

**COMMUNISTS AND BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY :
THEORY AND PRACTICE**
**A study of the use by the West Bengal Communist
Parties of Democratic Institutions for Popular Mobilisation.**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

ALISON M. ROBERTS

**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067**

1990

C E R T I F I C A T E

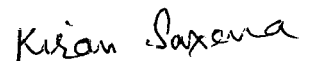
This dissertation entitled **COMMUNISTS AND BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY : THEORY AND PRACTICE: A STUDY OF THE USE BY THE WEST BENGAL COMMUNIST PARTIES OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS FOR POPULAR MOBILISATION** submitted by **ALISON MARGARET ROBERTS**, for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or fully for any other degree or diploma of any university. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.



PROF. BALVEER ARORA

[Chairperson]

Chairperson
Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067



DR. KIRAN SAXENA

[Supervisor]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My primary obligation is to the Department of Education of the Government of India, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the British Council for making twenty months of study at J.N.U. a financial and practical possibility.

Next I must thank the Centre for Political Studies for my rapid initiation into the study of Indian politics; I only regret that circumstances in the end did not permit me to take more advantage of the scholarship of the teachers who had set my ideas in motion. In particular I have to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Kiran Saxena, for her help and encouragement in the present enterprise, and to apologise for not having been able to polish the final product to the degree that I should have liked. I hope I have not disappointed her too much.

In Calcutta, the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences was an invaluable resource, both from the point of view of its library and of the intellectual clout of its resident academics. I am also grateful to the many people in Calcutta, Bolpur and Burdwan who gave me at least some ground-level experience. The help and kindness of Syed Mansur Habibullah, Arun Patnaik and Samit Kaur require special mention.

Lastly as a 'videshi' who has been lucky enough to have the opportunity to live in, travel around and study such a stimulating environment as India offers, I say a thank you to the many Indian friends who have helped make my stay here such a memorable experience. And especially to Urvashi, without whose help this dissertation would never have appeared at all.

A. Roberts

ALISON MARGARET ROBERTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AITUC	ALL-INDIA TRADE UNION CONGRESS (CPI Federation)
CITU	CONGRESS OF INDIAN TRADE UNIONS(CPM Federation)
CPC	COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA
CPGB	COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
CPI	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA
CPM	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA-MARXIST
CPML	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA-MARXIST-LENINIST
CPSU	COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION
FB	FORWARD BLOC
INTUC	INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS (Congress Party Federation)
LF	LEFT FRONT
MLA	MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
MP	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
NA	<u>"NEW AGE"</u> (CPI English-language Weekly)
PD	<u>"PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY"</u> (CPM English-language Weekly)
PSP	PRAJA SOCIALIST PARTY
RCPI	REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA ✓
RSP	REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY
UF	UNITED FRONT

* * *

CONTENTS

	Page No.
INTRODUCTION	1
The Context: Communist Innovation	1
The Problem Stated: Communist Theorisation	3
Conceptual Frame	6
Chapterisation	8
 CHAPTER - I	 13
Mobilisation from Marx to Lenin	13
 CHAPTER - II	 29
Integrating Theory With the Indian Reality	29
Communist Theorisations of the Indian State	29
The CPI and The Emerging Centre-States Issue	40
Kerala : The Testing Ground	49
Theoretical Issues in the 1964 Split	
 CHAPTER - III	 83
Mobilisation Strategy in West Bengal	83
Social and Economic Background	83
Communism in West Bengal, 1947-67	87
1967-70 : United Fronts	95
1970-77 : Top Alliances and Mass Mobilisation	148
The Congress Split & The West Bengal Communist Parties	149
The Left Front - I The Panchayats, Land Reform and Development	196
 CHAPTER - IV	 236
Theorising the Eighties	236
The CPM, Bourgeois Democracy & Centre-State Issue	237
The CPI and the Left & Democratic Alternative	246
 Conclusion	 248
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 256

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT : COMMUNIST INNOVATION

Marxism, according to Lenin, is not a dogma but a guide to action. As such, its application by Marxists in different countries has generated a vast repertoire of revolutionary understandings and methods. Bhabani Sengupta (1972) remarked that Indian communists had made no creative contribution to this "pool of applied communism". However, a more recent observer (Nossiter, 1988) is in disagreement; he believed that :

"they have learned by trial and error to utilise the whole apparatus of liberal democracy - elections, parties, parliaments, levels of governance from panchayat and municipality to province and the federal structure itself - to advance popular mobilization in ways which were unavailable to Lenin and the Bolsheviks and only hinted at by Marx". [p. 174]

This has opened up "a rich new seam of communist praxis", according to Nossiter's editor, Bogdan Szajkowski (p. vii).

There have indeed been many major developments on the Indian political scene since 1972 and Sengupta himself (1979) seemed willing to revise his earlier opinion in the light of

the rise of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - the CPM in West Bengal. Its increased strength resulted in its being elected to government in the 1977 Assembly polls with an absolute majority of seats even excluding the strength of its smaller Left Front partners.¹ The Front government (with the subsequent addition of the Communist Party of India) has over twelve years achieved a hegemonical position in state politics, with an increased proportion of the votes in the two Assembly elections in 1982 and 1987², not to mention sweeping success in elections to the newly-politicised panchayats.

If Nossiter's assertion regarding Indian communist innovation is correct, then, it will be particularly applicable to West Bengal, where the communists' mobilisation efforts have been amply rewarded in terms of increasing popular support, at least as measured in terms of numbers of votes. Both CPI and CPM are national parties in the sense of having a strategy and programme for the *Indian* revolution and a tactical line in accordance with this. However, the actual application of these tactical lines has, for reasons connected with the vast degree

1. In the 1977 Assembly elections CPM gained 178 out the 294 seats from 36% of the poll and the Front as a whole - with candidates in all the constituencies - obtained 230 seats on 47% of the vote.
2. It obtained 52.6% in 1982, 53% on 1987.

of cultural, socio-economic and political diversity within the Indian union, had a differential impact in the various states. Communism's particular strength in West Bengal and its apparent staying power there - unlike in those other erstwhile strongholds, Kerala and Tripura, where united front tactics have not paid the same dividends - makes the state of special interest for students of Marxism, not to mention its size and historical importance in national politics. However, a straightforward study of the use of weapons from the liberal democratic armoury for popular mobilisation in West Bengal would, it is suggested be only a very partial aid to understanding. The study of self-declared Marxist parties demands much more.

THE PROBLEM STATED : COMMUNIST THEORISATION

There was a tendency in the early literature on Indian communism to stress the role of foreign guidance - that is, in line with the geo-political and ideological dictates of Moscow - in the determination of communist strategy.³ Later developments in the post-Independence period prompted a widening of the focus to take into account the specifics of the Indian context.⁴ But

3. e.g. Masani (1954) Kautsky (1956).

4. e.g. Overstreet and Windmiller's (1959) "dual environment" thesis.

both Fic (1969,1970) and Mohan Ram (1969) dealt unsatisfactorily with the theoretical aspects of the issues and concentrated on the question of revolutionary means : peaceful transition versus armed struggle. Sengupta (1972), while stressing the need for a shift in subject-matter towards the attempts by the Indian communist movement to relate to the society, culture, demography and social institutions with which it had to work, continued to judge Indian communism by the yardstick of the degree of independence from the centres of world communism.⁵

However, few of these writers even considered a question central in the minds of Indian communist leaders themselves : that of what would constitute a Marxist approach to the specific problems of the Indian economy, society and polity.⁶ This has been a serious omission. Marxism, by any definition, seeks to change the world in the process of understanding it; thus for any communist party a full objective analysis of the situation in a particular area of operation, and consistent efforts to maintain a correct approach to this, are presuppositions of designating oneself 'Marxist' or 'Marxist-Leninist'. For this reason, for a Marxist party there can be no basic distinction

5. See his Introduction, on 'sovereign' versus 'satellite' revolutions.

6. Subramanian (1983) has been an extremely helpful source in my efforts to summarise these issues.

between theory and practice.

With this in mind, the present work proposes to outline how communist parties operating in West Bengal have utilised the democratic institutions available to them under the Indian Constitution for the purposes of mobilisation - but this outline is to be done in tandem with an analysis of the Marxist theorisations explicitly or implicitly applied at the time. On the assumption that Marxist theory and practice are inextricably linked, this enterprise is neither a detailed description of communist mobilisation efforts of the Indian communist movement. It is both something less and something more.

If it is true - and it would be churlish to deny it - that the Indian communists have done pioneering work in making use of democratic institutions for mobilisation, then the question must be asked how far they, as Marxists, have theorised that experience (preferably before rather than after the event), as part of the general endeavour to "integrate Marxism-Leninism with the reality of India"⁷. A further question would be what

7. Mohit Sen of the CPI, in the 1979 publication
Eurocommunism or Scientific Socialism.

might be the 'lessons' of the Indian experience⁸ for the world communist movement and indeed for Marxist theory. The present work attempts to deal with the first question but can also hope to give some indications of an answer to the second.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

It should be noted here that it is not the author's concern to outline her own view of the 'correct' Marxist approach to bourgeois democratic institutions in India. Rather, the aim is to reconstruct the logic of Indian communist praxis in utilising such institutions for mobilisation purposes, *in its own terms*. The attempt is to portray and to understand the communist parties' ideological positions as they relate to practice in a given arena. The vast bulk of the enterprise is therefore an 'immanent' rather than a 'transcendental' one, in that it is undertaken within the given frame of reference.⁹ The use of the word 'bourgeois' as a prefix to 'democratic' in the title is a recognition of this. It would be unhelpful, therefore, either to represent 'parliamentary communism' in

8. Compare similar discussions on the 'lessons' of Kerala, e.g. Joan P. Mencher in *Economical and Political Weekly*, special no. October 1980.

9. I am indebted to Ranade's excellent recent article (1989) for aid in the clarification of this methodological issue. Note also that in the main text of the following chapters points made from outside the frame of reference have been (fairly consistently, it is hoped) consigned to the status of footnotes.

general as some kind of departure from theory as a tactical manoeuvre, or to question the sincerity of the revolutionary intent of the Indian communist parties.¹⁰

Moreover, as Ranade (1989) aptly points out, while to accept public professions as faithfully representing intent may be fraught with problem in the messy world of politics, simply to examine the past record of parties is a no less unsatisfactory methodological approach. For there is then the problem that :

"performance, which can only relate to the past, does not always offer useful clues to future intent; it may not enable us to guess at what changes are likely in performance *as the context changes*. This is a point of particular relevance to the study of communist mobilisation strategy which *ab initio* foresees the graduation of a successful revolution from a 'bourgeois-democratic' to a 'socialist' one". [p. 544]

In the ever-shifting world of present-day Indian politics, such a consideration is an important one.

Since it is the position of the communist parties that unity and agreement on strategic requirements is need by a communist movement for advance, and since the organisations

10. This point is given due emphasis by Subramanian (1983, Chapter V).

are run on the lines of democratic centralism,¹¹ this present study must give full prominence to the public positions of the parties. These are expressed in programmatic and policy documents published by the party centres and West Bengal units and their affiliates (particularly peasant and trade-union bodies). For the purpose of a rounded understanding and a clarification of issues arising out of day-to-day events and activities, party journals are also useful; and public statements by prominent party leaders as well as articles by intellectuals with known affiliations may also safely be used - on the understanding that the pronouncements by the official bodies are definitive as regards the state of party policy and theory and any one time.

CHAPTERISATION

The structure of this work is designed with the above methodological imperatives in mind. Theory, practice and the interaction between them are sought to be discussed together. In order to make this possible, an outline of the wider context

11. Although the CPI and CPM understandings of this seem to differ. For self-assessment by the CPI indicating its flexibility (and some of its unwelcome accompaniments), Nossiter (1988), p. 29; and compare this with Jyoti Basu's comment in an 1979 interview (Ghosh, 1981, p. C-46) that "There may surely be debates within the party, but once decisions are reached, differences do not persist". This may not be the whole truth but the tenor of the statement is clear enough.

is necessary before going on to concentrate on West Bengal communism.

To this end, *Chapter I* is a survey of 'classical' Marxist writing (Marx, Engels, Lenin and the contemporaries with whom they exchange polemics) insofar as they relate to the use of bourgeois democratic institutions for popular mobilisation. By no means intended as an exhaustive study, it is presented in response to the need to indicate the 'gaps' in Marxist theory (the theory on which Indian communists draw) that might need to be filled by communist parties in a country such as India where bourgeois institutions are entrenched to a considerable degree. Of course, since constant reference is made by the Indian parties to the writings of the 'founding fathers' and of Lenin (as well as to those of Stalin and Mao in the case of the CPM and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) - the CPML - respectively) this chapter will be supplemented by later portions of the study.

Following on from this, *Chapter II* introduces the necessary outline of communist theorisation of the situation in post-independence India. The areas dealt with are : the multiple shifts in ideological position from 1947 onwards, culminating in the adoption of the 'theory of peaceful transition'; the emergence of a communist approach to the embryonic

Centre-states issue; the ideological aspects of the decision to cross the threshold to partial power in a single state of the Indian union in 1957 in Kerala; and the crystallisation of ideology that occurred during the split of the old CPI in 1967. It will also be necessary at this point briefly but clearly to outline the respective positions of CPI and CPM as regards their analyses of the objective situation in the country after the split.

Once this context has been given, *Chapter III* - the analysis of communist mobilisation strategy in West Bengal - can provide the main body of the text. Since it is not a factual study in the ordinary sense, precise periodisation is not desirable. However, as Subramanian (1983) notes,

"the Communist movement, as a whole, underwent a sharper ideological crystallisation after the 1964 split"

before which the desire for unity "tended to blur ideological issues" (pp. 173-4). Moreover, the formation of the first communist-led United Front ministry in West Bengal in 1967, in a scenario where a bourgeois-led and hostile government was in power at the Centre¹² (as has indeed been the case on every

12. Whereas in 1957 Nehru had been willing to give the CPI government in Kerala the benefit of the doubt, in 1967 the Central government had the memory of the communists' unreliability during the border crisis and war still vivid in its mind.

subsequent occasion of a communist-led government's coming to power) provides an excellent starting-point at which is observe the interaction of theory and practice in mobilisation activities.

The period between the fall of the second United Front government in 1970 and the lifting of the state of emergency in 1977 - although crucial in establishing the CPM's base in the rural areas (Mitter, 1977; Sengupta, 1979) - does not provide an equally-rich source of examples of CPM activity in utilising bourgeois institutions for this purpose. The CPI's alliance with the Congress Party is naturally of more interest here.

By contrast, the installation of the CPM-led Left Front government in 1977 set in motion a fascinating train of events in the sphere of mobilisation whose most remarkable expression was the revitalisation of the rural local government bodies - the panchayats - in politicised form in 1973. The field of activity of the panchayats has gradually been widened to include : aiding the government in the implementation of land reform, identification of beneficiaries and other recommendations for centrally-sponsored employment and works programmes, and involvement in the planning and development processes.

At the tail-end of this, *Chapter IV* will sum up the state of Indian communist theorisation - again as it relates to the use of bourgeois democratic institutions for popular mobilisation - in the current period, that is in the three to four years since the elections of Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre, with his growth-oriented, 'high-tech' government.

By this time the way should be clear for the *Conclusion* to draw on the preceding chapters in presenting the author's answer to the question of how far the Indian communists have theorised their experience : in short, whether they have successfully integrated their theory with their practice as good Marxists should. This question is not considered in order to 'prove' whether the Indian communist parties are 'genuinely' Marxist but rather with a view to understanding the implications its answer has for the future of communism in West Bengal. Finally, an attempt will be made to indicate the implications for Marxist theory of the West Bengal experience.

CHAPTER - I

Mobilisation From Marx to Lenin

Marx wrote in a period in which no major country in Europe had had extended experience of a bourgeois democracy in which universal suffrage had been instituted, an experience that has led to so many of the developments in Marxist theory since the Second World War.

However, writing in 1852¹ after the disappointments of 1848, Marx felt able to maintain that "Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population" and even to comment in respect of the rest of Europe :

"The carrying of Universal Suffrage would, therefore, be a far more socialistic measure than anything... with that name on the Continent... Its inevitable result, here, is the political supremacy of the working class"

1. In the 'New York Daily Tribune'.

- inevitable because of the developing class consciousness of the proletariat.²

Engels later remarked that in the 1840's

"German workers supplied their comrades in all countries with a weapon, and one of the sharpest, when they showed them how to make use of universal suffrage",

and that with development this "an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation" of the suffrage he said :

"In election agitation it provided us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the masses of the people where they still stand aloof from us; of forcing all parties to defend their views and actions against our attacks before the people; and, further, it provided our representatives with a platform from which they could speak to the opponents in parliament, and to the masses without, with a quite other authority and freedom than in the press or at meetings".³

Moreover,

"if we are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please [the bourgeoisie] then in the end they will themselves break through this fatal legality".⁴

2. 'The Chartists' *Selected Writing in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (eds. Bottomore & Rubel) (B & R).

3. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 pp. 195-6 (Moscow)(SW) These quotes are, significantly, reproduced by Ram Dass (1984) in a CPM theoretical journal.

4. From his Introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. There seem to be two major weaknesses in Engels's argument: "he confuses voting for a party with support for its long-term objectives", and his conception of the transition to socialism is ambiguous.

Regardless of the abstruse debates about Marx's view of 'true' democracy or the kind of 'democracy' that might prevail after the socialist revolution, it is fairly clear that the political environment of the time and the tasks Marx & Engels set themselves left them with little opportunity or inclination to speculate about the issue of parliamentary strategies that faced their successors. (Although he did note the contradictory or perhaps dialectical character of the workings of the democratic constitution in France in helping the peasantry and proletariat to victory even as it attempted to perpetuate the rule of the bourgeoisie).

Nevertheless, Marx did not scorn social reforms nor hesitate to call the passing of the Ten Hours Bill in England a "victory" due to the pressure of workers' organisation, which "compels legislative recognition of the particular interests of workers"⁵; and the 1850 'Address to the Communist League' stated his pragmatic position quite clearly as far as alliance with other political forces were concerned :

5. B & R, p. 197.

"The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is that : it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests"⁶.

