

Political Resolution

Adopted At The 17th Congress

(Hyderabad: March 19-24, 2002)

International

1.1. The 17th Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is meeting in the background of a markedly changed world situation. The terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001 and the consequent war launched by US imperialism with some of its allies on Afghanistan, have far reaching implications on international developments. US imperialism is seeking to utilise the situation to further strengthen its hegemony -- economic, political and military -- worldwide. Right-wing jingoistic forces in many countries are striving to strengthen their reactionary grip.

1.2 Our Party Congress is also meeting in the midst of a severe global economic recession. The IMF has predicted that the global economy will grow by only 2.4 per cent in 2001 and 2002 compared to 4.2 per cent in 2000. 29 major economies of the OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation & Development) countries are slated to grow at a mere 1 per cent. This is accompanied by a sharp fall in the growth rate of world trade from 13.4 per cent in 2000 to a mere 3.5 per cent in 2001. This deepening world capitalist crisis is expected to aggravate further after the September 11 developments. Imperialism will seek to transfer the burdens of this crisis on to the developing countries. Consequently, the coming period will witness further attempts to intensify the exploitation of the third world.

1.3 The developments prior to the September 11 events broadly confirm the trends noted in our 16th Congress, mainly: (a) utilising the circumstances following the dismantling of the socialist system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe which has presently shifted the balance of forces at the global level in its favour, imperialism continues its offensive to strengthen its economic, social, cultural, military and political hegemony over the world; and (b) the consequent imperialist offensive is being met by growing resistance.

1.4 The consequence of this imperialist offensive has been a ferocious intensification of the exploitation of the working people and the developing economies, globally. In our 16th Congress, we had noted two specific features of present-day world capitalism, viz. jobless growth and widening of inequalities amongst the rich and poor within countries and between the countries. These features have since sharpened. Unemployment on the global scale has worsened. In the USA itself, the unemployment rate grew from 3.9 per cent at the beginning of 2001 to 5.8 per cent by December. According to the Human Development Report 2001, the poorest 10 per cent of the world's population had only 1.6 per cent of the income of the richest 10 per cent. The richest 10 per cent of the US population

(over 25 million people) had a combined income greater than that of the world's poorest 43 per cent (around 2 billion people). More than 20 countries in the world have had a lower human development index in 1999 than they had in 1995. Of these, 10 countries had an index lower than in 1985. The vast majority of the people living in the third world are thus burdened with growing poverty and misery.

1.5 The enormous potential for raising the living standards of the vast mass of the world's population as a result of the scientific and technological advances is being hampered by the logic of capitalist production relations. Capitalism, clearly, is not only incapable of solving the basic problems facing humanity but, on the contrary, mercilessly dehumanises civilisation through its predatory search for profits.

1.6 This inhuman nature of capitalism and the burdens it is imposing on the people in the world in the present-day context are leading to the intensification of all the four major world social contradictions, with the contradiction between imperialism and the developing countries intensifying sharply. This offensive of global capitalism seeks to seriously undermine the sovereignty of independent countries. The unbridled quest of global capitalism for profits leads it to exploit the natural resources of the globe in a manner which poses a grave threat to the world's environment. The USA, with its strangulating control of the international financial institutions and through its political, military and technological dominance, has achieved the most spectacular accumulation of wealth seen in recent years.

1.7 The internationalisation of finance capital, as noted in our 16th Congress, has continued to grow practically unhindered. It is estimated that the annual transactions in the financial markets worldwide is nearly 50 times the value of the total volume of the global trade. Financial markets create imaginary wealth of immense proportions. While, on the one hand, the grip of IMF, World Bank and the WTO tightened like a noose over the third world countries, on the other hand finance capital driven global capitalism was reaching unsustainable proportions. The finance capital-driven global economy was seen as an enormous balloon that could inflate to infinity. Burst it did, leading to a new phase of global capitalist crisis.

1.8 Unlike the recent experience, the crisis this time has engulfed all the major centres of world capitalism. From mid-2000, the crisis began in the United States with sharp falls in gross domestic product and enormous growth in trade deficit. This led to a dramatic fall in the stock markets. The NASDAQ fell by a massive 66.24 per cent in 2001. The IMF forecast a growth of a mere 0.7 per cent for the USA in 2002. Japan, facing its fourth recession in ten years, was projected to decline at minus 1.3 per cent in 2002 after a minus 0.9 per cent decline in 2001. The European Union is estimated to grow by a mere 1.5 per cent in 2001. Germany, the leading economy of the European Union, is estimated to grow at 0.7 per cent in 2001 and 1.3 per cent in 2002.

1.9 This serious all embracing global capitalist crisis is bound to adversely impact on the developing countries, many of whom are already experiencing an economic slowdown and recession. While the terms of world trade has been increasingly adverse for developing countries, the crisis in the developed countries brought on by the present sharp fall in world trade will be sought to be transferred to developing countries, leading to further massive cuts in jobs and downscaling of economic activity. This will only compound the misery of the people further as seen during the economic upheavals in Indonesia and Turkey. The recent developments in Argentina tragically confirm this through violent food riots, mass protests and volatile political uncertainties. The IMF held out Argentina as a model. The country had followed all IMF prescriptions, privatised all major sectors and banks and pegged its currency on parity with the US dollar. In the process, it built up an unreturnable foreign debt of \$ 132 billion. Unemployment soared to 18.3 per cent. The economy became bankrupt, leading to the current implosion. While imperialist capital made super profits, the domestic economy was wrecked and the people paid the price, through growing unemployment, misery and rapidly declining living standards.

1.10 The period after our 16th Congress and prior to September 11, 2001 also saw the aggressive moves of US imperialism to consolidate its political hegemony through the continuous backing of Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people; the military attacks and inhuman sanctions against Iraq; the 78 days bombing of Yugoslavia by US-led NATO forces; and the reduction of Kosovo to a NATO protectorate. Led by the USA, the NATO adopted a new strategic doctrine giving itself the right to militarily intervene in any region to advance its interests. A specific feature of this period has been the increasing subordination of the United Nations and its agencies and their internationalist role to the dictates of USA and its NATO allies.

1.11 The ascendancy of George Bush to the US Presidency is accompanied by a more right-wing effort to strengthen US military hegemony over the world. The pursuance of the National Missile Defence (NMD) system has already led to USA unilaterally withdrawing from the 1972 Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. This has the potential of unleashing a new round of arms race, particularly in outer space. Such aggressive moves for global domination are bound to intensify after the September 11 events.

1.12 Such US moves, however, are also meeting with resistance. China and Russia have jointly opposed the NMD. Despite Russian President Putin's weak reaction to the US negation of the ABM treaty, the China-Russia treaty signed this year is a major step towards establishing a strategic relationship between the two countries. It has important consequences for developing resistance to US hegemony. The Shanghai-6 forum which includes China, Russia and four of the Central Asian Republics is also a manifestation of this trend. Some of the US allies like France and Germany have also been lukewarm in supporting USA's NMD. In other areas as

well, United States finds itself in a position of not being able to rally even its allies to its point of view. 186 countries went ahead with the treaty for environmental protection -- Kyoto Protocol -- which was unilaterally rejected by the USA. For ten years in a row, the UN General Assembly has been overwhelmingly voting for the lifting of the US blockade of socialist Cuba. The US arrogance about human rights has met with a rebuff with it losing its seat in the UN Human Rights Commission. Despite US walking out with Israel, the UN sponsored Durban conference against racism adopted a joint declaration. The US also faced isolation in negotiations on the treaty for abolition of biological weapons and the bio-diversity treaty.

1.13 Notwithstanding such conflicts, in the face of the growing economic crisis, the developed countries under US leadership are preparing for a major onslaught on the economic sovereignty of the developing countries. The WTO ministerial summit at Doha in November 2001, resulted in imperialist efforts to legally bind the developing countries to a process of intensified exploitation. Despite some resistance, the WTO agenda has been virtually expanded by initiating negotiations on investment, competition policy, government procurement and trade facilitation. In addition, new offensives are also being mounted through the consolidation of imperialist led regional economic blocs. The process of consolidation of the European Union has reached a new stage with the launching of the common currency -- Euro. The latest offensive of US imperialism, the Free Trade Agreement for America (FTAA), is designed to place the resources and markets of the entire continent at the disposal of USA. The national sovereignty of all countries in the region is grievously assaulted as all economic decisions would be in the domain of this supra-national US-controlled organisation.

