



E.M.S. Namboodiripad

The Frontline Years

Selected Articles

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Publisher's Note

E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1909–1998) is arguably modern India's most important revolutionary figure. LeftWord Books is proud to present some of EMS's most important writings in a series of volumes in his birth centenary year.

The present volume puts together a selection of the columns that EMS wrote for the newsmagazine *Frontline* over the last seven years of his life. The volume also includes a note by N. Ram as EMS's editor at *Frontline*, and a brief appreciation of EMS's life and contribution by Prakash Karat published in the remembrance issue of the magazine dated April 17, 1998.

The Publisher would like to make grateful acknowledgement to N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief of the *The Hindu* and Publisher of *Frontline*, for making possible this volume. Thanks are also due to P. Jacob, K. Rajendra-babu and their colleagues at *The Hindu* for the speed and efficiency with which the columns were compiled and made available to us. Prasenjit Bose helped in making the selection. A special word of thanks to V. K. Ramachandran for guiding this volume towards publication.

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EMS the Columnist

N. Ram

Between December 1991 and March 1998, octogenarian E.M.S. Namboodiripad wrote 128 columns for *Frontline* on an impressive—indeed awesome—range of subjects. For these seven years and more, his was simply the most dependable contribution from the standpoint of the editorial desk. The EMS column always arrived early, invariably on time, and never strayed beyond a self-judged readability limit. No full-time professional journalist could hold a candle to EMS when it came to showing deadline discipline or responding to breaking news or accommodating a special theme-related publishing request. He was a Master at handling history on the wing.

Between December 1991 and April 1994, EMS wrote one column a month for *Frontline*. Then he proposed in a letter that he had decided to write for every issue, an offer that was gratefully and immediately accepted.

‘Perspective’, the EMS column, ranged over politics, philosophy, economics, education, social movements, literature, cultural affairs, religion and books. He wrote about Marxism and revolutionary socialism, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, Gandhism, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian freedom struggle, other liberation movements and their leaders (especially Nelson Mandela), the ruling classes, planning, secularism, the Rig Veda, Advaita, Hindutva, Centre-State contradictions, budgets, new economic policies, self-reliance, foreign policy, liberation theology, religious fundamentalism, corruption, the politician-criminal nexus, Congress affairs, Sitaram Kesri, Sonia Gandhi, the United Front, coalitions, panchayati raj, decentralization, nuclear policy, working class struggles, empowering women, and handling river water disputes. His last column, posthumously carried in the remembrance issue of *Frontline* dated April 17, 1998, is titled ‘Centre, States and river waters’; it is sharply critical of the AIADMK’s demand that the Centre should take over the States’ rights over river waters.

How the EMS column began for us may be of interest to readers. EMS has always valued serious journalism and been contemptuous of trivializing, entertainment-led tendencies masquerading as journalism. When he was in Chennai for the 1991 Party Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), he conveyed to *Frontline's* Editor appreciation of what the magazine offered (revealing that he read it from cover to cover) and contrasted this with the vast amounts of 'trash' put out in print. When a request was made that he write a regular column, it was accepted and, in typical EMS style, immediately acted upon.

Within a couple of days after the first cheque by way of payment for the column reached EMS, it was returned with a courteous signed letter. EMS noted that for quite some time he had not been accepting any payment for his articles, royalties and so forth. He was therefore returning our cheque. However, if *Frontline* wished, any payment for his contributions could be sent to the AKG Centre in Thiruvananthapuram (to which he had assigned all his royalties and so forth). The party's receipt on account of royalties and payments for articles due to EMS has been very substantial.

Marxism in Theory and Practice

Prakash Karat

E.M.S. Namboodiripad straddled the history of twentieth century Kerala and the Indian Communist movement in a manner which invokes awe. The word 'history' is what recurs in the Malayalam media while paying tributes to him. History maker, history's man, epochal figure: these are some of the terms which underline the recognition that EMS was something bigger than a successful political leader.

EMS began his public activities in 1930, when as a student he participated in the Namboodiri social reform movement. The quest to 'make the Namboodiri a human being' by breaking the shackles of hide-bound upper-caste conservatism began the remarkable journey to the making of a proletarian revolutionary who strove to liberate the whole of humanity.

EMS, like many other potential Communist leaders, was a product of the major social and political movements of the early decades of the 20th century. As an activist in the social reform movement, he focused on the inhuman system which kept Namboodiri women in gilded bondage. Anti-caste revolt was the first spark. Next came the broader canvas of the anti-imperialist movement. He became a young leader of the Malabar Congress and one of the key organizers of the Congress Socialist Party.

The next big step in the background of the rising peasant struggles against landlordism was the introduction to Marxism and becoming a lifelong adherent to the cause of Communism. This trajectory of political development is mirrored in hundreds of militant young men and women who joined the Left movement in the 1930s.

Two things set EMS apart from all of them and made him unique. First, EMS with his extraordinary intellectual genius was able constantly to stay ahead of his contemporaries in applying Marxism to the specific conditions in Kerala and later the whole of India. He was a path-finder. In 1939, even when his study of Marxism was elementary, he wrote a brilliant note of

dissent on the Malabar Tenancy Reforms in the committee set up by the Madras Legislature, of which he was a member. The trenchant analysis of the *jenmi* (landlord) system and the advocacy of radical land reforms presaged his later pioneering role in initiating land reform measures as the first Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957.

This is only one example; there are many others. His *The National Question in Kerala* published in 1952 was the first creative application of the Marxist-Leninist approach to the nationality question to a specific nationality in India. This work brought him international attention in Marxist circles. He provided the historical basis for the development of the linguistic nationality of Malayalees, which translated into the foundation of *Aikya Keralam*, the unified linguistic State which was formed out of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar in 1954.

It is this quality in EMS—of grasping the theoretical essence of the Marxist approach and translating it into political movements and practical solutions—which made him stand above most others. EMS was not only a theoretician; he was a master of practice. The Kerala Communist movement was fortunate in having P. Krishna Pillai, the founder and master-organizer; A.K. Gopalan, the mass leader; and EMS. In the annals of the movement, history will record the pre-eminent position of EMS in this brilliant trio who fused his immense theoretical abilities with unerring practical politics.

EMS was also the most innovative in expounding the role of parliamentary democracy in India and relating Marxist strategy and tactics to developing the working-class movement in such conditions. From 1957 onwards, EMS was the pace-setter in clarifying and developing the role of a Communist Party which participates in governments where it has popular mandates, while continuing to keep the major focus on developing mass movements and the struggles of the working people. Not for him the sterile sectarianism of abjuring the mass politics of parliamentary democracy or the crass parliamentary opportunism which many people comfortably slipped into. During his last days, EMS was deeply concerned with the corrosive effects of parliamentarism, which subordinates the interests of the mass movements and the demands of class struggle.

The second outstanding quality which EMS possessed and which made him a phenomenon rarely seen in India is his role in shaping society and politics by unleashing the democratic impulses of the people. Whether it was implementing land reforms to transform feudal Kerala, or creating the climate for an alternative vision within a parliamentary democratic system in a bourgeois state, or an ideological struggle against the dominant ideology of the ruling classes, EMS was unparalleled in communicating to the people the necessity to organize and act. His was a life of democratic dialogue and polemical debates. It was a daily engagement with the people of Kerala and its politicians through the print media and his public meetings. What EMS stated became part of the political discourse instantly. This, along with his personal example of intellectual commitment, integrity and simplicity, made him the most beloved thinker Kerala has produced. A. K. Antony, the Congress leader, expressed the feelings of all Malayalees when he said: 'Kerala will not be the same again without EMS.'

Kerala changed for the better in the twentieth century due to the mass democratic endeavours of its working people. To an enormous extent, the credit for this goes to E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

“To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter.”

KARL MARX

The Path to Socialism

Progress of Indian Communist Movement

I am one of the few survivors from among the participants of the first Congress of the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) held in Bombay in 1943. I have had the good fortune to attend all the five subsequent Congresses of the undivided CPI and all the Congresses of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

In a series of articles published in the party newspapers (which were subsequently brought out in book form), I have explained how, from party Congress to party Congress, the political line of the Indian Communist movement has progressed and at last led to the formulation of the 'Indian path to socialism.'

Here, I would like to confine myself to the major differences between the first Congress of the undivided CPI and the 14th Congress of the CPI (M).

The first Congress of the undivided CPI was held when a titanic struggle was on against world fascism; we Communists thought that on the outcome of that war depended the victory of India's own liberation struggle. As opposed to this was the struggle waged by the Indian National Congress which had called on the British rulers to 'quit India.' Parallel to this was the Muslim League which demanded that the British rulers should divide India into two (Hindu and Muslim) states. 'Divide and quit' was its slogan in place of the Indian National Congress's 'Quit India.'

Furthermore, there was the Subhas Chandra Bose group which was trying to 'liberate' India from British rule with the direct assistance of the Japanese militarists. The only other Left party remaining in the country, the Congress Socialist Party, was actively working for the implementation of the 'Quit India' struggle.

The CPI which was then a small force was thus fighting against a formidable combination of bourgeois nationalists who denounced it for

aligning itself with the British and sabotaging the 'Quit India' struggle. The first Congress, therefore, had to apply its mind to the problems of 'swimming against the current' of nationalism which was moving crores and crores of the Indian people, as well as against the Muslim League which was engaged in a determined struggle for the disintegration of the country.

It is half a century since the call for 'Quit India' was given by the Congress leaders. That struggle was ruthlessly suppressed by the British rulers but the spirit of the freedom struggle was kept alive among the mass of the people. Furthermore, the historic victory of the Soviet Red Army in Europe and the historic development in China made a sweeping change in the world situation. The British rulers, therefore, thought it prudent to quit India as demanded by the Congress but simultaneously divide it into two, as demanded by the Muslim League.

For almost 45 years since then, the Indian National Congress remained the ruling party in the Indian Union part of what was once united India. The Communist Party was the first to raise the banner of struggle against the new rulers. Subsequently, however, many other Opposition parties and groups came on the scene. These have so evolved since then that today there are three major political formations operating in the country—(1) the Indian National Congress which is still the biggest and most influential political party in the country; (2) the Bharatiya Janata Party which is next in influence; and 3. a combination of the Communist and other secular democratic forces: the Left-National Front combine.

In this entire post-Second World War period the party, its policy and organisations, have been undergoing big changes, making advances and retreats, with splits, united actions and so on. The Communist movement which stands divided into the CPI (M), the CPI and various naxal groups is today at the crossroads. The CPI (M) has concluded a phase of its inner-party debate on these global changes at the 14th Congress, while the CPI is engaged in a serious internal debate in preparation for its 15th Congress.

The two Communist parties along with some other Left groups as well as the Janata Dal-National Front, are rallying crores of people on a programme of defending democracy and national unity, fighting the communal and other divisive forces and championing the interests of the working people.

The problems of such an emerging united front of Left and secular democratic forces were thrashed out at the 14th Congress in its political resolution.

Enormous changes had, in the meanwhile, taken place in the international arena. The Soviet Union which was successfully carrying on the patriotic defence of the country succeeded in it. It helped after the end of the War to bring about radical changes in the world situation: millions of people liberated from imperialism and living in the continents of Asia and Africa and Latin America have attained political freedom and are today organizing themselves for economic and socio-cultural freedom.

Today, however, the Soviet Union whose epoch-making victory in the anti-Fascist war speeded up the process of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, does not exist any more. The socialist system built over the years and which could not be disintegrated or destroyed by the threat or use of brute force by world imperialism has now disintegrated, thanks to the combination of earlier distortions in the system and the subsequent (Khrushchev-Gorbachev) revisionist policies. Not only has world socialism been thus weakened but imperialism headed by the United States has become so powerful and arrogant as to threaten the sovereignty and unity of all the former colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries which attained political freedom following the Soviet victory in the anti-fascist war.

The capitalist world (including those former socialist countries which have started the process of transition from socialism to capitalism) has, in the meanwhile, landed itself in such an ever-intensifying crisis in the economy and polity that the mass of the common people in the capitalist countries are up in arms against the capitalist system. A powerful united front of the common people led by the working class in all the developed capitalist countries (including the former socialist countries), the masses living in developing countries including India and the peoples led by their governments in the four socialist countries of China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba has come on the agenda at the international level.

Symbolic in this connection was the presence at the CPI (M) Congress of fraternal delegates from the four socialist countries as well as from neighbouring Nepal, together with messages from fraternal parties

including some in the developed capitalist and former socialist countries. These show that, although revisionist leaders of the former socialist countries have surrendered their independence and sovereignty to world capitalism, the flag of Marxism-Leninism still flies high. The CPI (M) is only one of the contingents of the present-day international Communist movement which, though weakened by the betrayal of revisionists in the former socialist countries, still adhere to the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism.

This provides the background against which the 14th Congress debated and adopted a document on certain ideological questions facing the world Communist movement. While recognizing the big damage done to the movement by the retreat of socialism in the former socialist countries of Europe, the CPI (M) Congress came to the conclusion that the setback to Marxism-Leninism does not mean, as is asserted by anti-Communists throughout the world, the invalidity of Marxism-Leninism.

On the other hand, the basic postulates of Marxism-Leninism—the class struggle, the leadership of the working class in democratic movements, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leading role of the Communist party in bringing about democratic and socialist transformations, the principle of democratic centralism as the guideline of the organization of the party—continue to be relevant, though every one of them should be updated on the basis of experience. The fact has to be recognized that, in the actual implementation of these principles, distortions have taken place and have to be corrected.

For example, the principles of dictatorship of the proletariat and democratic centralism have been distorted in practice: the dictatorship of the proletariat was reduced to the dictatorship of the party which, in turn, was reduced to the dictatorship of a leading group, if not a leading personality. In the operation of democratic centralism too, centralized leadership has very often had precedence over and suppressed internal democracy. This, however, does not mean that either the dictatorship of the proletariat or democratic centralism has lost its validity and relevance.

In the earlier years of the existence of the Soviet Union—from its foundation in 1917 to the end of the anti-fascist war in 1945—world

imperialism was trying to destroy world socialism through the use of force. This again happened in the post-Second World War period when American Presidents, from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan, tried to use nuclear force against the Soviet Union. It goes to the credit of the Soviet Union that, defying these attempts of its imperialist rivals, it attained nuclear parity by the 1970s and 1980s.

This, however, did not deter imperialism from destroying socialism through 'other means' which succeeded. Today imperialism is trying to resort to these 'other means' to disintegrate China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. Imperialism is also using all the resources at its disposal to weaken and disintegrate the organized working class movement in the capitalist countries and the national liberation movements in the developing countries. At the same time, imperialist powers are engaged in furious conflicts among themselves, although not going to the extent of fighting inter-imperialist wars.

All the four major contradictions in the world situation—between capitalism and socialism, among the capitalist powers themselves, between the working class and the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries and between imperialism and the peoples of developing countries—are thus operating, though not in the same way as in the years of the 'Cold War.' No Marxist-Leninist can afford to be blind to the fact that the struggle for world socialism is inseparable from the struggle against world capitalism. All the oppressed peoples in all the countries should therefore rally behind the working class in developed capitalist countries, which itself should be led by the Marxist-Leninist parties. Abandonment of this idea of the struggle between the two systems, between the two classes and of the leading role by the working class in the struggle for world socialism runs like a red thread through the renunciation by the revisionists of proletarian dictatorship and democratic centralism.

We have, of course, to learn from the negative experience of the actual working of proletarian dictatorship for over seven decades. Socialist democracy has to be combined with the leading role of the party. Without in any way underestimating the need for devising new ways of functioning in socialist countries, we should recognize the fact that abandoning the

principle of proletarian dictatorship would amount to throwing out the baby (socialism) with the bathwater (reforms like *perestroika* and *glasnost*). It should be noted that socialism in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union came to be disintegrated while it is being safeguarded in China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. It would be recalled that unlike eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, economic and political reforms in China are being carried out on the basis of the four cardinal principles—the socialist system, the people's democratic dictatorship, the leading role of the party and Marxism-Leninism.

Coming to the question of democratic centralism, the party has for some time been engaged in a determined struggle against bureaucratism, individualism and other evils associated with the denial of inner-party democracy. The organizational report presented and adopted by the 14th party Congress has concretized these struggles for internal democracy to go along with centralized leadership. Traditions of party functioning built over several decades have to be abandoned and new norms evolved, combining the widest possible inner-party democracy with the firm leadership provided by the all-India, State and district centres. A new mode and style of organizational functioning has to be established. Only then will it be possible for the party to emerge as a revolutionary mass party of the working class.

Although of special interest to the members and friends of the CPI (M), the political, ideological and organizational ideas thrown up by the 14th Congress are of interest to all the Left and secular democratic forces in the country; for the CPI (M) is committed to the defence of democracy and national unity, to the safeguarding of the interests of the working people and to all-round socio-cultural and political advance of all sections of the people in the entire country.

February 1, 1992

Is the CPI (M) 'Stalinist' ?

The Need for Clear-Sightedness

Commenting on the 14th Congress of the CPI (M) held in Madras from January 3 to 9, 1992, many organs of the print media said it conclusively proves the party to be a 'Stalinist' outfit. This, according to them, is enough to condemn the party in the eyes of the people.

The reason for such an accusation against the CPI (M) is that, while sharply critical of the negative aspects of Stalin's personality and role in history, the CPI (M) is cognizant of the positive elements in what is called 'Stalinism'.

It was Stalin who, in the days immediately following Lenin's demise, came out in sharp struggle against the Trotskyites and other distorters of the teachings of Lenin upholding the Leninist thesis that, while the completion of the construction of socialism requires proletarian revolutions in the major capitalist countries, it is possible for Soviet Russia to begin the process.

On this basis, Stalin proceeded to transform the then backward Soviet Russia into a developed industrial country. It was this that enabled the people and Government of the USSR to beat back the vicious military offensive launched by the vanguard of the international bourgeoisie—Hitlerist fascism. This was a positive contribution made by Stalin to the worldwide struggle for peace, democracy and socialism.

It was, again, in the period when Stalin stood at the head of the Soviet Union and of the international Communist movement that billions of people inhabiting what then were the colonies of a handful of European imperialist powers, completed their national liberation wars and secured freedom. This was another service rendered by Stalin to humanity at large.

We, therefore, consider Stalin as a great revolutionary leader of the world proletariat. This, however, is not to condone the negative aspects of the

Stalin leadership. The most important of these was the gross violation of socialist democracy in the country and internal democracy in the party.

Marx, Engels and Lenin had pointed out the inseparable connection between democracy and the process of socialist construction. The concept of dictatorship of the proletariat as envisaged by them was democracy for the majority of the people (with its concomitant, internal democracy under the stern leadership of the organized Party Centre) and dictatorship over the remnants of the overthrown exploiting classes. Stalin, however, so organized the working of the socialist state and the Soviet Communist Party that the dictatorship of the proletariat degenerated into the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat and then the dictatorship of a core of the leadership over the party. This is what was once described as the 'cult of Stalin's personality' which, we, along with all the Marxist-Leninists in the world, condemned.

Our critique of the revisionist leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), beginning with Nikita Khrushchev and ending with Mikhail Gorbachev, is that, under the cover of a struggle against what was negative in the personality and work of Stalin, they organized an assault on Marxism-Leninism itself. Painting in the darkest colours the years of Stalin's leadership in the Soviet state and the party, they denigrated all the glorious achievements of world socialism during the three decades of Stalin's leadership.

This degenerated, in the Gorbachev leadership, into the renunciation of the very basis of Marxist ideology—the class struggle. Elaborating his notorious theory that there are 'human values which should have precedence over class struggle', Gorbachev moved, step by step, to abject capitulation before international imperialism headed by the United States. His theory of de-ideologization of international politics led him to a complete abandonment of the basic task of Soviet socialism in the struggle against imperialism and in defence of the national liberation movements. It is this sharp critique of Gorbachev by us that becomes the basis on which our detractors denounce us as 'Stalinists.'

The 14th Congress of the party firmly reiterated our commitment to the cardinal principles of Marxism-Leninism—the class struggle, the militant alliance of the working class with the peasant masses and all other sections

of the oppressed and exploited people, the dictatorship of the proletariat, proletarian internationalism, democratic centralism in the organization of the party, etc. We are, however, conscious that, in actual working, these cardinal principles have been so distorted that they amount to dogmatic thinking and sectarian practices. Highly critical of these distortions, we are nevertheless committed to the principles which should be so applied as to steer clear of all distortions. That is why we restate our faith in the essential principles of Marxism but steer clear of distortions.

Without going into the question of how this will work out in practice in a general way, let me explain how this adherence to the cardinal principles, this determination to steer clear of all distortions, applies in the working out of our theory in terms of Indian politics.

First, unlike many others who call themselves 'socialists' but who subscribe to various strands of non-proletarian theories and practices of socialism, we are committed to proletarian socialism. This means that, as opposed to the feudal, the bourgeois, the petty bourgeois and other strands of socialism, our socialism is based on the leadership of the working class over all other sections of the working people, over all forward-looking sections of society. This in practice means that we look upon the movements and struggles of the industrial and agricultural proletariat, the mass of working peasantry, the exploited middle sections and all progressive elements in the rest of the society to be the main vehicle of India's advance to socialism.

In the present-day context, with the P.V. Narasimha Rao Government surrendering India's freedom and sovereignty to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, we consider the struggle against these policies to be the main instrument of the Indian people in the advance to socialism. It also means that the mass of the working people should take their stand against the major parliamentary Opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which not only extends its support to the anti-national and anti-people economic policies of the Narasimha Rao Government but itself champions the disruptive line of Hindutva against the minority communities. The Indian people cannot advance towards socialism unless these sinister forces

of surrender to imperialism and disruption of national unity are firmly combated.

Secondly, in the combination of the Left, secular and democratic forces, which is thus to be created, the working class and its political party play an important role. No socio-political force other than the organized working class and its Communist movement has set the clear perspective of taking the Indian people, through the present politics of Left and secular democracy, ultimately towards socialism and then to Communism. We, therefore, firmly reject all proposals and suggestions for the dissolution of the Communist Party, or for the renunciation of the cardinal principles of Marxism-Leninism.

The Indian Communist movement has a history of seven decades of struggle which has led to the consolidation of the downtrodden people in India under the leadership of the organized working class. It was in this process that the CPI (M), the CPI and two other all-India parties have joined together in an all-India Left front with which smaller Left groups are increasingly being associated. The unity of Left forces and the predominant role of the theory of Marxism-Leninism form the nucleus around which all other secular democratic forces are to be mobilized.

Thirdly, in such a consolidation of Left forces and their unity with other secular democratic forces, the struggle in the parliamentary arena is of enormous importance. Four decades of active participation of the Left in parliamentary politics, together with the experience of Left-led governments in some parts of the country for varying periods, has enormously helped the mobilization and unification of all the Left and secular democratic forces.

It would, however, be wrong to look upon the struggle in the parliamentary arena to be the sole or even the main form of political struggle. The main form is the independent mobilization of the working people under the leadership of the democratically functioning mass organizations of the working class, peasants (including agricultural labourers) and all other sections of the working people. While the Communist and other Left parties undoubtedly provide the political leadership over these mass organizations, the latter are by themselves independent and autonomous; it is they who create in the people at large the

class consciousness and sense of solidarity in its initial form. The Communist and other Left parties can establish their political leadership over the mass organizations only through providing correct political leadership.

In this sense, the unity of the Left and secular democratic forces, which occupies a prominent place in the Communist scheme of Indian politics today is, above all, a unity of the fighting millions finding expression in their own democratically elected organizations, ideologically and politically led by the Left parties. To such a movement led ideologically and politically by the Left parties should be subordinated the parliamentary arena, the MPs, MLAs, the Ministers, etc, being responsible and answerable to the mass of the working people united behind their own mass organizations.

Fourthly, the development of such a unity of the Left and secular democratic forces would, through a series of steps, culminate in the evolution of the people's democratic front as envisaged in the basic programme documents of the CPI (M). This is a front which will undertake the task of fundamental restructuring of the society, economy, culture and politics of the country as envisaged in the programme of the CPI (M) which makes the forthright declaration:

‘While adhering to the aim of building a socialist society, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), taking into consideration the degree of economic development, the degree of the political-ideological maturity of the working class and its organization, places before the people as the immediate objective the establishment of People's Democracy based on the coalition of all genuine anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces headed by the working class. This demands, first and foremost, the replacement of the present bourgeois-landlord state and Government by a state of people's democracy and a government led by the working class on the basis of a firm worker-peasant alliance. This alone can quickly and thoroughly complete the unfinished basic democratic tasks of the Indian revolution and pave the way to put the country on the road of socialism.’

Finally, there is the question of whether this process of immediately uniting the Left and secular democratic forces, then developing it into a people's democratic front and finally establishing socialism and

Communism in the country can be realized through peaceful means or whether it requires resort to revolutionary means. This question is answered in the Programme of the CPI (M) as follows:

‘The Communist Party of India (Marxist) strives to achieve the establishment of people’s democracy and socialist transformation through peaceful means. By developing a powerful mass revolutionary movement, by combining parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle, the working class and its allies will try their utmost to overcome the resistance of the forces of reaction and to bring about these transformations through peaceful means. However, it needs always to be borne in mind that the ruling classes never relinquish their power voluntarily. They seek to defy the will of the people and seek to reverse it by lawlessness and violence. It is therefore necessary for the revolutionary forces to be vigilant and so orient their work that they can face up to all contingencies, to any twists and turns in the political life of the country.’

The passages quoted above from the party programme have been declared by the 14th Party Congress to be still holding true. While the earlier chapters of the programme have, in several ways, become outmoded and require updating (for which the Congress has directed the Central Committee to appoint a commission and take necessary steps), the chapters where these passages occur are still relevant.

India’s path to socialism as envisaged by the CPI (M) is thus clear and forthright. In contrast to other trends of ‘socialism’, the CPI (M)’s concept is proletarian socialism in which the working class, in firm alliance with the peasants and other sections of the working people, plays the leading role in bringing about social transformations. Hence our reiteration of Marxism-Leninism.

March 14, 1992

Needed, Political Will

To Resist Pressure from Imperialism

A big debate has been going on for more than a half-year whether there is any alternative to the course of economic 'reforms' initiated by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. As opposed to the latter who claims that there is no alternative to what they are doing, a large number of economists and social scientists as well as the political parties of the Left and secular democratic movement have made proposals which would be an Indian path to economic progress and prosperity. The big monopoly press however turns a blind eye to these proposals, repeating their pet 'theory' that the World Bank-IMF loan is the only salvation for the crisis-ridden Indian economy.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao for his part asks: What is wrong if those who give us loans set certain conditions? If they are unacceptable, we can well reject them. But, he asks: Is it good for the country to reject them and thereby reject the loan? The same argument is advanced by the editorial writers and columnists of the big bourgeois press, according to whom India's path of advance to prosperity is via the acceptance of the conditionalities imposed by the World Bank, the IMF and private multinational financial institutions.

These wise men forget that, for full seven decades, the Soviet Union built socialism and developed itself into a mighty political and military power with no 'aid' from world capitalism. The founder of the state (Lenin), in fact, took the initiative to talk to some of the big businessmen in Western capitalist countries with a view to finding out whether he could use big capitalists in Western countries to build socialism in his own Soviet Union. The offer was rejected and the Soviet Union left to find its own way to socialist construction without any aid. Not only was aid rejected but a number of economic, political and diplomatic sanctions were imposed on the Soviet Union.

Lenin's successors therefore had to depend on their own resources, the support of their own people, to begin the socialist construction and so organize it that the Soviet state and people could successfully face the ordeals posed by the Nazi army's attack.

The saga of self-reliant socialist construction in the first land of socialism is a model for such countries as India aspiring to develop their own economic, socio-political and cultural lives. The spirit of helplessness shown by Narasimha Rao & Co. is not only alien to the spirit of swadeshi and self-reliance developed by our people during the freedom struggle, but also unnecessary in the light of the experience gained by self-reliance in socialist construction in the Soviet Union.

There will undoubtedly be difficulties and hardships if we reject the 'conditionalities' imposed by the World Bank, the IMF, private multinational financial institutions, etc., and they in their turn reject loans to us. But can we not learn a lesson or two from the experience of the Soviet Union whose leaders single-handedly developed their economy, socio-political life and culture under conditions which were far more formidable than what we have to face today if the World Bank, the IMF, etc., adopt a non-cooperative attitude? Our reply to the main question put by Narasimha Rao & Co. therefore is that there is a way if there is political will.

Our own country, let us recall, undertook a programme of industrialization (including the development of heavy industries) without 'aid' from world capitalism. As a matter of fact, the original request made by the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to the United Kingdom, the United States, etc., for help in modernization was arrogantly rejected. It was then that Nehru turned to the Soviet Union for help and the request was immediately conceded.

Industrialization with the help of the socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union made the capitalist countries themselves subsequently revise their attitude: Bhilai, with assistance from the Soviet Union, was followed by similar projects assisted by capitalist countries. The existence of a group of socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union thus helped our country in carrying forward its plans and projects for the modernization of our economy.

It is true that the situation has altered radically during the last decade. The collapse of the Soviet Union and East European countries has made the United States the unchallenged global power; there is no alternative set-up to which India and other developing countries can turn for help as it existed when the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union was a force to reckon with. But are we in a worse position today than the Soviet Union was in the 1920s and the 1930s? If the Soviet Union could overcome the hardships and difficulties six decades ago, why can we not do the same today? The question is whether we have the political will which the leaders of the Soviet Union had in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Let it be noted in this context that the Soviet Union was not alone in self-reliance for socialist construction. The millions of courageous people living in Vietnam and Korea who secured their national freedom at the end of the Second World War, the heroic people of China who carried out a people's democratic revolution in 1949, and the gallant Cubans who secured freedom in 1959—none of them has had that type of assistance from world capitalism as is now sought by Narasimha Rao & Co for India. China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba—each of them was and is today being attacked in various ways. Yet they secured freedom from foreign rule and are now developing themselves on socialist lines without accepting the 'conditionalities' imposed on us by world capitalism. If our sisters and brothers in these countries could do this, why can we not? Let us repeat again: there is a way out of this, provided there is a political will to be self-reliant and forward-looking.

Let us make it clear that when we talk of political will we mean by the term the will to bring about such changes in policies as would enable us to be fully self-reliant. For, the policies pursued even by the Nehru Government, not to speak of policies now pursued by the Narasimha Rao Government, were not conducive to the struggle for self-reliance. Despite the positive elements of the 'Nehru model'—its insistence on protection to indigenous entrepreneurs as against their foreign competitors and attempts at slowing down the growth of Indian monopolies, both of which, by the way, have been given up by Narasimha Rao—it had two inherent weaknesses:

First and more important, Nehru set his face against genuine agrarian reforms which alone will pave the way for the expansion of the internal market which is necessary for rapid industrialization.

Secondly, his fear of breaking with the imperialist powers, his anxiety to get as much aid as possible from them even while securing aid from the socialist powers, tied the Indian economy to the crisis-ridden world economy of capitalism. It was the existence of the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union which helped him in making India relatively independent of world capitalism.

There is, in any case, no doubt that Nehru did not have the political will that the Communist leaders in the Soviet Union had earlier shown and China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba are still showing. This was the basic weakness of the much-talked-about 'Nehru model'.

Far from removing this basic weakness of the 'Nehru model', the Manmohan Singh-Narasimha Rao leadership accentuates it. At the same time, it rejects outright what is positive in that model. Our economy, polity and socio-cultural life are thus being led towards an all round and ever-intensifying crisis.

On top of the failure to carry out agrarian reforms (which prevented the expansion of the home market so needed for a programme of industrialization) which was inherent in the 'Nehru model', the Manmohan Singh-Narasimha Rao leadership further restricts the home market through its 'structural reforms': closing (or at least reducing) the 'fiscal deficit' by withdrawing subsidies, increasing indirect taxes, liberalizing the exit policy, and so on. These amount to depriving the mass of the working people of their purchasing power. 'Liberalization' measures lead to a situation in which the mass of (small and medium) entrepreneurs are thrown to the wolves—the multinationals and the Indian monopolies. The 'reforms' are in short a mechanism through which 'the rich are made richer and the poor further impoverished.'

Is this unavoidable? It is not. We can resist pressure from imperialism, provided the people are rallied for the patriotic cause of protecting the independence and sovereignty of the nation. For, a few years of determined

resistance by our people will force the ruling classes of the developed capitalists to come to terms with us. After all, world capitalism requires countries where they can invest their surplus capital as much as we require their capital. This was what broke the blockade against the Soviet Union in the 1920s and the 1930s and the other socialist countries after the end of the Second World War. The question is whether we shall show the same political will as they did.

May 9, 1992

Off the Track

The Nehru Model of Indian Planning

The National Development Council has adopted the Eighth Five Year Plan which, in fact, has already started working. If the earlier Plans were each of five-year duration, this should have been the first year of the Ninth Plan, because 40 years have elapsed since the First Plan was launched.

The reasons for the loss of five years during the operation of seven Plans should have been closely examined if the Narasimha Rao Government had taken the process of planning seriously. Only such a self-critical examination of the past Plans would have enabled it to avoid the pitfalls into which the process fell during the last 40 years. That, however, was not done.

Yet, the basic approach of the planning process adopted in the mid-1950s has now been abandoned. A new basis has, in fact, been laid. The leaders of the Narasimha Rao Government are proud of a 'new thrust' given to the planning process after they took over a year ago. It will, therefore, be appropriate to examine the rationale of the planning process adopted in the mid-1950s, the achievements made after that restructuring process, the deficiencies in that process and how these deficiencies can now be overcome.

Let us begin with a little bit of history. The Jawaharlal Nehru Government which took over in 1947 and which started the process of planning had the ambition of developing the country along the lines of capitalist industrialization, development of agriculture on modern scientific lines and the renovation of socio-cultural life in accordance with the needs of a fast-developing capitalist country. They expected the former rulers of the country, the British, and the ruling class in the mightiest capitalist country in the post-War world, the United States, to help them in this process. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru negotiated with his colleagues in the British-led Commonwealth and undertook a trip to the United States—both with a view to securing assistance in the process of capitalist

industrialization and modernization. He however, met with a rebuff, his interlocutors 'advising' him that it was better for India not to attempt an ambitious plan of industrialization and modernization.

Fortunately for India, the Soviet Union had, by that time, come out of the great ordeal of the anti-fascist war. The destruction wrought on the economy during the war years was soon overcome and the country took the path of rapid progress in economic construction. The leaders of that country were prepared to help India on the basis of mutual cooperation. Nehru and his colleagues, therefore, could restructure the basis of planning that had earlier been launched.

This was how the 'bigger and bolder' Second Five Year Plan came to be adopted. Administering a strong rebuff to the British and the Americans who had earlier negated the possibility of India industrializing itself, a plan was drawn up for the setting up of a number of heavy industries which were expected to lay the basis for the development of medium and small-scale industries. The expectation was that, during the Second and succeeding Five Year Plans, a sound foundation would be laid for rapid industrialization.

That this was possible had already been proved by the experience of the Soviet Union which, to begin with, was as backward as India but which was, in the course of a decade, able to so industrialize itself, so augment the military and economic course of the country, as to give a crushing blow the Nazi hordes. If this was possible for the Soviet Union, it was argued, it was possible for India as well.

There was, of course, a flaw in this argument. The Soviet Union launched its plans of industrialization and the restructuring of agrarian relations because it had already carried out its agrarian revolution. The decree on agrarian relations adopted immediately after the 1917 Revolution had done away with big landlordism, liberating the mass of peasants and agricultural labourers from the tight hold of feudalism. The emancipated rural masses became the reliable basis on which industrialization could be undertaken. The rural poor had so improved their living conditions as to provide a reliable internal market for the rapid growing industries. The rural poor also became the solid basis on which a new educated and trained working class arose to man the process of rapid industrialization. Agrarian revolution was,

in other words, the starting point for the process of rapid industrialization with emphasis on heavy industries.

India, on the other hand, had no agrarian revolution. The meagre land reforms carried out in free India did not emancipate the mass of rural poor from the big landlords, moneylenders and wholesale traders; they therefore could not have such earnings as to provide a market for the rapidly developing industries. A restricted home market was the Achilles heel of the ambitious plans of India's industrialization launched by Nehru's Government.

Furthermore, the anti-labour policies pursued by the Government prevented the willing cooperation of industrial labour which is necessary for the smooth working of employer-employee relations. Neither in the industrial nor in the agrarian sector therefore did 'the bigger and bolder' plan launched by Nehru help the process of real and rapid growth. Crisis in the industrial and agricultural sectors was thus inherent in the plans of economic development adopted in India. The Communists and other leftists were thus obliged to draw attention to and fight these negative aspects of the Nehru model of Indian planning.

The Nehru model, however, was not an unmixed evil. It has its positive side which was seen in the fact that much of the new industries that were set up—heavy industries in particular—were in the public sector. This, of course, did not mean that India had taken the path of socialist industrialization, because, simultaneously with helping the development of the public sector, the planners led by Nehru were assisting the emergence of a powerful private sector. The growth of the public sector in what came to be known as 'commanding heights of the economy' also helped the emergence of powerful private sector industries including many which were of a large-scale nature.

The development of heavy industries in the public sector was, in other words, not antagonistic to, but helped the development of non-heavy industries in the private sector. Despite the leading role of heavy industries in the public sector, therefore, light industries of large, medium and small scale also grew. The result was large-scale and rapid development of industries in the public as well as the private sectors.

The leading role assigned to the public sector and the government's administrative control over development, in fact, helped the private sector to resist the onslaught of multinational companies which were out to swallow the swadeshi industries. It was with the active protection provided by the administrative machinery that Indian capitalists could resist the attacks on them launched by multinationals.

Indian big business was, of course, not pleased with the role assigned to the administrative machinery in economic construction. For the 'commanding heights' of the economy being occupied by the public sector meant that medium and small industries were protected against the attempts at swallowing them made by the big business. Legislative and executive measures adopted by the government to prevent the growth of monopolies in the private sector saved the medium and small industries, enabling them to resist the attacks launched by big business. This was not to the liking of big business which wanted the public sector and the administrative machinery to be used only against multinationals. Even here, of course, there was a substantial section of Indian businessmen who wanted to enter into deals with foreign multinationals and thus develop into partners of multinationals in the joint exploitation of the Indian people.

This is the background against which was developed a widespread offensive against the Nehru Government's 'bigger and bolder' Second Five Year Plan which was denounced as a plan to 'take the country into ruin and chaos.' Spokesmen of Indian big business banded themselves together in the Swatantra Party whose leaders had their sympathizers and supporters among the Congress leaders themselves.

It was in these circumstances that the Communists and other leftists extended their support to the main principles of the Nehru model of Indian planning—rapid industrialization with emphasis on the building of heavy industries; the building of a powerful public sector as a counterforce to the foreign multinationals as well as to Indian big business which was rapidly developing into monopolies.

Despite this general support to the main principles of the Nehru model of planning, however, the Communists and other leftists drew attention to the serious consequences of the agrarian policy, the policy on employer-

employee relations, policy on taxation and indebtedness, and so on. There was thus an approach which was positive in relation to the main principles of plan-rung but critical of the serious drawbacks in relation to the agrarian, industrial and labour, taxation and other policies. They, in other words, came out strongly against the Swatantra Party and other advocates of a right reactionary turn to the process of economic development, at the same time rallying the people against the negative elements of the Nehru model of planning.

The new model evolved by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh carries forward all that was negative but abandons all that was positive in the Nehru model. They carry forward the anti-peasant, anti-agricultural labour, anti-industrial labour and other policies which, in fact, had been the sheet-anchor of the Nehru approach. They, however, reject the leading role of the public sector, the active help rendered by the government in the protection of Indian industries from the multinationals, the line of helping the medium and small-scale industries against the attempt at swallowing them by the big business, and so on. They throw the doors and windows wide open for the multinationals freely to enter the Indian markets and ruin the swadeshi industries. They are abandoning the process of safeguarding the interests of the medium and small-scale industries which are threatened with ruin at the hands of a narrow upper stratum of Indian big business.

Dispensing with all measures of safeguarding the interests of the common people, such as subsidization of foodgrains and fertilizers, low rates of educational, health and other social services, and so on, they also raise the rates at which the people could earlier get education, medical and public health, electricity supply, transport services and the like.

The result is sky-rocketing of the cost of living of the common people which is compounded by the ever-increasing rates at which monetary and price inflation is taking place. This cannot be characterized in any other way than as an unscrupulous attack on the living and working conditions of the common people.

It is against this that the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions, supported by a number of political parties, are carrying on a widespread mass campaign which includes the organization of an all-India strike which

was once organized in November last year and was again organized on June 16. This is not meant for the reactivation of the Nehru model as such, but for its rectification and implementation—renouncing all that was negative and preserving all that was positive.

July 4, 1992

Different Paths, One Goal

Communists and the Quit India Struggle

The country is observing the 50th anniversary of the Quit India struggle. A national committee for its observance has been set up in which the general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and two members of its Polit Bureau—West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and myself—have been included.

The question will naturally arise whether, in view of our non-participation in the Quit India struggle, it was appropriate on the part of the Government to include us in the committee and whether it was appropriate on our part to accept the honour bestowed on us. It is not for me to answer the question for the Government which included us in the committee. I would only try to answer the question whether it was appropriate for us to accept the position.

It is true that we did not participate in the struggle; we were, on the other hand, definitely of the opinion that undertaking such a widespread mass struggle at a time when the country was being threatened on the one side by the Hitler hordes and on the other by the Japanese militarists, was suicidal. For the struggle would disrupt the war efforts of the Government of India in which we the Indian people were as much interested as anybody else in the world.

It was an illusion to think that the German fascists and the Japanese militarists would liberate our country from British imperialism; on the other hand, it would be a transfer from British overlordship to the Nazis' and Japanese militarists' terror rule. The victory of the anti-fascist forces (of which the British imperialists happened to be a part at the time) would in fact pave the way for the liberation not only of India but of hundreds of colonial countries inhabited by the majority of humanity. We, therefore, proposed to our brothers and sisters in the freedom movement that we should integrate our struggle for national liberation from British

imperialism with the struggle of the world peoples for liberation from the German and Italian fascists and the Japanese militarists.

In holding this view, of course, we were swimming against the main current of anti-imperialism sweeping over the whole country which happened to be directed against British imperialism. Millions of people who were actively participating in the struggle considered that we were helping the British; many of them went to the extent of calling us 'British agents.' Never before were we so isolated from our brothers and sisters of the mainstream anti-imperialist movement.

Looking back to those days now from the experience of what happened during the half-century that has elapsed since then, I am of the view that though we were mistaken in the practical working out of our policy of *People's War*, that policy itself was by and large correct. Our assessment that our national freedom depended on the freedom of the world peoples who were groaning under, or were threatened with, the Italian and German fascism and the Japanese militarism was fully correct. Regardless of the claims made by the organizers and leaders of the Quit India movement—the claim that it was their struggle that won us freedom—the fact remains that it was the victory of the anti-fascist forces led by the Soviet Union in the Second World War that liberated us and our brethren in the other Asian and African countries who were subjected to the domination of imperialist powers.

The Quit India struggle itself was brutally suppressed by the British rulers, who, however, were forced to negotiate with the national leaders in our country on the conditions under which they could 'Quit India.' And when they did so, it was under such conditions as made Mahatma Gandhi refrain from participating in the joyous celebrations of India attaining independence on August 15, 1947. He went on record that he had no heart to celebrate an event which culminated in the partition of India which he said 'was like the vivisection of my body.' The British rulers 'quitting India' in 1947 therefore was not under the pressure of the Quit India struggle, but because of the epoch-making victory of the Soviet Union and its allies in the anti-fascist war.

Let us recall that India attaining freedom in 1947 was part of a world process of dozens of countries in Asia and Africa attaining freedom either immediately after the end of the anti-fascist war or within a quarter century since then. None of these countries had anything like the 'Quit India' struggle here; they all attained freedom because, in the wake of the epoch-making victory of the Soviet Union in the anti-fascist war, no imperialist power could hold on to its colonies in Asia and Africa. It is a matter of pride for us that the people and the government of our country played an important role in the liberation of the overwhelming majority of these countries after we ourselves attained freedom in 1947.

The post-Second World War developments in global politics thus completely vindicated the position we adopted during the days of the Quit India struggle that India's struggle for national freedom depended on the fate of the world peoples in the struggle between fascism and democracy. If the fascists had won the war, in fact we would have continued to be subjected to imperialist rule, though the power that dominated us would have changed from Britain to Japan or Germany. We are therefore proud of the role which we played during the critical days of the Quit India struggle in our own country, and in the titanic global struggle between fascism and national liberation.