Thus Marx recognised in principle the opportunities offered by the specific patterns of political life in Europe at that time.⁷

When it came to longer-term objectives, however, he was a harsher judgement of bourgeois institutions and more concerned with enumerating their severe limitations. Criticising the 1875 Gotha Programme of the recently-merged German Social Democrats, he wrote that its demands restricted themselves to "the old democratic litany familiar to all : universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people's militia, etc."⁸, in other words, demands that were only a staging post on the road to revolution, let alone communism.

Two important themes can be drawn out of Marx's writings on parliamentary democracy : firstly, the significance of

6. SW, p. 279.

7. It would not be extending the metaphor too far if one was to include parliamentary democracy in the "weapons" with which the bourgeoisie "furnishes the proletariat" (along with political and general education), while undertaking its own fight against the aristocracy and the foreign bourgeoisie.

8. SW, p. 565.

universal suffrage in circumstances where the proletariat, either alone or with its allies, constituted or seemed to promise to constitute the majority of the population; and secondly, the essential limitations of political emancipation (which Marx held to have been "completed" in the US) as opposed to "human emancipation".⁹ In an 1844 essay Marx wrote: "The *State* and the *structure of society* are not, from the stand-point of *politics*, two different things".¹⁰ This raises the important and problematic issue of how the transition to socialism should come about in a society in which democracy of the bourgeois form is well established.

These two themes were taken up by Marx's followers, who were left with the task of unravelling their complexities.¹¹ However, at the time that Eduard Bernstein wrote his articles collectively titled 'Problems of Socialism' in 'Die Neue Zeit' (1896-8 : a few years after Engel's death) the problems had hardly been touched upon by the few who could genuinely claim

9. 'On the Jewish Question', SW pp 39-57.

10. 'The State and Law', B & R, p. 22.

11. As Hunt () notes, representative institutions pose "severe problems of Marxist theory... of political analysis, of the characterisation of arena of struggle and the forces engaged in them, problems of democratic theory, and problems concerning the movement from capitalism to socialism". (p. 21).

to be Marxist theorists. As McClellan (1979) says, "The boundaries of the revisionist controversy were set by the boundaries of the spread of Marxism", that is, Germany, Austria and Russia. It would be unfair to characterise Bernstein's approach as relying heavily on a *parliamentary* strategy. His view of democracy was a broader one: a society "where no one class possesses political privilege that is opposed to the whole community".¹² It was this democracy that would allow the realisation of socialism - indeed it *was* being realised, hence his often-quoted words, "the movement is everything". This movement included co-operatives, trade unions and "municipal socialism".

Kautsky was, on the face of things, a much more implacable opponent of the bourgeoisie. In 'The Road to Power' he announces : "the immediate tasks of the proletariat are clear... It cannot make any progress without changing the foundations of the state".¹³ Yet in 1910 in an article replying to Luxemburg's advocacy of the mass strike he declared that an absolute majority of votes for the SPD in the 1911 Reichstag elections would mean "a catastrophe for the whole ruling system of government".¹⁴ He called universal suffrage a "day of judgement" for Germany's

12. 'Evolutionary Socialism' from McClellan (1979) p. 31.

13. Kautsky, *Selected Political Writings* (ed. Goode) (SPW).

14. Ibid, p. 60

ruling class. Similarly in 1897 Bebel believed it was possible to calculate the end of capitalism "with mathematical certainty"¹⁵ and Kautsky's essentially passive strategy for revolution (consisting mainly of organisation in preparation) was in keeping with this deterministic attitude. He did stress the importance of class consciousness, however, and devoted a section in his anti-Bolshevik article 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat' to 'Democracy and the maturity of the proletariat'. Indeed he said that democracy's "most important function for us in this [pre-socialist] period is its influence on [that maturity]".¹⁶ While other prerequisites for socialism (the will for collective ownership, its material possibility and the strength of the proletariat) "arise directly from economic development", the fourth - the capacity of the proletariat to maintain and develop socialism - "must be obtained actively". While the immiseration of the proletariat had reduced many to despair some "retained the strength and courage necessary for the battle". But "The proletarian class struggle as a mass struggle presupposes democracy"; otherwise dictatorship would result. "It is in the course of struggle for ...

15. McClellan, p. 32.

16. Kautsky, SPW, p. 103.

political rights... [that] the proletariat attains maturity". And although democracy had its "degenerating effects" (preoccupation with petty details and day-to-day concerns), these were to be lessened by the success of democracy in shortening the working day and providing the proletarian with more free time.¹⁷ Contrasting Lenin's conception with what he felt was Marx's, Kautsky continued :

"For Marx the dictatorship of the proletariat was a state of affairs which necessarily arose in a real democracy because of the overwhelming numbers of the proletariat".¹⁸

Kautsky's theorising about democracy, therefore, forever came back to his belief in the irresistibility of the majority. He quoted Marx's opinion that in America and England "the workers may be able to achieve their ends by peaceful means".¹⁹ Rosa Luxemburg's assessment of democracy, by contrast, depended on no such assumptions :

"In a word, democracy is indispensable not because it renders possible the conquest of political power by the proletariat, but because it renders this both *necessary* and *superfluous*".

17. Ibid, p. 103-113.

18. Ibid, p. 115.

19. Ibid, p. 102.

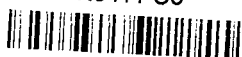
Luxemburg goes beyond Bernstein and Kautsky in appreciating the paradoxes of the situation facing socialists in a democrach. 'For on the one hand capitalism sets up obstacles to realising the socialist programme (Luxemburg, ,p.78) obstacles that are "strengthened and consolidated by the development of social reforms and the course of democracy", (p.41) yet on the other it provides the *possibilities* for realising that programme. Democracy

"is necessary to the working class because it creates the political forms ... which will serve the proletariat as fulcrums in its task of transforming bourgeois society... only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task".

Here, for all her scepticism towards the operations of democracy, Luxemburg provides us with a far clearer conception of the 'maturing' of the proletariat than either Bernstein or Kautsky. But it had a unique twist to it. Not only should the struggle for reforms be the means of preparing the working class for the revolution (a point emphasised by Kautsky), but it would also make it realise through practical experience that the ultimate goal had to be the overthrow of the capitalist state.²⁰ Her prescription was reform and

20. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 53.

DISS
321.8095414
R5411 Co



TH3875



TH-3875

revolution, both, but the struggle for the former must be with reference to the aim of achieving socialism. 'Reformism' of the English trade union type instead tended to *replace* revolution with a series of reforms.²¹

Luxemburg's particular contribution to Marxist theorising about strategy in a bourgeois democracy was to combine an understanding of the opportunity offered by elections for propaganda, mobilisation of the masses and assessment of socialist influence among them,²² with the 'strategic principle' that the daily struggle must be organically linked with its final aim. This final aim would be not this or that conception of some future state, but that which must *precede* the establishment of any future society, namely the conquest of political power.²³ This approach gave her flexibility in utilising the "weapons" offered by the bourgeoisie - including the opportunity of achieving positive legislation - yet stressed the importance of the German Social Democrats' oppositional role. Even in her discussion of the mass strike - which was central to her theory of revolution - she pointed to the importance of parliament (as the one accessible platform during the years 1914-18) in triggering mass actions.²⁴

-
- 21. Under these circumstances, reforms demobilise, points out Przeworski ('Capitalism and Social Democracy') also citing the contrasting case of the development of Swedish Social Democracy.
 - 22. Engels had noted this last point - compare Hunt, p. 21.
 - 23. Explanation in Frölich, p. 54.
 - 24. In the 'Juniusbrochure', Frölich, p. 143.

The view from Petrograd was necessarily somewhat different from the Western European one. The 'Revisionist' view (after the liberals') that parliamentarianism destroys classes and class divisions must have appeared laughable to those operating in a society where the high-water mark of parliamentarianism was, up to 1917, the Duma, with its ever-shrinking suffrage. Lenin was able to write that parliamentarianism "lays bare the innate character even of the most democratic bourgeois representatives as organs of class oppression". It could therefore serve the function of *enlightening* (and organising) the population on a broader scale in a rather novel way thereby *intensifying* civil war rather than eliminating it as Bernstein hoped. Lenin maintained :

"Whoever does not understand the inevitable inner dialectics of parliamentarianism and bourgeois democracy ... will never be able to conduct propaganda and agitation consistent in principle, really preparing the working-class masses for victorious participation in such 'arguments'."25

Whereas for Kautsky politics was 'The Class Struggle', with the working class first achieving full democracy *then* using it to transform society, Lenin stressed the non-neutrality of the state vis-a-vis the class struggle.

25. In 'Marxism and Revisionism'

"It is natural for liberals to speak of 'democracy' in general, but a Marxist will never forget to ask 'for what class?'.²⁶

Lenin's 1920 work ' "Left-Wing" Communism - an Infable Disorder' had an influence of Indian communists from early times,²⁷ and dealt in detail with the circumstances in which communist parties should participate in bourgeois parliaments. It is therefore worthwhile to outline its argument in some detail here.

Criticising the German 'Left Communists' outright dismissal of 'parliamentary forms of struggle', Lenin made the distinction between parliamentarianism's being 'historically obsolete' in the sense that "the *era* of bourgeois parliamentarianism is over", and its being 'politically obsolete'. In denying the latter, he commented : "it is a glaring theoretical error to apply the yardstick of world history to practical politics". He continued : "we must *not* regard what is obsolete to us as something obsolete to a class, to the masses" while it was necessary for the party to remain the vanguard of the working class,

26. 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky', *Collected Works* (Moscow), vol. 28, p. 235.

27. See, for example, Muzaffar Ahmad's account of his first purchase of Marxist literature, *Myself and the Communist Party of India*, p.81.

"at the same time you must *soberly* follow the *actual* state of the class-consciousness and preparedness of the entire class... and of all the *working people*".

Where, as in Western Europe, the backward masses and small peasants are

"much more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia... it is *only* from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can and must wage a large and persistent struggle... to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices."

On the issue of boycotts of parliament, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks' experience proved the importance of assessing the prevailing conditions when coming to a decision. The boycott of the Duma in 1905 showed that

"when legal and illegal, parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms."

But Lenin also maintained that

"in 1904-14 the Bolsheviks *could not have* preserved (let alone strengthened and developed) the core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat, had they not upheld... the viewpoint that it was *obligatory* to combine legal and illegal forms of struggle, and that it was *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institution."

In sum, "experience has shown that this participation was not only useful but indispensable... as to pave the way for

the second bourgeois revolution (February 1917), and then for the socialist revolution".

Similarly, the persistence of support for reactionary parties among the workers in the Germany of the time signified that

"participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is *obligatory* on the party of the revolutionary proletariat *specifically* for the purpose of educating the backward strata of *its own class*...".

Developing this theme and again citing Boleshevik experience, this time of 1917, Lenin continued :

"Far from causing harm to the revolutionary proletariat, participation... actually helps that proletariat to *prove* to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be done away with; it *facilitates* their successful dissolution, and *helps* to make bourgeois parliamentarianism 'politically obsolete'."

Lenin laid great stress on "the *combination* of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to... the revolution within it" at the crucial movement of revolution, and "the importance of *combining* legal and illegal struggle". He also made the statement that "action by the masses... is more importance than parliamentary activity at *all* times, and not only during a revolution or in a revolutionary situation."

This combination of methods had its organisational benefits. The evolution of reliable and authoritative leaders for the party required that they be tested in the performance of just such a combination of legal and illegal work. The party's requirements also dictated that its leaders should be willing *and* able "to utilise parliamentary elections and the parliamentary rostrum in a revolutionary and communist manner". Elsewhere in his writings²⁸ Lenin had emphasised the need to formulate and present fundamental demands for political democracy -- which had significance as "the freer, wider and more distinct *form* of class oppression and class struggle." -- in the correct manner :

"not in a reformist, but in a revolutionary way; not by keeping within the framework of bourgeois legality, but by breaking through it; not by confining oneself to parliamentary speeches and verbal protests, but by drawing the masses into real action, by widening and formenting the struggle for every kind of fundamental democratic demands".

To conclude this survey, here is Lenin's advice to communists in Western Europe and America on how to utilise parliamentary elections and "all other fields, spheres and

28. *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, written in early 1916.

aspects of public life, but "in a new way, in a communist way" :

"...the Communists must learn to create a new, uncustomary, non-opportunist, and non-careerist parliamentarianism; the Communist parties must issue their slogans; true proletarians, with the help of the unorganised and downtrodden poor, should distribute leaflets, canvass workers' houses and cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages... they should go into the public houses, penetrate into unions, societies and chance gatherings of the common people, and speak to the people, not in learned (or very parliamentary) language; they should not at all strive to 'get seats' in parliament, but should everywhere try to get people to think, and draw the masses into the struggle, to take the bourgeoisie at its word and utilise the machinery it has set up".²⁹

29. *'Selected Works'* (Moscow)

CHAPTER - II

Integrating Theory With the Indian Reality

COMMUNIST THEORISATIONS OF THE INDIAN STATE

As mentioned in the Introduction, the credentials of a genuine Marxist movement in a country depends upon the engagement in a full objective analysis of the situation in that country (including its relation to the world situation). This analysis must incorporate the stage of development of the society, socio-economic conditions and the correlation of class forces in any arena of operation. Given this fact, and the legacy left by the Indian national movement, the immediate imperative was to define the nature of the brand new Indian state - and this definition inevitably overlapped with an assessment of the nature of the Indian National Congress. At Independence Congress, formerly in opposition, was transformed into a ruling party, and communist discussion centred for a considerable period around the question of what could be the meaning of this change in Marxist terms and what the strategical requirements it entailed.¹

1. Subramanian (1983) goes so far as to state that : "It is in this basic transformation of the Congress from an oppositional force into the ruling party that the key to the character of ensuing debate within the CPI is to be sought." (p. 93)

However, the CPI did not initially recognise any such transformation. Independence was held to be incomplete, and this was thought to imply that the "anti-imperialist united front" should continue in the form of communist support for Nehru and the "popular government". As compared with the situation existing before the June 1947 Mountbatten Plan announcing the demarcation of India and Pakistan.

"The only difference was that state power... has now become a weapon in the hands of the Indian people."

This weapon could be used to "liquidate" imperialism and reaction (Subramanian, 1983, pp. 94-6).

By the end of 1947 some discontent had built up within the Party as regards this view of events (Nossiter, 1988, p.16). The Congress fronts were making distressing inroads among workers, peasants and students, and some members felt an opportunity for more obviously revolutionary activity was being missed. By the time of the Second Congress at Calcutta in February-March 1948, where the first thorough-going formulation of policy towards the fledgling state was made, Ranadive had replaced Joshi as General Secretary and the Zdanov 'insurrectionary line' was emanating from Moscow, partly in response to events in China.

The Calcutta 'Political Thesis' declared that the Mountbatten Plan was a betrayal of the struggle for Independence, that the bourgeois part of the "Imperialist-feudal-bourgeoisie combine" had taken vacillation to the very point of capitulation, and that this meant that previous distinctions between progressive and reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie were no longer relevant. In this situation, the new objective of People's Democracy was to be achieved by a combination of political strikes in the towns leading to uprising in the rural areas.²

Through 1948 and 1949 the party was pushed gradually more and more underground. Actions in West Bengal and Tripura, and - less successfully - elsewhere, led to deaths, detentions, splits and demoralisation. The Telengana agitation, though, was more effectively organised and from it evolved the 'Andhra line' of prolonged civil war fought from liberated areas based on agrarian revolution. In May of 1950 Rajeshwar Rao of the Andhra wing became Secretary, and for a

-
2. As Nossiter (1988) points out, "As a revolutionary plan it echoed Russian experience. The only trouble was that Nehru was not Kerensky and August 1947 not February 1917. The CPI lacked the machinery, resources and influence to implement such a revolutionary movement; and they had neither a Lenin nor a Trotsky." (p. 16).
 An assessment by the post-split CPI remarked that the Calcutta analysis (Rao, 1976, p. ix)
 "was carried out in the most peculiar manner. Not on the basis of a concrete study of the concrete situation but on the basis of quotations from Lenin and Stalin and later from Mao and the Chinese leaders".

year, until his resignation, the Andhra line prevailed, bolstered by Comintern approval in the form of an editorial in the Cominform organ of 27th January, 1950.³

The CPI journal 'Communist' appeared to fall into line with the Cominform as its February-March issue carried a statement by the editorial board noting the "great lag" between the CPI's success and that elsewhere. Sectarian errors had restricted the scope of the workers' struggle. The key phrase of the article was the assertion that

"fictitious independence... has not changed the colonial character of the Indian economy"⁴

Since it was the imperialists who were the leading force in the 'imperialist-feudal-bourgeoisie combine' some - temporary - agreement was possible with some sections of the bourgeoisie on action against imperialism, feudalism and the big bourgeoisie.

3. This declared that there was "unprecedented scope" for all types of revolutionary struggle worldwide, including armed. The success of the Chinese revolution served to strengthen the forces of national liberation in the colonies. On the Chinese model, the working class was to unite with
 'all classes, parties, groups and organisations
 willing to fight the imperialists and their hire-
 lings and to form a broad, nationwide united front.'"[Rao, 1976, p. ix
 In the conditions of India's "sham independence" this alliance would stand against the "Anglo-American imperialists" and the feudal princes collaborating with them.
4. Democratic Research Service (1957)(DRS), p. 53.

But the CPI was obviously still unsettled with the new line. Even while accepting the main premise the board of 'Communist' still called for a struggle against the "fascist repressive policy of the congress rulers"⁵. It was to take a sharp rebuke from R.P. Dutt (of the CPGB) in early 1951⁶ for a full reassessment of Nehru to begin.

The 1951 party Programme was the outcome of the interaction of this fraternal advice, the CPI's own experience, and world and Indian developments. Being the first serious programmatic document in the evolution of the CPI and coming at a significant stage of Indian political evolution (the framing of the new Constitution) and international events (burgeoning Soviet power and the emergence of communist China) it had a great impact on the future ideological evolution of the Indian communist movement, not least by establishing the party as a legal one.

