

Report on Current Political Developments Adopted At the May 7-8, 1999 Meeting

The 13-month old Vajpayee government was defeated in the Lok Sabha when it sought a vote of confidence on April 17, 1999. The fall of the Vajpayee government was sparked off by the withdrawal of support by the second largest partner in the BJP coalition, the AIADMK. Thus the opportunist alliance forged before the March 1998 general elections finally came apart as we had anticipated in the Party congress resolution.

In the last Central Committee meeting held between March 12-14, 1999, we had evaluated the performance of the one-year rule of the BJP government; a period marked by widespread attacks on the Christian minorities; duplicity on economic policies with the slogan of Swadeshi as a façade while pursuing pro-MNC-big business policies; authoritarian trends such as the use of Article 356 in Bihar; the deteriorating living conditions of the people; and the systematic RSS penetration of the State apparatus and its efforts to push forward the Hindutva agenda.

The C.C report had also highlighted the dismissal of the Naval Chief, Admiral Bhagwat and the dangerous implications of the BJP government's interference in the armed forces. In external affairs, the Vajpayee government's surrender to American pressure through the Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh talks on the question of the CTBT was also pinpointed.

All these reactionary features of the BJP rule were being manifested in the background of what the report termed as "perpetual uncertainty and the fragility of the ruling alliance".

The report had also analysed the role of the Congress party. It had supported the economic policy measures such as the Patents Amendment Bill and the IRA bill in parliament. But on the question of the use of Article 356 to dismiss the Bihar government, the Congress opposed the measure, which led to the restoration of the Rabri Devi Government. After evaluating the trends in the Congress party, the Central Committee concluded that: ""The continuance of the BJP in power, the penetration of the RSS in the State apparatus and the spread of communal poison by the RSS outfits is a serious threat for the country's unity and integrity. If the Congress does not politically take on frontally this threat posed by the BJP, it will enable the communal forces to inflict more damage."

The report concluded by calling upon the Party to go to the people exposing the BJP rule with the slogan that "One Year of BJP Rule has been a disaster for the country".

When the budget session of parliament began, the developments, which were highlighted in the CC report, came to a head, which resulted in the crisis for the government's existence. The conflicts within the ruling alliance came out into the open. These conflicts were taking place in the background of a division within the BJP itself, on whether to pursue the

Hindutva policy aggressively or to present a more moderate face by taking into account the views of the other constituents of the alliance. In the background of the growing attacks by the RSS outfits, the strains caused to the alliance by this led the Vajpayee government to modify its approach and try to present itself as representing secular values.

Two major issues came up during the parliament session, which had the potential to seriously embarrass the government. The first was the arbitrary dismissal of Admiral Bhagwat as the Naval Chief. The role of the defence ministry in this episode aroused a number of questions vital for the future of the armed forces. The BJP fully supported the Defence minister and first opposed any discussion in parliament and the demand for a JPC. After the issue threatened to stall parliament, the government agreed to a discussion though not for the setting up of a JPC.

The second issue was the exposure of the high-level deal struck on behalf of big business by the advisor to the finance minister, Mohan Guruswamy, after he was sacked. Appointed by the BJP, he indicated the type of corrupt practices indulged in at the highest levels of the government. On both these issues, the BJP was on the defensive.

AIADMK Withdraws Support

It is at this juncture, during the recess in parliament session that the AIADMK leader, Jayalalitha, raised the question of the dismissal of the Naval Chief. She demanded his reinstatement, setting up of a JPC and the shifting of George Fernandes from the Defence ministry. The BJP at its national executive in Goa refused to consider these demands and the stage was set for a confrontation. Jayalalitha withdrew her two ministers from the cabinet and followed this up by resigning from the Coordination committee. She came to Delhi and withdrew support to the government on April 14, the day before parliament was scheduled to reconvene. Being reduced to a minority by this action, the President asked Vajpayee to seek a vote of confidence in the house.