This is not to claim that we committed no mistakes. On the other hand, we did commit the serious mistake of denouncing the leaders and participants in the Quit India struggle as 'agents of world fascism and Japanese militarism.' Our correct assessment that the struggle would actually be of help to German fascism and Japanese militarism prevented us from appreciating the noble aspirations of our sisters and brothers engaged in the titanic Quit India struggle.

To take one instance, we denounced Subhas Chandra Bose, the organizer and leader of the Indian National Army (INA) who was fast moving towards Indian frontier in collaboration with the Japanese military, as a 'Japanese agent.' We forgot for the moment that, though pursuing the wrong policy of collaboration with the Japanese militarists, Bose was moved by the noble objective of liberating India from the British imperialist rule. Instead of bridging the wide gulf that separated us from the millions of mainstream

anti-imperialists who were engaged in the Quit India struggle, we further enlarged the gulf. Never before in the history of a century-long struggle for Indian freedom were we so isolated from the mainstream anti-imperialist masses in our country.

As against this, of course, was the fact that our sisters and brothers participating in the Quit India movement considered us ‘British agents.’ From the fact that our activities, for the time being, helped the British in using the immense resources of India for the war waged ‘with the objective of preserving and strengthening the hold of British imperialism on dozens of countries including India, they jumped to the conclusion that we were deliberately helping British imperialists to hold on to their domination over India. While we did subsequently make the honest self-criticism that we were wrong in considering them as fascist agents, they too should honestly admit that they were wrong in denouncing us as ‘British agents.’

The fact of the matter is that both they and we were pursuing the same objective—India’s freedom from British domination—but pursuing different (and even contradictory) paths of advance towards national freedom. Obstructing the war efforts of British imperialism (since it was carrying on a policy of naked repression against the freedom movement) was for them the way to win freedom, while we helped the war efforts of British imperialism with a view to liberating the world from the fascist terror, thus paving the way for India’s own freedom. A conflict between these two assessments of the situation, two strategies for winning India’s freedom, was the essence of the situation in which the mainstream anti-imperialist masses and we of the Indian Communist movement took opposite positions.

Our party at its second Congress (held in February–March 1948) made the self-criticism of what we did in the days of Quit India struggle. Ever since then, we have considered the struggle as much a part of our own struggle as of the actual participants in the struggle, though we did not participate therein. We realize that, though brutally suppressed by the British who, to quote Mahatma Gandhi, ‘unleashed leonine violence’ against the organizers of the Quit India struggle, the upsurge that was unleashed after the arrest of the Congress leaders on the morning of August 9 played its role in keeping the fire of anti-imperialism burning in our country and,

together with the victory of the Soviet Red Army in the anti-fascist war, forced the British rulers to come to terms with our national leaders, making them the new rulers of the Indian Union.

This enabled us to reforge our links with a section of the organizers of the Quit India struggle and Netaji Bose's INA movement.

Aruna Asaf Ali, the high-priestess of the underground organization behind the Quit India struggle, subsequently joined the pre-split CPI of which she became a central committee member (though she left the party later).

Captain Lakshmi, the leader of the women's contingent of Netaji's INA, is still an active member of the CPI (M). There are several other (though lesser-known) organizers and participants of the Quit India movement who are today cooperating with us—many of them even joining us as party members.

Such cooperation between the active participants in the Quit India struggle and the Communists who kept away from the struggle is important today when the Narasimha Rao Government is pursuing such policies' as would mortgage the freedom, sovereignty and national unity for which the brave participants in the struggle made immense sacrifices.

August 15, 1992

Philosopher of Secularism

On Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, who expired recently, was considered the pioneer of Marxist theory in Indian philosophy. His books, beginning with *Lokayata* published in 1959, were the first attempt made by an Indian philosopher to show that in India, as in any other country in the world, the materialist and idealist philosophies had confronted each other. Materialism, therefore, is as much a part of Indian philosophical thinking as in any other country.

Chattopadhyaya's works, however, were not merely Marxist writings. They were philosophical works which enabled the secular socio-political forces in the country to fight the forces of obscurantism. For he showed that the defeat of materialism at the hands of idealist philosophers, culminating in Sankara's works, was a defeat of progressive socio-cultural forces. Involved in the struggle between materialism and idealism was the furious struggle between two socio-class forces: those of the Sudras, the overwhelming majority of the working people, and the Dwijas (Kshatriyas, Brahmins and Vysyas) who constituted a small minority of the Indian people. Defeat of materialism at the hands of idealism, therefore, constituted the defeat of the working people at the hands of the exploiting minority.

Chattopadhyaya's pioneering work, *Lokayata*, showed that materialist philosophy in India was as ancient as the Indus Valley society. In terms of history, therefore, materialism was in existence before the appearance of the Vedic society. The works of the *Lokayatikas* were destroyed probably by the Vedic people, so that the original works of the *Lokayatika* philosophers are not available to us today. They, however, have been preserved in the form of the *Poorva Paksha* (the point of view of the opponent) quoted by the idealistic philosophers to prove their *Sidhanta Paksha* or theory. Even in this form, they show the vigour and strength of arguments of the pre-Vedic materialist philosophers.

Like other Marxist theoreticians, Chattopadhyaya went into the sociological roots of the materialist thinking of the pre-Vedic people. He came to the conclusion that society in the days of emergence of the *Lokayata* philosophy was tribal. Collective labour, collective life, collective thinking, collective arts and literature—these were the characteristic features of that society. The difference between manual and mental labour had not yet appeared, everybody labouring manually as well as mentally. This unity of action and thinking, physical labour among the forces of nature and mental or intellectual labour were, therefore, the preoccupation of all members of society.

This oneness with nature led to materialist thinking, though of a very elementary nature. Chattopadhyaya, in fact, calls it ‘proto-materialism.’ That, in fact, was the first form of scientific thinking in pre-Vedic India.

This was not abandoned, but continued to live in the early Vedas. The people who produced the early Vedas were in fact having the same type of tribal society as the creators of the *Lokayata* philosophy. Chattopadhyaya, however, points out with plenty of literary material at hand that there was a difference in the social order of the pre-Vedic *Lokayata* philosophers and the authors of the early Vedas. The former had a society which was predominantly agricultural and matriarchal while the latter was pastoral and patriarchal. The collective life of tribal society remaining the same in both systems, unity of manual and mental labour continued in the early Vedas. The philosophical content, therefore, was the same—proto-materialism.

It took several centuries for the early Vedas to be supplanted by their later versions. With time, however, the division between manual and mental labour started appearing. The mode of production having advanced since the days of early Vedas, those who were employed in labour became separated from their counterparts who employed them in manual labour. This was the beginning of a small group of Dwijas who lived on the product of manual labour in which the majority of the people—Sudras—were employed. What Chattopadhyaya calls the ‘lordly power’ or the Kshatriya, the ‘holy power’ or the Brahmin and the power of the trade and agriculture (the Vaisya), who together constituted the exploiting minority, lived on the labour of the exploited majority. The exploiting minority required a

theoretical system which would convince the exploited majority that exploitation is the law of God. Here began the rapid growth of idealist philosophy.

Idealism, however, could not have a free field. The original works of the *Lokayatikas* remained destroyed by the combination of the 'lordly' and the 'holy' power but remained in the consciousness of the people. These were given new forms by the Carvakas, the Buddhists, the Jains and so on. In his two major works, *Lokayata* followed by *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*, Chattopadhyaya showed how the various *Nasthika* systems—the systems which refused to accept, and challenged, the authority of the Vedas—came into direct conflict with the systems of the *Asthikas*. The distinguishing features of each school of the *Nasthika* and *Asthika* (philosophers) are explained in detail in both his works.

In the process, he showed that ancient India produced not only materialist philosophy but the dialectical world outlook. Extensively quoting from the writings of the Buddha and philosophers like Kanara, he showed how the dialectical principle of constant change, the coming and passing away of every phenomena in nature, society and thinking had begun to sprout. India, therefore, can claim the credit for having developed its own materialism and its own dialectics which, if allowed to develop freely, would have culminated in the new philosophy of dialectical and historical materialism which was the characteristic feature of 19th century Europe.

It is, however, the misfortune of the Indian people that their ancient materialism and dialectics were not allowed to develop freely. The combination of the 'lordly and holy power' which dealt a powerful blow to the *Lokayatikas* and the other materialist philosophers also defeated the early beginnings of the dialectical method which found its characteristic expression in Kanara and the Buddha. It was against these twin principles of materialism and dialectics that the most towering personality among the idealist philosophers, Sankara, dealt a powerful blow. The development of materialism and dialectics was thus effectively stalled.

This, Chattopadhyaya shows, lies at the root of the social, philosophical and scientific-technological stagnation that gripped Indian society in the post-Sankara centuries. By that time, however, Europe had developed

further from the early beginnings of Greek materialism and Greek dialectics. The early dialecticians of Greek society had developed into the modern European Hegel while the Greek materialist philosophy was further developed by Feuerbach. The dialectics of Hegel, however, was based on the idealistic world outlook, while the materialism of Feuerbach was metaphysical, rather than dialectical. Marx and Engels had the privilege of developing Hegel's idealism in a materialist way while developing the Feuerbachian materialism dialectically.

This was the culmination of intellectual development stretched over two millennia in Europe. In India, on the other hand, the proto-materialism of the pre-Vedic *Lokayata* philosophy and the philosophy of the early Vedas was defeated in ideological battle. So was the dialectical method of thinking and discussion (*Poorva Paksha* being defeated by the *Sidhanta Paksha* and the Buddhist dialectics of the universe being in constant flux) defeated. An all-round intellectual stagnation gripped the Indian society since the latter decades of the first millennium A.D. when Sankara dealt the final blow against ancient Indian materialism and dialectics.

Chattopadhyaya, in one of his major works, *Science and Technology in Ancient India*, quotes the 20th century scientist of chemistry, P.C. Ray, to show that the stagnation of science and technology should be traced to Sankara's philosophy. The same conclusion is drawn by another towering Marxist intellectual, D.D. Kosambi, from whose works Chattopadhyaya quotes extensively.

This, therefore, is a powerful weapon in the hands of secular and science-oriented intellectuals and social activists in their struggle against the *Hindutva* and other sinister forces which want to throw India back to the days of the later Vedas and the Upanishads culminating in the works of the idealist philosophers like Sankara. They want to blow out not only the pioneering works of early materialists contained in *Lokayata*, but also subsequent materialist thinking including the Carvaka, the Buddhist, the Jaina, the Samkhya, and so on. They repeat the canard invented by the ideologues of the colonial British rulers, according to whom India has remained a land of idealism and spiritualism *par excellence*.

It is on the basis of this thinking that they have evolved the socio-political theories and practices which amount to what is today known as *Hindutva* and which has its non-Hindu counterparts in Islamic, Christian, Sikh and other forms of revivalism and obscurantism. Chattopadhyaya's works therefore provide a sharp weapon against all these revivalist and obscurantist theories and practices.

July 31, 1993

Religionless Christianity

On Liberation Theology

The Latin American countries have given rise to what is known as 'Liberation Theology'—a theory of Christianity in practice which brings about relations of cooperation with Marxists and other revolutionaries, even while adhering to the principles and practices of the religion.

The leaders and activists of this movement have been rubbing shoulders with Communists and other revolutionaries in their respective countries in the struggle against imperialism and autocracy, for democracy and in defence of the rights of the working people. Many of them have joined the ranks of fighters for a new social order, some of them even becoming martyrs in the cause of revolutionary struggle.

Such a movement created by devout Christians is yet to develop in India. There are, however, clear signs that it is taking shape in this country as well. An example of this is provided by the doctoral thesis submitted by K.A. Paulson who later became Bishop Poulose Mar Poulose of a denomination of non-Catholic Christians in Kerala. He was a student in the University of Berkeley, California, working for a doctorate in theology and submitted his thesis in October 1975. It has not yet been published but was given to me by the author for study.

The title is 'Bonhoefferian Corrective to Karl Marx's Critique of Religion.' A study of the thesis makes it clear that Liberation Theology is coming into India—to Kerala, to be specific.

The thesis is divided into three parts, of which the first (in five chapters) deals with Marx's critique of religion. In the second part, which too consists of five chapters, the perspective of a German theologian, Bonhoeffer, is explained. The third part is an exhortation to Christians to wake up from their dogmatic slumber and enter into a dialogue with Marxists.

‘Such a dialogue,’ the author adds, ‘is suggested not primarily as a diplomacy for human survival but for the affirmation of our humanity as it is disclosed in the Incarnation.’ The final appeal, therefore, is to Marxists and Christians to adhere to their respective theoretical outlooks but yet cooperate among themselves for the good of humanity.

It is with this broad approach that the author begins a very lucid and faithful presentation of Marxism. The author rebuts the theory expounded by some non-Marxist scholars that there is a contrast between the ‘earlier Marx’ and the ‘subsequent Marx’. He says: ‘The “young” and “old” Marx are essentially one and the same; there is a continuity of thought in Marx’s writings. The basic ideas on man as Marx expressed them in the manuscripts and the ideas of the elder Marx as expressed in *Capital* are not contradictory. Marx did not renounce his earlier views completely. Evidently Marxism of both earlier and later periods is significant for us. Therefore, our approach to the problem should be that of considering it in a purely factual way by enquiring into the relation between them.’

Coming as this does from a non-Marxist scholar, it shows that the author is seriously and sincerely trying to understand what Marxism is. This is followed by a painstaking study of the major tenets of Marxist philosophy which brings the author very close to those who would be called Marxists.

There is, however, one point which demarcates him from Marxists: in Chapter 3, he points out that ‘Marx’s critique of religion is basically different from that of Lenin’s.’ He is of the view that Lenin in his understanding of religion was going back to the 18th century (bourgeois) critique of religion, the clergy and the Church. This assessment, it appears, is based on the author’s failure to note the difference in the socio-political environment in which Marx and Lenin lived, worked and wrote.

Marxism, as is well known, is a theory of action. It is the theory which helps practice which, in turn, enriches the theory. Furthermore, the theory as well as the practice of Marxism has very much to do with the development of the modern working class. As Marx himself has in one place observed, ‘Philosophy finds in the working class its *material* weapon; the working class finds in philosophy its *spiritual* weapon.’ Therefore, anybody

who fails to relate the theory and practice of Marxism to the working class fails to understand what Marxism is.

Furthermore, everything in the world does, according to Marxism, undergo constant transformation. The contradictions between thesis and anti-thesis produce a synthesis which, in turn, becomes a new thesis producing its anti-thesis, leading to a new synthesis which once again becomes a new thesis, and so on interminably. This applies as much to the theory and practice of Marxism as to any other phenomenon in the world. For a proper understanding of Marxism, therefore, one has to examine how and under what circumstances Marxism arose, how and under what circumstances it developed, and so on. That is why it has been well said that 'Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action'—action in the sense of the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions.

Marx and Engels were originally the products of bourgeois revolution but found in the working class, growing in the ranks of the bourgeois-democratic revolutionaries, the new rising class—the modern proletariat. The biographies of Marx and Engels, as subsequently of Lenin and the later-Marxists, are the histories of the development of the world revolutionary movement—of the bourgeois-democratic type to begin with and proletarian-socialist type subsequently.

Marx and Engels lived and worked in the 19th century Europe where bourgeois-democratic revolutions were raging and the working class was rising in the ranks of those revolutions. By the time Lenin appeared, the bourgeois-democratic revolutions had already started transforming themselves into socialist revolutions of the modern proletariat.

While for Marx and Engels the proletarian revolution was a matter of the future and, therefore, the struggle against religion had no immediate significance for the class struggle, it was for Lenin a matter of current practical action. Engaged as Lenin was in the practical struggle for socialist revolution in his own country and in the rest of Europe, he saw in the Orthodox and Catholic churches of Europe a force in the camp of the enemies of the proletarian revolution. He, therefore, had to fight a furious battle not only against the Czar in Russia and his counterparts in other European countries together with their bourgeois allies, but also against the

Orthodox and Catholic churches which were mounting an all-sided attack against the fighting working class.

This difference in the socio-political background against which Marx and Engels on the one hand and Lenin on the other had to fight is not taken note of by the author. The author, however, notes, 'he (Lenin) like Marx opposed the attempts of Bakunin to put the struggle against the religion in the centre of class struggle. The question of religion must not be the principal issue that separates the religious and non-religious workers into two camps and weakens the class struggle. Instead, the struggle must be focused at the 'social roots of religion,' i.e. capitalism.'

The author, while overstating the changed emphasis of Lenin, thus ignores the concrete circumstances in revolutionary Russia, particularly the role that was being played by the Russian Orthodox Church, making such militant atheistic approach to religion inevitable.

The author is, no doubt, correct in emphasizing the humanistic essence of the theory and practice of Marxism. The understanding of this view of Marxism, however, is inadequate, since it fails to take note of the class roots of Marxism, that is, that it is the theory and practice of the modern working class.

Having made his critical assessment of Marx and his theory that it is a theory of humanism like Christianity, the author goes on to an examination of Bonhoeffer's theory. This also is a humanist theory which is intimately connected with practice. Bonhoeffer, in fact, was an anti-Nazi theologian who was imprisoned and executed in Germany. He shared with Thaelman, a Communist, and his comrades the tortures and indignities of the Nazi jailors, holding high the banner of democracy and humanism.

This was possible for him because he looked upon the teachings of Christ as the theory and practice of humanity's socio-political action which does not tolerate oppression and exploitation. This is what made him a friend and ally of Communists in the struggle against Hitlerism. The author quotes the jail doctor, who supervised the execution of Bonhoeffer, to show that he was a genuine martyr sacrificing his life for the cause of humanity's

liberation from oppression. It is the theory and practice of such a man that the author compares to the theory and practice of Karl Marx.

Bonhoeffer, like many devout Christians, had deep faith in God and Jesus Christ. He, however, rejects the theory advanced by the leaders of the established Church that faith in and the worshipping of God and Jesus Christ are necessary for man to get salvation in the other world. The Bonhoefferian interpretation of Christianity is a philosophy and plan of action for man *in this world and not in the other world*. While having full faith in God and Jesus Christ, he uses that faith in the service of living man in this world. That is why Bonhoeffer uses the term 'Religionless Christianity'.

It is 'religionless' in the sense that the theory and practice of Christianity are used for the service of humanity in this world. It is, however, Christianity in the sense that it has abiding faith in God and Jesus Christ. This faith is to be used for the service of man in this world.

This is the point on which Marxism and 'religionless Christianity' are in agreement as well as in disagreement with each other. Marxism is a materialist philosophy. It has no place for God and Jesus Christ as Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity has. Proceeding as it does from its materialist world-outlook, Marxism agrees with the 'religionless Christianity' of Bonhoeffer whose starting point is faith in God and Jesus Christ.

The two, therefore, converge on the common commitment to the service of man in this world. That is why the concluding chapter of the book is 'A call for dialogue' between Marxists and Christians. The author says: 'By examining Marx's critique of religion optimistically and without prejudice, we found Marxists and Christians can agree, in spite of several disagreements, that both are ultimately concerned for true humanity, especially for the rights of the poor and needy, the hungry and the hopeless; both could agree that they strive to be 'true to the earth'. We observe that Marx's assessment is primarily an anthropological affirmation; it is another way of putting human beings in the centre of human interest and concern... The essence of Christian faith is even consistent with unqualified commitment to revolutionary struggle in the name of man against the forces

of alienation. This corrective also serves the purpose of presenting to the Church a new understanding of differences and the autonomous modern world and it reminds us what it means to be a Christian in the world come of age.'

We may now conclude with the observation that there is no use attempting a 'dialogue' between the materialist and spiritualist philosophies represented by Marxism and Christianity (or other religions). While the Marxist should respect the sincerely-held faith of the Christians in God and Jesus Christ, devout Christians should respect the philosophical convictions of the Marxists; with this as basis, they both can proceed to get into dialogue on the *practical questions of how to serve man*.

September 11, 1993

Philosopher and Society

From Buddha and Sankara to Vivekananda

The centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to the United States and the historic address he delivered in Chicago is being observed on a grand scale all over the country. The occasion is being used by the spokesmen of Hindutva politics to claim that they are following the Swami's lead in upholding the greatness of Hindu philosophy. This is opposed by those philosophers and political activists who look upon the Swami as one of the leaders of the Indian renaissance movement of the 19th century.

Participating in a seminar organized by the Sanskrit Department of Calicut University on the 'relevance of Vivekananda's philosophy today, this writer had the opportunity to say that, in order to get a proper understanding of a philosopher and his contributions, one should not only make a penetrating study of the philosopher's works and interpret them but also examine the socio-economic and cultural milieu in which the philosopher lived and worked.

A product of the great renaissance opened by such stalwarts as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda so interpreted his philosophy of Vedanta as to help the development of modern renaissance in India. That was why the title of the paper read by this writer at the seminar was 'The Philosopher of India's Renaissance.'

Consciously or unconsciously, every philosopher (including those who appear to be far removed from the humdrum conflicts going on in society and politics) reflected and theoretically interpreted the surrounding socio-political environment. To illustrate this, the paper presented by this writer made a comparison between two ancient Indian philosophers—the Buddha and Sankara—with Vivekananda. The conclusion drawn was that even the most abstruse philosopher through his discourses not only interpreted, but sought to change the world around him, as was pointed out by Karl Marx in his well-known thesis on Feuerbach.

The Buddha lived in an age when the old tribal society was breaking up and the new caste society was emerging. He was in full sympathy with the millions of people who were deprived of their social life and cultural heritage. Although born in a family which belonged to the higher-ups in the new society, he was spiritually at one with those who were deprived of their dear life and culture. He was thus a rebel against the new system that was emerging, a defender of the old tribal society which was rapidly breaking up. This is the source of the Buddha's philosophy, which was opposed to the spiritualism and idealism of the Vedic Brahmin society. Denounced by his opponents for his materialism and atheism, he championed the cause of those who were being dispossessed in the process of the break-up of the tribal society. The significance of his philosophy, therefore, cannot be understood unless one takes serious note of the socio-cultural and political developments taking place in the country when the Buddha was alive.

The Buddha was thus trying to take society back to the stage which had .by and large been overcome. Objective reality had made tribal society outmoded but the Buddha clung to it, fought for its preservation. He was therefore vanquished in the battle against Brahmin domination. Buddhism as a socio-cultural force, which was rapidly growing through the centuries, was at last defeated. The great centres of Buddhist learning could no more thrive when the new socio-cultural forces representing the caste society were getting the upper hand.

It is a tragic reality that, though the teachings of the Buddha spread far and wide outside the borders of India, Buddhism became an insignificant socio-cultural force in the country of its birth.

It was in the struggle against the Buddhist philosophy that Sankara came to the forefront. The abstruse theoretical formulations made by: Sankara in his campaign against Buddhism really covered up the great philosopher's partiality for the caste society. It is significant that in his discourses against Buddhist philosophy and in defence of his own Vedanta philosophy he often quoted Manu as an authority. Even while advancing the theory that the entire universe is a myth and that Brahma alone is real, he was merciless in fighting all violations of the rules of caste society as outlined by Manu. Just

as the Buddha as a philosopher was defending the dying tribal society, so was Sankara the philosopher of the rising caste society.

Although the caste society championed by Sankara was more advanced than the tribal society which the Buddha tried to defend, the caste society in India could not stand against the new force that was emerging—not in this land but in Europe. The domination of the Brahmin in the caste society which Sankara consolidated became the undoing of that society. India which was equal, or in some respects even superior, to European civilization became a back number in the post-Sankara period.

While Europe had its industrial, technological, political and cultural revolutions, India lagged behind, making it a prey to European powers. As a historian of Indian science pointed out, Sankara's Vedanta was not just a philosophical dogma but a socio-political theory which discouraged scientific investigations. India, which in the ancient and medieval periods of history is credited with many inventions and discoveries of a scientific and technological character, could not keep pace with Europe which was rapidly coming into the forefront in scientific and technological changes.

This socio-cultural backwardness of Indian society was the objective reason why the European merchants who started meddling in the political affairs of the country, making alliances with one or another political-administrative authority in one or another part of the country, were able in the end to subjugate the whole country. The loss of India's national freedom, therefore, had very much to do with Sankara's philosophy which weakened Indian society culturally, economically and politically. Learning the lessons from this experience, new generations of Indians started following the cultural and intellectual lead given by the European powers. That was the significance of the rise of a new generation of Indian intellectuals—in Bengal to begin with, followed by the rest of the country. Well-considered and all-round attacks on the caste society defended by Sankara became the characteristic feature of the new generation of Indian intellectuals, the authors of the renaissance beginning in the 19th century. The central objective of that renaissance movement was the overthrow of the caste society, whose champion philosopher Sankara had been.

They, however, did not want to go back to the age of the Buddha with his nostalgic ideas regarding ancient tribal society. What the leaders and activists of the new renaissance movement wanted was a modern (bourgeois) society which is a negation of the ancient tribal as well as the subsequent caste society. A new cultural, political, economic and social upsurge was what the authors of the new renaissance were striving for.

Swami Vivekananda was the intellectual and philosopher who tried not only to interpret but change Indian society as he saw it—change not to the ancient tribal society as the Buddha had dreamed to do, but to build a modern, science-oriented, democratic, secular and political India. The very Vedanta philosophy which was used by Sankara to consolidate caste society was used by Vivekananda to mobilize the people against that caste society. He propounded the theory of ‘Sudra rule’—an Indian (Hindu) version of proletarian rule. Seeing the caste oppression so rampant in Kerala in his days, he cried, ‘This land is a real lunatic asylum.’ His call was for complete equality, social, economic and political.

This is not to suggest that Vivekananda was a socialist or a Marxist. He had not familiarized himself with and understood the theories of Marxism. He, however, was a democrat, a social rebel, working for a complete reconstruction of Indian society. The work turned out by him and his colleagues of the same generation paved the way for the subsequent emergence of a modern working class and revolutionary socialist movement based on Marxism.

This real significance of Swami Vivekananda is sought to be negated by those who call themselves Vivekananda’s followers but would like to forget his revolutionary teachings.

October 23, 1993

Mao's Thought

Applying Marxism to Chinese Reality

In less than two decades since Mao Zedong's demise, important developments have taken place both in China and in the world. The enemies of Communism are gleefully talking of 'the collapse of Communism' and 'the irrelevance of Marxism-Leninism in the present-day world conditions.' They, however, have to acknowledge the glorious achievement of the Chinese Republic after the 'collapse of Communism' in several former socialist countries.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) for its part has had to make a serious study of and correct many theories and works of Mao in his last years, particularly in the period of the 'Cultural Revolution.' Yet, it upholds 'the thought of Mao' as the summing up of the experience of the Chinese Revolution up to 1949 and then of socialist construction for almost a decade, that is, up to the launching of the 'Cultural Revolution.' This, it holds, is the concrete application of Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions, making it possible for the Chinese Communists to outline the path of advance towards 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.'

They, in fact, have incorporated 'the thought of Mao' as one of the 'four cardinal principles of socialist building in China,' the other three being the socialist system, people's democratic dictatorship and the leadership of the Communist Party. What then is Mao's thought? How is it applicable to the Chinese Revolution even after Mao made serious mistakes in the period of the 'Cultural Revolution'? Does it apply at all to other countries, including India? If so, how?

As Lenin repeatedly pointed out, Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action. The concrete manner in which Marxism is applied will vary from country to country and, in the same country, from stage to stage of the revolution. Failure to pay attention to this Leninist dictum was one of the failings of the Communist International (Comintern) for several years.

Instead of learning from the positive and negative experiences of the socialist revolution and the construction of the new society in Russia, there was a tendency in several Communist and workers' parties to take whatever happened in Russia during the pre-revolutionary and subsequent years as models for every country to be mechanically applied. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was one of the many that committed this mistake in applying Marxism to Indian conditions.

The CPC led by Mao was one of the very first to break from this tradition, closely following the original directive of the Comintern that the revolutionary parties in backward countries should base themselves on the peasant masses for building a united front with all anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces including the bourgeoisie, while developing and strengthening the independent revolutionary party of the working class.

While this general line outlined by Lenin and accepted by the International in its earlier years remained on paper in the case of several parties, the CPC applied it in a systematic way. That is why, as early as in the latter half of the 1920s, the Chinese Communists were able to organize people's revolutionary armies, first under the joint leadership of the Communist Party and the Sun Yat Sen-led Kuomintang, and, after this united front was broken by Chiang Kaishek, directly under the leadership of the CPC. The formation of liberated areas, administered by revolutionary state authorities led by the Communist Party in some parts of the country, was the first example of the application of the basic Leninist principle and strategy to the concrete conditions of China. In fact, Mao became the undisputed leader of the CPC through activities that led to the formation of these liberated areas.

This *practice* of independent action by the party of the proletariat, leading vast rural masses and effectively fighting the feudal-dominated Kuomintang forces, led to the *evolution of the new concept* of 'new democracy.' Basing themselves on the 'old democracy' as conceived by Sun Yat Sen, the Chinese Communists further developed it into the new democracy.

The characteristic feature of this new democracy was that it was based on the solid revolutionary alliance of workers and peasants led by the working

class and, furthermore, a united front with the anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie (as opposed to comprador bourgeoisie which was pro-imperialist and pro-feudal in character).

This concept of new democracy, based on the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry and drawing into its fold the whole of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal sections of society, was generalized into a world concept when the Communist International at its 7th Congress (1935) outlined the perspective and delineated the contours of the anti-fascist united front on a world scale and anti-imperialist united fronts in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries.

This concept of the class alliance of the most revolutionary sections of society against the most reactionary forces made it possible for the Chinese' Communists, in the period of the anti-Japanese Resistance War, to rally the entire Chinese people in patriotic resistance against the imperialist aggressor. It was in the process of developing this broad alliance of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and patriotic forces that the CPC led by Mao developed many ideas concerning the economy, politics, culture and ideology of the working people led by the working class in China. Determined resistance to the reactionary Kuomintang leadership was a necessary condition for uniting all the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces against the national enemy, Japanese imperialism, and making the Chinese people an integral part of the world-wide struggle against fascism.

In elaborating the specifics of this strategy and the tactics of a united front, the CPC made a number of contributions to the further enrichment of Marxism-Leninism. Sections of the international movement including those in India, in fact, mistakenly thought that these contributions to Marxist theory made by the CPC and Mao are and should be applied mechanically in their own country.

In the CPI for example, there was a debate, at some stage in the development of our movement, whether the Chinese or Russian model was relevant to Indian conditions. It took a Couple of years of acute inner-party struggle for the CPI to come to the collective conclusion that neither the Russian nor the Chinese 'model' can be copied by Indian Communists; they, on the other hand, should evolve their own 'Indian model' for completing

the anti-imperialist ‘and anti-feudal democratic revolution and going forward to socialist revolution.

In moving towards the evolutionary politics of new democracy, as opposed ‘ to old democracy, and in developing the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry while drawing all the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal elements into this alliance, the CPC had to fight fierce battles. The arduous Long March of the Chinese Red Army, under direct attack from the Kuomintang reactionaries; the setting up of a liberated area where a people’s democratic government led by the Communist Party was in existence parallel to the Kuomintang Government in the rest of the country (the Yen’an period); the open proposal made after the end of the Second World War for a Kuomintang-Communist coalition government which was rejected by the Kuomintang counter-revolutionaries; the glorious three-year-long revolutionary war which ended in the humiliating defeat of the Kuomintang and the setting up of the People’s Republic of China in 1949—these constituted the brilliant application of the concept of new democracy and the strategy and tactics of unity with and struggle against the Kuomintang.

Having won a glorious victory in the three-year-long Liberation War, the CPC proceeded to outline the character of the new regime established under its leadership. Called the people’s democratic dictatorship, the CPC applied the basic principle of proletarian dictatorship to the concrete conditions of Chinese reality. As distinct from proletarian dictatorship which is applicable to the developed capitalist countries, where the working class is a major if not a majority class, dictatorship in China is exercised jointly by all the revolutionary classes (the proletariat, the broad mass of the peasantry, the other anti-imperialist and anti-feudal classes including the rich peasants and all groups and individuals interested in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism). That is why dictatorship in China is characterized as ‘popular’ rather than ‘proletarian.’

At the same time, post-Revolution China has strong remnants of the defeated classes—the feudals and comprador bourgeoisie in particular. Dictatorship has to be exercised against these counter-revolutionary forces, but in relation to the toiling people there is no coercion but ideological and

organizational leadership in the march from people's democracy to socialism.

The concept of a people's democratic dictatorship, like the earlier concept of new democracy, was thus a further enrichment of Marxism-Leninism on the basis of the Chinese experience. In several essays, reports and so on, Mao himself and other leaders of the CPC outlined the perspective with which the Chinese people have to go forward from people's democracy to socialism.

The first seven years of the People's Republic of China broadly completed people's democratic tasks—agrarian revolution in particular. They also laid the basis for the development of a new socialist China. The Chinese leaders, however, were clear that it would take several decades to complete the process of socialist construction. In this whole period, the people's democratic dictatorship has to continue; only under its hegemony can the economic, socio-cultural, political and ideological basis be built for rapid transition from people's democracy to socialism.

In this period, therefore, the two elements of broad democracy in the country and internal democracy in the party on the one hand, and the firm leadership of the proletariat and its party in the process of transition from people's democracy to socialism on the other, should be combined and integrated. Broad democracy for the people as a whole and necessary measures of coercion against the enemies of the people—this is the essence of the people's democratic dictatorship.

The ideological, political and organizational basis of such a transition from people's democracy to socialism was laid at the 8th Congress of the CPC held in 1956 (at which, incidentally, this writer had the privilege of being present as the leader of the CPI's fraternal delegation). It prepared the whole party and the people for a sure but step-by-step transition from people's democracy to socialism.

Unfortunately, however, in a couple of years after the 8th Congress, a 'left' trend made its appearance in the very leadership of the CPC. Those who belonged to this trend were impatient of the slow pace of transition from people's democracy to socialism. Unfortunately again, Mao happened

to be the initiator and leader of this 'leftist' trend. He gave his ideological-political and practical leadership to such movements as 'Great Leap Forward' and 'Cultural Revolution' which were intended to speed up artificially the process of transition to socialism. The decade from 1966 to 1976 is, therefore, rightly regarded as the 'tragic decade' in the history of the CPC and the People's Republic of China.

The 'leftist' trend which manifested itself in this process, however, did not confine itself to ideology and politics. It embraced the organization and practical activity too. With the enormous prestige arising out of his correct leadership in the anti-Kuomintang and anti-Japanese struggle, in the organization of the liberation war that ended in the emergence of the People's Republic and in leading the process of socialist construction in its initial years, Mao (though in a minority among the top leaders of the CPC) was able to assert himself in the party and among the people. Many leading comrades, including Liu Shao-qui, Vice-Chairman of the party and Chairman of the Republic, were subjected to persecution and had to die in jail.

Furthermore, in the absence of several top leaders who were removed from posts, and even arrested and jailed, adventurist factional groups headed by Lin Biao on the one hand and Mao's wife on the other were on the point of taking control of the party and the state. Though Mao tried to prevent some of the excesses his 'followers' had committed, he was too much involved in the ideological, political and practical activities of the gangs which were creating havoc in his name. The evil consequences of the 'Great Leap Forward' and the 'Cultural Revolution' therefore could be removed only after the demise of Mao. The 6th Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC adopted a resolution which made the following assessment of the positive and negative qualities of Mao, the man and his leadership:

"The chief responsibility for the grave "left" error of "Cultural Revolution", an error comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration, does indeed lie with Com. Mao Tse Tung. But after all, it was the error of a great proletarian revolutionary. Com. Mao Tse Tung paid constant attention to overcoming shortcomings in the life of the party and the state.

In his later years, however, far from making a correct analysis of many problems, he confused right and wrong and the people and the enemy during the “Cultural Revolution”. While making serious mistakes, he repeatedly urged the whole party to study the directions of Marx, Engels and Lenin conscientiously and imagined that his theory and practice were Marxist and that they were essential for the consolidation of the dictatorship of proletariat. Herein lies his tragedy.’

Unlike Khrushchev’s and Gorbachev’s critique of Stalin, therefore, the CPC’s assessment of Mao—his positive and negative qualities—was balanced. That was why the Chinese party and the People’s Republic could carry out a relatively smooth transition from the excesses of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ to a new political line for building socialism with Chinese characteristics.

January 1, 1994

On Indian Nationalism

From Naoroji and Ranade to Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh

The debate, in Parliament and outside, on the Dunkel proposals reminds one of the pioneers of Indian nationalism, particularly Dadabhai Naoroji and Mahadev Govind Ranade.

The former, it will be recalled, authored the well-known 'Drain Theory'. Basing himself on a lot of statistical material, he pointed out that the British rulers in London were every year draining our country and making it poverty-stricken. Ranade, on the other hand, pointed out that the theory of *laissez-faire* which formed the basis of the British Government's policy prevented the development of Indian industries: he argued that a backward country like India cannot develop modern industries unless the state plays an active role in industrialization.

These two theories, together with those advanced by Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others—who together constituted what may be called 'the founders of India's national economy theory'—laid the foundations for the subsequent development of political nationalism. Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru and so on carried forward the brilliant heritage handed over by the early pioneers. The slogans of swadeshi and boycott raised by Tilak, khadi and village industries developed by Gandhi who also fought a determined battle against the British Government's call for equality between foreign and Indian capitalists, followed by the beginnings of a planned economy laid by Nehru gave Indian nationalism an economic agenda.

The pioneering effort at Indian planning made by Sir M. Visweswarayya, followed by the labours of the National Planning Committee chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru in the latter half of the 1930s, and then by the well-known Bombay Plan of the 1940s, together with such other efforts as the People's Plan of M.N. Roy and the Gandhian plan of Shriman Narayan, made Indian politicians 'plan-conscious'.

It was with this rich heritage that Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, presided over the titanic effort at formulating the Second Five-Year Plan. That was the first serious effort in any Third World country to project a plan of accelerating the process of industrialization, modernization of agriculture and the development of infrastructural organizations. To Nehru goes the credit of piloting the Plan through, despite determined opposition from imperialism abroad and right reactionary forces like the Swatantra Party at home.

The Communists were not blind to the deficiencies in the Nehru perspective. Subjecting the Plan as formulated by the Nehru Government and the Planning Commission to incisive criticism, the Communist Party pointed its finger at two main drawbacks:

First, though said to be based on the 'Soviet model,' it refused to undertake those basic transformations in land relations (abolition of feudal landlordism without compensation to landlords) which was the starting point of the planning process in the Soviet Union (and subsequently in other socialist countries, including China). The result was that there was no rapid expansion of the home market which was to have a direct impact on industrialization; it failed also to generate internal capital, since the mass of rural poor were still carrying the burden of feudal rent. Abolition of this burden on the rural poor was the basis on which rapid industrialization could take place in the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries. Nehru refused to carry out this basic reform.

Secondly, for finding financial resources for investment, the Plan failed to tap real national resources, that is, the labour power of the working people which could have been mobilized only if appropriate labour, agrarian and democratic policies had been formulated. The result was that the Government had to depend exclusively on foreign capital and the resources that could be mobilized by domestic monopolies.

Despite these failings, however, the perspective of planning outlined by Nehru had the great merit that, with the help of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, it did away with basic reliance on imperialist advice and assistance, though only to a limited extent. An economy of self-reliance was thus sought to be built up. The series of large-scale and heavy industries

built with economic and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries made a big impact on the whole course of economic development in the country. Development of science and technology required for the creation of an industrialized modern economy was also undertaken.

All this would have been unthinkable if a break had not been made with the policy of dependence on advice and assistance from the imperialist powers. Together with the enormous prestige acquired through a foreign policy of anti-colonialism and non-alignment, this economic development made the country an example for all other Third World countries. This was the culmination of the process started by Naoroji, Ranade and others almost a century earlier.

These positive features of the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of planning, however, could not negate the evil consequences of the basic failures noted earlier. In the middle of the Second Five-Year Plan itself, the country faced a serious crisis of foreign exchange. The foolish moves made by Nehru on the question of the border dispute with China further accentuated the crisis. This was compounded by two years of drought which made Indira Gandhi declare a 'Plan holiday' for three years. In a note submitted to the National Development Council in 1968 (when, as the then Chief Minister of Kerala, I was a member of the Council), I pointed out:

'a. The postponement of the date on which the Fourth Five-Year Plan is to start from 1966 to 1969 indicates the serious crisis in the whole planning process in the country;

'b. We will be deluding ourselves and deluding the people if we were to blame the crisis of the planning process on the border conflicts with China and Pakistan, or on the two years of drought, or on both combined.

'c. The root of the crisis in the planning process lies in the fact that the policies pursued were inadequate to serve the main objective of planning—optimum use of the material and human resources of the nation for the most rapid industrialization of the economy and modernization of all fields of socio-economic activities.'

‘The crucial weakness of our planning,’ I continued, ‘has been its dependence on foreign ‘aid’ and loans for the public sector, combined with collaboration in the private sector. This is justified on the ground that our own national resources are inadequate and have to be supplemented by contributions from abroad. The rationale behind this policy apparently is that development with foreign “aid” or collaboration for some time would so strengthen the economy that, after a time it would be no more necessary to have any assistance. “Dependence in order to end dependence” is the sloganised form of the entire argument.

‘Experience has proved the utter baselessness of this whole project. After 18 years of “aid” loans and collaborations, the economy is still in need of more “aid,” more loans and more collaborations. The notorious PL-480 ‘aid’ has proved the ever-tightening noose around the neck of our people. The loans which are once contracted have to be repaid with still further loans. As for the collaboration between the foreign and Indian private capitalists, it is becoming the means through which the key sectors of our economy are gradually slipping out of our hands, falling into the iron grip of foreign monopolists. The result of this policy has been that, in the political sphere, our freedom of action is getting more and more restricted, while, in the economic sphere, the burdens on the national economy (by way of interest on and principal of the loans to be repaid) are becoming unbearable. The economic uncertainties and the political humiliation involved in the annual meetings of the so-called “Aid India Club” for fixing the quantum of “aid” are making a mockery of “the independent economy” which is supposed to be developing in the country. This is sharply underlined by the Deputy Prime Minister after his futile visit to Washington.’

The consequence of this was spelt out by me as follows:

‘A major part of what is secured by India is in the form of consumer goods or machinery for industries producing consumer goods. “Aids”, loans and collaborations are either for importing foodgrains or other consumer goods (many of them goods that are consumed only by the social elite), or for providing for maintenance imports or for setting up industries which produce consumer goods. The result is that the longer the period in which “aid” continues, the greater is the need for such “aid.” The devaluation of the

rupee to which our Government was obliged to resort to two years ago, the uncertainty of securing foreign “aid” even after devaluation and the consequent decision to postpone the date of beginning of the Fourth Five-Year Plan—all this shows that, as opposed to the promise to end the need for foreign “aid” the noose of foreign “aid” has been getting tighter and tighter. The noose has to be broken, the whole policy completely reversed, if the nation is to be saved either politically or economically.’

Mine, unfortunately, was a lone voice. None of my colleagues in the Council supported me. (The West Bengal Left Front Government of 1967 had been dismissed in less than a year after its formation and therefore the representative of that Government was not present at the Council meeting.) I, however, expressed myself and voted against the adoption of the draft outline of the Fourth Five-Year Plan.

Unfortunately for the country, however, my prognostication proved correct. The noose of foreign ‘aid’ and loans was tightening around the neck of our nation. After a decade of the meeting of the National Development Council where I was in a minority of one, the story repeated itself. As Prof. C.T. Kurien noted in an article (*Frontline*, November 5, 1993),

‘In the early 1980s, when Indira Gandhi returned to power, a new industrial policy was launched to stimulate industrial growth by making imports more favourable and financing these imports by borrowing from the rest of the world, this time on commercial terms of interest and conditions of repayment. Hence a deliberate policy of liberalization was started more than a decade ago. In 1980–81 imports amounted to \$15.8 billion with exports being just \$8.3 billion. In 1981 India took a substantial loan from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and from then on liberalization was maintained through more and more borrowings.

‘What was started as a pragmatic measure was made into the new economic policy by Rajiv Gandhi, who pushed it hard during the Seventh Plan period started in 1985. It has been suggested that the new strategy was adopted on the advice of the then President of the World Bank. By 1988–89 imports had gone up to \$23.6 billion while exports lagged behind at \$14.2 billion, leaving a huge deficit of \$9.4 billion.

‘Borrowings also increased correspondingly, and by the end of the decade India came to have the dubious distinction of becoming one of the largest debtor nations among the developing countries—a position that belonged to Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil at the beginning of the decade. The situation in 1990 was glaring with debt service alone claiming 40 per cent of the country’s export earnings, a critical ratio which gives to potential lenders the signal that the borrowing country may find it difficult to meet its debt obligations.’