5. Ibid, p. 59

6. Ibid, p. 65.. Dutt mocked some communists' references to a 'White terror' in India; there were a multitude of legal opportunities for opponents of the government. While "the Nehru Government represents the interest of the monopolist big bourgeoisie", this was not always to be identified with that of U.S. imperialism. Due to India's proximity to China, its foreign policy was relatively independent. There were, in fact, different trends even within the big bourgeoisie : hence the vacillation in policy formation.

While distancing the CPI from Congress, the Programme explained that the immediate aim was to finish the democratic revolution, and this must determine the attitude towards the bourgeoisie :

"the Communist party is not demanding the establishment of socialism in our country in the present stage of development. In view of the backwardness of the economic development of India and of the weakness of mass organisations... our party does not find it possible at present to carry out socialist transformations in our country..."

The scope for action lay in another direction :

"... our party regards as quite mature the task of replacing the present anti-democratic and anti-popular government by a new government of People's Democracy created on the basis of a coalition of all democratic, anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces in our country⁷"

More specifically and significantly for future policy, the accompanying Policy Statement asserted that :

"We must fight the parliamentary elections and elections in every sphere where the broad strata of the people can be mobilised and their interests defended."⁸

7. From Mohit Sen (ed.) 1971, *Documents of the CPI*

8. Ibid.

This document ruled out mechanical application of the Russian or Chinese 'paths', emphasised worker-peasant unity, and concluded,

"It would be a gross exaggeration to say that the country is already on the eve of armed... revolution".

The government, it was admitted, was not isolated and even what discontent there was did not necessarily amount to communist strength. Hence unity with other 'progressive' elements was required.⁹

At the Madurai (third) Congress in December 1953 the assessment of the government expressed in 1951 remained in place. Nehru's foreign policy was progressive but he was "tied to the chariot wheels of British imperialism". On the emerging contentious question of who was the main enemy, British or American imperialism, the congress concluded that the struggles against these two were part of the same struggle. As Ajoy Ghosh later explained,

9. The 1951 formulation can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the new constitutional regime, the not wholly favourable political situation and other, international, compulsions. Nossiter (1988) calls it a "hesitant compromise" (p.17) and the act of 'relegating revolution to a distant future' (Nossiter, 1982, Chapter IV) did produce an inherently unstable situation. Subramanian (1983) describes it as "a relatively moderate and realistic strategic and tactical line" but comments that it was simply overtaken by events. This was despite the good results of the 1952 elections, in which although the CPI only secured 3.3% of the vote left-wing parties together took a fifth.

"We have to win full freedom from the British but we have also defend our existing freedom from the increasing menace of the United States."¹⁰

As the decade wore on the complications of assessing the Indian situation multiplied,¹¹ and the fourth CPI Congress, at Palghat in April, 1956, certainly saw a shift in the assessment of the Indian government's foreign policy. Despite an earlier document's having denounced the

"manoeuvring between the main enemy of peace [the U.S.] ... and the peace-loving countries"¹²

Congress Political Report now hailed the "assertion of independence" made by India and noted the heightened conflict between the Indian people (including, crucially, the government) and the imperialists.¹³ There was a "sharpening" of the contradiction between the Indian bourgeoisie and imperialism, on the internal as well as external front. The change in foreign policy was "of immense importance" yet at Madurai the

10. Quoted in Subramanian.

11. After praise of Nehru's foreign policy, Kruhchev visited Delhi in 1955, and the Awadi resolution of the INC in favour of a "socialistic pattern" of society as the party's aim prompted both the CPGB and 'Pravda' to extol both Nehru's foreign and domestic policies.

12. The 1953 'Tactical Line', reproduced in DRS.

13. DRS, pp. 231-6.

basic understanding had been sectarian, at a time when there was actually a need for "consolidation of national unity".

The new slogan was to be 'Unity with, struggle against': the "leading force" in the government, the bourgeoisie, was trying to eliminate feudal exploitation and to industrialise, but

"it seeks to resolve its conflict with imperialism and feudalism at the cost of the people".¹⁴

There was "no question" of a united front with Congress but at the same time the necessary democratic front would not be composed of the current anti-Congress forces. Rather,

"the most important division is that between the democratic forces that follow the Congress on the one hand and the masses that follow the democratic opposition on the other hand".

The Congress mass following had to be won over.

Despite the preparation for the congress, in the form of debate in party journals,¹⁵ the meetings were overshadowed by events at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. It was explained

14. Ibid., p. 292.

15. For Example Ajoy Ghosh's 'Some Questions of Party Policy in 'New Age'.

to delegates that the 'peaceful transition to socialism' envisaged by Krushchev would be possible in India in certain conditions.¹⁶ The most significant implication (Nossiter, 1988, p. 18) was that

"Representative institutions were now to be taken seriously as a battleground for the extension of people's rights and powers rather than as an arena for propaganda as in the 1951 formulation."¹⁷

It should be noted that Moscow could only push the CPI so far. The implications of Modeste Rubinstein's argument in the July, 1956 edition of 'New Times', that in India there were the "objective possibilities for obviating the continued growth of monopoly capital" and that Nehru was himself following a peaceful path to socialism, are reported to have "shocked" the CPI Executive (Fic, 1964, p. 261). However, the Palghat Congress ended a decade of metamorphosis : from Telangana to

16. These being : (1) that the working class be in the vanguard, (2) that the bureaucracy and police be curbed and the state apparatus and army democratised, and (3) that the most reactionary elements be removed (from Nossiter, 1988, p. 18).

17. Nossiter points out that although state legislatures are not mentioned in the text - unlike panchayats and district boards - this closed session had great importance given the success of the CPI in the Kerala state elections next year.

an approach whose crystallisation was the 1957 Election Manifesto, in many ways indistinguishable from that of Congress.¹⁸

The CPI had moved towards its 1956 understanding during a period in domestic politics when Congress's immense popularity nationwide meant the ambiguities in the Constitution adopted in 1959 remained dormant. When the only experience of 'Centre-state relations' (a phrase understandably of more recent coinage) was of exchanges between different levels of the Congress Party even Nehru himself could not have an idea of what room for manoeuvre a future non-Congress state government might have.

However, in a few areas of the country challenges - usually with firm roots in the national movement and the agitations to demand linguistic states - were being mounted to the ruling party's supremacy. The CPI's tackling of the issues emerging in the new federal scenario was also fired in the crucible of its own involvement in pre-Independence and regional movements. Its ideological and political approach to these issues must therefore be seen in this context.

18. This might seem to imply that the CPI had developed the theory of peaceful transition relatively independently of the international communist movement, which only recognised it in 1956, at the CPSU Congress. However, to make any such assertion would of course require detailed examination of CPSU and Comintern/Cominform positions throughout the period.

THE CPI AND THE EMERGING CENTRE-STATES ISSUE

India's refusal to fit either the federal or unitary models of a political system has led to , among others, the designation 'quasi-federal'. The existence of states as such is guaranteed by the constitution, but the existence of particular states as permanent governmental or administrative entities is not. State powers in the original lists included policing, education, health, agriculture, industry and certain powers of taxation. However, the first two of these have been to some extent encroached upon by the Centre; and items on the concurrent list are also subject to over-ruling by New Delhi. Given the (in some circumstances wide) discretionary powers of the state Governors; the supervision of the state administrations by the All-India Services; and the distribution of revenue-raising capacity in favour of the Centre, it is not surprising that many communists and non-communists alike have been pessimistic about the feasibility of bringing about fundamental changes in social relations in a single state within the Indian constitutional framework.

But the case can be over-stated. It is true that the system of resource transfers from Centre to states has resulted in deep indebtedness for the latter, and that the Planning

Commission (chaired ex-officio by the Prime Minister) has ultimate control over allocation of loans and grants. But to some extent the Centre depends on the states for implementation of its own policies, and relations vary according to political factors such as stability and credibility of the central government and the configuration of forces in individual states. There is thus a 'relative political autonomy', and the degree to which this extends to the transformation of social relations, notably in the field of land reforms, on to the pursuit of the economic goals of growth and redistribution is indeed a central issue for communists.

But at the time of the first general election of 1951, which left Congress in control at the Union level and in the states, the 'Centre-states issue' in its embryonic form covered only the debate on linguistic states. Although the intellectual stratum of the regional bourgeoisie and landholding groups first voiced the demand,¹⁹ the movements soon developed a mass character, first in Andhra, then elsewhere. By 1952 A.K.Gopalan was announcing that "India's most important problem, the Communists No. 1 goal" was the formation of linguistic provinces.²⁰ In

19. As noted by CPM leader, Karat Prakash (1973), p. 30.

20. In *Times of India*, 26th May 1952, quoted in Nossiter (1982).

a 1953 article, Politburo member E.M.S. Namboodiripad outlined the limits of the policy :

"The right of secession should not be confused with the expediency of the formation of separate states."

Each 'nation' was a special case and in India

"the principle of self-determination means and naturally includes the right of separation",

but at that time it was "inexpedient... to exercise the right".²¹

There is an unmistakeable affinity here to the Soviet experience and theoretical outlook, by no means incidental. Stalin's 1913 formulation of the Bolshevik attitude to the national question guided Indian communists and had been their touchstone in the run-up to Partition. As late as 1973 a CPM leader could say that it "has remained for them the definitive work on the question".²² So it is worthwhile briefly to outline it here.

The article 'Marxism and the National Question', written by Stalin in 1912-13, set out to define a 'nation', analyse the

21. 'Questions and answers : nationalities and the Right of Secession', *Crossroads*, 6th September 1953.

22. Prakash (1973), p. 51.

nature of national movements and state the Bolshevik view on the issues of national cultural autonomy, self-determination of nations and secession. A 'nation' was, he held,

"a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture".²³

The formation of nations can take place in different fashions (independent nation-states in Britain and France, multi-national states in Eastern Europe) but all belong to "the epoch of rising capitalism".²⁴ In circumstances where there is a struggle between "dominant" and other nations, the bourgeoisie "plays the leading role".²⁵ Driven by "the desire to secure its 'own', its 'home' market", its rallying of forces against the semi-feudal bureaucracy of the ruling nation represents the beginning of any national movement.

However, if the proletariat in the country concerned has a high degree of class consciousness and organisation there is "no need to rally to the banner of the bourgeoisie".

-
23. I.V. Stalin, *Works*, (1953, Moscow), vol.2, p. 307.
No one characteristic or group of these characteristics other than the totality was sufficient for the definition.
24. Ibid, p. 313. Compare Lenin's 'The Right of Nations to self-determination', quoted by Prakash (1973).
25. Ibid, pp. 316.

For communists²⁶ should not support every institution linked with the 'nation', but

"uphold only the right of the *nation*²⁷ itself to determine its own destiny".

In practice, the suitability of the options available - cultural autonomy, federation or separation - depends on "concrete historical conditions". In Russia the most important question of political life was not the national but the agrarian.²⁸

Hence "the national question is a subordinate one".²⁹

It is against this theoretical background that Indian communist attitudes must be seen. As with Stalin's analysis any Marxist approach to the language and nationality question in India must relate it to the specific class structures of Indian society.³⁰

26. Stalin actually uses the phrase 'Social - Democracy'.

27. Ibid., pp. 317-21.

28. Ibid., p. 330. Specifically, "The destruction of the relics of feudalism".

29. Stalin's own solution to this question, the "*Basis* and condition" for which is "the complete democratisation of the country", has as its essential elements the right to self-determination, religion autonomy, and equal rights of nations in language, schools, etc. Also vital given the danger of any nationalist ethos developing to the detriment of working-class organisation was the principle of international solidarity of the workers.

30. For example, the rise of the D.M.K. in Madras has been seen as only the "logical culmination" of the "radical attack of the new bourgeoisie", which was given the "signal" by antibrahminism (Prakash, 1973, pp. 69-70).

Before Independence the CPI had already accepted the multi-nationality of India. The immediate result of this approach, when Adhikari applied it to the matter of Muslim self-determination,³¹ was the expulsion of communists from the Congress in 1945.³² But the Party launched into the movement for linguistic states in earnest when the soul-searching of the immediate post-Telengana period made clear the necessity for a broader-based strategy of mobilisation. According to CPI General Secretary Ajoy Ghosh,³³ the importance of the movement was threefold : (i) it was democratic, as the use of the common language increases the access to government and the possibility of participation; (ii) it combatted feudal elements; (iii) the flowering of culture made possible by the emergence of linguistic states was an essential condition for democracy.

The growth and success of these movements was most markedly seen in the future states of Andhra and Kerala. Communist activity in the cultural field was of vital importance in building

31. G. Adhikari (1944), *Pakistan and National Unity*.

32. Prakash (1973) cites P.G. Joshi's 1946 'A Communist Reply to the Congress Committee's Charges'.

33. 'On the work of the IIIrd Party Congress' (1954), quoted in Prakash (1973), pp. 53-4.

support for the party's future battles, electoral and otherwise.³⁴ Namboodiripad's writings of the time, too, showed a subtle understanding and conscious use of this powerful weapon. In an article published in December, 1955³⁵ he credited the kisan sabhas and trade unions with the spread of cultural activities into the lives of working people, and with organising "night schools, reading rooms and libraries and study classes". The contribution of the Communist Party included "several thousands" of poems, songs, short stories and plays as well as hundreds of "local cultural squads". However, this was not merely to facilitate the development of a bourgeois culture consonant with the linguistic state in the process of formation. The purpose was to develop a "working people's culture", and was thus two-pronged. Such activities by trade unions and kisan sabhas, outside those based on economic and political demands, gave the people the means to break the "chains of ignorance, superstition and backwardness" imposed by the ruling classes.

34. Prakash remarks that in Kerala "the party was outstanding in channelling and identifying with the flowering of Malayalam", (although he does warn against facile explanations attributing communist successes to use of regional patriotism, singling out Fic (1970) for criticism). See also Nossiter (1982).

35. 'The Communist Party and the Struggle for Cultural Advance' in the CPI journal *New Age*.

Clearly, Namboodiripad and others have felt the need periodically to redress the balance between language and class. In an editorial comment of January 1955³⁶ Ghosh wrote that Nehru had been talking of national unity and the 'anti-national' character of the Communist Party. But,

"the Andhra people know full well who it is that has served their national interests... The Communist Party is *the* national party of the Telugu people."

There is revealing ambiguity here. Not only is Ghosh deliberately using the word 'national' in a sense not at all meant by Nehru, but the passage would read as smoothly if the word 'national' was replaced by the word 'class'.

In fact the nationality question has been fraught with difficulty for communists. Ghosh felt obliged at the Third Congress to warn against a trend of bourgeois nationalism. Moreover, the acceptance of alliances even with feudal classes in the linguistic-states movements left unpleasant and lasting fall-out in some states (Prakash, 1973, pp. 71-2). At the same time, the success of popular movements for linguistic

36. 'For Victory in Andhra', *New Age*, January, 1955.

states has been partly responsible for considerable strains on Centre-state relations.³⁷ In addition, the growth of regional particularism in the communist movement (also partly attributable to factional strife between 1947 and 1951) has, it has been suggested (Gelman, 1963), led to certain traits developing among communist parties that are usually associated with bourgeois parties : the phenomenon of local power-bases held by national leaders and the concomitant neglect of the party centre.³⁸ The twin attracting poles of language and class in the mass movements of the early 1950's must be partly held responsible for this. Namboodiripad wrote in a September 1955 article³⁹ :

"Our Party should carry on a continuous struggle against the bourgeois approach to national integration even while joining hands with it on issues in order to isolate and defeat the more disruptive forces."

This statement demonstrates just what a narrow path the CPI was trying to walk.

-
37. In fact Prakash (surprisingly for a CPM man) claimed in 1973 to detect an "inexorable process" eroding the Centre's power and posing, ironically, a real problem to parties organised on the basis of democratic centralism.
38. Gelman goes so far as to say of this and the following period: "factionalism, blatant lack of discipline, and regional disregarded for central authority... became permanent features of CPI life, to a degree seen in few if any other Communist parties."
39. 'Prospects of Capitalist Development in India', *New Age*, September 1955.

KERALA : THE TESTING GROUND

It has already been seen how the CPI committed itself to use of representative institutions. As General Secretary Ghosh remarked, peaceful methods were neither a creed nor a tactic but "a policy - a seriously meant policy"⁴⁰ It has been noted that communist MP's in the Lok Sabha became correspondingly more active and constructive after the change of line. (Nossiter, 1988, p. 175)

The record of the CPI in Kerala made this state particularly suitable for testing the new 'theory of peaceful transition' if once the entry into government in a single state in the Indian Union was established as part of the application of this theory. Not only had the party gained considerable strength and credibility in being so involved in the movement for a united Kerala, but it has solid experience of participation in elections and elected bodies.⁴¹

With all this under its belt the CPI in Kerala was well suited to taking a 'constructive' approach, fully outlined

40. In *New Age*, 18th May 1956.

41. The only elections it had boycotted were those of 1948 in Cochin and in 1956 it won control of a local government body in the District board elections, subsequently earning even Nehru's praise for its "model administration" (Nossiter, 1988, p. 65).

in its 'Communist Proposal for Building a Democratic and Prosperous Kerala'. Its emphasis on a 'minimum programme' for social justice and economic reconstruction in no way went beyond the professions of Congress socialism, and the manifesto for the 1957 elections was reminiscent of the Centre's Second Five Year Plan.