The BJP had mounted a big campaign arguing that the President should not ask it to seek a vote of confidence, instead it was upto the opposition to move a vote of no confidence as parliament was in session. Ignoring past precedents in such cases, when in a coalition government the Prime Minister was reduced to a minority, and the President directed that the vote of confidence be sought, the BJP sought to pressurise the President to act otherwise. However, the President took a prompt decision on a vote of confidence, which upset the BJP's calculations. When it became clear that the Vajpayee government was in a minority, democratic norms required that he submit his resignation. Instead they went all out in a desperate measure to win over MPs from the opposition.

BJP Defeat

The BJP did everything possible by money power and unscrupulous methods to muster support. On the eve of the vote of confidence, Chautala's party, which had withdrawn support, switched sides and committed its four MPs to vote for the government. The BJP was confident that it would win, after the BSP declared that it would abstain. The last minute decision of the BSP to vote against the government upset their calculations. The Vajpayee government lost the motion by one vote. One

vote of the AIADMK was not registered during the voting against the motion.

After the defeat in the Lok Sabha, the honourable way out for the BJP would have been to submit their resignation and give an opportunity to the opposition to form the government. Instead, they resorted to various manoeuvres to remain in power. They mounted pressure on the President to give them another chance to form the government. They threatened that if they were not allowed to form the government then the only option would be dissolution of parliament.

The president undertook the exercise of finding a solution and to explore whether an alternative government would be formed. Over a period of ten days he consulted the leaders of various political parties, constitutional experts, and ultimately decided to dissolve parliament when no party or group of parties could provide proof of commanding majority in the house.

The CPI(M)'s Intervention

Since the BJP coalition government was formed after the 1998 elections, the Party had concluded that it was a dangerous situation for the Left and democratic forces, for secularism and for national unity. It was to meet this situation that the Central Committee decided that we should make all efforts to defeat the BJP government in the confidence motion in March 1998 when the government was formed and to support an alternative government led by the Congress from outside. This was spelt out by the April 1998 Central Committee meeting which stated: "No question arises of having any front or alliance with the Congress. But in order to prevent the BJP from consolidating its hold over state power, and the infiltration of the administration that it seeks to do, we had decided to support the Congress, if and when the situation arises, from outside."

Again in July, 1998, when Jayalalitha threatened to withdraw support to the Vajpayee government and the issue of an alternative government came to the fore, the Central Committee stated: "Our Party indicated that in the eventuality of the downfall of the Vajpayee government, there has to be a secular alternative government as mid-term elections cannot be thought of immediately. In such a situation, we re-iterated the stand taken at the time of the confidence vote, that we would extend support from outside to the formation of a Congress-led government in the framework spelt out in the last Central Committee Report."

Referring to this July Central Committee stand, the Organisational Report of the recently concluded XVI Party Congress, states:

"Underlying the stand was the understanding that we would not enter into any alliance with the Congress, but have an approach of issue-based support to the Congress government from outside."

In evolving this tactical line, keeping in mind the central task of dislodging the BJP government at the Centre, the Party Congress political resolution also stressed the necessity to regroup the forces of the third alternative which had got weakened after the 1998 elections and disrupted by the defection of the TDP and other parties.

While supporting a Congress alternative government from outside, our

Party should also strive to get all other allies of the erstwhile United Front to adopt a similar position which would help us to rebuild and strengthen the third alternative in the coming days.

We were following the developments in the BJP alliance closely as we knew that the conflicts and contradictions could lead to the breakdown of the alliance. When Jayalalitha began taking the steps to break off from the BJP in the month of March, the opportunity arose for the fall of the government. We had to immediately intervene in the situation. Our Party's effort was to see that the Left parties and all the other secular bourgeois parties who belong to the erstwhile United Front stay together and support an alternative Congress government from outside so that we could accomplish the task of removing the BJP government while at the same time maintaining the identity of the third force which could demarcate from Congress policies and go towards the strengthening of the third alternative.