1.14 Popular resistance during this period has taken the form of global actions. The protest against globalisation in the advanced capitalist countries saw a process of crystallisation. Beginning with the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999 to the G-8 summit in Genoa in 2001 -- every single meeting of the imperialist world saw big mass protests. They have grown both in their size and militancy. All international trade union organisations had, for the first time, given a call for protest against the WTO coinciding with the Doha meeting. Growing resistance to imperialist-driven globalisation is being seen in widespread struggles in Latin America. Many developing countries rallied together to put up joint resistance against imperialist bullying tactics at the WTO Summit at Doha. In many developing countries, where the domestic ruling classes have been pursuing policies facilitating imperialist globalisation offensive, mass protests and struggles have been growing, like in India. Mass protests took place throughout the world against the US war on Afghanistan including in the USA. Even in the advanced capitalist countries, the massive layoffs and cuts in social services expenditure are being resisted through growing protests. Newer forms of struggles against globalisation are emerging with larger participation of people both from the advanced capitalist countries and the developing world.

1.15 This resistance is bound to intensify in the days to come. The fall in world trade, the consequent massive loss of jobs and fall in living standards are bound to aggravate in the immediate future. This period has shown that wherever the Communist and the progressive forces have led the protests against these attacks, they have been able to rally popular support. Even in the advanced capitalist countries, such trends can be seen.

1.16 During this period, the socialist countries despite the severe setbacks to socialism in former USSR and Eastern Europe, have continued to successfully weather the otherwise gloomy global economic situation as well as resist imperialist pressures. China's steady economic growth of around 8 per cent annually stands out strikingly in the present global economic scenario. US imperialism after having blocked China's entry into the WTO for nearly a decade had to finally relent. The process of economic reforms being pursued by China, combatting the negative consequences that arise, it is hoped, will further strengthen the world's biggest socialist country. This is all the more important given the open targetting of China by US imperialism in its strategic doctrine justifying the NMD.

1.17 Socialist Vietnam is also making steady advance and is no longer isolated in South East Asia. The glorious resistance of the Cuban people continues to grow in strength despite the blockade and increasing US provocations. This period has seen various instances of US provocations against Cuba, the most glaring being the abduction of a small child. North Korea, despite facing a difficult economic situation, particularly the food situation, has been able to successfully counter all US manoeuvres to subvert its independence and is pursuing the Korean reunification process despite obstacles being raised by USA.

1.18 In the former socialist countries, the process of restoration of capitalism was accompanied by one of the biggest loots of economic resources seen in recent history. The sharp fall in the living standards of the people, increasing poverty, unemployment and violent ethnic conflicts have seen the rejection of the political formations, in recent elections, that had supervised the counter revolutionary dismantling of socialism. This was seen in Mongolia, Moldavia, Ukraine earlier and more dramatically in Poland where Solidarity was reduced to a virtual non-entity. In Russia, the Communist Party has emerged as the largest group in Parliament in successive elections. The revival of the influence of the Left parties in these countries reflects the popular discontent with the process of capitalist restoration and presages a prolonged struggle against it.

1.19 In the background of these developments, imperialism led by the US is seeking to initiate a new phase in international relations. The process of brazenly assaulting the national sovereignty of countries as seen in Yugoslavia and Iraq; the process of enslaving the economies of the developing countries and the process of strengthening its overall hegemony based on military might are sought to be strengthened in the post-September 11 situation. US imperialism is seeking to

create a divide in the world between those countries who support its self-styled war against terrorism and all others. It links all aspects of globalisation with the fight against terrorism. It seeks to bring repressive laws both internationally and within individual countries to suppress dissent and opposition to imperialism in the name of fighting terrorism. The "struggle against terrorism" is sought to replace the cold war slogan of "struggle against Communism" as the new war cry of US-led imperialism. It seeks to strengthen its military presence in various parts of the world. It seeks to keep Afghanistan under its influence after the removal of Taliban -- an objective it had been seeking given the strategic position of this country as an entry to the immensely rich oil and natural gas resources in central Asia. It now seeks to extend the war beyond Afghanistan targetting other countries like Iraq, Iran, DPRK, Sudan and Somalia. US imperialism is now developing new nuclear weapons targetting sovereign countries that comprise the so-called "axis of evil". The theatre missile defence system that is being established with allies such as Japan in the Asia Pacific region, apart from directly targetting socialist China, seeks to establish absolute US nuclear dominance in the world.

1.20 The progressive and democratic forces the world over will have to rally together to counter this fresh wave of imperialist assaults all over the world. Imperialism had never hesitated, over the last five decades, to utilise all reactionary and fundamentalist forces to pursue its hegemonic objectives. It created, reared, financed and nurtured reactionary forces against progressive regimes the world over. Consequently, it has been responsible for the loss of millions of innocent lives in the name of protecting the "free world". Resistance against this has been growing in many countries. The highlight of this has been the second *intifada* launched by the Palestinians. The US practiced and continues to practice State-sponsored terrorism. It brazenly encourages its allies like Israel to launch one of the worst types of State terrorism against the Palestinians. They continue to be denied their legitimate homeland. The recent unprecedented Israeli military offensive killing hundreds of innocents seeks to deny them even the small gains of the peace process. State terrorism and individual acts of terrorism like what the world saw on September 11 only feed each other. In the process, innocent lives perish and progressive and democratic forces are attacked.

1.21 Under these circumstances, it must be noted that, all fundamentalist responses, including Islamic fundamentalism, can never play the role of genuinely mobilising the anti-imperialist forces. Our 16th Congress Political Resolution had noted: "Islamic fundamentalism, a phenomenon which has been prominent since the eighties, continues to pose a threat to secular-democratic forces in many countries. The Taliban in Afghanistan represents the most virulent and reactionary form of this trend. US imperialism is tacitly backing the Taliban to establish its hegemony so that it can reach out to Central Asia." Subsequent developments have only vindicated this understanding. After September 11, US imperialism has shamelessly sought to deny its past complicity in propping up the Taliban, and now seeks to secure a position of leverage with the new regime being installed in Afghanistan.

1.22 It is in the background of these developments that the popular resistance to imperialist-driven globalisation will have to be consolidated. Both the US "war against terrorism" with all its consequences noted above and the threat posed by terrorism based on all varieties of fundamentalism will have to be challenged. This period has seen increasing efforts for the revival and regrouping of Communist, progressive and democratic forces in the struggles against imperialist-inspired anti-people policies. As a Party based on proletarian internationalism, the CPI(M) while ceaselessly mobilising the Indian people in the struggle against imperialism, for democracy and socialism, will contribute to the development of secular and democratic global resistance which alone can rally the most oppressed and exploited peoples around the world. Reaffirming its deep commitment to defend socialism and standing firmly in solidarity with socialist countries who face hostile imperialist manoeuvres, the CPI(M) will actively work to raise the anti-imperialist consciousness of the Indian people at a time when imperialism is making rapid inroads into our region.

National

Introduction

2.1 More than three years have elapsed since the 16th Congress of the Party. It has been a period of uninterrupted rule by the BJP-led government, which first came into office in March 1998. There is ample evidence to illustrate the correctness of the warning of the 16th Congress about the implications of BJP rule. The resolution pointed out: "For the first time, the reins of power at the Centre are in the hands of an avowedly communal party, which works under the guidance of the fascistic Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. This has greatly intensified the threat posed by the communal forces to the secular and democratic foundations of the polity and the preservation of national unity. Further the right reactionary character of the BJP-RSS combine portends a bigger onslaught on the working people and the Left and democratic forces."

2.2 The four year period of the BJP-led government has seen:

- a) A continuous assault on the secular principle of the State, the penetration of the RSS into the State apparatus and vicious attacks on minorities.
- b) An accelerated pursuit of the economic policies of liberalisation and privatisation, which has increased the exploitation of the people and social inequalities.
- c) A foreign policy directed towards making India an ally of the USA by a government which is the most pro-imperialist government in independent India.
- d) A systematic plan for communalising society through eroding the secular content of the educational system and assaults on composite cultural values.

e) Growing authoritarian threats to democracy, attack on federal structure and widespread corruption in governance.

2.3 The quest for power by the BJP in the last one-decade resulted in its first coming to office illegitimately for 13 days in 1996. This was followed by the first BJP-led coalition government in March 1998 after the 12th Lok Sabha elections. This government collapsed in April 1999 and after a six-month stint as a caretaker government, the BJP with its allies in the NDA, won the 13th Lok Sabha elections in September 1999 to form the second Vajpayee government. The BJP got only 23.7 per cent of the votes, but it was able to get a majority along with its allies in the NDA.

2.4 It is under the cover of the NDA agenda that the push for building the temple at Ayodhya, revising the Constitution and attacks on minority rights are taking place -- precisely all those "contentious issues" which are not supposed to be on the agenda of the NDA. The ruling coalition is the NDA, but the actual rulers are the BJP. The NDA is a convenient cover for the BJP-RSS combine to push ahead with its real agenda.