Nevertheless there were many uncertainties inherent to the situation - despite the CPI's good electoral showing⁴² - and a complete lack of precedent of a communist party running a government in a federal framework controlled by non-communist forces. In these circumstances it was unsurprising that there was a group of comrades even in Kerala who held that even Leninist-type exploitation of government was not relevant in the case of India. And even the advocates of such exploitation were agreed that whereas in Eastern Europe the capture of full state power made possible whole-scale nationalisation and collectivisation, use of educational and cultural organs for propaganda, and control of police and armed forces, in Kerala such weapons would not be at the ministry's disposal. Moreover, there were wider, international, considerations connected with

42. Sixty out of 126 seats in the Assembly.

the interests of the Soviet Union in not seeing its new friend Nehru destabilised. Yet the Indian Constitution itself (in its Preamble and Directive Principles) called for the establishment of socialism in India, so at least initially the Centre could not take exception to the communist programme.⁴³ The two great imponderables (to be considered, of course, in Marxist terms) where : (i) what would be the response of the ruling class and the Indian state apparatus to the unfolding of a government run by communists; and (ii) where did the running of a state government fit into the Party's overall strategy?⁴⁴

It seems that there was no answer to these questions that could command universal - or even near-universal - support.⁴⁵ However, some attempt had been made to think through the implications of applying the Palghat line, and later the

-
43. Subramnian (1983) has justly said that it is this combination of possibilities and limitations represents "an ideological challenge, perhaps not faced by any other Communist movement in the world" (p.21) Fic had also asserted (1970), that whatever they could learn from others' experiences, "the Communists had to evolve a finer and more sophisticated mode of transition than used in Europe and China" (p. 82)
44. That is, was it a large step on the road to control at the centre, or was it just a part of the "etc." in Ghosh's call to comrades at the Palghat Congress to involve themselves in "Panchayats, District Boards, etc."?
45. Indeed twice the national party secretary had to intervene to sort out differences within the Kerala State Committee (Nossiter, 1988, p. 66).

important Moscow Declaration, to the Indian situation. In the Malayali-language textbook used in party schools Namboodiripad outlined the conditions for the peaceful transition to take place : Congress must legislate at the Centre to curtail the economic power and privileges of the exploiting classes; meanwhile - and by implication this is where the Communists Party comes in - the masses must be mobilised to turn the legal acts into reality on the ground. This would be done by (a) forming committees of workers and farmers that would take "direct action" to enforce the measures, and (b) ensuring the participation of these people's organisations in the work of public administration, at all levels from panchayats to state parliament and even cabinet. In this way the whole operation of the administration would be democratised, paving the way for a peaceful transition to communism even under Congress rule (Fic, 1970, p. 83).

Despite his awareness of the specificities of the Indian situation Namboodiripad also attempted to apply some of the lessons of the Chinese experience.⁴⁶ The first stage of the transition, it seemed, involved not sweeping nationalisation but

46. In a series of articles in *New Age* in late 1956, shortly after returning from a trip to Beijing.

state capitalism and private enterprise. Legislation effectively to dispossess the exploiting classes was of course vital, but must be reinforced by militant groups of workers and peasants organised by the Communist Party. These groups would carry forward the government's programme even as open class struggle developed.

Immediately after the election results had been announced and in anticipation of being asked to form a government the Secretary-General of the Kerala Party declared that a CPI ministry would "function in the service of the people within the four corners of the present Constitution". There would be no "upheaval", any state-level nationalisations would of course require consultation with the Central government and the CPI would merely implement the Congress Party's own programme more thoroughly (Fic, 1970, pp. 84-6). The Politbureau of the national Party was soon appealing to the PSP (earlier in coalition with Congress) to join in the government.

Evidently - at least before the formation of the ministry - allaying the fears of non-communist influentials was a priority. However, a *New Age* editorial two and a half weeks later proclaimed that this would be a "resolute break" from all past state governments, in that it would be trying to realise the

"hitherto forsaken" Preamble and Directive Principles. At the same time, the article mentioned the limitations in the Constitution itself that presented obstacles to the realisation of these same Principles. More importantly,

"One has to reckon with the fact that the State power in India rests in the hands of the exploiting classes. It will be the worst illusion, therefore, to think that these classes will take kindly to a fact of the popular democratic government in Kerala, or reconcile to the democratic and historic process that would immediately follow..."

The public statements of the leaders may have been cautious but this talk of "democratic and historic process" seems to give evidence that the CPI believed at the time that significant change *was* possible, given the right political situation.⁴⁷

However, the programme outlined in the manifesto envisaged that the government's work would take place strictly within the boundaries of the Constitution. Nevertheless, its functioning would according to M.N. Govindan Nair, have impact beyond Kerala. It would 'radicalise' forces elsewhere and help to clarify the meaning of socialism for them. This in

47. This proviso had, of course, an international dimension due to the importance of the protection of Soviet state interests to the CPI.

itself would "concretise" the possibility of peaceful transition at the all-India level. He admitted that the Party itself did not know how the advance towards socialism would come about.

"But what is important is that the realisation should grow that such a problem exists and that its solution is as important, if not more, as running an efficient administration. *Indeed, the two things cannot be separated from each other in a mechanical fashion...*"⁴⁸(my emphasis).

Concrete policies would have to be evolved and introduced, but

"Even more important... will be the introduction of a new style of work which will bring the government closer to the people and enable them, as far as possible, to participate in its work..."

Nair wrote of the "latent power" of the toiling sections to be tapped by the new government.

The leaders were thus quite aware of the complexities of this hitherto unique situation. The Constitution could be quoted, criticised *and* exposed. There was a need to set an example of efficient and honest administration yet the desire was also strong to experiment with a new form of democratised government. Nair declared that the Party "looked upon the

48. *New Age*, vol VI, no. 4, April 1957.

winning of governmental power as a great responsibility and an enormous opportunity"; but the plans for mass mobilisation could provoke the Centre to the ultimate revenge. However, the very facts that the State Committee often developed internal disagreements - and that Nair as Secretary was frequently forced to interpret the party line without the benefit of thorough discussion or practical precedent - suggest that there was no one stable understanding of the application of the theory of peaceful transition, that could warrant calling Kerala 'the Yenan of India', as Fic (1970) would have it.⁴⁹

The limitations within which the government had to operate are seen most clearly in its police policy and in its approach to agrarian reform. In a sovereign state where a communist party has come to power the police could be used on the side of the mass movements against the exploiting class. But in only one state of the Indian Union this was not possible. Namboodiripad's important public statement of July 1957 tacitly recognised this and accordingly announced only the neutralisation of the police (as it came to be called) in the case of demonstrations or strikes on the part of the "democratic movement". The plan was to leave the way clear for the 'direct

49. He wrote of the state that
 "it represented a focus of Communist power from which
 it could radiate until it engulfed the whole nation". (p. 81).

actions' by communist-led organisations to take effect. The previous policy was roundly condemned :

"such use of the police in favour of the owning classes is a violation of the fundamental rights of the toiling classes".⁵⁰

The agrarian policy was also cautious.⁵¹ Finance Minister Achutha Menon maintained that radical redistribution was just not practicable given the shortage of land. Having passed a Stay of Eviction Ordinance within a week of coming into government to protect tenants and hutment dwellers in the interim, the ministry clearly intended to produce a viable Act.⁵²

However, the CPI approach to government extended, as anticipated, beyond legislation. The legislation itself, in the field of prices, wages, education, and administration, was expected (and intended) to polarise opinion both at the stage of debate and at the stage of implementation. The heated arguments in the Assembly were reported in the Communist press

50. Quoted in Fic (1970), pp. 465-6.

51. In his 1952 work 'On the Agrarian Question' Namboodiripad, in 1957 of course Chief Minister, had written of the need to abolish feudalism first and to create capitalist relations in agriculture.

52. Not only did the Peasants' Union have more influence in the Party than the labourers (Nossiter, 1988, p. 70), but a reasonably wide consensus was seen to be needed to get the Bill through.

in terms of a struggle between forces of progress and reaction, in line with Nair's earlier comments (Fic, 1970, pp. 92-3). Meanwhile, there was a membership drive by the party⁵³ and strenuous attempts were made to strengthen communist trade unions, most notably with the one-industry-one-union formula. In addition to neutralising the police it is widely accepted that local cadres exercised to some degree pressure on District officials (as effectively admitted by the Law Minister in September 1958).⁵⁴

It would be wrong, however, to characterise the CPI's mobilisation strategy as 'disruptive'. In industrial policy there was much constructive work, including legislation on wages and conditions, the setting-up of conciliation bodies and generally implementing the already existing AITUC policy of encouraging economic development even at the expense of the short-term interests of the workers concerned. Although the frequency of strikes did go up in 1957-8 the communist unions cannot be stuck with the responsibility for this.⁵⁵

53. Though not without some inevitable loss of discipline (Nossiter, 1988, p. 68).

54. Some also accuse them of downright obstruction of justice.

55. Nossiter (1982) points out that the only major strike AITUC was involved in was against a British tea company (p.80).

Nevertheless, the leadership did see mobilisation of supporters and sympathisers as of vital importance, particularly at moment of crisis. For example, the students' unrest of July 1958 and the problems of dealing with it resulted in a call by Govindan Nair for the formation of "citizen's committees". More generally, the 'excesses' and demonstrations in support of the government were central to the mobilisation of the poor along class lines (Nossiter, 1982, Chapter V), as became clear from the polarisation of the electorate in the 1960 election.

But by January 1959 Namboodiripad was having serious doubts about the applicability of the theory of peaceful transition to his state. He declared at a public meeting:

"...[t]here are certain limitations on the side of the Government which obstruct the real fulfilment of the regional needs. The Executive would meet with difficulties unless a total revolution similar to that which had occurred in the Soviet Union and China took place in this country also..."⁵⁶

56. Quoted in Fic (1970), p. 110.
The Moscow Declaration had also stated that in winning power the working class would at least try to avoid civil war, this depending on "the attitude of the exploiting class in a given country".

A mobilisation drive was started in April 1959 to defend the government, but on his return from consultations in Moscow Namboodiripad had already indicated that the links between party and state apparatus must be broken to placate the Centre. In the event, this proved irrelevant as when the opposition refused to enter into negotiations in June and the conflict worsened, the national leadership decided that dismissal by the Centre would have the best propaganda value. This judgement was proved correct; almost a decade Namboodiripad himself was harking back to this action of the central government's as evidence of its moral bankruptcy :

"When the people begin to use parliamentary institutions for advancing their cause, and they fall away from the influence of the reactionary bourgeoisie and landlords, these classes do not hesitate to trample underfoot parliamentary democracy as was done in Kerala in 1959." (Namboodiripad, 1968, p. 4).

Apart from this, what were the 'lessons of Kerala' for the CPI? Fic's judgement (1970) is that,

"The operations of the Communist government, taken in their totality, amounted to a unique case of systematic adaptation, conversion and exploitation of the institutions of parliamentary democracy for the purpose of its transformation into a special form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a people's regime." (p.78).

This may have been the original aim but the dictatorship of the proletariat certainly never emerged in Kerala and given the stance of the CPSU never looked likely to. More mundanely, but

probably more accurately,

"the party developed an appreciation of both the possibilities and the limitations of work on the parliamentary front" (Nossiter, 1988, p. 79).

Work in the assembly was combined with work in the panchayats and district boards, which could be seen as 'training grounds' for class struggle, electoral mobilisation and administration. However, the fact that, although politicised, they tended to be insulated from the full ramifications of class struggle (Gough, 1968, p. 197) perhaps provided a lesson for later communist-led governments.

Another important lesson, according to Fic, (1970),

"is that any time they assume power in one state of the Indian Union, the foremost task to be accomplished before embarking upon the process of transition quite apart from its slow rate, is to throw all resources into building mass organisations. The control over a vast network of these organisations, and the slow rate of transition, could preclude the opposition forces from amassing themselves. This would assure that the process takes place in a relatively peaceful atmosphere." (p. 114-5)

In general it can be said that the experience of 1957-9 made the CPI at both state and national level much less sanguine about the prospects for real change under a left government in the federal system.⁵⁷

57. As noted above, Namboodripad had expressed this shift in mood early in 1958.

Moreover, the participation in parliament and government seems to have had other, unwelcome, effects. As early as 1952 there had been complaints that the state leadership was negotiating united fronts of parties and not of classes.

Another danger was the temptations of office. As A.K. Gopalan (1973) later commented :

"A new life, a new environment, a new alliance - I found myself in an environment calculated to ruin a man. First class travel, comfortable chambers in the parliament a surfeit of money, magnificent quarters - and a life devoid of heavy responsibility... we did not feel hopeful about this much eulogised parliamentary democracy." (pp. 181-2)

Nevertheless, during the ministry's tenure there was a demonstrable rise in the incidence of class conflict. Not only did agrarian mobilisation get the support of the government, but the opposition started to mobilise their supporters against government. The deep inter-relationship between mobilisation and legislation (Oomen, 1985), was shown in the example of MLA's' frequently holding union office.

Just as the CPI found it impossible to outline a comprehensive strategy at the outset of the experiment in government, so it could not come to a consensus on its results. The ministry, its functioning, and the Marxist meaning of its eventful term became issues of contention in the crisis leading up to the final split in 1964.

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN THE 1964 SPLIT

The Amritsar Extraordinary Congress of April, 1958⁵⁸ has been labelled "the highest water mark of ideological and organisational unity" of the CPI (Fic, 1969, p.367). Insofar as this description is correct the unity was really possible only due to the prevailing circumstances - Nehru's apparent desire to co-exist with the communist ministry in Kerala, the accommodation reached between the CPSU and CPC in the form of the Moscow Declaration, and the encouraging progress of the Kerala government itself. The new party constitution declared the faith of the CPI in the peaceful path including participation in parliament as a means to securing full democracy and socialism. Although some have viewed the adoption of this policy as basically a result of pressure from the Soviet party (Gelman, 1963), and the 1964 split as the outcome of the conflicts engendered by the introduction of pressure from China, others have seen Amritsar as a crucial and irreversible step to 'Indianising communism'.

58. See the opening section of this chapter.

However, the party was still split behind the facade of the new constitution. Namboodiripad, writing in 1975, recalls the "furious struggle" at the time between two "trends" on the essential attitude to Congress.⁵⁹ By the summer of 1958 differences over the correct response to the situation in Kerala had not only emerged in Indian state units and the party nationally. There was disagreement in the international movement, too. Based on their differing assessments of Nehru, Beijing wanted revolutionary mass struggle while Moscow favoured resignation.⁶⁰ (Fic, 1969, p.301)

The details of the events leading to the final split in 1964 are not relevant to this work, but a few stages in the ideological 'battle' may be analysed here. As the Sino-Soviet disagreements intensified and the border dispute with China seized the national consciousness, the Central Executive Committee of the party met in September, 1960 to prepare the ground for the forthcoming congress in April of the next year.

59. 'The Communist Party of India (Marxist)' in *Selected Writings* (1982).

60. For the CPC, Nehru was in a conservative phase where Western aid had dented his neutrality. Since India was now actively aligned with imperialism the country was an international class enemy. (Although small, U.S. private investment had tripled since 1950).

A Resolution 'on certain questions before the international Communist movement' was drawn up in attempt to reconcile the opposing views.⁶¹ On the issue of Indian foreign policy the resolution declared that India was the biggest of the ex-colonies with independent alignment, forming a "broad peace zone". As for China, its actions since August of 1959 were stated not to have been strengthening the forces of peace.⁶²

The Moscow Conference in November, attended by Ghosh, was not a meeting where allegiances could continue to be fudged and the CPI National Council came out in support of the CPSU's line involving concents such as the 'third stage' of the crisis of capitalism in which new allies would emerge, 'national democracy' and the 'non-capitalist path'. Unsurprisingly, there was strong opposition from sections of the CPI to such a bold commitment and by the time of the Vijayawada Congress the cleavages were well established.⁶³

-
61. The Party is usually held to have been divided into three 'groups' : see, for example, Fic (1970), p.145 and Nossiter (1988), pp. 19-20.
62. This kind of formulation could satisfy no-use as it combined this implied blaming of China with a statement that in some ways the Nehru government was moving to the right (Subramanian, 1983).
63. Fic (1970) writes that the party was "in complete disarray" (p. 146).

Three draft Political Resolutions were presented to the Congress, two of them being pretty well new programmes for the party. The resolution drawn up by Dange, P.C. Joshi and G. Adhikari was an interpretation of the Moscow Statement of a few months earlier : since Congress had not exhausted its revolutionary potential the party should continue its partial support, with the aim of a National Democratic Front whose core would be the unity of the national bourgeoisie and the working class. The 'centrist' draft (as it came to be known) piloted by Ghosh himself advocated a different weightage of elements with the combination of working class and peasantry as the core of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal alliance. Congress had two 'wings' but the need was to draw in the "mass of Congressmen". The 'leftist' proposal - in effect a new programme - dismissed the calls for a national democratic front and demanded that the party work for revolutionary mass struggle led by the working class with the goal of People's Democracy. The right had, according to this group, underestimated the reactionary character of the Congress. This programme was a thoroughly oppositional one.⁶⁴

64. As the CPI(M) weekly was to make clear later, the main relevance for the 'leftists' of Congress' progressive declarations was as grounds on which to expose it and "for forging unity" with erstwhile Congress supporters who had been misled by that party (*People's Democracy*, June 1968).

Ultimately no thoroughgoing compromise could be reached and the formally-unanimous resolution repeated the old line of 'unity and struggle'. In January 1962 Ghosh, "the great healer and unifier"(Varkey, 1974, p. 274), died. When in October after more border clashes the Chinese 'People's Daily' launched its attack on Nehru⁶⁵ the National Council fell apart. After several members of the body had resigned the final resolution branded Chinese the aggressor. Meanwhile the left began setting up parallel party centres (Nossiter, 1988, p.19), and between then and May, 1964 the disintegration, or rather the polarisation, gathered pace.⁶⁶

There has been a great deal of debate both inside and outside the CPI on the causes of the split. As we have seen⁶⁷ some writers stress the importance of Soviet or Chinese influences, others (Nossiter, 1988, p. 14; Subramanian, 1983, p. 120) - backed up by Namboodripad (1982, p. 263) - are adamant on the indigenous nature of the cleavage. One commentator gives weightage to the differing assessments within the

65. Who had now, apparently, substituted reactionary nationalism for the anti-imperial, anti-feudal revolution and the class nature of whose government made it increasingly dependent on - and the servant of - imperialism.

