

On Communist Unity

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The subject of prospects of unity of the communist movement, particularly the merger of the CPI(M) and CPI, has evoked much interest and speculation in political circles. This has come in the context of the growing prestige of the Left forces as a whole in the political scenario of the country. The continuous and consistent struggles of the working class and toiling people against the growing misery getting accentuated by the new economic policies, the systematic campaign against communalism and for national unity and the fight against corruption and social evils -- waged under the initiative of the Left has kindled expectations of unity of the Communist movement. The recent victories of the Communist parties in Andhra assembly elections have further contributed to rising expectations. Large number of sympathisers and well wishers of the communist movement, articulate these aspirations quite often. The CPI has been time and again going public with statements expressing its eagerness for communist unity, though no specific proposals or suggestions have been ever advanced. The CPI(M) has on various occasions in the past explained its essential approach to the question. Here we are trying to examine these questions on the basis of the fundamental ideological, political-organisational aspects connected with the subject.

Expressions of sentiments and good intentions cannot by themselves lead to the realisation of the aim of building a revolutionary party. The ideological, political, practical and organisational basis for unity and historical experience of the international and national level have to be borne in mind.

International Experience

The first political organisation of the world proletariat was the Communist League founded in 1847. The Communist Manifesto, was published as the programme of the League. The League had as its aim the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the building of a

communist society. The battle slogan of the world proletariat -- "working men of all countries, unite!", was given. As the class struggle deepened, the slogan was strengthened to "Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite!"

In September 1864, the International Workingmen's Association was constituted. The First international considerably strengthened the international solidarity of the European and American working class, and as Lenin said "laid the foundation of an international organisation of the workers for the preparation of their revolutionary attack on capital, laid the foundation of the proletarian, international struggle for socialism." It also performed a significant role in guiding the revolutionary working class movement in various countries. Influential mass working class parties emerged in many countries. The historic Paris Commune of 1871, was the first example of the working class seizing political power.

A new upsurge in the international working class movement began at the close of the 19th century, with the spread of the Marxian ideology. The second international came into being, with Engels taking an important part in its founding.

The Second international founded in 1889 played a significant role in uniting and rallying the workers and spreading Marxism. Unfortunately, however, in the political and theoretical outlook and activities of the international, opportunism took its toll. This was due to the period of comparatively peaceful development of capitalism, the growth of the working class movement and the participation in it of members of non-proletarian strata, the emergence of labour aristocracy and labour bureaucracy, which introduced the idea of compromise into the labour movement. All this took place, as Lenin clarified, "at the cost of a temporary drop in the revolutionary level, a temporary strengthening of opportunism, which in the end led to the disgraceful collapse of this international". Notwithstanding this, during this period, together, there existed and operated within the labour movement, a different, genuinely revolutionary tendency. The most consistent channel of it was Bolshevism, that was led by Lenin. In the struggle inside the R.S.D.L.P a clear cut division emerged between the majority (Bolsheviks) and the minority (Mensheviks). Bolshevism represented an active struggle against reformism and helped to strengthen and rally the international revolutionary movement within the working class movement.

It was precisely due to the unflinching struggle waged by the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership that the social-chauvinist degradation of most of the parties of the Second International could not destroy the basic vitality of the revolutionary movement. Even during the trying years of the first world war, the Left contingents of

the revolutionary movement maintained and widened their mutual contacts and ties.

This was a period when the communist movement was confined mainly to Europe. It was a time when it was conceptualised that revolution will take place in Europe. The European social democratic parties, however, soon found themselves rallying behind the bourgeoisie of their respective countries, in the latter's war efforts. It was only the Bolshevik party, under the indomitable leadership of Lenin, that could successfully seize the initiative and achieve victory in the revolution in 1917.

With the October revolution began a new epoch, the epoch of transition from capitalism to socialism. This was to have a cascading effect on the then ongoing ideological debate. The Leftists in the social democratic parties in other countries too were inspired to follow the example of the Bolsheviks. Comprehending this situation, Lenin took the initiative to form a new international.

Lenin had conclusively demonstrated the necessity of forming such an international organisation of the working class. This followed from his own contributions to the Marxist theory. With the emergence of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, Lenin visualised a period of fierce onslaught on the working class as well as on the peoples of the colonial countries and consequently of intense revolutionary struggles. To meet this challenge and provide leadership to the struggle and to combat reformist ideas obstructing the struggle a new International organisation of the proletariat became a historical necessity. The Communist International known as the Third international was founded in 1919.