DMK's Opportunism

However, difficulties cropped up when it became clear that the AIADMK would break off relations with the BJP. The DMK seeing its main enemy in Jayalalitha began changing its stance. It approached the CPI(M) leadership for entering into an alliance with the Congress to preempt such a move by Jayalalitha. We refused to entertain the proposal as we wanted them to remain with the third force. Their apprehensions about the future of the DMK government were also unwarranted as no government at the Centre would be able to impose Article 356 in Tamilnadu if it was dependent on the Left and secular forces. The DMK in a crassly opportunistic manner shifted and defected to the BJP, going against the entire stand it had been taking on the question of fighting communalism. The DMK had been part of the five party alliance in Tamilnadu consisting of four other parties, the TMC, CPI(M), CPI and Janata Dal. This alliance had launched some campaigns against the BJP and its policies. Reversing all this, the DMK has now allied itself with the BJP by voting with the government in the confidence motion and participating in the meeting of the BJP alliance.

Both the DMK and the TMC had been kept informed of the developments and consultations were held with these parties, contrary to what the DMK claims. Unlike the DMK, the TMC took a principled stand of opposing the BJP even while expressing reservations about Jayalalitha.

RSP/Forward Bloc Stand

In the case of the Left parties, we were in constant touch with all the Left parties on the developing situation. In fact we had posed the issue before them last year itself. While the CPI fully agreed with our approach, the RSP and Forward Bloc stated that they cannot extend support to a Congress government. We had pointed out to them well before the crisis erupted that a situation could arise where the BJP government would fall when the alliance breaks down and then the question of an alternative government cannot be avoided. The Forward Bloc initially stated that while it disagreed with our stand, it would in the interests of Left unity adopt a flexible position if the situation so warranted. However, later, it refused to change its position.

Despite these problems the BJP could not succeed in winning the vote of confidence.

Role of Big Business/Imperialism

All through this period, it was clear that the bulk of the big monopoly houses were fully behind the BJP. There were the source for the massive amounts of money, which was utilised by the ruling alliance to try and maintain itself in power. All through the crisis, big business and imperialist agencies were active to foil the possibility of any non-BJP alternative. What was pointed in the 16th Congress resolution about imperialism's hostility to any government dependent on the Left was evident in the way forces worked after the defeat of the BJP government to help it make a comeback.

Alternative Government:

Differences in Opposition

After the fall of the Vajpayee government, the Polit Bureau met on 18-19 April. It decided that we should pursue a line of support to a Congress led government from outside and try to rally all our allies to adopt a similar position. In the given situation where there were differences and conflicts amongst the non-Congress opposition parties, the viable option would have been in the first stage to have a Congress minority government supported by all other parties from outside. However, some of the parties were interested in joining the government. The Congress also made statements that they are prepared to consider a coalition government.

The failure to form an alternative government is a result of the rigid stance adopted by the Samajwadi party. After making repeated calls asking the Congress to come forward to form an alternative government to dislodge the BJP, the Samajwadi Party in the final stages did a volte face by arguing that it cannot support the Congress government as the Congress party had been compromising with the communal forces. The Samajwadi party was motivated also by the concern for preserving its influence over the minorities in Uttar Pradesh without realising that the interests of the minorities lay foremost in the defeat of the BJP government and the installation of an alternative government. This would have had a positive impact in Uttar Pradesh, the strong hold of the BJP. Our assessment that Mulayam Singh would eventually support a Congress-led government proved wrong. His adamant stand against the Congress was unexpected and it upset the efforts for the formation of an alternative government.

The RSP and the Forward Bloc's opposition to any form of support to a Congress-led government, combined with the Samajwadi Party's position created a deadlock and contributed to the failure to secure agreement for an alternative government.

The CPI(M) has been consistently opposing the Congress party's policies particularly in the realm of economic policies. It had clearly stated that given the priority to dislodge the BJP from power at the Centre, there is no other way but to allow the second largest party, the Congress to make a bid for government while the Left gives it issue-based support from outside. This would have helped us to accomplish our main task of

removing the BJP government while at the same time safeguarding the interests of the working class and the common people at this particular juncture. The sectarian stance of these two parties has harmed the interests of Left unity.