Prof. Kurien goes on: ‘Following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the price of oil, a major item in India’s imports, doubled in a short span of six weeks. The lenders began to take serious note of the situation which happened at a time of political uncertainty also in the country. The lenders included the NRIs who were holding some of their surpluses in the Foreign Currency Non-Resident Accounts in India. Fearing that the Indian economy was at a stage where it would be difficult to honour payment commitments, the NRIs started withdrawing their deposits, \$102 million in October, moving up to \$373 million in April 1991, \$228 million in May and \$330 million in June, making a total of \$1.3 billion. This depleted the foreign exchange reserves of the country, bringing it to an all-time low—barely sufficient for two weeks’ requirements. That is where liberalization with borrowed funds led and that was the problem the Narasimha Rao Government had to face when it assumed office in June 1991.’

This is the background against which the new economic policy of the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh Government came into operation. What is the result? As pointed out in ‘India’s External Debt: A Status Report,’ signed by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, the grand total of our external debt in 1993 was Rs. 2,32,216 crore. This is exclusive of defence debt which, if added to the above, would come to Rs. 2,66,167 crore. Table 2 in the document gives the external debt and debt servicing for the years from 1980–81 to 1992–93 which is given in the note.

The figures given in the note show that total debt services (payment of interest on and part payment of the principal) as a percentage of current receipts rose from 10.2 in 1980–81 to 25.7 in 1992–93. This is the ‘debt trap’

against which warnings had been given by economists and political activists when Indira Gandhi was going in for the IMF loan.

The economic policies pursued by the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh duo (of which the acceptance of the Dunkel Draft is the latest example) would further accentuate all the problems narrated above. Liberalization and globalization—the two ideas running through the Dunkel Draft—would make India the victim of a far more serious ‘drain of India’s wealth’ than what Naoroji spoke about a century and a quarter ago; the difference is only that, while in Naoroji’s time it was the political-administrative power of the British rulers that drained India of its wealth, it is the international power of the World Bank, the IMF, GATT, and so on, which today forces us to pay a major part of what we earn by exports as interest on and principal of the debts we contract year after year.

The conditionalities laid by our creditors as the price for the loans they give us make us victims of such a ‘liberalization and globalization’ and enable the multinationals to devour our industries, our agriculture, our banking and other financial institutions, everything created through the sweat and labour of the Indian people. Liberalisation and globalization, in fact, is the most systematic and far more vicious application of the *laissez-faire* principle against which Ranade took up cudgels. All that Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi fought against is being made an integral part of the ‘New Economic Policy’ formulated and carried out by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh.

It is significant in this context that a section of large-scale traders and industrialists who had originally welcomed the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh policy has been slowly realizing the dangerous consequences of these policies. Far more significant, however, is the coming together of the industrial and agricultural workers, working peasants, middle class intelligentsia and all other sections of the working people who are rapidly organizing themselves into the platform of the Mass Organizations in the Struggle Against the Government’s Economic Policies. This in fact is the surest guarantee that the anti-national and anti-people policies of the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh Government will be defeated—the current variant of genuine nationalism—will be fought by the people.

January 29, 1994

World Socialism Today and Tomorrow

Following as they did similar developments in other former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the recent elections in Hungary raise the question: has the trek back to socialism in these countries begun?

For, not only in other former socialist countries in Eastern Europe but even in Russia, 'marketeers' and 'democrats' of the Yeltsin variety appear to be in retreat, though they are still at the helm of affairs in most of these countries.

The answer to the question is by no means simple. For, people's experience of the socialist system which existed in the former Soviet Union for seven decades and for nearly half a century in other East European countries, is mixed.

On the one hand, they were living in a society which the well-known social scientists, the Webb couple, called 'a new civilization.' That was a system in which there was virtually no unemployment, no increase in the prices of essential commodities, no precipitous falls in the prices of commodities produced by the working people, no hikes in the direct and indirect taxes levied on the people, and where education, health, housing and other social services were almost free for every citizen. All these have been taken away with the new 'market economy.'

On the other hand, there was no democracy—not just bourgeois democracy but even proletarian democracy. Furthermore, the exalted goals of the founder leaders of the socialist system—Marx, Engels and Lenin—have been trampled upon. Some questions like the balanced development of the production, distribution and exchange of economic wealth were also violated in practice, so were the noble principles of complete equality between all the nationalities and sections of people in multinational states, the willing association of the peasantry in the project of socialist construction, the development of a higher socio-cultural order, and so on.

People in the former socialist countries therefore fondly recall the society in which they lived for decades—a society in which man does not exploit man, nor does nation exploit nation. The trek back from socialism to ‘market economy’ and to ‘democracy’ has meant that the people in the former socialist countries are as much victims of exploitation, poverty, unemployment and so on, as are the peoples of the developed, capitalist countries. That is why the people in these countries have been increasingly fighting against Russia’s Yeltsin and his counterparts in other East European countries.

This experience has shown the whole world that there is no basis for the assertion that capitalism has established its superiority over socialism. In fact, the all-round crisis—economic, political and moral—which is enveloping most developed capitalist countries as well as the former socialist countries has shown that capitalism is no alternative to socialism, that the end of socialism in the USSR and East European countries does not herald the advance of capitalism the world over. On the other hand, the struggle between world capitalism and world socialism continues.

At the same time, people in the former socialist countries are not prepared to go back to the ‘model of socialist construction’ which was in existence in these countries for over half a century. They do not want a repetition of the distortions in socialist construction which alienated the governments and ruling parties in those countries from the people. What they are fondly hoping for is a renovated socialism, rather than going back to the system which led to a crisis in their lives earlier.

This view of the peoples of the former socialist countries is shared by the Marxist-Leninists in the developed as well as developing capitalist countries. A seminar held in Calcutta in May 1993 in which representatives of Marxist-Leninist movements in over two dozen countries participated directly or indirectly, came to the conclusion that, while Marxism-Leninism is still valid, there were distortions in practice in the implementation of the project of socialist construction.

Participants in the seminar therefore opted for a renovation of socialism, rectifying the distortions that took place in the building of socialist society in the East European countries, including Russia. While they would not go

back to the 'model' of socialist construction as it existed for nearly seven decades, they would not opt for that unplanned economy which is characteristic of capitalist society. Nor would they adopt bourgeois democracy in place of proletarian democracy.

What then is the 'new model' of socialist construction? The answer is that the 'new model' has yet to be evolved. It is a question of *trial and error* through which alone the brilliant achievements of socialist construction extending for over half a century can be preserved and strengthened, while the distortions that entered the process of socialist construction are removed.

It should, in this context, be recalled that, when the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin took power in 1917, it had no 'model' to follow. Marx and Engels had not given detailed guidance on how to build socialism in an individual country. They were envisaging the transition of humanity from capitalism to socialism on a world scale; it did not occur to them that the process of transition may begin (as it in practice did) in a single country or in a group of countries.

Lenin in fact had no other guideline than (1) his intimate knowledge of the general propositions laid down by Marx and Engels on the transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale; and (2) his close acquaintance with actual conditions in Russia. His, therefore, was an experiment in socialist construction, a matter of trial and error.

During the seven years of his life after the October Revolution, Lenin experimented with two 'models': *war communism* to begin with and *New Economic Policy* subsequently.

The former helped the young Soviet state to beat back the offensive launched by its enemies from across the borders as well as within the country. That was the purpose for which the Soviet Party and the state led by him exercised rigorous control over all aspects of socio-cultural, political and economic life. (Hence the term 'war communism'.)

While recognizing the validity of and making such an experiment for the duration of the enemy attack from outside and from within the country, Lenin saw that the defeat of the enemy had made it necessary to adopt a new

economic policy, so that the worker-peasant alliance—the solid base on which Soviet society was built—could be protected and strengthened. Hence the New Economic Policy.

During the few years when he was nearing the end of his life, Lenin wrote a series of articles, notes, letters and so on, in which he outlined the process of building socialism in a backward, predominantly peasant-dominated country with the willing cooperation of the millions of peasantry and the masses of many nationalities in the multinational Soviet state. For his successors, these provided the guidelines to carry out their task of socialist construction.

That was why they were able to perform the herculean feat of overcoming the backwardness of their country in about a decade and a half, and with the national strength built up on this basis, to beat back the vicious offensive of the Nazi hordes. Full credit should go to Lenin's successor, Stalin, for successfully discharging this task.

This, however, does not absolve Stalin of the distortions that took place in the process of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. The World Communist Movement recognized in 1956 (after the 20th Congress of the CPSU) that there were violations of socialist democracy in the country and of internal democracy in the Soviet Communist Party. Not a single contingent of the World Communist Movement denied the truth of this criticism.

There were also distortions in the implementation of the Marx-Engels-Lenin line on the agrarian and national questions.

Above all, the Soviet Union, placed as it was in perpetual military threat from the powerful imperialist world, had to use so much of its financial resources on defence that very little was available for civilian planning. This made the socialist Soviet Union lag behind the developed capitalist countries in the development of a civilian economy catering to the needs of the common people.

All this led to the alienation of the Soviet state and the Soviet Party from the Soviet people.

Unfortunately, however, Stalin's successors aggravated the situation, going to the other extreme: instead of removing the distortions, they drove the socio-economic and political system in the reverse direction. In the name of *perestroika*, they abandoned the essence of planned economy, throwing the people to the domination of the all-powerful market. Politically too, in the name of removing the 'Stalinist excesses,' they gave up the proletarian character of the state, making it another bourgeois state. They, in other words, threw the baby of socialist construction along with the bathwater of distortions that had crept into the process of socialist construction.

The above process was repeated in all the other socialist countries, but in some of them such as China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba, the distortions were detected and corrected in time. They, therefore, could renovate socialism.

What is now going on in the four countries of existing socialism is once again a new experiment, a matter of *trial and error*. None of us can guarantee that there will be no distortions in China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba. We are, however, satisfied that the leaders of these four countries of existing socialism are conscious and are warning their people of the dangers arising from the distortions that are possible.

In the meanwhile, both the developed and the developing countries of the capitalist world are going through a serious crisis of the system—economic, political and socio-cultural. Growing unemployment, increasing prices of essential commodities, the inability of the masses to get fair prices for their produce and several other indices of economic misery are coexisting with moral-political crisis enveloping the ruling classes. The masses in those countries led by the working class are, therefore, fighting.

The contradictions among the ruling circles of developed capitalist countries, and between the common people in developing countries and the ruling circles in the developed capitalist countries, are growing. Ever-increasing struggles among the various sections of the people for freedom from world imperialism, for national independence and sovereignty, for the most rapid overcoming of the backwardness of developing capitalist countries—this is the essence of the world situation today. This will

determine the future of world socialism, the manner in which country after country will go over from capitalism to socialism.

June 18, 1994

The Legacy of Engels

Revolution's Friend, Philosopher and Guide

Marx was born in 1818 and died in 1883, while Engels was born in 1820 and died in 1895.

I had the privilege of participating in a seminar organized in Berlin on the occasion of the death centenary of Marx. The centenary year of Engels' death, 1994–95, is being observed in India, particularly in Kerala. I had the privilege of inaugurating a function held in Calicut on August 5 to mark the beginning of his death centenary.

Engels was an extremely modest man. He recognized that Marx stood far above him and every other comrade. 'He was a genius,' said Engels, 'while we were talented.' That is why the philosophy, the political economy, the historiography, the politics, the aesthetics and so on, which they jointly created, have been rightly called after Marx's name.

This, however, does not mean that Engels' contribution was negligible in the creation of Marxist theory. As a matter of fact, while Marx had elaborated the philosophy of dialectical materialism and its application to law and politics to begin with, it was Engels who took the initiative in elaborating the Marxist theory of political economy. His *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, written in 1844, was a major contribution to the development of Marxist theory and helped Marx in his own theoretical studies which led him to the production of *Capital*, the major work of Marxist political economy.

Engels' *Critique of Political Economy*, together with his *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, and Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*—all produced in 1844—heralded the emergence of Marxist political economy and political science.

In writing *Capital*, Marx relied on the contributions made earlier by his friend, developed them beyond what Engels could individually have done

and brought out the first volume of the book in its finished form. Engels' advice and suggestions were of immense help in making the book ready for publication—a fact which Marx acknowledged in a letter addressed to Engels when the volume was going to press.

However, since Marx died before he could finish writing Volumes II and III, Engels had to undertake the job left unfinished by his friend and senior comrade. Volumes I to III of *Capital* are thus the joint product of Marx and Engels.

Even in writing *The Communist Manifesto*, which was jointly undertaken by the two friends, Engels' contribution was invaluable. Many of the key formulations contained in the joint product had originally been made by Engels individually, which have subsequently been brought out under the title *Principles of Communism*.

As long as Marx was alive, therefore, he was considered the senior partner in the Marx-Engels partnership. Engels himself acknowledged his role as a junior partner in the combine in which Marx and Engels jointly exercised the theoretical and practical leadership of the world working class movement.

It is interesting in this context to note that the first two volumes of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, brought out in Moscow, are individual contributions made by Marx and Engels separately before they had started their collective work (1838–42). All the subsequent volumes bring together the works of both produced separately or jointly. Even in the case of the separate pieces produced by each in this period, advice and help from one to the other were very much present; even they, therefore, were in reality joint works.

But, once Marx was no more, Engels became the sole survivor of the Marx-Engels partnership and was looked upon as the undisputed leader of the world revolutionary working class movement. Proletarian revolutionaries all over the world looked up to him for guidance. He combined his own independent theoretical writings like the *Dialectics of Nature*, *Anti-Dühring*, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, etc., and the tough task of editing for the press the second and third

volumes of *Capital*, with carrying on correspondence with a number of fraternal parties, offering advice on the theoretical and practical problems they were facing. He, therefore, became the friend, philosopher and guide of the world revolutionary movement.

It will be useful in this context to refer to the piece of advice Engels gave the Italian Socialists. A revolutionary democratic movement was going on; the Socialist-led working class movement and other radical democratic forces were in alliance. There was the prospect of this alliance winning in the revolutionary movement and forming a coalition government. If that happened and if seats were offered to the Socialists, should the offer be accepted or declined?

Engels did not give a straight and direct reply to this question. Not being familiar with the concrete conditions in Italy, he said he was not in a position to give any concrete advice. Leaving the job of taking a decision on this question to the Italian comrades, he made a general observation on the basis of the experience gathered by him and Marx. The advice was: If seats were offered in the government, the Italian Socialists might be a minority in the government. They therefore would not be in a position to exercise any influence in the formulation of the government's policies, while they would be held responsible for all misdeeds likely to be committed by the bourgeois partners of the coalition. 'That would be disastrous,' Engels pointed out.

He, however, was careful to add that this need not necessarily be the position. That is a question which the Italian comrades themselves have to answer. That is why he declined to give a definite answer to the question.

It would thus be clear that the basic approach adopted by Engels was that if the party of the working class was in a position to influence decision-making, participation in government would be a matter of advantage. There was no element in Engels' advice of what Lenin later called 'an infantile disorder' (left-wing communism).

Using bourgeois parliamentary institutions (including participation in governments in conditions where policy decisions can be influenced) was correct as a matter of revolutionary tactics. The post-Engels history of the world Communist movement (including the history of post-Independence

Indian Marxist-Leninists) shows that, as opposed to the 'leftist' tactics of boycotting bourgeois parliamentary institutions and the rightist tactics of becoming a tail of the bourgeoisie in parliamentary work, there is the revolutionary proletarian tactic of using parliamentary institutions in furtherance of the cause of the revolutionary proletarian movement.

Like Marx, Engels was for a combination of revolutionary theory with revolutionary practice, for uncompromising adherence to basic principles and a high degree of flexibility in practice. That was why the two friends who jointly created the theory and practice of Marxism were able to build such varied organisations of the revolutionary proletarian movement as the Communist League earlier and the First International later. By uniting Communists living and working in various parts of their country and several other countries, the two joint founders of scientific socialism were able to forge the unity of the revolutionary proletarian movement. In discharging this task, of course, Marx stood far higher than Engels but the role played by the latter was by no means negligible.

Engels, who helped his European comrades in founding the Second International after Marx's death, was unsparing in his criticism of the rightward shift and opportunism of the leaders of the Second International—a legacy taken over by Lenin after Engels' death. The uncompromising struggle waged by Lenin against right-wing social democracy in the Second International was instrumental in the 1917 revolution in Russia and the foundation of the Third (Communist) International.

Lenin took over the legacy of Engels also in the analysis of the changes that were taking place in the nature of capitalism. The ideas thrown up by Engels in his introduction to the post-Marx editions of *Capital* laid the basis for Lenin's elaboration of the theory that monopoly capitalism or imperialism was the 'moribund phase of capitalism.'

The death centenary of Engels falls at a time when the world revolutionary proletarian movement is facing new challenges. We, the successors of the Marx-Engels-Lenin legacy, are in a situation similar to the one Marx and Engels faced after the defeat of the 1848–49 revolutions in Europe. Like them nearly a century and a half ago, we are placed in a

situation in which reaction has temporarily triumphed. Like them again, we know that this is a temporary phase.

Forces have already started moving by way of breaking the barriers created by the fall of the Soviet Union and the eastern European people's democracies. World capitalism in the latter half of the 19th century was ridden with innumerable contradictions: so is today's world capitalist system, full of contradictions. The forces of revolution, which undoubtedly did suffer serious reverses three to four years ago, are bound to get stronger again. That is why it is necessary for us to learn from the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin and apply them to the present-day conditions on a world-scale and in our respective countries.

August 27, 1994

The Mahatma's Greatness

And a Movement that Strayed

Mahatma Gandhi would have been 125 years old had he been alive on October 2 this year. On that day, all over the country, speeches will be delivered and articles written lauding the services of the Mahatma in the cause of Indian Independence. He will be called the 'Father of the Nation', the creator of the new free state of Indian Union.

The fact, however, is that Gandhi was the one person in India who did not join the celebrations of the dawn of Independence on August 15, 1947. To quote his biographer Tendulkar: "There were festivities all over the land. But the man, who, more than any one else had been responsible for freeing India from the alien rule did not participate in these rejoicings. When an officer of the Information and Broadcasting Department of the Government of India came for a message, Gandhi replied that "he had run dry". When told again that, if he did not give any message, it would not be good Gandhi replied: "There is no message at all; if it is bad, let it be so." (Vol. VIII, p. 95–6)

More than five months later, on January 26, 1948—just four days before he was murdered—he observed: "This day, 26th January, is Independence Day. This observance was quite appropriate when we were fighting for independence we had not seen nor handled. Now! We have handled it and we seem to be disillusioned. At least I am even if you are not' (VIII, p. 338).

The Mahatma was thus the first Indian to realize, and give expression to, the fact that the much-lauded 'attainment of freedom' was not the realization of those ideals which he had held dear when he was leading the freedom struggle. The main reason for this realization was the wave of communal frenzy that was spreading throughout the country in the wake of the 1946–47 negotiations between the representatives of the British Government and the leaders of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and other parties. Never was such a frenzy witnessed in the history of India's national

movement: never were so many Muslims on the one hand and Hindus and Sikhs on the other cold-bloodedly murdered by one another as in the months preceding and following August 15, 1947.

It had always been Gandhi's claim that the path which he had charted out for the Indian people was the path of love rather than hatred. If only the Indian people chose this path, he said, they would be able to bring about a change in the heart of even the most violent and brutal oppressors of the nation—the British imperialists. Yet here was a situation in which his method failed even in uniting the hearts of our own people, not to speak of changing the hearts of British imperialists.

In fact, a full month before August 15—on July 14—he said: 'What we had practiced during the past 30 years was not non-violent resistance, but passive resistance, which only the weak offer because they are unable, not unwilling, to offer an armed resistance. If we knew the use of non-violent resistance, which only those with the hearts of oak can offer, we would present to the world a totally different picture of free India, instead of an India cut in twain, one part highly suspicious of the other and the two too much engaged in mutual strife to be able to think cogently of the food and clothing of the hungry and naked millions, who know no religion but that of the one and only God, who appears to them in the guise of necessities of life' (VII, p. 57).

It should further be said to Gandhi's credit that he continued, to the last moment of his life and to the last ounce of his energy, to fight against the evil forces of communalism according to his light. From the first moment when signs of the dangerous communal frenzy that was spreading throughout the country were available—since the outbreak of the first communal riot in Calcutta on August 16, 1946, which had been declared by the Muslim League as 'Direct Action Day'—he devoted himself to the task of preaching communal harmony.

When the riots started spreading from cities to the villages, he gave up all other activities in order to spread his message of unity. It was to this end that he spent several weeks in the Noakhali district of Bengal, going from village to village. It was again for this that he left Noakhali for Bihar, wanted to go to the Punjab, went to Calcutta, again went to Delhi. Fighting the

communal frenzy, defending the victims of riots, giving succour to refugees, etc., became the main theme of his daily post-prayer addresses.

Gandhi knew that the relations between the two communities were so strained that anyone who attempted to bring about communal unity would earn the hatred of fanatics on both sides. He knew that he himself was taking a personal risk in fighting the communal frenzy. His reference in the course of a talk with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on January 28 to the possibility of his 'dying by the bullets of a mad man' and his promise that, if it happened, he would 'do so smiling. There must be no anger within me. God must be in my heart and on my lips' have a melancholy ring today in the light of what happened just two days later.

It should further be put to Gandhi's credit that he was the first Congress leader to realize that having risen to the position of the new rulers of the nation had turned the heads of those who earlier had been following him in the struggle for freedom. For example, he wrote in July 1946—more than a year before the dawn of freedom—in a note entitled 'A Tragic Phenomenon':

'My post contains so many letters from persons who want to be in the Constituent Assembly, that it frightens me into the suspicion that, if these letters are an indication of the general feeling, the intelligentsia is more anxious about personal aggrandisement than about India's independence . . . I write this more to draw attention to the disease, of which these applications are a sign, than to warn my correspondents against building any expectation of my intervention' (VII, p. 186).

This developed further and became a very serious problem to which Gandhi's attention was drawn by several of his correspondents. In the course of his post-prayer speech on the evening of January 12 where he announced his decision to fast from the following day, he quoted from a letter he had received from the veteran Andhra Congressman, Desabhakta Konda Venkatappayya. The letter stated:

'The one great problem, apart from many other political and economic issues of a very complicated nature, is the moral degradation into which the men in the Congress circles have fallen. I cannot say much about other provinces, but in my province conditions are very deplorable. The taste of

political power has turned their heads . . . the factions in the Congress circles, the money-making activities of several of the MLAs and MLCs, and the weakness of the Ministers have been creating a rebellious spirit amongst the people at large. The people have begun to say that the British government was much better and they are even cursing the Congress' (VIII, pp. 302–03).

These internal developments in the Congress made Gandhi give serious thought to the future of the Congress. In the well-known draft constitution for a reorganized Congress, prepared by him in his last days, he stated: 'The Congress, in its present shape and form, as a propaganda vehicle and a parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of India's seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns. The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. The Congress must be kept out of unhealthy competition with the political parties and communal bodies. For these and other similar reasons, the All-India Congress Committee resolves to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangha under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand' (VIII, p. 342). The leader of the freedom struggle for a quarter century was thus the first to show courage in declaring that the freedom won on August 15, 1947 was not what he had dreamed of and that power had made his former disciples so selfish and intriguing that he had no hope for the continuing presence of the political organization which he had shaped—the Indian National Congress. He indeed was a Mahatma in that he realized and openly admitted that his mission in life was a failure.

October 8, 1994

[An Eagle of Revolution](#)

[The Lenin-Luxemburg Debate](#)

Those of us who are keen on getting more and more material on the history of the world Communist movement would be grateful to Sobhanlal Datta Gupta for preparing a book titled *Readings in Revolution and Organisation: Rosa Luxemburg and Her Critics*. The value of the volume is that it gives texts from Rosa Luxemburg herself, together with those of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and the Hungarian Marxist, Lukács.

The central point of the volume is that ranged against each other were two titans of the World Proletarian Revolution—Russia's Lenin and Germany's Rosa Luxemburg.

The former was a tireless fighter against the revisionist-opportunist tendencies in the Second International, the founder of the Russian Bolshevik Party, the leader of the first successful proletarian revolution in the world who started building a socialist society in an extremely backward country.

The latter too was a relentless fighter against revisionists in the Social Democratic Party of her adopted country, Germany. (Though born in Poland, Rosa had to leave her country because of the terror there and sought refuge in Germany which, after the withdrawal of the Anti-Socialist Law, gave relative freedom for proletarian revolutionaries.) She therefore joined the German Social Democratic Party, adopted a leftist stand, polemicizing against such titans of the German Social Democratic Movement as Bernstein and Kautsky. She thus emerged as the leader of the Left.

After the collapse of Social Democracy on the outbreak of the First World War, she organized, with other comrades, the Spartacus League, which ultimately grew into the German Communist Party.

While Lenin was the leader of the first successful proletarian revolution in the world, Rosa Luxemburg was a leader of the Left in the German Revolution of 1918. Like Lenin in Russia, Rosa in Germany tirelessly

exposed the Social Democratic leaders into whose hands power had fallen; they, in fact, handed back to the bourgeoisie the state power which the fighting proletarians had taken.

The same attempt had earlier been made in Russia by the Russian Mensheviks and Socialist revolutionaries but was effectively countered by the Bolsheviks led by Lenin. In Germany, on the other hand, the leftists who organized themselves in the Spartacus League were a small minority in the Social Democratic Party which was dominated by Right opportunists, together with 'centrists' like Kautsky.

In the struggle against this betrayal of the proletarian revolution, Rosa, along with her valued Comrade Karl Liebknecht, was murdered by the Social Democratic leaders of the Government, who paved the way for the final emergence of Nazism.

Lenin had a high opinion of Luxemburg, whom he called the 'eagle of proletarian revolution'. Writing in his 'Notes of a Publicist' in 1922, he recalled a good old Russian saying: 'Eagles may at times fly lower than hens, but hens can never rise to the height of eagles.' He then added: 'In the backyard of the working class movement, among the dung heaps, hens like Paul Levi, Scheidemann, Kautsky and all that fraternity will cackle over the mistakes committed by the great Communist.'

As can be noted from this quotation, Lenin was not unaware of the mistakes committed by Rosa Luxemburg. Over these mistakes, however, stands the fact that she was a towering personality in the German and international proletarian movement and therefore the class enemies finished her off. She was a model for proletarian revolutionaries throughout the world despite her mistakes.

What were the questions on which Rosa committed mistakes? Once again to quote Lenin:

'Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken on the question of the independence of Poland; she was mistaken in 1903 in her appraisal of Mensheviks; she was mistaken in July 1914 when, together with Plekhanov, Gandervelde, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; she was mistaken in what she wrote in prison in 1918 (she corrected most of

these mistakes at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 after she was released).’

He then adds:

‘In spite of her mistakes, she was—and remains for us—an eagle. And not only will Communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her complete works will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world. “Since August 1914, German Social Democracy has been a stinking corpse”: this statement will make Rosa Luxemburg’s name famous in the history of the international working class movement.’

Rosa Luxemburg first came out against Lenin on the issue of his thesis on the need for a centralized proletarian revolutionary party to lead the socialist revolution. She was still under the influence of the Social Democratic Party which considered centralism to be an evil. This, however, did not make her give up her struggle against the opportunism and parliamentary cretinism of the rightwing leadership of the German Social Democratic Party. That was why she was able, on the outbreak of the First World War, to see the betrayal of and break with the rightwing leadership of her party and struggle against them along with Lenin and his comrades.

In this debate, Lenin proved correct, as can be seen in two facts:

First, in Russia, the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin was able to win over the overwhelming majority of Social Democrats and proletarian revolutionaries against right opportunism and, together with the mass of peasantry and soldiers, carry on a successful anti-feudal and anti-bourgeois revolution. It was the centralized leadership built under Lenin that succeeded in transforming the bourgeois revolution of February to the proletarian revolution of November 1917.

Secondly, though the German Revolution of 1918 was as sweeping as the Russian Revolution a year earlier, the rightwing opportunists were able to carry with them the majority of comrades in the Social Democratic Party and hand over power to the bourgeoisie.

It was the existence of a centralized party led by Lenin that could successfully carry the proletarian revolution in Russia through: the absence

of such a party in Germany led to the handing over of power, won by the workers and soldiers, back to the bourgeoisie—a treachery which culminated in the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

It should, in this connection, be noted that after the revolution which led to the establishment of Soviet power, Lenin became aware of the fact that a centralized leadership was capable of being misused. In his last letter to the Central Committee, he warned of the danger of disunity in the Central Committee, leading to the establishment of an authoritarian leadership over the Russian Communist Party. Subsequent history has shown that Lenin was prophetic in uttering the warning against the dictatorship of the proletariat being turned into authoritarianism within the party.

Despite this, however, the fact remains that if the party leadership had not been highly centralized as Lenin envisaged, it would not have been possible to carry out successfully the 1917 Revolution, start building a socialist society, and maintain it for over seven decades. The superiority of Lenin's vision has thus become clear to all of us.

The second point of criticism made by Rosa Luxemburg against Lenin was that, immediately after taking power, Lenin led the struggle against the Constituent Assembly (which was the product of the November revolution, but started being used against the Revolution).

She wrote this while in prison where she did not have access to materials on the ground reality. However, when she came out of prison and saw what was happening to the German Revolution, she wrote a series of articles denouncing the German counterpart of the Russian Constituent Assembly. These articles, written between November 18, 1918 and January 14, 1919, collected in this volume, bring out the genuinely revolutionary character of Rosa Luxemburg. A critic of the Bolshevik disbanding of the Constituent Assembly became as sharp a critic of the German version of the Russian Constituent Assembly, showing that she, on the basis of her own experience, was shifting her position to Leninism.

On two other questions on which Rosa differed from Lenin—on the agrarian programme of social democracy and on the nationalities question—she does not appear to have made any correction. She continued to be

opposed to the Leninist line of the unity of the toiling masses against the feudal and bourgeois classes. She also was an unreconciled opponent of the Marxist-Leninist line of oppressed nationalities being the most reliable ally of the international proletariat.

Despite these mistakes which remained uncorrected up to the last, Rosa Luxemburg continued to be a source of inspiration for all proletarian revolutionaries in the world—an ‘eagle’ who flies in the skies, as Lenin remarked about her.

February 11, 1995

Right and Left Alternatives to the Congress

The last three years, since the Narasimha Rao Government has been pushing through the World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF)-dictated economic policies and compromising with communalism, has seen a rapid erosion in the mass influence of the Congress party.

The results of the elections in some North Indian States towards the end of 1993, in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in 1994 and in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bihar now are an inadequate expression of the rapid loss of the Congress hold on the people.

Far more indicative is the fact that all-India strikes and bandhs have taken place in this period against the policies of the Congress as well as the BJP. These mass actions have brought together the trade unions of industrial workers, organizations of middle class employees, agricultural workers' unions and peasants' organizations embracing all sections of Indian peasantry. All these are reflected in the newly-emerging National Platform of Mass Organizations fighting against Congress and BJP policies. These all-India mass actions have been supplemented by local and sectoral struggles based on the immediate demands of the working people concerned but integrated with the major demand for a complete reversal of the Congress Government's and the BJP's policies.

These, of course, are at present in their initial stages. They have to go far, together with the joint electoral force that is being created by the Left and secular democratic forces, to become a real Left and secular democratic alternative to the Congress. The 15th Congress of the CPI (M), which ended on April 8 in Chandigarh, has given a call to develop all these mass actions into a viable political alternative to the Congress (I) as well as the BJP.

It is worth noting in this connection that, as opposed to this emerging Left and secular democratic alternative, a right communal alternative to the Congress is developing. While its leader at the all-India level is the BJP, it has its strong allies like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. This rightist, communal,

divisive combination has its sympathizers and allies in several States and local parties and organizations all over the country. The CPI (M) at its 15th Congress, therefore, gave a call to defeat this emerging rightist communal force. Without fighting this force, the working people led by the working class cannot develop the Left and secular democratic parties into a viable alternative to the Congress (I).

The Left alternative will, of course, focus on the issues of the Congress Government's economic policies. These are, first, detrimentally affecting an overwhelming majority of the people—industrial and agricultural workers, working peasants, the toiling middle classes and all other sections of the exploited people, including students, the youth, women, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and the religious minorities. This is realized even by increasing sections in the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes who find in these economic policies a real danger to the independence, sovereignty and self-reliance of the nation. A broad front of all these classes and strata, their fighting organizations and political parties working for these toiling people is, therefore, possible and will make the struggle a real national struggle.

The necessity for this is seen in the fact that the economic policies pursued by the Congress Government and supported by the BJP are not only anti-poor but anti-national. The essence of these policies is that our country, which became free, emancipated from the colonial domination of a single imperialist power, is being reduced to a collective colony of the major capitalist powers in the world, which are operating through such agencies as the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, the emerging World Trade Organization, etc.

This collective imperialism is, as the single imperialist power in pre-Independence days was attacking the people of India, reducing them to poverty economically, backwardness culturally and semi-colonial dependence politically. The struggle against this growing penetration of world capitalism has thus become a necessity in which patriotic sections in Indian society have to unite.

One important area in which the emerging Left-oriented alternative is to fight is the various divisive and disruptive forces—majority and minority

communalism; forward and backward casteism, tribal, cultural and linguistic separatism, etc. While the Left alternative has to fight the disruptive and separatist nature of the movements developing on these lines, it has simultaneously to take a clear stand of support to and defence of the legitimate aspirations of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and the religious minorities. These oppressed sections of society have to be told and persuaded to accept the position that the way to defend themselves is to join the mainstream of the Left and secular democratic alternative, rather than to form themselves into separate (caste, communal, tribal) political organizations. The struggle to win over the masses belonging to these oppressed sections would require a firm stand and struggle against the bourgeois-landlord leaders of these castes, communities and tribes.

The major obstacle in the way of uniting Left and secular democratic forces is, of course, the majority Hindu communalism represented by the BJP. It is directed not only at the non-Hindu religious communities but against an overwhelming majority of Hindus themselves. Their conception of *Hindutva* involves 'the revival of the glories of ancient Hindu India' which is nothing but the consolidation and strengthening of high-caste, especially Brahmin, domination over the majority of Hindus.

The Left and secular democratic forces should, therefore, carry on an intense ideological struggle against the philosophy and practices of the BJP and all other groups which are commonly called the *Sangh Parivar*. It is significant that the Congress leadership, instead of organizing a united struggle against these sinister forces, is compromising with them as was seen in its attitude towards the Babri Masjid question. This, however, does not mean that the Left and secular democratic forces can have any political compromise with minority communalism, such as that of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. While we understand the grievances and legitimate aspirations of these oppressed sections, we have increasingly to convince them that separately organizing themselves into political parties would only alienate them from the rest of Indian society.

The Left and secular democratic forces should, in fact, independently make a bid for the masses belonging to the oppressed castes and

communities. The Left and secular democratic forces will also have to take a democratic stand on such issues as language and culture, backwardness of certain States and regions within States, etc. All of these are sought to be cleverly used by the ruling Congress (I) and the Opposition BJP. We have to defend the rights of the linguistic, cultural and tribal communities which have been kept backward through the decades of British domination earlier and Congress rule now. The struggle for 'Unity in Diversity' is an integral part of the struggle for Left and secular democratic unity.

In the struggle against Right reactionary and communal parties, there are several segments with their respective ideological and political positions. This, naturally, raises several questions of differences among them. These have to be sorted out in the process of arriving at a minimum programme of struggle for democracy and socio-cultural and economic progress. That is the essence of protecting and strengthening the unity of all Left and secular democratic forces.

In this struggle for Left and secular democratic unity, the Left parties in general, and the two Communist parties in particular, have to play a key role. They, after all, are the representatives of proletarian internationalism and militant Indian nationalism. Learning from the positive and negative experience of the international and national movements, they are currently engaged in updating their understanding of the international and national situations. They can, therefore, play a pivotal role in uniting all the Left and secular democratic forces. This, naturally, was sharply underlined by the 15th Congress of the CPI (M).

April 22, 1995

Triumph and Tragedy

'Forgotten Story' of the Indian National Army

The Forgotten Army is the title of a 524-page book written by Peter May Fay. The title implies that though Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA) played a glorious role in the struggle for India's independence, it had been forgotten not only by the British rulers against whom the Army fought, but by the freedom fighters as well.

The latter did not hesitate to use the INA in their bargain with the British rulers but saw to it that the saga of the INA was subordinated to the Gandhian Quit India movement.

The story is woven around the two celebrated leaders of the INA, Prem Sehgal who, together with Shah Nawaz and Dhillon, was brought before the Red Fort trial against those who 'waged war against His Majesty the King Emperor', and his wife, Lakshmi Sehgal. The author had a number of intimate interviews not only with Sehgal himself but his relatives—also with his wife.

The latter, Lakshmi Sehgal, it will be recalled, was the leader of the women's wing of the INA named after the historical figure, the Rani of Jhansi. She was also a minister in the Azad Hind Government of which the chief was Subhas Chandra Bose.

The opening two chapters give biographical data concerning Prem and Lakshmi Sehgal, the former's training in the Indian Army, the latter's in the Madras Medical College. Intimate details of their biography before the formation of the INA are given in the two opening chapters. Further on, similarly intimate details are given on how Prem Sehgal as an officer of the Indian Army was posted in Malaya, was taken prisoner by the Japanese and how he subsequently joined the INA led by Bose.

Lakshmi too, as a trained doctor, set up practice in Malaya and was in full contact with those who initiated the Indian Independence League.

When Subhas Bose replaced Mohan Singh as the leader of the INA, he discovered Lakshmi and asked her to take over the command of the Jhansi Rani Regiment.

Similarly intimate biographical data are given of not only Shah Nawaz and Dhillon—co-accused with Sehgal in the Red Fort trial—but of innumerable other men and women who played a historical role in the Subhas Bose-led INA. Above all, data concerning Bose's own biography are given, including his love affair with a German lady who gave birth to his only child. Profiles of innumerable men and women of lesser calibre who constituted the INA are given.

Still another characteristic feature of the book is an objective account of how the British rulers had organized their Indian Army. True to their policy of 'divide and rule', they divided the people of India into 'martial' and 'non-martial' races—the former coming from North India. Among the 'martial' races themselves, there were some communities like the Sikhs, the Pathans, other North Indian Muslims,

the Rajputs, the Jats and so on from whose ranks rose the men and officers of the British rulers' 'Indian Army'. (It will be noted that the three co-accused in the Red Fort trial were from these 'martial races'.)

Prem Sehgal joined the Army as a young man, was promoted and when the Second World War broke out, posted to Singapore. Before joining the Army, however, he had contacts with the freedom movement and was closely following the developments in it. It was therefore not surprising that when the INA was formed under Subhas Bose's leadership, he opted for it.

The first major achievement of Subhas Bose's INA was that it did away with the distinction between 'martial' and 'non-martial' races. There was no difference between North Indians and South Indians in the INA, while the officers and men in the British 'Indian Army' consisted of only those who came from the 'martial' races.

Though some officers of the INA were from the 'martial' races, the men (and the women) came from the whole country; the South Indians, in fact, were a very important segment of the INA. That was how the second INA was commanded by Subhash Bose who came from the 'non-martial' races—

so was the command of the women's wing taken by Lakshmi (Swaminathan) Sehgal. This is one point on which Bose's INA sharply differed from the British rulers' 'Indian Army'.

But the main point which distinguished the new National Army from the old 'Indian Army' was that the officers and men of the new organization were committed to a programme of liberating India from the British rulers. In this sense, it closely followed the Indian National Congress (INC) back home; the leader of the INA and the Provisional Government of India, Subhas Bose, made it a point to start the march to India ('Delhi Chalo') only when the Congress gave the call for the Quit India struggle. A one-time president of the Congress, Bose was particular that the military operations of the INA should be coordinated with the Quit India struggle back home.

In this, of course, the INA differed sharply from the INC. The latter, it will be recalled, was committed to perfect non-violence in the struggle for India's liberation from British rule, its basic strategy being to unleash nonviolent mass struggles to force the British rulers to negotiate and come to terms with India's national movement. It was on that question that the former president of the Congress (Bose) broke with the Congress leadership, leaving the country to get the help, first of Germany, and then of Japan. When this effort failed and Japan was defeated in the Eastern Sector after Germany was defeated in the West, Bose wanted to come into contact with the Soviet leaders who, he knew, were as interested as the Germans and the Japanese in helping India's national movement against British rule.

The national movement completely disagreed with Bose and the INA in their strategy and tactics of taking the help of fascist powers for the liberation of the country. They, however, were all admiration for the courage and self-sacrificing spirit with which Bose, along with the men and women who followed him, fought for Indian freedom.

'Release the INA prisoners,' was the battle cry with which the INC fought the elections to the Central and State Legislative Assemblies in 1945-46. An INA Defence Committee was set up under the auspices of the Congress and well-known jurists such as Sapru, Bhulabhai Desai and Asaf Ali were associated with it; Bhulabhai, in fact, was the major Defence Counsel who demolished the case put up by the prosecution. Nehru, for his part, once

again donned the barrister's robe and sat among the Defence Counsel fighting for justice for the men and women of the INA.

The several weeks during which the Red Fort trial of the INA leaders went on witnessed massive demonstrations against the British rulers, leading to a new revolutionary upsurge in the country. Giving rise to a number of mass militant actions such as Telengana and Punnapra Vayalar, it also drew the men of the Royal Indian Navy itself to go in for a regular 'mutiny' against their British rulers.

This is the triumph of the INA led by Subhas Chandra Bose. It, however, had a tragic end. The men and women who started their 'march to Delhi' were surrounded and taken prisoner in Malaya and Burma. Bose himself wanted to escape being caught and was trying to get out of the Japanese stranglehold. Having succeeded in persuading the Japanese to get for him contact with the Soviets, he met with an air accident and died. This was the last of the INA.

The volume under review briefly tells the story of Burma's Subhas Bose—Aung San, the Burmese leader who joined hands with the Japanese against the British rulers. Unlike Bose's India, however, Aung San's Burma came under Japanese occupation. When the leader of the Burmese National Army found that Japan's occupation was no better than the earlier British occupation, he sought and got British help to throw the Japanese out. The Burmese National Army, which had originally been an ally of the Japanese military, subsequently joined hands with the British military authorities to throw the Japanese out. At this stage, Aung San used his position in the Burmese National Army to negotiate with the British rulers and secured independence for Burma.

In India's case, although the Bose-led INA was defeated in battle, its exploits fired the imagination of the Indian people. The Red Fort trial arranged by the British rulers to 'expose' the INA turned out to be the forum where the Indian people were educated in the politics and organisation of the INA. The result is that, although the three accused in the Red Fort trial were convicted of the charge of 'waging . . . war against the King Emperor', the punishment to be meted out to them according to the Court's verdict

was cancelled by the Chief of the Indian Army. Sehgal, Shah Nawaz and Dhillon were thus set free.

We have referred to the parallel between Subhas Bose and Aung San. The result was the same. The exploits of the Indian and Burmese National Armies were used by the bourgeois-landlord classes of the two countries to start negotiations and come to agreements with the British Government for transfer of power. Independence thus became a reality for India and Burma. In the subsequent years too, a parallel can be seen between free India and free Burma. Since independence came to both countries on the basis of negotiations with British imperialism, the post-freedom years in the two countries have been tragic. Within a few months of India attaining independence, Mahatma Gandhi was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic. In Burma too, even before the dawn of independence, Aung San was done to death, followed by a series of incidents which have culminated in a situation when Aung San's own daughter has to fight for her country's freedom and democracy from inside prison.

The illusory character of the 'success' of India's and Burma's freedom conferred by the British rulers has thus become clear. While the people of India led by Gandhi, Nehru and Bose got freedom through negotiations, the fruits of that freedom are being stolen from them. In Burma too, the fake character of the independent republic of that country is clear from the experience of Aung San Sui Kyi?

May 20, 1995

[The Positive and the Negative in Stalin's Personality](#)

The Stalin Legacy is the title of a book written by Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, a Communist since the mid-1930s and the deputy leader of the Communist group in the first Lok Sabha (in 1952). It is a collection of articles beginning with the one he wrote on the occasion of the centenary of Stalin's birth, 1979. In the very opening para of that article, he wrote:

‘Stalin has been one of history’s most written about personality; reviled, derided and denounced for decades by most of world’s publicists, praised also by numberless admirers almost to the skies and in his own lifetime as one who steered with a totally daring and concentrated and inflexible determination the ship of the Soviet state that has navigated some of the newest and most turbulent and heavily-mined stretches in the sea of human history. It was Stalin, again, whose feet of clay and sullied hands were sought to be almost masochistically and with fevered fury exposed and excoriated at the twentieth Congress (1956) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The man once almost deified was suddenly hurled down from the heights of adulation, releasing a process of denigration (and for a time, virtually, of what is quaintly called “unpersoning” which the Soviets have later tried to restrain and also to some extent redressed, but in which the enemies of the USSR and of “real existing socialism” have pounced with almost audible whoops of joy and frenzy and reinforced, on the basis as it were of a windfall, their never-ceasing attack, lately even more cunningly orchestrated in the theory and practice of Communism and of the world view of Marxism-Leninism.’