66. A detailed account is given in Fic (1970), p. 274.

67. See Introduction.

Party of the prospect of change in a parliamentary democracy (Wood, 1965); another pays more attention to the methods advocated in this context (Sengupta, 1972, p. 20); and yet another to the issue of the economic 'paths' to socialism (Sharma, 1984).

However, quite aside from these debates, there is another level of explanation. Communist parties are engaged in the Marxist enterprise of transforming the social and political system in a revolutionary direction. This involves tackling the problem of defining the nature of the state as described at the beginning of this chapter. From a Marxist point of view, for change there must be understanding, and a conflict of ideas is inevitable with this approach. Obviously splits are not inevitable in all parties in all circumstances but as we have noted the Indian situation poses particularly complex problems to be solved.

With this view of the issue of the split in mind, it is now necessary briefly to outline and contrast the programmatic documents of CPI and CPM after the separation. This is not only due to the need to set the bearings for the next chapter, but also due to the ideological 'crystallisation'. Analysis of differences between the two parties' lines will be dealt with in the areas of :

- i] the characterisation of the Indian state and its relationship with the bourgeoisie;
- ii] the assessment of Indian capitalism - and hence the 'path' to be taken towards socialism;
- iii] the nature of Indian democracy - and hence the communist parties' attitude to participation in its institutions;
- iv] Indian foreign policy;
- v] questions of policy that flow from the understandings of the above issues - including the attitude towards Congress and other parties and the correct approach to front politics.⁶⁸

i] *State and Bourgeoisie*

"The state in India, asserts the CPI,⁶⁹

"is the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, which upholds and develops capitalism and capitalist relations of production, distribution and exchange in the national economy."

In it power and authority are concentrated at the Centre. The limited autonomy of the states means restrictions on economic and cultural growth - leading to 'contradictions' between Centre and states.

68. To some extent any such division is artificial as the solutions to these problems chosen by the parties emerge from the whole conceptual approaches. Nevertheless it is necessary here for the purpose of clarity.

69. CPI, *Proceedings of VIIIth Congress* (1965), p. 25.

More specifically,

"In the formation and exercise of governmental power, the big bourgeoisie wields considerable influence."

The national bourgeoisie has progressive elements, but it "compromises with the landlords" for example by allowing them to hamper land reform. Despite this, however, and despite the emergence of a "new set of reactionary vested interests" in the agrarian sector, the system can be used to develop socialism once those obstacles have been overcome.

For the CPM,⁷⁰

"The present Indian state is the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development. This class character essentially determines the role and functions of the state in the life of the country."

The programme adopted at its founding ('Seventh') Congress also noted that

"Although our state structure is supposed to be a federal one, practically all power and authority is concentrated in the central government."

70. CPM, *Programme adopted at VIIth Congress, Calcutta*, p. 25.

Not only does this restrict the development of the states but over the years contradictions between Centre and states have grown, often underlain by the contradiction between the big bourgeoisie on the one hand and the "entire people", including "the bourgeoisie of this or that state", on the other. This "deeper contradiction" is aggravated by the unevenness of development. Because the big bourgeoisie resists genuine reform it must be opposed and the present state replaced by "a state of people's democracy led by the working class."⁷¹

ii] *Indian Capitalism*

The issue of what significance to attach to the planned development engaged in by the Indian government was, as mentioned above, an important aspect of the controversies in the communist movement.⁷² As had a section of the united CPI, the post-split CPI attached much importance to the industrialisation initiated by Nehru, and to the Awadi resolution of the Congress Party.⁷³ It was thought possible for the country to move to socialism through maturing capitalism.

71. Ibid., p. 43.

72. This was particularly true from the mid-1950's when the Second Five-Year Plan came into operation.

73. CPI, *Proceedings*.

For the CPM the bourgeoisie's strategy toward development demonstrates clearly its "dual character" : mobilising resources (including socialist aid) against imperialist monopolists; while using state power to appropriate "the fruits of the labour of the common people for its own capital requirements" (and failing decisively to attack imperialism and feudalism). Economic planning does represent a "more expedient use of resources" but can in no way be equated with socialist planning.⁷⁴

The CPM also drew attention to the new stage in the crisis of capitalism as identified by the Moscow Statement of 1960. This new stage took the form of "growing instability of the entire world system of capitalism" on the one hand and a "profound crisis in bourgeois politics and ideology" on the other. The implications of this turn of events was that the limitations of the capitalist system were becoming more evident, especially in a country like India where conditions for the evolution of capitalism in the way it evolved in the West do not exist.⁷⁵

74. CPM, *Programme*, pp. 4-14.

75. Without a solid base of heavy industry or an empire from which to supply capital the crisis of capitalism is in India particularly "painful and protracted".

The superimposition of capitalist elements on a pre-capitalist society left a "peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with caste, communal and tribal institutions". To prepare the ground for socialism such remnants have to be destroyed. But since India is the most developed among the ex-colonies and its economy has strong elements of monopoly capitalism, the CPM's understanding of the Moscow statement is that "to talk of a non-capitalist path of development and the establishment of a national democratic state to achieve this aim in India is unreal". As mentioned above the state is to be replaced by one of people's democracy led by the working class, but "on the basis of a firm worker-peasant alliance" (Subramanian, 1983, pp 139-40).

According to the *CPI*, meanwhile, due to the "dual nature" of the national bourgeoisie its economic and political policies had been lead to contradictions. The rise of reactionary forces (monopolists, feudal elements and foreign capital) necessitated the rallying of "all patriotic democratic forces" to build a National Democratic front to take over the running of the state.

"Such a state... under constant pressure of the national mass movement from below"

will have to implement non-capitalist development.⁷⁶

76. *CPI, Proceedings*, pp. 38-42.

iii] *Indian Democracy*

The *CPI* view of the nature of democracy in India is that

"In spite of the bourgeois class character of the state, the ushering in of the bourgeois democratic state was a historic advance over the imperialist-bureaucratic rule."⁷⁷

Although the exercise of constitutional rights is limited, the parliament does enable the people to prevent the development of autocracy for the benefit of the reactionary classes, and to demand social transformation. This essentially defensive aspect of the *CPI* strategy is supplemented in the Programme by the assertion that

"[by] developing a peaceful mass revolutionary mass movement, by winning a stable majority in parliament backed by such a movement, the working class and its allies will strive their utmost to overcome the resistance of the forces of reaction and transform parliament from an instrument serving the bourgeoisie into a genuine instrument of people's will for effecting a fundamental transformation in the economic, social and state structure."

The *CPI* thus has a clear picture of the possibilities of transformation from within the system.

77. Ibid., pp. 25.

In the case of the *CPM* the understanding is quite otherwise. The administrative system of the country is based on a highly-centralised bureaucracy whose strength reflects "the growth of capitalist development". The laws passed by parliament serve the interests of the exploiters and the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution are real only to the exploiting classes.⁷⁸

Then comes a qualification :

"However, universal adult franchise and parliament and state legislatures can serve as instruments of the people in their struggle"

They offer opportunities to the people to defend their interests, intervene in the affairs of state " to some extent ", and enable the party to "mobilise them to carry forward the struggle".⁷⁹ The programme pledges the *CPM* to

"utilise all opportunities that present themselves bringing into existence governments pledged to carry out a modest programme of giving immediate relief to the people."

78. Moreover, even the oppositional element within the ruling classes is denied democratic right according to Namboodiripad.

79. *CPM, Programme*, p. 30.

This would give a "great fillip" to the movement and help in the building of the Democratic Front that would begin the task of bringing in People's Democracy.⁸⁰

For the CPM, the big bourgeoisie and landlords pose a real threat to the parliamentary system :

"when the people begin to use parliamentary institutions for advancing their cause and fall away from the influence of the reactionary bourgeoisie and landlords, these classes do not hesitate to trample under foot parliamentary democracy... It is of the utmost importance that the parliamentary and democratic institutions are defended in the interests of the people against such threats and that they are successfully utilised in combination with extra-parliamentary activities." [Quoted Subramanian, 1983, pp.142-3]

Thus the major difference between the two parties on this subject is that while the CPI, believing it possible to transform the parliament into a "genuine instrument of the people's will", emphasises the importance of a peacefully-won majority in parliament; its rival, due to its more sceptical view of the depth of the roots of democracy in India, sees the opportunities for change via legislation as far fewer.

80. However, such governments "would not solve economic and political problems ... in any fundamental manner."
They would merely be of a "transitional character" and for strengthening the mass movement. (CPM, *Programme*, pp. 52-3).

iv] *Indian Foreign Policy*

The assessment of the *CPI* is that the government's external policy is "in the main" one of peace, non-alignment and anticolonialism, although there are some "lapses and compromises". It "conforms to the interest of the national bourgeoisie" and "meets the needs of India's development and reflects the sentiments of the mass of the people."

In general, declared the *CPM Programme*,⁸¹

"[foreign policy] in the final analysis, is nothing but the projection of [a government's] internal policy and it reflects, in the main, the interests of the class or classes that head the government and the state in question."

So in India it reflects the dual character of the bourgeoisie as explained above. For its development the Indian bourgeoisie needs world peace. So it uses the contradictions between the imperialist and socialist camps and between the U.S. and British imperialisms. Its 'non-alignment' varies according to its class interests at any one time.

81. *CPM, Programme*, pp. 20-24.

v] *Policy Issues*

This area may be sub-divided into three parts :

- a) the nature of the United Front, and its leadership;
- b) forms of struggle; and
- c) attitude towards Congress and other political parties.

[a] The aim of the *CPI* was declared to be the formation of a National Democratic Front and the introduction of a state of national democracy as mentioned in the 1960 Moscow Statement. The Programme distinguishes the "patriotic national bourgeoisie" from the monopoly element and wishes to work jointly with the former in an alliance of workers, peasants, middle classes and progressive bourgeoisie. Since the differentiation within the bourgeoisie is growing as the concentration of economic power increases, the first step is unity with the progressive part of the bourgeoisie, in a joint leadership.

The *CPM* will have none of this. The compromising tendencies of the government have become such that only leadership by the working class can complete the democratic revolution. The national bourgeoisie, or parts of it, is objectively progressive but its weak class position makes it succumb to its vacillatory tendencies. Its participation in the revolution depends on the particular correlation of class forces at the

moment; but the party *should* try to win it for the democratic front. But because of the absolute necessity of dislodging the big bourgeoisie from power and eradicating foreign monopoly capitalism, not a national United Front but a People's Democratic Front must be built; its core the alliance of the peasantry and the working class, led by the latter.

The CPM notes in its criticism of the CPI's Programme that the practical aim there is that of bringing about radical changes in the policies and set-up of the government, rather than of replacing the bourgeoisie-landlord government with government of the anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly, anti-feudal democratic front.

[b] Because of the importance the *CPI* attached to the emergence of the bourgeois democratic state after Independence, and its emphasis on the waverings of the national bourgeoisie, it felt bound to call for the use of all the democratic rights in an effort to forge unity with the masses led by Congress. The divisions between these masses and those led by the democratic opposition was "the most important division in our democratic forces today". Moreover,

"no National Democratic Front would be real unless the vast mass following of the Congress and the progressive sections... take their place in it."

By mounting mass struggles on the issue of the contradictions between anti-people policies and the interests of the masses, the divisions within the Congress would be further accentuated and ultimately a leftward shift in policies achieved as the process of 'uniting with' continues. Particular importance is placed on the joint work of the mass organisations under the communists and the Congress to this end.⁸²

Because it believes the bourgeoisie will always try to use state power to bolster its own position for the CPM the question of unity with elements of that class does not arise. The existence of a highly centralised bureaucracy and police apparatus serving the interests of the ruling class means that there is no way the parliament can be turned into an organ of the working class and its allies; this much can according to the Programme, be seen from the past operation of the constitution. But given the fact that the central parliament and state legislatures exist and can be used for purposes of mobilisation and for "immediate relief", the CPM will combine parliamentary work with work in the mass movement.

82. CPI, *Proceedings*, pp. 38-40.

[c] The rival parties' attitudes and policies towards the Congress and other parties will obviously be of a piece with their assessment of the class character of the state and the balance of class forces in India; and with their positions relative to the goals of National Democratic Front and People's Democratic Front respectively.

As will have become clear, the *CPI* viewed the Congress as on the whole anti-imperialist⁸³ and interested in the progress of national democracy. The need was therefore for a programme of unity with the masses led by Congress and joint work on the front of mass organisations in order to pressurise the government to radicalise its policies. Given the sharpening contradictions between the masses and the ruling classes and within the bourgeoisie itself there is a good chance of a leftward shift by the government. As for the masses led by the rightist parties, they must be won over.

This last is the approach taken by the *CPM* with regard to the masses led by the *Congress* Party. Although support may be given to government policy on issues of peace and anti-colonialism there can be no strategic unity with Congress.

83. It is "basically non-aligned", according to the *Programme* (p.61).

Congress policy is dictated by the dual character of the bourgeoisie, and no united front can alter this fact. Meanwhile the Congress masses must be 'won over', as must the masses following the other parties.

The same approach of identifying *particular* policies as progressive rather than any group within the bourgeoisie as progressive per se has been taken by the CPM towards the other parties. The party of the working class must win over the supporters of these parties rather than merely uniting with sections of them. The *CPI*, by contrast, has always given a special place to Congress as a generally progressive party. (Subramanian, 1983, pp. 156-7).

With the necessary theoretical background now sketched in, it is time to turn to its integration with the reality of a *single* major Indian state, West Bengal.

Chapter - III

MOBILISATION STRATEGY IN WEST BENGAL

The specificity of the conditions in each Indian state - whether it be Kerala, West Bengal or a 'Hindi-belt' state - inevitably affects the modes of operation of communists working with them. Theory, with the Indian communist parties, is national, but its application in a revolutionary praxis is unavoidably tied up with the local balance of political and socio-economic forces. A brief description of the conditions (more details of which emerge with the unfolding of the communist revolutionary praxis) therefore needs to be give here.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The overall effects of agrarian change under the British in Bengal¹ may be summarised as follows : the decline of the traditional zamindari class; the emergence of a quasi-kulak class or rich peasants, moneylenders and merchants; the growth

1. Most commentators (correctly, from a Marxist point of view) have begun their studies of post-Independence West Bengal with reference to the structurally - determining Permanent Settlement. There is every reason to follow this tradition here.

of the rural poor - sharecroppers, labourers and dwarf landholders; and the creation of a powerful urban ruling elite, the bhadralok, unique to Bengal in India. (Nossiter, 1988, p.115). This last group in particular has been the focus of many commentators trying to understand and explain the patterns of Bengali politics in this century.² Analysis has been made of the emergence of a strong communist movement in West Bengal in terms of the psychology and ideology of a class that has "suffered a more rapid social decline in the twentieth century than any comparable social group in India" (Franda, 1971, p.12). More generally, the cultural and political dominance of Calcutta over West Bengal and the make-up of its population made the bhadralok an important variable in any political party's calculations.³

Nevertheless any elite, no matter how dominant, has to operate within the constraints imposed by its environment. West Bengal is characterised by high natural fertility and abundant rainfall, which historically gave the area a lead over

2. eg. Broomfield (1968), Franda (1971), Addy & Azad (1973) and Ray (1988), to name just a few.

3. The 1949-50 reorganisation of the Congress under Atulya Ghosh was, according to Chatterjee (1982) "a recognition of the indispensability of urban bhadralok support for a party of order which had to hold power by electoral success. And with the population of Calcutta and its suburbs swelling with the massive influx of uprooted refugees from East Pakistan, it was soon apparent that the urban bhadralok would become indispensable even for parties of radical social change." (p.93).

other parts of India in terms of agricultural productivity and also led to the second highest density of population among the states, after Kerala.⁴

There has also been a high growth rate of population, partly due to a declining death rate but also due to the large numbers of refugees from the east. The pressure of population has resulted in a low land-man ratio especially as the opportunities for increasing acreage have not been good, unlike the situation in other states, again such as Kerala. The relatively low rate of urbanisation has made the conditions on the ground still worse.

In terms of output, productivity and technological change the twentieth century in Bengal has seen stagnation and relative decline, particularly in relation to population. While market relations in agriculture developed early in Bengal, this did not, apparently, affect production, due to the fragmentation, small size and lack of irrigation of Bengali farms. The uniqueness of the circumstances in West Bengal are

4. Even Darjeeling, the least densely-populated area, has almost twice the all-India average; while Calcutta has twice the density of Bombay.

summed up by the fact that even up to 1970 the state's per hectare value of agricultural output remained the second highest, while the per-worker value was middling and falling behind relative to others'. (Sengupta, 1976)

Yet combined with this stagnation in output and productivity there has been considerable structural change. While the incidence of tenancy remained stable over the years 1911-'71 the number of wage labourers increased relentlessly: 27 per cent of the rural workforce in 1931; 44 per cent in 1971 (Ghose, 1983). Meanwhile share-cropping has come to dominate tenancy arrangements to the point where most estimates set a figure of 95 per cent of all area under tenancy (although 18 per cent of total cropped area). So far as land holdings are concerned the trend has been to an increasing number of small farms covering an increasing share of the cultivated area. Along with the increase in wage labour and the pressure of population this would indicate the impoverishment of the people, and indeed one study found the incidence of poverty in West Bengal doubling in the seven years to 1967-'68, to 80.3 per cent of the rural population.⁵ The state is one of two in

5. A 1977 study by M.S. Ahluwalia in *Journal of Development Studies*, April 1978, taking a poverty line of Rs.15 per head at 1960-'61 prices.

India to show a significant increase in rural poverty during the 1950's and '60's. As Jose () summarises,

"the inherent advantages of a relatively more productive agriculture facilitated by favourable climatic endowments have been neutralised by other concomitant features such as high density of population, inequitous land distribution and high incidence of wage labour households in rural areas." (p. 146).⁶

Problems in the industrial sphere are of a different, but equally grave, nature :

"At partition in 1947 West Bengal was deprived of its eastern hinterland; its industries have, in key instances, been overtaken by technological innovation; communications are poor; and from the point of view of available investors, private, public or international, other areas of India have seemed more attractive, in some measure because of the uncertainty of the political situation... and because of industrial agitation." (Nossiter, 1988, p. 142).