The Polit Bureau met again on April 25 to take stock of the situation. It reiterated its resolve to prevent the BJP making a comeback to government. It decided to back the efforts to form a Congress-led alternative government even at this late stage. If this failed, then an alternative from the third force should be considered. Such a proposal would have some basis only if the Congress extended support to it.

As the largest party, the Congress had the right to try and form the government or take the initiative to forge a coalition. However, when these efforts failed due to the stand taken by the Samajwadi Party, RSP and Forward Bloc, the Congress party refused to come forward and consider any other option such as support to a government of the third force or of a non-Congress character. In the Working Committee meeting held on April 25, the Congress party adopted a resolution stating that it would not support a government of any other party or combination. Such a stand that only the Congress is entitled to form the government shows that the Congress still has illusions that it will be able to form a government on its own in the future. By this narrow shortsighted stand, the Congress party has acted against the wishes of the secular people who wanted a non-BJP government installed. By adopting such a stand, the Congress has also given the BJP the chance to accuse the opposition of being unable to cooperate to form an alternative government.

Present Situation

A new situation exists since the last meeting of our Central Committee with the country having to go for fresh elections in September. The BJP tried very hard for the election to be held earlier in June even before the revision of the voters list and when the monsoon sets in. But they failed to do so.

The defeat of the Vajpayee government despite all the frantic efforts to somehow remain in power is a serious setback for the BJP and the communal forces. Further, their gameplan to stage a comeback after losing the confidence vote was also foiled, in spite of the massive use of money power. This reverse has upset the plans of the BJP-RSS combine to consolidate their grip over State power. But the failure of the secular opposition parties to reach an understanding about an alternative government nullified to an extent the losses suffered by the BJP. It has evoked sympathy in some middle class circles and led to disappointment among secular minded people. However, the BJP's hope of cashing in on such a situation is misplaced. With the elections four months away, the issue which will dominate the campaign and the people's reaction is the adverse impact of the misrule of the BJP. The state assembly elections and the by-elections held since March 1998 have reflected the popular discontent against the BJP.

The results of these elections are without doubt going to be of crucial significance. After the last elections, the BJP came to power at the Centre.

Now in the 1999 elections, the question will be posed whether the BJP will continue in power or we can stop it from doing so and put an alternative government in office. The central question will be whether the BJP will continue in power at the centre or not.

In the run up to these elections, the positions of some of the political parties are going to change. The TDP, which broke with the United Front and joined hands with the BJP to keep it in power is now shifting positions. First it stated that its issue-based support to the BJP is over now that the government has gone. Later they stated that if the BJP comes to power again, the TDP will support it. At another time the TDP said it will fight the elections alone keeping in view the votes of the minorities. Similar is the stance of the National Conference. Betraying the interests of the people of Kashmir it supported the BJP government. This led to a division with Saiffudin Soz taking a firm stand against the leadership and fighting against the BJP. This stand was in the interests of the people of Kashmir and in keeping with the ideology of the National Conference. After the fall of the BJP government, the National Conference stated that it is prepared to support an alternative government.

After the withdrawal of support by Jayalalitha, the DMK declared that Jayalalitha is more dangerous than communalism for the country and voted in favour of the BJP's confidence motion. At present it has chosen to stand with the BJP, making its fight against Jayalalitha the main issue.

The opportunism displayed by the regional parties who look at their interest primarily from the angle of their own state interest and not the national level was noted by the 16th Party Congress too. The Political Resolution stated: "Given the state level preoccupation of these parties, they can take opportunist positions purely dictated by narrow considerations of being in power. Thus in the past some of these parties allied with the Congress, now with the BJP getting strengthened parties like the AIADMK, TDP and the National Conference have extended support to the BJP." The DMK is now the latest to join the ranks of parties, which vacillate in this manner. The problem of how to deal with this phenomenon should be discussed later in depth as it has a serious bearing on our quest to rally secular forces against communalism.

