

Power Through Elections ?

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DURING World War II India was passing through a revolutionary crisis. In rural areas in various parts of the country the peasants with the help of communist workers were themselves initiating powerful agrarian movements. The Telengana movement in Andhra, the Tebhaga struggle in Bengal, particularly in Susong and Kakdwip, and kisan unrest at various other places were fast developing into a revolutionary upsurge. Strikes in cities and industrial areas were assuming vast proportions. Students and other youths were becoming restive all over the country and discontent among Government employees was spreading fast.

In 1946 the storm broke. The men of the Royal Indian Navy mutinied. The workers of Bombay declared a general strike and joined the mutineers. The fire was about to spread throughout the country. The sepoy of the Indian Army were in a mutinous mood. The INA movement was at its height. Throughout the whole country the British administration was tottering. British officers and administrators were terrified at the prospects of another 1857. The naval insurgents went to the Communist Party headquarters in Bombay and asked it to lead the movement.

What did the party leaders do? They got panicky and handed over the insurgents to Gandhi-Jinnah-Patel, who in their turn betrayed them to the British.

Then came the betrayal of the Telengana agrarian revolution. On October 22, 1951, a statement on behalf of the Central Committee and the Andhra Pradesh Committee of the Party said that they had decided "to advise the Telengana peasantry and the fighting partisans to stop all partisan actions and to mobilise the entire people for an effective participation in the ensuing general election to rout the Congress at the polls."

In the same year the Communist Party adopted its first programme of "People's Democracy" and also its election manifesto. The former declared: "Our party regards as quite mature the task of replacing the present anti-democratic and anti-popular Government by a new Government of People's Democracy created of a coalition of all democratic, anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces in the country, capable of effectively guaranteeing the rights of the people, of giving land to the peasants gratis." The programme did not mention how the new Government of People's Democracy would come about.

What was kept vague in the programme was made clear in the Election Manifesto, that the party would bring about a government of People's Democracy by parliamentary means. The party leaders kept up the revolutionary slogan of People's Democracy but at the same time canalised the party activities along the parliamentary path. Since then the CPI [and also the CPI(M) since 1964] has been following this path, spreading the illusion that People's Democracy can be brought about through elections and no revolution is necessary.

Wherever there have been parliamentary elections, Marxists generally have participated in them; but in conditions of acute revolutionary crisis they have also boycotted elections. The first Duma election was boycotted by the Bolsheviks, but in subsequent elections they participated in them. The Bolsheviks, however, did not go to the Duma in order to take part in its "legislative" work as the Mensheviks did, but for the purpose of utilizing it as a platform in the interests of the revolution. As Lenin put it,

"The immediate political aims of Social Democracy in the Duma are (a) to explain to the people the utter uselessness of the Duma as a means of achieving the demands of the proletariat and the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, specially the peasantry; (b) to explain to the people the impossibility of achieving political freedom by parliamentary means as long as the real power remains in the hands of the Tsarist government, and to ex-

plain the inevitability of an open struggle of the masses against the armed forces of absolutism, the assumption of power by the masses and the convocation of a constituent assembly." (Works, 13, p 129).

In their approach to elections do the CPI leaders follow Marxist principles? In 1850, Marx had insisted that communists must fight the elections singlehanded and must bring their party point of view, their whole programme, in short, their revolutionary attitude before the public. He said: "Even in constituencies where there is no prospect of our candidate being elected, the workers must nevertheless put up candidates in order to maintain their independence, to steel their forces, and to bring their revolutionary attitude and party views before the public. They must not allow themselves to be diverted from this work by the stock argument that to split the vote of the democrats means assisting the reactionary parties. All such talk is but calculated to cheat the proletariat. The advance which the proletarian party will make through its independent political attitude is infinitely more important than the advantage of having a few more reactionaries in national representation." (*A Handbook of Marxism*, edited by Emile Burns, 68-9).