The articles that follow examine some of the salient features of Stalin, the man and his work. One of the chapters is headed ‘Ivory flawed but Ivory still’ which has been made into the sub-title of the whole book. The idea is that Stalin did undoubtedly commit many mistakes, even some crimes, but he was a Communist from the beginning to the end of his life. The mistakes were committed on the mistaken idea that they were necessary for carrying forward the Lenin legacy handed over to him.

He did carry it forward, making it possible for the transformation of a hitherto backward Czarist empire into the modern socialist state—a state which turned out to be the equal of the richest and most powerful capitalist country in the world, the United States.

While giving full credit to him for such a historic transformation of his country, truthful students of history cannot be oblivious of the serious mistakes committed by him in carrying forward the Lenin legacy.

Mukerjee, who is indignant at the de-Stalinisation begun by Nikita Khrushchev and ending with Mikhail Gorbachev, does not excuse him for the mistakes and crimes which were part of his life and work. His is therefore a seriously balanced assessment of what are the positive and the negative features of Stalin, the man and his work.

I am reminded in this connection of the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the then united Communist Party of India on the criticisms of Stalin made at the 20th Congress. The Central Committee then endorsed the criticisms but said that the criticism was flawed by two serious deficiencies.

First, the one-sided criticism of the mistakes and crimes committed by Stalin did not take into account the historic contributions made by the Soviet Union and the CPSU in the industrialization, agricultural modernization and cultural revolutions which made it possible for the Soviet people to inflict a crushing defeat on the Nazi hordes, thus liberating humanity from slavery to fascism which was then threatening it.

Secondly, the criticism made it appear as if Stalin alone (personally) was responsible for the mistakes, while the achievements of socialist construction and the defeat of the Nazi hordes were the result of the collective endeavour of the Soviet leadership. The fact, on the other hand, was that both the achievements and the mistakes were the consequence of the collective leadership of which of course Stalin was the head. As Mukerjee noted in his article on the Stalin centenary, it was the very same people who, during his lifetime, had deified Stalin who denounced him as the devil incarnate. The CPI Central Committee therefore called for a

balanced assessment of the positive and the negative not only in Stalin's personality but in the CPSU leadership of which Stalin was the head.

I am reminded also of the profound observation made by the then general secretary of the Communist Party of Italy, Palmiro Togliatti, who characterised the CPSU's critique of Stalin as superficial. The question, he said, was not whether the mistakes attributed to Stalin were committed or not but what were the ideological, political and organizational roots of these mistakes. Without finding this, Togliatti said, the world Communist movement could not come to correct conclusions on the lessons of socialist construction carried out under Stalin's leadership.

These and other comments of the different contingents of the world Communist movement have assumed still greater importance after the retreat from socialism in the Soviet Union and the eastern European countries of people's democracy. As the CPI (M)'s 14th Congress held in Madras in 1992 noted and the 15th Congress held in Chandigarh reiterated, a deeper study is needed of the developments in the European socialist countries, together with the continued presence of socialist construction in the more backward countries of existing socialism—China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba. That study is still to be undertaken by the various national contingents of the world Communist movement. There are, however, some points on which Marxist-Leninists throughout the world are agreed.

First, the formation of a workers', peasants' and soldiers' Soviet state in the former Czarist empire was a historic turning point—the beginning of humanity's transition from capitalism to Communism. It goes to the credit of the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin that it took power on November 7, 1917 and started building a socialist society. Those like Kautsky who advised Lenin and the Bolsheviks against taking power have proved to be wrong, since the Soviet state and society continued for over seven decades. Two of the world's respected non-Marxist-Leninist social scientists, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, called Soviet Communism 'a new civilization'. The existence of that state and society for seven decades showed the people of over 100 backward countries (including India) that what was being done in the Soviet Union will become their model.

Secondly, Lenin had no illusion that socialist construction in backward Russia alone would lead to humanity's transition from capitalism to Communism. The socio-economic and cultural backwardness of Soviet Russia was a great impediment for the worldwide transition from capitalism to Communism. His hope was that the work of socialist construction in the backward Soviet country would help the removal of backwardness in Russia and inspire the revolutionary working class and common people in developed capitalist countries to carry out their proletarian revolution. It was from this standpoint that he welcomed the proletarian revolution in one of the developed capitalist countries in Europe, Germany, a year after the Russian Socialist Revolution. He hoped that similar revolutions would take place in other capitalist countries, particularly of western Europe, which, in its turn, would further strengthen and improve the chances of socialist construction in the Soviet Union.

Thirdly, this being his approach to the world proletarian revolution, he attached the greatest importance to the Soviet Union. Having successfully completed the first experiment of 'War Communism', he went over to the next experiment of the 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) saying, 'it is in the field of economic construction that socialism of the Soviet Union has to beat capitalism in the developed capitalist countries'. He therefore gave leadership to the release of market forces which would, unless strictly controlled by the proletarian state, lead to the return of capitalism. He in fact gave the perspective of 'NEP Russia being transformed into Socialist Russia'.

Fourthly, it was with this perspective that Lenin laid down the lines of (a) widest possible democracy for the working people as the basis on which the dictatorship of the proletariat is to be established; (b) the willing cooperation of the peasant masses in the transformation of agriculture, in keeping with the nation's steady transition to socialist agriculture (there being no room for the use of force to bring the peasant masses into socialist agriculture); and (c) real democracy in the solution of the problem of nationalities, admitting no use of force to integrate minority nationalities into the federal socialist state. It seems obvious now that all the three principles laid down by Lenin were disregarded or violated by his successors among whom Stalin was the most eminent.

Fifthly, while these departures from the Lenin line were made by Stalin and his comrades, they stood steadily by the Leninist principle that the Soviet state and society were the basis on which humanity's transition from capitalism to Communism can take place. They therefore made it their main job to protect the Soviet state and society. They succeeded in that endeavour up to a point. Socialist transformation started taking place in the 1930s which made possible the defeat of fascism in the 1940s.

In discharging this task, however, the Leninist principles of socialist democracy in the country and internal democracy in the CPSU were violated; violations were made also of the Leninist basis for the transformation of agriculture on socialist lines and the democratic principle of voluntary integration of the nationalities in the Soviet Union. While the responsibility for these violations should be borne by the entire leadership of the CPSU, Stalin as the leader of the party should bear personal blame.

Sixthly, a section of the next generation of the leadership of the CPSU, beginning with Khrushchev in the 1950s and ending with Gorbachev in the 1980s, threw the baby of the Leninist line out with the bathwater of the distortions that had taken place under Stalin's leadership. Blaming Stalin personally for these distortions, they gave up the essentials of socialist construction—the leading role of public property in the economy and of the party in the political field. This culminated in the notorious *perestroika* and *glasnost* which took the country back to capitalism.

These are obviously only the tentative conclusions on the basis of which Marxists-Leninists throughout the world have to carry out the work of further studying the experience of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and in the eastern European people's democracies and also of the efforts made everywhere for the renewal of socialism, that is, carrying forward the achievements while giving up the distortions that crept into socialist construction.

June 3, 1995

Lessons of the Emergency

Two decades have elapsed since the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, clamped the internal Emergency regime on the country. Freedom of the press, speech, organization—all were taken away from the people. Parliamentary institutions were overturned in reality, with most of the Opposition leaders put behind bars. Never before since Independence had India gone through such a tragic experience.

The question now arises: will the story repeat itself? This is prompted by the moves made by influential political leaders (including former President R. Venkataraman) to revive, in one form or another, the proposals made during the Emergency regime for replacing the parliamentary system with the presidential. That proposal had been made during the Emergency, but had to be put off only because of strong public opposition.

Several alternatives to this major proposal being made now serve the purpose of making parliamentary democracy ineffective. There is therefore every reason to think that the dismantling of the Emergency regime by the Janata Government of 1977–79 has not exorcised the looming danger to democracy.

There is, however, a vital difference between the situation in 1975, and today.

For one thing, the ruling Congress party has been far more' weakened than 20 years ago; even the most optimistic of its leaders do not hope for the return of a single-party Congress Central Government when the next elections are held—a year away. Hence the proposals like the replacement of parliamentary democracy with the presidential system and its several variants.

It will, in this connection, be recalled that Indira Gandhi was prompted to clamp the Emergency because of the serious conflicts within her own party and the growing threat from Right Opposition parties like the Congress (O), the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party, supported from the

Left by the Socialist Party. She could not stem the tide of their advance without silencing their voice. Hence the wholesale detention of Right Opposition leaders without trial, and other measures of repression.

These measures were primarily directed against the Right Opposition. The latter returned the compliment by adopting an attitude of confrontation with the Indira regime. Remember the open call made by Jayaprakash Narayan to government employees to disobey unjust orders issued by the Indira Government. It was this situation of open confrontation between the ruling Congress and the Right Opposition parties that led to the clamping of the internal Emergency.

This, in fact, was a matter of great political advantage for the Emergency regime; it could claim that the political and administrative attack was directed mainly against the Right Opposition. That was the solid ground on which the Emergency regime could mobilize public opinion in the Soviet Union, other socialist countries and some sections of the anti-imperialist world.

Within India too, the Emergency regime could mobilize the Communist Party of India (CPI) and sanctions of the Socialist Party behind it. This, in fact, was the major strongpoint of the Emergency regime, since it could project itself as an anti-imperialist regime, fighting fascists in the country, while in fact that regime itself was moving towards fascism.

It should, however, be noted that while the Emergency was primarily directed against the Right Opposition, the Left Opposition too was not allowed its freedom of speech, press freedom and other fundamental rights. Though a large number of members of the CPI (M) and other Left parties were also put behind bars, an impression was created that the CPI (M) and other Left Opposition leaders were free to carry on their activities.

A.K. Gopalan in the Lok Sabha and myself in the Kerala legislature were allowed to expose the atrocities of the Emergency regime, though our speeches delivered in the Lok Sabha and the State legislature were not allowed to be published.

As for freedom of the press, the *Desabhimani* daily in Malayalam with which I was intimately connected was the only media organ in Kerala which

had to show every piece every day to get the approval of the censor.

Neither AKG nor I was given permission to use mikes at public meetings. More or less the same situation obtained in West Bengal where Jyoti Basu and Promod Das Gupta were outside jail but not allowed freedom of the press and: speech. While the Government wanted to create the impression—in India itself as well as abroad—that the Emergency regime did not; touch Left leaders, we on our part wanted to use whatever opportunity we had to go to the people and campaign against the Emergency regime.

As a matter of fact, for days together I had to visit towns and villages of Kerala and make speeches—as many as half a dozen and more a day—without the facility of the mike. It was a question of utilizing every opportunity—however slender it may be—to go to the people and lay the basis for mobilizing the broadest sections of them against the Emergency regime.

Fortunately for us, there were other democratic sections of the people who too were working like us. Our contact with them culminated in a broad convention held in New Delhi (presided over by the respected Gandhian leader Acharya Kripalani) against the Emergency and against the proposed amendment of the Constitution replacing the parliamentary system with the presidential.

Meanwhile, those like the CPI who had originally extended support to the Emergency regime did have second thoughts. There was acute disillusionment with the Emergency regime which they had originally thought to be 'an anti-fascist regime'. The excesses committed by the extra-constitutional authority, the Prime Minister's son Sanjay Gandhi, forced them to adopt an increasingly oppositionist stand.

That was how, sometime in 1976, I had my first meeting with CPI general secretary C. Rajeswara Rao—the beginning of the coming closer of the two parties which, after a couple of years, led to the formalization of unity in action; after a few years, this led to the formation of the present Left Front.

Our relations with the other anti-Emergency forces were also getting closer, which led to the formation of the Janata Party. Our party extended support to the Janata in the 1977 elections, while the CPI opposed both the Congress and the Janata Party.

The Janata Government to which we extended our support from outside did a lot by way of dismantling of Emergency set-up. It, however, fell from office less than half way through its term, after which Indira Gandhi came back to power.

Efforts are now being made to attack parliamentary democracy. These, however, can be beaten back. For, the political situation today is fundamentally different from what it was in 1975. A careful examination of the differences between 1975 and today will lead to the conclusion that while a repetition of the Emergency in one form or another cannot be ruled out, the forces fighting it are far stronger today than during the Emergency.

The first point to be noted is that the Narasimha Rao Government today cannot project the image of an anti-rightist force fighting against fascism. On the other hand, the Government is being identified more and more with international imperialism and the indigenous forces which are seeking to replace the parliamentary with the presidential system. The Narasimha Rao Government has actually thrown away the banner of anti-imperialism which the Indira Government was dangling when she clamped the Emergency. Narasimha Rao in fact is going back on these policies of anti-imperialism which were championed in his time by Jawaharlal Nehru and later taken up by his daughter. No anti-imperialist or radical democratic force in India or abroad can have any illusion about this Government.

Secondly, the Jan Sangh, which was one of the constituent organizations of the Janata Party in 1977, has since then transformed itself into the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—a party which not only supports the Narasimha Rao Government's economic policies of globalization, liberalization and privatization, but continues its anti-minority and anti-backward caste policy. Those who are eager to fight any authoritarian tendency in the Narasimha Rao Government will thus have to fight the Hindu communal forces led by the BJP.

Thirdly, the struggle against the Narasimha Rao Government's economic and political policies has to be strengthened further through the growth of militant opposition developed by the class and mass organizations led by the trade union, agricultural labour and kisan movements. These class and mass organizations have now come together in the National Platform of struggle for national unity and in defence of the nation's sovereignty. Four all-India general strikes or bandhs organized in the course of four years by the National Platform, which became a reality now, would have been unthinkable in the months before, or during, the Emergency.

Fourthly, the resistance of the class and mass organizations is supplemented and supported by the emerging electoral unity of Left and secular democratic forces which are in control of the State administrations not only in West Bengal and Tripura but also in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. These forces are working towards further consolidation so that, in the Lok Sabha elections in 1996 the Left and secular democratic forces can emerge as a viable alternative to the Congress on the one hand and against the BJP on the other.

Whether or not these forces will actually be able to form the next Central government, they will, in any case, emerge as a decisive force at the Centre while continuing to have governments in half a dozen States.

The further strengthening of this force is the guarantee that the move for replacing the parliamentary with the presidential regime can and will be frustrated.

July 15, 1995

Criticism and Self-Criticism

A Feature of India's Communist Movement

Several national newspapers have given extracts from the Political-Organizational Report of the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) where a critical and self-critical appraisal of the policies and the organizational situation of the party was made. The lesson drawn from these excerpts by the media organs is that the CPI (M) is as internally divided and faction-ridden as any bourgeois party.

What they forget is that, like every Marxist-Leninist party in the world, the CPI (M) considers it a crucial task to carry on systematic and principled criticism and self-criticism. In fact, only through the constant practice of criticism and self-criticism can the party consolidate the gains it has made politically and avoid mistakes in practical policies as well as in organization. In India itself, this process of growth and development of the Communist movement through successive criticism and self-criticism has been the feature of actual life ever since the party was born.

Although small groups of Indian Communists had sprung up in various parts of the country following the Russian Revolution, an effective all-India centre of the party could emerge only a decade and a half later. From 1919 to 1934, the various Communist groups in the country exhibited signs of political sectarianism and organizational factionalism which could be removed only in 1934 when the first All-India Central Committee and Polit Bureau came into being.

The ideological and political basis for the formation of this all-India centre was the programme of the anti-imperialist united front evolved by the 7th Congress of the Communist International. It gave a fervent call for an anti-fascist united front in the world and anti-imperialist united front in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries.

This was the starting point of a big move forward. The Communists were active in the Indian National Congress in which they joined hands with other leftist groups to consolidate the anti-imperialist united front in which independent class and mass organizations of industrial and agricultural workers, working peasants, toiling middle classes and all other sections of the working people were included. The latter half of the 1930s was in fact the glorious period for the general anti-imperialist movement, the Communist movement in particular.

The anti-imperialist united front formed in the latter half of the 1930s was divided in less than half a decade through the manoeuvres of the right-wing leadership of the Indian National Congress. Politically too, the Communists were facing a grave international situation on the outbreak of the Second World War. Beginning as a war between two groups of imperialist powers, the War subsequently turned into a titanic battle between the fascist powers on the one hand and, on the other, the anti-fascist camp which included a section of the imperialist world and the only socialist power then existing. Appearing as it did as the collaboration between India's oppressor, British imperialism, and the Soviet Union, the task before the Communists was difficult indeed. They had to go it alone in the cause of ensuring the victory of the anti-fascist camp internationally, while striving their utmost to preserve and maintain the unity of the anti-imperialist forces in the country.

The strategic perspective outlined by the party, indicated by the slogan 'People's War', alienated the party, though temporarily, from the mass of anti-imperialist people in the country. While the strategy adopted was cent per cent correct, the tactics adopted in pursuance thereof were incorrect—a fact which was self-critically noted at the 2nd Congress of the party held in 1948.

The Congress gave the call for building the unity of the people against the new rulers of the country—the bourgeois-landlord classes into whose hands power had been transferred by British imperialism on August 15, 1947. Here again, while the strategic objective of rallying the people against the new ruling classes was correct, the tactic went wrong in several respects. After protracted discussions, among Indian Communists and with the

leadership of the International Communist movement, the tactical mistakes were rectified and a new programme and tactical line were adopted at an extraordinary congress of the party held in 1951. The new line evolved at this conference enabled the party to regroup itself and face the first general elections in the country (1952). The party emerged from the electoral struggle as the major Opposition party in Parliament and in a few States.

This helped the party make big advances, and in the next elections (1957) it came out as the ruling party in Kerala. The 28 months of existence of the Communist Government in the State made the party extremely popular among the people throughout the country, since that was a government which, to quote a statement made by the present writer (as the then Chief Minister of the State), 'was trying to implement in practice the broad policy pronouncements made by the Congress as an organization which however failed to carry them out while in Government.'

Although a very small party on the national scale, the Communist Party of India came out politically as an alternative to the Congress in the matter of serving the people. It however came face to face with certain ideological-political trends which led to serious internal problems. These later culminated (in 1964) in the split of the party to form the present CPI (M) and CPI.

The decade of conflict between the Right and the Left in the united Communist Party, which lasted from 1955 to 1964 and ended in the split of the party, was indicative of the process of criticism and self-criticism in the united party), the two political groups fighting each other in the united party, representing the major political trends. The intense debate which took place in the united party from 1955 to 1964 and the two programmatic political perspectives represented by the two parties after 1964 were, in fact, an indication of serious criticism and self-criticism in the then united Communist Party.

The 1964 split leading to the formation of two parties did not bring to an end the process of criticism and self-criticism which, in fact, went on in both the new parties. Without going into the details, one can say that the formation of the naxalite groups within the CPI (M) and the departure of

the Dange group from the CPI were matters of criticism and self-criticism in the two parties.

Today, therefore, if one has to think of a reunification of the CPI (M) and the CPI, between themselves and with other groups which claim to be Communists, as is suggested in some circles, one has to examine the ideological, political and organizational roots of the original split and the subsequent splits within the CPI (M) and the CPI. As Lenin noted in his day, a party can be united only if it is united ideologically and politically. That such ideological-political unity does not exist today is the reason why the two major Communist parties and several other smaller groups which claim to be Communists are in existence. It is idle to hope for, and attempt at, an artificial uniting of the parties and groups which arose out of the first split and the splits within the split.

The CPI (M) for its part has gone through a long process of intense debate, criticism and self-criticism, through which alone has the party grown during the last 31 years. It was through such an arduous process of criticism, self-criticism and political rectification that the party has been able to arrive at its present policy—of uniting all the Left and secular democratic forces in the country against the two main threats to democracy, national unity and people's welfare—the ruling Congress (I) and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party. At the nine Congresses held since the 7th, serious debates took place on the political line. The party collectively, and its leaders and cadres individually, had to rectify many of the wrong political lines and organizational practices.

The 15th Congress, however, is unique in that it was unanimously agreed that while the activities of the party in Parliament and in the various State legislatures have been fruitful, these were accompanied by some serious mistakes as well.

The first point was the ideological and political disease of parliamentary opportunism which does not mean the use of parliamentary institutions. On the other hand, the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism enjoin on every working class party to use the forum of parliament and other elected bodies for advancing the cause of the working class movement.

Parliamentary opportunism consists in the use of parliamentary institutions not for the purpose of developing the revolutionary mass movement but for serving the personal interests of those who are entering parliamentary institutions. The disease which is common to bourgeois political parties is impermissible in the party of the working class. Parliamentary opportunism is therefore a disease created in the atmosphere of the working of bourgeois parliamentary institutions—a disease which should be reversed through systematic struggle.

This leads to other diseases like corruption, loss of all revolutionary norms, individuals fighting one another for securing positions in parliamentary institutions, etc. The latter leads to what is called factionalism—a trend which is opposed to the discipline of the collective party leadership and organisation, the discipline of a particular faction or group.

These are the diseases which infect the body of a working class party, while they are normal to any bourgeois party. The 15th Congress noted that these evils had crept into the party, including the units in the two strongest States of India's Communist movement—Kerala and, though not to the same extent, West Bengal as well. While exposing these evils, the 15th Congress gave a fervent call for a determined struggle against all the evils which the party has inherited from the bourgeois environment.

Following the Congress, party units are engaged in the task of fighting the evils unearthed in the political organisational report presented to and accepted by the Congress.

July 29, 1995

Panchayati Raj and Centre-State Relations

Elections to the three-tier panchayats and nagarpalikas, constituted under the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, have been or will shortly be held in all the States. This is claimed to be a major achievement of the Congress party headed once by Rajiv Gandhi and now by P.V. Narasimha Rao.

Power is supposed to have been 'transferred' to the people. Claimed as it is to be the implementation of the Gandhian ideal of 'panchayati raj', this is supposed to be the gift of the Narasimha Rao Government at the Centre and various Congress-led State governments.

Actually, however, the Central Government does not transfer any power to the States. What is transferred to the panchayati raj and nagarpalika institutions is the power now vested with the States. The latter, therefore, can legitimately claim that they are being deprived of the powers vested in them in terms of the Constitution.

If this is to be considered 'giving power to the people', the Centre should transfer power in several respects to the States, while the latter transfer power to the panchayati raj and nagarpalika institutions. In my note of dissent to the Asoka Mehta Committee on Panchavati Raj, submitted in the 1970s, I had talked of 'four-pillared democracy', which means that the Centre, the States, the districts and the lower levels of administration will be democratized. Permanent officials working with each of these four administrative units will be completely under the elected body at the corresponding level.

This was the idea with which, as the first Chief Minister of Kerala, I piloted a bill in the Kerala Legislature providing for District Councils which would stand between the State Government and the panchayats. The District Collector and other departmental officials at the district level would be fully controlled by the District Council, of which the Collector would be the Secretary. At the lower level too, the panchayats and the urban councils

would have full control over the permanent officials working at the corresponding level. This meant that decentralization from the Centre to the States, from the States to the districts, and to the panchayats from the districts would be fully democratic.

The idea was further carried forward in the bill introduced by the coalition government headed by me in the latter half of the 1960s. Like the earlier (1959) District Council Bill, this too had the District Collector as Secretary fully under the jurisdiction of the elected council insofar as the administration of the transferred departments was concerned.

Neither the 1959 nor the 1960s District Council Bill, however, could be passed in the Assembly since the Governments which piloted them went out of office, the first through the 'Liberation Struggle' organized by the Congress and its allies and the second through manoeuvrings and intrigues within the ruling coalition. Neither, therefore, could become law.

It was only in the 1980s, when the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government headed by E.K. Nayanar was ruling the State, that all the formalities of enacting the District Council Bill were completed. But that Government too was overthrown through internal intrigues. It was therefore left to the second Nayanar Government (1987-1991) to implement legislation concerning the constitution of the District Councils.

Elections were conducted to all the 14 District Councils in the State in which, incidentally, the LDF came out victorious in all but one district. The presidents and other functionaries of the elected District Councils took over the administration, the Collectors being the Secretaries to the District Councils. But, when the second Nayanar Government was followed by the K. Karunakaran Government, all the powers transferred to the District Councils were taken back. This shows that, for more than a quarter century, the Congress and its allies in Kerala have been consistently barring the path of the State's progress towards democratic decentralization.

Seen against this background, the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution (under which appropriate State legislation was pushed through and elections are now taking place in Kerala on September 23 and 25) would be seen as an attack on the scheme of

democratic decentralization which had been put through by successive governments in Kerala. For, the District Councils under the legislation that existed in Kerala till the 73rd and 74th Amendments were far more democratic than the bodies that will be elected now.

Two specific differences between the existing legislation in Kerala and the scheme forced on the State by the Central Government are worth noting. Both constitute an attack on democratic decentralization.

The first difference is that the Kerala legislation that existed till the enactment of the 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments had a two-tier system. None of the governments that ruled the State since 1967 or any Opposition party demanded that the panchayati raj set-up should be a three-tier one. Panchayats and urban councils below and District Councils above was the pattern followed in the State from its formation in 1956 down to the present day. It was therefore an uncalled for act on the part of Parliament to impose the three-tier system on all the States, including Kerala.

It may, in this connection, be recalled that the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee appointed by the Nehru Government to consider the implementation of the panchayati raj system recommended that whether a particular State should have a two-tier or three-tier system should be left to the State concerned. It was in accordance with this recommendation that Kerala opted for the two-tier system. No demand has been made by any party, group or organization in the State that Kerala should have a three-tier system. It was simply imposed on an unwilling Kerala.

Another characteristic feature of the 1959 and subsequent legislation in Kerala was that the District Councils at that level were elected bodies representing both urban and rural areas, making it possible for the bureaucracy at the district level to be fully under the elected District Council insofar as the subjects transferred to the District Council are concerned. All the elected urban bodies in a district are as much part of the elected district administration as the rural panchayats. It is against this unity of the rural and urban areas that a blow has been struck with the complete separation of the rural (panchayati raj) and urban (municipal and corporation) bodies.

This obviously makes the bureaucrats at the district level completely independent of the elected councils.

Added to these deficiencies in the Central legislation are the provisions in the State legislation which empower the bureaucracy at the State level to annul any resolution adopted by the panchayati raj and urban bodies.

Legislation empowers the bureaucracy at the State capital also to remove any member of the panchayati raj or urban council bodies. The elected institutions in urban and rural areas are thus fully subordinated to the bureaucrats at the State centre.

Despite these infirmities of the Central and State legislation, however, the fact remains that a good deal of power has been transferred (not from the Centre, but from the States) to the panchayati raj and urban bodies. An alert and politically conscious panchayati raj or urban institution can therefore use these powers to serve the people.

That is why the CPI (M) and other constituents of the LDF are fully participating in the electoral contests. They tell the voters that if elected, their representatives will use power not for serving the selfish interests of the members concerned but in the interests of serving the people. Hence the call of the State Secretariat of the CPI (M) to elect the candidates set up by the LDF.

The Secretariat of the CPI (M), however, pointed out that while using the powers entrusted to the elected bodies in the cause of the people, the CPI (M), along with other like-minded parties, would fight for a restructuring of Centre-State relations and necessary amendments in the panchayat and urban councils Acts of the State where the bureaucracy at the State centre has full power to ride roughshod over the elected bodies.

The departments which are crucial to the unity of the country (like defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications, together with planning and coordination of all economic and cultural activities of the state) should rest with the Centre. The rest should be transferred to the States which, in their turn, should transfer more powers to the lower urban and rural elected bodies.

Furthermore, national unity and unity of the States should be ensured through an effectively-functioning National Development Council and State Councils.

The newly-elected panchayati raj and urban bodies will therefore undertake two separate but interconnected tasks: (a) using the powers vested in them in the best interests of the people and (b) rallying the people for a full restructuring of Centre-State relations and for a full democratisation of the panchayati raj and nagarpalika set-ups. This will constitute a major contribution for the advancement of democracy in the State.

September 9, 1995

The Marxist Definition

Class and Caste in 'Creamy Layer' Controversy

Marxism is allegedly incapable of subjecting caste to scientific analysis. This is stated to be the reason why the Marxist political movement has 'failed' to strike deep roots in India's socio-political life.

A convincing answer is given to this question by the way in which the Marxist political movement, ever since its inception, has attempted to relate the question of caste and communal disruption to the developing class struggle in the country.

In the early 1920s, when India witnessed the eruption of communal riots all over the country, the then young Communist Party of India and its global leader, the Communist International, analyzed the problems of communal disruption, relating it to the developing militant class movement.

In several official pronouncements of the Communist International and of the Communist Party of India, the idea was set forth that the communal divide could be bridged not through the liberal notion of 'unity between the communities'. The real solution lay in the militant unity of the working people belonging to various castes, religious communities, tribal societies, linguistic-cultural groups, and so on.

In other words, *class unity* of the working people against the oppressing and exploiting groups at the top was the real solution for the communal problem.

The bourgeois leadership of the national freedom movement naturally refused to subscribe to this idea or to implement it. Their way was either to preach abstract 'communal unity' or to deny the very existence of the communal problem. The result was the vertical division of the country into two on the eve of and during the attainment of the national objective of complete independence.

What is worse, the communal passions roused in the process culminated in the most tragic communal riots in the two pans of the once-united India—the killing of tens of thousands of men, women and children belonging to both communities, the looting of property and destruction of houses belonging to one community by another, and so on. This broke the heart of Mahatma Gandhi who refused to join the festivities connected with the dawn of freedom. Ironically, the Mahatma was assassinated by a fanatical anti-Muslim Hindu.

It is, therefore, clear that the Marxist assessment of the communal problem was one hundred per cent correct: *communal unity* cannot be forged except on the basis of *class unity* bringing together various sections of the working people belonging to both the communities on the basis of a united militant struggle waged by the people against the oppressing classes.

This is as true of the caste question as of the communal question. I may illustrate this by the way in which the Marxist movement in Kerala assessed and sought to solve the question of the demand raised by the backward castes for reservation in government service. The realists that they were, the Marxists refused to join the rest of the national movement in denying the caste factor operating in society. They recognized caste divisions and caste feelings as a reality to be reckoned with.

But they refused to join the leaders and spokesmen of caste organizations and the political parties based on them. The latter considered caste oppression as nothing but the subjugation of the majority of a particular caste by the minority of some other castes. The Marxist, on the other hand, traced the division between castes and the discrimination against the majority of castes at the hands of a minority to the existence of the socio-economic and cultural domination of big feudal landlords and their political representatives, feudal chieftains and ruling families. The all-round struggle against the socio-cultural, economic and political oppression of the ruling classes against the majority of the people is the reality of which caste oppression by a minority of castes against the majority is only a part.

The Marxist movement in Kerala in its early days, therefore, did two things: first, it supported the demand of the oppressed castes for full equality with the oppressing castes. That is why it extended full support to the

demand of the backward castes for reservation in government jobs and in educational institutions.

Second, it refused to join the caste leaders who were mobilizing their supporters as *oppressed castes* against the *oppressing castes*. It, on the other hand, organized the *working people* (belonging to all castes and communities) on class basis. Trade unions, kisan sabhas, agricultural labourers' organizations, organizations of other oppressed *classes* on the basis of their class demands were the real alternative to the backward caste leaders' attempt to organize caste organizations/political parties on the basis of caste demands. There is thus a clear distinction between all-class and caste-based movements organized by the backward caste leaders and the independent *class organizations* without reference to castes and communities.

Adopting as the Marxists did this approach to the caste question and caste demands from the class point of view, the first Communist Government in Kerala (1957–59) proceeded to apply concretely the principle of reservation for the backward castes and communities to the whole of Kerala, unifying the rules and methods of reservation existing in the Travancore-Cochin and Malabar parts of the newly-formed State of Kerala.

It was the first Communist Government in the State which formulated and issued the rules according to which definite quotas were fixed for the backward Hindu castes as well as for Muslims and the Christian communities. This order was issued by the first Communist Government of Kerala in 1958. This, in fact, was quoted in the Bill adopted by the Kerala Assembly on August 31 this year.

At the same time, as the head of that Government and as the Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Committee appointed by the Government, I felt that the majority of the offices and appointments reserved for particular castes and communities were being cornered by a minority of the affluent section of these communities. The result was that the overwhelming majority of those very castes and communities continued to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water.

After discussing this question in detail, the Committee came to the conclusion that the reservation existing in the laws and regulations should be confined to the poor majority in the backward castes and communities, removing affluent families from the list of people who could avail of the reservation facility.

This was hotly contested by the affluent sections of both the forward and backward communities, 'the former criticized it for continuing caste-based reservation, demanding that the only basis for reservation should be the economic position and not the caste. The latter, on the other hand, criticized the same proposal for excluding the affluent sections in the backward communities from the benefit of reservation; they demanded that the sole basis on which the principle of reservation should be applied should be caste. I personally had the dubious distinction of being the butt of attack from both the sides.

Thirty-five years later, however, the highest judicial authority in the country, the Supreme Court, endorsed the proposal made by the Kerala Administrative Reforms Committee chaired by me. 'The creamy layer' criterion laid down by the Supreme Court was virtually the same proposal made by my committee in 1958, the only difference was that, while I gave only the content, the Supreme Court gave it the new term of 'creamy layer'. I may, therefore, make the modest claim that I was the original author of the 'creamy layer' formula.

Having made this claim, however, I must admit that the formula originally mooted by me and subsequently endorsed by the Supreme Court is defective in one respect: if the poorer sections in the backward castes and communities are unable to provide a sufficient number of candidates for particular posts, the posts will be transferred to the 'general pool', which means they will go to the forward castes.

In order to meet this difficulty, the all-India leadership of my party has proposed that in such cases—only in such cases—the offices or the posts should go to the affluent section in the same caste or community.

Furthermore, a small proportion of reservation should be provided for the poorer sections in the forward castes.

Since both these proposals are opposed to the formula adopted by the Supreme Court, the Union Government and Parliament may have to step in, so that: (a) the posts reserved for backward castes and communities are not cornered by the affluent sections in the forward castes or communities; (b) a small percentage of posts are for the poor in the forward castes and communities.

This, therefore, is an eminently reasonable formula which should meet the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of people in both the backward and forward castes and communities. Here, a serious attempt is being made to solve the question of caste-based reservation on class principles.

Castes and communities which have remained oppressed for generations would continue to have caste-based reservation. But its benefits would go to the poor in the backward castes and communities, while a small proportion would go to the poor in the forward castes and communities as well.

Seeing this, no opponent of the Marxist movement can claim that the Marxists do not have an understanding of the problem of oppressed castes and communities or of the oppressed sections within the forward castes and communities.

October 17, 1995

Coming Full Circle

Kerala Politics from 1957 to 1995

Kerala came on the map of Indian and world politics in 1957 when the Communist Party was voted to power in the State. This was the first occasion when any left party came to ministerial office in India through elections.

The party, however, did not have a majority of the electorate behind it, though in terms of seats in the legislature it had about 52 per cent. The first Communist Government in any State therefore was a minority government against which were ranged all other parties (themselves minorities in terms of electoral support). The latter therefore decided to join together in an anti-Communist coalition.

That was what led to the notorious 'liberation struggle' and the Central Government's dismissal of the State Government two years later.

A decade later, in 1967, the tables were turned against the Congress. Almost all other parties joined together against the Congress under the leadership of the Communists. The latter therefore had a sweep, the Congress being reduced to a minority of just nine seats (out of 126).

This was the basis on which the late leader of the Muslim League, C.H. Mohammed Koya, boastfully claimed: 'We (the League) will decide who—the Congress or the Communists—should rule the State.'

Two decades later, Koya's boastful claim was disproved (though by that time he was no more). As against a combination of all the caste and communal parties with which was associated renegade CPI (M) leader M.V. Raghavan, the CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front made a clean sweep of the elections.

The first left government with no support from any caste or communal organization or party came into existence and ruled the State for four years. The story was repeated in 1991 when elections were held to the 14 District

Councils: the LDF won 13 out of the 14 Councils. (The solitary exception was the League-dominated Malappuram district.)

The United Democratic Front (UDF) leaders claimed that this was a departure from the normal course. They appealed for the support of the people when a few months later the State Assembly and Lok Sabha elections were held. The UDF had now a clean walk-over.

The difference between the two combinations in terms of electoral support, however, was just 2 per cent. This confirmed the idea which had been propagated earlier that the two combinations were neck and neck, the one which has a slight edge over the other coming out victorious.

The electoral victory of the UDF in 1991, however, should be attributed to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination which created a wave of sympathy for the Congress. The normal trend was pro-LDF, the 1991 performance of the UDF being an exceptional phenomenon.

This was confirmed by the results of the subsequent by-elections, all of which except Tirurangadi in 1995 showed a growing erosion of the UDF's electoral support. The most cruel blow was delivered to the UDF in the Lok Sabha by-election in the Ottappalam constituency: as opposed to the LDF candidate trailing behind the UDF candidate by 15,000 votes in the earlier election, the LDF candidate won the seat with a margin of 1,32,000 votes. The electoral wind was clearly turning against the UDF and in favour of the LDF.

It was against this background that elections to the three-tier panchayat bodies as well as to the three City Corporations and over 50 Municipal Councils were held this year. The LDF had high hopes of winning the elections hands down, thus preparing the soil for the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. There were several political factors working for the UDF and against the LDF.

First, the discredited Karunakaran was removed from the Chief Minister's office and A. K. Antony, with a relatively better image, was installed in office. He made a number of proposals and changes in the administrative sector, which were intended to prove that the Antony

Government was different from the Karunakaran Government. This was expected to be a plus factor for the UDF.

Secondly, the UDF Government, which was in charge of dividing the panchayat and urban bodies into constituencies and wards, so gerrymandered them that the UDF had an undue advantage over the LDF. The clear directive of the Act that the constituencies should be more or less equal in size of the electorate was violated; there were differences between one constituency and another to the extent of four or even five times. The constituencies and wards were so divided that the LDF strongholds were far bigger in the number of votes than those where the UDF was strong. This too was expected to favour the UDF.

Thirdly, with a view to facilitating a big swing of the backward communities against the LDF and in favour of the UDF, a Bill for the protection of reservation was introduced in the legislature. That was used to mount an offensive against the CPI (M), which was denounced for its 'hostility to reservation.' Unfortunately for the CPI (M), even the other constituents of the LDF led by the CPI supported the Government's move, though they too joined the CPI (M) in questioning the motive of the Antony Government in introducing this legislation on the eve of the panchayat and urban council elections. The 'isolation' of the CPI (M) even within the LDF was supposed to be an asset for the UDF and a liability for the CPI (M).

Despite all these unfavourable factors, however, the electorate solidly voted for the LDF. In two out of the three city corporations, the LDF had a clear majority, while in the third it was the biggest single group. The non-LDF forces in the third (Thiruvananthapuram) Corporation were the BJP and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) with which it was difficult for the Congress (at least to begin with) to join hands for securing the mayoral seat. The LDF therefore gained the mayoral seats in all the three City Corporations.

Elections were held in 55 town municipalities, of which the LDF won 29. Even out of the rest, there were some where neither the UDF nor the LDF was in a clear majority. The result was that the LDF got over 30 chairpersonships. In the Muslim League stronghold of Malappuram, it should be noted, all the five municipalities went to the LDF.

As for district panchayats, the LDF was in a clear majority in 10 out of 14, and the presidents of these 10 were LDF candidates. As for the block and grama panchayats, the LDF won almost two-thirds of them.

Why did this happen?

First, the seven months of the Antony rule so exposed the reality of that regime that very few people see any difference between the Karunakaran and the Antony regimes.

Secondly, the gerrymandering of the constituencies had no impact on the electorate, since the people by and large were increasingly disillusioned about the UDF whether it was led by Karunakaran or Antony. The constituencies earmarked for a clean win for the UDF fell into the hands of the LDF.

Thirdly, the Narasimha Rao Government at the Centre was incurring the wrath of the people because of its economic policies and softness to communalism.

Fourthly, the intensive campaign run by the CPI (M) showed the masses belonging to the backward communities that, if the Supreme Court verdict concerning the 'creamy layer' is amended as suggested by the CPI (M), they would not lose anything. (The amendment proposed by the CPI (M) was that, if there are no eligible candidates from the poor, the jobs concerned should go to the 'creamy layer' rather than to the common pool, as was proposed in the Supreme Court verdict.) The masses belonging to the forward communities, on the other hand, saw that the amendment proposed by the CPI (M) included one that 10 per cent of the reservation should go to the poor in the forward communities. There were thus no inroads made into the LDF electoral support among the backward communities, while there was a clear edge for the LDF in the forward communities.

All this amounts to the fact that the electoral trend visible in die 1987 Assembly and 1991 District Council elections was continuing: and the defeat of the LDF in the post-Rajiv assassination election was just an aberration. The fall of the UDF and the rise of the LDF in terms of electoral support are continuing.

Compare this with the 1957 Assembly elections when the Communist Party was first voted to power. It was thanks to the division among its opponents that the party could get a majority of seats. In all the subsequent elections till 1987, the Left combination could have electoral successes only when one or the other Muslim outfit was with the LDF. Today, on the other hand, the LDF won on its own without support from any caste or communal organization.

On the other hand, every constituent of the UDF today remains divided—Karunakaran *vs* Antony in the Congress, the Muslim League having to fight Suleiman Sait's National League and A4adani's PDP, the Kerala Congress divided into the Mani, Jacob and Pillai factions, while one section led by Joseph is with the LDF.

It is almost impossible for the UDF constituents to keep themselves united; even if they are united, the LDF is strong enough to get the support of the electorate, as it did in the Assembly elections of 1987, the subsequent District Council elections and now in the three-tier panchayat and urban council elections. Kerala politics has come full circle: the anti-Communist combination of 1957–59 has crumbled; in its place has come a combination of left and secular democratic forces led by the CPI (M) and the CPI.

October 21, 1995

Essence of Leninism

Building Socialism in a Backward Country

Had it not been for the counter-revolution organized by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, November 7 this year would have been observed throughout the world as the 78th anniversary of the October Revolution. The question naturally arises: why did the Soviet Union and, along with it, the East European socialist countries retreat from socialism to embrace capitalism?

To this question should be added certain counter-questions: why should the first successful socialist revolution in the world have taken place in Russia, a relatively backward country and not in any developed capitalist country like England, Germany, France and so on? Was this not contrary to the Marx-Engels vision of socialist revolutions taking place in developed capitalist countries?

This latter is the story repeated tens of thousands of times, so that people believe it. Actually, however, Marx and Engels in some of their writings had pointed to the then Czarist Russia as a country where a revolution was possible.

In fact, Marx's and Engels' concern was not where revolutions took place but the conditions in which they took place. That they bracketed Russia with developed capitalist countries as the country where revolution might take place shows that they were never dogmatic as to where revolution takes place.

In relation to India, for instance, they had visualized as one of the two possibilities that the Indian people might succeed in throwing the British out even before the British working class took power into its hands. The question for them was to investigate the concrete conditions in each country and find out the type of revolutions—bourgeois democratic, or proletarian socialist, or national revolutionary—that take place in individual countries.

Marx and Engels, however, were writing in an epoch of history when competitive capitalism was predominant. This was replaced by monopoly capitalism, which it was left for Lenin to analyze in detail.

Lenin's analysis led him to the conclusion that, in the epoch of imperialism, the working class in a less capitalistically developed country like Russia which, however, had a more advanced working class and its revolutionary political party, might be able to take power and start building socialism. This was a point on which Lenin developed and enriched, rather than corrected, the Marx-Engels thesis.

In opposition to such erudite Marxist scholars as Karl Kautsky of Germany and Georgi Plakhenov of Russia, Lenin pointed out that the more class-conscious and organized Russian proletariat might outstrip the working class of European capitalist countries in taking power and using it to start building socialism. Lenin, however, was clear that starting the building of socialism is different from completing it. The latter would require proletarian revolutions in developed capitalist countries.

It is interesting in this context to note that Lenin, in one of his writings, had said that though with the October Revolution the Russian working class had outstripped its comrades in the developed capitalist countries, Russia might once again lag behind the developed capitalist countries, if the latter have their proletarian revolutions. But, since the Russian working class has taken political power and has inherited the legacy of socio-cultural backwardness, it is for it to so plan the economic development (if the country as to coexist with the developed capitalist countries and in time to overtake them.

That is why, in his pronouncements on the New Economic Policy. Lenin stated that the whole question concerns whether backward Russia can economically develop so as to catch up with, if not overtake, developed capitalist countries. This is (he rationale behind the New Economic Policy about which he was clear, and categorically stated that it is a retreat from socialism, though temporary: the Russia of New Economic Policy would develop into the Russia of socialist society.