Long-Term Project of Hindutva

RSS Penetration of State Apparatus

2.5 The existence of the BJP-led government must be seen in the context of the long-term agenda of the RSS and the Hindutva forces. The mobilisation for the temple at Ayodhya culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 was just the first step towards the goal of Hindu rashtra. Controlling the levers of State power was the second step. Though constrained by a coalition and not having an absolute majority, the BJP has set about implementing the second phase. In the past four years, the BJP utilising the Government has gone about the task of penetrating the State apparatus. The bureaucracy, the police, the judiciary, the post of Governors, the educational system, mass media and even the armed forces are subjected to this infiltration. The Gujarat government was forced to withdraw its circular lifting restrictions on government employees participating in RSS shakhas, but the surreptitious penetration of the RSS goes on.

2.6 The BJP and the Sangh combine wish to rewrite the Indian Constitution to do away with its secular character. The setting up of the Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution is in line with this long-cherished goal. Through the legitimacy of a Commission, the BJP wants to popularise its anti-secular and anti-democratic proposals such as removing the protection for minorities and replacing the parliamentary system with the presidential form of government.

2.7 The RSS has for long run educational institutions with its own Hindutva ideological content. It now seeks to transplant these values into the State-run

system. The UGC, NCERT, ICHR and the ICSSR are all manned by pro-RSS personnel at the top. The formulation of a new national school curriculum, the rewriting of history on communal lines and the production of textbooks to erode the secular content and reflect Hindu chauvinist values is underway. The introduction of courses in astrology and vedic rituals at the university level is going on. Resistance to these moves by the Left and secular forces is the main obstacle which has hampered its designs till now.

Temple At Ayodhya

2.8 The Vishwa Hindu Parishad announced in January 2001 that it will give the Central government time till 12th March 2002 to clear the hurdles for building the Ram temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood. After that, the VHP decided it would begin construction from March 15 after conducting a puja on the land acquired by the government. For this programme it began mobilising kar sevaks at Ayodhya. The Godhra attack on the kar sevaks and the savage mass killings in retaliation in Gujarat highlighted the dangers inherent in the inflammatory programme. The BJP-led government instead of firmly adhering to the stand that nothing can be done to disturb the status quo began a series of manoeuvres to help the RSS-VHP game. The dubious proposal mooted through the Kanchi Shankaracharya, the submission by the Attorney General to the Supreme Court that "symbolic puja" may be allowed at the acquired land and when the Supreme Court ruled against it, the sending of a high level officer of the PMO to receive the "pillars" from the VHP are all indications of how the BJP in government seeks to advance the goal of construction by providing patronage for all the illegal activities indulged in by the VHP-RSS combine. It has exploded the myth that the temple issue is not on the agenda of the BJP-led government.

Attacks on Minorities

2.9 Both the Muslim and Christian minorities have faced the brunt of intensified anti-minority propaganda and attacks since the BJP came to power. The advent of the BJP government in 1998 saw widespread attacks against the Christian minority in Gujarat. Such attacks soon spread to other states in 1999. The worst carnage was the killing of Graham Staines and his two young sons in Keonjhar district of Orissa. Attacks on Christian institutions, priests and nuns have taken place in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and other parts of the country. Arms training is given to the Bajranj Dal activists in various camps.

2.10 The planned violence which engulfed the Muslim community in Gujarat after the gruesome attack in Godhra on the kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya, was nothing but State-sponsored terror. Gangs of VHP-RSS-BJP marauders hunted down Muslims, burnt their houses, shops and properties. Women were raped and along with children burnt alive. The barbarism reached levels never seen since the days of partition. The police stood by and in many cases helped the attackers. The Chief

Minister, Narendra Modi, himself a RSS pracharak, openly justified these attacks as a reaction to Godhra. The Gujarat experience where the BJP, secure in power, has terrorised the minorities through the RSS-VHP network portends how the BJP will deal with the minorities if it has absolute power at the national level.

2.11 The propaganda against the Muslim minority has been stepped up in a big way after the September 11 attacks in the United States. The BJP and the RSS are engaged in portraying the entire Muslim community as supporters of terrorism. Opposition to the US war on Afghanistan among the Muslim community is held to be proof of this. The administration and police authorities, sections of which are already communalised, have been coming down with a heavy hand on the minorities. Faced with constant attacks and communal riots, the Muslim minorities are losing faith in the State and administration as impartial and secular agencies. Discrimination in access to education, employment and other avenues of socio-economic development, contribute to the sense of alienation of the community. Among the Muslim minorities, fundamentalist forces are active. Though a big section amongst the Muslim community is against these forces, the growing frustration among a section of the Muslim youth is exploited by the fundamentalists who are often financed by external sources. The CPI(M) while resolutely defending the rights of the minorities, reiterates that minority fundamentalism is harmful to democracy and progress and has to be countered.

National Unity

Jammu & Kashmir

2.12 The BJP's being in power at the Centre is having an adverse impact on national unity. A party which is hostile to the autonomy of Jammu & Kashmir, which stands for the scrapping of Article 370 and which fans distrust of Muslims who are in a majority in the valley, is incapable of evolving a political solution to the Kashmir problem. The main secular party in the valley, the National Conference led by Farooq Abdullah, got further discredited in the eyes of the people when it became a part of the NDA. The fundamentalist forces benefited from this betrayal and went on the offensive. Terrorist violence supported from across the border escalated. The security forces in combatting the terrorist activities have committed excesses on innocent people which deepens the alienation. The suffering of the people has increased manifold. The Vajpayee government which summarily rejected the resolution of the J&K assembly in 1999 for greater autonomy, is looking more and more to the United States to sort out the dispute with Pakistan. Trifurcation of the state on communal lines -- a plan advocated by the US, is being touted as the first step towards a solution. The RSS is advocating a Jammu state separate from the valley and making Ladakh a Union Territory.

2.13 Kashmir is not just a territorial dispute as far as the Indian Union is concerned. It is a test of the secular nature of the republic and whether the commitment made to the Kashmiri people, who rebuffed the Pakistani raiders in

1947 and acceded to India, will be fulfilled. The BJP remaining in the Central Government with its Hindutva ideology means alienating the Kashmiri people further and destroying this compact.

2.14 The CPI(M) steadfastly demands that maximum autonomy be provided for the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Without assuring the Kashmiri people of their identity and fulfillment of their democratic aspirations within the Indian Union, the separatist and fundamentalist forces cannot be countered. Urgent attention has to be paid to the development of the state and creation of jobs for the educated youth. The two regions, Jammu and Ladakh should be provided with regional autonomy within the composite state with equitable distribution of resources.

Terrorist Attacks

2.15 The activities of certain extremist groups active in Jammu & Kashmir and backed by fundamentalist groups in Pakistan have led to the deaths of hundreds of people of all communities. The suicide attacks on the J&K assembly on October 1, 2001, on the parliament on December 13, 2001 and the armed attack on the US Information Centre at Kolkata in February 2002 represent a new dangerous trend. The CPI(M) strongly condemns such activities and demands that the Pakistani regime curb the organisations which sponsor such acts of terror. However, the CPI(M) opposes talk of military retaliation against Pakistan and the war hysteria which was sought to be whipped up in the aftermath of the December 13 attack.

The North-East

2.16 The problems of separatism and insurgency have not abated in the North-Eastern region. The shortsighted move to extend the Nagaland ceasefire outside the borders of the State threatened to upset the whole equilibrium in the North-East. Manipur was in open revolt till the Centre was forced to rescind this clause in the ceasefire accord. The region which has suffered from chronic neglect and discrimination since independence has become the playing field for all sorts of divisive forces and foreign agencies. Inter-ethnic conflicts continue to fester in the hill areas of Manipur and the Bodo and other areas of Assam. The bordering areas of Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan provide shelter for armed groups as varied as the ULFA, both groups of the NSCN, NLFT, ATTF (Tiger), NDFB, PLA and the KLO.

2.17 The BJP-led government continues with the same approach of patronising local elites in the North-Eastern region who pledge allegiance to whoever rules at the Centre. The defections engineered in Manipur and the shenanigans in Meghalaya are witness to these manipulative politics. More dangerously, the RSS is spreading its activities in the region with its anti-Muslim and particularly anti-Christian agenda. This will increase the alienation of the predominantly Christian population in some of the states and introduce new tensions and conflicts in an already volatile region.

2.18 The CPI(M) in Tripura has continued to show the way on how to maintain the unity of the people. Despite paying a high price with several tribal and non-tribal Party cadres being killed, it has countered the depredations of the extremist groups and maintained the unity of the tribal and non-tribal people. This has been accomplished in the face of the BJP-led government's withdrawal of the armed forces from the state. The Left and democratic forces have to step up their intervention to see that priority is accorded in the national agenda for the speedy development of the North-Eastern region and for the creation of a democratic set-up for minority tribal and linguistic groups.