United Front

Instead of contesting single-handed, the CPI forms a united front with all sorts of nondescript parties most of which are opportunistic and petty-bourgeois and even with bourgeois and feudal parties like the Bangla Congress. In the CP Programme it was declared that the party will unite all the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces. These forces are equated with the left parties, and an opportunist alliance is formed with them only for the sake of winning the elections! Discarding peasants' and workers' movement, party leaders devoted their entire effort to bringing about 'unity' with the spurious left parties, and in that process they sacrificed the fundamental Marxist principle of unity.

Then comes the question of the formation of an alternative govern-

ment of a United Front Ministry. This also is an exhausting and all-embracing game. Whether the communist leaders understood the significance of this parliamentary game or not, the representatives of the ruling class knew it quite well. Rajagopalachari told his colleagues at that time— "If you want to make the communists harmless, make them MPs!"

In 1894 Engels warned the Italian socialist leader Turati regarding the question of a coalition government with republican parties (i.e. with the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie). By such participation, Engels said, the working class party will not only be forced to share all the infamies and treachery of others, but also "their presence in the government completely paralyses the revolutionary action of the working class which they claimed they represented." (Marx-Engels Correspondence, p 555).

How prophetic these words of Engels were when considered in the light of the working of the United Front ministries under the leadership of the Communist Party in Kerala and West Bengal!

Both the communist parties of India, the Right as well as the bracketed Marxist, proclaim that when they win a majority of the seats and form a UF government, they will accentuate class struggle. When they will become Ministers, they declare, they will pass many good laws in the interest of the people which will naturally be opposed by the Congress, capitalists, jotedars and blackmarketeers. Then the Ministers will call upon the people to intensify their struggle.

But in fact the moment the communist leaders form a coalition ministry they undertake to work according to the bourgeois Constitution and all that it implies. In such a case they have no alternative but to work in cooperation with the bureaucracy. This is the main contradiction in which the UF Ministers are trapped and they cannot come out of it.

What is the main characteristic of the Indian Constitution? By Article 31, like all bourgeois constitutions, it gives all protection to private property by whatever means it is acquired. The

State, of course, has the power to acquire or take possession of property for public use only, but in that case it must pay compensation. The sacrifice involved in the payment of compensation is the sacrifice of all the individuals of the community minus the private owners. In other words, even the power of the State is restricted in respect of certain individuals, the property owners. The protection-guaranteed as a fundamental right under our Constitution is not restricted to Indian owners of private property alone. It extends to foreigners also—British, American, German etc. That is to say, foreign imperialist interests are also protected by the Constitution.

In short, the existing Indian property relations, i.e. the entire system of exploitation, cannot be changed; they must remain untouched. Which means our whole production system cannot advance. Our Constitution guarantees, says Dr Dhirendranath Sen, that "the exploited must not only allow themselves to be exploited, but pay compensation for any impairment of the exploiters' fundamental right to exploit the human material no less than the country's material resources." (*From Raj to Swaraj*, p 109).

Our Parliament and Assemblies are the creatures of this Constitution. When the election manifestos of both the communist parties promise that they will bring about radical changes if they obtain a parliamentary majority, the leaders know they are lying. To form a UF ministry under the present Constitution means that it will have to support, willingly or unwillingly, the class interests of the monopoly capitalists and of their feudal allies and their foreign overlords, and hence it will have to go against the interests of the people. We have seen in West Bengal how a United Front Ministry could shoot down even women when the peasants fought for their land in Naxalbari and workers for their rights in Ranaghat, Nabadwip and Dum Dum, while they could not touch the jotedars, mahajans and blackmarketeers who were openly defying the laws of the land and starving the people.

After 10 months of "Marxist" rule

in Kerala, her Chief Minister told the *Washington Post* correspondent: "people today have even less food (and that at a higher cost) than 10 months ago. The problem of unemployment and lack of all-round economic development has also become worse during the last 10 months." (*People's Democracy*, January 14, 1968). The record of 28 month's rule of the previous Kerala UF Government in 1957-59 also demonstrates how impotent these popular Ministries are under the present Constitution. So far as the achievement of the UF Government in West Bengal is concerned, the less said the better.

Sometimes communist leaders, both Right and Left, do admit that they cannot bring about fundamental changes through the present Constitution. But, they assert, they can at least give some relief to the people and do some good to them. Their performance in Kerala and West Bengal has shown that they cannot do even that much, unless they consider giving a few licences and a few Government flats to their cronies as doing good to the people.