This is a key Leninist idea which is today being implemented in the countries of existing socialism—China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba. Here, for example, is how the general secretaries of the Communist Party of Cuba and president of the State, Fidel Castro, formulated the problem: ‘Practically everything is in the hands of the nation. But if we had to introduce a specific amount of capitalism we will introduce it; we are introducing it with all its inconveniences.’ The same idea is given expression to by the Chinese and other leaders of the countries of existing socialism. But let us proceed with what Castro adds:

‘The key, comrades and friends, the key to all this is power, who holds power, the big landowners, the bourgeoisie, the wealthy? I mention the big landowners at this point because that is what we had before; there are not big landowners now, the only land owners we have here are the cooperative workers and members of the basic units of cooperative producers together with the tens and thousands of small independent farmers.’ He goes on:

‘Who holds the power? Will the power be in the hands of the bourgeoisie, wielded by the bourgeoisie and for the bourgeoisie? Will the power be in the hands of the capitalists, wielded by and for the capitalists? *The question of power is the key.*’ (Emphasis added.)

This in fact is a 1995 version of what Lenin had said of the then Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. Giving all incentives to the profit-hungry farmers who want to sell their products in the market will certainly generate capitalism, hour by hour, day by day, but since political power is in the hands of the proletariat, the increase in production on the basis of incentives given to the profit-hungry peasants would strengthen socialism. That is why Lenin said that the New Economic Policy would be transformed into socialism.

Lenin was a dialectician and a materialist, an adherent of dialectical materialism. He was therefore able to see that the main contradiction in the post-Russian revolution world was the socio-culturally and economically backward Russia whose working class, however, was far ahead of its brethren in the developed capitalist countries.

World capitalism would do its worst to choke the young proletarian state (as it did in the interventionist and civil wars of the immediate post-Revolution years). They have to be defeated in that and they were defeated.

Then came the problem posed by world capitalism suffocating the young socialist state in an economic war. The point therefore was to defeat world capitalism in this game as well. That is why the very Lenin who evolved the line of *war communism* during the years of interventionist and civil wars devised the new strategy of the New Economic Policy.

The common point between the two is the defence and extension of proletarian power. The New Economic Policy was to be implemented under the strong leadership of the state of proletarian dictatorship.

The essence of Leninism is, in other words, the project of the working class taking power and starting to build a socialist society in a relatively backward country. This use of power for building a socialist society, however, is increasingly connected with the struggles of the working people all over the world against world capitalism. The socialist society that was coming up in Russia and other countries of the erstwhile Marxist empire was thus part of the worldwide struggle of the working class for building a socialist society.

Was this vision shared by his successors in the Soviet party and the leadership of the international communist movement? It is now obvious that serious mistakes were committed—mistakes of a dogmatic and sectarian character as well as those of revisionist and right opportunist character.

Despite these mistakes, however, the achievements of Soviet society far outweigh them. We have to build on these positive achievement while eliminating the negative features. It is with this determination that we remember Lenin today.

November 4, 1995

'Opium of the People'

Marxist Theory and Religion

Trenchant critics, as well as some ardent supporters, of the Marx-Engels-Lenin theory of Dialectical and Historical Materialism appear to agree that the essence of the Marxist theory concerning religion is the celebrated observation 'religion is the opium of the people'.

Non-Marxist rationalists therefore criticize the Marxist-Leninists for ignoring the Marxist theory on religion when Marxist-Leninists join hands with religious leaders on questions of struggle for national independence, democracy, world peace and social justice.

On the other hand, dedicated religious leaders turn their guns against Marxists for sticking dogmatically to Marx's formulation that 'religion is the opium of the people'.

Both, however, forget the context in which Marx made the observation. In his Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx says: 'Man, who looked for a superman in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing there but the reflection of himself, will no longer be disposed to find but the semblance of himself, the non-human (Unmensch) where he seeks and must seek his true reality.'

He goes on:

*'Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, a reversed world-consciousness, because they are a reversed world. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It*

is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence because *the human essence* has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore mediately the fight against the *other world*, of which religion is the spiritual aroma.’

He then concludes:

‘*Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people.’

The religious leaders in their criticism of Marx and the Marxist who consider the opium formally to be the essence of Marx’s approach to religion have therefore taken that particular formulation out of context. What it really means is that, helpless in the oppression of class society, man seeks imaginary help from religion. That help is provided by religion but only temporarily, just as opium relieves the agony of someone suffering excruciating pain. That immediate relief is no substitute for a real and permanent cure of the malady. In the same way, religion gives temporary relief to the oppressed man but does not give permanent relief. For the latter, man should organize himself, struggle against class oppression, take political power and create a classless society.

Against this background, it can be seen, religion has a positive element—temporary relief—which however is inadequate. The real solution is class struggle. Such is the crux of the Marxist theory of religion.

Now let us go to a piece of writing by Marx’s celebrated collaborator, Friedrich Engels. In a piece on the history of early Christianity, Engels traces the development of two major religions of the world—Christianity and Islam:

‘The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people. It first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers’ socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery.’

Engels goes on, 'Christianity places salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society. Both are persecuted and baited, their adherents are despised and made the objects of exclusive laws, the former as enemies of the human race, the latter as enemies of state, enemies of religion, the family, social order. And in spite of all persecution, nay, even spurred on by it, they forge victoriously, irresistibly ahead. Three hundred years after its appearance, Christianity was the recognized state religion in the Roman World Empire, and in barely 60 years socialism has won itself a position which makes its victory absolutely certain.'

Engels adds in a footnote: 'A peculiar anti-thesis to this was the religious risings in the Mohammedan world, particularly in Africa. Islam is a religion adapted to Orientals, especially Arabs, that is, on the one hand to townsmen engaged in trade and industries, on the other to nomadic Bedouins. Therein lies, however, the embryo of a periodically recurring collision. The townspeople grow rich, luxurious and lax in the observation of the 'law'. The Bedouins, poor and hence of strict morals, contemplate with envy and covetousness these riches and pleasures. Then they unite under a prophet.'

While Marx was describing the process of the origin and growth of religion in general, Engels applied it to the origin and development of two major religions in the world. Neither Marx nor Engels however had the time or opportunity to study the origin and growth of other religions in the world. We do not therefore have a comprehensive understanding of the origin and growth of religion in every country.

But Marx's description itself is sufficient to show that religion in general is a way out of human suffering in class society, which however would not be required in a classless society which would emerge after a short period of proletarian dictatorship. Religion, like other natural and social phenomena in the world, has its origin, growth and also fall. It is therefore unscientific on the part of non-Marxist rationalists to consider the struggle against religion in the abstract, in isolation from the class struggle in present-day class society. Equally unscientific is it for certain religious leaders to think that religion is a force which will continue for all time, even after class oppression ends and a classless society emerges.

This integration of the struggle against religion and class struggle was graphically described by the close disciple of Marx and Engels, V. I. Lenin, in his pamphlet, 'To the Rural Poor'. 'The Social Democrats further demand that everybody shall have full and unrestricted right to profess any religion he pleases. Of the European countries, Russia and Turkey are the only ones which have retained shameful laws against persons belonging to any other faith than the Orthodox, laws against schismatics, sectarians and Jews. These laws either totally ban a certain religion, or prohibit its propagation, or deprive those who belong to it of certain rights. All these laws are as unjust, as arbitrary and as disgraceful as can be.'

Then he goes on to lay down the lines along which a modern democratic society should deal with religion: 'Everybody must be perfectly free not only to profess whatever religion he pleases, *but also to spread or change his religion*. No official should have the right even to ask anyone about his religion; that is a matter of each person's conscience and no one has any right to interfere. There should be no established religion or Church. All religions and all Churches should have equal status in law. The clergy of the various religions should be paid salaries by those who belong to their religions, but the state should not use state money to support any religion whatever, should not grant money to maintain any clergy, orthodox, schismatic, sectarian, or any other. That is what the Social-Democrats are fighting for, and until these measures are carried out without any reservation and without any subterfuge, the people will not be freed from the disgraceful police persecution of religion, or from the no less disgraceful police handouts to any one of these religions.'

These, it can be seen, are the principles of the 19th century bourgeois liberalism, adapted to the requirements of the modern working class movement. The question therefore arises: what is the attitude of the revolutionary political party of the working class towards religion? This question is answered by Lenin in another article entitled 'Socialism and Religion'. He makes three major observations:

First, 'Religion must be declared a private affair. In these words socialists usually express their attitude towards religion. But the meaning of these words should be accurately defined to prevent any misunderstanding. We

demand that religion be held a private affair so far as the state is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair as far as our party is concerned. Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connection with governmental authority.

‘So far as the party of the socialist proletariat is concerned, religion is not a private affair. Our party is an association of class-conscious advanced fighters for the emancipation of the working class. Such an association cannot and must not be indifferent to lack of class-consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs. We demand complete disestablishment of the Church so as to be able to combat the religious fog with purely ideological and solely ideological weapons, by means of our press and by word of mouth.’

Secondly, Lenin answered the question, ‘Why do we not declare in our programme that we are atheists?’ and then explains:

‘Our programme is based entirely on the scientific, and moreover the materialist, world-outlook. An explanation of our programme, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog. Our propaganda necessarily includes the propaganda of atheism; the publication of the appropriate scientific literature, which the autocratic feudal government has hitherto strictly forbidden and persecuted, must now form one of the fields of our party work . . . *But under no circumstances ought we to fall into the error of posing the religious question in an abstract, idealistic fashion, as an intellectual question unconnected with the class struggle, as is not infrequently done by the radical-democrats front among the bourgeoisie. It would be stupid to think that in a society based on the endless oppression and coarsening of the worker masses, religious prejudices could be dispelled by purely propaganda methods. It would be bourgeois narrow mindedness to forget that the yoke of religion that -weighs upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society. No number of pamphlets and no amount of preaching can enlighten the proletariat which is not enlightened by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.*’ (emphasis added)

Thirdly, *‘That is the reason why we do not and should not set forth our atheism in our programme; that is why we do not and should not prohibit proletarians who still retain vestiges of their old prejudices from associating themselves with our party. We shall always preach the scientific world outlook, and it is essential for us to combat the inconsistency of various “Christians”. But that does not mean in the least that the religious question ought to be advanced to first place, where it does not belong at all; nor does it mean that we should allow the forces of the really revolutionary economic and political struggle to be split up on account of third-rate opinions or senseless ideas, rapidly losing all political importance, rapidly being swept out as rubbish by the very course of economic development.’* (emphasis added)

These long extracts from the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on religion and its linkage with class struggle would show:

1. That we do not fight religion as the non-Marxist rationalists do, in the abstract, separate from class struggle.

2. That we help the backward elements in the democratic and proletarian movements who flock into our ranks but who still have vestiges of religious prejudices to overcome these prejudices through the experience of class struggle and education in the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of Dialectical Materialism.

That is why, even while fully cooperating with the leaders and ranks of religious communities, which we are prepared to carry with us on general questions of national freedom, national unity, world peace and advance towards a world socialist society, we certainly have to combat the ideology of religion to which many of our friends are still committed.

We cannot give up our determined struggle for dialectical and historical materialism, even while fully cooperating with the religious-minded masses and their leaders in the common struggle.

November 18, 1995

What Secularism Means

In Politics and Socio-Cultural Life

Inaugurating a seminar on 'Towards a Secular Kerala', the highly-respected leader of the Christian Orthodox Church in Kerala, Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, said: 'While by and large I agree with the secularists and Communists with regard to the need for a secular State, I do not consider it either possible or proper to have a secular society.'

He explained that society and culture are inseparable from religion; it is, on the other hand, possible and necessary to separate religion and politics. The state should not, in his opinion, have a religion of its own, leaving it to individuals to believe in, practise and preach the religion which he or she prefers. He added further that man's cultural life is guided by his or her religion. Religion, therefore, will play a predominant role in shaping the socio-cultural life of a country.

Tracing the origin and development of secularism in Europe, Mar Gregorios said that secularism was born in the age of Enlightenment and Renaissance in Europe. These latter were atheistic, denying God and religion based on Him. He as a practising Christian cannot allow the import of European secularism (with its atheistic overtones) into the socio-cultural life of Kerala.

This, however, does not mean that he is intolerant of the irreligious and atheists. As a matter of fact, there is a large area of agreement between his understanding of religion in general, Christianity in particular, and modern secularism and Communism.

He, in fact, is known not only in India but abroad as 'a fellow-traveller of the Communists.' He has made big contributions to the idea of cooperation in practical life between religious leaders and the irreligious and atheistic Communists. For the latter, therefore, what is important is Mar Gregorios' advocacy of dialogue and cooperation between the followers and opponents of religion on a broad range of issues on which they agree.

While taking note of this positive element in Mar Gregorios' approach, the Marxist-Leninists cannot leave unanswered his argument that humanism and moral values require the leadership of religion; they have to combat Mar Gregorios' proposition that atheism in general and Communism in particular are anti-religion in the sense of attacking the believers and their spiritual leaders in day-to-day practical life.

They have to point out that the charge that he makes against secularism in general is true only of non-Marxist rationalists for whom the struggle against religion and God is the beginning and the end of the ideological struggle. The Communists today are as ardent in supporting the idea of dialogue and cooperation between religious leaders like him and the irreligious and atheistic Communists.

It is necessary in this context to be clear and concrete on how and why the 17th-18th century Enlightenment and Renaissance in Europe happened to be directed against religion in general. Medieval Europe was steeped in the fanatically religious ideology of feudal society. Such practices of the Christian Church and its leaders as Inquisition were used to perpetuate the domination of the feudal lords and kings over the common people.

When the wind of modern democratic ideas swept medieval Europe, therefore, the Enlighteners had to take up cudgels against religion which was a necessary pre-condition for the fight against feudal rule.

As Karl Marx noted. 'Criticism of religion is the beginning of criticism.' The struggle against the Inquisition and other barbarous practices of the medieval European Church had to be organized if the socio-economic and political domination of feudal lords was to be put an end to.

It was against this background that the demand arose in 18th century Europe for complete separation of religion and the state. If the triple slogan of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, raised by the Enlighteners, were to be put into practice, the tight hold of medieval church leaders had to be fought against.

In India, too, the rise of modern Renaissance in the 19th century gave birth to what is known as (non-Marxist) 'rationalism.' For the advocates of this trend, the criticism of religion was not the beginning of criticism in

general as noted by Marxists. but the end as well. Unlike the Marxists who grew out of them and who made the criticism of religion and God as part of the organized mass movement against the landlord-bourgeois ruling classes, the non-Marxist rationalists confined themselves to the struggle against religion and religion alone. For the Marxists, on the other hand, religion was the ideological weapon in the armoury of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the ideology and practices of the working class. Unity between the religious and the irreligious fighters of the working people for the all-round liberation of humanity from the landlord bourgeois classes was on the agenda as an ideology.

The Marxists undoubtedly fight religion as an ideology which disorients the fighting masses in their class struggle. Instead of uniting the mass of the working people—the believers as well as the non-believers—in the common struggle against oppression and exploitation, religion consoles the masses by saying that bearing the difficulties of a bourgeois-landlord-dominated society in this world would enable them to reach ‘heaven’ in the ‘other world’. The Marxists, therefore, consider it their sacred duty to disseminate among the working people the ideology of Marxism-Leninism which is based on materialist philosophy.

Every member of the party, everyone who is prepared to work for the strengthening of the party, should therefore do his mite to disseminate the ideas of materialism—not materialism in general but dialectical materialism. It was dialectical materialism which made Marx declare that ‘philosophy finds in the working class its material weapon, while the working class finds the philosophy its spiritual weapon.’

The education of Ac working people in the principles of dialectical materialism is thus an important job which every member of the party, everybody who aspires to become a member of the party, should undertake.

The Marxists, however, know that those who have acquired Marxist-Leninist consciousness—the consciousness of dialectical materialism—are a small minority in every country’s population. Convinced Marxist-Leninists being a small minority, they have to take with them the large mass of the people, people who believe in, practise and preach one or other religion. It is

from this point of view that they advocate the policy of dialogue and cooperation between believers and non-believers.

The position therefore is that, while the leaders of religious communities like Mar Gregorios have come to the conclusion that, in the very interest of propagation of Christian values, it is necessary to organize dialogue and cooperation between believers and Communists, the Marxists for their part start from the idea of uniting the believers and non-believers in the common struggle against all that is rotten in present-day society and proceed to develop relations of cooperation with the religious leaders. They do not expect the religious leaders to give up their faith in religious doctrines and practices. Nor are they prepared to give up their ideology based on dialectical materialism.

Dialogue and cooperation between the believers and the Marxists, therefore, require each of them to understand where the other stands, but without giving up one's own ideological position, to cooperate with the other in practical life and struggles.

There is, therefore, no basis for the understanding that secularism is *ipso facto* an anti-religious movement as the 18th century Enlighteners in Europe were and as the non-Marxist rationalists in India today are. Ardent believers like Mar Gregorios can well find a place in the secular democratic movement along with Communists. The only point to be noted is that the believers and the atheists in the common secular democratic movement should understand, tolerate and respect the beliefs and practices of the other. This is the only condition on the basis of which a secular democratic (socio-cultural as well as political) movement can be built.

Having made this point clear, one may proceed to discuss Mar Gregorios' proposition that cultural and moral values are based on religion. Even the most hard-headed anti-Communist would concede that Marx, Engels, Lenin and their followers were men of high moral political values. Theirs are lives of struggle in which they had to bear innumerable agonies and persecutions. They suffered all this because they were working and fighting for a cause to which they committed themselves.

High moral values in their case were the products of their very ideology of dialectical and historical materialism. Dedication to the cause of revolution, of building a heaven on this earth, rather than in the 'other world', is therefore the foundation on which Marxist-Leninist humanism was built. With due respect to the religious leaders, one may say that none of them equals Marx, Engels and Lenin in point of dedication to the service of man which, according to the best religious leaders, is service to 'God'.

Why then should we insist that not only in politics but in sociocultural life mere should be secularism? The answer is that secularism means equal respect to all religions as well as to the irreligious. Only if this approach of equal respect to religions as well as to the irreligious is accepted will there be tolerance, leaving it to each individual to believe in, practise and preach any religion as well as having no religion. Such an equal respect and tolerance will alone help the cultivation of a cultured society.

December 2, 1995

On With the Struggle

With the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union, anti-Communists throughout the world declared that the end of communism had come. Capitalism, they declared with glee, was the final social formation man had created.

To these prophets of doom for world socialism, recent developments in the former socialist countries of Europe came as an eye-opener. Country after country in that part of the world elected former Communists to leading positions in the administration of their countries. The list has now extended to Poland whose Lech Walesa, the pacesetter for Eastern Europe's retreat from socialism, was roundly defeated by a former Communist. These examples have made many confirmed anti-Communists sound the warning; 'Communism is coming again.'

We Communists, however, do not think that the socio-political setup which existed in the former Soviet Union and other countries of Europe will be revived, nor do we desire it. For, along with many brilliant victories of socialist construction which made perceptive social thinkers (such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb) declare that 'Soviet communism was a new human civilization', the very magnitude of industrialization and other indications of rapid economic development made it possible for man to cease exploiting man and nation to cease exploiting nation. Such a society—free from chronic unemployment, free from steady increase in the prices of essential commodities, free from lower prices for the commodities produced by the poor and middle sections of society, and so on, that is, a society in which there is education, health and housing for all—had come up in the former socialist countries of Europe.

Together with these great achievements, however, were distortions which alienated the governments in former socialist countries from their people. Such a society cannot and should not be revived in the old form.

Marxist-Leninists, therefore, are the first to declare that there is no going back to the system which collapsed in the former socialist countries of Europe. This, however, does not mean that the class-conscious proletarians of the world, patriotic sections of people in the former colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries, would allow world capitalism to have a free run.

While learning from the mistakes and distortions which had crept into the socialist system in Europe, common people throughout the world would learn from positive gains in the former socialist countries. That is the declaration made by Marxist-Leninists, including those in India and nearby two dozen other countries who gathered in Calcutta in May 1993. Full of optimism for the future of socialism and the doom of capitalism, Marxist-Leninists are determined to carry the struggle forward. The victories gained in the former socialist countries of Europe are an example of this.

Worthy of mention in this connection is the fact that, despite the retreat from socialism to capitalism in some European countries including Russia, the flag of socialism is flying high in China, Vietnam, Korea, Cuba and Laos. Their leaders are determined that socialist construction in their countries would be free from the distortions that took place in the former socialist countries of Europe. Socialism yes, hut with the national characteristic of our own country—this is the stand adopted by the Marxist-Leninists in these five countries.

Marxist-Leninists in the capitalist countries, including India, are determined that they will not copy the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Koreans, the Cubans and the Laotians who are carrying out socialist construction with their respective national characteristics.

Indian Communists, for example, had made the declaration as early as in 1951—in the documents adopted by the special conference of the then undivided Communist Party of India—that they would not follow the Russian, the Chinese or any other national model; they would, on the other hand, evolve their own model of completing the democratic revolution, going forward to a people's democratic state and government and then to full-scale socialism and communism.

For over seven decades since the Great October Revolution in Russia, Marxist-Leninists and other revolutionaries all over the world expected that the Russian example would be followed in country after country, so that the whole globe would come under communism. This was the essence of ‘proletarian internationalism’ which was the hallmark of Marxist-Leninists.

The retreat from socialism in the European countries has not stabilized that part of the world which is currently called ‘developed capitalist countries’. They are, in fact, in the midst of an intense crisis—economic, political and ideological. The growth of unemployment, rise in the cost of living of common people, corruption which is widespread in the administrative-political set-up in country after country, political and administrative instability seen in the changes of government, conflicts of policies amongst the top echelons of administration, increasing criminalization of the socio-political set-up—these are some of the manifestations of the intense crises bursting out in developed capitalist countries. Things are coming to a stage when rulers cannot rule in the old way, nor will the ruled allow things to continue as they are.

How these symptoms of ever-intensifying crisis will burst out leading to political revolutions in developed capitalist countries cannot be foreseen. But as the situation grows more and more inflammable, revolutions of one kind or another are bound to burst forth. The ruling classes of developed capitalist countries are sitting on a volcano which may erupt any time anywhere.

More significant is the fact that the overwhelming majority of humanity lives in what was once known as ‘the third world’—neither the developed capitalist nor the emerging socialist world. Their population comes to an overwhelming majority of humanity.

They were, at the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, colonies, semi-colonies, dependent countries of a small group of developed capitalist countries mainly in Europe, the U.S. and Japan. They gained political independence in the wake of the historic victory of the heroic Red Army in the Soviet Union and the revolutionary liberation forces of Asian countries such as China, Vietnam and Korea.

Most of these countries, like our own India, are ruled by the bourgeoisie along with its class ally, the landlords. They, however, are not so subject to world imperialism as they were before their liberation. The leadership of the ruling party or alliance in these countries are, of course, surrendering their national freedom and sovereignty to world imperialism. But they too have to raise their feeble voice against some of the transparently domineering policies of imperialism.

This is illustrated by the ruling classes—the bourgeoisie and the landlords headed by the monopoly bourgeoisie—in our country who have a dual role. On the one hand, they are surrendering national dependence and sovereignty to the dictates of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and so on.

On the other hand, on some issues such as atomic and missile policy, the attempt of imperialism to make the Government of India sign on the dotted line on trade issues, the imperialist patronage for the aggressive ruling circles of Pakistan, the open partisanship on Kashmir and so on, our ruling classes are forced, by circumstances, to raise their voice against imperialism.

Far more significant than the feeble voice raised by the ruling classes on some issues is the militant line taken by the industrial and agricultural working class, the working peasants and other sections of the toiling people, together with all other patriotic elements in society who are increasingly coming together in a common struggle against the anti-national and anti-people policies of the ruling establishment and the disruptive policies of the major Opposition of the country. This coming together of the common people against the ruling classes in our country is the guarantee that the people will reverse the weak-kneed policies of the ruling classes.

Other capitalist countries, developed as well as underdeveloped, are different from India. They all have, however, this in common: they cannot afford to weaken their struggle against the most anti-people section of the ruling classes in the capitalist world—monopoly capitalists in all countries. The working peoples in the former third world countries, as well as the countries where the flag of socialism still flies high, will fight the ruling classes of developed capitalist countries headed by the United States.

Each of these countries—over 150 in number—has its own specific national characteristics. Their struggle in their own countries will merge increasingly with the common struggle in which entire humanity is engaged against the ruling classes of the U.S. It is this common struggle which will ultimately develop into a worldwide struggle against capitalism and for socialism and communism.

December 16, 1995

Civil Code Debate

Personal Laws and Women's Equality

The Hindu communalists have been carrying on a concerted campaign for the immediate legislation of the Common Civil Code envisaged in the Constitution for the future. On the other hand, the Muslim communalists have been campaigning for the preservation of the Indian Mohammedan law, which they call the 'Shariat' laid down by the Prophet. The two together create a vicious atmosphere of communal passions—anti-Muslim and anti-Hindu.

It was against this background that some women's organizations, on the initiative of the All India Democratic Women's Association, held a convention in Delhi. With a large number of women's organizations in the country participating, it was a representative gathering.

It made a detailed analysis of the Hindu law reformed as the Hindu Code, the Mohammedan law, which is characterized by the Muslim communalists as the 'Prophet-made Shariat', the Christian law and the tribal law—all of them concerning marriage, divorce, right to property, inheritance and so on.

The unanimous conclusion was that what is required for Indian women is neither the immediate implementation of the Common Civil Code nor the preservation of the Islamic Shariat. Every personal law, on the other hand, should be subjected to scrutiny in order to find out where and how far each of them infringes the rights of women in accordance with the modern principles of democracy, social justice, equality between men and women. If any personal law infringes the democratic rights of Indian women, that law should be amended suitably.

Behind this conclusion lies the assessment that every personal law, including the Hindu Code, contains provisions violating the democratic principle of equality between men and women. It is, therefore, absurd to suggest, as is done by the Hindu communalists, that the Hindu Code as

enacted in the 1950s is the most democratic and progressive and therefore should be applied to all communities. It is the firm opinion unanimously held by all the participants in the convention that, despite the powerful social reform movement among Hindus which made it possible for the enactment of the Hindu Code, it contains many provisions which perpetuate inequality between men and women. The Hindu Code should therefore be subjected to as close a scrutiny as any other personal law in the country.

The position is still worse with regard to the Mohammedan law which sanctions the right of Muslim husbands to divorce their wives by merely saying '*talaq*' three times in one sitting; to refuse to pay alimony to the divorced wife; to marry a second, third and even fourth time when the first wife is alive, and provides for complete inequality for Muslim women concerning share in the family property. These provisions of the Mohammedan law or the Shariat are, in the opinion of a large number of progressive men and still larger number of Muslim women, to be removed.

Unfortunately, however, social reform movement had been far weaker in the Muslim community than among Hindus. That community's women and progressive men could therefore not put sufficient pressure on the State and Central Governments for enacting legislation annulling these anti-women provisions of the Mohammedan law. Together with progressive men in all communities, Muslim and non-Muslim women, therefore, consider it right that these anti-women provisions of the Indian Mohammedan law should immediately be annulled.

The argument of Muslim fundamentalists that, even though these provisions are anti-women, they should continue to be preserved because they are part of the law which was laid down by the Prophet, does not stand the test of modern ideas of democracy and social justice.

For one thing, the Indian Mohammedan law in several respects is, according to scholars and jurists, faulty; at least some of these provisions are against the injunctions of the Koran. Secondly, even if all of them are fully in accordance with the Koran, they should be amended if they go against the modern notions of democracy, justice and social equality. The Muslim men and women of the 20th and 21st centuries should not be bound down by the

provisions made over a thousand years ago in accordance with the then existing social conditions.

Progressive women's organizations like the All-India Democratic Women's Association therefore carry on a campaign simultaneously against the imposition of the Hindu Code on the Muslim community and for amending the Muslim personal law in accordance with modern notions of democracy, social justice and equality between men and women. They are equally opposed to the Hindu communalists' demand for the immediate enactment of a Common Civil Code and their Muslim counterparts' demand that 'the Prophet-made Shariat' be preserved intact. The relatively better, more democratic and more progressive Hindu Code also contains many provisions which go against the principle of complete equality between men and women, particularly regarding the right to property.

What is, therefore, required is not the imposition of this Hindu Code on the non-Hindu religious minorities but removal of those provisions in the Hindu Code which infringe the democratic principle of equality between men and women.

Coming to Christians, their personal law was so amended a few decades ago by a Supreme Court verdict that women would secure equal right to the property of her father who had made no will. The amending legislation also provided that it will have retrospective effect. This latter provision is now being sought to be amended by the Congress (I)-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Government of Kerala. The K. Karunakaran and A. K. Antony Governments were, in this respect, submitting themselves to the dictates of the male chauvinists of the community.

Mary Roy who fought and won the legal battle which culminated in the pro-women verdict of the Supreme Court—a verdict which is sought to be reversed by the proposed legislation of the Antony Government—in fact presided over one of the sessions in the convention. Non-Christian women as well as men are solidly behind the campaigners for women's equality like Mary Roy and her colleagues.

Even with regard to the Mohammedan law, it will be recalled, the well-known Shah Bano case was a partial victory for women's equality, but the

Rajiv Government, like the Karunakaran and Antony Governments of Kerala in the case of Christian women, introduced legislation invalidating the Supreme Court verdict.

Progressive men and women belonging to all communities denounced this anti-women move of the Rajiv Government, as they are doing now in the case of the anti-Christian women move of the Karunakaran and Antony Governments. Although a very small part of the battle for women's equality, the struggle against the Rajiv Government's move at the Centre and the Karunakaran-Antony Governments in Kerala is very important.

The Delhi convention also noted that tribal women are, in their own way, subjected to disabilities arising out of inequality between men and women. The tribal delegates who participated in the convention narrated the story of their being oppressed by the male chauvinists of their own community and requested that women and progressive men from the non-tribal communities extend their support to tribal women.

The powerful voices raised at the Delhi convention will indeed strengthen the struggle for women's equality, an integral part of the struggle waged by the Left and secular democratic forces in the country.

December 30, 1995

The Rig Veda

Holy Book or Work of Literature?

In a function organized in Thiruvananthapuram on January 2, I was releasing the eight-volume Rig Veda in Malayalam—text with meaning in Malayalam. I was then reminded of the six years (from my eight to 14 years of age) when I was exposed to the holy Rig Veda.

It should, however, be mentioned that I was not *studying* the Rig Veda but learning to repeat it, Rik by Rik, without understanding the meaning. This was the practice for the Namboodiri boys of those days after their *upanayanam*. Not only did I learn the whole Rig Veda by heart but learnt to divide each Rik into the *padas* (words) and do some gymnastic exercises with those words. It was expected of the boys who do this that they would undergo an examination. I too was sent for the examination but failed.

Rig Veda for us was a holy book which cannot be learnt by any non-Brahmin—not even by Brahmin women. The boys and elderly men in the community however were not only to learn it by heart but use it for various rituals, including the daily *surya namaskar*. Although I underwent this exercise for six years, I did not understand the meaning of the great work.

At 87 years today, I do not remember a word of what I learnt to recite in my boyhood. Many of my elders were proficient in the recitation of Rig Veda without understanding a word of what it means. Rig Veda for us was a holy book whose words have the power of influencing personal and family life.

Later on, I learnt that European scholars had studied the Vedas not as I and other boys of my generation did. They understood every word and wrote about what was for us to recite as a matter of ritual. For them, it was a matter of *studying* them.

Later still, I found that the whole Rig Veda was translated, metre by metre, by the great Malayalam poet Vallathol and published. For him it was a job of making the great work of literature available to Malayali readers.

Still later, one of my friends who had undergone the same process of 'learning' Rig Veda as I did, undertook the task of compiling a volume where each Rik is printed in Malayalam, followed by the order in which the *padas* in a particular Rik is to be reformulated in the process of *anvaya*, and finally, the meaning of the Rik in Malayalam prose. That book was released in Delhi by the then Union Minister for Education, P.V. Narasimha Rao. The second edition of the same book has been released now in Thiruvananthapuram.

For the European scholars who translated that great work into their own language. Rig Veda was a work of literature, not a holy book whose Riks are recited as part of rituals as it was for us. The translator of the book into Malayalam prose was also a victim like me in the practice of learning Rig Veda as a holy book. But he thought it was wrong to confine its study to Namboodiri boys: it should be made available to men and women of all Hindu castes and of non-Hindu religious communities.

The second edition of the book which I was releasing had already been handed over to 5,000 readers to whom the publisher of the edition had offered it at concessional rates. The great work which had been kept as a close preserve of the men of the Brahmin community was now being made available to the men and women of all communities.

Going through the pages of the book, one can find that the whole work is a collection of hymns composed by those communities 'who, in the pre-Christian centuries, were entering India from the North-West. They were singing the hymns of *Agni* (fire), *Vayu* (air) and other phenomena of nature, each of whom was given the attributes of a god or goddess. *Yagas* and other rituals were performed in honour of these gods and goddesses. As part of the rituals, the intoxicating liquor of *Soma* was being consumed. The whole work, in fact, is an exposure of the men and women of those days to the phenomena of nature. It is thus a treasure-house of knowledge acquired by man over nature.

As the work proceeds, there are references to social labour and its products, One gets a glimpse of how wealth is produced and consumed. Far from being a source of speculative philosophy and of religious practices, the book is thus a mine of information on the relations between man and

nature. This is the greatness of Rig Veda, one of the treasures of Indian and world literature.

Subsequent to the composition of Rig Veda, other Vedas, Upanishads and other works of speculative philosophy were written. This in its entirety is known as Vedic culture and civilization. The proponents of Hindutva philosophy would have us believe that this is the source of Hindu or 'Bharatiya' culture. That myth is thoroughly exposed by the translation of these works of Vedic culture into the foreign and then into Indian languages. Foreign and Indian readers are today able to understand what the great works of Vedic culture contained.

How does society in the days of Vedic culture look like? The main thing is that, like the pre-Vedic, the Vedic culture is also a stage in the continuing development of Indian society—a development that still goes on. There was the culture of the Indus Valley society which preceded the Vedic culture. The latter, in its turn, underwent so many transformations as seen in the multiplicity of the great works of Vedic culture—Rig Veda followed by other Vedas, then by the Upanishads, each of which was subjected to commentaries by scholars—all these constituted what is known as Vedic knowledge.

The society which gave birth to this culture was developing from tribal to caste society which itself had its opponents like the Lokayatas, Samkhyas and other materialist philosophers. It also had such social movements as the Buddhist and the Jain which constituted a revolt against the Brahmin-dominated caste society.

These rebels within the Brahmin-dominated society had a great influence on the mass mind of their days; they therefore were furiously attacked by speculative philosophers who, in the name of fighting for Vedic culture, demolished the *Nasthika* sects which refused to acknowledge the authority of the Vedas. Battle between the *Nasthikas* and *Asthikas* continued for centuries at the end of which the *Asthikas* prevailed over the *Nasthikas*. Their triumph over their opponents was, at the same time, a defeat for the mass of people who refused to acknowledge the authority of the Vedas.

At the very time when these battles were going on, other social forces, other modes of social and philosophical thinking, entered India. Like the authors of the Rig and other Vedas earlier, the proponents of these subsequent social outfits and philosophical modes came from abroad, but ultimately mixed with the earlier occupiers of the country.

Such were the followers of non-Vedic societies and philosophers like the Christian, the Muslim, the Jew, the Parsi, and so on. The most successful and aggressive among these were the Muslims who ruled the whole of northern and western India for a few centuries. Their relations with the earlier inhabitants of the country were those of conflict and cooperation. Centuries of living together as neighbours and friends coincided with centuries of conflict.

The Vedic, the Islamic, the Christian, the Jewish and other religious groups mingled with others who followed their own culture. These separate socio-cultural groups however did not merge into one common people. That is why Karl Marx noted that the Indian people have no common political identity: divided as they were into the Hindu, the Mohammedan, the Christian and other religious groups as well as into various castes in Hindu society, together with the ethnic tribes and groups. Indian society was a conglomeration of several socio-cultural groups with no political unity. For the first time in Indian history, it was the British rulers of the 18th to the 20th centuries who brought about some semblance of political unity for the country.

This political unity brought about by the British was transformed by the freedom movement into modern political unity. The flowering of the freedom movement into a militant mass movement in the early 1920s brought the Indian people belonging to all Hindu castes, non-Hindu religious groups, speakers of all languages, all the ethnic communities and so on into a common *nation*. Modern nationalism, therefore, is the child of the Indian people's resistance to British occupation.

The British occupiers however did not confine themselves to the use of the sword but successfully used the division of the Indian people on the basis of caste, religion, culture, the ethnic groups, the language and so on, to bring about national disintegration. That was how the British who brought

about India's political unity with their sword used their diplomatic manoeuvres and succeeded in creating an organization which declared that India is not one nation but consists of two nations—Hindu and Muslim. The movement based on that demand was so irresistible that the British who originally brought about the political unity of India presided over the division of India into an Islamic Pakistan and a Hindu Indian Union.

Those who today claim that the Vedic culture is the only genuine indigenous culture of India are thus denying the whole history of India, the evolution of its people through a diversity of cultures and social, religious, ethnic groups. Indian unity cannot and should not be at the expense of its diversity. The art and science of politics consists in so determining the relations between the socio-religious, ethnic and cultural groups that, while the unity of India as a nation is preserved, its diversity is also kept intact. Vedic culture as the sole Indian culture—the theory of *Hindutva vadins*—is thus a denial of Indian nationalism.

January 27, 1996

Options Ahead

The Issue before the Voters

In April this year, voters will go to the polls and choose among the three main contenders for power at the Centre—the ruling Congress (I); the main Opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party; and the combination of non-BJP Opposition parties consisting of the Left and secular democratic forces. Who among these will be allowed to form the next Central Government?

Behind this straight and simple question is the more complicated question: what are the policies that the new government should follow? On this, however, there is a certain amount of convergence between the ruling Congress (I) and the major Opposition, the BJP! Equally do they want the Narasimha Rao Government's New Economic Policy to continue. The non-BJP Opposition consisting of the Left parties and a number of non-Left and non-BJP Opposition parties, on the other hand, is opposed to the policies pursued by both the Congress (I) and the BJP. This question of policy, therefore, is the real relevant issue posed before the voters.

Although differing in some respects and on some issues, the Congress (I) and the BJP have a common stand that a country like India has to rely on U.S.-led world capitalism for its economic and political advance. The Congress (I) has been the champion of the World Bank-International Monetary Fund-dictated New Economic Policy which has caused havoc to the life of the Indian people. It has also led to the erosion of national freedom and sovereignty.

The BJP, for its part, has no fundamental disagreement with this policy of dependence on world capitalism; it, in fact, went on record to say that the Congress (I) has 'stolen' its (the BJP's) economic policy. This is natural because the two parties represent the same class combination—the big bourgeoisie and landlords who are dependent on world capitalism for further capitalist development in the country.

Revealing in this connection is the stand adopted by the BJP on the question of the Enron project in Maharashtra. During the last Assembly elections, the BJP raised the issue as a question of national self-respect and self-reliance and vowed to terminate the agreement entered into by the Sharad Pawar Government. After making a lot of noise, however, the alliance government of which it is a constituent came to an agreement with the very same Enron on terms which are of no basic significance.

It is obvious that if the BJP is returned to power at the Centre, it will continue the same World Bank-IMP dictated New Economic Policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization.

The most consistent fight against these policies has been waged by the Left parties; however, the non-Left contingents of the combination of Left and secular democratic forces are prepared, to some extent, to support the Left's campaign against world capitalism.

It will be recalled that, in the 1950s, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru formulated his economic policy of rapid industrialization and cooperation with the socialist-led anti-imperialist forces in relation to economic and foreign policies, the Left extended general support to the Nehru policy. But the Narasimha Rao Government's New Economic Policy is a complete reversal of the Nehru policy.

The Nehru policy, of course, was not faultless. While its emphasis of rapid industrialization, particularly building of heavy industries, was correct, it was not based on fundamental changes in the agrarian sector—a prerequisite for rapid industrialization since it leads to an ever-expanding home market. The Nehru policy depended to a great extent on foreign capital, but what it refused to do was to be fully dependent on foreign monopoly capital. The Left therefore made a sharp critique of the agrarian, employer-employee relations, taxation and other elements of the economic policy and proposed alternative policies.

Tax the rich, make the public sector units profit-making in cooperation with the workers and other employees, give relief to the poor and the middle classes—these were the basic lines along which the Left wanted the Nehru Government to reformulate its planning policy.

Despite this criticism, however, the Left appreciated the fact that Nehru was trying to bring about the industrialization of the country with assistance from the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries. This precisely was the point on which Nehru was denounced by imperialist forces abroad and right-wing bourgeoisie at home—the Swatantra Party and such other outfits. They alleged that Nehru's policy was 'pro-Communist' and would ruin the country. The Left was a major contingent in the struggle against these Right reactionary forces.

Even after Nehru's death, his successors adopted by and large the same policies. It was when the Soviet Union and its East European allies abdicated the socialist path and embraced capitalism, refusing to give India the same type of assistance they were giving Nehru, that the Indian ruling classes headed by Narasimha Rao abandoned what was basically anti-imperialist in the Nehru policy.

Does this mean that the Left and its allies want the country to go back to the policies adopted by Nehru? No. Because, as the Left had earlier pointed out, the Nehru policy had its drawbacks. It sought 'plan' aid from the big world powers—from both the socialist world and the capitalist countries. This line had a number of contradictions.

The country started to fall into a crisis even during the Third Five-Year Plan period. The Left has been continuously pointing out that the crisis of planning into which the country landed even in Nehru's days was the direct consequence of the Nehru Government's refusal to depend on the working people for Plan resources to increase production in industries and agriculture, to make social services—like education and health—serve the people, and so on. It was the Nehru Government's refusal to adopt a pro-people approach on all these questions that landed the economy in a serious crisis. There is therefore no question of going back from the Narasimha Rao policy to the Nehru policy. What is required is a basic restructuring of the country's entire economic and political policy.

A number of non-Left, but progressive, intellectuals and sections have offered suggestions to solve the problems arising out of (a) the weaknesses of Nehru's own policy and (b) the open consequences of the New Economic

Policy adopted by Narasimha Rao. What is required, therefore, is a new Left-oriented set of policies.

The Left considers that all proposals which come from progressive intellectuals should be coordinated to work out a new economic and political policy for the new government if the combination of the Left and democratic forces gets a majority in the elections.

The BJP does not have any such conception of major changes in the economic and political policies of the Narasimha Rao Government. It differs from the latter only in an area in which the Narasimha Rao Government itself is making heavy concessions to it (the BJP). The reference is to the anti-Muslim and—generally anti-minority—stance adopted by the BJP, its unashamed championing of the anti-minority (particularly anti-Muslim) platform.

Even in this, it should be noted, the Narasimha Rao-led Congress and its Government are making heavy concessions to Hindu communalism, as was seen in the Ayodhya case. No quarter should therefore be given to the aggressively Hindu platform of the BJP and its Hindutva outfits. That is why the Left and secular democratic forces are anti-Congress and, at the same time, anti-BJP.

It is, of course, not easy to bring together on one platform all the political forces which are at once opposed to the Narasimha Rao-led Congress (I) and to the aggressively anti-minority BJP. There are obvious differences among the proposed constituents of the emerging Third Front against the Congress and the BJP. These, however, can be ironed out if everyone of the non-Congress, non-BJP political outfits realizes the need for complete unity against the Narasimha Rao Congress (I) and the BJP. It is therefore with hope and confidence that the Left and secular democratic forces are looking forward to being united against the Congress (I) and the BJP.

What are the prospects for the coming together of the Left and secular democratic forces? One cannot assert that they are very bright since the differences among them are serious. All of them, however, realize that if they do not join forces, the Congress (I) or the BJP or an alliance between the two will come out victorious and then it will be goodbye for democracy,

national unity, communal cohesion and the self-reliance and sovereignty of the country.

The danger facing the country if either the Congress (I) or the BJP comes out victorious or if they come together is illustrated by a number of recent developments:

(a) The imperialist powers headed by the U.S. are making aggressive moves against India in respect of Kashmir and Indo-Pakistani relations; India's policy of nuclear self-reliance and security; and international trade and other questions of economic relations between India and the capitalist world. On every one of these questions, imperialism seems to put pressure on India to make it surrender before imperialism. Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP is prepared to adopt a clear and authoritative stand against imperialism in these respects.

(b) The economic and financial situation in the country is going from bad to worse. India already has fallen into an internal and foreign debt-trap into which the World Bank and the IMF have been leading it. India's foreign debt, international trade deficit, revenue and fiscal deficits in Central and State financial budgets—all these are forcing the country into complete dependence on imperialism. Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP is prepared to take the bull by the horns and make the country economically and financially self-reliant.

(c) India's foreign relations are deteriorating. The country, which was relatively independent of world capitalist powers in the days of Nehru, has now been reduced to a collective colony of world imperialism. Its political independence is increasingly under the threat of not only economic but political and military subordination to world imperialism. Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP is prepared to make a break with this diplomatic and political policy.

