

Who Rules India?

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For two decades after Independence (1947) India's ruling party, the Indian National Congress, had overwhelming dominance over the political life of the nation. In the Lower House of the Indian parliament, Congress held between 357 and 371 seats in the period 1952-67. This represented almost 75 per cent of the 500 or so seats in the House. In this situation, as Gunnar Myrdal (*Asian Drama*, 1968, p. 288) has pointed out, "the primary aim of other parties" was to "influence groups within the ruling party". To an extent this still applies, but with increasingly less force since the late 1960s. In the general election of 1967 Congress was reduced to 280,¹ or just over half the seats in the Lower House and further disasters followed in the mid-term elections of 1969 (see below).

These bare facts are merely a statistical expression of a situation which can be of great importance for the Left movement in the second most populous country in the world. It is the purpose of this article to say something about how this situation has arisen and what consequences have flowed from it.

After Independence

In the period after 1947 there is no doubt that Congress owed its large degree of support among the electorate partly to its leading role in the Independence struggle and partly to not inconsiderable achievement in its earlier years of office. This achievement included a programme of industrialisation, based on a series of Five-Year Plans, which raised total production over the period 1951-66 by 159 per cent. Soviet aid has been of great assistance in India's efforts to achieve a greater degree of economic independence, especially with the completion of such heavy industrial projects as the Bhilai steel mill.

In agriculture there has been a partially successful land reform directed against semi-feudal landowners, and important successes in the introduction of fertilisers and new types of seed have given rise to talk of a "green revolution". Food grains pro-

¹ It should be noted that, like certain other countries, India does not practise a system whereby seats allocated are in proportion to votes cast. Thus the 357-371 seats of 1952-67 were obtained on the basis of 45-47 per cent of the total votes cast, whereas the 280 of 1967 corresponded to 39 per cent of the votes. In all elections the British-type "first past the post" electoral system has been to the advantage of Congress.

duction has risen very substantially since 1947 and some think, probably rather optimistically, that the days of food shortage may soon be over.

Another important advance since the colonial period has been in democracy. Despite some important limitations, Indian democracy compares favourably with most of its neighbours. So far there has been no resort to the forms of military rule and semi-dictatorship under the guise of "guided democracy" characteristic of other parts of South Asia. There is universal suffrage, regular elections and quite a degree of freedom of speech and assembly. Those bastions of feudal reaction, the so-called "Native States", the British maintained to bolster their rule have been swept away, though the princes were given pensions and privileges in compensation.

A significant achievement in international relations was India's rejection of the imperialist war pacts like SEATO and her adherence to "non-alignment" and to the Panch Shila, or five² principles of co-existence, in her relations with China.

The story of Congress rule after 1947 was, however, by no means one of untarnished achievement.

Capitalist Development

The land reform was essentially a capitalist one. According to C. Bettelheim (*India Independent*, 1968, p. 185) the effect of the agrarian laws to eliminate the "middleman" has been as follows:

"First they have not suppressed big property, but have limited it and have substituted a system of *usus, abusus* and *fructus* for a feudal system.

"Secondly, the legislation *has given the richer peasants an opportunity to become landed proprietors* . . . It has paved the way for rural capitalism; the big landowners and the rich peasantry will form a new and dominant class of rural capitalists."

Despite the undoubted accomplishments of the Five Year Plans, "measured against what needs to be done . . . these achievements appear insubstantial" (Myrdal, *loc. cit.*, p. 286). This has been largely a result of the character of Indian planning which

² The five were: Respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.

tends to merely state what is anticipated rather than to lay down targets which enterprises must fulfil. This in turn is a result of the non-Socialist nature of the Indian economy.

The advances in output and national income since 1947 have largely benefited the monopolies such as Tata, Birla, Burn and Dalmia-Jain which play such a large role in the economy. Between 1951 and 1958 these four biggest financial groups increased their percentage of the total capital of private-sector companies from 21.85 to 26. On the other hand "the gains of economic progress, so far as there have been any, have not been of benefit to the mass of very poor people" (Myrdal, *loc. cit.*, p. 286).

Whilst India since 1947 has steered clear of the imperialist war pacts, its financial dependence has been very great. Bettelheim estimates (*loc. cit.*, p. 59) that foreign capital has very nearly equal shares with domestic capital in the Indian economy. Total private foreign investments are nearly Rs. 10 billion, and in certain industries (e.g. oil, rubber, jute) there is almost complete control by foreign capital. An indication of India's financial dependence on imperialism is her foreign debt which grew three times (from 5.04 million Rs. to 15.78 million Rs.) between 1948 and 1959 (Bettelheim, p. 310). India's dependence on the USA especially has been a restriction on her freedom to choose her own policies towards such issues as the Indo-China war.

