

RESOLUTION 'ON ELECTIONS'

[*The following is the document (Draft) of the CPI(ML) led by Satyanarain Singh, dated April 3, 1977.—Ed.*]

The Central Committee, having reviewed the Party line 'on elections', has come to the conclusion that the line of total and general boycott of elections during the entire period of People's Democratic revolution is a line contrary to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and is an outcome of the Party's over-reaction to revisionism and subjective and metaphysical approach.

The Party, particularly the Central Committee, confused the parliamentary path as peddled by the revisionists with participation in and utilisation of the parliamentary institutions by the revolutionary Marxists for exposing the real nature of bourgeois parliaments, for educating the backward sections of the people about the necessity of armed struggle for the overthrow of their enemies, for organising and mobilising the broad masses in revolutionary struggles and for wrecking the bourgeois parliament from within. The parliamentary path

peddled by the revisionists is to go to establish the so-called parliamentary democracy in India as an "instrument of people's will" and advocate the "peaceful path" to socialism or the path of "peaceful transition". The revisionists' conception is to gain a majority in parliament, capture the government and effect basic social transformation without demolishing the existing reactionary State machinery. The revolutionary Marxists, on the other hand, believe in utilising the elections for mobilizing the people for revolutionary overthrow of the enemies of the people from power by smashing the reactionary State machinery, for overthrowing bourgeois democracy and establishing people's democracy and socialist democracy. The parliamentary path peddled by the revisionists and revolutionary utilisation of the bourgeois parliament are not the same thing. The Central Committee in its over-reaction to revisionism, wrongly bracketed the two entirely mutually antagonistic concepts and adopted the line of total and general boycott. The impetuosity of accomplishing the revolution on the morrow to our resolve led the CC and the whole Party to a negative and harmful line of boycottism. It led to boycott of elections, boycott of partial and economic struggles and boycott of mass organisations and threw the entire Party and the revolutionary movement off its correct rails. In our enthusiasm to draw a sharp line of distinction between Marxists and the revisionists, the CC and the Party threw away the baby with bath water.

Even after the CC and the Party rectified its line of boycott of economic and partial struggles and of mass organisations, even after it upheld and practised the tactics of combining the legal with the illegal, open with secret and other forms of struggle with armed struggle, the line of total and general boycott of elections was continued on the basis of the erroneous understanding that to utilise parliament was the same as taking to the parliamentary path and giving up the path of People's war.

The CC, victim of subjectivism and voluntarism, negated

the Leninist conception that utilisation of the parliament or participation or non-participation in elections or in bourgeois-parliament was a matter of tactics, that it was part of the tactics of combining legal with illegal and there cannot be an absolute approach to this question as it was a question of tactics and when to participate in it or when to call for a boycott depended upon the level of consciousness of the people, degree of their organisation and strength and the striking capacity of the Party.

Comrade Lenin narrated the experience of the Bolsheviks and observed : "...it has been proved that participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament even a few weeks before the victory of the Soviet republic, and even *after* such a victory, not only does not harm the revolutionary proletariat, but actually helps it to *prove* to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be dispersed ; it *helps* their successful dispersal and *helps* to make bourgeois-parliamentarism 'politically obsolete'. To refuse to heed to this experience, and at the same time to claim affiliation to the Communist *International*, which must work out its tactics *internationally* (not as narrow or one-sided national tactics, but as international tactics), is to commit the gravest blunder and to retreat from internationalism while recognizing it in words."

[Lenin : *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*
Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975 P. 54]

Thus, participation in bourgeois parliament before and even after the victory of the Soviet Republic, in order to prove to the backward masses the utter futility of such parliaments, to facilitate its successful dissolution and to make it politically obsolete for the masses was correct tactics for the Bolsheviks, according to Lenin. The line of total and general boycott of elections upheld by the Central Committee was thus a total rejection of Leninism on this question.

Lenin repeatedly has spoken about the political conditions in which to participate in elections or not to participate in elections. Writing about the boycott of Duma in August

1905, Lenin observed thus : “At that time the boycott proved correct; not because non-participation in reactionary parliaments is correct in general, but because we correctly gauged the objective situation which was leading to the rapid transformation of the mass strikes into a political strike, then into revolutionary strike and then into uprising. Moreover, the struggle at that time centred around the question whether to leave the convocation of the first representative assembly to the tsar, or to attempt to wrest its convocation from the hands of the old regime. When there was no certainty, nor could there be, that the objective situation was analogous, and likewise no certainty of similar trend and rate of development, the boycott ceased to be correct.”

[Lenin : *Ibid*, Pp. 20-21]

Bolsheviks linked the question of participation or boycott of Duma or elections to a particular combination in the situation. The boycott was correct when revolutionary strikes were turning into an uprising, when Soviets as people's organ of power had begun appearing and when revolution was on the verge of breaking out. The revolutionary tide was reaching its zenith.