COMMUNISM IN WEST BENGAL, 1947-67

Three major groupings may be identified among the leadership of the communist movement in the two decades after Independence, each of which can be traced back to a particular phase and source of recruitment in the years before : firstly, the leadership of the organisational apparatus in West Bengal, the

6. He also shows that the per capita intake of calories in the state - an important determinant of the level of poverty in a rural society - fell during the 1960's, and was at all times lower than the national average.

bulk of which was comprised by former terrorists in such nationalist groups as Anushilan Samity and Jugantar, many of whom were converted to communism while in jail during the 1930's;⁷ secondly, the party 'theoreticians' who came into the party following the lifting of the legal ban on the CPI in 1942, most of whom came to Marxism via Indian intellectual movements; and thirdly, a growing "electoral following" distinct from cadre and intellectuals, more established in West Bengal society and interested in the communist movement primarily because of their interest in defeating the Congress in electoral contests. (Franda, 1971, pp. 13-40)

Although a significant portion of the leadership, then, had not been involved in the movement before 1942, the work of previous years, including the capturing of the All-India Students Federation and the All-India Kisan Sabha, stood the party in good stead, particularly in West Bengal where it gave the CPI a considerable mass base.⁸ Through 1943 the newly-released activists involved themselves in famine relief

7. Sengupta (1972) as well as Franda (1971) claimed to identify certain traits in the organisation and modes of operation of the communist movement that could be seen to have originated in the revolutionary, conspiratorial methods of the earlier terrorist groups.

8. This was despite the adoption of the 'People's War' line in 1942 and the refusal to support the Quit India movement of the same year.

and subsequently led the Tebhaga movement centred in southern 24-Parganas. The communist-dominated Bengal Pradeshik Krishak Sabha was prominent in the movement.

In 1947, West Bengal comrades were far less enthusiastic about Independence than their counterparts in other states. The unit in West Bengal opposed the party line calling for an alliance with "progressive elements in the Congress" and was instrumental in the move to a change of line in 1948 to the so-called 'insurrectionist strategy', adopted after the party headquarters had been shifted to Calcutta. (Franda, 1971, p.48)

For the communists in West Bengal, the situation certainly seemed to hold out truly revolutionary possibilities : there had been a serious famine; Partition had resulted in the arrival of huge numbers of refugees from East Pakistan; there was no end in sight to the food shortages and communalism was a grave problem. The administration seemed completely unable to cope with the breakdown in order, and the splitting of the civil service and police structure on Partition made life even more difficult for the new government.

The adoption of the Calcutta Theses provided the state CPI with a licence to act according to the assessment of the situation it had held all along. The 'insurrectionist' period

in West Bengal was a very active one, but the CPI was saved from most bad effects of its violent activities on its popularity by the mis-handling of the situation by the Congress government.⁹

However, despite turning its attention in 1949 to the rural areas,¹⁰ by 1950 the CPI was feeling the effects of the government's police operations. At a public meeting in January 1951 the party passed a resolution pledging that it would

"learn from its mistakes, re-establish links with the people, and do everything in its power to unite all leftist parties to form a democratic front to fight the present government."

There was unusual unity in the West Bengal unit, not only during the three years after Independence, but at the time of this switch from an insurrectionary to an electoral policy. Most Bengali communists, no matter what their 'faction', were agreed on the assessment of Congress. The perceived neglect of the state's problems by the centre and the "unsavoury character of provincial Congress politics" merely compounded

9. In a 1949 by-election, Sarat Chandra Bose (not a communist), fighting as a united opposition candidate mainly on the issue of preventive detention, was conspicuously successful.
10. Principally the southern districts, and taking the demands of the pre-Independence Tebhaga movement a few steps further by advocating radical redistribution of land.

the already deep resentment at the ruling party's acquiescence in the partition of Bengal. (Nossiter, 1988, p. 129) Disagreements on the correct conclusions to draw from the insurrectionary experience and on where priorities should lie in the rural or urban areas - could be set aside in the continued fight against Congress, this time in a different arena : that of electoral politics.

The communist party in West Bengal had first contested elections in 1946, to the pre-Partition United Bengal Assembly. The CPI at that time won three seats and was able to elect a representative to the Constituent Assembly. Despite this merely token presence in elected bodies it seems that the legislative experience gained thereby was very important for the emergence of the communists as the major - at times only - organised opposition to Congress in the state. Jyoti Basu was also able to establish his reputation as a parliamentarian respected even by thoroughly bourgeois observers (Franda, 1971, p. 34).

The results of the 1952 elections (twenty eight seats for the CPI - the second largest block after the Congress's 238, despite the non-communist left's obtaining almost twice as many votes as the communists) admitted of various different interpretations and this was the source of much of the factionalism in the next ten years or so. Most of the seats won by the

CPI were in those areas where the party had been most active during the 'insurrectionist' period. This led many to conclude that the ideal prescription would be a continuation of the same strategy, if not immediately then at some time in the near future, especially in rural areas where mass struggles had had such an impact. Others were led by the relative failure in Calcutta to believe that priority should be given to electoral strategy in the urban areas.(Franda, 1971)

Nevertheless through the years 1952 to 1962 there remained the clear need for electoral alliances of the left in order to defeat the Congress at the polls. In 1952 itself there had been two leftist alliances, one intended to embrace all the left parties but deserted by three small leftist parties due to ideological and strategical disagreements. The larger bloc comprised the CPI, the Forward Bloc and the Socialist Republicans, and was quite successful, gaining a total of 43 seats.

This example spurred the leftist parties in 1957 to repeat the experiment, but this time three non-Congress alliances emerged : the United Left Election Committee (consisting of CPI, Praja Socialist Party (PSP), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Forward Bloc and Forward Bloc-Marxist) being by far the most significant. It achieved a total of 80

seats at these elections while its two smaller rivals on the left gained a total of two. It was evident that so long as the communists could garner the support of two or three of the other main left parties no non-communist front could make a dent in their support.

By 1962 the polarisation of West Bengal politics was almost complete : the anti-Congress coalition of left parties (the United Left Front) consisted of the CPI, Forward Block, Forward Bloc-Marxist, RSP, Bolsheviks and Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), and obtained 72 seats in the Assembly, while the Socialist Unity Centre (SUC) and the PSP, out in the cold, managed only five and no seats respectively. The pattern was clear : Congress versus CPI-led alliances with smaller leftist parties. The extent to which the predominance of the CPI in leftist fronts had been accepted by all concerned was shown in the fact that even after the 1964 split, when there was much negotiation about the future pattern of electoral alliances, both the anti-Congress alliances that emerged were led by communists.

As has been noted above, this basic agreement on an anti-Congress strategy in every arena co-existed with intra-party disagreement on the lessons of the experience of the years since Independence. This was as true of the central

leadership of the CPI. In fact Ajoy Ghosh's response to the decreasing scope for meaningful compromise at the national level seems to have been a policy that shifted the focus of activities to the state level.¹¹

For some time this policy worked after a fashion. Prominent intellectual leaders of the West Bengal CPI backed Ghosh or at least were careful to maintain a semblance of party unity. However, others, particularly those in the organisational and electoral 'wings' of the party, grew increasingly disenchanted with the line emanating from the central leadership (Franda, 1971, pp. 56-7). The insurrectionist policy may have been premature and even counter-productive, but an alliance with Congress need not follow from the recognition of this fact. There was always the danger of the party's support being undercut by the Marxist left parties prominent in state politics. The ascendancy of the Left in the statement in the years up to 1964 has been explained by Nossiter (1988) as follows :

11. This enabled the leadership to refrain from attacking the Congress at the Centre (as was necessitated by Soviet) strategy and allowed for the possibility that state units might gain support by addressing specific local issues.

"The united CPI had a record of disciplined militancy. Congress in West Bengal was by no stretch of the dialectical imagination a progressive aspect of the national bourgeoisie. After the split, the key figures, Jyoti Basu, Promode Das Gupta, Harekrishna Konar, Saroj Mukherjee and so on, were CPI(M) at a point when anti-Congressism was the minimum definition of who was Left and who was Right." (p.130)

1967-'70 : UNITED FRONTS

In the period immediately following the split of 1964, continued (and often even more intense) factionalism within the now separate parties, confrontation between them and public disapproval of the perceived stand of communists on the border conflict issue seemed to weaken the movement in West Bengal immeasurably. Some leading communists were disillusioned enough to leave their party and various of the demonstrations staged by both parties during 1964 were conspicuously unimpressive. Party membership also felt at this time. (Frando, 1971, p. 129)

However, in the next few months and years central government arrests of 900 CPM members and the imposition of President's Rule in Kerala handed over enormous propaganda opportunities. As the state government's food policy became more and more unsteady the way was open for agitation on concrete, emotive issues. The huge 'bandh' of March, 1966 was but the culmination

of many weeks of hard work, particularly by the CPM, agitating and organising on a whole range of issues likely to arouse bitter feelings against the central and state administrations, and to prepare the ground for rallies and processions that on occasions ended in violence.¹² When the break-away Bengla Congress was formed under Ajoy Mukherjee in early 1966, however, the CPI and CPM differed as to what was the correct approach to take towards it.

The next three to four years, in the course of which the state had the experience of two communist-led ministries (for eight months in 1967; thirteen in 1969-'70), were, it has since become clear, crucial in the formation and establishment of new patterns in Bengali politics. The subsequent analysis will deal with developments during the period, but with the focus on the mobilisation efforts of the communist parties and keeping in mind the Marxist interaction between theory and practice. With this aim in view, the following sub-sections - on the 1967 elections and after them, the question of power; the importance of class in

12. A clear account of the first three months of 1966 in West Bengal is given by Franda, pp. 132-4.

ommunist mobilisation; activities on the peasant and trade union fronts; and the issues raised in the running of a ministry led but not completely dominated by communists - will be by no means strictly chronological in structure. Nevertheless, a picture of the development of mobilisation strategy in these eventful months.

The 1967 Elections and the Question of Power

Paradoxically, the split in the West Bengal Congress Party served initially to perplex rather than fire up the CPM. Should it capitalise on the obviously overwhelming popular discontent and lead a leftist alliance to power? Or should it rather exploit the same discontent with a more 'revolutionary' policy? In 1966 the party members who were to desert the CPM to form a new party in 1969 were still on board; consequently an attempt had to be made to find a way forward acceptable to both factions.¹³ Prior to the 1967 elections, however, the CPI was definitely out of favour, as the electoral strategy in Promode Das Gupta's hands aimed at the total defeat of that party, even at the cost of a continuation of Congress rule in the state. Nevertheless, Franda

13. In June, 1966 at Tanali the decision had been taken to explore the possibility of alliances with all non-Congress forces barring the extreme right. But the views of the 'Left' faction had been backed up by Chinese support and at the National Council meeting at Jullundur in October it was decided to take a much stricter line on electoral alliances: only where the CPM was guaranteed the majority of seats in the alliance would they be entered into.

believes that most of the efforts of the party's 'electoral' leaders were devoted to areas where defeat of the Congress candidate was a good possibility, rather than where the CPI might be reduced to obscurity. It should be added, though, that the CPM also contested seats where the primary - and only practicable - aim was to "strengthen its organisation for revolutionary rather than for electoral purposes." (pp.146-7)

The *CPI* approached the question of electoral alliances in an utterly different frame of mind. It had broken with the CPM partly because of the belief in the centrality to the revolutionary strategy of an alliance with "progressive Congress forces".¹⁴ The CPI chose to see the emerging possibility of alliance with the Bangla Congress as an "upsurge for unity of all Left and democratic forces".¹⁵ The move to form a People's United Left and Democratic Front (PULF) was certainly eased by the fact that leftists were much fewer in CPI ranks than in the CPM allwing the leadership additional flexibility in making alliances; and also that there was room for manoeuvre in

14. Over assessments differ : the Bangla Congress has variously been described as "clearly a party of the jotdar-rich peasants of south-western Bengal" (Chatterjee, 1982, p.94) and "clearly a party of landowners and millowners much like the Congress". (Franda, 1971, p. 145)

15. CPI Election Manifesto, 1967.

in interpreting party strategy as outlined in the programme.¹⁶

In the event, although the erstwhile anti-communists of the Bangla Congress made overtures to the CPM (Franda, 1971, p.145), they had ultimately to be satisfied with a front composed mainly of Forward Bloc and CPI allies. The CPI and CPM faced each other in 38 constituencies, mostly in the industrial region between Calcutta and Durgapur, and in general in areas where the united CPI had been "active and reasonable strong".¹⁷

It seems on analysis of the voting figures in the 1967 elections that the participation of the Bangla Congress had by far the greatest impact at the polls.¹⁸ No matter what the origins of the narrow Congress defeat, however, the non-Congress leaders were so pleased with the Congress debacle

16. "Our programme can only indicate in general terms how the NDF is initiated, how it develops and leads to mass national upsurge of struggle against reactionary and right-wing forces. It cannot make a cut-and-dry scheme for this. The main strategic and class principles of this are indicated..." (*Proceedings of the VIIth Congress of the CPI*, p.20).
17. In other words, "Direct competition between the two CP's... was primarily the result of each party's attempts to retain previous Communist strongholds." (Field & Franda, 1974, p.46).
18. Bangla Congress secured 42 per cent of the additional votes polled in this highvoting election.(Field & Franda, 1974)

that they were quick to expressed their willingness to enter into a coalition government." (Franda, 1971, p. 145) The United Front (UF) government formed comprised fourteen parties (three of which had not been in either of the two anti-Congress electoral fronts) and one independent.

Given the electoral strategy of the CPM at any rate it is understandable that some of the comrades, if not most, were surprised by the election result. The "double-debut" of participating in elections and finding themselves on the threshold of the establishment of power left the party with a not wholly-developed theory of use of government in an Indian state. The predominant reaction of the leadership was one of caution:

"... the democratic movement must be always conscious of the danger of backsliding by those representatives of the vested interests, and of sabotage of the working of democratic measures in the interests of the people, and even of their hatching conspiracies to scuttle these governments and join hands with the Congress to set up reactionary governments both in the states and at the Centre."¹⁹

There were strong pressures from within the party to resist the temptations of power.²⁰ Harekrishna Konar himself soon to be Land and Land Revenue Minister in the new government, had,

19. CPM *Election Review and Party's Tasks*, adopted by the Central Committee in Calcutta, April, 1967, quoted in Franda (1971), p.182.

20. As far back as 1965 Charu Mazumdar had circulated his 'six documents' stating that the Chinese path was the path of liberation for India and that it was necessary to develop a secret party organisation in order to propagate the politics of agrarian revolution (Mukherjee, 1983, p. 42).

after a visit to Beijing a few years before upheld the Chinese argument that the CPSU line of peaceful coexistence and peaceful transition was "sowing illusions".²¹

However, even the dissident wing of the CPM had been divided on the issue of whether to fight the 1967 elections, belying the picture of unity of purpose that sometimes has been drawn. Mukherjee (1983) writes :

"Some, influenced by Charu Mazumdar, argued that participation in the elections would amount to advocating a parliamentary path which they rejected. However, the more prominent view at that time - that the elections would enable them to further the politics of agrarian revolution - was ultimately accepted." (p. 43)²²

But entering the government was quite a different thing and during the first few months of the government's term several underground party journals appeared - all directing their attack against Promode Das Gupta, who had gone along with the decision to enter the ministry, although himself voting against (Franda, 1971, pp. 151-2). By May a Committee to RESist Revisionism within the Party had been formed.

21. Such declarations had been significant in attracting large numbers of Bengali youths to the party at the time of the split.
22. Among others, Jangal Santhal ran for election.

The leadership's decision on participation in a ministry had not been an easy one. Das Gupta had reason to fear a full-scale revolt by the left faction if the CPM joined the ministry, but it was also conceivable that the state party could use the ministries to enhance the militancy of its cadre. Others in the party had anyway been advocating a rapprochement with the CPI since 1964, and as Franda says, "cooperation in the ministries was seen as an excellent starting point."²³ But the decision to participate had to be seen to spring from the broader strategy, and the April session of the Central Committee set about dealing with this. The "particular immediate task" was to consolidate the Party organisation,²⁴ this especially in relation to the CPI :

"It is our work among the people and the correctness of our path that would convince the general mass of the people to swing over to us."

The emerging line was one of 'unity with, struggle against' :

23. Not many months later Basu was writing explicitly of 'The Need for Unity'.

24. *The New Situation and the Party's Tasks* (CPM, 1967).

"We have to combine our exposure of Right Communist ideology, politics and tactics while working with them in the new ministries, in mass organisations, in common people's struggles... We must know how to demarcate and develop our independent ideology, policies and mass base, while working along with them and other petty bourgeois or bourgeois parties."²⁵

There was another section of the Central Committee's report that was extremely significant for the future. On the one hand it was declared that

"the fortunes of the entire party at the present stage of development are closely linked with the successful running of ministries",²⁶

which seemed to indicate a sense of governmental responsibility; on the other, the Central Committee also stated that the United Front governments²⁷ were

"to be treated and understood as instruments of struggle in the hands of the people, more than as Governments that actually possess adequate power, that can materially and a substantially give relief to the people".

In this way they could "win more and more allies for the proletariat and its allies... for Socialism."²⁸ More cautiously it added

25. Quoted in Franda (1971), p. 182.

26. Central Committee *Political Report*, quoted in Mukherjee(1983),p.42.

27. One had been formed in Kerala as well.

28. Quoted in Irani (1968).

"there is an ocean of difference between declaring them straight away as instruments of struggle and the direction to strive [so to use them]".²⁹

Effectively the eventual necessity of full ideological discussion of the CPM position in the state ministries was postponed in favour of the immediate task of organisational consolidation. (Franda, 1971, pp. 182-3 and 209-)

From the CPI's point of view, there was hardly any question of not taking part in the ministry when the Congress defeat became clear. Back in 1964 the idea of giving more prominence to the "nonpeaceful possibilities of transition" had been considered.³⁰ But the Commission on Ideological Controversies rejected such an amendment to the Congress resolution,

"because equating the two possibilities [of peaceful and nonpeaceful transition] in practice paralyses mass initiatives for a peaceful transition and leads to passivity. Besides, we all know from experience that equating the two possibilities is one of the sly methods by which left-sectarians attempt to smuggle in their adventurist tactics in the mass movement."³¹

29. Quoted in Nossiter (1982), p. 245.

30. As had actually been proposed by West Bengal CPI leader Amiya Das Gupta.

31. CPI, *Proceedings of the VIIth Congress*, 'Discussions', p. 16. This is an interesting 'mirror image' to the Naxalites' argument why *not* to take the 'parliamentary path' (see below in text).