(d) Corruption has become all-pervasive. As the Vohra Committee reported sometime back, there is 'a nexus between big business, big bureaucrats and the leaders of (bourgeois) political parties'. Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP is prepared to take a stand against this. On the other hand, they are themselves involved in this, as is clearly seen in the role

played by Congress (I) and BJP leaders in the notorious hawala case in which there is serious suspicion even against Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

Accused of corruption in this case are not just a few individuals and political leaders, but the whole economic and political set-up in the country. Neither the Congress (I) nor the BJP is prepared to make a break with those who are making merry with the huge amounts they earn through business deals. The whole lot of the political leadership including those of the two major political parties—the Congress (I) and the BJP—should be deprived of power, to save the nation.

Such a clean-up of India's polity will be the beginning of a great move for a clean administration, for patriotic policies, for secularism and for full democracy. None of the ideals preserved by the people can be protected if either the Congress (I) or the BJP or an alliance between them is allowed to form the next government.

February 10, 1996

Is Secularism Anti-Religion?

In a debate on secularism, Poulse Mar Gregorios, a respected leader of the Orthodox Christian Church in Kerala, made a forthright declaration that he is opposed to secularism as the latter is a denial of religion. A devout Christian, he cannot think of separating religion from socio-political life.

He, however, added that he is opposed to the state favouring, or coming out against, any religion. Equal respect for all religions is the basis of his philosophy. Therefore, he proceeded, the state should not subsidize or patronize any religious community.

The religious people should be allowed to go their own way through their voluntary organizations. He was therefore opposed to his own or other Christian churches as well as their counterparts in the non-Christian communities using their spiritual hold on the people in favour of, or against, any political party.

To the question whether all this does not amount to secularism, he replied: no, because secularism is a denial of religion.

This evaluation of the respected leader of the Orthodox Church in Kerala is contradicted by the Constitution of India, which, according to him, is an example of the secularism he cannot accept. For, the Indian Constitution provides for the religious people to 'swear in the name of God' and the irreligious people to 'solemnly affirm' their loyalty to the Constitution when they take oath as MPs, MLAs, Ministers, and so on.

This obviously is a provision which puts into practice the secularist principle of complete equality among all religious communities and the irreligious people. Most of the MLAs, MPs, Ministers and so on take oath in the name of God, while a small minority prefer to 'solemnly affirm'. This is not a denial of religion but giving complete equality between the religious and the irreligious.

The Marxist-Leninists for their part have made it clear that while they are opposed to the political use of any religion (in elections and so on), they respect the religious sentiments of the people and would not do anything to wound their feelings. While they assert their right to be irreligious, they respect the right of the religious people to believe in and practise their respective religions. They are, in other words, following the policy of giving the religious communities and the secular state their due in the sphere of their respective operations: 'Unto God what is His and unto the state what is its.' Such is the word and spirit of secularism as the Marxist-Leninists conceive.

Marxist-Leninists, however, go further and see what is positive in genuine religion, as opposed to the 'religion' believed in and practised by the exploiting classes. They are opposed to the theocratic state as existed in Europe and Asia in the medieval days against which there was a revolt when feudalism was being subverted by growing capitalism. In this process of transition from feudalism to capitalism, there was an extensive movement against religion as such.

Those who organized and participated in this movement were attacking religion as such, rather than it being misused in the selfish interest of the feudal-bourgeois ruling classes. Such was the secularism of bourgeois Europe with which the respected Christian leader is familiar.

That, however, was not the attitude of Marx and Engels, the founders of Marxism-Leninism, nor of their followers like Lenin and other Communist leaders including Fidel Castro.

Marx, in one of his celebrated writings, said that criticism of religion is the beginning of criticism of society in general.

Engels was highly appreciative of the principles of early Christianity which, he claimed, can be found in the documents of the modern labour movement.

Lenin for his part called on the religious and the irreligious to unite in an endeavour 'to create a heaven on this earth rather than speculating on the heaven in the other world'.

Fidel Castro, in his reminiscence, recalls how Catholicism helped him, as a boy, to acquire the character of a modern democrat and the champion of the working people.

It is thus a question of religion as conceived by the original prophets and its misuse by the subsequent generations of the exploiting classes who used religion to keep the common people under subjection and oppression.

It is significant that Mahatma Gandhi, who was the supreme leader of our freedom movement for a full quarter century, characterised the poor people in India as '*Daridranarayan*'. Devoutly religious as he was, he considered the workers and peasants of our country the living gods in whose services he laboured for a whole lifetime.

He was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic because, a devout Hindu himself, he had equal regard and respect for Muslims. Sharply opposed to the idea of a theocratic Islamic state championed by Jinnah (who, incidentally, was himself not a devout Muslim), he stood for complete equality among all the religious groups. When the secularists demand that religion should not interfere in politics, they do not mean that the devout Hindu, Muslim, Christian or the follower of any other religion should not work for the salvation of the nation or humanity cutting across all barriers including the religious.

The proposition that religion should not interfere in political matters does not mean that individual people believing in any religion, including their spiritual leaders, should not participate in political activities. What it means is that the *authority* of the religious leader should not be used for one or against another individual political party or group. Devout Christians who took up cudgels against fascism, devout Muslims and Hindus who fought the authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi, devout followers of all religious communities in India who today take up cudgels against the proponents of the theory and practice of *Hindutva*—all these are and should be free to join other democrats in the defence of civil and political liberty. What is and should be opposed is the *misuse* of the *authority* of the religious leaders in favour of or against any political party.

There is, therefore, no basis for the apprehension that secularism is opposed to religion as such. What it is opposed to is the misuse of religion for anti-social purposes.

February 24, 1996

The Liberation Theology

Its Philosophy and Praxis

Much water has flowed through all the rivers of Kerala since the Catholic Church in the 1950s gave ideological leadership to the infamous 'liberation struggle' against the then Communist Government; it was able to mobilize all the Christian churches in the process of the struggle. That was how the first Communist Government in any State of India was dismissed by the Central Government.

Within less than half a decade after the 'liberation struggle', the first crack in the anti-Communist front—within the Catholic Church itself—appeared. When the anti-Communist Government threw out thousands of peasants—a substantial section of them the followers of the Catholic Church—and the Communist leader A.K. Gopalan went on a hunger-strike in protest, Catholic masses responded to that hunger-strike magnificently.

One of the Catholic clergymen, Father Vadakkan, who incidentally was the organizer and leading campaigner in the anti-Communist 'liberation struggle', publicly expressed his support to the hunger-strike. A few years later, his followers formed what was then called the Karshaka Thozhilali (Peasants and Workers') Party and arrived at an electoral understanding with the Communists. A coalition government of seven non-Congress parties, including the Karshaka Thozhilali Party, was formed with Father Vadakkan himself as its godfather. One of his close followers was a Minister too. For this cardinal 'sin', Vadakkan was disrobed by the Catholic higher establishment in the Vatican.

The particular political-organizational problem to which this gave rise was, of course, soon resolved. Vadakkan was taken back by the Catholic clergy and the Karshaka Thozhilali Party ceased to exist, but the rumblings to which the incident gave expression continued. Catholic masses and even the lower clergy rallied in large numbers behind the Left and democratic movement in the State.

Now, three decades later, the established Catholic Church itself has undergone a basic transformation. The Catholic Bishops' Conference, held in the third week of February this year, made some public declarations which indicate a basic change in the Catholic clergy's approach to the socioeconomic and political problems in the State and in the country. No more is the Church in the anti-Communist camp but has started moving towards what is known as 'liberation theology', that is, a move towards dialogue and common action even with the Communists in the service of the suffering and oppressed people.

At the time of every election till now, the Catholic clergy in Kerala had the practice of issuing formal instructions to the Catholic voters to vote against 'the godless Communists'. After some time, the appellation 'godless Communists' was changed to 'atheists'. Without mentioning openly the name of Communists, the leftist political parties, and groups, were warned against and voters asked to vote only against the 'atheists'.

The harshness of the denunciation of the Communists has not only given way but the Catholic bishops have now collectively appealed to their followers to vote only for those parties, groups and individuals who stand for the poor, who fight corruption and who fight the pro-rich New Economic Policy of the Narasimha Rao Government at the Centre. Never before have the Catholic bishops gone to such an extent as allowing their followers to vote Communist.

However, the Catholic is only one, though numerically the most important, denomination of the Christian Churches. There are others like the Orthodox Churches, the Anglicans and some of the smaller Churches. Many of them have gone further than the Catholic Church. In their ranks are many who call themselves followers of what is known as 'liberation theology'.

While being deeply religious they see in the Communists the true representatives and 'servants of God'. One of these went to the extent of declaring that God sent Marx, Lenin and Mao to earth to create a 'classless society'. They do not conceal the fact that the only difference between them and the Communists is that they believe in God while the Communists do not. This is what is called 'liberation theology'.

This trend, however, is not peculiar to Kerala. In fact, the Christian masses and the lower clergy here took it from the Latin American countries where Catholic clergymen have stood shoulder to shoulder with the patriotic fighters against the U.S. attempt at domination in their countries.

In Europe too, a number of clergymen sacrificed their lives in the struggle against fascism during the Second World War. The brilliant success of Fidel Castro in Cuba, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and other Latin American and Caribbean countries in the struggle against imperialism is to be traced to the fruitful development of cooperation between the godly Christians and the godless Communists. Tenets of that 'liberation theology' were, in Kerala, taken over first by the followers of non-Catholic denominations and now even the spiritual mentors of the Catholic Church have fallen in line. It is an interesting development whose impact on future political developments in Kerala cannot be underestimated.

It should, however, be made clear that the followers of the 'liberation theology' continue to be devout Christians. They make it clear that their philosophical ideal is opposed to materialism. Their leaders argue that there is no scientific proof to assert that the material world is real. The philosophy against which Lenin polemized in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is subscribed to by the philosophers and followers of 'liberation theology'.

From this follows the fact that they are believers in God, all that they want to achieve through the philosophy of 'liberation theology' is in accordance with the will of God. On that fundamental question, therefore, there is no compromise between 'liberation theology' and Marxism.

With this as their philosophical basis, however, they interpret God in such a way as will not be accepted by any organized religion. God, according to them, is the embodiment of all that is good and noble in human society. They, therefore, refuse to subscribe to the secular principle of the separation between religion and society.

The particular conception of God to which the leaders and followers of 'liberation theology' subscribe, is different from that of established religions. The common people—the suffering and the oppressed—are the representatives of God. An analogy to this can be seen in Mahatma Gandhi's

conception of '*Daridranarayan*', that is, the poor being God. It is such an interpretation of God that differentiates 'liberation theology' from other theologies.

With this as the philosophical basis, the leaders and followers of 'liberation theology' have the same praxis as that of the Communists. The life and struggles of the working people are as sacred to the followers of the 'liberation theology' as is revolutionary practice for the Marxists. It is, therefore, possible for the followers of 'liberation theology' and the Marxist-Leninists to work together in day-to-day life even while differing on the question of the existence of God.

One of the leaders of the 'liberation theological movement' says, 'science can neither prove nor disprove the theory of the existence of God'. Belief in God is, for them, a matter not of scientific understanding but of faith. It is, therefore, possible for them to work with the Communists, while reserving for themselves the belief that the 'godless Communists' are themselves the creatures of God in whom they believe.

The Catholic Church (with a reference to which this piece began) does not of course follow this 'liberation theology'. But the declarations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference held in Kerala recently show that they have gone very far from their original position (that of the 1950s and 1960s) according to which godlessness is the main evil to be fought. That moral political position has now been replaced by the new position that political and official corruption, oppression and exploitation of the toiling people, the evils of the Narasimha Rao Government's New Economic Policy, and so on, are the forces against which those of the Catholic Church and the godless Communists have to join together and fight.

March 9, 1996

Non-Alignment Today

The foreign policy of non-alignment adopted in the 1950s has given India rich dividends—international as well as national. It has raised India's prestige among the world peoples. One of the initiators of the world-wide anti-colonial movement, India participated in the widespread campaign for decolonization. Over 100 colonies, semi-colonies and dependent countries gained freedom in the course of a couple of decades. Today, therefore, there is no country where a foreign power exercises its authority.

In this battle against colonization, India stood shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and other socialist countries. There was an abiding friendship between the socialist countries and the newly-liberated countries including India. This made our Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru one of the world's respected statesmen.

Added to this achievement in world politics is the fact that friendship and cooperation with the socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union made it possible for India to undertake a policy of rapid industrialization. The myth, spread by the imperialist powers, that India is not fit for industrialization was exploded. It was the socialist Soviet Union that first gave India a heavy industrial enterprise—Bhilai Steel Plant. Then followed other heavy industrial enterprises assisted by the Soviet Union itself or other socialist countries.

This forced the hands of imperialist powers also to assist India in setting up industries. Never before was India able to set up so many industries—particularly the heavy industries. The people of India are grateful to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries not only for the help they themselves rendered to India but also for the fact that the example set by them forced some of the developed capitalist countries to participate in the industrialization of India.

This, however, had an international background—the existence of a camp of socialist powers and its opposite, the camp of capitalist powers. The

bitter conflict between the two camps helped India and other backward countries adopt a relatively independent stand without succumbing to the pressures of imperialism.

That was how there emerged—as opposed to the capitalist and socialist worlds—a ‘third world’, consisting of those countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America who gained freedom in the post-Second World War period. India, the largest among these countries and headed by a renowned statesman such as Jawaharlal Nehru, occupied a high place in world politics.

Conditions have of course changed during the last four decades. The main feature of the then world politics—the existence of a capitalist camp and a socialist camp—is no longer there. The Soviet Union and other socialist countries of Eastern Europe have ceased to exist.

Non-alignment, in the sense of refusal to ally oneself with either the capitalist or the socialist camp, is therefore no more relevant. That is the reason advanced by the Narasimha Rao Government and its supporters to the present policy of abandonment of non-alignment. They point out that since both the capitalist and the socialist camps have ceased to exist, there is no sense in talking of non-alignment.

It, however, does not follow that India and other eastern countries should align themselves with the camp of capitalism headed by the United States. Decolonization of over 100 countries in the world has made a big change in the international situation. For, while it is true that the so-called ‘bipolar world’—a world divided between the capitalist and the socialist worlds—has ceased to exist, it has not been replaced by the U.S.-dominated ‘unipolar world’, as is asserted, among others, by India’s Narasimha Rao and his supporters. As a matter of fact, the old ‘bipolar world’ has been replaced not by the so-called ‘unipolar’ world but a ‘multi-polar’ one. The world is divided into more than 150 independent and sovereign countries, each of which is free to establish such relations as they desire with other countries. India is a free and sovereign country as are several other countries which may be smaller in size than India but are invested with the same power of national freedom and sovereignty.

It is true that the U.S. is making hectic efforts to dominate over all other countries. The latter, however, are powerful enough to resist this attempted domination made by the U.S. and its allies in the imperialist camp. Not only are they juridically free and independent but are in reality able to exercise their independence and sovereignty. If each of them decides to stand on its own legs and to fight the hegemonic ambitions of the U.S.-led imperialist powers, they can fully exercise their sovereign rights.

This is best illustrated by one of the smallest countries in the world—Cuba. Ever since it had its revolution in 1959, American imperialism has been trying with its might and men to drown that small island country in blood. This has continued for 37 years. Cuba has bravely stood against all sorts of attacks launched by its big neighbour. It has, in fact, become a thorn in the flesh of the mighty U.S.

Putting up stiff resistance to the powerful U.S. is by no means easy for Cuba. For, Cuba is in fact denied the right to live as a free nation. The economic blockade imposed on Cuba is literally starving its people: the foodgrains that the people require are not allowed to go to that country. Similarly, medicines, oil and a number of other essential commodities are not allowed to reach the people. The strategy is to starve Cuba into submission.

The courageous people of Cuba, however, are resisting this regime of blockade and boycotts. President Fidel Castro and his colleagues are giving personal leadership to their people in the resistance to U.S. imperialism. This heroism of the Cuban people is inspiring the rest of the world.

Many countries, including those who are fully allied to the U.S. imperialism, have been raising their voice against the totally unjustified ban and blockades on Cuba. The United Nations, by a majority, has been adopting resolution after resolution expressing solidarity with Cuba and demanding that the bans on that country be lifted.

It goes to the credit of India that the ruling and the Opposition parties in this country have joined hands in making mass collections for organizing the dispatch of foodgrains, medicines and other essential commodities to

Cuba. India is thus following the good old traditions of the days of her nonalignment policy.

The three other socialist countries which exist today—China, Vietnam and North Korea—are also courageously resisting the hegemonic policy of the U.S. When the U.S. rulers threatened the People's Republic of China with bans and blockades, the Chinese leaders retaliated that these would be as costly to the U.S. as to China, indicating that China will reply in kind. The latter therefore had to eat the humble pie and desist from imposing bans and blockades against China. North Korea too has been resisting the threats and blackmail of U.S. imperialism. As for Vietnam, the courageous stand taken by the leaders of that country has forced the hands of even the mighty U.S. to start cooperating with the country.

The four countries of existing socialism, therefore, have been models to non-socialist developing countries (including India) for defending themselves against threats and blackmail issued by U.S. imperialism. It is for the rulers and the ruled in every developing country to imitate China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba in defending their national freedom and sovereignty.

However, it is not only the socialist countries that are resisting the hegemonic policies of the U.S.. Several capitalist countries, including France, Germany, U. K., and Japan, are doing so on individual issues. Many of them in fact are giving partial support to India in the latter's concerns relating to Kashmir, atomic policy, trade and other questions.

It is thus possible to isolate the U.S. even within the capitalist camp on issues on which India or other Third World countries are interested. The question is only whether the ruling classes and the people are prepared to take a principled stand of defending their national sovereignty and resisting the threats and blackmail of the U.S. If they adopt such a policy, they can well resist the U.S. as the four socialist powers have been successfully doing.

The fact, therefore, is that, while non-alignment has formally ceased to be relevant since the former socialist world has had a serious setback towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the anti-imperialist content of the policy of non-alignment is very much relevant

today. The U.S. is not so powerful as its apologists make out. The few socialist countries that still exist, the majority of nations in the world, the former socialist countries whose people are having a taste of what retreat from socialism means and, above all, the peoples in the newly-freed countries who constitute the bulk of the world population—all these are interested in resisting the U.S. attempt to dominate the world.

Added to this is the fact that even such developed capitalist countries as Germany, France, U.K. and Japan are prepared to cooperate with the Third World countries in their resistance of American imperialism on individual issues. This is the world background against which the nonalignment of the 1950s can be adapted to the new conditions of the last years of the 20th century. The question is only whether our ruling classes headed by Narasimha Rao and his colleagues would have the sense of reality and courage in defeating the threats and blackmail issued by the U.S. imperialism.

March 23, 1996

The Ongoing Struggle

On Nelson Mandela's Autobiography

In 751 pages divided into 115 chapters, Nelson Mandela's autobiography narrates his own life story—from a 'country boy' to 'freedom'. It is an exceedingly readable, eminently educative book. For, it is the life story of one man and the story of struggles waged by the South African people.

The book is full of events and anecdotes which generate emotions. Intimate details of the author's relations with his parents and with the tribal chief to whose protection the boy Nelson was handed over and equally intimate details of the student Nelson's teachers and class fellows are given. These lead up to his first marriage which, after the birth of a son, broke up because of his activities as a freedom fighter to which the lady could not adjust herself. The second marriage was with Winnie who was not only a wife but a loyal comrade. She herself was subjected to persecution. As the autobiography unfolds, the narration includes their sad separation after Nelson's freedom from jail which, it appears, has now led to their divorce through court.

Towards the end of the autobiography, the author says:

'We took up the struggle with our eyes wide open, under no illusion that the path would be an easy one. As a young man who joined the African National Congress, I saw the price my comrades paid for their beliefs, and it was high. For myself, I have never regretted my commitment to the struggle and I was always prepared to face the hardships that affect me personally. But my family paid a terrible price, perhaps too dear a price, for my commitment.

'In life, every man has twin obligations—obligations to his family, to his parents, to his wife and children; and he has an obligation to his people, his community, his country. In a civil and humane society each man is able to fulfill those obligations according to his own inclinations and abilities. But in a country like South Africa, it was almost impossible for a man of my

birth and colour to fulfill both those obligations. In South Africa, a man of colour who attempted to live as a human being was punished and isolated. In South Africa, a man who tried to fulfill his duty to the people was inevitably ripped from his family and his home and was forced to live a life apart, a twilight existence of secrecy and rebellion. I did not in the beginning choose to place my people above my family, but in attempting to serve the people, I found that I was prevented from fulfilling my obligations as a son, a brother, a father and a husband.

‘In that way, my commitment to my people, the millions of South Africans I would never know or meet, was at the expense of the people I knew best and loved most. It was simple and yet as incomprehensible as the moment a small child asks her father, ‘Why can you not be with us?’ And the father must utter the terrible words: ‘There are other children like you, a great many of them...and then one’s voice trails off.’

This is the man who, born into an outcast tribal community, made his way up the ladder of the apartheid society. It is doubtful whether, apart from our own Indian caste system, there is a social system comparable to the social environment in which Nelson was born and in which he lived till the evening of his life. Despite the handicaps, however, he rose in his society and his profession becoming a practicing advocate and, at the same time, a highly active politician building the ANC: He did not give up his profession but the profession left him because of his activities as the leader of the ANC. These activities found him in prison more than once, which, however, did not restrain him from his activities.

From the very beginning of his life as a political activist, he was an ardent advocate of the ANC policy of South Africa being the common homeland of the blacks, the coloureds, the Indians and the whites. African patriots did not in the beginning understand his and the ANC’s insistence on the unity of the South African people regardless of their colour. On the other hand, the white rulers despised him and the ANC for championing the cause of the blacks—the cause of dismantling apartheid. Mandela and his ANC firmly adhered to the policy of a new South Africa above racialism.

The white rulers, however, did all they could to smother the freedom aspirations of the black people who organized a systematic resistance to the

hegemonic policy of white racialism.

Another characteristic feature of South African nationalism was its intimate connection with the South African Communist Party (SACP) whose leadership included the whites, the coloureds, the Indians and black Africans. This collaboration between the ANC and the SACP was the point on which the white racist rulers of South Africa persisted with repressing the ANC itself in the name of 'suppressing Communism'. Nelson and other leaders of the black African community were advised to put an end to their close relationship with SACP but they steadily refused to do so.

The political conditions in the country made it obligatory for the ANC to work underground and Nelson was an effective organizer of the underground movement. His sojourn in the entire African continent and some other countries helped the process of organizing the ANC for the armed struggle. It was he who made it possible for the militant activists of the ANC to get training in arms in other countries—African as well as others. His sojourn was the starting point of the militant underground organization which could unleash armed struggles.

Legally organized boycott, illegally organized sabotage and ultimately armed guerilla struggles—this was the perspective with which a specific militant organization was set up: it was different from and independent of the ANC but the ANC naturally had its sympathy for the militant underground organization. Nelson was the first commander-in-chief of the underground organization for armed struggle.

Nelson himself and the militant underground organization he led, together with the ANC, were however categorical that the armed actions resorted to should not cause damage to the persons and properties of civilians. They were also clear that by armed struggle alone the white rulers could not be forced to come to terms and agree to dismantle apartheid.

They, therefore, availed themselves of every opportunity to open talks with the enemy, without giving up their own methods of armed struggle. In the event. Nelson proved himself to be as proficient in the art of diplomacy as he was efficient in the organization of armed struggle.

These activities naturally landed Mandela in jail. For 27 years continuously he was in jail, subjected to unspeakable atrocities. Even while going through all these atrocities, he did not give up his programme of negotiations. For the sake of negotiations, however, he was not prepared to give up armed struggle.

Nelson's last days in jail were the most significant in the history of South Africa. He was separated from his colleagues—not as a matter of punishment but for purposes of facilitating negotiations. In this process he had to fight a two-sided battle—against his own comrades who were impatient of the method of negotiations and against the white rulers who used the forum of negotiations to disarm the underground militant organization of the ANC. He was as firm against one as against the other.

The chapters which deal with the negotiations that in the end led to an agreement between the white government and the ANC are the most remarkable in Nelson's *Long Walk to Freedom*.

Engaging himself in these negotiations not only roused the suspicions of his comrades but also gave hope to the enemy that he could be separated from the rest of the ANC. Like any sagacious leader who deals with the enemy, Nelson was conscious of the pitfalls and therefore took his comrades into full confidence. That was how the personal negotiations which he opened to begin with were transformed into negotiations between the government and the ANC.

The last stage of the negotiations was also the most difficult because the white rulers wanted somehow to maintain their hegemony in the South African polity. They made proposals after proposals to deny the South African people what they wanted—a non-racial South Africa with majority rule on the basis of 'one man one vote'. These moves of the white rulers were countered by the mass mobilization in favour of non-racial majority rule. The chapters of the book which describe the course of these negotiations, the politics of the white the ruling classes persisted with, the counter-politics of the ANC of mass mobilization—this is the saga of struggle-cum-negotiation through which the unwilling white rulers were forced to concede the demands of the ANC.

Even when the white rulers were at last forced to concede the demand, there were forces within the black African community which were striving to sabotage the smooth transition from apartheid to non-racial democracy. Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the King of Swaziland were the instruments which tried to sabotage the final elections. These two however were defeated by the militant mass mobilization resorted to by the ANC, the SACP and the mass organizations led by them.

The autobiography comes to an end with the final elections in which the ANC secured an absolute majority of 62 per cent of the votes and Nelson became the first President with two Deputy Presidents—one each from among the whites and the blacks.

It goes without saying that the struggle for the preservation of racial unity, for a non-racial democratic state and society has not ended. It is to go on, but the forces unleashed and organized in the process of decades of struggle (in which not less than 27 years of Nelson's life were years of imprisonment) guarantee that the obstacles to racial unity in South Africa will be removed and the struggle for a non-racial South Africa will continue.

April 6, 1996

VIPs and Prosecutions

An Alternative to Lok Pal

Innumerable allegations of corruption against bureaucrats and ruling party leaders have raised the question whether the exemptions from prosecution for VIPs, including the highest dignitary in the country, the President of India, should be allowed to continue.

During the hearing of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe relating to the Jain diaries in the hawala case, the Supreme Court directed the CBI to proceed against anyone involved, 'however high or low he or she may be'. That is a wholesome principle which will be heartily accepted by active politicians as well as others. It is a principle of jurisprudence and parliamentary democracy that nobody is above the law.

Despite this direction from the Supreme Court, the CBI did not proceed to take statements from former President R. Venkataraman or from Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, against whom there was the statement made by the main accused in the hawala case, S.K. Jain. Jain told the CBI that he had paid, directly or through agents, not less than Rs. 3.5 crores to the Prime Minister.

Subsequently, evidence came to hand that four leaders of a minuscule Opposition party were paid lakhs of rupees allegedly by Narasimha Rao through his agents for voting against the no-confidence motion which was under discussion in the Lok Sabha. Bank accounts of the four MPs to whom Narasimha Rao allegedly made the payments were discovered.

Narasimha Rao was involved also in the St. Kitts affair in which godman Chandraswami is a co-conspirator. None of this prima facie evidence made the CBI start investigations against the Prime Minister.

Soon came the report concerning Sheila Kaul, Governor of Himachal Pradesh and a former Union Minister. She has been found by the CBI to have acted wrongly and irregularly in the allotment of government houses.

Among the beneficiaries of her acts in the case were her sons, daughters, sons-in-law and other relatives. The case was so strong that the Judges of the Supreme Court suggested orally that Sheila Kaul vacate the office she was holding.

On coming to know of this, President Shankar Dayal Sharma directly asked the Government of India what was being done in this case. Only then did Sheila Kaul vacate her office as Governor.

In the case of Uttar Pradesh Governor Motilal Vora and Kerala Governor P. Shiv Shanker too, the Supreme Court had to intervene before the CBI at last launched prosecution and they had to vacate office.

The cases referred to here raise a fundamental question: Should VIPs who occupy senior positions of state and government be exempted from investigations by investigating agencies and from prosecution? The principle of equality of all citizens before the law is violated when such exemptions are given to the President of India, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister, Governors, Chief Ministers, Members of the Union and State Councils of Ministers, and so on. Should not the principle, enunciated by the Supreme Court in the Jain hawala case, that guilty persons, regardless of the high positions occupied by them, should be proceeded against if there is evidence against them, be applied to all high dignitaries at the Centre and in the States, not excluding the President, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister, Governors and Chief Ministers? Why should a person be exempted from investigation and prosecution simply because he or she occupies an official position at the Centre or in the States?

The election manifesto of the Congress party talks of a law providing for the appointment of a Lok Pal whose jurisdiction includes even the office of Prime Minister. If this provision is put into practice, it may go a little way towards curbing the corruption indulged in by leaders of government, including the Prime Minister. But what about the President, who, after all, is very likely a former Minister or leader of the ruling party? (It so happened that the Jain statement to the CBI mentions the name of R. Venkataraman, former President. Should he not be proceeded against? Has the CBI done it?)

Should it be presumed that laws and rules concerning investigation and prosecution should be applied differently to ordinary citizens and to holders of high office? VIPs, after all, are ordinary citizens who temporarily occupy high office. Exempting them from investigation and prosecution is a blatant violation of the principle of the equality of all Indian citizens before the law.

The Supreme Court itself observed in the Sheila Kaul case that the charges against her did not concern what she did as Governor; they related to actions taken by her when she was a Union Minister. This is a sound principle.

The appointment of a Lok Pal and bringing the office of the Prime Minister within the jurisdiction of the Lok Pal is no solution for the widespread corruption from which no VIP is free. The real solution is the equal application of the law to VIPs and others. Fear of the law, the fear that one may be caught by the investigating and prosecuting agencies, is the only deterrent that will prevent VIPs from doing what they are now doing. The two Governors named in the Jain diaries and the Prime Minister who has been named in the statement made before the CBI by Jain (there is evidence against Narasimha Rao in the St. Kitts case too)—all of them are ordinary citizens of India who, for a time, occupy (or occupied) high posts. They are alleged to have misused their positions. Should there be a Lok Pal to investigate their cases?

After all, even if the Lok Pal goes into the cases, the conclusion that he arrives at would only be the basis on which prosecutions will start. Why should, therefore, prosecution wait for an inquiry by the Lok Pal? Investigation and prosecution by the agencies concerned constitute the proper way to deal with VIPs as well as ordinary citizens.

It is true that the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and members of the Union and State Councils of Ministers are all primarily responsible to Parliament and the State legislatures. There may be a case for committees of Parliament and State legislatures making a preliminary study of the charges of corruption against these high dignitaries; on the basis of the findings of these committees, the prosecuting agencies should be asked to file cases against them in the ordinary course of law.

This is the alternative that is proposed here to the Congress proposal for a Lok Pal Bill. (This procedure should be applied even in cases in which VIPs are charged with the misuse of powers vested in them as occupants of high office for the time being. In all other cases, they should be dealt with straightaway by the investigating and prosecuting agencies.)

The heart of the suggestion made here is that VIPs should not be placed on a high pedestal, enjoying exemption from investigation and prosecution. Fear of ordinary investigating and prosecuting agencies will alone deter VIPs from what they have been and are continuing to do.

May 18, 2006

Art and Politics

Social Roots of Art and the Role of the Talented Artist

‘Art for art’s sake’, ‘Art above politics’—these were the two slogans with which acknowledged men and women of letters greeted the formation of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association in the latter half of the 1930s. They objected to the call of progressive writers to take up the cause of anti-fascism, the world-wide struggle for peace, India’s own struggle for freedom and the struggles of the Indian people for liberation from obscurantism and outdated social practices. These, allegedly, were outside the scope of art.

Opposed to them were the Communists, Socialists and other leftists who were trying to develop a new literature and art closely related to the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic revolution in India and the world. New generations of writers, singers, dramatists and practitioners of other arts emerged and made themselves part of the developing Left movement in the country. The struggle between them and the traditional men and women of literature was part of the struggle between the emerging militant movements of the working people and all sorts of conservative forces opposed to the emergence of the new socio-cultural force.

While I was a participant in the foundation conference of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association held in Lucknow in 1936, my activities connected with the movement were by and large confined to my own State of Kerala. Although in the general debate I kept in touch with the progressive writers’ movement in other States, I was an active participant in the struggle between the two forces in Kerala’s cultural movement.

In the beginning, Kerala’s progressive cultural movement was by and large confined to those of us who were active in the radical political movement. We had no credentials as men and women of letters. We engaged ourselves in problems of art and literature only as part of the radical political movement. We wrote poems, songs, short stories and so on and we staged plays and sang songs, in furtherance of the political movement of which we

were active participants. Art in general, literature in particular, was for us one of the effective weapons of political struggle.

Within less than half a decade, a section of the acknowledged men and women of literature and the arts joined us. The historic anti-fascist war on a world scale, the intensification of the national struggle culminating in the Quit India struggle as well as the Indian National Army (INA) movement led by Subhas Chandra Bose, inspired a large number of established writers and artists to join us in the formation of a new, far wider progressive cultural movement. The new organization of progressive writers, of which the non-Communist men and women of literature and culture were participants, proclaimed that literature and culture should have a clear perspective of the objectives of socio-political progress with which cultural activities should be conducted.

This new organization, however, had a serious weakness within it: although agreed on the importance of the anti-fascist war on a world scale, the Communists and others in the organization had different perspectives on the international and national situation. These differences intensified after the end of the War and the attainment of Independence in August 1947. These differences led to a serious conflict within the united organization of progressive writers and cultural activists.

The differences, however, did not manifest themselves in the direct political form of differences in assessment of the independence of the country, the class nature of the new rulers, the tasks of Left and progressive forces in the new situation and so on. On the other hand, differences appeared ostensibly on questions of the form and content of literature.

The non-Communist contingents agreed with the Communists that art and culture should have a clear perspective of socio-political progress. That position was part of the manifesto issued by the united organization. However, they argued that while being progressive in content, art and literature should be good in form. This in fact contained the criticism that the writings, songs, plays and so on produced by the Communists, though with a content that was progressive, were unacceptable from an aesthetic point of view. A big debate took place in which both sides showed sectarian tendencies. These tendencies were subsequently corrected but the debate

helped the process of clarification, forming the basis of these application of Marxian aesthetics to the specific conditions of Kerala.

When we formed the first organization of progressive writers in the 1930s we did not have a correct perception of the principles of Marxian aesthetics. That is why, in our debates, we tended to be sectarian towards non-Communist writers and other cultural activists. Many respected literary and cultural figures, who were not Communists but who played a positive role in the development of the radical socio-political movement in the State, were denounced by us—a mistake that was subsequently corrected.

On the other hand, our opponents too failed to appreciate the positive role that we were playing in the development of an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic culture. We were therefore obliged to make a study of the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin and their successors in the development of Marxian aesthetics. That was how, within the progressive cultural movement, a distinct Marxist trend appeared. It is in order here to spell out the corrections that we made in the course of our debate with our opponents.

First of all, we were perfectly right in emphasizing the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic, secular and scientific nature of the literature and culture as we had done from the very beginning. Art for socio-political progress—the slogan with which we began the progressive cultural movement in the 1930s—was, in other words, perfectly correct.

Secondly, in the process of emphasizing this anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic nature of culture, we were unaware of a fundamental principle which Marx, Engels and Lenin had laid down—the principle that anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and generally democratic culture can be created not necessarily by those who are consciously adopting that political outlook. Even those who have not committed themselves to the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal progressive nature of culture can unconsciously create genres of culture which are anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic, and so on.

Marx and Engels, for example, had referred to the celebrated writer Balzac who was subjectively influenced by reactionary ideas but had produced works that helped the progressive revolutionary movement. Lenin

too, in his appreciation of Tolstoy, pointed out that, despite his own subjective reactionary world outlook, Tolstoy in his writings 'mirrored the Russian Revolution'.

This is a principle which we were unaware of when making immature judgments of many leaders of culture. Our new understanding led us to a complete rethinking of traditional literary and cultural forms and enabled us to make a properly balanced assessment of the positive contributions and negative features of several writers and artists in Malayalam literature. That was the beginning of the application of Marxist theory to the questions of literature and other cultural forms in the State.

Thirdly, even before completing the process of our re-education in Marxian aesthetics, the political roots of the differences between the Communists and the rest in the progressive cultural movement began to get ironed out. That was why, within less than a decade after our debate on the form and content of literature, the outstanding critic of our position, the late Joseph Mundassery, joined us in the first Communist Government of Kerala as Education Minister. However, the theoretical differences on the form and content of art had not been resolved. But the practical differences on the assessment of the character of the independence that was won in 1947 and the attitude to be adopted towards the new rulers had been resolved. That was the beginning of a process which ended in the formation of a still broader organization of progressive writers and artists.

Having thus outlined the development of the progressive cultural movement in Kerala, let me now sum up the debate on the key question of the socio-political roots of literature and the arts, and the role of talented writers and artists.

1. Literary and artistic production is undoubtedly a function of the talented individual—the writer, the singer, the actor and other artists. Their freedom to create should be acknowledged by everybody.

2. The talented artist, however, is an integral part of the society of which he or she is a member. Writers and artists are therefore subject to the limitations of the society of which they are members. The socio-political content of every artist's productions would have its caste, communal, party-

political and other limitations. This does not mean that they should not be allowed to write, sing and so on as they please. While they have perfect freedom to produce what they like, others have a similar right to criticize them. Only through criticism can they correct themselves and become better writers and artists.

3. Though Marx, Engels and Lenin have not produced separate works on Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, they have made references in their writings, notes, letters and so on which are a valuable addition to the literature applying dialectical and historical materialism to the problems of literature and arts. They look upon literature and the arts as an integral part of the development of human society, each individual in that society.

Basing themselves on the fundamental proposition that the ruling ideas of a particular epoch and a particular country are the ideas of the ruling classes, to which are opposed the ideas of the emerging but fighting classes; they consider literature and other forms of art as the manifestation of class struggle in the realm of ideas. Artistic and literary creation are thus part of class struggle—every artistic creation should be assessed in the light of this approach.

Class struggle, however should not have been seen in isolation from but together with all other aspects of social and individual human life. It is because of this that Marx, Engels and Lenin were able to see that there were outstanding writers who, despite their reactionary world outlook, could see the revolutionary world movement in the society that they were describing. Several pieces of advice that they gave in their letters and notes concerning the realistic appraisal of the situation that writers and artists described in their works constituted a basis for Marxian thought. These indeed are the guidelines on the basis of which subsequent masters of Marxian aesthetics like Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, Gorky and others developed the theory of Marxian aesthetics.

That the Marxists in Kerala began to make a similar application of Marx, Engels and Lenin's theory of aesthetics to the problems of literature and other arts in their State is the positive outcome of the debate that took place for over half a century and which still continues.

June 1, 1996

Centre-State Relations to the Fore

With the swearing-in of the Deve Gowda Government at the Centre, the struggle to recast Centre-State relations has gained added importance. For, there are two groups of parties in the United Front that are committed to the devolution of greater powers and greater financial resources by the Centre to the States.

First, there are the Left parties and the secular democratic parties such as the Janata Dal, which have been fighting against the Congress Government's policies of keeping all political and administrative power with the Centre and making the States powerless. They have been fighting also the basic policy of the BJP which is based on the Hindutva concept of a unitary Centre with the States reduced to the position of abject dependence on the Centre. The Hindutva forces have, in fact, been trying to impose their formula 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan'. The States would have stood to lose even more if the BJP were allowed to run the administration at the Centre.

Secondly, the United Front, which succeeded in throwing the Vajpayee Government out and in installing its own Government headed by the Janata Dal's H.D. Deve Gowda, has as its constituents such 'regional parties' as the DMK and the TMC in Tamil Nadu, the TDP in Andhra Pradesh and the AGP in Assam, which have now formed the Federal Front. Together with the Left and secular democratic forces that came together in what was known as the 'third force', these regional parties will launch a powerful campaign for the devolution of more and more power, more and more financial resources, more and more technical cadres, to implement the programme of decentralized development at the level of panchayats and other civic councils. This is a step directed against the policies of centralization pursued by the Congress on the one hand and the BJP on the other.

It is obvious that the perspective outlined by the constituents of the United Front whose Government has assumed office will require fundamental changes in the Indian Constitution. The Congress Government

had a highly centralized set-up, making the States thoroughly dependent on the Centre in every respect. The one-party rule of the Congress Party which continued for the first 30 years of free India and the basic approach adopted by the Central Government since the Congress monopoly of power was broken in 1977 ensured the continuation of the centralized constitutional set-up. Even the powers conferred on the States by the 1950 Constitution were taken away one by one by the Centre. The constitutional amendments made during the Emergency regime, even the administrative measures taken then, obliterated the federal character of India's political and administrative set-up.

Left and democratic parties like the CPI (M) and the CPI and regional parties like the DMK, the TDP and the AGP have been fighting these tendencies towards centralization of power. They have been drawing attention to the fact that the weakening of the States by the Congress and the other bourgeois parties at the Centre would weaken the Centre too. A strong Centre, they said, needed strong States.

As a matter of fact, even under the much-talked-about panchayati raj concept, the States are asked to devolve power to the panchayati raj institutions at various levels while the Centre keeps to itself all the powers that it enjoys. The CPI (M) has been demanding that there should be decentralization with the Centre devolving powers to the States and the States to the local bodies. The local institutions of democratic administration should be the basis on which a strong Centre is built up.

This is not to deny the need for a strong and powerful Centre. On the other hand, India's unity can be preserved, protected and strengthened only if the Centre is entrusted with necessary powers to discharge the essentials of a unified administration. Key subjects such as Defence, Foreign Affairs, Communications and the overall guidance to economic development should, no doubt, remain with the Centre. Only a strong and powerful Centre can discharge its responsibilities in relation to these subjects and maintain national unity, independence, sovereignty and communal cohesion.

This, however, does not mean that all the Ministries and 'Bhavans' that operate in Delhi should continue. On the other hand, subjects such as

agriculture, small-scale and cottage industries, education minus the running of research institutions catering to high-tech fields, medical and public health activities and so on should be completely transferred to the States and from them to the village panchayats and urban bodies, which alone can keep track of the needs and desires of the people in the villages, towns and cities.

Together with such a reformulation of the areas in which the Centre and the States operate, there should be a more rational approach to the coordination of the activities ' that are reserved for the States and the democratization of the manner in which the Centre discharges its tasks in relation to the subjects allotted to it.

To this end, it is suggested that coordinating bodies like the National Integration Council for the country as a whole, and similar bodies for the major subjects which are allotted to the States, should be formed. This will help the Central Government and Parliament to bring about such a coordination of the approaches and activities of State governments to which can be allotted important subjects like agriculture, small-scale and cottage industries, education and public health. There will be coordination at the national level, while the formulation and execution of policies will be left to the States.

In relation to subjects that are allotted to the Centre too, there is need for constant consultation and interaction between the Central and State governments. For while the responsibility of administration in these fields does and should rest with the Centre, the actual execution of policy in these fields requires the full consent and cooperation of the States. Supervision of the activities of the Centre by the representatives of the States, and supervision of the activities of the States by the democratic bodies at the Centre will help constant consultation and coordination of the activities of the Centre and the States.

An example of such consultations and coordination is provided, though in a very unsatisfactory manner, by the National Development Council, which is supposed to deal with the formulation and implementation of Five-Year Plans. Similar bodies also exist for different Central departments. They are, however, for the present ornamental bodies with no real power. They should be made functioning bodies.

This will mean that, while the Centre consults and takes the advice of State governments, the latter facilitate concerted action by the Centre. Such cooperation between the Centre and the States alone will make it possible that, while more and more powers are transferred from the Centre to the States, there are constant efforts to bring about a national coordination of activities even in the areas left to the State governments. In the areas reserved for the Centre too, there will be constant interaction between the Centre and the States, so that subjects left with the Centre are dealt with in accordance with the desires and aspirations of the people in the States.

Such uninterrupted consultation and interaction between Central and State administrative bodies will guarantee that the devolution of more and more powers from the Centre to the States and from the latter to the local bodies will lead to a strong Centre based on strong States.

It is to be hoped that joint action by the parties that have come together in the United Front under the auspices of the Deve Gowda Government will bring about a complete change in the situation in the country.

June 15, 1996

From Congress to Coalition

Indian Politics, 1952–1996

The swearing-in of the non-Congress, non-BJP Government headed by H.D. Deve Gowda and the publication of the Common Minimum Programme prepared by the 13-member United Front were a logical culmination of the political process that began during the first months of the attainment of Indian Independence.

Mahatma Gandhi was the first national leader to point his finger at the disastrous consequences of the Indian National Congress having been elevated to the position of the ruling party in the country. Disillusioned by the way in which non-Congress governments in the States were functioning and disappointed at the anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan attitude of Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Mahatma advised the Congress to disband itself and transform into a new Lok Sevak Sangh.