Similarly, pointing out the reasons justifying participation in bourgeois parliament, Lenin observed : “Even if not ‘millions’ and ‘legions’, but only a fairly large *minority* of industrial workers follow the Catholic priests—and a similar minority of rural workers follow the landlords and kulaks (Grossbauern)—it *undoubtedly* follows that parliamentarism in Germany is *not* yet politically obsolete, that participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is *obligatory* for the party of the revolutionary proletariat *precisely* for the purpose of educating the backward strata, of *its own class*, precisely for the purpose of awakening and enlightening the undeveloped, downtrodden, ignorant rural *masses*. As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you *must* work inside them *precisely* because there you will still

find workers who are doped by the priests and by the dreariness of rural life, otherwise you risk becoming mere babblers.”

[Lenin : *Ibid*, Pp. 52-53]

Thus, Lenin points out the conditions in which it is obligatory on the part of the revolutionary proletariat to utilise elections and the bourgeois parliaments to work within them. As long as revolutionaries lack the strength to do away with bourgeois parliaments and every other type of reactionary institutions, they must work within them.

However, the CC ignored the scientific tactics laid down by Lenin and adopted a disastrous tactic of boycotting all elections irrespective of the level of the revolutionary movement, the level of consciousness of the people and the degree of their organised strength.

The CC, in order to justify its departure from Leninist tactics, used all sorts of arguments to defend its “Left” slogan of general boycott. The CC in its various documents (*Revisionist Onslaught, The Indian Revolution and Its Path* and other documents) laboured hard to prove that Leninist tactics with regard to participation in bourgeois parliament was no longer applicable to the present day India. The CC took shelter behind the argument that world capitalism was no longer in the stage of decennial crises but in the stage of permanent crisis, that the Indian people had already sufficient experience of the elections since 1952 or even earlier and were convinced that in India elections were based on bogus votes and not on real votes, that there existed no lull in the revolutionary struggles and that it was in the phase of decline. The CC, in one of its documents, categorically stated that parliamentary democracy was not only historically obsolete but also politically obsolete in India. Hence the decision of the Party to boycott elections. There has never arisen a situation in which the boycott could be a correct slogan. Overwhelming majority of people have yet to get disillusioned from the elections, their struggle has yet to reach the stage when they could have the strength to sweep away the bourgeois parlia-

ments and other reactionary institutions. The revolutionary movement is still in its infancy. The areas of revolutionary mass struggles are microscopically small in size in such a vast country as ours. Even when the country was passing through post-Naxalbari upsurge, the level of consciousness of the people, their organisation and strength had not reached to *that* stage when they could sweep away the parliament. The organs of people's power were yet to be born. The parliamentary democracy—though historically obsolete had not politically outlived itself. People were making use of it and participating in the elections and this was not only the case with the backward strata of the people but for the whole people, except the people of those areas where we had developed good movement and where they followed us loyally. What was politically obsolete to the revolutionary Marxists had not yet become so for the masses, for not only for a substantial minority of our people but for the millions of our countrymen. The CC confused the relationship of the leadership with the masses. Can the basis of outbursts of mass peasant struggles from Naxalbari, the militant waves of students' struggles and working class struggles in several parts of the country be taken as the emergence of the stage when combining the legal with the illegal, parliamentary with the extra-parliamentary, the open with the secret, and other forms of struggle were regarded as contemptible and counter-revolutionary? The subsequent elections also, even the one held in 1971 after the severe setback suffered by the revolutionary people in 1970-71, did not move us to the realisation of the reality that revolution had suffered defeat, that revolutionary forces had to be revived, strength had to be created and accumulated in order to prepare the Party and the revolutionary forces for a rapid advance. The boycott of elections to the Lok Sabha in 1977 (March) was the most serious blunder as it prevented the Party from emerging as a much stronger force. The bankruptcy of the line of general boycott, the total absurdity of it can be realised from the fact that it was

overthrown not only by masses, but by overwhelming majority of revolutionary cadres as well. In this respect, the election verdict of 1977 is also a convincing victory against the line of general and total boycott of elections advanced by the Party. Comrade Lenin teaches us: "We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, but said—and from April (1917) Conference of our Party onwards began to say officially in the name of the Party—that a bourgeois republic, with a Constituent Assembly is better than a bourgeois republic without a Constituent Assembly; but that a "workers' and peasants' " republic, a Soviet republic, is better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary, republic. Without such careful, thorough, circumspect and prolonged preparations we could not have obtained victory in October 1917, nor have maintained that victory". [Lenin : *Ibid* P. 15].

The CC could have taken the lesson from Lenin and stated that a big bourgeois-big landlord regime with bourgeois democratic rights and institutions was better than a big bourgeois-big landlord regime without bourgeois democratic rights and institutions but the people's democracy was the best. Even this mistake might have saved us from the ridiculous position in which the CC landed itself in March 1977. In this election we even failed to correctly estimate the urge of the people against the fascist dictatorship of Indira Gandhi and therefore failed to play a positive role in the 1977 elections.

The CC in its effort to overcome Lenin's objection to the line of general and total boycott of elections took shelter behind the argument that since India was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country and not a capitalist country, there existed no democratic rights and that elections on the basis of adult suffrage and secret ballot had no relevance for the revolutionary people. The material reality of the existence of parliament and people's participation in elections were just ignored or wished away as it might create illusions in the minds of the people and divert them from the path of people's war.