The Third International was a qualitatively new type of organisation, which absorbed the best traditions of the world revolutionary movement, developed and enriched them, while giving it a new organisational form. Under the guidance of the CI, communist parties were formed in various countries advanced beyond the borders of Europe and America. It rapidly spread in Asia and Africa and emerged on the world scene as a powerful accelerator of the historical progress, exercising more and more influence over the world.

The coming into being of the Communist International was not a smooth process. The spread of the movement, the formation and development of communist parties and the dissemination of its ideology was met with violent resistance from the Right-wing leaders of social democracy, who adopted anti-communist positions. At a later stage, the communist movement had to combat Left sectarian and dogmatic trends. Thanks to the leadership of Lenin, the

Communist international was not only able to steer clear of these challenges from revisionism and dogmatism but in the process consolidate its ideological and political basis. This accomplishment came about as the Comintern could furnish answers to the problems faced by the working class movement as well as that of the national liberation movements, based on Marxist-Leninist postulates, while playing an important part in framing the political strategies and tactics of the communist parties in different countries. The Comintern upheld the concept of the Communist Party as the highest form of class association, and stressed that the Communist Party should fulfill its leading role in the working class movement, while unremittingly propagating Marxism-Leninism.

This experience of the International clearly revealed that during the course of the forward march of the movement, the communist movement at every twist and turn in history had to confront the challenge of reformist and sectarian ideas. It was only by defeating and overcoming them that it was able to consolidate the revolutionary forces.

Current Experience

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in East European countries conclusively prove the devastating effect that such trends within the communist movement can cause. The distortions in socialist construction combined with the deviations from the science of Marxism-Leninism had ultimately led to the setbacks and reverses. The revisionist ideas that gained greater currency during the Gorbachev period, were accelerated further, leading ultimately to the abandonment of the socialist ideal itself. It was not surprising, therefore, to find many communist parties replacing their name boards overnight and turning out to be amongst the most vociferous critics of all revolutionary concepts. Indulging in denunciation, such parties even started questioning the fundamentals of the Marxist ideology. These were to an extent reminiscent of the latter period of the second international.

Once again, within a very short period of time of three to four years, events have confirmed the basic validity of the CPI(M)'s stand and have rebuffed the defeatist, nihilist responses of the detractors. Recent experience is confirming that sans the revolutionary ideology and bereft of the principles that would guide such an organisation, no communist party can survive. This is a historical truth established beyond doubt. In the absence of both, a ideology based on the revolutionary tenets of Marxism-Leninism, and the organisational

principles that flow from it, the movement will fail in discharging its responsibility of leading the proletariat to victory and the attainment of the socialist ideal.

Indian Experience

In evaluating our own experience and drawing lessons, it should be borne in mind that the communist movement had had to face intense and sharp difference of opinion and intense ideological conflicts over a long period in the forties and fifties. A big debate had started in the middle of the 50s within the Party. The furious inner party debate rocked the party and ultimately led to the division of the Party in 1964. It is not that the division arose out of certain personal conflicts, or temporary misunderstanding and differences of opinion as is suggested to be explained by some. It is also a distortion of truth to equate the differences and divisions in the CPI as solely being the offshoot of the conflicts in the international communist movement, as is presented by the CPI. The document adopted by the CPI(M)'s seventh Congress at Calcutta has elaborately dealt with the entire developments leading to the split.

The crux of the disagreement lie in the characterisation of the class nature of the Indian State. This is a theme that has been elaborately covered in various writings in the past. Briefly, they relate to the class character of the government, the stage and strategy of the revolution and the role of different classes in it.

Those who remained in the CPI understood the class nature of the State to be that of a State of the national bourgeoisie. As opposed to this, we who later on formed the CPI(M) advocated that it was a bourgeois-landlord State headed by the big bourgeoisie collaborating with foreign capital. From this emerged two distinct ideological and tactical lines. While both characterised the stage of the revolution as democratic, the strategic class alliance to achieve this was fundamentally different. The CPI on the basis of its understanding gave the concept of 'national democracy' while we asserted 'peoples democracy'. While we affirm that the people's democratic revolution can be only under the leadership of the working class, based on the worker-peasant alliance, in alliance with the petty bourgeoisie and the non-monopolist bourgeoisie, the CPI maintained that the alliance will be under the joint leadership of the bourgeoisie and the working class and that through this process the working class will strengthen its position and assume the leadership.