His insight into the consequences of yesterday's freedom fighters being turned into today's rulers was remarkable. But the limitations of his ideology prevented him from proposing an alternative. His own suggestion of a Lok Sevak Sangh was too idealistic and would not have worked even if his advice had been accepted.

Parallel to this was the evolution of the Communist Party of India, which, through a process of acute inner-party struggle, arrived at the conclusion that, instead of the Gandhian concept of Lok Sevak Sangh, there should be a unity and consolidation of the working people headed by the working class. The objective of such a unity of the toiling people, the party went on, should be the transformation of bourgeois democracy, inherent in Congress rule, into a people's democracy.

The Gandhian concept of a Lok Sevak Sangh was taken up and put into practice by Vinoba Bhave with his Bhoodan and Gram Dan movements appearing for a time to be an alternative to the Communist concept of transforming bourgeois democracy into people's democracy.

Those who subscribed to the Vinoba model, like Acharya Kripalani, formed, on the eve of the first general elections (1952), a new political party called the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. That party cooperated with the Communists in some parts of the country in fighting the Congress in the first general elections.

This combination of Gandhians and the Communists was able to win major victories in the then States of Travancore-Cochin and Madras, where the combination was on the point of becoming the ruling party after the first general elections. That possibility was scotched only because of the active intervention of the Rajapramukh of Travancore-Cochin and the Governor of Madras, who, under the obvious guidance of the Central Government, so manoeuvred things that Congress Governments were formed in both the States.

In a third State, PEPSU, where the Left movement was weak, the non-Congress Opposition was headed by the Akali party and an Akali Government was formed. In several other States of the North and the South, non-Congress parties with a rightist orientation based on casteism, communalism, regionalism and so on came to dominate the electoral scene. The dominant influence of the regional and linguistic forces represented by the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu were only balanced by the dominant position of the Left in the Kerala and Andhra areas of Madras.

The situation after the first general election was thus marked by the preponderant influence of rightist Opposition parties which came out to be a big force in the North Indian States. Only in West Bengal, Tripura and Hyderabad were the Left in a leading position in the non-Congress Opposition.

That election showed that the Congress was rapidly declining, but its position was taken up in a large part of the country by Right Opposition parties. However, the Left was also emerging as a major force in the South and in the East, which culminated in the emergence of the Communist Government of Kerala in 1957; the party was also the major Opposition in West Bengal and Tripura. However, the defeat of the Communist Party in the Andhra part of Madras in 1955 weakened the Left movement in the country as a whole, with Andhra being transformed from a strong fortress

of the Communist movement into an area of extreme weakness for the party.

The approach adopted by the ruling Congress Party to the Communist Government in Kerala—its combination of anti-Communist agitation and struggle from below and governmental action from above—created a sense of concern among the democratic sections of the people which made the Communist Party popular all over the country.

Together with the principled stand adopted by the Left segment of the Communist Party on the India-China border question, the uncompromising position adopted by the Left in the CPI towards the Congress made for a new, powerful movement of united struggle against the Congress. Although the differences between the Right and the Left in the CPI on the China question split the CPI as an organization and weakened the Left opposition to the Congress in the 1967 elections, the Congress was defeated and non-Congress governments were formed in more than half a dozen States, including West Bengal and Kerala where Left-led united front governments assumed office.

The non-Congress governments that came to power in 1967 were, however, mostly led by the parties of the Right Opposition to the Congress—the Akalis, the Jan Sangh and . even the Swatantra Party. In spite of these governments being dominated by rightist parties, the leftists extended support to them from outside; the CPI even joined the three Right-led State Governments of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, while the CPI (M) declined the offer, preferring to extend its support from outside.

However, all these State Governments that were formed in 1967, were brought down by the manipulations of the Congress. Only the Government in Tamil Nadu continued, while that in West Bengal remained for some time.

In West Bengal, the Congress in the 1970s, resorted to semi-fascist terror against the CPI (M) and its allies. That terror regime in West Bengal was the dress rehearsal for the Emergency regime.

The struggle against the Emergency regime once again united the non-Congress Opposition forces, culminating in the formation of the Janata

Party and its Government in which even the Jan Sangh was an active constituent. The CPI (M) did not have any hesitation in extending support to the Janata Party and its Central Government, although that party and government were rightist in political complexion. The CPI (M) in its Party Congress and Central Committee documents elaborated the strategy and tactics of fighting Right reactionary forces even while joining them in the struggle against Congress authoritarianism.

The more than two-year-long tenure of the Janata Party Government showed that communal and reactionary forces headed by the Hindutva reaction were raising their heads, the Jan Sangh, through its Ministers in the Janata Government, created a basis for Hindu reaction. Radical elements in the Janata Party as well as the leftists outside the Janata raised the question of some Janata Party members being simultaneously members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. On that question, the leftists and other radicals joined together and brought about the fall of the Janata Government.

A serious struggle ensued among the non-Congress parties on the question of approach to communal and divisive forces. There was a tendency in sections of the non-Congress Opposition to be soft towards communal and divisive forces. The CPI (M) to begin with, and other Left parties subsequently, took a firm stand against communalism.

This in fact led to an inner-party struggle in the CPI (M) itself in Kerala, where a group of CPI (M) leaders doggedly fought for a full united front with the Muslim League. That line, however, was opposed with determination, with the result that in the 1987 elections to the State Legislature, the CPI (M) and its allies came out with flying colours against the combination of caste and communal forces headed by the Congress.

This was followed by a formal resolution of the CPI (M) Party Congress which completely separated itself from the line of a united front with caste and communal forces. This uncompromisingly anti-communal and anti-caste political line of the CPI (M) was subsequently adopted by other secular forces, though in the beginning, many of them vacillated. By the 1996 general elections, however, this line had been adopted by the entire segment of Left, democratic and secular forces.

On the eve of the elections to the 11th Lok Sabha, the CPI (M) gave the call to 'bring the Narasimha Rao Congress Government down, prevent the BJP taking over the role of the Congress.' This call was endorsed by the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party and several regional parties. That was how the elections to the 11th Lok Sabha was fought and won, reducing the Congress to the position of the second party in the Lok Sabha.

Although the position of the first party in the Lok Sabha was taken by the BJP and its leader was invited by the President to form the government, that government was brought down and replaced by the combination of 13 Left, secular and regional parties. The Congress too for its own reasons, thought it better to join hands with the combination of Left, secular and regional parties in first throwing out the BJP Government and then in installing the United Front Government headed by Deve Gowda.

The culmination of this process was, in other words, a victory for democracy, secularism and national unity as well as for correct democratic relations between the Centre and the States. Being a combination of 13 parties, each of them having its own ideological and political positions, the maintenance of this combination is by no means easy. But keeping both the Congress and the BJP out of power is of utmost importance. Therefore every constituent of the 13-member United Front should show caution and prudence. Only then can the anti-Congress and anti-BJP unity be preserved and strengthened.

June 29, 1996

Resisting the CTBT

Imperialist Pressures Will Intensify

The immense pressure exerted on the Government of India by the United States did not work. India's representative at the Conference on Disarmament, Arundhati Ghose, declared that the country cannot accept the CTBT as it stands and that it is exercising its veto on the dispatch of the CTBT text to the United Nations.

This act is said to have 'isolated' India in the 'world community'. That of course is true. All the other countries have accepted the CTBT; though many of them have reservations, they decided, in the end, to go along with the majority.

India, however, is internally united on not accepting the CTBT; all parties represented in Parliament supported on the floor of the House the Government stand that a self-respecting India cannot accept the proposition that the five nuclear powers, while continuing to keep the heavy nuclear arms they have piled up, have a right to dictate to non-nuclear powers that no nuclear test should be conducted even for peaceful purposes.

While vetoing the CTBT in its present form India said it would gladly sign the document only if the five nuclear powers agree to a time-bound programme of destroying the stockpile of their nuclear arms. What India is objecting to, in other words, is the right of the nuclear monopoly powers to dictate to the non-nuclear powers regarding test ban. This is a stand that the Indian people have unanimously agreed with.

The reaction of the major nuclear power, the United States, was typical of the country which has ambitions of dominating the world. The U.S. contends that the elimination of the existing pile of nuclear arms is not 'practical'. If that is so, says India, the application of its ban treaty to non-nuclear powers is not practical.

India, it has been made clear, does not propose to produce nuclear arms now. It was one of the first countries that demanded universal disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, nearly four decades ago. India still sticks to the demand but, as a sovereign nation, it has an inherent right to acquire the know-how of nuclear arms so long as the five nuclear powers refuse to part with their huge pile of nuclear arms. All reasonable persons will agree that this is India's right as a sovereign nation.

In a typical reaction from a country that aspires to become the single dominant power in a nuclear world, the U.S. spokesman warned India that it would have to 'pay a price' for not 'falling in line' with the U.S.-dominated 'world community'. It is clear that the level of pressure exerted on India before it vetoed the CTBT will not only continue but will be intensified in the coming days. It is therefore obvious that India is in for days of trouble. The question is whether our people, their socio-political leaders, the ruling combination, the BJP Opposition, and the Congress (I) which extends formal support to but exercises tremendous pressure on the United Front Government, will show their determination to protect national self-interest, and whether the political leaders and the people will be prepared to face the troubles deliberately created by the imperialist world for the simple reason that India did not sign on the dotted line.

We are not unaware of the tremendous pressure put by the United States today on Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The people and the leaders in those countries have been bravely facing the troubles created by the U.S. embargo on Cuba and various other sorts of pressures on Korea. Apart from the national leaders who stood by the people of Korea and Cuba, many foreign countries are also extending cooperation to them.

We know the heroism which the people of Vietnam had to show against imperialism in order to protect their freedom and sovereignty. Before Vietnam, the Chinese people too had to face heavy odds since American imperialism was determined to beat them down. Earlier still, the people of the Soviet Union in the days of the Great Patriotic War faced heavy odds and saved their nation though millions of them had to sacrifice their valuable lives.

Even before the modern era of world socialism opened, the peoples living in various nations and belonging to various nationalities have sacrificed their lives for securing freedom and preserving and protecting the freedom they won. Human history, in other words, is a history of heroic struggles against the impediments put by imperialism.

It is clear now that if India refuses to be cowed down by the threats and pressures exerted by the U.S.-led nuclear powers, the people of India will have to undergo suffering as their sisters and brothers in other countries did when they stood up against a single aggressive power or a combination of aggressive powers.

It is good that the United Front Government headed by Deve Gowda, the BJP and the Congress (I) have come together to make it possible for India's representative at the Geneva conference to veto the CTBT. Are they, however, equally determined to face the consequences if U.S. imperialism forces India to 'pay the price', as stated by the U.S. spokesman? The question now arises because both the BJP and the Congress (I) are committed to the economic policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization—a formula dictated by the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization.

The Congress (I) claims that these economic policies have helped solve the serious crisis the country was facing when the Narasimha Rao Government took office. The BJP, which claims to be the major force that is successfully working towards becoming the next ruling party, is also committed to the policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization.

Even the Janata Dal and other 'centrist' forces that are participating in the Deve Gowda Government are vacillating on the question of the struggle against globalization, liberalization and privatization. While associating themselves with the Left parties, which are carrying on a consistent struggle against the economic policies dictated by U.S.-dominated world imperialism, the Janata Dal and other 'centrist' constituents of the 13-party United Front show great vacillation in the struggle against the anti-people and anti-national economic policies of the Narasimha Rao Government.

The firm stand adopted by the Deve Gowda Government on the CTBT, its firm decision to veto the imperialist-sponsored programme, is good so far it goes. However, unless it shows the same determination in relation to the economic policies, it will not be able to withstand the pressure exerted by imperialism with regard to the CTBT. The pressure exerted so far to prevent India from exercising the veto on the CTBT will be multiplied in the days to come. Progressive anti-imperialists should therefore be on guard to see that the Deve Gowda Government does not falter in the future. This is the mission that the Left constituents of the United Front have to carry out.

September 7, 1996

A Kerala Experiment

Planning from Below—and Above

In half a year from now, the Ninth Five-Year Plan will be inaugurated. As in other States of India, in Kerala too preparations for this have started. But there is a difference: for the first time in India the principle of ‘planning from below’, ‘planning with people’s participation’ is sought to be implemented. A committee for people’s participation in the process of planning has been set up. Gram sabhas in the rural areas and ward sabhas in the urban areas are now engaged in discussions. Men and women, young and old, are joining in the discussions on what they require, how much they themselves would contribute and other details of planning from below.

The Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government as well as the Opposition parties, together with non-party individuals, are in the field explaining to the people why they should not depend on ‘instructions’ from above and, instead, why they should do their own thinking and participate in the process of planning even at the State and Central levels. These discussions will be followed by seminars at the panchayat, block, district and urban body levels. The inputs from these bodies will then be integrated by the State Planning Board as material for the preparation of the State’s Ninth Five-Year Plan.

This process, however, requires as much planning from above as from below. For, the people below only know what they want; they do not have the know-how of the ways in which they can get what they want. This means that the State Government and the Planning Board working under it and other official and non-official agencies should educate the people on what the problems of the State as a whole are.

This is particularly so because, for historical reasons, Kerala is politically divided sharply into two formations—the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the LDF. Furthermore, the consciousness of the people is such that they do not understand the significance of production activities, their attention

being focused only on the social services sector. For the common man in Kerala, development means only more and more schools, more and more hospitals, more and more transport facilities and so on. They do not understand that although these are undoubtedly important, they cannot develop the State unless the productive sector—industries and agriculture in particular—is put on a healthy basis. The State Government and the Planning Board, therefore, are putting greater emphasis on industrial and agricultural production, on increasing productivity in both industry and agriculture. Technically competent personnel, socio-political activists, governmental agencies and so on should as much learn from the working people as they impart education in modern technologies of production.

The State Planning Board started with the training of State-level instructors—one camp in each district. The majority of the personnel selected from each district were nominated by the existing statutory District Planning Committees, and a small number was directly selected by the State Planning Board. Those who received training at these camps number 400.

These personnel were to organize similar camps for 6,000 district-level trainees. However, the total number of persons who were trained in the camp rose to 10,000. These instructors, in their turn, conducted local camps for 50,000 persons—at the rate of 40 for every panchayat—who trained a couple of instructors for every gram and ward level personnel. Such a massive campaign of training personnel for planning from below has never been attempted in this State.

It was after this preparatory work that the gram and ward sabhas were organized—a process which has only begun at the time of writing. From the experience of this writer who observed three gram sabhas, it is clear that the common people are active participants in the discussion not only on what they want but on what contributions they can make in the development of their area.

Although prepared by the LDF Government and the State Planning Board, the movement has had the unanimous support of all political parties, of socio-political organizations and of independent individuals. A broad-based Committee that has been organizing this massive campaign has on it all the former Chief Ministers of the State—one as the chairman and the

others as vice-chairman—and also three well-known independent individuals—Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, Sukumar Azhikode and Dr. K.N. Raj.

Furthermore, it has as its members all MLAs and MPs from the State (including the single BJP MP, who has been elected from Madhya Pradesh), functionaries of all major political parties and socio-cultural organizations, and independent individuals in the State. Every one of them is unanimous that this is a laudable project, though many had their reservations on the practical working of the project.

This does not mean that the political polarization between the LDF and the UDF has been overcome. On the other hand, at the very time when work in connection with people's planning was actively going on, there was continuous confrontation between the ruling and Opposition coalitions in the Assembly. Leaders of the UDF are also making hectic preparations to defeat the LDF candidates in the two by-elections to the State Assembly. Nobody has the illusion that the UDF will give up its struggle against the LDF Government. The fact, however, remains that the two combinations have come together on this single issue of making local bodies work for developmental activities. This augurs well for the politics of the State.

It should be recalled that politics in the State has remained polarized ever since the first Communist Government was installed in office in 1957. In election after election since then, either one or the other combination secured a majority in the Assembly and formed the Government, but the victory was with a small margin of 2 to 3 per cent of the vote. Even in the recent elections to the 10th Legislature, the LDF won with a small majority. How to build a bridge between the two contesting combinations has therefore been the principal question in Kerala politics.

The merit of the people's campaign for planning from below is that there is a growing realization that there is something more important for the two combinations than contesting for ministerial offices. The much-lauded 'Kerala model' of economic development has put the State in such a situation that it has to depend on other States of India and even other countries for almost all its requirements including rice, the staple diet of the people, and such articles of daily use as vegetables, fruits and milk products. This situation exists despite the fact that the natural resources of the State are

such that it cannot only be self-sufficient in all articles of daily consumption but export them.

The unfortunate fact is that the vast natural resources of the State remain untapped, agricultural land is turned into non-agricultural land and human (labour) resources that can be used for increasing production and productivity in the State are being exported to the Gulf and other foreign countries. The State has immense resources by way of technical knowledge stored in numerous research institutions. The question is how to bring the untapped material resources together with the immense manpower that the State is forced to export.

The solution to this problem requires a complete re-education of the mass mind—educating the masses on the crucial importance of increasing production and productivity, integrating the mass of trained and non-trained labour with the immense store of know-how of the research institutions. Quantitative increase in the production of material values and qualitative improvement in the products that are turned out from land and factories—this is the essence of the socio-economic and political problem in Kerala.

Very much, of course, depends on the shape of the Ninth Five-Year Plan at the national level. Will it start the process of ending the dependence on the globalization process, the privatization and liberalization policies of the Narasimha Rao Government which, by and large, are being continued by the present Deve Gowda Government? The people and the Government of Kerala have, of course, to fight for a reversal of policies at the level of the Central Government.

But, now that the Government in Kerala is headed by the Left Democratic combination and the majority of the panchayat raj institutions and urban bodies are controlled by the LDF, there is every possibility that a modest beginning can be made by way of restructuring the socio-economic development of the State. It will also help the beginning of a political process through which the two combinations in the State come together to solve the common problems. That is the modest aim with which the LDF Government and the State Planning Board have formulated and are

implementing their programme of people's campaign for the local-bodies-oriented Ninth Five-Year Plan.

October 5, 1996

People's Plan

The Why and How of a Massive Exercise in Kerala

In July 1996, the Government of Kerala launched the 'People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan'. Since it was a novel idea, very few people could understand what it was, why it was necessary and how it would be carried out. Furthermore, since the Government is being led by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) headed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), various motives were attributed to the project and reckless criticisms were advanced.

One of the criticisms was that the 'People's campaign for the Ninth Plan' is calculated to bypass the elected panchayats. The Guidance Committee headed by this writer (in his capacity as the first Chief Minister of Kerala) was denounced as a parallel organization designed by the CPI (M) to serve its own interests. The Leader of the Opposition, A. K. Antony, said that while he generally welcomed the project, he had serious doubts about how it would work. The Coordination Committee of the United Democratic Front (UDF) denounced the project and said that it would bypass the elected panchayats. Allegations were also made that those selected to carry out the project were CPI (M) cadres and that they would divert large amounts of money from the government to the party.

That these criticisms and denunciations were baseless has now been proved by the fact that the elected panchayats (which are supposed to have been sidelined by the project) have started preparing the plans for their respective panchayats. While it has been announced that this process will be over by November-end, I have before me the project reports of seven panchayats in five districts—Peelicode in Kasaragode, Anthur and Mayyil in Kannur, Vallikunnu in Malappuram, Thirumittacode in Palakkad, Madakkathara and Kaiparambu in Thrissur. Work is in progress in other panchayats also. It will not be surprising if at least 50 per cent of the 1,000 panchayats are covered.

Prepared as they are on the basis of discussions held earlier at the State, district and panchayat levels, the documents have a general pattern. Beginning with a description of the geographical and other features of the panchayat, they give the history of the panchayat as is known traditionally, elaborate on the various sectors of socio-economic activity in the panchayat (agriculture and irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, industries, education, drinking water, transport, energy, market, social welfare, housing, culture, women, cooperation, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) and detail the resources available for the development plan. This is the format of all the seven documents that I have seen so far. The material collected and the conclusions drawn are such that one would wonder whether the work was done by post-graduates or research scholars.

How was this possible? The answer is that the State Planning Board with the Chief Minister as the Chairman had a clear perspective that a break should be made from the traditional method of formulating a Five-Year Plan. The Board decided that the Plan should no longer be a collection of documents prepared by different State departments, which would be mechanically carried out in every panchayat, without any role for the people living in the panchayats in either preparing or implementing the Plan. In the Ninth Plan, the initial work is being done at the panchayat level, or rather at the gram sabha level in rural areas and at the ward level in urban areas. At the meetings of the gram sabhas and ward sabhas, participants air their grievances and suggest measures to redress these. It is on the basis of these meetings that the panchayats prepare integrated plans at their level.

The seven documents mentioned earlier are drafts that will be discussed and finalized by the panchayats. The panchayat or the urban body plans are then integrated into the district and State plans. It was made clear initially that 40 per cent of the State's outlay for developmental activities would be set apart for the panchayats and urban bodies. Furthermore, the panchayats and urban bodies are expected to raise their own resources—in cash and in kind, as well as by way of *shramdan*—for the implementation of the plan.

This, therefore, is the real people's plan as opposed to the eight Five-Year Plans that have been prepared and implemented by bureaucrats. The

panchayats and the urban bodies, the basic units of a decentralized democracy, are the basis on which the State Plan is ultimately formulated.

This requires a good deal of organizational work at the State and district levels—mobilizing an immense number of voluntary workers, teaching the elected panchayats the elements of planning, and so on. For this, an elaborate mechanism has been set up:

(a) At the top level, nearly 400 voluntary workers are selected, three-fourths of them by the statutory District Government Committee and the rest by the State Planning Board.

(b) These State-level voluntary workers train about 1,000 persons in each district.

(c) The State and district level personnel impart training to approximately 1,000 persons from each panchayat.

(d) Going further down, the panchayat-level personnel organize and lead discussions in the gram/ward sabhas. The latter are the forums where, in approximately 12 different sectors, the people air their grievances and suggest remedies.

The entire process involves several lakhs of persons from the State-level camps to the gram and ward sabhas. Identification of the people's problems in each gram sabha and ward sabha area, is, however, only the beginning of the plan process, which is supplemented by socio-economic surveys (a few panchayats have already conducted these surveys). Squads of two or three people visit various government offices and collect the relevant data. (The Government has issued instructions to officials to give them whatever data is available.)

The data is then rechecked with the experience of the segments of the population concerned. Selected persons are interviewed on the history and culture of the panchayat. The squads who go around the panchayats collecting information also prepare maps showing the roads, streams and canals in the panchayat areas; they also note down obvious deficiencies. Experts like doctors, engineers and technicians, those in service and those who have retired, are also involved in this process.

The entire exercise is aimed at collecting as much material as possible on the conditions prevailing in the panchayats and preparing reports. The reports are scrutinized and definite schemes prepared for every sector in the panchayat and urban wards. The schemes for each sector will then be integrated and the panchayat plan finalized.

Mobilizing training personnel in such large numbers for preparing a plan, bringing together the technical personnel, both from the government services and outside, and integrating their expertise with the common aspirations of the working people have never been attempted in Kerala before.

But, as is clear from the seven documents mentioned earlier and the others that are being prepared, this immense organizational work has paid dividends. The elected panchayats and urban bodies are not sidelined but are helped with technical advice. Laymen who constitute the bulk of panchayats and urban body members get assistance from a large number of technical personnel and socio-political activists.

It goes to the credit of the Kerala Government and the State Planning Board that work of such magnitude involving so many staff members has been carried out and has yielded extremely valuable reports.

November 30, 1996

Empowering Women

The Need to Fight Male Chauvinism

In a bold move towards bringing about equality between men and women, the H.D. Deve Gowda Government prepared a Bill that reserved 33 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha and the State legislatures for women. This was welcomed by the democratic movement in general and the Left and secular democratic forces in particular.

After the Bill went through the first reading in the Lok Sabha, it was referred to a joint select committee. The committee, after discussing the Bill, submitted its report to the Lok Sabha. However, it seems that male chauvinists in the Lok Sabha do not want the Bill to become law. If one were to go by press reports, no less than 80 MPs belonging to the Treasury and Opposition benches (except the Left Front MPs) submitted a memorandum to the Government requesting that the Bill not be passed into law.

The initiators of this move have raised the question of reservation for Other Backward Classes, as if the Constitution does not lay down rules for reservation, as if the principle of reservation was being introduced for the first time in the Lok Sabha and State legislatures.

To put matters in the right perspective, let us recall that in the prolonged discussions on the British Government's decision to transfer power to the elected representatives of the Indian people, the Muslim League put forward a demand for separate electorate for the Muslim community. This was accepted by the British Government as early as the first decade of the present century.

This demand was followed by another that communities such as the Depressed Classes (later called Harijans) should be given reservation. Similar demands arose from Anglo-Indians and other communities for separate election to the legislative bodies and for jobs in government service.

In the two Round Table Conferences of 1930 and 1931 the battle for separate electorates was fought. As the communities could not come to an agreement among themselves, the British Government gave an award that separate electorates be provided for several communities, including Muslims, Christians, the Depressed Classes and so on.

When the British Government's award was given, Mahatma Gandhi was in jail. He raised his voice against separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes but did not consider it prudent to oppose separate electorates for other communities. In a letter to the authorities, he gave notice that he would resist with his life the imposition of separate electorate on the Depressed Classes. He went on a hunger strike when parleys began in jail and outside among the leaders of the different communities for whom separate electorates were provided for in the British Government's award. These parleys ended in an agreement that, in the case of the Depressed Classes, seats would be reserved for them but there will be no separate electorate. The Depressed Classes or the Scheduled Castes were given larger quantities of seats—not through separate electorates but through reservation.

Only those who belonged to the Depressed Classes could contest the seats reserved for them, but they had the right to vote for the reserved as well as general candidates. This formula had two advantages: first, the Depressed Classes would get a larger proportion of seats than was provided for them in the British Government's award and, secondly, all the voters in the constituency would have the right to vote for the candidates contesting the reserved as well as general constituencies. There was a net gain for Gandhi's idea: while the Depressed Classes would be assured of a minimum number of seats in which their candidates would be elected, the candidates for both the general and reserved seats would be elected by the entire electorate, including the Depressed Class voters.

Even at that stage, Mahatma Gandhi did not consider it prudent to put this concept into practice in relation to Muslims and other communities. However, after the British rulers quit India and the Indian Union was formed as an independent state, the founding fathers of the Constitution of the new state decided to abolish separate electorates for communities. There

were to be reserved constituencies as well as general constituencies. It was also provided for in the Constitution that State Governments and legislatures will have the right to apply the principle of reservation in relation to government jobs.

Some provinces, such as the composite State of Madras, Travancore, Cochin and Bombay, already had reserved seats in government service before the Constitution was framed. These States were allowed to continue the practice; other States were also empowered to provide reservation in government jobs.

In the composite State of Madras, Moplahs in the Malabar district were included among the communities entitled for the reservation of seats in government service. When the Malabar district in the composite State of Madras and the two princely States of Travancore and Cochin were merged to form Kerala, the Communist Government of the new State provided for reservation in government jobs for Muslim Moplahs as well as the others all over the State. Kerala thus became the first State where Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes as well as Muslims were given reservation in government jobs; even the Latin Christians and Backward Class Christians enjoyed the facility.

Even in Kerala the principle of reservation was not applied in the State legislature. The question of a separate electorate for any community did not arise. The situation in the country therefore is that while there is reservation for definite communities in some of the States including Kerala, there is no reservation either for Parliament or for State legislatures. There is a common electoral list in which voters belonging to all castes and communities are included and any voter, regardless of the community to which he or she belongs, has the right to exercise his or her franchise. This is the system that prevails in the country now. The question of changing this system to have separate electorates or reservation for certain communities is entirely a separate one.

Those who try to mix this question with the question of empowering women by providing them with reservation of seats in Parliament and in the State legislatures are spokespersons for male chauvinism. They want to sabotage the broadly welcomed proposal to get 33 per cent of the seats in

legislative bodies reserved for women. One can well understand if some people want to raise the question of reserving seats in legislative bodies for backward classes, but they must raise the issue separately. To insist on reservation for communities as a condition for empowering women is nothing but male chauvinism.

In this connection one must bear in mind that male chauvinism is active in several forms in the country. Bride-burning is becoming more and more common. Women in many families are harassed for large amounts of dowry. Beating women or harassing them in other ways is becoming increasingly common. Hindu women after the death of their husbands are desperate. In Rajasthan sati is being glorified. To what an extent has male chauvinism gone!

Against such male chauvinist practices, large sections of women and progressive men are organizing themselves. Their sentiments and views are reflected in the proposal made by the Deve Gowda Government to empower women by providing for 33 per cent reservation in the Lok Sabha and State legislatures. It is against this that a concerted move has been made by the male chauvinists in every political formation except the Left. That is why the battle for empowering women has become an integral part of the developing Left and democratic movement.

December 28, 1996

Inner-Party Democracy

The Contrast between the Congress and the CPI (M)

The reported request of Congress president Sitaram Kesri to the Election Commission that his party may be permitted to postpone its organizational elections throws a flood of light on the nature of the crisis into which the Congress has fallen. This should be read with the consistent propaganda carried on by Congress leaders that it is the 'Congress tradition' to have 'unanimous elections' and that it is contrary to the party practice to have 'contesting elections'. No party that has faith in the democratic consciousness of its membership at large would fear election and ask an outside body (like the Election Commission) to fix the date of or otherwise conduct its elections.

This is in marked contrast to the CPI (M) and other parties of the working class for which elections are part of the normal day-to-day democratic functioning of the party. Take the instance of the CPI (M). Ever since its formation in 1964, it has held its congresses regularly, every three to four years. The seventh congress of the Communist Party of India (which was the first CPI (M) congress) was held in 1964 and the subsequent ones were held in 1968, 1972 and, after a break during Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime, in 1978, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1992 and 1995.

Party congresses elect the Central Committee, which in turn elects the Polit Bureau. Preceding party congresses, the State, district, local and branch conferences elect the corresponding committees of the party. Each of these conferences (including the all-India Congress) makes a review of the developments since the last party conference and elects a new committee and delegates for the next higher-level conference. The delegates elected at lower-level conferences meet at the higher-level conference.

Political discussions are held to review the developments since the previous conference and resolutions are adopted on the political-tactical line of the party. This means that not only are elections held regularly but

political review discussions are also held. For the CPI (M), therefore, it is not a question of fixing dates and conducting organizational elections but of systematic functioning of the party as part of which organizational elections are held.

This system of regular elections is based on the party constitution, which guarantees internal democratic rights of all party members to:

(a) express freely and frankly their views on political issues and to criticize any party functionary, even one at the highest level;

(b) receive from the leadership replies to questions and criticisms raised by the lower level units of the organization;

(c) criticize freely and frankly, at every level of the conference, the life and activities of the members and the leadership on the basis of which the outgoing committee selects the names for a panel to be presented before the conference for election of the new committee;

(d) criticize the name of any comrade included in the panel and to demand that the name of such a person be removed from the panel;

(e) free and fair election at the end of this widespread criticism and self-criticism;

(f) special inner-party discussions on occasions when new developments take place or when there are serious differences among the leading committees on questions of policy (such discussions are held systematically in the entire party and concluded by the appropriate committee., the decisions made binding on all party members);

(g) pre-congress discussions in the entire party (down to the branch) on a draft political resolution for presentation at the party congress in which any unit or member of the party can give his or her views and make criticisms, which are taken into account and answered by the Central Committee when the draft resolution is presented at the congress.

Therefore full inner-party democracy is practiced all the time, not merely in connection with the so-called 'organizational elections'. Nor is there any question of the party tolerating (not to speak of requesting) the

intervention of the Election Commission in the matter of organizational elections.

This is the practice not only in the CPI (M) but in other Marxist-Leninist parties as well. It is a matter of principle for the party of the working class that continuous and systematic discussions are held at all levels of the party on questions of ideology, politics and assessment of individual leaders, selection and removal of the leading comrades of the party, and so on. As Marx, Engels and Lenin have clearly pointed out, the internal organizational unity of the party is based on constant and continuous discussions on ideological political questions.

For a bourgeois party like the Congress and other bourgeois parties like the BJP, the internal organizational set-up is not based on ideological and political unity. Ideological political questions are decided by a narrow clique at the top. For the members of proletarian parties, on the other hand, frank and fearless criticism is an integral part of maintaining their ideological, political and organizational unity.

For the Congress and other bourgeois parties, again, 'organizational elections' are a question of manoeuvring by leading personalities with a view to keeping themselves in or to get on to seats of power.

The modern Chanakya of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, and his successor Sitaram Kesri have proved themselves to be experts in organizational intrigues. Having come to occupy the dual positions of Congress president and the country's Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao used the two positions (to which he was elected by the chance phenomenon of the assassination of his predecessor) to keep himself in power for a full five years.

Kesri, too, is now using the position to which he was first elevated (the provisional president of the Congress) to consolidate his position in the organization and to indulge in intrigues to get elected as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. To this end, he gave currency to the theory that it is in the 'tradition' of the Congress to have unanimous elections. The idea is that when he contests for the post of the CPP leadership, there should be no rival candidate; that like his predecessor he should also come to occupy the two highest posts, Congress president and leader of the CPP, the

latter to enable him to become Prime Minister if and when the occasion arises.

On questions of ideology and politics, there is no difference at all between a Narasimha Rao and a Sitaram Kesri, nor between the latter and a Sharad Pawar or a Rajesh Pilot. They all agree that the Indian economy should be thrown wide open to international monopoly capital, that India should lose her national freedom and sovereignty, that in internal politics, there should be opportunistic combinations with caste and communal outfits like Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party or the Advani-Vajpayee BJP, that the principled struggle waged by the Left and democratic parties and the unity of the Left and secular democratic forces should be opposed with political opportunism.

They agree on all these ideological and political questions, but differ on who should have the opportunity to wield power—Narasimha Rao, Kesri, Sharad Pawar, Rajesh Pilot and others. It is a question of merely jockeying for power among the top leaders of the party.

Such politics of personal and factional aggrandisement was virtually absent when the Congress was fighting for Independence. It was the fight against imperialism that enabled Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues to keep the party together till August 15, 1947. However, as soon as the British leaders left Indian shores, elevating Congress leaders to the seats of power, conflict and contradictions arose among them on the question of who will take what share of the cake.

In the immediate post-Independence weeks, Mahatma Gandhi learnt that his most loyal colleagues who became the new rulers of the country started bickering among themselves on the question of taking the best plum from the newly-acquired power cake.

He, however, had no inspiring ideal to replace what existed earlier—the people's aspiration to become free from British rule. He could not offer anything better than the highly impracticable Panchayati Raj where there would no unity of the Indian people on a programme of building a new democratic and secular India. In desperation, therefore, he advised the Congress to disband itself as a political organization.

It was the Communist and other parties of the Left that offered a new perspective—of building a new people's democratic India on the basis of struggle against imperialism, feudalism and Indian monopoly capital. These Left parties in fact offered a new democratic version of the ideal and objective which inspired the millions in the years of freedom struggle.

That is why the Left and democratic parties were able to give the slogan of removing the Congress from its monopoly of power. The struggle which they unleashed in 1951 has now culminated in the removal of the Congress from power, while preventing the BJP from taking the place of the Congress. However, while registering this advance in the political field, the Left parties led by the CPI (M) are conscious of the need for a continuous struggle against the evils of parliamentary opportunism. Using parliamentary institutions, including the formation of ministries, for strengthening mass organizations and struggles for which there should be full internal freedom within the party on the basis of democratic centralism—this is the ideological and political basis on which the organizational unity of Left parties is built.

Hence the policy of the CPI (M) and other Marxist-Leninist parties to establish full inner-party democracy with a highly centralized leadership at the top.

The Congress and other bourgeois parties are unable to find solutions for their ideological, political and organizational problems. The Kesri Congress, like the Narasimha Rao Congress earlier, is caught in a crisis which does not make it possible for it to have internal democracy. Hence Sitaram Kesri's call for a consensus election—in his favour.

January 11, 1997

A Settled Matter

The CPI (M)'s Position on Participation in the Deve Gowda Government

Following a press interview by Jyoti Basu, the Indian press began speculating on 'serious differences' in the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on participation in the Deve Gowda Government. It was even mentioned that the party leadership would organize a special plenum to discuss and settle the issue.

Actually, however, the issue was settled and closed when, in May last year, after serious discussions the CPI (M) Central Committee took a majority decision against participation. As Jyoti Basu himself stated, he was in a minority in that discussion and voting. In accordance with the party constitution, the minority is bound to accept the majority decision. If anybody in the minority desires to reopen the issue, that can be done only in one of two ways:

a) Demand an inner-party discussion that will be granted if there is considerable support in the party, that is, if party units representing a particular proportion of party membership demand such a discussion.

b) Raise the issue as part of the pre-Party Congress discussions when the next Party Congress is held.

These being the only two ways in which the minority can reopen the issue, it has to accept for the time being the decision of the majority.

This constitutional position however does not answer the basic question whether the developments of the last eight months warrant any reopening of the question. After all, when the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee arrived at the decision by a majority against participation, it had a particular assessment of the political situation. Has that changed in the last eight months? This is the real issue.

The Polit Bureau and the Central Committee positively assessed the Deve Gowda Government, which was a coalition of the Left, secular-democratic and regional parties, committed to the struggle against the Congress(I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The objective was to keep the two parties out of political power; hence the support extended to the Deve Gowda Government.

This, however, did not mean that there was no negative element in the character and role of the Deve Gowda Government. In fact, on questions of foreign policy and domestic economic policy, there was virtually no difference between the Narasimha Rao Government and the Deve Gowda Government. That is why the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee decided that the support extended to the Deve Gowda Government should be from outside and not inside. While the party was interested in rebuffing all attacks launched by the BJP and the Congress (I) against the Deve Gowda Government, it reserved for itself the right to fight those policies of the Deve Gowda Government that were a continuation of the policies of the Narasimha Rao Government. That was why during the last eight months the CPI (M), along with other Left democratic parties, carried on an independent campaign against the foreign policy and the domestic economic policy of the Deve Gowda Government. On several issues of foreign policy and domestic economic policy, the CPI (M) joins other Left and democratic parties in demarcating itself from the policies of the Deve Gowda Government.

It is necessary in this connection to note that Marxist-Leninists have always been making a distinction between extending support to a non-Left Government and joining it. The lead for this was, in fact, given by Frederick Engels in the 1880s when the Italian Revolution so developed that a revolutionary government headed by the non-working class parties might be formed and a few seats might be offered to the party of the Italian working class. The Italian comrades sought Engels' advice on whether this offer should be accepted or not.

Answering them, Engels wrote an article that was published in the Italian Press. That is reproduced in the Selected Works of Marx and Engels published in Moscow. A careful study of that article would show the

remarkable clarity with which the co-author of dialectical and historical materialism was anxious to preserve the independent identity of the party of the working class, while helping the process of development of the common revolutionary movement. He made two points:

First, he would not veto participation, provided it helped the development of the revolutionary movement. This was a question that he left to the Italian comrades who were the people on the spot.

Second, he was sure that if the seats were offered under the circumstances, the party would be a minority partner in a bourgeois-dominated government. That, he pointed out, was a real danger.

He was, in other words, not dogmatically opposed to participation but, from a practical point of view, cautious of the danger of the party of the working class joining as a junior partner in a bourgeois-dominated coalition government. In order to emphasize this point, Engels gave an example from the French Revolution of 1848. The Socialists were then offered seats in the Government and they accepted them. The result was that, for all the anti-people policies pursued by the bourgeois-dominated government, the French people held the Socialists responsible. This, Engels warned, might be the fate of the Italian party if it agreed to participate as a minority in the bourgeois-dominated government. In other words, Engels was not dogmatically vetoing participation but giving caution regarding the pitfalls of participation in a bourgeois-dominated government.

This non-dogmatic but cautious position regarding participation in governments has been consistently adopted by India's Communist movement in the post-Independence years.

1. In the early 1950s, the then united Communist Party of India decided to participate in the general elections. It placed before the electorate the task of breaking the monopoly power of the Congress, unifying all the Left and democratic parties in a common front. It registered remarkable victories. While it became the major Opposition party in Parliament and in some State legislatures, it was close to becoming the ruling party in the then States of Travancore-Cochin and Madras.

2. In the 1957 election, the party was voted to power in one State, Kerala. Without any hesitation, the party formed the Government and brought about important legislative and administrative measures that strengthened the democratic movement and created goodwill among the people not only in Kerala but throughout India. That Government, however, was thrown out of power not through an adverse vote in the legislature but through the unconstitutional direct action organized by the Congress and its allies. The State Government was dismissed by the Central Government.

3. A decade later, in 1967, coalitions headed by the CPI (M) and including the Communist Party of India (CPI) were voted into office in Kerala and West Bengal. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, Governments headed by non-Left parties came to be formed. The Left parties including the CPI (M) and the CPI decided to support all these Governments. There was, however, a difference on participation between the CPI (M) and the CPI. While the CPI (M) decided to extend support to all these non-Congress Governments from outside, the CPI opted for participation in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It is worth mentioning here that the CPI, which joined non-Congress Governments in three States in 1967, agreed in 1969 to head a Government of which one of the coalition partners was the Congress. That cooperation with the Congress finally led it to extend support to Indira Gandhi's authoritarian regime.

4. In 1977, the first non-Congress Government was formed at the Centre with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister. The CPI (M) decided to extend support to it from outside but not to join it. The CPI, on the other hand, opposed this non-Congress Government.

5. The fact that the CPI (M) gave support to the Morarji Desai Government however did not prevent the party from fighting the reactionary policies pursued by that Government. The party's fire was directed against the reactionary and communal components of the Janata Party and its Government, including the Jan Sangh. This culminated in the joining together of the CPI (M) and the CPI and other Left parties in voting the Morarji Desai Government out of power.

6. A question, meanwhile, arose on the attitude to be adopted towards such non-Congress parties as are based on communal reaction. On this question, the CPI (M) adopted a realistic policy. Its support to the Morarji Desai Government was in spite of the fact that one of its partners was the reactionary communal Jan Sangh. At the same time, in Kerala, the CPI (M) headed a State Government in which the Muslim League was a partner. The party however was careful to preserve its identity and fight the communalism of the majority as well as the minority. That was how the party came to be identified with the struggle against the Jan Sangh (the present BJP) at the national level and the Muslim League in Kerala. Whatever tactical arrangements were made either with the Jan Sangh at the national level or with the Muslim League in Kerala was without prejudice to the principled struggle against the majority as well as minority communalism. That was how, by the 1980s and the 1990s, the CPI (M) emerged as the most significant force in the struggle against the authoritarian Congress (I) on the one hand and majority and minority communalism on the other.

7. In the course of this struggle, the V.P. Singh Government emerged at the Centre. This was a minority Government that could remain in office only with the support of the BJP on the one hand and the CPI (M) on the other. We proposed to V.P. Singh—and the proposal was accepted—that we would keep out of office but that the BJP too should be kept out of office.

8. The consistent struggle against the Congress (I) and its major adversary, majority and minority communalism, culminated in 1996 in the formation of the Deve Gowda Government. Hence, the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee of the CPI (M) decided that the party would extend support from outside but not join the Government.

That, of course, was a majority decision with a significant minority including Jyoti Basu and Harkishan Singh Surjeet. But as Jyoti Basu has made it clear, the majority decision is binding on the minority. Those who desire any change in the decision should resort to either one of the two measures mentioned earlier—demand an inner-party discussion or wait for the next party congress when the whole question could be reviewed. That was why when the reports of Jyoti Basu's interview appeared, the Polit

Bureau commented that non-participation in the Government under the present circumstances was a settled and closed question.

January 25, 1997

Netaji's Way

Subhas Bose's Contribution to the Freedom Struggle

The centenary year of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose provides an appropriate occasion to make an objective assessment of Netaji the man, and his contributions to India's freedom struggle.

Born in Bengal, one of the cradles of India's revolutionary movement, Subhas Chandra Bose was a leftist from the very beginning of his political career. His sympathies lay with those revolutionaries who were denounced as 'terrorists' because their revolutionary activities were a part of India's freedom struggle. He had no patience either with the old 'liberals' or with such mass leaders as Mahatma Gandhi. The latter were opposed to any revolutionary action and advocated complete non-violence.

Beginning as a young Congressman in the early 1920s, Subhas Bose rose to become a recognized leader of young members of the party in Bengal. By the end of the 1920s, he was one of the leaders of left-wing Congressmen who opposed those right-wing Congressmen who were satisfied with a form of swaraj for India as in the dominions of the British Empire. Like other leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, he championed the cause of complete independence, or severance of all connections with the British Empire.