The Unity of

Left Democratic and Secular Forces

And Left and Democratic Front

At present we have to address ourselves to the immediate situation and the positions taken by these parties which have a bearing on the elections. When we raised the slogan of the unity of the Left and secular forces, we had made it clear that it is not the real alternative that we envisaged in the form of a Left Democratic Front. Such a front of the Left and democratic forces is based on a common programmatic understanding. However, till the Left and democratic forces grow in strength for such a front to be possible, we have to adopt tactics to intervene in the immediate situation. The alliance that we build with secular bourgeois parties for an effective electoral intervention to isolate the main enemy in the situation, should not be taken to be a front such

as the Left and democratic front.

Till we strengthen the Left and democratic forces through mass struggles, united actions, and greater political intervention, we have to rally the secular bourgeois parties from time to time to meet the immediate situation. Such alliances are unstable given the present strength of the Left forces and these bourgeois parties despite being secular make compromises and vacillate for their narrow interests. The recent experience shows that such defections from the secular alliance on the part of these parties will occur. Till we strengthen the Left and democratic movement we cannot impart a degree of stability to such alliances. We have to keep this in mind while dealing with the concrete situation on how to win over or retain allies at the present juncture to advance our tactical line.

Central Task

In the Coming Elections

Despite the defeat of the BJP narrowly, it will make full efforts to come back to power. It has the backing of the bulk of the big bourgeoisie and US imperialism will also be interested in its success. The return of the BJP to power will be extremely harmful for national unity, parliamentary democratic system and the Left and democratic forces. The BJP has got a number of secular bourgeois parties in its alliance, which will seek to provide legitimacy and cover for its communal character. Defeating the BJP and its allies is essential for the future of the Left and democratic forces.

As against this, we have to ensure that their aim to somehow come back to power is foiled. The BJP is hopeful that "sympathy" will be there for Vajpayee being removed and it hopes to cash in on the failure of the opposition to form an alternative government. As against this, we should not adopt a defensive position but we must expose the entire record of the BJP government in office. Its anti-people policies, its abandonment of Swadeshi for pro-MNC, pro-monopoly policies, its attack on the public sector, corruption, the sufferings of the people due to price rise and lack of employment; the efforts to communalise education; the shameful attacks on the Christian community; its onslaught on all secular values and parliamentary democracy; its spoiling of relations with neighbours etc.

It must be kept in mind that it was this disastrous record of the BJP which led the people of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi to decisively reject it in the November 1998 elections. The campaign that we launched to expose the one-year of BJP rule has to be intensified in the coming election campaign.

BJP Alliance--

Common Manifesto

The BJP with the concurrence of the RSS has decided to subordinate all its basic goals to the paramount need for recapturing power at the centre.

For this, the BJP is now prepared not to have its own election manifesto but go for a common programme (based on the earlier National Agenda) with its allies. Issues such as the Ram temple, Article 370 and the uniform civil code are being relegated to the background, in order to project the alliance headed by Vajpayee as a broad based formation fit to govern the country. RSS outfits such as the VHP will conduct the independent campaign to keep the communal issues alive. Behind this tactic is the realisation that the hard Hindutva agenda will fail to place the BJP in power. It is only the support garnered by allies and the legitimacy accorded by an alliance with secular parties which can sell the BJP to the people, as a credible party for government. We must aggressively counter this stance by showing how under BJP rule, Hindutva forces ran amok with attacks on minorities and on our syncretic cultural values.

A major responsibility lies on the shoulders of our Party and the Left to mobilise workers, peasants and the common people by highlighting the danger of how the communal poison divides the people and helps the exploiters. We should also arouse the patriotic sentiments of the people against the Vajpayee government, which was succumbing to US pressures and was willing to act as a partner of the US in its foreign policy.

Our Tactics

For The Elections

In the coming general elections, our main task is to defeat the BJP and its allies. We have to work to strengthen the Party and the Left and rally all the secular and democratic parties and forces who are opposed to the Congress policies too. While directing the main fire against the BJP, we should also oppose the Congress Party's politics and policies in such a manner as to project the need for a third alternative. The left will have to advocate the alternative policies which can attract all sections of the working people and the ordinary citizens.