These dissimilarities between the approach of the CPI and the

CPI(M) are not small and insignificant but it marks a basic and major demarcation between the two parties. This distinctive approach vis-a-vis the ruling classes and developing the revolutionary movement to overthrow them under the leadership of the working class as advocated by us and the line of class collaboration with the national bourgeoisie as advocated by them forms the quintessence of the differences between the two parties.

While the conflict within the Party was getting more and more intense, revisionist ideas and concepts got a boost with the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, throughout the world. In India, at a later stage its impact reflected in the struggle within the Party.

The CPI had also adopted a chauvinistic approach as opposed to the proletarian internationalist outlook of the CPI(M). This was very much in evidence particularly during the Indo-China conflict in 1962. We had called for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the two countries. The CPI on the other hand was supporting the chauvinistic approach of the government of India. When this line of support to the government was endorsed by the majority in the National Council of the undivided party, immediately thereafter, those who had demarcated themselves from this line were put behind bars. Sadly, there were no protests against these massive arrests from those who were in control of the Party then, even after the General Secretary EMS Namboodiripad was among those arrested, A similar scene was witnessed during the Indo-Pak war. Whereas we advocated a peaceful settlement of the question, the CPI went as far as to propose a 'march to Lahore'.

Despite the intensity and bitterness of the inner Party conflict, we again and again made efforts to avert a split. We proposed that a Party Congress be convened on the basis of the membership that existed prior to our being sent to prison in 1962 in which the ideological issues should be debated and clinched. As these were not entertained, we were forced to part ways and give a call for the 7th Congress.

CPI(M)'s 7th Congress

The 7th Congress marked a milestone in the history of the communist movement. Breaking away from the revisionist approach, the Congress adopted a Party programme, the Programme of the CPI(M). That the programme and the basic formulations contained therein, in relation to the stage, class nature and strategy of the revolution has stood the test of time has been vindicated by

subsequent developments during the last 30 years.

It should not be lost that for a considerable part of this stretch of thirty years we were virtually outcastes in the international communist movement. Both the leading contingents of the international movement, the CPSU and the CPC, at varying periods of time had denounced us. This hostility, however, did not lead us to adopt either anti-Soviet or anti-China postures. On the contrary, we greeted the advances and contributions to socialist construction being made by these parties in their respective countries. We were christened with a variety of names. This acrimony did not in any manner lessen the recognition by the CPI(M) of the historic role that these parties had discharged. However, we were unsparing in our criticism minus the name calling, when we found their understanding to be wrong. Neither were we wanting in sharply putting across our views. We had occasions when we begged to disagree with both the CPSU and CPC at different points of time on the Indian situation. We also did disagree when our assessment of the world situation varied and was not in consonance with that of both these parties.

Shortly, after the 7th Congress, however, Left sectarianism, in the form of naxalism, caused another cleavage in the movement. From the erroneous understanding of the character of the ruling class as being 'comprador bourgeoisie' and hence the situation was ripe for the revolution they advanced the slogan of immediate overthrow of the State by mobilising the peasantry for armed struggle. There is a marked difference in the way by which the naxalites parted company with us as opposed to the manner in which we formed the CPI(M). Whereas we who later on formed the CPI(M) could not have any opportunity for inner-party debate to clinch the issue, this was not the case with the naxalites. A thorough inner-party discussion, culminated in the Burdwan plenum. The naxalites rejecting the Burdwan decisions broke away to form another party soon after. How incorrect was their understanding was revealed by subsequent events. Today, the naxalite movement finds itself divided into scores of groups, many even lacking an orientation, devoid of a country-wide character and left only with remnants.

The CPI, on the basis of their programmatic understanding started collaborating with the ruling Congress. This programmatic understanding also gave rise to opportunism since the current tactics and practice of a party are inseparably connected with the basic programme. Not only did they join governments headed by the Congress and formed alliances with it but they even joined ministries dominated by the Jan Sangh, the predecessor of the present BJP, under the plea that their class nature had changed and that there was nothing wrong in joining hands with them. It may

be recalled that during this period in 1967 there was a big anti-Congress upsurge among the Indian people leading to the breaking of the monopoly of power of the Congress party and coming into existence of various non-Congress state governments. Subsequently, when these ministries were overthrown they again rallied behind the Congress party.