Crisis in the Mid-1960's

The failures in government policy showed themselves in mounting difficulties which reached the point of crisis in the mid-1960s.

The immediate cause of the crisis was the failure of the backward agrarian system to cope with adverse climatic conditions. From a record level of 150.2 in 1964-5, the index of foodgrains production fell to 120.9 in 1965-6 and 124.6 in 1966-7. The blame for the situation should not be simply laid at the door of nature, however. In fact, the State governments had either neglected the implementation of land reform legislation or had administered it in such a way as to make it ineffective. This is not surprising in view of the power of the rural rich in the Congress party machine, especially at the lower levels. The crisis in agriculture was an indictment of vested interest in the Congress party.

The crisis spread to other sectors of the economy. The index of industrial production, having advanced by 6.3 per cent in 1964, gained only 5.8 per cent in 1965, 2.4 per cent in 1966 and 1.4 per cent in 1967. The charging of high monopoly prices and the official policy of inflation as a method of financing development both worsened the situation by placing restrictions on the size of the home market. Defence expenditure, rising from Rs. 2.9 billion

in 1961-2 to Rs. 8.4 billion in 1967-8 added to the problems as did the growing burden of foreign loan repayments.

In 1966 the US bankers pressurised the government to try to solve its economic problems by devaluing the rupee at a rate of 36½ per cent. The result was disastrous. Not only did India fail to attain her objective of radically improving her balance of trade situation, the greatly increased cost of imports added severely to inflation. Moreover devaluation raised the foreign debt in rupees by 57.5 per cent.

The years of crisis inflicted untold suffering on the people. Even before the crisis two-thirds of the population was officially said to be at starvation level. Now, with the Consumer Price Index rocketing from 152 in 1964 to 217 in October 1967 and the per capita net income (at 1960 prices) falling from Rs. 339.2 in 1964-5 to 313.1 in 1966-7, living standards deteriorated further. Famine in Bihar became world news and in industry real wages were officially said to be below pre-war level. The crisis also ruined the large handloom industry and threw thousands of weavers out of employment. Unemployment rose from 9 million in 1961 to 13 million in 1966.

These were the conditions which formed the background to the wave of militancy which swept the country during this period. Man days lost due to strikes, which had averaged 5.70 million in 1962-4 reached 13.85 million in 1966. Demonstrations, marches on parliament and action against grain hoarders indicated the mood of the people.

General Elections of 1967

A great opportunity for the people to show their anger came with the general elections in 1967 with the results in terms of Congress losses as described above.

Unfortunately no united left existed in 1967 to give the necessary leadership to the movement of the people against Congress. There was a marked tendency for the electors to favour the party which was best placed to defeat the ruling party so that in some cases the right-wing gained and in others the left made important advances. The latter was the case in Kerala where the left presented a united front, but where the left was disunited the right-wing sometimes made big gains.

Left-wing and democratic parties obtained 118 seats in the Lower House to the right-wing's 85. The two Communist parties received almost 9 per cent of the votes, increasing their number of seats in the Lower House from 32 to 44, the Communist Party of India (CPI) from 17 to 25 and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) from 15 to 19. The other seats on the left were held by the

two main Socialist parties, the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and certain progressive regional parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Tamilnadu and the Bangla Congress of West Bengal. The right-wing group was mainly composed of the party of sections of big business and the former princes, Swatantra, which increased its seats from 22 to 42 and Jana Sangh, the Hindu communal party, increasing from 12 to 34.³

The 1967 elections also was the first great breach in the Congress monopoly of power in the States. Anti-Congress governments were set up in 8 of the 17 (West Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Tamilnadu, Haryana and Manipur). In West Bengal and Kerala the United Front ministries were composed of the CPI, CPI(M) and other democratic parties and elements. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab the CPI supported non-Congress ministries.

Mid-Term Elections 1969

The Congress leaders, having been used to a monopoly of political power in the 20 years since Independence, took very badly to the existence of non-Congress ministries in half the States, especially where, as in West Bengal, and Kerala, those ministries were led by the Left. The Congress Central Government adopted a hostile attitude to the non-Congress State ministries and began to use its extensive powers over State affairs to achieve their downfall. In West Bengal in particular, where the United Front government gave support to the movements of the masses for rights to which they were legally entitled but which had been denied them by the previous Congress regime (rights such as wage and bonus payments and to land illegally occupied by landlords), a hue and cry was raised by Congress about the "collapse of law and order" although the movements were peaceful.

By 1968 through bribery of members of United Fronts (no Communist could be bought however) and by the contravention of the rights of States laid down in the Constitution, the Central Government had managed to cause the downfall of the ministries of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, and the government called a "mini-general election" for February 1969.

The results of this election marked a further stage in the decline in support for the ruling

party. Congress was dealt a shattering blow and failed to win a majority in any of the four states.