More specific to West Bengal, the 1966 bandh movement, as the party summed up at its next Congress at Patna in early 1968, was "unique and unprecedented" and had accentuated the conflicts and differentiation within the bourgeoisie that the CPI had long been identifying.³² In all this the emergence of the Bangla Congress was the "most noteworthy development" and one that demonstrated the correctness of the party's policy of trying to draw congressmen into the democratic movement rather than driving them away.³³

Not only was the CPI committed to exploring the possibilities of peaceful transition; its leadership believed that the CPM's failure to join in an all-embracing electoral alliance was just about all that was preventing "a decisive shift in the balance of political forces to the left." The State Council of the CPI estimated that,

"Had a single united front, including both the communist parties, been formed in West Bengal, instead of two rival fronts, the results might have been comparable to what was achieved in Kerala."³⁴

32. Political Resolution, *Documents of the VIIIth Congress of the CPI*, 0.8.

33. Ibid., pp. 61-63.

34. Quoted in Franda, p. 223.

It referred to the inter-party disputes, rather dismissively, as a "quarrel". The CPI was all set for a share in government. However, as Franda points out (1971, p. 224), the key to making the party's tactical line of "united front from above" work was "the ambiguous series of relationship" that were to be formed with the CPM in order to both court it for the prospective National Democratic Front and defend the CPI's own base and programme.

As noted above, the CPM decision to enter into government served to exacerbate the existing tensions within the party. The origins and development of the peasant revolt in the Naxalbari region have been described elsewhere;³⁵ what needs to be outlined here is relevant parts of the revolutionaries' criticism of CPI and CPM tactics and those parties' response to the challenge. As with the 1964 split, the rebellion of the 'Naxalites' in West Bengal was a catalyst for the further crystallisation of the existing ideological differences (and it had a great impact on the as-yet-unformed modes of operation of the two communist parties in government. An account of the ideological challenge from the left³⁶ is therefore in order.

35. See especially Mohan Ram (1971), Biplab Dasgupta (1974), Ashish K Roy (1975).

36. This usage is conventional; its use here does not convey either approval or disapproval.

After the suppression of the peasant revolt in Darjeeling³⁷ and the expulsion of the District Committee members from the CPM, moves began in earnest to form a new grouping of those thoroughly disillusioned with the parliamentary path. At a public meeting in Calcutta in November 1967 Charu Mazumdar preached armed rebellion and the idea of a new party organised and oriented on Maoist lines was mooted. Despite the efforts of the CPM leadership to head off the Naxalites by shifting the emphasis of the party programme at the Calicut session of the Central Committee³⁸ momentum had already gathered. The All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries was formed on November 13th, 1967, and gained further in strength when the CPM's criticism of both CPSU and CPC for interference in its affairs, at the Burdwan plenum of April, 1968, provoked a walk-out by yet more delegates (Mukherjee, 1983, pp. 43-4). At this point the AICCCR felt justified and able to sever ties with its parent party.

In the May 1968 Resolution on Elections the AICCCR declared bourgeois parliamentary institutions as "having

37. See below, *The peasant front*

38. General Secretary P. Sundarayya even saying that the prominence given to parliamentary procedures should be reversed (Irani, 1971).

already become historically obsolete".³⁹ The experience of the United Front government was shattering the illusions of the people as far as elections and ministries were concerned. As for Naxalbari, it had "dug the grave of parliamentarianism in India". Parliamentarianism was, in fact, equated with revisionism.⁴⁰

However, the newly-formed CPML, which had impressive support in the state of West Bengal, was dismissive of arguments for participation.⁴¹ The preamble to the political resolution adopted at April 1969 inauguration rejected completely the parliamentary path :

"The events of the last eighteen months... we prove that the line of rejecting the parliamentary path and adopting the path of revolutionary struggle is wholly correct. During this period, the people of India have lost faith in all the bourgeois and revisionist parties and are convince of the utter futility of the parliamentary path."⁴²

39. Drawing on Lenin's used the term in '"Left-Wing"Communism - An Infantile Disorder' (see Introduction).

40. Quoted in Mukherjee, pp. 43-4.
But even within the AICCCR there was not full agreement on basic ideological questions. The Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee (formed in September, 1968) had previously operated as the Andhra State Committee of the National organisation. But shortly before the inauguration of the new party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPML), on April 22nd, 1969, the APRCC away on the issue of the ideological stand on elections, regarding the question as a 'tactical' one while the AICCR saw it as 'basic'.

41. Such as the Andhraites'.

42. Quoted in Mukherjee (1983), p. 46.

The communists should "reject the hoax of parliamentarism" and concentrate on bringing about an "immediate revolution... through revolutionary people's war" according to a document of early 1969. Given the "excellent revolutionary situation", it was judged that

"Today the basic task is to liberate the rural areas through revolutionary armed agrarian revolution and encircle the cities and, finally, to liberate the cities and thus complete the revolution throughout the country."

In short, a prescription for action on the Chinese model.

In the first phase of its activities, the CPML concentrated on two fronts : the organisation and education of student groups on campuses in West Bengal; and work in the villages and towns among peasants and labourers. There was a definite effort at integrating the two branches of the party's work, with the Party Programme warning of the dangers of isolation of the "advance section" if it does not encourage the "backward sections" to "participate creatively in the struggle". If this happened the "reactionaries" would take advantage of the situation to themselves organise the "broad sections of the backward masses". (Franda, 1971, pp. 173-4)

As for the 'revisionists', in its assessment of the history of the movement since 1947 the left makes much of the "treachery" of the CPI in following the CPSU's description of

Nehru as progressive; the "comprador-bureaucrat double-dealing" involved in the treatment of Bengali revolutionaries;⁴³ and at that moment the two-faced policy of the United Front government, whose role was, apparently, to serve the CIA, criminals and vested interests, "while pretending to serve the people". Similarly, the May, 1970 programme held that

"... obviously conditions are favourable for armed action [which] would spread like a forest fire... To enter parliamentary politics at a time people are ready to launch an armed struggle to overthrow the State power is *tantamount to betrayal*... Parliamentary activities at this moment... would create illusions about bourgeois democracy and draw people away from the struggle." (Dasgupta, 1974, pp. 121-2 emphasis added)

Whatever the reasons for this emphasis on "treachery" and "betrayal"⁴⁴, these attitudes have been extremely important

43. Both quoted in Franda, p. 175.

44. See Franda's "bhadralokian explanation" (Noissiter, 1988) pp. 174-6 and Ray (1988), p. 123 : Ray identifies the lack of confidence in the leadership's 'socialist morality' as a major provocative factor for the 1964 split (for example on the 'Dange letters' issue). Because the idea of 'betrayal', rather than just ideology, was a central reason for the formation of the CPM, theoretical issues remained unresolved. The issue of morality continued to be contentions within the CPM.

in determining the leftists' relationship with the CPM and CPI and the ways in which the two parties react to their attacks.

The CPM had certainly gone to some lengths to deflect the criticisms both of the CPC and the 'leftists', and to bring the latter back into the fold.⁴⁵ The dismissal of the United Front government on November 21st 1967 by the "notoriously anti-communist" Governor Dharma Vira, who seemed to have been put in the post expressly for the purpose (Nossiter, 1988, p. 132) could only add fuel to the Left's fire. No state plenum took place prior to the crucial national plenum at Burdwan in April 1968 and there were allegations that selection of delegates had been rigged to keep out the leftists. (Nossiter, 1982, p. 250).

The Politbureau acknowledged the seriousness of the disagreement which went to the extent of questioning the Party Programme,⁴⁶ and severely criticised "Left deviationists" :

45. Irani (1971) goes so far as to allege that in its efforts to escape the charge of revisionism during 1967 the leadership banned any public criticism of the Chinese party.

46. 'Ideological' Debate Summed up by Politbureau quoted in Franda (1971) p. 210.

"It is amazing that our critics can exaggerate the political crisis to the point of equating it with a revolutionary crisis".⁴⁷

At that moment President's Rule was being enforced in the state and even if the communist movement were to be instrumental in creating an anarchic situation the prospects of its spreading to other states whose political and social development was so different was not very great. In the words of the Politbureau,

"It is precisely because we... have a *centralised and unified regime* in the form of the Indian Union, that it is incumbent upon us to study concretely the contradictions that form the basis for revolutionary crisis and the disintegration of the ruling classes, their parties and their centralised state apparatus... Refusal to undertake this study, the tendency to pooh-pooh these conflicts [between members of the ruling classes] as of no consequence, the facile idea that by pointing them out the mass struggles get diverted, and at the same time indulge in the tall talk of revolutionary situation and armed struggle is symptomatic of infantile phrase-mongering, not of a serious Marxist-Leninist attitude to the study of contradictions."⁴⁸

The matter of relating the dispute and the CPM's position to the international debate could also not be avoided, particularly given the constant citing by the rebels of Chinese precedent. At the Tenali meeting of the Central Committee of the party in 1966 the announcement was made that

47. Quoted in Franda (1977), pp 180-1.

48. Ibid, p. 181.

Committee of the party in 1966 the announcement was made that the party was "not committed" to any of the "authoritative pronouncements of fraternal parties" to be published for discussion.⁴⁹

Evidently, the CPM was not merely reacting to the attacks launched upon it from one direction or another; its practice had a structure of its own, which developed during the United Front ministries.⁵⁰ Prety theoretician Biplab Das Gupta (1973) summed up the differences between the Naxalites and the CPM attitudes to parliament as follows: the former believed parliamentary politics were to be avoided because participation led to illusions; the latter saw it as a tactical question and not one of principle - although the main fields of work were on the mass fronts, the parliaments could be used for propaganda (and were not an end in themselves).

A succinct and influential summary of the emerging line, although not by a Bengali, was that by E.M.S. Namboodripad

49. Ibid, p. 209

50. Bhabani Sen Gupta (1979) later described the approach over the period 1967-71 as "the Leninist method of parliamentary politics" (p. 44).

in a 1968 lecture⁵¹:

"The only criterion on which Marxism-Leninism bases itself when it selects a particular method for bringing about social transformations is whether it will serve the purpose... while Marxist-Leninist will not have that pathetic faith in the efficacy of the bourgeois parliamentary democratic system which was characteristic of social democracy, they are not allergic to the system of parliamentary democracy, as their enemies accused them of."

Having quoted the relevant section of the Party Programme, he continued :

"...so long as this system continues, it is in the interest of the working class and the working people to so utilise the institutions built up on the basis of [the Indian] Constitution as to further consolidate and strengthen the struggles of the working people for basic social transformations."

Nevertheless,

"... the Party has no illusion that the working class and democratic movements will be permitted to use the parliamentary democratic institutions to such an extent, and for such a length of time, that fundamental social transformations can be carried out through the much-talked-of 'Parliamentary path'."

For once the class interests of the ruling classes are threatened the "luxury of parliamentary democracy" can no longer be permitted by them. At that point a new dimension to the approach comes in :

51. 'The Republican Constitution in the Struggle for Socialism', (Namboodiripad, 1968), pp. 2-4.

"It is of utmost importance that parliamentary and democratic institutions are defended in the interest of the people against such threats, and that such institutions are skilfully utilised in combination with extra-parliamentary activities."

Although not unaware of the limitations of the Constitution the CPI did not face the same need to convince large numbers of its cadre to remain loyal as did the CPM. The Political Resolution for its Eighth Congress at Patna in Feb., 1968 discussed the limited nature of state powers and the "serious impediments" arising from the fact of Congress control at the centre.⁵² State Governors were referred to as "instruments of interference" - as were members of the All-India Services - at work "undermining" parliamentary democracy.⁵³

However, even the "centre's attack on democracy" in West Bengal did not discourage the CPI as far as the potential of state governments was concerned. Even the U.P. government (dominated by the Jan Sangh) was a "weapon in the hands of the masses... in the context of sharpening class struggles".⁵⁴

52. CPI, VIIIth Congress *Documents*, p. 25

53. Ibid., p. 74.

54. Ibid., p. 106.

Fifteen months later, in response to the formation of the CPML, the CPI weekly *New Age* expressed the fear that the event would carry splittism and disruption a step further and that Naxalite activities would "mean the dissipation of some revolutionary energy into wholly wrong and self-defeating channels" For CPI leader Rajeshwar Rao,

"There is not a ghost of a chance for that type of a long drawnout armed guerilla warfare which went on in China for 22 years to succeed in India. Here... any revolution can succeed only under the direct leadership of the proletariat, with cities as the leading centre of revolution."⁵⁵

Moreover, the Naxalite activities seemed bound to provoke the kind of crackdown that could make the CPI suffer too, as well as helping the enemy to "confuse and divert the people's attention". Along the same lines as Namboodiripad, CPI leader Mohit Sen cited as the "basic tenet" of recent communist experience,

"that the ideology does not commit... the revolutionaries in any country to only one form of revolution, any one type of struggle."⁵⁶

But the party was not oblivious to the need to guard against the sins of which the Naxalites and CPM accused them. The Patna resolution had noted examples of a "right opportunist attitude" and the "exaggeration of... the potentialities" of the democratic elements of the strategy.⁵⁷

55. Both quoted in Franda (1971), pp. 238-9.

56. Ibid, p. 240

57. *Documents*, VIIIth Congress, p. 120.

Class and Mobilisation

Soon after the formation of the United Front government in 1967 the CPM newspaper 'People's Democracy' declared that since the "levers of economic power" were in the hands of the capitalists and landlords, the communist movement should see to it that "every issue from tramfare to people's food will be arena of class struggle".⁵⁸ In 1969 Ranadive summed up the aim of the second United Front government as "to unleash the discontent of the people rather than to give relief".⁵⁹ Such declarations are in a familiar idiom of class conflict but need to be 'unpacked' in their specific context : which classes; struggles over what; for what goals?

After the assumption of power in 1967, according to a contemporary CPM assessment,⁶⁰ a "firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry" must be brought about, by a tactical approach involving hard and aggressive work among workers and peasants in direct and unstinting competition with other parties. The policies of the CPM on the peasant and trade

58. Quoted in Subramanian, p. 186.

59. Ibid, p. 177.

60. CPM *The New Situation and Party's Tasks* (1967).

union fronts as they unfolded from 1967 onwards can be seen in this light.

However, from the start the mobilisation policy of the CPM showed striking flexibility. In assessing the 'Tasks on the Kisan Front' the Central Committee held that "different sections of the peasantry play different roles in the revolution", implying that indeed all classes in the countryside had a place in the CPM's alliance :

"The agricultural labourers and poor peasants who constitute seventy per cent of the rural households and are subjected to ruthless exploitation by landlords, by their very class position in present-day society, will be basic allies of the working class. The middle peasantry, too, are the victims of depredation of usurious capital... and landlord domination in rural life so affects their social position in innumerable ways so as to make them reliable allies in the democratic front."

Even the rich peasants, feeling the effects of heavy taxation and inflation, could be brought into the front, despite their having benefited from Congress land reforms.

Not only did the breadth of the potential alliance give scope for party activists; there was flexibility according to region, too. It would be "incorrect" to "make a rigid pattern of organisation for... all states and regions", particularly as to "*whether*, where and how the agricultural

labourers are to be organised."⁶¹ (emphasis added)

It appears that at this crucial juncture, when the party had explicitly decided on a policy involving competition for potential support in the face of similar efforts by other United Front parties, it was vital to leave local units free to take a line that would ensure maximum support, whether it be taking in influential rich and middle peasants as brokers or leading movements to seize land with the connivance of the state government and administration. (Franda, 1971, p. 184)⁶²

In 1968 the AIKS President A.K. Gopalan may have felt that

"reluctance to take up their [agricultural labourers'] specific demands, fearing that this will drive the rich and middle peasants away from us, will have to be given up",⁶³

but the CPM's position was not so straightforward.

61. *Tasks on the Kisan Fronts*, Quoted in Franda (1971) p. 184. This problem was an old one. A separate organisation for the khetmajoor (agricultural labourers) was never created even up to the time of the AIKS split in 1967, despite the khetmajoor's providing the "main force behind all the [peasant] movements" in the state (Ghatak, 1978).

62. The Darjeeling radicals stand in stark contrast to this: their campaign as CPM candidates, "far from appealing to as many sections of the electorate as possible... clearly and deliberately alienated a large section." (Mukherjee, 1983, p. 43).

63. Quoted in Franda, p. 77.

Indeed in 1966 the party criticised 'rightists' for having failed to give the "correct class-orientation to the work on the peasant front,"⁶⁴ and a call to the party to

"undertake the political tasks of formulating the concrete demands and slogans of the peasant and agricultural labour movement as well as the organisational task of throwing the entire party cadre in the rural areas into the job of building mass organisation of poor peasants and agricultural labourers."

But an experienced observer could later conclude that vigorous organisation of the landless agricultural labourers had "never been seriously attempted" (Chatterjee, 1982, pp. 94-5).