2.19 The problems of national unity in a multi-lingual and multi-national country like India can be addressed and resolved only within the framework of a federal and secular polity which recognises and respects the diversities of our society and harnesses these forces for strengthening unity. The BJP with its narrow and sectarian vision is the antithesis of such an approach, whether it be the problems in Jammu & Kashmir, the North-Eastern region, or providing a just deal for the religious minorities who constitute 15 per cent of the population. The BJP's approach will only weaken unity and strengthen the divisive forces. In the coming days, the defence of national unity and countering the threats posed to it must continue to be an important task.

A Decade of Liberalisation

Ruinous Economic Policies

2.20 In the decade of liberalisation from 1991 to 2001, the Vajpayee government's tenure occupies one-third of that period. From the time of the Narasimha Rao government which ushered in the new economic policies through the interregnum of the UF government and the present BJP-led government, the current regime has proved to be the worst in terms of its enthusiastic and blind adherence to the pro-imperialist prescriptions of the IMF-World Bank and the WTO. The Vajpayee government's economic policies are marked by its acceptance of the dictates of imperialist finance capital and its willingness to sacrifice the public good in favour of the Indian big bourgeoisie. Given the BJP's ideological hostility to the public sector and open affiliation with big business, the Vajpayee government has been presiding over a reactionary economic regime. It has proved to be the most callous to the problems of mass poverty and human suffering.

2.21 The CPI(M) has been the most consistent opponent of the IMF-World Bank dictated liberalisation policies. The balance sheet of one decade of liberalisation has blown up the myths about liberalisation and purely market oriented policies being the best option for India. The average growth rate in the 1990s has not been more than in the 1980s. The industrial growth has been decelerating and the manufacturing sector has been in recession for the past few years. The rate of

foodgrains growth in the 1990s has averaged 1.8 per cent per annum, which is less than the rate of population growth. The reduction of public investment in the name of cutting fiscal deficit has led to the contraction of demand which is at the root of the current recessionary phase.

2.22 The BJP has outdone the Congress party in its blind pursuit of liberalisation and privatisation. A most damaging step adopted is the entry of the private companies including foreign ones into the insurance business. Insurance occupies a major part of the financial sector of the country and who controls it has a crucial bearing on how and where the resources of the economy are being deployed. Privatisation of insurance in turn is a component of financial liberalisation which is the persistent demand of international finance capital and whose realisation would make the country completely vulnerable to the whims and caprices of a bunch of international financial speculators. The next major step is to denationalise the banking sector. The government has announced its intention to reduce its stake from 51 to 33 per cent. Liberalisation of the financial sector has led to a series of scandals engineered by a nexus of bankers, brokers and big business. The most serious of these is the crash of the UTI's US64 scheme which has left millions of small investors in the lurch.

Industrial Crisis

2.23 Sector by sector in industry after industry, the BJP-led government has opened up 74 percent to 100 per cent equity ownership to foreign capital. Even retail trade is being opened up to foreign capital. The bankruptcy of the power policy of the nineties is exemplified by the fiasco of the Enron project at Dabhol. The counter-guarantee extended to Enron, the agreement which allowed the US multinational to loot the Maharashtra State Electricity Board and the eventual collapse of Enron itself in the US, is a saga of multinational duplicity and plunder.

2.24 The public sector is under relentless attack. The sale of BALCO for one-tenth of its asset value, the effort to sell Air India and the decision to sell off 13 public sector units recently, are all part of the harmful policy to dismantle the public sector. The profitable public sector units are targeted for privatisation and most of the disinvestment deals have been manipulated to benefit certain big business companies and foreign firms. The telecom sector is being privatised with the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (VSNL) handed over to the Tatas. The strategic defence production sector, now exclusively with the government, is to be opened up to Indian and foreign capital. The all-encompassing privatisation drive covers all spheres, it seeks to privatise the coal industry, push for the privatisation of the railways and downsize the government departments.

2.25 Under the WTO regime, the government removed all quantitative restrictions on imports (on 1429 items by April 2001) which has badly affected Indian industry and in particular the small and medium sector. The small-scale industries have

borne the brunt of import liberalisation and lowered tariffs under the WTO regime. With de-reservation of the SSI sector on the anvil, thousands of small-scale units have closed down. The dumping of cheap industrial goods has contributed to the downturn in industrial production.

2.26 The pro-big business and anti-people character of the BJP-led regime is exemplified by the last three budgets which have gifted Rs. 13,500 Crores as concessions to big business and the corporate sector, while imposing Rs. 20,000 crores through indirect taxes on the common people. The tipping off of the big business houses, to sell off their shares in the US64 scheme before sales were suspended, is another example of the class character of the government. The failure to discipline big business houses which are refusing to pay back huge bank loans and whose dues constitute the bulk of the Rs. 80,000 crore of non-performing assets of the nationalised banks is another glaring example. The government refuses to realise the Rs. 1,52,897 crores in various tax arrears from the corporate houses.

2.27 The pro-rich policies are reflected in India having one of the lowest tax-GDP ratios in the world. The obsession with curtailing the fiscal deficit through expenditure cuts and the refusal to raise revenue through taxation on the affluent to finance increased public investment have led to accentuating the recession in the economy with falling demand. The external debt stood at \$ 100.38 billion at September-end 2001 with the share of commercial borrowings showing an increase. The total internal liabilities according to the budget estimate for 2001-02 works out to 54.8 per cent of the GDP. The Central government is passing on the burden of the fiscal crisis on to the state governments and they in turn are forced to turn to the World Bank for "assistance". State governments are signing agreements with the Bank with stringent conditionalities for structural adjustment loans. Thus, the World Bank is wielding direct control over individual states, which poses a threat to the unity and integrity of the country. The Central budget for 2002-03 has legalised the proposal to link central plan assistance to the reform process. Nearly a third of such assistance will now be disbursed by the Central government on the basis of its "interpretation" of the state government's policies. This, in fact, constitutes a gross violation of the federal principles of our Constitution.

Disastrous Effects on Agriculture

2.28 The agrarian situation is marked by a deep crisis which has put the livelihood of seventy per cent of the population in jeopardy. The removal of quantitative restrictions on the import of a whole range of agricultural commodities deprived the country of one instrument to check the steep fall in the prices of commodities produced by Indian peasants. Peasants were deprived of tens of thousands of crores of rupees due to the steep fall in prices of crops. Even the rich peasants have been badly hit. There has been a crash in the prices of coconut, paddy, groundnut, tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, tea, coffee, rubber, vegetables, pepper, arecanut,

apples and chillies. The government not only removed the restrictions well before the WTO schedule, it also levied tariffs much below the tariff bindings prescribed. Agricultural imports have gone up four fold between 1995 and 2000.

2.29 The crisis in agriculture is also due to the decline in public investment in agriculture and the withdrawal of subsidies leading to the fall in the growth of agricultural production. The Central procurement of foodgrains and distribution through the FCI is sought to be abandoned. Peasants are unable to get their crops procured at the minimum support prices due to the refusal of the government agencies to intervene. Peasants are at the mercy of the big traders.

2.30 The implementation of land reforms is being reversed. Land ceiling laws are being diluted. Land, including waste land is being made available to big business and MNCs. Growing mechanisation has a disastrous impact on the rural employment situation. All this is a prelude to the corporatisation of agriculture advocated in the Central government's agriculture policy. The opening up of agriculture to the global market dominated by MNCs is leading to a shift from foodgrains to commercial crops. This has resulted in the fall in the rate of foodgrain production endangering food self-sufficiency. The MNCs have entered into agriculture through supply of seeds and other inputs, with technologies and marketing systems which make peasants dependent on them. Changes in the patent law and the intellectual property regime are designed to act against the interests of the peasants.

2.31 In the agrarian sector, the policies of the bourgeois-landlord governments at the Centre and the states are increasing the divide between the rural rich consisting of landlords, rich peasants, contractors and big traders on the one hand and the mass of the poor peasants, middle peasants, agricultural workers, artisans and under employed rural men and women, on the other. With the steep fall in the prices of agricultural commodities, the poor and the middle peasants are forced to resort to distress sales. Indebtedness of the peasantry has become an alarming problem. The plight of the agricultural workers has deteriorated with fall in real wages, decrease in work days and forced migration for long periods.