In West Bengal the result was a triumph for the united Left and democratic front which polled 54 per cent of the vote and won 214 of the 280 seats. Congress won only 55 seats (127 in 1967) and Jana Sangh and Swatantra none (one each in 1967). The largest party was the CPI(M) with 80 seats (up from 43) and the CPI won 30 (previously 16). In votes the CPI(M) total went up from 2,293,000 in 1967 to 2,677,000 in 1969 and the CPI total from 827,000 to 937,000.

In Bihar no Left front could be formed largely because the main Left party the SSP with its anti-Congress obsession attempted to build an "all-in" electoral alliance including *all* non-Congress parties, even Jana Sangh. This was rejected by the CPI and other left parties, so the election became a "free-for-all" in which the vote of all the Left parties (except the CPI which increased from 936,000 or 6.7 per cent of the total votes cast in 1967 to 1,550,000 or 10.3 per cent in 1969) declined. On the other hand Jana Sangh advanced from 10.2 per cent to 15.2 per cent. Bihar was another object lesson in the necessity for Left unity.

In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, again, no Left front could be formed, in fact in Punjab not even a CPI-CPI(M) agreement could be reached and the CPI(M) made an electoral pact with the Sikh party Akali Dal which was the main beneficiary from Congress's losses. Although the Communist vote remained practically static both parties lost a seat each in Punjab.

In Uttar Pradesh the main party to advance was a new one, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, representing the richer peasantry, which had not contested in 1967 but which captured 99 seats in 1969. The CPI although increasing its vote from 630,000 to 715,000 lost nine seats and the CPI(M) had its vote cut from 273,000 to 115,000, though it retained its one seat. Jana Sangh also lost ground.

The 1969 elections confirmed the experience of 1967 that government policies were losing Congress electoral support and that if the Left could achieve unity they would be the ones to gain. It also proved, however, that, whereas in 1967 the people were willing to vote for any party which had a chance of ousting Congress, the experience of United Front government from 1967 to 1969 had changed blind anti-Congressism to a more careful consideration of different party policies, and it was where the Left movement had been campaigning longest to put its policy to the masses (i.e. in West Bengal and Bihar) that the best results were achieved. The CPI made a welcome advance in this election, raising its votes total

³ All these figures tend to obscure marked regional differences in party strength, for whereas the right-wing parties are strong in such states as Rajasthan, Orissa and Gujarat where the former princes are still influential, the Communist Parties have substantial numbers of seats in such State Assemblies as West Bengal (59), Kerala (71) and Bihar (28). Figures as for 1967 elections.

from 2,613,000 (1969) to 3,414,000, its percentage of the total vote from 5.03 to 6.04 and its seats from 58 to 63. The CPI(M), although it raised its votes tally from 2,878,000 to 3,080,000, its percentage from 5.52 to 5.97 and its seats from 57 to 86, registered all of its advance in West Bengal where its gains made up for losses elsewhere.

Congress After the Elections

The mid-term elections of 1969 brought the strains which had been growing within Congress for some time to near breaking point. The considerable loss of electoral support and the advances made by both Left and Right Wing parties were evidence of the growing mass discontent within the country over the consequences of the failure to radically change Indian society.⁴

The Congress leaders read the signs and they concluded that the ending of their electoral monopoly meant that it would be suicidal to go into the 1972 general elections without allies. But where to find them—the Left or the Right? The Congress Party membership still retains some of its old pre-1947 character of a broad national front ranging from real socialists to the extreme right even though the leadership and basic policy has been a bourgeois one. Consequently, one section of the Party regarded the Left as potential allies, another the Jana Sangh and Swatantra.

“The Syndicate” Attacks

It was the latter section of Congress which controlled the party machine and which was led by such men as Morarji Desai, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister and S. Nijalingappa, the then Congress President. These were two of the key figures in what has come to be popularly known as the “Syndicate”, the old guard conservatives who had a firm grip on the Congress organisation. The strategy of the Syndicate was to forge an alliance with Jana Sangh and Swatantra and set up a right wing government in India.

In this strategy the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s daughter, was to be ousted from her post. She had originally, on the death of former Prime Minister Shastri, been a compromise candidate in the faction-ridden Congress, but the party bosses had been dissatisfied with her performance as Prime Minister. To a great extent it was a question of a personal struggle for power but political issues were involved because the

Syndicate objected to the closeness of India’s relationship with the Soviet Union which developed under Indira Gandhi. (This in turn was not unconnected with the debate within Congress about the degree of State involvement in industrial development since much of the help the USSR has given India has been in developing heavy industry in the public sector). The Prime Minister was accused of surrounding herself with “favourites” of an allegedly pro-Soviet, anti-Western inclination.