Unfortunately, things came to such a pass that when the hated Emergency regime was clamped in 1975-77 and democratic rights were dispensed off with, we found the CPI by the side of the Congress. This was the natural outcome of a policy of class collaboration that they were pursuing. It was only after the Congress was overthrown in the 1977 elections and the emergency framework was dismantled that the CPI started making amends. However, the deviations from the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism have yet to be overcome. Their programmatic understanding of the class nature of the Indian state, the stage, strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution are still at variance with that of the CPI(M). However, following the change in the tactical line of the CPI, in 1978 possibilities emerged for joint activities. During this period, left unity in struggles strengthened led to the present situation where commonality on tactical approach has been growing.

With regard to the programmatic and tactical positions, however, some differences continue to persist. In the main these are related to the concept of building Left and democratic unity in order to advance towards the people's democratic front. Whereas, we of the CPI(M) consistently try to demarcate from the bourgeois parties and insisted on strengthening the Left forces that would enable us to rally the democratic forces and thus in the process strengthen the position of the Party, the CPI tends to trail behind the bourgeois parties, forging temporary alliances to achieve immediate objectives. Take for instance, the question of alliance with the secular opposition parties. There are two aspects to the issue. Firstly, it is meant to wage the struggle against the Congress and the BJP. Secondly, the struggle to strengthen the Left and democratic forces. The second aspect, though, is overlooked by the CPI. While joining alliances with these parties, it was only the immediate objective that was kept in mind.

Similarly, differences in approach and tactics are reflected in very many current issues, including the electoral tactics in different states. Even on some questions concerning Left unity particularly regarding attitude to SUCI, IPF etc disagreements surface often.

There are many other issues on which we have been unable to come to a common understanding. Reservations is one such subject. The CPI has been advocating the implementation of the

recommendations of the Mandal Commission, without any distinction between the rich and the poor among the backward classes. Our party on the other hand, has been advocating the Karpoori Thakur formula which while denying these benefits to the richer among the backward castes gives these benefits to the poorer sections. The economic and social changes that have come about during the over one and half decades since the presentation of the report by Mandal must also be taken into account. However, the votaries calling for the full implementation of the reservations asked for by Mandal, overlook one important aspect of the recommendation contained in the report. This pertains to land reforms. Mandal was very categorical in asserting that unless and until the land question was not solved, the problems of poverty and unemployment cannot be solved.

It is an axiom that the organisational structure, methods of functioning and day to day practices of a communist party are intrinsically linked to its programmatic perspective. Experience of the last thirty years go to show that even on the approach to organisational questions and practice, there are differences between the CPI and the CPI(M).

In spite of the prevailing differences, nevertheless, it is heartening that on many an issue we have been able to come to arrive at a common understanding and on certain others come closer. There has been increased joint intervention and cooperation between the two parties on many issues. This unity between the two parties has to be carried forward and in the process Left unity can be further strengthened. Coordination committees between the two parties have been working at the all India level. After our last Congress such coordination committees have been formed in various states also. It was the joint effort of both the parties that gave us added strength in the negotiations with the bourgeois parties in Andhra and Karnataka assembly elections, recently. Though, this is not the case everywhere, efforts have to be redoubled to make this a reality.

The very impact that is generated with both the parties coming together on a joint platform, galvanising the atmosphere is a factor that has to be borne in mind. Whatever be the mobilisation at the individual party's level, the joint platform by itself enthuses the masses. It is through these coordinated action and Left unity alone that the two parties will get closer. Slogans calling for quick merger of the two parties or of the communist movement will not help as at the crux of such unity lies in the common understanding on ideological and political-organisational issues. Genuine unity can be forged only on the firm basis of principles which can ensure unity of will and action.

In the current political situation in our country, strengthening of the Left unity is of crucial importance. It is only on this that the Left, democratic and secular forces can be brought together in opposition to both the Congress and the BJP. The CPI(M) is committed to strengthening Left unity in action to advance people's struggles.