2.32 The biggest scandal concerns the mounting food stocks, now in the region of sixty million (six crore) tonnes. This has happened despite the fact that per capita foodgrains output has declined during the nineties. This means the purchasing power of the rural poor has shrunk faster than the foodgrain output. After hiking the issue price of wheat and rice three times since 1998, the government has ensured that the rural and urban poor cannot access the Public Distribution System (PDS). The Below the Poverty Line (BPL) category is a scandalous farce perpetrated on the poor. It illustrates the utter failure of the targetted system of PDS and the abandonment of food security for the people. The government refuses to initiate largescale food for work programmes which can put purchasing power in the hands of the rural poor. The huge stockpile of foodgrains in the godowns is a scathing

indictment of the Centre's vicious policy, while hunger and starvation stalk the poor, particularly in the tribal areas.

2.33 The withdrawal of the State from economic activities and public services is accompanied by the imposition of user charges on all essential services. Electricity, education, water, health, public transport and municipal services are all subject to steep increase in rates making them out of reach for ordinary people. The MOUs signed by certain state governments with the World Bank are instrumental in enforcing these hikes.

2.34 Employment generation has suffered a serious setback due to the policies of liberalisation. The closure of industries and thousands of smallscale units have thrown lakhs of workers out of jobs. The rate of growth of employment which was 2.37 per cent per year in the period 1987 to 1994 has declined to only 1.05 per cent per year in the period 1994 to 2000. Employment in the Central public sector undertakings has gone down by 325 thousand between 1991 and 2000.

2.35 The overall state of the economy is bound to worsen in the coming period. With the world economic slowdown and the onset of global recessionary conditions, the Indian economy is heading for an all-round crisis.

All-round Attack on People

2.36 The cumulative impact of the liberalisation policies pursued by the Central government and most of the state governments have resulted in harmful consequences for different sections of the people.

- (i) The plight of the peasantry and agricultural workers has worsened especially after the enforcement of the WTO regime. Faced with the steep fall in the prices of all agricultural commodities and the increasing debt burden, peasants have been ruined by distress sales. Heavily indebted peasants still continue to commit suicides in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamilnadu etc.
- (ii) The agricultural workers have suffered a sharp fall in employment and living standards with the shift away from foodgrain production. The equivalent of non-agricultural work declined due to the decline in the expenditure on rural infrastructure. The per capita consumption of foodgrains has actually declined under liberalisation.
- (iii) The working class has come in for severe attack due to the largescale closures and retrenchment. Employment in the public sector and government departments is dwindling through voluntary retirement schemes and cutbacks. The interest rate for Provident Fund has been reduced from 12 per cent to 9 per cent in the space of two years, so also, the interest rates on small savings and

bank deposits, robbing workers, employees and middle classes of their savings. The government is proposing retrograde changes in labour laws which seek to do away with even the limited protection for the workers.

- (iv) The handloom industry which sustains lakhs of weavers is in crisis. The hike in prices of yarn, cuts in subsidies and rising costs has led to lakhs of looms closing down. The beedi industry is also in crisis with no relief from excise and other duties. Fisherfolk with traditional fishing methods are deprived of their livelihood by the entry of the corporate sector and big mechanised trawlers for fishing.
- (v) Women have suffered from drastic fall in employment opportunities, particularly in the rural areas. The cuts in social sector spending has hit women the hardest and have drastically increased their work volume -- whether it is in the fetching of drinking water, collection of fuel etc. The social impact of liberalisation policies include an increase in violence against women.
- (vi) The plight of dalits and adivasis has worsened. The dismantling of the PDS, the cutbacks in social sector expenditure and the privatisation of public sector have all taken a toll on the health and livelihood of the most oppressed sections -- the landless scheduled castes and the adivasis who are deprived of access to land and forests. Liberalisation and privatisation has drastically reduced the employment prospects through reservation of jobs for dalits and backward classes.
- (vii) The youth in urban and rural areas face the grim prospect of unemployment. Only one in 24 young job seekers got a job in the organised sector during the past three years. 41.2 million (4.12 crore) job seekers were registered with the employment exchanges as on 31st March 2001.

Impact of Liberalisation In other Spheres

2.37 Education: The BJP-led government is moving towards outright commercialisation of the educational system and withdrawal of the State from its basic responsibility to provide education for all. The Ambani-Birla report is a pointer in this direction. Education is being subjected to the sinister project of eroding the secular content and replacing it with sectarian, communal and distorted values. The CPI(M) stands for reversing the drive towards commercialisation and privatisation of education. The public education system has to be expanded and strengthened with adequate resources being allocated both at the Central and state levels. The CPI(M) will unite with all democratic forces to stop the communalisation of the educational system.

2.38 Health: The public health system has been a major casualty of the decade of liberalisation. The Union budgetary allocations have come down from a low of 1.3

per cent in 1990 to an abysmal 0.9 per cent in 1999. At the states level, the decline has been from 7 per cent to 5.5 per cent. The government has accepted the logic of the TRIPS agreement under WTO and is making medicines more expensive for the common people at the behest of the multinational corporations. Allocations in the health sector are lopsided in favour of population control, while prevention of common diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are being neglected. Health for all as a goal is being abandoned. The CPI(M) demands that adequate resources be allocated for the public health system and the expansion and strengthening of the primary health centre network.

2.39 Culture: The BJP-RSS combine is aggressively pursuing the goal of imposing a Hindutva concept in culture. With the BJP in power, RSS outfits have attacked artists, films and writers who oppose their sectarian and authoritarian ideas. Official cultural bodies are being subverted and misused. The cultural offensive which is part of the imperialist globalisation has led to the widespread purveyance of the values of consumerism, greed and egotism which mirror the needs of the market. Sex and violence are promoted in cultural productions which is having a harmful effect on our youth and society. The struggle for secular and democratic cultural values assumes vital importance at this juncture. The CPI(M) will extend support to all efforts to nurture and develop a healthy and democratic cultural life.

2.40 Media: The BJP-led government has been susceptible to pressures to open the print media to foreign capital. The CPI(M) strongly opposes the entry of foreign media organisations into the print media. Such a move is fraught with serious consequences for the democratic system. The BJP-led government has destroyed the prospects of an autonomous Prasar Bharati serving as a public broadcasting service. The electronic media under Prasar Bharati needs to be given autonomy with the states having a say in running the system. There has to be an autonomous body constituted by parliament to regulate the electronic media as a whole including the private television channels.

2.41 Environment: Liberalisation has aggravated the problems of environmental degradation. Deforestation, soil erosion, pollution of air and water resources affect the well being and livelihood of the people. Toxic industrial wastes are allowed to be imported and dumped indiscriminately. The contractor/bureaucratic nexus operating with political patronage is the prime reason for the destruction of forest cover. The government at the Centre and in the states refuses to enforce environmental protection measures. Instead, in the name of environmental protection, the higher judiciary has closed thousands of factories indiscriminately resulting in lakhs of workers losing jobs with no adequate compensation. People oriented development has to go along with environmental concerns for a strategy of sustainable development.

Foreign Policy

2.42 The BJP-led government has reversed India's independent and non-aligned foreign policy. In three and a half years, the Vajpayee government has assiduously pursued the United States in order to gain recognition as its regional ally in South Asia. The Prime Minister has declared the United States to be a natural ally and the government has single-mindedly pursued a policy of winning US recognition for its nuclear power status and in return to serve as a reliable agent of US global strategy. It has completely downgraded the non-aligned movement and India's role in it.

2.43 From establishing close ties with Israel including military and security cooperation, to withdrawal of recognition to the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, to proposing that membership of the NAM be based on the criteria of being democratic, to joining the US sponsored "Community of Democracies" and mouthing the American version of free markets and democracy, the Vajpayee government has a shameful record in downgrading India's status as an independent and major non-aligned country.

2.44 The dangerous implications of the worldview of the Vajpayee government became evident during the Kargil war when the government repeatedly requested the Clinton administration to intervene to restrain Pakistan and get its troops to withdraw across the LOC. The United States has virtually become the arbiter in Indo-Pakistan relations. The Vajpayee government was the first government to come out publicly in support of the National Missile Defence plan announced by President Bush. It showed pathetic eagerness to offer military logistical facilities to the US military for their attack on Afghanistan and has promised strategic cooperation in advancing US interests in South Asia.

2.45 The Vajpayee government's policy of nuclear weaponisation after the Pokhran tests in May 1998 has made India more vulnerable to imperialist pressures. The US is playing the role of arbiter in the Indo-Pakistan nuclear equation. The CPI(M) reiterates that nuclear weaponisation be stopped and nuclear weapons be not deployed. The CPI(M) opposes the unequal nuclear world order and advocates universal nuclear disarmament.

2.46 The Vajpayee government has eagerly entered into military cooperation with the US after the Americans decided to remove sanctions on such cooperation which were imposed after the Pokhran tests. Under the military cooperation pact signed in 1995, the Vajpayee government is now strengthening joint training and exchange programmes with the United States. Naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean between the two navies is in the offing. Port facilities were given to US warships engaged in operations in Afghanistan.