Syndicate tactics for easing Indira Gandhi from the Prime Ministership involved, as a first stage, the election of Right-wing Sanjiva Reddy as President of the Republic (the previous President had recently died). As the British “Times” reported on July 10th, 1969, “this would be the first in a series of moves to force her resignation”.

Mrs. Gandhi then adopted the tactics which transformed the whole contest. She raised the fight from the plane of the personal-factional to the political by submitting in July 1969 to the Congress Working Committee (CWC) a note advocating radical economic measures including the nationalisation of some of the biggest banks, with a view to winning back mass support for Congress.

Mrs. Gandhi’s Moves

The Syndicate, knowing the mass support for socialism in India, could not but endorse the note, but were confident of preventing the implementation of the measures—Congress has a long history of socialist talk and capitalist practice.

What really electrified the political situation in the country was Mrs. Gandhi’s next moves. She sacked Desai, symbol of the extreme Right from his post as Finance Minister on the grounds that he would never implement socialist measures, took over the Ministry herself, accepted Desai’s resignation from the Cabinet and nationalised the 14 biggest banks in the country by ordinance on July 19th, 1969. These moves were enormously popular. Even the *Times* later admitted (October 19th) that Mrs. Gandhi’s popularity became “unrivalled since the nationalisation of the banks”.

The CPI organised massive rallies all over India in support of the nationalisation move and urged support for V. V. Giri, former Vice-President, who had decided to stand for the Presidency against Syndicate-man Reddy, in the impending Presidential elections. Reddy had been chosen by the Syndicate-controlled Congress organisation as the official Congress candidate but Mrs. Gandhi demanded a free vote by the electoral college members (from the Houses of Parliament and the State Legislatures).

⁴ As Myrdal (*loc. cit.* p. 279) observes: “If the well-springs of Indian development efforts seem now to be drying up, the explanation must in large part be traced to the inability or unwillingness to reform the social and economic structure of the country”.

Results were declared on August 20th. Giri had won 420,677 votes to Reddy's 405,427. The Syndicate plans had suffered a hard blow.

The Syndicate at first threatened Mrs. Gandhi and her supporters with action for a breach of Congress discipline, but the display of mass support for the Prime Minister's moves outside Parliament, and the obvious overwhelming support she commanded among Congress M.P.'s (it was estimated that 170-180 had voted for Giri) persuaded the Syndicate that the time was hardly opportune for forcing a showdown especially since opportunist elements in the Syndicate camp, seeing the way the wind was blowing, changed sides.

A patched-up "unity resolution" at the CWC meeting on August 25th marked a temporary truce, but during the autumn the cracks began to widen as the two sides manoeuvred to gain the advantage. The tactics of Mrs. Gandhi were to try to remove Nijalingappa, key Syndicate member, from his post as Congress Party President, as a step on the way to wresting control of the Party organisation from the Syndicate. The Syndicate's objective was to try to undermine the Prime Minister's strongest base, in the Parliamentary Party, by winning away a sufficient number of Congress M.P.s to prove that Mrs. Gandhi was dependent for the survival of her government on the votes of the Left. This would enable the Syndicate to attack her as a "tool of the Communists".

The Congress Splits

The impending split was now inevitable and it came at the beginning of November 1969. The Congress had split after 84 years of existence. The Prime Minister had hoped that her bid to capture the party machine would be successful and the Syndicate would be left isolated as a small group of four or five men, but in this she underestimated the strength of the Syndicate which retained much of the party machine.

There now followed a period of battle for as many Congress MPs and members as either side could lay its hands on. In the end 111 Congress MPs took their seats on the opposition benches as the Syndicate Congress—officially, the "Congress Party Opposition" (CPO), popularly known as "Cong-O"! When Mrs. Gandhi faced a no-confidence motion on November 17th, 306 MPs, from the Congress and the Left mainly, overwhelmingly outnumbered the 140 supporters of the motion, mainly from the CPO and the Right wing.

On November 23rd Mrs. Gandhi called an All-India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting which she claimed was attended by 441 of the 709 AICC members. But the Prime Minister dismayed the

Congress Left at the meeting by bringing the Maharaja of Baroda, leader of the princes' fight for the retention of their state pensions and privileges, on to the AICC. This was one of the numerous indications that the Congress split was not yet a clear left-right cleavage. Further evidence came at the Congress convention in Bombay at the end of December. Although the meeting directed the Government to carry out a new economic programme, including the nationalisation of India's import trade, and passed a resolution asking the Government to place an upper limit on urban property, implement existing land reform legislation by the end of 1970 and abolish the princely purses and privileges during the February Budget session, the response of the leadership was less militant. True enough, Mrs. Gandhi and Home Minister Y. B. Chavan, supported the measures, but the Prime Minister said she was not prepared to take over the import trade or wholesale trade in grain immediately as certain contracts would have to run out first. The clause had to be re-phrased to promise that the import trade would be nationalised "expeditiously" in the distant future. The leaders also refused to accept a resolution to amend the Constitution to abolish the fundamental right to own property, saying that the courts had ruled that Parliament had no right to amend this clause. Mrs. Gandhi reiterated her intention to abolish the princely purses but apart from this gave the Congress Left only vague slogans.