Unlike 1996-98, when a UF type formation existed to face the challenge of the BJP, this time, there is no such combination at the national level. We will have to, in the coming days, make efforts to unite the Left, democratic and secular forces at the national level. At the same time, at the states level, different tactics will have to be formulated keeping in mind the overall objective of fighting the BJP and its allies.

This does not mean we relax our fight against the Congress party where the BJP is not a force and where the confrontation is directly between the Congress and the Left-democratic forces. In all these areas we must expose the opportunism of the Congress, its harmful economic policies and mobilise the people against them so that we are able to increase the influence and strength of the Left.

The situation is complicated. There are certain states where the BJP is a big force and where the Left and non-Congress secular forces are weak. In some others, earlier allies belonging to the United Front or those working with us have deserted and joined hands with the BJP. The TDP in

Andhra and the DMK in Tamilnadu are in this category.

In the first case, i.e. states which are BJP strongholds and the Congress is the main rival, we had already worked out tactics to meet this situation in the 1996 and 1998 general elections. We should fight only a few seats where we can effectively register the Party's presence and in the state as a whole campaign to defeat the BJP.

In the second case, we should have no soft corner for these parties which defected as their understanding with the BJP helps the latter to make a bid for power at the Centre. In the case of Tamilnadu, the situation is particularly complex. There will be the new line up of BJP-DMK and others in one combination, the AIADMK-Congress being in a rival combination, and the TMC not joining either of them. The danger of the BJP being able to penetrate Tamilnadu on the basis of aligning with one Dravidian party or other is not to be underestimated. Our party will have to work out appropriate tactics in such a situation.

In Bihar, we have been opposing the Laloo/RJD government. However, in the Party Congress we had acknowledged that Laloo and the RJD have a role to play at the national level in the struggle against the BJP. Recently, there is some rethinking in the Janata Dal towards him and moves for a merger are being mooted. In Bihar, we have to fight the BJP-Samata combine. We have to discuss with the Bihar state committee how this fight can be taken forward. In Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnataka, we have to find secular allies. In Orissa too, this will depend on the future of the Janata Dal. In Assam we have an understanding with the AGP and this combination of AGP-Left has to fight both the BJP and the Congress.

UP is of crucial importance given the fact that the BJP and allies won 59 out of 85 seats last time. This is nearly one-third of the BJP's total strength. The Samajwadi Party's erratic behaviour has caused some demoralisation among the minority community and the secular forces. But the SP is the second largest party in UP, followed by the BSP. Our attack should be focussed on the BJP and the edge should not be diverted to the SP. We have to see how the anti-BJP fight is strengthened in the state.

The electoral struggle against the BJP must result in increasing the Party's strength and Left influence. We have played the most consistent role against the BJP-RSS combine and that is why the Hindutva forces are directing their attacks against our Party primarily. The increased strength of the Party will enable us to play a more effective role in the democratic-secular combination in the future. Therefore, while taking principled positions, we should adopt flexible electoral tactics keeping in mind the differing conditions in each state so that we are able to get elected representatives from various states.

The lesson of the recent political crisis underlines the importance of stepping up our political-ideological work and launching mass movements to strengthen our mass base and that of the Left-democratic forces. Till we are not able to do this in a substantial manner, we have to deal with the exigencies of the electoral situation by working out short-term tactics to win over allies to fight the main danger.

The short time before the election campaign must be used for equipping

the Party to effectively expose the BJP's record in government, make people conscious of the communal danger and popularise alternative policies which are opposed to the Congress's policies. We must be able to forge electoral alliances or understanding which will foil the BJP's manoeuvres and enhance our electoral chances.

The Central Committee therefore, calls upon all its Party units to gear up to fight this crucial electoral battle. We should rouse the people to reject the BJP and the communal forces and vote into office an alternative secular government. To accomplish this, the people must be mobilised to support the Left, democratic and secular forces. The Party must win more and more popular support for its own candidates. The choice before the country is to face communal discord and disunity if the BJP is elected or, to preserve national unity and secular democracy by electing Left, democratic and secular forces.