2.47 The servile pro-imperialist policies of the Vajpayee government must be resolutely opposed. The struggle to restore India's non-aligned foreign policy assumes vital importance at this juncture.

Neighbours

2.48 The key to peace and harmonious developments in South Asia lies in the complex web of India-Pakistan relations. It is essential that both countries sort out their problems through bilateral dialogue. This is all the more necessary as at present both the Indian and Pakistani governments are willing to make the US the arbiter in their relations and its role has grown in the post-September 11 period. The Lahore visit, the Kargil conflict and the Agra summit in the past three years -- all point to the complicated and contradictory trends that have manifested in the relations between the two countries. In the aftermath of the December 13 attack on India's parliament, tensions grew once again with military mobilisation by both sides on the borders. The CPI(M) stands for continuation of the dialogue with Pakistan to resolve all outstanding problems including the Kashmir issue.

2.49 The CPI(M) condemns all efforts to position India as a counterweight to China as advocated by rightwing circles in the USA and India. The progress in improving relations between India and China should be maintained and stepped up particularly in the economic sphere.

2.50 The menace of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan, the growing activities of fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh, and the strengthening of majority and minority chauvinism in Sri Lanka are cause for concern. Along with the growth of majority communalism in India, these trends are harmful for the peoples of South Asia. Such a climate is utilised by US imperialism, which finds it easy to exploit these contesting chauvinism and conflicts.

2.51 The CPI(M) advocates forging common bonds of solidarity between the people of India and all the South Asian countries and making SAARC a vital institution for regional cooperation. It wants the unity of Sri Lanka strengthened with a just provision for autonomy for the Tamil people. The close ties with Nepal should be based on an equitable relationship, which eschews any big brotherly attitude on the Indian side and chronic anti-Indian postures in Nepal.

2.52 The strengthening of the democratic and progressive forces in all the South Asian countries is the guarantee for closer relations and meaningful progress in solving the common problems of mass poverty and underdevelopment.

Attack on Federal Structure

2.53 The creation of three new states Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttaranchal has given a fillip to demands for more new states to be formed by breaking up the existing linguistic states. A separate Telengana carved out of Andhra Pradesh and Vidharba from Maharashtra are the two most prominent amongst other demands. The BJP wishes to create small states so that the Centre can dominate them. Small states with limited resources would mean weaker states incapable of resisting

Central encroachment. Replacing states with clear-cut linguistic nationality identity which can assert their rights, with small states will weaken the federal system. The CPI(M) is strongly opposed to the break up of the linguistic states which were formed after a powerful mass movement for democratising the State structure. At the same time, the CPI(M) stands for the development of the backward regions within the linguistic states.

2.54 The BJP conceals its authoritarian proclivities behind the façade of the NDA coalition government. The Vajpayee government has the dubious distinction of having twice in succession invoked Article 356 to attempt to dislodge an elected government -- the RJD government in Bihar. Even after the assembly elections in 1999, the BJP in a brazen step foisted a minority government for a week using a pliable Governor. It is only the lack of a majority in the upper House which has prevented the BJP-led government from authoritarian intervention in the states ruled by opposition parties. The way the Governor of Tamilnadu was summarily removed when she refused to accept Central dictates is another pointer to the authoritarian attitude of the BJP. The Centre is forcing states to sign MOUs with it to accept the IMF-World Bank package of reforms. It refuses to take substantial steps to devolve financial resources to the states. The core of the BJP's approach is anti-federal. It wants a unitarian and authoritarian Centre which can override all dissent, political and social. The CPI(M) will continue to defend federalism and the rights of the states against authoritarian attacks.

Struggle for Democracy

Women's Rights

2.55 The raising of women's consciousness and their increasing role in public life is seen in their active participation in the panchayats and local bodies despite many obstacles. This participation must be taken forward with the implementation of one-third reservation for women in parliament and legislatures. The bourgeois parties faced with this growing assertion of women's rights pay lip service to this demand but block it in practice. The BJP-led government is the most culpable as it has failed to push the bill through in parliament.

2.56 Apart from the economic oppression suffered by women and discrimination in jobs and wages, the values purveyed under liberalisation and the market economy have led to the commodification of women and new forms of gender discrimination. Economic progress in general does not necessarily lead to gender equality, as the declining sex ratio of women in Punjab, Haryana and the Western region shows. Anti-women practices such as sex determination tests, increased demands for dowry, violence and sexual harassment have grown. The RSS and its outfits are seeking to impose obscurantist values and restrictions on women, while fundamentalists in the minority community seek to shackle women.

2.57 The CPI(M) will take up the fight for women's rights in a forthright manner. It will extend full support to the struggle to counter anti-women social practices.

Dalit Rights

2.58 Despite fifty years of the Indian Constitution asserting the rights of the scheduled castes to be treated as equal citizens, the practice of untouchability is widespread and social oppression and discrimination is the lot of the millions of dalits who comprise an important section of the urban and rural proletariat. The struggle for the emancipation of the dalits will succeed only when the fight against the oppressive caste system is harnessed to the struggle to end the economic exploitation of the dalit working masses, when the class issues of land, wages and employment are taken up along with the heinous and inhuman caste practices. Dalit Christians should be provided reservation as other scheduled castes since conversion to any religion does not free the dalits from social oppression.

Fight For Social Reforms

2.59 The CPI(M) while fighting for a caste-free society is deeply concerned about the growing casteism and divisions being perpetuated and nurtured in society. It finds reflection in the political and social spheres. Such caste fragmentation is disruptive to developing class unity and for advancing democracy. The Party should organise campaigns against caste divisions and mobilise people to struggle against all forms of caste oppression. Degrading caste practices, the social oppression of women, evil of dowry, bride burning and pernicious social and religious customs which devalue human life are all obstacles to the creation of a genuinely democratic society. The CPI(M) will take up all such issues and fight for social reforms.

Adivasis Rights

2.60 The eight crore adivasi people are subject to both new and continuing onslaughts. For decades under capitalist development they have experienced the loss of lands and their access to forests. The Forest Act treats the tribal people as encroachers and not as forest dwellers who nurture the forests. The laws protecting tribal lands in the scheduled areas have proved to be toothless and are now sought to be further diluted. The identity of the tribal people, their culture, language and way of life is under threat from communal and divisive forces. The Central government and most of the state governments refuse to provide autonomy to the tribal compact areas. The Left Front Governments of Tripura and West Bengal have done the most for implementing land reforms which favour the tribal people and have prevented alienation of their lands.

2.61 Under the onslaught of liberalisation, mining and mineral exploration have been thrown open to the private sector, leading to further uprootment of Adivasis

from their land. MNCs and big corporations are acquiring these lands with the connivance of the state governments. The collapse of the public distribution system has affected the tribal people the most as they are the most vulnerable. Starvation deaths, as highlighted in Kashipur, Orissa are replicated in other tribal areas of Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan.

2.62 The CPI(M) must in earnest take up the work of organising the tribal people, to defend their rights to land and forests, to defend their language and culture, protection from money lenders and rapacious contractors and for autonomy for the majority tribal compact areas.

Attack on Democratic Rights

2.63 Making use of the USA's "global war against terrorism" the BJP-led government seeks to push through various authoritarian and anti-democratic measures. The POTO with its draconian provisions is one such move. In the name of strengthening internal security, a Central police agency and more repressive laws are contemplated which have met with strong resistance from the states. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, democratic rights are sought to be circumscribed.

2.64 A worrying phenomenon has been the increasing judicial encroachment on the rights of citizens. The Kerala High Court after prohibiting bandhs followed it up by a ban on hartals. There have been a series of decisions by courts restricting the right of demonstrations and processions. Increasingly, the right to protest and hold public rallies is being seen as an anti-social activity and a law and order problem. Increasingly, judicial verdicts are being handed out against the rights of workers in tune with the liberalisation policies of the State, as in the case of the regularisation of contract workers. The Constitutional right of citizens to assemble and protest must be strongly defended.

2.65 Reactionary groups like the Ranvir Sena in Bihar and other upper caste landlord armies unleash inhuman violence and terror against the rural poor massacring even women and children. The violence indulged in by certain naxalite groups like the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) has a disruptive impact on building a democratic movement. Further, it provides the State with an alibi to step up its repressive actions. The CPI(M) is firmly opposed to the resort to such anarchist violence as it helps the reactionary sections of the ruling classes. Under the patronage of the RSS and Shiv Sena, extremist groups like the Bajrang Dal resort to violence and intimidation to terrorise the minorities. Similarly, terrorist acts of certain minority fundamentalist groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen and the Lashkar-e-Toiba who are sponsored by Pakistan's ISI, create communal tensions and aid the Hindu communal forces to target the Muslim community. Terrorist violence, whatever be the motivation has to be firmly combatted as it disrupts the unity of the working people and helps reactionary forces to divert attention from the real problems facing the people.