The differences within Mrs. Gandhi's camp were reflected in her failure to get unanimous and uncontested elections for the new CWC, 38 candidates having been put up by the various embryonic factions for the ten elected posts.

Attitudes of the Communist Parties

The attitudes of the two Communist Parties to the recent developments in Congress cannot be understood without some discussion of the broader differences between the parties.

These differences have quite a long history and have largely been concerned with the assessment of the role of the Indian bourgeoisie and the Congress Party. In 1934 one of the present CPI(M) leaders, B. T. Ranadive, met with opposition within the CPI over his characterisation of Gandhi as, objectively, an imperialist agent. After 1947, for several years, the Party leaders were disunited in their evaluation of independence and the changes brought by it, one section taking the position that India did not in reality attain independence in 1947.

Party unity was maintained until the early 1960s when General Secretary, Ajoy Ghosh, who had played an important part in preventing a split,

died. Soon after came the border conflict with China which was accompanied by the exacerbation of the differences within the Party and there followed in 1964 the split, involving a minority of about a third of the Party's National Council, which eventually formed its own party.

The CPI General Secretary, Rajeswara Rao ("New Age", August 31st 1969) has outlined three main points of difference which were at issue in 1964. These were:

1. Whether a revolutionary situation was maturing in 1962-4.
2. The support of the CPI(M) leaders for the Mao Tse-tung stand in the ideological dispute in the international communist movement.
3. The CPI's advocacy of a National Democratic Front as opposed to the CPI(M)'s People's Democratic Front.

Although the CPI(M) today rejects the first two points of disagreement as false, it is true that the public statements of the CPI(M) following the split clearly showed a similarity to many of the positions then taken up by the leadership of the Chinese Party and open opposition to the policy adopted by the international communist conference of 1960. In fact, soon after the 1964 Indian Party split, the CPI(M)'s line found favour with the Chinese Party leadership. This situation has now given way to one of bad relations and the withdrawal of Chinese support in favour of the "Naxalites". This is an extremist group which began to form in the CPI(M) in May 1967 and which eventually broke away to form a separate organisation, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). They take their name "Naxalites" from Naxalbarj, a settlement in West Bengal where they led a peasant revolt. This was widely reported by the Chinese press and radio which spoke of it in a favourable way.

The Naxalites

The Naxalites reject all agreements with other political parties as unprincipled compromises and speak of the CPI and CPI(M) involvement in Indian parliaments in the States and in Delhi as "bourgeois parliamentarism". They also substitute the advanced revolutionary vanguard for the masses and advocate premature insurrections. They take up a position which virtually denies the role of the working class in the revolution under the cover of slogans such as "peasants' people's war", "world villages encircling the world cities and liberating them", and "national liberation revolutions playing the decisive role in defeating world imperialism and achieving world socialist revolution". Finally, the extremists deny the existence of a world communist movement (ex-

cepting one or two Communist Parties) since they allege, in the face of the real facts, that the majority of Parties have succumbed to revisionist leadership and that the Soviet Union, in particular, has become an ally of imperialism.

This extremist line, as in other parts of the world, has an attraction for sections of lower middle-class youth and students with militant sentiments, and for some desperately poor peasants.

Attitude to Congress

There can be no doubt, that although the relationship between the CPI(M) and the Chinese Party has changed with the passage of time, the third point in Rajeswara Rao's analysis is of the greatest importance and needs fuller discussion.

The CPI characterises the state in India as "the organ of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence. This class rule has strong links with the landlords. These factors give rise to reactionary pulls on the state power". The CPI states that the monopoly bourgeoisie has not yet established its leadership of the state and the Congress, but that it is fighting to do so and in the meantime exerts powerful (though not leading) influence in both.

The CPI considers that differentiation in the bourgeoisie can be hastened by a stronger and more united mass movement and its impact on the ruling party. Its policy is to find allies among the representatives of the "non-big" (i.e. non-monopolist) bourgeoisie who are considered to exist in Congress and the Government and to form a National Democratic Front with these and other left and democratic forces in which there will not be exclusive leadership of either the revolutionary party of the proletariat or of the "non-big" bourgeoisie.

The attitude of the CPI to the Congress split is that although it is not yet a clear-cut division between progressives and reactionaries, it is the *beginning* of such a differentiation. For this reason the CPI gives tactical support to the Indira Gandhi section even though it contains "vacillating and even reactionary sections". The intention of the CPI is to use its influence to strengthen the progressive trend in the Indira Gandhi camp, a trend which is engaged in a struggle to reverse the shift to the Right which in previous years had become the order of the day in Congress and the government.