Today even the best of parliaments, those of England, France, West Germany, the USA, have been reduced to impotent and farcical institutions. Aitkins, a British MP, called the House of Commons an "idiotic circus." (*The Statesman*, July 28, 1966). *The Spectator* of June 7, 1968 wrote, "The French Parliament, it is true, has become almost an irrelevance, but then so (regrettably) is the House of Commons at the present time." If this is the case with the best of parliaments, what is the position of the fake Indian Parliament where not even 5% of the MPs open their mouths? And what a tremendous burden on the Indian people to maintain this huge institution for which they have to spend crores of their money every year. Actually, the administration is run by the various bureaucratic and autocratic departments and army, police and courts over which Parliament and the Assemblies have very little control. Parliament, moreover, cannot change at all the existing property relations.

It is the attitude to Parliament and parliamentarism that decides whether a party is Marxist or revisionist. The CPI has openly declared its faith in Parliament; it has proclaimed that it will bring socialism by peaceful means through Parliament. It has undertaken the noble task of rescuing Parliament from the hands of reactionaries and turn it into a People's Parliament. In 1962 under its domination the Party's Election Manifesto declared: "The Communist Party of India is deeply interested in the strengthening of our parliamentary system both in form as well as content."

That the bracketed Marxist leaders, are not lesser devotees of revisionist parliamentarism can be clearly seen from their 1964 Programme, which says, that though bourgeois democracy always remains a democracy for the exploiting rich and a wordy formality, and a shadow for the toiling poor, "universal adult franchise, parliament and State legislatures can serve as instruments of the people and the parties which represent their interests. The threat comes from the exploiting classes. It is they who undermine the parliamentary system both from within and without . . . when the people begin to use parliamentary institutions for advancing their cause and they fall away from the influence of the reactionary bourgeoisie and landlords, these classes do not hesitate to trample underfoot parliamentary democracy as was done in Kerala in 1959 . . . It is of utmost importance that parliamentary and democratic institutions are defended in the interest of the people against such threats, and that such institutions are skilfully utilised in combination with extra-parliamentary activities." (pp 28-29).

True, the threat from the ruling class is assuming a more and more alarming character. But is parliamentary politics the best way to counter the threat? Is not the programme of People's Democratic Revolution the only effective and valid alternative to that threat at this time of deep national crisis? The Programme of the CPI(M) is basically a revisionist parliamentary programme and it

throws the perspective and the tasks of a People's Democratic Revolution far into the background, as if it is a matter of the distant future. In the process the party isolates itself from the people.

The CPI(M) report on Tasks on the Kisan Front (April 1967) opens with the sentence: "The biggest weakness in the present Indian situation is manifested in the extremely poor state of the kisan movement and its organisation on different levels." Again their *Election Review and Party's Tasks* (April 1967) states: "That we are weak in working class organisation (trade unions etc) has been once more revealed. In rural areas our organisation, party as well as mass organisation, was not strong enough to counteract Congress propaganda. In vast areas we do not exist at all." (p. 39).

In Maharashtra, which had been the party headquarters for more than 25 years, which gave rise to the most militant working class movement and from where come such stalwart leaders like Dange and Ranadive, of a total of 270 Assembly seats the CPI(M) could put up only 11 candidates of whom only one won by a very narrow margin, and one lost his deposit. The record of the CPI is not much better either. To cover up this shameful state of affairs in Maharashtra the *Election Review and Party's Task* states: the main reason for our defeat is the basic weakness of our party (p. 94).

One has also to ask the leaders of the two parties what they have done to check the fascist activities of the Shiv Sena?

It is the Naxalbari revolutionary peasants who have shaken up the entire communist movement in India. In reality it is a revolt against the long tradition of the leadership's compromising parliamentary politics. It has at last opened up the path for a real Marxist-Leninist party in India. It is under these conditions that the communist revolutionaries have given the call for a boycott of the mid-term election in West Bengal. It is a challenge to the Congress as well as to the policy of the CPI and CPI(M).