Brazen Corruption

2.66 The BJP-led government has proved to be corrupt to the core and brazen about its venality. The President of the BJP was caught on videotape taking a bribe. The tehelka tapes exposure, the stock market scam, the telecom and defence deals and the series of financial scandals have become synonymous with the largescale corruption flourishing under the Vajpayee government. The brazen disregard for propriety in dealing with corruption charges was seen in the way the Prime Minister reinstated George Fernandes in the Cabinet even before the judicial commission completed its enquiry into the tehelka tapes.

2.67 The CAG report on defence purchases during the Kargil conflict is a shocking confirmation of the all pervasive corruption in the government. The fact that money was made out of coffins, apart from boots and other clothing for the soldiers reveals the sordid depths to which venality is flourishing. Alongwith large-scale corruption in the administration, criminalisation of politics has become rampant and the victims are the ordinary people who have to pay bribes for even getting essential services.

Political Forces

2.68 **BJP & Allies:** The image of the BJP and the NDA has steadily eroded. Within a year of the government's second stint after the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, discontent and disillusion spread affecting the BJP's mass base too. Of the twenty two state assembly and one Union territory elections held since the 12th General Elections in 1998, the BJP and its allies lost in all, except four. This alongwith the discontent against the BJP-led government's policies has had its impact on the NDA, which is an opportunist combination between the BJP and some of the regional parties and splinter groups. Some of the parties like the Samata led by George Fernandes have become hardened supporters of the BJP and seek to provide legitimacy to the communal platform. The TDP has not joined the NDA but supports the government from outside. On a range of issues, differences and conflicts have emerged between the constituents. Some parties like the Trinamul Congress and the PMK have gone in and out of the alliance. The NDA is a fragile combination but it remains intact with the sole purpose of remaining in power.

2.69 **Congress:** The Congress party has been out of power since 1996 and is the main opposition party in parliament. It has been able to come to power in some more states cashing in on the discontent against the NDA. The Congress party stands for the same economic policies that it initiated in 1991. All its state governments are implementing the same discredited policies. It is with this outlook that the Congress supported the opening up of the insurance sector and amending the Patent Act in parliament. The compulsions of acting as a opposition party makes it adopt certain positions at times, but on basic economic policies it does not

have any differences with the BJP. On secularism, the Congress cannot go along with the BJP, but it displays vacillations as before. As a party of the big bourgeoisie, the Congress is hostile to a federal set up and devolving more powers to the states. In Tripura, in order to fight the CPI(M) and the Left, the Congress has allied with the front of the banned extremist organisation, the NLFT. Given its class character, the CPI(M) cannot have an alliance or united front with the Congress party. In the present situation, where the BJP is the main target, the Party should adopt tactics which will enable all the secular and democratic forces to effectively thwart the gameplan of the BJP-RSS combine. While doing so, efforts must be made to appeal and reach out to the mass base of the Congress as their mobilisation is essential for strengthening the fight against communalism.

2.70 Regional Parties: Since the end of one-party dominance at the Centre, the regional parties have been playing a prominent role. Amongst these parties, there are variations with some representing the regional bourgeoisie and landlords and articulating the linguistic/nationality aspirations of their state, while others are mainly caste-based. There has been a change in the outlook of the regional parties representing the regional bourgeois-landlord classes with the expansion of capitalism. They have changed their attitude to foreign capital and are favourable to the liberalisation policies as the regional bourgeoisie sees in them opportunities to advance their interests further.

2.71 The regional parties are shifting their positions politically, according to their narrow interests at the states-level. Their attitude to fighting communalism is inconsistent. Though most of them are of a secular character, they are intent on protecting their own political interests in the state concerned and therefore ambitious to play a role at the national level. Most of the regional parties who were in the United Front crossed over to the BJP-led alliance displaying sheer opportunism to be in power.

2.72 The CPI(M), taking into account the changing role of the regional parties, will adopt a differentiated attitude to them. It will firmly oppose those parties who have opportunistically joined hands with the BJP. The Party will cooperate with those secular regional parties who are prepared to fight the communal forces. The Party will combat all forms of regional chauvinism. The Party will join united struggles and enter into electoral understanding from time to time with those regional parties which adopt anti-communal and pro-people positions.

Working Class & Mass Actions

2.73 The last three years have seen important struggles against the policies of liberalisation, the imposition of the WTO regime and the privatisation of the public sector. There were two general strikes which took place at the call of the National Platform of Mass Organisations on December 11, 1998 and May 11, 2000. There were the 14-day postal strike, three-day coal strike twice in November 2000 and

December 2001, the 67-day strike by the BALCO workers, a one-day state government and Central government employees' strike in July 2001, strikes by insurance, bank and telecom employees against privatisation and so on. Another notable struggle was the 37-day strike of the Kerala state government employees. There was also the prolonged struggle against increasing electricity rates in Andhra Pradesh. Recently there has been the trend of wider trade union unity with the participation of all trade union centres. However, the efforts for a countrywide general strike against the new anti-working class onslaughts in the Union budget of 2001 could not materialise.

2.74 The Party, independently and jointly with Left parties conducted campaigns and struggles against the economic policies, the attacks on minorities and the pro-imperialist policies of the BJP-led government. The September 2001 countrywide movement by the Party against the policies of the BJP-led government elicited a good response from the people. The seven Left-led kisan and agricultural workers organisations held a big rally in November 2000 at Delhi on a charter of demands. There have also been campaigns and struggles against the communalisation of education, the attacks on Christian minorities and in defence of cultural freedom. But these activities are not sufficient in scope and impact. There is need to step up the Party's continuous activities and develop sustained struggles at the local level on political and mass issues.

Left Forces

2.75 The CPI(M) being the most consistent opponent of the BJP-led government at the centre and the bourgeois-landlord classes, came under severe attack in the recent period. In West Bengal, planned violence was unleashed in three districts by the armed gangs of the Trinamul-BJP combine to physically eliminate the Party and its supporters. The PWG and the KLO are also targetting and killing CPI(M) cadres. In Kerala, the RSS conducted murderous attacks on the Party's cadres. In Tripura, scores of tribal leaders and activists of the Party were assassinated by the extremist gangs. The Party has firmly and successfully rebuffed these attacks.

2.76 The assembly elections in West Bengal and Kerala in May 2001 were important for the Left forces. The victory for the sixth time by two-third majority for the Left Front in West Bengal was a significant event. It highlighted the continuing relevance of the alternative posed by the Left in national politics. The defeat of the LDF in Kerala was the result of the gang-up of all the caste and communal forces behind the UDF, some shortcomings of the LDF government and certain organisational weaknesses. Here the CPI(M) and the Left and democratic forces will strive to overcome a setback.

2.77 The performance of the Left Front governments of West Bengal and Tripura and the earlier LDF government in Kerala show how it is possible, despite the limitations, to formulate and implement policies which are pro-people and help to

develop the state. The 24 year Left Front rule in West Bengal has shown the way in land reforms implementation, a decentralised panchayati raj system and widening of the democratic rights of the people. In Kerala, the people's plan initiative was taken and the public distribution system expanded. In Tripura, the rights of the tribal people were assured and schemes to benefit the poorer sections of the people implemented. Both the West Bengal and Tripura governments have to work under the severe constraints imposed by the economic policies of the Centre and the withdrawal of the State from economic activities. We should explain to the people frankly the situation and devise measures which can effectively fulfill our commitments to them.

2.78 The unity of the Left parties is important to mobilise the people to defend their interests and to rally other democratic and secular forces to fight the BJP and the rightwing forces. Strengthening the Left is essential for developing the Left and democratic alternative. The CPI(M) as the biggest Left force should work to rally all Left minded forces in the country notwithstanding their differences. The CPI(M) is committed to strengthening and deepening Left unity.

Relevance of Third Force

2.79 We have pursued the line set out in the 16th Congress -- fighting the BJP and its allies as our main task while opposing the Congress policies. In this context, to meet the immediate situation, we strove to reforge the third alternative. The continuing efforts to forge a third force at the national level must be seen in the proper perspective. This is necessary to meet the current situation wherein both the BJP and the Congress are gathering parties around them and trying to see that two combinations emerge. To counter this, our effort is to build a combination of the non-BJP, non-Congress forces. A step towards this was the formation of the People's Front, which comprises the Left parties and some of the secular opposition parties like the Samajwadi Party and Janata Dal (S). This combination is a partial expression of the immediate need for a third force. Some of the secular bourgeois parties will come and go out of this formation, but its existence will help meet the needs of the current situation.