The CPI(M), however, regards India as a "bourgeois-landlord state *headed* by the big bourgeoisie". Its estimate of Congress is that it represents essentially the three main exploiting

classes of Indian society, the big (monopolist) bourgeoisie, the "non-big" bourgeoisie and the landlords.

Estimations of the Congress Split

The CPI(M) considers that a split in the "conflicting combine" is inevitable since the "non-big" bourgeoisie is "objectively interested in the accomplishment of the principal tasks of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution". The Party considers that, with the growing crisis in India due to the following of the capitalist path of development and the growth of the movement of the masses against this path, the "non-big" bourgeoisie will be compelled to "come into opposition with state power and can find a place in the people's democratic front", though under "proletarian hegemony". But although "every effort must be made to win them to the democratic front", the CPI(M) considers that the "non-big" bourgeoisie "are still sharing state power along with the big bourgeoisie and entertain high hopes of advancing under the same regime".

Consequently the CPI(M) does not see the present split in Congress as, at root, one between a monopolist and a non-monopolist section but as two variants of "the same old bourgeois-landlord class line", in other words as "two conflicting tactical lines" which both have the aim of securing stability for their class rule. Thus although they consider one Congress party to be relatively progressive and the other reactionary and although they are prepared to give a degree of support to the Indira Gandhi group as a measure against the Syndicate-Swatantra-Sangh axis, their estimate of the relative closeness of the two positions is shown in their labelling them as "Syndicate" and "Indicate".

The unenthusiastic CPI(M) view of the split is in contrast to that of the CPI which considers that the Congress rift has presented the democratic movement in India with the opportunity "to broaden its base and for the masses to forge ahead in their struggle for democracy and social progress". (Resolution of the National Council of the CPI, November 24th, 1969). The CPI has also stated that, although the CPI(M) envisaged sections of the small and medium bourgeoisie breaking away and coming out in opposition to the state power, it never considered that the differentiation could develop in the government with the central government itself taking anti-monopoly measures as it has done over the banks.

Unstable Situation

The CPI considers that to reduce the difference between the two Congress parties to one of merely

"two conflicting tactical lines" is to ignore the possibilities which the new situation presents. Thus, the move of Congress government to the Right, which had in earlier years been pronounced, has been more or less halted. In addition, a number of significant measures which are in the interests of the masses have been wrested from the government. In fact on May 18th 1970, the ruling Congress Party acted against India's former princes when the Home Minister introduced a Bill to abolish the former Rajahs' privileges and privy purses. This will save the nation £2.5m a year and will also abolish certain tax and duty concessions.

On the other hand, the CPI has no illusions but that the present situation is a highly unstable one, with the Indira Gandhi government resisting pressure from the Left and with reactionaries entrenched in the ruling Congress sabotaging progressive changes. An example came in April when a government-supported bill to abolish the privileges of the remaining members of the old Indian Civil Service was defeated when several ruling Congress MPs conveniently failed to show up in Parliament for the crucial division.

The CPI considers that the Indira Gandhi government is too weak to fight the reactionary combine of the Syndicate-Jana-Sangh-Swatantra axis and has said that its support for the government against the Rightist bid for power does not imply the Party's general support. Whether to support or oppose the government is decided from the standpoint of the interests of the people and each issue is to be judged on its merits.

The CPI has taken the position that no basic changes in the structure of Indian society can be expected from the present government which is even incapable of eliminating the Rightist threat. The present Indira Gandhi government which is vulnerable to pressures both from the Left and the Right is considered to be only a temporary phase in a rapidly developing situation. It is expected that it will be replaced either by a government of Left and democratic unity or by a Rightist coalition.

The Prospects for India

The situation in India presents for the Left both a big challenge and new opportunities which did not exist previously. The policy of leaving the rural social structure basically untouched and strengthening the monopoly hold over the economy, which Congress governments have been pursuing, has brought India to an economic and social-political crisis. The anti-Congress movements of millions of Indians and the gains of Left and democratic parties in the recent period have brought the Indian bourgeoisie to the pre-

sent crisis. Whether or not the Left can turn the situation further in its favour depends very largely on the further growth in strength of the Left, and the greatest obstacle to such a growth is disunity.

One of the threats to the unity of the masses is communalism. The ruling class has always tried to split the movements against them by playing on all kinds of differences and in India one of the differences which has been exploited most is between Hindu and Muslim.

Between September 18th to 26th September 1969, in Ahmedabad, there occurred the worst communal riot since the carnage of the days of Partition. No-one knows the correct number killed, because the official figure of 1,000 is certainly an underestimate, but it is known that more than 50,000 were made homeless, especially among the minority community.

