actions were undertaken in Kerala and in the 1987 assembly elections, the Left Democratic Front was elected to the state. At a later period, the Congress/communal/caste alliance indulged in terrorism against the Left forces, in particular singling out our Party.

With the crisis of the UDF and the possibility of elections particularly after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a split took place in the Muslim League on the issue of the alliance with the Congress. The Muslim League president Sulaiman Sait, when he failed to rally a majority to his side, set up a new party, the Indian National League. With parliamentary opportunism having affected sections of the Party, some sought to give ideological and political justification to the INL and the Madani party. They theorised that these outfits were no longer communal with the view to arriving at an understanding with them.

This issue was thoroughly debated in the Central Committee which unanimously rejected this understanding and stated that while the Party would welcome any section or person who discarded a communal approach on the basis of religious appeal, and came to a position of secularism, this was not possible in a day or a week. Such sections or persons would have to prove their bonafides to the people who would serve as the best judge of their secular credentials. The Party Congress endorsed this line of the Central Committee and warned against involvement with minority communalism at a time when we are stepping up our struggle against the heightened danger from majority communalism. The Congress also stressed that the Kerala unit should directly approach the masses and convince them that it is our Party and the Left which has consistently stood in defence of the right of minorities and appeal to them that their interests are best defended by joining the Left and democratic forces.

The second important issue that came up for debate was on the industrial policy of West Bengal. Initially the statement of the Left Front government had created some confusion with its emphasis on certain points and bypassing certain other important aspects. Later the PB and CC decided a document on the industrial policy of the West Bengal government should be prepared in order to unify the understanding in the party ranks. The document was prepared, adopted by the Central Committee and now endorsed by the Party Congress.

THREE FRONTS

The main debate in the Political Resolution centered round the direction of the movement and it appeared that some confusion existed. Three types of alternatives were mentioned in the Resolution and their place in pursuing the tactical line. The three were the People's Democratic Front which alone can achieve the People's Democratic Revolution, a long range perspective to complete the stage of the democratic revolution and march to the ultimate goal of socialism. This is a strategic objective fighting for which requires a class alliance of the working class, peasantry, petty-bourgeoisie and the non-monopoly bourgeoisie, based on the worker-peasant alliance, led by the working class. The building of this front requires a radical change in the correlation of class forces when the working class will be able to acquire leadership. Only when this strategical line is forged can we claim to be on the verge of revolution. This perspective must be kept in mind and all other formulations in the interim period directed to achieve this objective.

Secondly, is the interim slogan of the Left Democratic Front which can be termed as a tactical slogan. This Front will lead to the achievement of the Peoples' Democratic Front. The only difference between the two fronts (the People's Democratic Front and the Left Democratic Front) is that in the latter, the leadership of the working class is not yet ensured. In other words, the process of advancing from one to the other involves bringing about the necessary change in the correlation of class forces that ensures the leadership of the working class. It is possible that during this process the bourgeoisie may itself split with some sections forming new parties at the national or regional level. They may even join with the Left on the basis of a minimum programme which could eventually emerge as an alternative to the bourgeois-landlord parties.

However, at the present moment, neither the People's Democratic Front nor the Left Democratic Front can be immediately realised. but to be realised as a tactical slogan which helps achieve the strategical goal. The LDF must be seen as a tactical slogan which helps achieve the strategic goal of the people's democratic revolution. The requisite conditions for reaching this stage can be created through mass actions by the Party and the Left as a whole, with class struggle as the motive force.

This Front is not the immediate alternative because as yet the correlation of class forces is not in our favour. Then how do we meet this complex situation where on the one hand, in the wake of political instability, the Congress is pursuing economic policies endangering economic independence, and on the other, the BJP with like-minded groups is posing a grave threat to national unity?

To meet both these challenges from the BJP and the Congress requires a huge fight against both, rallying the secular forces along with Left, where the slogan of unity of Left and secular forces presents an electoral alternative. Knowing the limitations of the secular parties we have to warn them to have a cohesive programme because of the bad experience the people have had of them in the past. In spite of the victory of the BJP in the western states, by and large, the country would not like the BJP to rule, aware of the consequences it would pose to national unity. Such a situation would strengthen the forces of fundamentalism even inside the minorities where each would supplement and complement the other. Given the huge size of the minority community, these forces would be bound to disrupt national unity.