Independent Role of Party

2.80 While chalking out our future direction, the main concern should be how to strengthen the independent role and influence of the Party. It must be admitted that we have not made much advance in this regard over a considerable period. Without the CPI(M) advancing and increasing its all-India strength, it will not be possible to go towards building the Left and democratic front.

2.81 At the state level, the Party enters into electoral understanding with bourgeois parties from time to time. Such electoral alliances help the Party to meet the immediate political objective and to have access to the masses following these

parties. They are not meant for prolonged alliances or united fronts. We must continue to adopt such tactics without tailing the bourgeois parties or blurring the independent identity of the Party.

2.82 While continuing to enter into electoral understanding to meet a specific situation, it should be remembered that such alliances do not by themselves determine our growth. We have to pay more attention to developing our political campaigns, mass movements and united struggles concerning different sections of the people and particularly the basic classes. We must use united front tactics more effectively, including electoral tactics, to advance our influence. We must pay serious attention to the political and ideological work alongwith our struggles on economic and mass issues.

Left & Democratic Front: The Real Alternative

2.83 The Left and democratic programme that is spelt out below must be taken as the basis for developing, organising and expanding our Party's multifaceted activities and to rally all other Left and democratic forces and those vast masses of the working people who will constitute the bedrock of a Left and democratic front. We must concentrate on developing the movements of the working class, poor peasants and agricultural workers. The only way to change the correlation of class forces is by strengthening the Left and democratic forces and winning over the masses following the bourgeois parties on the basis of concrete slogans and demands arising out of the fight against the bourgeois-landlord policies and the political and ideological struggle against the ruling class ideologies.

2.84 The 17th Congress of the CPI(M) is committed to bring about the people's democratic revolution based on the Programme of the Party updated in 2000. In order to advance to this goal, the Party strives to build the Left and democratic front which alone can present a real alternative to the bourgeois-landlord policies.

2.85 The CPI(M) seeks to mobilise all sections of the working people, the working class, the peasantry, agricultural workers, artisans, middle classes, intelligentsia and service sector personnel along with the mass of women, students and youth through mass struggles on the basis of the following programme which is a distinct alternative to the bankrupt policies of the ruling classes.

2.86 Programme of the Left & Democratic Forces

(i) Defend National Unity & Secularism

Implement principle of separation of religion and politics under the Constitution; strengthen secular character of the State and its institutions; remove RSS infiltration in the State apparatus. Combat communal ideology in society. Counter divisive, communal and separatist forces to strengthen national unity.

Provide maximum autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir within the ambit of Article 370. Enforce rule of law and judicial process to resolve disputes such as Ayodhya.

(ii) Federalism

For a truly federal system, restructure Centre-state relations with more powers to the states. Revise concurrent list in the Constitution for this purpose. Replace Article 356 with suitable clauses to be invoked in extraordinary situations with sanction of parliament. Revamp role of Governors.

(iii) Democratic Structure

Expand democratic rights of citizens; scrap repressive laws like NSA, ESMA & POTA. Introduce proportional representation with partial list system in elections. Electoral reforms to curb money power and malpractices. Curb corruption by stringent action against corrupt public servants, businessmen and politicians. Right to information be assured to citizens by law. Develop public broadcasting system in electronic media with democratic control.

(iv) Economic Policy

a) Review policies of liberalisation to strengthen self-reliant economic growth; streamline and strengthen public sector in core and strategic sectors; promote non-monopolistic industrial growth, encourage medium and small scale industries. Ensure adequate resource mobilisation by increased direct taxes, recovery of tax dues and curbing black money. Foreign capital investment to be based on national priorities and requirements of advanced technology. Regulate capital flows.

b) Implement radical land reforms, distribution of surplus land and cultivable waste land to the landless. Provision of sufficient public investment for agricultural development; expansion of irrigation facilities; credit to poorer sections of peasantry. Ensure procurement at minimum support prices for agricultural produce. Promote cooperatives run on democratic lines in all spheres.

c) Fight to revise WTO agreements to protect Indian agriculture, industry and indigenous science & technology. Impose higher tariffs to protect domestic interests.

(v) Right of working people

Need based minimum wages for workers; recognition of trade union on the basis of secret ballot; statutory provision for worker's participation in management; end discrimination of women workers; equal wages for equal work. Ensure minimum wages for agricultural workers and other rights through Central legislation. Right to work as a fundamental right in the Constitution.

(vi) For People's Welfare

(a) Set up a comprehensive public distribution system to cover 14 essential commodities; adequate procurement of food stocks by the State for this purpose; roll back privatisation of public services like health, education, public transport, water and electricity supply. Improvement of public health system and expansion of

primary health centres with adequate stocks of medicines. Housing to be a basic right.

(b) Compulsory primary education and universal elementary education; free education up to the secondary stage. Revamping educational system on democratic, secular and scientific lines. A comprehensive sports policy which provides adequate sports facilities for the youth.

(vii) For Development

Promoting balanced development of all regions through planning. Decentralisation of development decisions up to the panchayat and local bodies level. Devolve financial and administrative powers to the panchayat system. Environmental policy integrated with needs for rapid and sustainable development. Promoting indigenous scientific and technological research for independent development.

(viii) For Social Justice

Equality for women in all spheres by ending all forms of discrimination. Equal rights in property; joint pattas for women; provision of one-third reservation for women in legislatures and Parliament; measures to abolish child labour.

Eliminate untouchability and atrocities against scheduled castes and tribes by stringent action. Ensure reservation quotas for them are filled. Ensure right to forest land and protection of the cultural identity of adivasis. Regional autonomy for contiguous areas with majority adivasi population.

Equality of all Indian languages. Encouragement to Urdu language. Development of a democratic, secular culture.

(ix) Foreign Policy

Non-aligned foreign policy with anti-imperialist orientation; end military cooperation pact with US; no nuclear weaponisation; strive for universal nuclear disarmament; strengthen relations with socialist countries; support to anti-imperialist struggles and world peace; policy of friendship and closer ties with neighbouring countries.

2.87 The mobilisation for and the realisation of the Left and Democratic Front cannot be relegated to a distant goal. All the work of the Party, politically, ideologically and organisationally, should be geared to the basic task of building and strengthening the Left and Democratic Front. The Left and democratic platform alone can offer a full-fledged alternative to the disastrous policy of liberalisation and the destructive path of communalism and casteism.

Strengthen the Party

2.88 In order to mobilise all sections of the working people for struggles on the demands of the Left and democratic programme, the CPI(M) must be able to rapidly increase its political, ideological and organisational influence. The need for

strengthening the Party in all these spheres must be taken up as the main task in the coming days. Without a strong CPI(M), there cannot be a strong Left movement and progress towards developing the Left and Democratic Front. The Party has to go back amongst the people in a big way to mobilise them against the onslaughts of the policies of liberalisation, imperialist-driven globalisation and the communal ideology. The mass movements must be developed on a wider scale keeping in mind the local conditions. The work among the rural poor must be given priority. The Party must pay urgent attention to raise the ideological level of the entire Party membership so that it can effectively combat the bourgeois and imperialist purveyed ideologies.

2.89 The Party has to pay immediate attention to building the organisation and overcoming problems and shortcomings in organisational work. Based on democratic centralism, the Party has to conduct a continuous rectification campaign against harmful trends at all levels, which erode its communist character. The Party must give priority to the struggle against the pernicious Hindutva ideology and its communal manifestations. The fight against all forms of communalism is a fight to preserve class unity and to defend national unity.

2.90 The Party must adopt a correct approach to the development of mass organisations to expand their mass influence. It must initiate steps for united struggles and united platforms for mass movements.

Conclusion: Call of the CPI(M)

2.91 The CPI(M) will resolutely fight the growing US imperialist influence by mobilising all patriotic and anti-imperialist sections of the people. The Party will struggle with redoubled vigour against the policies of liberalisation and privatisation and for alternative economic policies. The CPI(M) will continue the fight to isolate the communal forces on the political and ideological plane.

2.92 The BJP-led government represents the most reactionary government in independent India. Its continuance means greater imperialist influence in our country endangering national sovereignty; erosion of the foundations of the secular republic; more sufferings for the people due to its reactionary economic policies and growing divisions in our society.

2.93 The crucial task in the coming days is to defeat the BJP-led government and work for a secular and democratic alternative. This calls for the rallying of the broadest sections of the people and all the secular and democratic forces.

2.94 It must be accomplished in such a manner as to pave the way for the advance of the Left and democratic forces. The CPI(M) must undertake a leading role in this struggle, uniting the Left and rallying all patriotic and democratic sections of the

people. The struggle to develop the Left and democratic alternative must be taken up to show the country a new path.

Let us go to the people with this message.