In the early 1930s, when a controversy raged in the Congress over the question of the Congress accepting ministerial office after the 1937 elections in the provincial legislatures, he was one of the top leaders of the committee that organized a campaign against the party accepting office. This led him in the final years of the 1930s to expose the right-wing leaders of the Congress who, after getting into seats of power in the provinces, used those vantage positions to enter into negotiations with the British rulers on the transfer of power from Britain to India. That was the central issue on which he contested for the post of Congress president in 1939. In a pitched battle, he defeated the right-wing Congressmen's candidate, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. He was, however, manoeuvred out of office by the right-wing leaders headed

by Mahatma Gandhi: he was not only forced to resign from the post but expelled from the Congress.

That was immediately before the Second World War in which Britain, among other imperialist powers, stood opposed to the fascist powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. The right-wing Congress leaders led by Mahatma Gandhi used that opportunity to put pressure on the British to start negotiations for the transfer of power.

Subhas Bose, however, had another strategy. He took the help of Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and militarist Japan with whose assistance the Indian National Army (INA) was formed to free the country from British rule. Here, therefore, were two strategies. One was to enter into negotiations with the British rulers for the transfer of power, the strategy adopted by right-wing leaders led by Mahatma Gandhi. The other was to use Britain's adversity as India's opportunity by seeking assistance from the fascist powers.

The anti-war agitation and mass or individual civil disobedience action adopted by the right-wing leaders culminated in the Quit India Movement. Although it electrified the country and brought tens of thousands of people into militant action against the British rulers, its leadership was bent on using the opportunity to start negotiations with the British rulers. The actual negotiations, however, started only after the Quit India Movement was completely suppressed and Britain, with its allies, won the Second World War. The Quit India Movement saw the Congress leadership heading the freedom movement but also beheading it. On the other hand, Subhas Bose's strategy ended in the formation of the INA in Japanese-occupied Asian lands.

Although it was formed and it functioned with direct material and moral assistance from the Japanese militarists, the INA was a genuinely national organization. It was the embodiment of national unity among the various communities of India and had patriotic national symbols.

It was as the commander-in-chief or Netaji of the INA that Subhas Chandra Bose gave the call, 'Delhi chalo'. Former soldiers of the British-organized Indian Army and civilians living in the Japanese-occupied Asian

lands flocked to the INA with the genuine belief that their Japanese friends were helping them in the achievement of the national objective of India's freedom. Unfortunately for them, however, they were faced with a more powerful British Army which defeated them in battle. The officers and men of the INA were taken prisoners, and their Netaji himself was killed in an air crash.

The British rulers were thus elated at this victory against two antagonists—the organizers of the Quit India Movement and the officers and men of the INA. Their major adversary, the Indian National Congress, was forced to come to the negotiating table where the British could set the Muslim League and the Congress against each other.

In preparation for the final 'settlement' dividing India into a Muslim-majority Pakistan and a non-Muslim majority Indian Union, the British rulers manoeuvred the Congress and the League into a provisional government of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader and the Muslim League's Liaqat Ali Khan the deputy leader. The very composition of the interim government and the protracted negotiations on the terms of the transfer of power were so manoeuvred that the Muslim League's call to the British 'to divide and quit India' was met.

While the negotiations were going on, the Indian people were stirred by memories of both the Congress-led Quit India Movement and the united campaign for the release of the INA prisoners who were detained in various Indian jails. The trial of INA officers and men saw people, cutting across communal and political barriers, coming on to the streets in defence of the INA prisoners. Netaji's call, 'Delhi chalo', became as powerful as the Mahatma's call, 'Do or die'. The two streams of India's freedom movement, shaped by Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Bose respectively, merged into one. The Indian people, who were earlier stirred by the Mahatma's 'Do or die' and Netaji's 'Delhi chalo' slogans, formed a single political force that put pressure on the British rulers to give up their obstinacy and ultimately transfer power.

The demand of the Indian people for the release of the INA prisoners stirred the officers and men of the armed forces organized and led by British officers. The Royal Indian Navy (RIN), quartered in Bombay and other port cities, raised the banner of revolt against discrimination on the basis of the

colour of the skin, and this became integrated with the people's determination to force the British rulers to quit India. In a significant move, the rebel officers and men of the RIN unfurled the flags of three fighting political parties in India—the Indian National Congress, the All-India Muslim League and the Communist Party of India. They appealed to the leaders of the three parties to help them not only in the struggle against racial discrimination, but also in the struggle for freedom.

Parallel to this, Bombay's working class, led by the Communist Party, launched a strike action in solidarity with the fighting officers and men of the RIN. Congress and League leaders refused to respond to the call and advised the militant RIN men to lay down arms. The strike committee of the fighting RIN officers and men declared that they were surrendering at the call of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. An opportunity to develop the RIN struggle was thus lost. The Congress and League leaders who betrayed the RIN struggle agreed with the British rulers that they would 'divide and quit India', creating two antagonistic states of Pakistan and the Indian Union.

The cause espoused by the RIN officers and men, however, was taken up by the Communist Party which organized a series of working class, peasant, student and other militant mass movements. These included Bengal's Tebhaga militant peasant movements in other parts of the country, working class and student actions, militant democratic movements in the princely states and so on. They culminated in the historic Telengana struggle which freed several villages from the feudal Nizam's rule and from the domination of feudal landlords. On a smaller scale, the working class and poor peasants of Punnapra-Vayalar in Travancore also stood up against military terror for almost two weeks.

These militant actions took place at a time when the Congress and the Muslim League, partners in the interim government, continued to quarrel among themselves and gave the British rulers the opportunity to claim that they were dividing the country because Hindus and Muslims, the Congress and the League, could not agree between themselves. This could have been averted if only the leaders of the Congress and the League had responded to the call of the radical democratic movement in the country unitedly to lead the militant masses in the freedom struggle rather than quarrel between

themselves on sharing the spoils of power. It was a story of glory and shame —glory for the fighting people and shame for the bourgeois leaders of the Congress and the League.

February 8, 1997

Planning Basics

From Nehru to the Era of Liberalization

Winding up his introductory speech to the National Development Council meeting on January 16, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Prof. Madhu Dandavate, said: 'I have always believed that in our national life there are areas of policies that often transcend the barriers of partisan attitudes. In the post-Independence period, policies of non-alignment in international affairs was one such area. I fervently feel that despite some differences in details, in the present national environment the direction and thrust of our planning can be another area of broad consensus. I urge the members of the National Development Council to view the approach document of the Ninth Five Year Plan in this spirit.'

Dandavate forgot that it is not on some details but on the basics that the Left parties and the rest in the United Front hold views dramatically opposed to each other. That is why the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Forward Bloc have not participated in the Government but support it from the outside. The Communist Party of India, on the other hand, participates in the Government but at the same time joins the CPI (M), the RSP and the Forward Bloc in publicly criticizing the economic policies of the H.D. Deve Gowda Government.

The issues on which they criticize the Government are basic—the very concept of foreign policy and the strategy of planning. The Left parties are convinced that while they were trying to shift the foreign and domestic economic policies of the Nehru Government to the Left, Nehru's successors have steadily worked to shift his policies to the right. This is what culminated in the notorious Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh policies of globalization, liberalization and privatization against which the Left parties carry on a determined struggle.

They characterize the Narasimha Rao Government's policies as those of going back on what was anti-imperialist and democratic in the Nehru policies, although some concessions are being made to the Left in the interest of keeping the Congress (I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party out of power. There is therefore no question of a consensus between the Left on the one hand and the Narasimha Rao-Sitaram Kesri Congress on the other on questions of foreign and domestic economic policies.

This, however, does not mean that the Left wants the Government of India to go back to the Nehru policies. For it was because of the inherent weaknesses of the Nehru policies that they were subsequently abandoned in favour of Narasimha Rao's policies that are being carried forward by the Deve Gowda Government.

When the Nehru Government formulated the Second Five Year Plan, the approach of the Left was dual: it welcomed some positive features of the Plan which were, to a limited extent, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic. That is why Nehru was able to formulate a Plan bigger and bolder than the First Five-Year Plan (that was essentially based on the perspective formulated by the British Government before they left India in August 1947).

However, those policies framed with a new perspective made heavy concessions to imperialism abroad and feudalism and Indian big bourgeoisie in the country. The united Communist Party of India, in fact, went on record that there was an inherent contradiction between the laudable objectives of the Plan and the anti-people economic policies formulated to carry out that plan. Unless this contradiction was removed, the party pointed out, the planning process would go from crisis to crisis. The party therefore formulated certain socio-economic policies as an alternative to those included in the Nehru plan.

If those alternative policies had been adopted by the Government, the basic purpose of the Nehru plan or its broad objective could have been protected on the basis of relevant socio-economic policies. That, however, was not done. The very Nehru Government that proclaimed Indian socialism to be its objective, refused to carry out basic agrarian reforms: in places where the old type feudalism ended by and large, new types of semi-

feudalism took its place; the former feudal landlords were converted into new capitalist landlords, while a small upper stratum of big farmers was created out of the peasantry. This laid the basis of crisis in the planning process, together with the heavy dependence on foreign aid as the major source of finance for planning. This crisis culminated in 1966 in the declaration of a three-year Plan 'holiday'.

That was the beginning of a crisis in Indian planning, which went steadily forward and in the end forced the country to adopt the new Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh model of globalization, liberalization and privatization. Whatever was progressive and in the national interest in the Nehru plan was thus given up, transforming the nation into a collective colony of world capitalism led by the United States.

The steady development of the crisis in the planning process was intimately connected with the inherent weaknesses of the political elements of Nehru's foreign policy. That policy was of course based on non-alignment but the concept of non-alignment itself was understood and put into practice in different ways in different periods of India's political history.

The first stage of development of the non-alignment policy emphasized the demarcation from the socialist camp, which amounted to an orientation to the imperialist camp. That was from 1947 to 1952-53. Then came a new interpretation of non-alignment, one that meant closer cooperation with the socialist camp and with the liberation movements in other countries. That was the background against which Nehru adopted a new foreign policy and a new approach to the planning process in the mid-1950s.

However, in this period, cooperation with the capitalist and socialist camps was such that India's ruling classes demarcated themselves from a part of the socialist camp, that is, socialist China. Nehru had the illusion that he could play between the Soviet Union and China and mounted an offensive on socialist China with the perspective of using the Sino-Soviet differences to the advantage of India's ruling classes.

That led to the disastrous adventure of attempting to 'push the Chinese out' of what was considered to be India's traditional border. This fiasco further intensified the crisis in Indian planning and forced Indira Gandhi in

1966 to declare a three-year Plan 'holiday'. That unhappy chapter in India's political history has now fortunately come to an end. Relations with China have steadily improved from the days of Indira Gandhi to Deve Gowda. But the lessons of the adventurous game resorted to by Nehru have yet to be learnt by Nehru's successors. The contribution of the anti-China stance adopted by Nehru in 1960–64 to the crisis in the planning process has to be learnt both by the ruling classes and the people of India.

There is therefore no question of going back either to the economic or to the political basis of planning initiated by Nehru. While distortions by Nehru's successors in transforming his socialist-oriented plan into the policies of globalization, liberalization and privatization adopted originally by Narasimha Rao and, with some insignificant modifications, carried forward by Deve Gowda, have to be fought and defeated, it should be realized that these distortions end themselves in the Nehru policy.

The Left, in fact, is fighting for a complete renewal of the economic and political basis of planning formulated by Nehru. They are fighting for a new approach to the foreign and domestic economic policies in the country. This new approach is solidly based on:

1. A complete break with the U.S.-led capitalist world which, through its instruments such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and so on, are dictating the terms on which we in India and our brothers and sisters in the rest of the backward countries should arrange our affairs. The 'conditionalities' on the basis of which alone loans and aid are granted by the institutions of world finance capital, should be rejected.

2. Relations of full cooperation should be established with the former socialist countries—Russia and the former socialist countries of Europe; the present day socialist countries of China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba; and over 100 countries of what was once called the 'Third World'; as well as with those developed capitalist countries that have their contradictions with the U.S. (the European countries and Japan). This would constitute the basis on which India can resist the political and economic offensive of world capital.

3. Recast the entire basis of the domestic economy, so that industrial and agricultural workers, working peasants, middle class employees and other sections of the working people are enabled to improve their living and working conditions, while vigorous offensives are launched on hoarders, black marketeers and other captains of black money.

The initial basis for this has already been laid in the foundation of the Deve Gowda Government, which is a combination of the working people on the one hand and forward-looking patriotic elements in the ruling classes on the other. This being the class composition of the U.F. and its Government, there are obviously differences among the constituents of the U.F. and its Government.

These differences can, however, be ironed out, since both components of the U.F. are interested in making a complete break with the policies of globalization, liberalization and privatization as well as overcoming the crisis that arose out of the faulty policies of the Nehru Government.

February 22, 1997

Questions of Social Transition

Deng Xiaoping's Role in the Communist Movement

Reporting the death of Deng Xiaoping, the media called him 'the supreme leader of the Chinese people'. That is correct in one sense, because Deng Xiaoping was at the helm of affairs since the process of modernization began in 1978. It will, however, be wrong to characterize Deng as only 'the supreme leader of the Chinese people.'

As a matter of fact, Deng Xiaoping became the world statesman of the international revolutionary movement and of the Communist parties in particular. In order to assess his role in the international Communist movement, we will have to go back to the founders of dialectical and historical materialism, Marx and Engels, and how their theories and practice evolved from stage to stage. That is what is attempted in this article. Marx and Engels were not just 'dreamers' imagining a society of equality and fraternity; they were social scientists who, applying the strict rules of scientific analysis, established that a stage would come in the history of humanity when societies based on exploitation would come to an end, and when a society in which man did not exploit man and nation did not exploit nation would arise. Such a change in the social system was inevitable because of the operation of the scientific laws of social development.

Marx and Engels, however, did not understand how this stage would come, what would be the nature of social relations in the new, exploitationless society. From the French working class, which overturned capitalist society and started building a new society in 1871, they had an inkling of how capitalist society would come to an end and how socialism would come into existence. That was the last occasion when Marx and Engels saw how the new state and society would operate. That, however, was insufficient to understand how socialist revolution would be organized and how socialist society would come into being in individual countries.

In 1917 when the Russian working class took state power into their hands and began to build the new socialist society in their country, Lenin, the leader of that revolutionary movement, had before him no blueprint for going about the task of building a socialist society. There was no writing of Marx and Engels to guide him on how to start the construction of socialism. He had, in fact, to experiment, for which he had with him only the concrete understanding of socio-political conditions in his country, Russia, and the general understanding of the theoretical legacy of Marx and Engels.

During the seven years after the Russian Revolution when he was alive, Lenin undertook two experiments in socialist construction. The first was known as 'War Communism': young socialist Russia was engaged in a war in which it fought the Russian and international exploiting classes. Everything had to be subordinated to the need to win the war. All democratic rights, property rights, educational and cultural institutions had to be oriented towards the task of winning the war.

When the objective of winning the war was attained after a few years, Lenin saw that there was no further need for exercising so much control over the activities of Russian citizens. Furthermore, such control created tensions between the peasant masses, who were connected with petty and medium types of private property, and the working class, which was not at all interested in any form of private property.

Lenin was of the view that the attempt at building a socialist society could not be successful unless these two segments of the Russian people were united in a strong alliance. It was, therefore, necessary to allow the millions of peasants the right to sell their products in the market. It was to meet this situation that Lenin undertook the next experiment—what was known as the 'New Economic Policy'. The restrictions imposed in the earlier phase were relaxed.

Both 'War Communism' and the 'New Economic Policy' succeeded in consolidating the new revolutionary state of the working class, which was solidly allied with peasantry and other sections of the Russian people. Lenin did not live to see the effects of the practical working of this 'New Economic Policy' but he gave sufficient indications of the direction in which the state and society of the proletariat had to be built. His writings in the last few

years showed how he visualized the 'New Economic Policy' to lay the basis for the future socialist society. He thus carried forward the direction given by Marx and Engels in their writings after the historic proletarian revolution of 1871 in France.

After Lenin's death, his successors carried forward the legacy left by him. The new Soviet Russia of Lenin's days was transformed into the mighty and powerful Soviet Union of the following half a century. The series of Five-Year Plans that were carried out, the historic victory of the Soviet state and the Red Army in the anti-fascist war and the magnificent scientific advances made the Soviet Union a scientifically advanced and militarily strong nation, next only to the United States of America, the strongest capitalist state in the world.

While making these gains, however, those who followed Lenin committed certain mistakes; in particular, they failed to carry forward, and improve upon, Lenin's 'New Economic Policy'. As a matter of fact, the post-Lenin leadership of the Soviet Union was guilty of revisionist mistakes on the one hand and of left sectarian mistakes on the other. These mistakes, committed by the entire post-Lenin leadership of the Soviet Union (who happened to constitute the leadership of the world communist movement as well), culminated in a crisis in world Communism, leading to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the return of capitalism to the entire European part of the world socialist camp.

It is, however, significant that, while the European part of the socialist world recreated from socialism to capitalism, three Asian countries—China, Vietnam and Korea—as well as Cuba in the Western hemisphere still have the red flag of socialism flying high. The reason for this is that in these four countries, revisionist and sectarian mistakes committed by the leadership were fewer than those in the European part of the socialist world.

This does not mean that the parties in these countries did not suffer from revisionist and sectarian mistakes. Marxist-Leninists in these countries, however, were more successful in correcting them and maintaining the purity of Marxist-Leninism. That is why the Marxist-Leninists in these countries were able to save their socialist society from the fate that overtook the socialist countries of Europe.

In China for example, Mao Zedong, the great leader of that country's Communist party was himself a victim of left sectarianism. The leadership he gave for the Cultural Revolution ended in a disaster. A section of the leadership led by Deng Xiaoping, however, was able to save that country's Communist Party from the evil influences of sectarianism. The post-Mao leadership of the Chinese party headed by Deng made a balanced assessment of the glorious achievements of the Mao leadership in the socialist revolution and during the initial years of socialist construction. But he did not spare Mao in his critical analysis of the sectarian mistakes he committed.

That was how Deng was able to take the Communist Party of China on correct lines and to initiate the process of modernization of the economy, polity and culture of China. He did not spare either the right revisionism of Khrushchev and company or the sectarian mistakes committed even by Mao.

The rectification campaign undertaken by the leadership of the Chinese Party led by Deng Xiaoping was a major contribution not only to the Communist Party of China but to the entire world Communist movement. The philosophy and the plan of action that are credited to Deng are, in fact, the application of Lenin's 'New Economic Policy' to the conditions in China of the last quarter of the 20th century.

For almost two decades Deng was the supreme leader of the Communist Party of China. This period witnessed an unprecedented growth of the economy, the polity and the culture of the Chinese Socialist Republic. China today is as powerful in world politics as the Soviet Union was in the 1940s and 1950s—a fact for which credit should go to Deng Xiaoping.

This happened because Deng had no patience with either dogmatism or right opportunism. Deng made it clear that China under his leadership was building 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Furthermore, the state and government, which were building socialism, were part of what the Chinese party called 'people's democratic dictatorship', a system which combined broad democracy for the common people of China and uncompromising struggle against the enemies of socialism. Unlike the Russia of Gorbachev and Yeltsin which abandoned the leading role of the public sector in the

economy and adopted bourgeois democracy in politics, socialist China under Deng developed the Chinese economy on the basis of the public sector, which played the leading role in the economy, while no quarter was given to the enemies of socialist system in China.

Deng Xiaoping had no illusions that his China would set a model for other countries to follow. For, he was a faithful follower of the Marx-Lenin dictum that, while all countries would necessarily go forward to socialism, the manner in which they did so would differ from country to country. Just as Deng's China was building socialism with Chinese characteristics, every country would build socialism with the specific national characteristics of that country.

This world outlook on the transition of humanity from the present-day exploiting society to the free and democratic society of the future is the major contribution made by Deng Xiaoping to Marxism-Leninism.

March 8, 1997

What Marxism Is

The Theory and its Revolutionary Practice

The Dr. John Mathai Memorial Lecture, organized by the University of Kerala and delivered by 'one of India's most distinguished economists'. Dr. K. N. Raj, in Thiruvananthapuram on April 19, the extracts of which appeared in *Frontline* (June 13, 1997) shows that Dr. Raj is not only a *distinguished economist but a keen student of Marxist theory*.

Answering those bourgeois theoreticians who consider the recent developments in socialist countries as a refutation of Marxism, 'the end of history' and so on. Dr. Raj says: 'The developments in Russia and China over the last decade signify (in my view) neither the end of revolutionary socialism nor even of Marxism; they are perhaps no more than another phase in the evolution of social, economic and political systems in a world that is just completing two millennia of recorded history and is likely to survive for several more millennia extending to A. D. 10,000 and even further to A.D. 100,000 and beyond. *Major changes in social and economic systems take several centuries to be successfully completed, as those who have studied the transition from feudal to capitalist systems understand very well now.*' (emphasis added).

He also sums up, in the words of a distinguished professor, that the essentials of Marxist thought can be reduced to (a) a dialectical approach to knowledge itself, (b) a materialistic approach to history, (c) a general view of capitalism that starts from Marxist social analysis and (d) 'last but not least a commitment to socialism.' These extracts from Dr. Raj's lecture show that Dr. Raj, the distinguished social scientist, is very close to Marxism. However, I would not place him in the category of Marxist intellectuals because a Marxist intellectual is not only one who subscribes to Marxist theory, interprets it as occasion and circumstance demand, but also one who puts Marxist theory into practice and enriches Marxist theory on the basis of revolutionary experiences. This Dr. Raj does not do.

Karl Marx, of course, was a great theoretician. His contributions to the theory of philosophy, political economy, political science, socio-cultural development, aesthetics and so on would put him among the most distinguished theoreticians in world history. He, however, occupied this position as a great theoretician because he was a *revolutionary political activist*. His theoretical contributions, including *Das Kapital*, were the result of his daily practice as the theoretician of the world working class. That is why the distinguished professor whom Dr. Raj quotes refers to 'a belief in the unity of theory and practice' as one of the components of Marxist theory.

Marx was an outstanding intellectual and he could have occupied a leading position in the academic world of the then European countries of the time. He however opted for a life of penury. The great theoretician who wrote the magnificent work *Das Kapital* and his family had to undergo a life of poverty. Had it not been for his commitment to the cause of the working class, he would have given up the entire struggle.

Why did he opt for a life of poverty? Because he had immense faith in the working class which, in the words of himself and Engels (in the well-known *The Communist Manifesto*), is 'the grave-digger of capitalist society'. He did not mind leading a miserable life in which, among other things, he had to see his children die, mortgage his clothes for burying one of them and face the humiliation of his family being thrown out of his house by creditors. He did so because he had no doubt in his mind that the working class, whose consciousness he aroused and for whose aspirations he gave voice, was the builder of a more humane society.

It is the fashion of some of our bourgeois intellectuals to distinguish Marx's *academic* works such as *Das Kapital* from his 'journalistic writings' on current developments. They forget that his academic and journalistic writings supplement and support each other. His writings represent not only what he taught the working class but also what he learnt from it. As he himself observed in a significant context, 'philosophy finds in the working class its *material weapon*, while the working class finds its *spiritual weapon* in philosophy.'

Marx and Engels were able to write a number of academic works because they lived and fought along with the working class and learnt from it. This is

an aspect of Marxist theory that has not been sufficiently understood by radical democratic intellectuals, who have *interpreted* Marxism but not *followed* the Marxist tradition of revolutionary political activity.

The tradition was carried forward subsequently by Lenin, who further developed Marx's *Das Kapital* into Imperialism and further enriched Marxist philosophy with his *Materialism and Empiric-criticism*. He could do this because, like Marx and Engels, Lenin too was an outstanding theoretician as well as a revolutionary political activist. That is why Leninism is recognized to be 'Marxism of the imperialist era'. That was also why Lenin could carry out the first successful proletarian revolution in the world and nurture the Soviet Russian State into becoming the Soviet Union.

Like Marx, Engels and Lenin, post-Leninist Marxists have to make their own contribution to further develop Marxist theory through the revolutionary application of that theory to their own country's concrete situation. This was done for Italy by Gramsci, for China by Mao Zedong, by Ho Chi Minh for Vietnam and for every other country by the collective leadership of Marxist-Leninists of those countries. Marxism, which developed into Marxism-Leninism has thus been constantly developed and strengthened through the revolutionary practice of Marxist-Leninist parties in different countries.

Today there is no Marx, Engels or Lenin. There are, however, Marxist-Leninist parties in almost all countries of the world, each applying Marxist theory to its own national conditions and enriching Marxist theory through its own revolutionary practice.

As an Indian Marxist-Leninist who has worked for over six decades, I am proud of the fact that, although our party has not produced a Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, Mao Zedong or Ho Chi Minh, we have produced a collective leadership of Marxist-Leninists in our country. We have further developed Marxist-Leninist theory as applied to our national situation, which has enabled us to bring about a political situation in the country in which the working class is emerging as the leader of all other oppressed, exploited and forward-looking classes and strata in society.

The travails that we had to undergo to develop the party have helped solve socio-economic, political and cultural problems in the country. That is why the Left component of the United Front of Left, democratic, secular and federalist parties has become the major actor on the political stage in the country today.

June 28, 1997

The Opposition and the Left

It is characteristic of Mahatma Gandhi that his was the first voice of dissent in post-Independence India: he refused to join the festivities on August 15, 1947. Again, in January 1948 he declared openly that he was not satisfied with the type of independence that India had won. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Father of the Nation, almost alone, acted as the first Leader of the Opposition in Congress-ruled India.

What was the root of his dissatisfaction? Was it that India was cut in twain, forming two enemy states out of a formerly united India? He had declared earlier that ‘the vivisection of India is like the vivisection of my own body.’

Mahatma Gandhi, however, was far more concerned that the sociocultural consequences of two hostile communal states being formed was that communal passions were roused—in the Indian Union against Muslims and in Pakistan against Hindus and Sikhs. The result was the most widespread communal riots in both countries. This was contrary to the ideal of communal unity that was pan of his philosophy of action. He had to see people who had lived as brothers and sisters for centuries being made enemies of one another.

He was still more pained that the colleagues and followers who followed him in the decades of the freedom struggle had, on becoming members of the ruling party in the communally carved out Indian Union, renounced all the ideals that had inspired them in the days of the freedom struggle. He went to the extent of suggesting that since the main objective of the freedom movement—the attainment of independence for the country—had been achieved, the Congress should cease to function as a political party that contested elections and competed with other political parties and communal organizations.

Mahatma Gandhi’s perception on the nature and consequences of the independence that was won on August 15, 1947 was subsequently shared—

for reasons other than those of Mahatma Gandhi—by the then united Communist Party of India. After a few weeks of euphoria, the party came to realize that the political independence that was won on August 15, 1947 was independence for the bourgeois-landlord classes and not for the common people. Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who advised the disbandment of the Congress and the formation of a non-political Lok Sevak Sangh, the Communist Party at its Second Congress (held in February–March 1948) decided that on the agenda was the political mobilization of the working people on revolutionary lines against the Congress rulers. The party called for organized mass struggle against the new (Congress) rulers, in which the working people were to be rallied under the leadership of the Indian working class.

After some time, when the party played with the idea of extending the Telengana armed warfare to the whole country, the party's protracted internal discussions led it to the conclusion that the path of advance for post-Independence India is the combination of militant mass actions and united struggle in the parliamentary arena. In the first general elections in free India (1951), the electorate gave a clear verdict that the Communist Party was the major force through which mass discontent against Congress rule could be mobilized.

Since then the party has organized struggles in the electoral arena without giving up the Marxist-Leninist line of joining and leading militant mass actions. The party steered clear of the two deviations of social democratic parliamentarism and 'Left'-Communist sectarian contempt for parliamentary work.

This is how, in the second general elections of 1957, the Communist Party was voted into ministerial office in the small State of Kerala. During the 28 months of its existence, that Government showed the people of Kerala and other States in India that there was an alternative to the Congress. Although not powerful enough to replace the Congress at the Centre, the party was strong enough in one State to show that land reforms, educational reforms, the decentralization of power to panchayats and so on—formal objectives of the Congress that were later sabotaged—could be implemented by a non-Congress government headed by the Communist

Party. The Congress thus saw a challenge to its continuing the first elected Communist government in a State of India was dismissed; by the Central authority.

However, the message sent out by the first Left-led non-Congress government caught the imagination of people throughout the country. Together with the Socialists and Left democrats the Communists succeeded in slowly developing democratic movements that could challenge the authority of the Congress Government at the Centre. That process ultimately led to the formation of another Left-led Government, in West Bengal, together with non-Left-led non-Congress governments in half a dozen other States. The CPI (M) adopted the policy of extending support to, but not joining, the State governments formed by non-Left but non-Congress parties. Broad democratic unity was thus being forged against the Congress.

This emerging unity in the Opposition, together with the internal developments in the ruling Congress party itself, led in 1977 to the replacement at the Centre of the Congress by the Janata Party Government headed by Morarji Desai. While extending support to that Central Government, however, the CPI (M) refrained from joining it and, besides, fought the reactionary and communal forces like the Jan Sangh which were integral parts of the Janata Party and its Government. The CPI (M) joined other Left and secular democratic forces in bringing the Janata Government down and fighting the Jan Sangh and other communal forces.

Thus began two trends in the non-Congress Opposition: first, the unity of Left, right and communal forces against the Congress; secondly, unity of Left and secular democratic forces against the Congress on the one hand and reactionary communal forces on the other. The Marxist-Leninists on the Left adopted a consistent stand of fighting the Congress monopoly of power, without making any concession to right reactionary and communal forces.

It was this consistent line of fighting the Congress on the one hand and reactionary communal organizations on the other that led to the formation of the V.P. Singh Government at the Centre in 1989. After some time, when the Congress came back to power again, Left and secular democratic forces came to a joint front which subsequently led to the formation of the Janata Dal-led United Front and its Government in 1996.

By this time, however, the Congress had ceased to be a cohesive political party. The final loss of power initiated the process of the Congress ceasing to be a national political party.

While fighting this political battle against the Congress monopoly of power and against right reactionary and communal forces, Marxist-Leninists were conscious that political-electoral struggle alone would not be enough to replace the Congress on the one hand and reactionary communal forces on the other. In fact, this political struggle on the parliamentary arena should be supplemented by militant struggles of industrial and agricultural workers, working peasants, middle class employees and intellectuals and all other sections of the people who are interested in national unity, the protection of national independence and sovereignty and in going forward to a socialist society.

The Left, democratic, secular and regional parties are all interested in the struggle against the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In developing the unity of these forces, however, it is necessary for Marxist-Leninists and their Left allies maintain their independent identity and come out against the anti-national and anti-people policies pursued by certain allies in the U.F. itself. That is why the Marxist-Leninists, while extending full support to the U.F. Government, are at the same time demarcating themselves from the World Bank–IMF-dictated economic policies pursued by the Deve Gowda Government earlier and by the Gujral Government today. The line adopted by Marxist-Leninists in today's India is: jointly strike against the Congress, the BJP and other reactionary communal forces, while at the same time act independently in protecting the interests of the working people.

August 9, 1997

Eight Decades of India's Communist Movement

I have before me the first five of the 20 volumes brought out by the West Bengal State Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which includes documents concerning the birth and growth of India's Communist movement. The first volume contains a foreword by Harkishan Singh Surjeet, the general secretary of the CPI (M), which makes an overall survey of the development of the Communist movement in India. The same volume also carries an article by me, which assesses the contribution of Indian Communists to the development of the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism as applied to India.

The question naturally arises: how is it that the Communist parties of China, Vietnam and Korea, which were formed more or less at the same time as the Communist Party in India, and the party of Cuba, which was born a few years after these parties, have been able to carry out revolutions that established the socialist system of society? Does this mean that Indian Communists failed to discharge their duties in applying Marxism-Leninism to Indian conditions?

In this context, it should be noted that more or less at the same time as the seeds of Communism were sown in India, another political philosophy—Gandhism—also began to influence the public mind in India. These two political philosophies—one represented by Gandhiji and another by Communism—were natural results of the development of India's political movement for freedom.

The Indian National Congress, it should be recalled, was a bourgeois liberal political party and could not organize the revolutionary movement against British imperialism. It adopted the political line of bourgeois liberalism, though it was a little more radical than the early moderates. Mahatma Gandhi did call for militant mass action against the 'satanic' British Government. The entire Indian nation was stirred when he launched a campaign of non-cooperation against the British Government in 1919. He was, besides, a votary of the theory of *Daridranarayan*, that is, the poor

millions. Such a philosophy certainly attracted the mass of working people whom the Communists addressed. Gandhiji, however, insisted on complete non-violence and asked the people to consider landlords and capitalists as keeping their huge properties as trustees on behalf of them.

As against this bourgeois political philosophy, Communism advocated militant mass action by industrial and agricultural workers, poor and middle peasants as well as by anti-imperialist and anti-feudal sections of all other classes and strata of society. Revolutionary (violent, if necessary) mass action, in which the toiling people in the country were active participants, was the essence of the Marxist line, which pointed out that agrarian revolution against imperialism and feudalism is an integral part of the anti-imperialist revolution.

The two political philosophies were, in other words, the world outlooks of two classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletarian mass of working people. Gandhism did not understand the significance of the Communist ideal of the integral connection between anti-imperialist and agrarian revolutions. Only by carrying on a systematic ideological struggle against Gandhism and its various other manifestations such as Nehruvian Socialism, caste and communal separatism and other variables of bourgeois ideology could Communists influence the common people.

However, as Lenin said to comrades when the Communist International was formed, it was the duty of Communists to organize themselves as an independent revolutionary political force to forge a firm alliance with the agrarian masses and rally all other sections of the Indian people, including the forward-looking elements in the bourgeois-landlord classes.

It was with this perspective that, on the initiative of the Communist International, an organization called ‘the Communist Party of India’ was formed in the Soviet city of Tashkent in October 1920. However, even before this, local groups of Communists had formed in several parts of the country.

The Indian Communists had to carry on a dual struggle—together with the bourgeoisie against imperialism and feudalism but against the bourgeoisie with its political philosophy of non-violence, trusteeship and so

on. This was an arduous struggle in which mistakes of two types, 'left' opportunism and 'right' opportunism, were possible.

The history of the Communist Party of India, in fact, was a story of struggle against left opportunism without falling into the opportunism of the right.

The documents collected in these volumes show how the two kinds of opportunism raised their heads on different occasions, how they had to be fought and were indeed fought and defeated; and how, in the process of defeating one variety of opportunism, the party fell into the opportunism of the other type. The inner party struggle waged in different periods was, in other words, the process through which mistakes of one type or the other were corrected.

The inner-party struggle was intense on several occasions: in the first stage of party history, left opportunism raised its head; then right opportunism against left opportunism. The struggle continued until in 1964, when the party split into a 'left' and a 'right'—the CPI (M) and CPI; and then, within the CPI (M) itself, a small 'leftist' trend called naxalism raised its head. Even after the split, inner-party struggles occurred.

The inner-party struggles, marked by mistakes and corrections, have been a process of development of all Marxist-Leninist parties in the world. This process occurred in the European social democratic parties when Marx and Engels were alive. This happened in Russia after the death of Marx and Engels, in the Soviet Union, China and other countries after Lenin's death and so on. The Indian party too had to go through this process to be able to occupy the position of the party of the working class with its distinct identity. It goes to the credit of our Communist movement that these inner-party struggles did not weaken but rather strengthened the party of the working class.

At least on two occasions—during the Quit India movement and the Indian National Army (INA) struggles of the 1940s and then during the India-China border conflict in the 1960s—the party had to go it alone in fighting the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties on the questions of integrating Indian nationalism with proletarian internationalism. The party

grew stronger after each of the two periods of temporary 'isolation' from the anti-imperialist masses.

Since the first general elections of 1952, the party has been a major factor in political-electoral struggles: the party became the major Opposition group in the two Houses of Parliament in 1952, it formed the first Communist Government in Kerala in 1957, CPI (M)led governments were formed in Kerala and West Bengal in 1967, it supported the Janata Government even while demarcating itself from the Jan Sangh and other reactionary constituents of the Janata Party. Each of these is a milestone in the history of the party, where the party marches together with its electoral allies but strikes separately. There were clear examples of the complete independence of the party from all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois formations but unity with them in the struggle against the Congress and right reactionary and communal outfits such as the Swatantra Party, the Jan Sangh and the Muslim League.

This was the process through which the party, together with its Left and democratic allies, played its positive role in the development of the present anti-Congress and anti-BJP secular democratic front.

It will be clear from this narration that, although the party is still a minor political force in the country as a whole, it is a major force in three States—West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. It is also an active secular partner in the emerging Left, democratic, secular and federalist unity at the Centre. This was possible because the party, since its inception, has been trying to apply the theory of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete political conditions obtaining in India.

As one who has been an active participant in this process for more than six decades, I am proud of the achievements registered by the party in its 80-year period. I am also conscious of the distance to be covered by the party to come out as a major political force, if not as the effective leader of the Left, secular democratic and federalist forces in the country.

December 27, 1997

Ideological Choices

Ideological Choices in Post-Soviet Russia. This is the title of a collection of papers written by Prof. Madhavan K. Palat and published by the Delhi Policy Group. The author has taken pains to study original material on present-day Russia, on the basis of which he projects four possible choices for the country. They are Communism; Liberalism; Nationalism; and Eurasianism. A chapter of the book is devoted to each of these.

It would appear from the above that present-day Russia will either go back to the pre-1991 Soviet system, which the author calls Communism, or adopt what he refers to as Liberalism, Nationalism or Eurasianism. The book contains an interesting comparison of the four choices that are examined by the author. I, however, feel that the author fails to note the recent developments in Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. The chapter in which he explains Communism is a description of the state of affairs that existed in the Soviet Union. He has failed to take into account the fact that since the retreat of Socialism in the former Soviet Union and in the former Socialist countries of Eastern Europe, Communism itself has undergone significant changes.

To take one instance, the socio-political set-up established in the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe was called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Experience with the working of that system has shown that though major achievements have been registered under it, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as practised in the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe had serious deficiencies. Marxist-Leninists throughout the world have now come to the conclusion that there is no going back to the system that existed in the Soviet Union until the recent changes (which the author calls a 'revolution').

The leading Socialist country of today, the People's Republic of China, does not call its own system a 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat', but a 'People's Democratic Dictatorship'. This it has done after taking into account the distortion that had occurred in the political system as worked out in the

former Soviet Union and in the former Socialist countries of Eastern Europe. What does this change in terminology mean? It means, first, that the dictatorial element is preserved. Secondly, it is not the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but the dictatorship of the entire people against a small stratum of the former ruling classes.

It is a new experiment that is being tried out in the present-day Socialist China. Other models may appear in other socialist countries. But the essence will be that in the process of socialist construction the working people will use force (state power) against the remnants of the old exploiting classes. The exact form may change from country to country.

Such a change in the form of state power will change the character of Communism itself, adapting it to specific national conditions. If this is done in post-Soviet Russia, the three categories mentioned by the author as Liberalism, Nationalism and Eurasianism will be absorbed in what may be called 'reformed Communism.'

Elements of representative democracy and private property except monopoly private property may be included in 'reformed Communism.' What the author calls Liberalism, Nationalism and Eurasianism will thus find a place in a modified form in the new Communism, which in any case will have the hegemony of the proletariat. Such a reborn Communism is not visualized by the author. He suggests that post-Soviet Russia will either go back to the pre-1991 Soviet system or will have a liberal system of Nationalism and Eurasianism.

The question will, however, arise whether such a new, reborn Communism is consistent with the theory and practice of Marx, Engels and Lenin. The answer is that the Marx-Engels-Lenin thought envisages the slow development of working class state power, whose essence is the solid alliance of all oppressed and exploited classes and the strata of society under the leadership of the working class.

It is now recognized by all Marxist-Leninists that distortions did take place in the actual working of this theory. Dictatorship of the Proletariat was transformed into dictatorship of the party, which, in turn, was distorted into what was termed in Soviet literature the 'cult of personality.'

The socio-political basis of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat—the solid alliance of the working class and the peasants—also came to be distorted into the dictatorship over the working class of the party and over the working class and the peasant masses. The Marxist-Leninist principle of nationalities also came to be violated, which created serious complications in the former Soviet Union.

Instead of removing these distortions in practice, the post-Stalin leadership of the Soviet Union and the leaderships of the parties in the East European Socialist countries threw overboard the very concept of class struggle and Dictatorship of the Proletariat. That was how Soviet power was overthrown in what became present-day Russia and, following it, Socialism was overthrown in the East European countries.

Serious efforts are being made by every fraternal party of the working class to remove the distortions and restore the principles of Marxism-Leninism as suited to the national situation in their respective countries.

It is therefore possible that instead of ‘Liberalism’, ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Eurasianism’ becoming ideological alternatives to Communism as the author envisages, what is positive in all of them will be absorbed by the respective Marxist-Leninist parties of not only post-Soviet Russia but of all countries of the world.

March 21, 1998

Centre, States and River Waters

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), like other Dravidian organizations, is supposed to stand for State autonomy and against centralization. It is, however, curious that the party now demands that the existing rights of States over river waters in their territory should be taken over by the Centre.

I am referring to the series of demands that the AIADMK placed before its senior alliance partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as part of its conditions for sending its letter of support to the BJP to form a government at the Centre. One of the conditions was that the BJP, when its government was formed, should agree that rivers flowing through the States would become the Centre's property and would be controlled by the Centre.

This reminded me of the fantastic statement made by Tamil Nadu leaders when I was Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957 and 1967. Their statement was that the waters of the rivers in the State of Kerala flowed into the sea and were thus 'wasted', and, if they were diverted to Tamil Nadu they could be utilized fully to provide water for irrigation, drinking water supply and so on. However, such diversion will mean that the saline water in the Arabian Sea would intrude into the fresh-water rivers of Kerala. This would turn the beautiful paddy fields of Kerala into deserts. The demand made by the Tamil Nadu leaders meant that Kerala should be turned into a desert for the benefit of Tamil Nadu.

Naturally, I could not agree to that proposition. I, however, understood Tamil Nadu's need for water for drinking purposes and for irrigation. I, therefore, agreed to provide water to the thirsty fields of Tamil Nadu and, more important, for the provision of drinking water in some of the Tamil Nadu towns close to the Kerala border.

That was how certain agreements were arrived at between the representatives of the two States. I remember that the Minister who represented Tamil Nadu at the time, C. Subramaniam, remarked that the

agreements arrived at in the presence of himself and myself were a 'Deepavali gift' from Kerala to Tamil Nadu. I considered it necessary to give some water to my sisters and brothers in Tamil Nadu—an action which I have never regretted and shall never regret.

It was, however, impossible for me to allow the green paddy fields of Kerala to be turned into a desert, so that the thirsty men and women, as also the paddy fields, of Tamil Nadu got the water that they desired.

Like my friends in Tamil Nadu in the 1950s and 1960s, AIADMK general secretary Jayalalitha today talks of Kerala 'allowing its water resources to go waste' in the Arabian Sea when they can be put to efficient use by Tamil Nadu. These friends forget that river waters constitute a national asset that can be used for many purposes.

Irrigation of agricultural fields is, of course, important. Equally important are the provision of drinking water and the supply of water for industrial use. Besides, in a coastal State like Kerala, it is also necessary to prevent sea water from entering paddy fields and turning them into deserts.

To what use the internal water resources of a State have to be put is a question that has to be decided by the State concerned, under the federal Constitution of India.

It is, therefore, not clear how a Dravidian party such as the AIADMK could suggest that this right of the State of Kerala be extinguished and that the Centre be empowered to determine the use of all the rivers in all the States of India.

For the BJP, however, this will be acceptable because it is a party that is trying to extinguish the rights of the States in favour of the Centre. Would the AIADMK and its erstwhile government in Tamil Nadu have allowed this to be done in relation to other resources of Tamil Nadu? On the other hand, would it not resist such an incursion into the rights of Tamil Nadu, whether it is done by a BJP government or any other government at the Centre?

Jayalalitha and her friends should understand that the Constitution allows every State to use its resources, which include water resources, in the way it considers it proper. Any attack on this right of the States is contrary to

the very principle on the basis of which the AIADMK, like other Dravidian organizations, is supposed to be functioning.

Is it not significant that Jayalalitha had not made such a demand on the Central Government all these years when she was either the leader of the ruling party or the leader of the Opposition in Tamil Nadu? Why does she make such a demand now?

This shows the thoroughly opportunistic character of the alliance between the BJP and the AIADMK: while the former is an ardent advocate of a 'strong Centre', the latter claims to be fighting for the rights of the States against the Centre.

For its part, the BJP may, in line with its political opportunism, concede the demand, which in fact will strengthen its own philosophy of a 'strong Centre' against the States. The masses who follow the AIADMK will, however, realize that such a concession to the proponents of the idea of a 'strong Centre' will boomerang on their own struggle for State autonomy.

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