While the Party Congress decided that both the Congress and the communal forces would have to be defeated by rallying the Left and secular forces, the question was asked, who is the main enemy? The answer to this will depend on the concrete situation, of which force at a particular moment comes to the fore.

The people would like a Left and secular alternative, but the secular parties are not clear on their economic objectives, or sufficiently aware of the dangers arising from the centre's economic policies. We have to constantly warn them that the people will not repose their confidence in them unless the objective of social justice is kept in mind, not only with regard to the castes, but in regard to the general poverty and backwardness without tackling which, no political party can rally the people.

We are confident that with the developing crisis in the Congress, the rising prestige and initiative of the Left will succeed in advancing this limited objective. The Party Congress gave a clarion call in this respect.

But, as the debate in the Congress emphasised, on the basis of the three years of experience, even to achieve this a further increase in the influence of the Left is necessary, particularly of our Party. This can be done through unleashing mass struggles and movements against the economic policies, against communalism and in defence of secularism. To that end, we must consolidate the mass organisations of the working class, agricultural labourers, youth and students, women, employees, and from these struggles draw the militant cadres into the Party. Thus, we can fulfil the objective laid down in the Salkia Plenum of building a mass revolutionary party.

PARTY ORGANISATION

The Party Congress debated on the state of the Party organisation and mass fronts, noting the big gap existing between the Party's prestige acquired through intervention on all the political and social issues coming before the nation, and the weak party organisation. Unless this lag is overcome we will not be able to discharge our responsibilities and turn the tables on the bourgeois-landlord regime. Otherwise our intervention will be limited to temporary interventions to ward off immediate dangers.

The Party Congress also noted with the decentralisation, a very large number of elected posts had been created at every layer of administration. The lure of these posts, particularly in West Bengal where we are in office and even in Kerala, was leading to parliamentary deviations among partymen. This apart, certain bourgeois vices are also creeping into the Party with some cadres opting for an easy life etc.. The Party has had to take action in cases of corruption. The Party Congress has warned that, being a revolutionary party, it cannot allow any scope for such tendencies and deviations. It emphasised that each post assigned to any Party member has to be considered as a job to intensify the class struggle to achieve our goal. No assignment or post should be considered a life-long one -- the only permanency is the dedication of the revolutionary to the sacred cause to serve the objective of a people's revolution.

Certain factional tendencies were also noted, particularly in Kerala and to a certain extent in West Bengal. The Congress decided these must be terminated and no quarter given to those who indulge in

factionalism. The Party is based on the principle of democratic centralism -- every member has a say in the formulation of policy and raising any political ideological or organisational issues. Once a decision is taken no one is allowed to play a disruptive role. The Congress authorised the Central Committee to take firm action to weed out factionalism wherever and at whatever level it emerges.

They should be no hesitation in eliminating these tendencies emerging inside the Communist Party. The Party is judged not only for its world outlook, based on the historical-dialectical-materialist philosophy but also its outlook on life as dedicated revolutionaries.

MASS FRONTS

In discussing the mass fronts the Congress reminded the Party Committees to give up a sectarian approach, and draw in the masses of all political parties, including the following behind the Congress party, into common struggle. It reminded the party committees of their responsibility of carrying out the Resolution on Mass Fronts which has still not been adhered to, and remains unimplemented. The Congress gave a call for strengthening the Party and mass organisations.

There were a large number of amendments on the various documents presented to the Congress. Many were accepted because they strengthened the broad thrust of the document. Many were also rejected, but, after debating them, no amendment was pressed, and the Political Report was unanimously passed. Similarly, with the election to the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission.

The Congress also adopted specific resolutions on Lenin's 125th birth anniversary, the 50th anniversary of the victory over fascism, solidarity with Cuba, North Korea, against the economic policies of the central government, on fighting communalism, solidarity with Tripura and a special resolution thanking the Punjab Committee for its excellent arrangements in hosting the 15th Party Congress.

The 15th Congress gave a ringing call to unleash mass struggles, build powerful mass organisations, ensure their democratic

functioning, strengthen Left unity and build a mass revolutionary Party. The Congress ended with the singing of the Internationale and the slogan of CPI(M) Zindabad.