Further communal rioting has taken place in Maharashtra state during May 1970 and the authorities themselves have begun to speak out openly against the role played by communalist parties. On May 14th Mrs. Gandhi bitterly attacked the leader of Jana Sangh, A. B. Vajpayee, for fomenting communal hatred and preaching "naked fascism".

Communalism continues to present grave dangers to working class unity and is an important weapon in the hands of reaction. It is also notable how often these communal riots are used as an excuse to murder working class leaders and recent events have been no exception.

The biggest weakness and problem is the disunity of the Left forces. This is made even more acute by the divisions between Indian communists themselves, not only because there exist different Communist parties, but because the political differences between them are now very sharp and have affected the mass organisations of workers and peasants.

Kerala

The dangers of disunity among the forces opposing reaction have also manifested themselves in the state of Kerala. Here, a United Front government was formed after the 1967 elections with a huge majority in the State Assembly. The CPI(M) was the largest party with 50 seats in an Assembly of 116. The CPI had 21 seats and a number of other Left parties participated in the United Front. Divisions soon manifested themselves, however, and the United Front government ended in October 1969 with the resignation of CPI(M) Chief Minister E. M. S. Namboodiripad.

The CPI has declared that the break-up of the Kerala Ministry was due to the CPI(M) policy of

"big-party bossism", disruptive behaviour and sectarian policies. It emphasises that the CPI(M) has indulged in "ultra-revolutionary phraseology" about the defects of the Constitution and about the people's struggles, denouncing the other parties as revisionist, whilst failing to make a serious attempt to implement "even the minimum programme of the Front".

In particular it points out that the CPI(M) Minister in charge of a comprehensive amending Bill to change the Land Reforms Act of 1964 was responsible for inexcusable delay in preparing the Bill which was placed before the Assembly only in August 1969. The CPI also states that the CPI(M) gave concessions to vested interests in Kerala such as transport operators and wholesale food grain dealers. But the key charge is that the CPI(M) used their hold over the administrative machine of the State to further their party interests and subjugate the other United Front partners.

The CPI states that after the 1969 mid-term elections Namboodiripad came out with a statement that the CPI(M) had to work for a new realignment of political parties for the 1972 elections when the CPI(M) would have to aim at a single party majority for itself in Kerala. It is this, the CPI say, which has been behind the "big party bossism" by the CPI(M) in Kerala and its "treating of the allies of the working class as enemies to be exposed and fought first".

N. K. Krishnan (CPI) in *New Age*, November 9th, 1969 commented:

"there is nothing in common between fraternal criticism and the Left-sectarian line of directing the main fire against the partners of the United Front in the name of fighting 'revisionism' and 'bourgeois reformism'."

The CPI declared last autumn that the CPI(M) leaders were trying to use the split in the Congress Party, not to strengthen the existing United Fronts and extend them on to an all-India level, but to press forward their one-party domination in the then existing United Fronts of Kerala and West Bengal. The CPI considered ominous the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPI(M) passed at its October 1969 session which spoke of splits in the United Fronts being inevitable and which forecast that future United Fronts would be of a different form. The CPI has pointed out that the results of these theories of the inevitability of splits and the polarisation between "bourgeois and revisionists" on the one hand and "the revolutionary forces" on the other could lead to the same type of disastrous consequences which the similar Maoist theses led to in the international communist movement.

Fortunately, the fall of the Kerala United Front Ministry was not followed by Presidential rule. On November 1st a new United Front ministry was sworn in with C. Achutha Menon (CPI) as Chief Minister. However, the strongest party in the Assembly, the CPI(M) immediately called for "total opposition" to the new government, proclaimed November 1st as "betrayed day" and declared its intention to "rouse public opinion to make it impossible for this Government to continue". Demonstrations were mounted against the Government by the CPI(M) but they failed in their objective.

The new United Front Ministry already has a number of progressive measures to its credit. An ordinance for the payment of gratuities by employers to workers who retire, resign or are dismissed took effect from December 10th. Another ordinance ensuring proper rates of pay for agricultural workers awaits the concurrence of the Centre and an agreement was signed on November 30th between the Kerala government and the Food Corporation of India to hand over to the latter wholesale distribution of food grains in the state. *Within 31 days of assuming office the new Government distributed permanent title deeds for land to over 25,000 families.* Moreover strong measures have been taken to evict rich landlords from government land they have been occupying without authorisation. A "Trade Union Recognition Ordinance" is also awaiting ratification by Centre. Most important of all, the Kerala Land Reforms (amendment) Act of January 1st, 1970 is the most radical land reform implemented anywhere in India and a model for future legislation.

The CPI considers it important that the achievements of the present Kerala government be popularised throughout India to help restore the people's faith in the Left and democratic united front where it has been shaken by the disruptive line of the CPI(M).