It was argued that if the Party participated in elections it would deviate from the path of armed struggle. While it was correct to think that in a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country the base of bourgeois democratic liberties as parliamentary institution is weak, but this was only one aspect of the reality, the other aspect being the existence of the bourgeois parliament with adult suffrage and secret ballot. The elections could have been used right since the outbreak of the Naxalbari struggle to take our programme and path to the vast millions of our countrymen, and revolutionary movements developed by combining the legal with the illegal were simply not considered at all. The existence of parliament in a semi-colonial semi-feudal country was summarily dismissed as useless despite the express provisions in the June 14 letter of CPC regarding combining parliamentary with extra-parliamentary. Since, there existed no parliament in China for the CPC to make use of, we refused to take the concrete reality of a parliament in India and fell a victim to metaphysical approach. The CC based itself not on facts but on fancy.

The CC, in order to overcome the discomfiture caused by Lenin, took shelter behind the argument that it was not a period of lull but of revolutionary upsurge and that the tactics of participation in election did not apply. Our conception of an upsurge was that even if there was a lull in this period, it would be of a very short duration. In one of our documents, we had stated that the revolutionary upsurge which had appeared in post-war India was still continuing. Although we recognized the possibility of a "temporary lull", for all practical purposes, the CC has been a victim of the theory of permanent upsurge. And, that is one of the main reasons why even after the serious setback of 1970, even after the caution of the 10th Congress of the CPC that Leninism was the Marxism of the era and that Lenin's theory and *tactics* were valid today, we refused to *move* out of our fancy world. The conception of permanent upsurge has been damaging the Party's links with the masses and leading to voluntarism in practice. Even

after being smashed, the revolutionary situation became more and more excellent and the boycott continued !

The CC, in its attempts to overcome Lenin's admonitions to those who believed in general and total boycott irrespective of the conditions, took shelter behind the fact that since armed struggle had emerged, the parliament, assemblies or local bodies would cause hindrance to its development and expansion. It was not taken into account that though the peasants rose in mass struggles taking arms against the feudals in several pockets of the country, areas of armed resistance were microscopically small, the number of regular squads were still very small and they too acted mainly in self-defence and for more time they organized the people in struggle on the basis of their immediate demands, and we had a long way to go in emerging as a national political force of any significance in the country and that we had to work hard, and utilise all legal opportunities to educate and mobilise the people for agrarian revolution and for the path of the people's war. And, for such an objective, the parliamentary institutions had to be combined with the extra-parliamentary and other forms of struggle had to be waged to supplement the armed struggle that was emerging in some small pockets in the country. But the CC counterpoised the utilisation of elections of the parliament against armed struggle, thus ignoring the dialectical unity between other forms of struggle with armed struggle.

The CPI(ML) has committed grave mistakes in the sphere of applying Marxist-Leninist tactics in Indian conditions, which have caused much harm to the cause of the people (by the line of general and total boycott of elections irrespective of conditions). The CC is mainly responsible for the continuance of this "Left" line for such a long period, although this line was continuously opposed by several communist revolutionaries both inside and outside the Party.

The CC committed "Left" deviation on this question because it failed to apply Marxism-Leninism to the concrete practice of Indian revolution. It became a victim of meta-

physical approach and abandoned Marxist dialectics. Besides, it should be noted that the wrong line on elections was the product of over-reaction to revisionism and its manifestations—legalism, parliamentarism and reformism. Such has been the ideological source or root of this “Left” deviation.

The social root was the very preponderance of the petty bourgeoisie in the party ranks as well as in the leadership of the Party. The urban petty bourgeoisie, the ruined artisans and impoverished peasantry and its mood of dejection and impetuosity cast their reflections and the Party became a victim of impetuosity of the petty bourgeoisie. Such has been the social basis of our “Left” deviation on this issue.

The historical root of this deviation was the long domination of revisionism in our party. The cadres and the leadership of the CPI(ML) had seen how before the split, the CPI(M) had degenerated into an election machine, into a completely legal, open and reformist party and how cadres had got infatuated with all the views of bourgeois parliamentarians. This past history created a feeling of aversion against parliamentary elections in the minds of revolutionary cadres and leaders who not only lacked maturity in Marxism but also lacked sufficient experience of revolutionary struggles. The absence of parliamentary institutions in several countries of Asia also had its impact on the minds of the cadres and leaders of the Party.

In conclusion, the CC views that participation in a particular election or its boycott should be treated as a question of tactics. And this should be decided on the basis of the concrete situation existing at the time of that particular election, depending on the consciousness of the people, the level and organised strength of the people’s movement. Comrades should realise that the aim of participation in or the boycott of a particular election is the same, namely, the advancement of the revolutionary movement through different methods. Therefore, the Party should decide its attitude to any election, whether to the parliament or assemblies or local bodies, on the eve of each election on the basis of the conditions laid down by Lenin.

The CC is placing this resolution before all the Party units for discussion. After gathering the opinions of the Party on this question, the CC will take the final decision on this.

[Source : "*Red Flag*" (edited by Satyanarain Singh),
Bulletin No. 2]