West Bengal

This is a matter of particular concern after recent events in the other state where a United Front existed, West Bengal. The greatest problem here has been frequent violent clashes between groups of CPI(M) supporters and those of the other parties in the United Front. The situation was aggravated by the failure of the CPI(M) Home Minister, Jyoti Basu, to maintain law and order. In fact there are indications that he used his position in a biased manner in order to assist the CPI(M) at the expense of other United Front parties. The CPI has been among the critics of the attitude and behaviour of the CPI(M) towards its colleagues in the Front. *New Age* (March 22nd,

1970) charged the CPI(M) of "misusing the police portfolio to behead other partners of the Front, disrupt their mass following and into the bargain create a general condition of insecurity in the entire state". In the CPI it is felt that these disruptive policies of the CPI(M) are a direct result of the sectarian position it has taken up in which it sees itself as the only main fighter against the supposed "revisionism" of other Left parties.

In the face of these difficulties, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Ajoy Mukherjee, announced his intention to resign on March 8th and submitted his official letter of resignation on March 16th whereupon the CPI(M) tried to set up a "mini-government", based on itself with whatever allies it could secure, but without the majority of the United Front. To bring pressure to bear on the Governor and make him agree to such a proposal the CPI(M) called a general strike on March 17th, 1970. There was considerable opposition to this strike call from the supporters of the other parties, and sharp clashes took place. *New Age* (March 22nd, 1970) charged that "Armed gangs of the CPI(M) inspired by the campaign of hatred unleashed by its leaders, attacked the workers to enforce the strike call, killing at least 27 and injuring over 200".

The Governor refused to accept the CPI(M) "minifront Government" proposal, and accordingly the central Government suspended the State Assembly on 19th March, 1970 and introduced President's rule.

The CPI has put forward proposals to revive the 14-party United Front on a new basis and for its restoration to power again with Ajoy Mukherjee as Chief Minister and by allotting the home portfolio to a party other than the CPI(M). Unfortunately, a wave of acts of violence and terror carried out by groups of Naxalites in Calcutta has given the opportunity for reaction to carry out a programme of repression and reprisals.

This situation has been a factor behind recent suggestions made by General K. M. Cariappa, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, that the constitution should be scrapped and the present Administration replaced with Army rule. Another part of the background to these calls has been the unprincipled behaviour of Congress and other politicians in the States in the recent period of the decline in Congress monopoly of power. State governments have collapsed on innumerable occasions as Congressmen and others, seeking personal power and gain, have neglected election pledges and defected to the opposition. All this has given Cariappa the opportunity to demand Army rule in "politically unstable states", the dissolution of Parliament and

the assumption of power at the Centre by the President with "the backing of the Army and a group of eminent advisers" (*Times*, 18th May).

Conclusion

India faces a very difficult and complex situation. The split in the Congress, and the manoeuvres on the Right, emphasise the need for the utmost unity of the Left forces in order to achieve a progressive orientation for the country as a whole. The split in the Communist Party, however, with both the CPI and the CPI(M) enjoying a mass following of millions of supporters⁵ and voters (apart from the further breakaway of the Naxalites), and in particular the sectarian and adventurist policy of the CPI(M), have brought about deep divisions on the Left precisely at a time when the greatest unity is required. These divisions can only play into the hands of reaction.

A further recent blow to left unity has been the

⁵ A welcome indication of the advance the CPI has registered over the recent period was the growth in Party membership reported after the 1970 membership enrolment Campaign which ended on January 31st. In 1968 CPI membership stood at 135,212. The 1970 figure is 243,238, an 80 per cent increase. Membership is highest in Bihar (48,580), Andhra (37,043), Kerala (33,000) and West Bengal (28,856).

decision of the CPI(M) to form a separate trade union organisation. The existing All-India Trade Union Congress which, for many years, has organised Indian workers and conducted many major class battles, has up to now been able to avoid the worst consequences of the split between the CPI and the CPI(M). Leaders and members of both parties have worked within the one trade union body although, naturally enough, there have been difficulties. Whatever may be the views concerning the politics of the two different parties there is no doubt that the splitting of this mass organisation, can only increase the difficulties on the Left, facilitate the attacks of the employers and give pleasure to all on the right who want to use the present situation for further attacks on the democratic rights of the people.

A disunited Left could be faced with a regrouping of forces on the right—Syndicate, Jana Sangh, Swatantra—backed by the military. The collapse of the centre (Congress Party) would not automatically mean a turn of India to the Left. If the Left is divided and with no agreed common position, the result could be a move to the right. As the National Council of the CPI (May 17th) has said, "the question of power at the Centre is already on the agenda". How this question is answered will have important consequences for the situation in the rest of Asia and therefore for world politics.