As described in the CPI party programme, the "central slogan" was the National Democratic Front, involving a heavy emphasis on the need to "forge unity" with progressive Congress forces. The Central Executive Committee had earlier conceded that no one tactical line was universally applicable. In West Bengal, however, the party's attempts at gleaning the support of all groups and classes other than the monopoly bourgeoisie have come up against the formidable obstacle of having to make inroads into the established bases of other parties, reinforced by patronage. (Franda, 1971, p. 223-4). In these circumstances

64. *Tasks on the Kisan Front*, resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the party in October, quoted in Ghosh (1981), p. 46.

it has been difficult to formulate and adhere to a policy of mobilisation that is concerned with class as opposed to party alliances. Back in 1962 Bhowani Sen (now with the CPI) had expressed the opinion that socialism could be reached through the development of co-operative farming, facilitated by bourgeois democratic land reforms.⁶⁵ But a CPI academic had to admit in 1976 that slow agricultural growth and increasing numbers of labourers could produce unrest but no stable political basis for a "breakthrough" (Sengupta, 1976)

As the realisation of this sank in, the CPI line was arrived at by what Franda calls a "series of Subtle manoeuvres". (p. 224) The National Council's assessment⁶⁶ of the situation after the 1969 election bore the marks of this. It noted how the earlier "vague anticongressism" of the people had turned into a "positive attitude towards the formation of a progressive, democratic government". The masses had been "enthused" by the United Front as an alternative to Congress in West Bengal. The lessons of the elections were that the CPI had put up a "good show" only where its campaign was "firmly based on the toiling

65. Sen, *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India* (1962), p. 274.

66. *Review of Midterm Elections and Our Tasks and Resolutions*, adopted by the National Council of the CPI, 5-12 April, 1969.



people"; only then could it win over allies from the other classes on the basis of its strength. Yet the document continued by declaring that "the problem of unity of the entire peasantry must receive our earnest attention". The tactics of 'two-pronged struggle' adopted ("overcoming both the Rightist and ultraleftist trends") indicated the CPI's efforts to develop an approach that could deal with the variable of both party and class.

The first United Front government itself pledged that the government "will not suppress democratic and legitimate struggles" and that it would "reorient the executive and police in a manner consistent with the democratic aspirations of the people."⁶⁷ This was perceived as a sharp break with previous practice and one that would leave the way open for the toleration and even encouragement by the government of direct class conflict. However, towards the end of 1969, when the government was running short of funds for its commitments, the CPM Jyoti Basu was reported to have commented that the government could no longer continue to "please all sections of the people". This comment, coming mid-way through the tenure of the second United Front (UF) ministry, and whatever it was meant to imply about the class bases of the CPM's coalition

67. Fourteenth Point of the 18-Point Programme of the United Front.

partners, demonstrates that the picture of class and mobilisation under the United Fronts was a complex one.

The Peasant Front

To ensure the full success of the tasks it had set itself after the 1967 elections the CPM would ideally have liked to secure the portfolios of Land, Labour and Police, so important for determining government policy on the peasant and trade union fronts. However the party's 43 seats out of the Front's 141 only carried weight enough to give it the Land Ministry out of these three (as well as the Deputy Chief Ministership and one other post out of a total of 18 in the Cabinet). The Land and Land Revenue Minister, Harekrishna Konar, was a major peasant leader in Burdwan district and supposedly the "leader of the left radicals in Bengal". (Ghosh, 1981)

The new government's policy, announced Konar, was to be to "recover land involved in 'benami' and other transactions with popular cooperation", while police in the countryside were told "not to suppress the democratic and legitimate struggles of the people".⁶⁸ In some areas, however, what started

68. As had been promised in the 18-Point Programme.

out as movements with the full backing of the Front parties, or at least the most militant of them, appeared to get out of control. The agitation in the Naxalbari area of Darjeeling district was the most prominent of these; indeed it occupied the attention of the United Front government for the whole of the summer of 1967.

Ironically it seems to have originated in a plan decided on just before the 1967 elections to start a massive agitation in the northern districts - with the support of the CPM leadership - as a means to harass the new government, which at that time was expected to be, again, Congress.

Once the CPM had entered that new government its leaders felt at best ambivalent about the agitation, which the local Krishak Samity was determined to go ahead with. At first, as the organisation went about its work, mobilising cadres from the rural poor to form a militant vanguard for the movement, using processions to consolidate their support, and seizing land, the police held back. But when events took a violent turn in May, action was taken : over a thousand arrests were made with the help of the additional 1500 police sent by the government in July. Within three weeks most of the leaders of the agitation were in jail.

By the end of July 1967 Konar had thus been made fully aware of the need to control the militancy of the movements for the redistribution of land that the government's pronouncements had been instrumental in sparking off. There was an attempt at a new synthesis : land distribution by government efforts (Konar had already initiated investigation of benami land and now set up Land Advisory Committees including lawyers, local governmental and party leaders, and peasant leaders) but

"strengthened and supplemented by the conscious and organised participation of the peasants and the people at large."⁶⁹

Konar claimed that by the end of the first United Front government 248,000 acres of land had been redistributed (mostly held over from the previous, Congress, ministry)⁷⁰. The government-stipulated share of the crop to be given to share-croppers was altered from 60 per cent to 75 per cent but registration remained low (Datta, 1988). In any case, by late 1967 there was a new preoccupation : the threat of dismissal by the Centre. Konar announced that the "struggle has reached a new phase" - that of the defence of democracy. (Sengupta, 1979), p. 73)

69. From *Mainstream*, quoted in Sengupta (1979).

70. Although this was only three per cent of total arable land in the state.

During the time between the dismissal of the first Front ministry and the 1969 mid-term elections the peasant organisations of the various parties continued to be active. There was even some attempt at improving the organisation of agricultural workers but although the CPI did found the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union in September 1968 no sustained action was achieved in West Bengal and the organisation remained "weak and ramshackle". (Ghatak, 1978) Nevertheless the pressure paid off to some extent as the Minimum Wage Act began to be enforced (zones and rates were fixed) despite the paucity of Inspectors.

The 1969 elections, according to the CPI National Council, were "preceded by a mighty and militant mass struggle", specifically against central intervention, strengthening the unity of the left and democratic forces.⁷¹ In relations between CPI and CPM the struggles against the centre "made the difference between 1967 and 1969", declared the CPI.⁷²

71. CPI, *Review of Midterm Elections* (April 1969), p. 7. There had been unprecedented co-operation of the non-Congress forces at the polls, the United Front this time comprising all but one of the parties that had taken part in the first Front government.

72. Ibid, p. 25.

But when the threat from the Centre receded, it temporarily, relations once again deteriorated. In 1969 Konar, again Land and Land Revenue Minister, announced the supersession of the Land Advisory Committees (now stuffed with Congress appointees), to be replaced by a new approach. District Land Reform officers were to consult with "representatives of local peasants' organisations" on the possibility of new legislation. In the meantime some advances in implementation could be made "if the whole administrative machinery is geared up and if proper and timely measures are taken at all levels".⁷³

The Land Ministry's policy was in keeping with CPM strategy. The results of the 1969 election (giving the CPM enough seats to demand both Land and Police portfolios - as well as that of Labour) gave the party the opportunity to put its programme of peasant mobilisation into full practice. As Konar told Sengupta (1971),

"The crucial point in our programme was to allow the peasant masses to do things on their own initiative."
(pp. 73-4)

Almost immediately after the 1969 elections rural organisations began once again to mobilise peasants on a large scale to seize benami and other land in excess of the ceiling limits, in March explicitly encouraged by a CPM Secretariat directive. This was -----

73. Quoted in Franda (1971), p. 186.

what Bhabani Sengupta (1979) later labelled the CPM's own "non-Chinese way of mobilising the poorer elements of the peasantry" (p. 44). Konar himself later described the evolution by the party of new "revolutionary tactics using the parliamentary method for waging the class struggle" by "simultaneous use of legal and extra-legal means". (p.54) But there were also voices at the time calling for restraint. Basu warned that

"the Government would support all forms of legitimate struggle of the people, but could not uphold unlawful actions." (p.187)

Other Front parties were also very active. In April the National Council of the CPI had called for its members and peasant activists to

"wholeheartedly plunge themselves in the... campaign [for democratic norms] by rousing and mobilising vast masses of the peasantry"⁷⁴

and a high level of activity was necessary in order to protect the party from the inroads the CPM was attempting to make into its support.

74. *Review of Midterm Elections*, p.39.

Konar warned the CPM's UF partners against "indiscriminate acts of seizure" if they had "no mass base and little idea about land records",⁷⁵ but while this tells us both about the CPM leader's views on the prerequisites for successful land seizure and about his opinion of the qualifications of the other parties for the purpose, it was of little effect as a discouragement.

The consequences were on the one hand an escalation of clashes between United Front parties at levels from the state Cabinet to the grass roots where two or more party-linked groups often attempted to seize and distribute the same plot of land; and on the other the banding together of landlords and fishery-owners exploring ways to protect their interests, through court injunctions, financial blackmail of tenants or use of traditional status. In addition there were some quite successful attempts by landholders to infiltrate Front parties, adding to the strains within the government that were anyway developing by early 1970.

In keeping with its policy of guarding its organisations distinct from those of other parties, the CPM rejected the suggestion that local 'people's committees' be set up to prevent violent clashes. Although the reason given was that such

75. Quoted Franda (1971), p. 187.

committees should "emerge from a mass movement", the party subsequently ordered its own local units to set up People's Committees composed of CPM activists (Franda, 1971, p. 188).⁷⁶

The *CPI's* discussions of events on the rural scene were marked by the political effects of government policy and CPM tactics. In April of 1969 the call of the (CPI-led Kisan Sabha) had been for work for united action on the peasant front: to lead to united organisation. But by November a State Council resolution was complaining of the emergence of "Left adventurist and disruptive forces", which had for some time necessitated a two-front struggle by the party's supporters, against jotedars and other vested interests on the one hand and disruptionists on the other.⁷⁷ The United Front government had continued the Krishak Sabha, strengthened the peasant movement in the state and intensified class struggle but the CPM's attitude left a lot to be desired.

As earlier, the CPI Front's own emphasis was on a broad alliance. Labourers, sharecroppers and landless peasants, being a majority of the rural population, "are destined to become the

76. In this way the party retained its organisational purity while flaunting its revolutionary integrity.

77. Quoted in Franda (1971), p. 225.

vanguard of the movement" but nevertheless "for their own interest they should rope in middle and rich peasants." The Kri hak Sabha sought to reassure the better-off sections with rational formulae for land distribution, agreed procedures for endowing the right of ownership, and machinery for the arbitration of disputes between local party leaders and peasant activists.

This conciliatory approach, however, failed to win over the CPM. When the "unity talks" of mid-1969 ended in ignominious failure, the National Council formalised the 'two-pronged' strategy, which seemed all the more relevant as the national split in Congress became more evident.

The Trade Union Front

The new Labour Minister in 1967 was Subodh Banerjee. His party, the Socialist Unity Centre (SUC) warned against of the "parliamentary illusion" and claimed to approach "every question from the point of view of accelerating the course of revolutionary preparation". More than this, the capture of state governments, for the SUC, would "create favourable conditions for revolutionary preparations".⁷⁸ As the only

78. Irani, (1971), section on 'The Proletariat and Industry'.

Minister from his party in the United Front government, Banerjee's aims in his Department were clear.

The new Minister's labour policy was to be "a break with the past, with the anti-people and bureaucratic policies and approach of the Congress". Its aim was

"to enlist the people's cooperation for the implementation of policies rather than depend on the administrative machinery."⁷⁹

Indeed since the relevant sections of the Labour Department were to be reorganised "on a more democratic basis" and the police were not to intervene in the case of "legitimate" action by unions the way was clear for the rapid realisation of the above goal. Other of Banerjee's pronouncements were that layoffs were to be discouraged without government approval and that the Ministry would set up bodies to "solve industrial disputes as expeditiously as possible".⁸⁰ Meanwhile, whereas under the Congress government trade unions of government employees were not recognised and known communist party members were asked to leave the service, the United Front granted recognition to (communist-led) union of government employees and reinstated

79. Ibid

80. Ajoy Dasgupta, 'Bengal : A New Approach to People's Problems', *New Age*, April 16th, 1967.

what would previously have been labelled as "known security risks".⁸¹

The response to the new policy was swift. On the one hand the mere formation of the Front had "encouraged labour to press its demands with increased vigour and confidence",⁸² on the other, *Mainstream* less than a month later accused employers of trying to pull down the ministry by starting "an offensive" of layoffs.⁸³ Whoever was responsible for the deteriorating situation, there was undoubtedly a "scramble" to unionise workers. Between March and September, 591 new trade unions were registered in the state.⁸⁴ All indices of industrial unrest touched record highs in 1967.⁸⁵

The theoretical guidelines of the CPM in dealing with and if possible taking control of the new situation had been outlined before. According to a 1966 resolution⁸⁶ the ultimate aim was to organise the working class to play its historic political role by instigating within it the development

-
- 81. Irani (1971), Section on 'The First 50 Days'.
 - 82. Quoted in Vaid (1972) *Times of India* editorial, 3 March 1967.
 - 83. 'The Trade Union Movement after the Pools', *Mainstream*, April 1st, 1967.
 - 84. *Economic and Political Weekly*, cited in Franda, p. 194.
 - 85. See the table of state government figures given on p. 193, Ibid.
 - 86. *Tasks on the Trade Union Front*, Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPM, 1966, quoted in Irani (1971) Chapter on 'The Proletariat and Industry'.

of a "socialist consciousness" that would focus on the necessity of "the struggle against the state of the capitalist class which [the worker] must replace". For the party this meant a "continuous political battle" to lead the workers from elementary trade union consciousness to this higher consciousness.

Tactically the CPM's aim was "united front from below"; indeed the Central Committee has referred to this as the "main pillar of our tactics". To make use of the "powerful urge for unity in the masses" and reinforce and direct it, the need was for "pressure from below" to prevent "reformist and revisionist leaders" from weakening the struggle.⁸⁷ As on the peasant front, a broad alliance must be forged, but without compromising organisational independence :

" The effort for united front from below includes constant appeals to all sections of workers... It consists of joint actions at the base, in factories."

The idea is to organise

"a disciplined working class with revolutionary socialist consciousness, drawing it nearer the Party, with its best elements joining the Party in hundreds, enabling the class as a whole to play its historic political role in the revolutionary struggle."

87. *Tasks on the Trade Union Front*, 1967, quoted in Franda, p.191.

However, the existence of other well-established left parties in the West Bengal industrial arena and the CPM's weakness in the communist-led All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) posed immense challenges. In the words of the Central Committee:

"We must constantly bear in mind that... we ourselves form a far from dominating and leading force in the organised trade unions, the other sections being stronger than us in many industries and equal to us in some industries."

It has therefore been necessary, and West Bengal is the best example of this, to pursue "the real bolshevik method of mobilising the masses", i.e. militancy in disputes but

"supplemented by offers of united front from the top which at times is a pre-condition of united front from below."⁸⁸

A measure of the success the party had using these tactics is demonstrated by the fact that between March and September of 1967 there were 170 new trade unions registered affiliated with the CPM (Franda, 1971, p. 194).⁸⁹

88. Ibid., p. 192.

89. In the same period there were 140 gains by the CPI.

The phenomenon that symbolised industrial relations and the government's attitude towards them more than any other in 1967 was the 'gherao'. This tactic - where a number of persons surround a room, building or just one person to prevent him from moving until certain demands are met - was according to one contemporary observer, "never far below the surface in public consciousness in West Bengal" during this period.⁹⁰

When Banerjee announced that the police were not to interfere in legitimate disputes, subsequently formalising this direction by sending out the first 'gherao circular' at the end of March, the number of gheraos shot up : over a thousand in the first six months of the ministry, according to one survey. (De & Srivastava, 1967). Although the United Front Cabinet and the Direction Committee or 'Super Cabinet' seem to have been unanimous that there should be no police interference in genuine democratic trade union activities the parties disagreed on two major issues : the implementation of this principle ; and the judgement of the bonafides of the

90. A.P. Aggarwal, commenting on the industrial relations scene in 1968.

gherao movement. Lacking a real consensus the Cabinet effectively authorised Banerjee to himself certify the situations where intervention by the police would be appropriate. By all accounts the Minister was very accessible, but the informal procedure that evolved⁹¹ made for arbitrariness in implementation.

By the time the employers had gone to court over the issue of the legality of the tactic the latest divisions within the Front were revealing themselves. The communist parties supported the Labour Minister in his efforts to evade the court injunctions that started arriving in June. CPM leader Ranadive called the gherao "a perfectly legitimate weapon - a trade union weapon of protest and action" and CPI General Secretary Dange saw it as :

"a legitimate weapon of workers in their fight against capitalists [who had] created a situation in which workers are forced to launch struggles for the defence of their interests." (Ghosh, 1971, p.69)

although he was not so happy with the violent aspects of the movement (Vaid, 1972). In May a still-formally-united AITUC (headed by Dange) had its delegates walk out of a central Standing Labour Committee on the issue of gheraos. When it failed even-handedly to condemn violence of workers or management.

91. Banerjee, when he felt that a gherao was no longer merely a labour-management dispute, would inform Ajoy Mukherjee, who, as Minister for Police, would send in the forces of law.

The gherao, able to be conducted by a ministry group even against majority reluctance, had special attraction for the SUC. Yet it was the communist parties, and particularly the CPM, that made the greatest gains under Banerjee's regime. Well under half of the cases of gherao between March and August 1967 were instigated by CPI or CPM trade unions, despite the fact that these were in the majority. CPM union leaders did take advantage of the situation to organise militant gheraos but always attempted to remain in control of the movements they were leading. Thus when the courts had annulled the government's second 'gherao circular' in August, the CPM and to a lesser extent the CPI was in a good position to consolidate.

That they were able to do so was demonstrated in the 1969 elections. Field Franda (1974) report that the CPM had come out well in 1967 in industrial areas and in 1969 the party was found to have achieved much increased support among labour unions in the Calcutta industrial belt.⁹² As well as maintaining its dominant position among workers in the restive engineering industry its unions had made inroads into the INTUC and SSP strongholds in the jute factories and coal fields. (Ghosh, 1981, p.69).

92. So reported Ashok Mitra, quoted in Franda, p. 195.

In the second UF government the party, now with 80 seats, managed to secure the post of Labour Minister (in addition to eight others). Under the new Labour regime of Krishnapada Ghosh the approach was essentially the same except for the significant policy of establishing a 'one-union-in-one-establishment' formula, which, as the CPM was the most militant and best-organised party at the base and Ghosh incharge of the election machinery, could only have worked in favour of the CPM.⁹³ Inter-union clashes increased become more frequent as both CPI and CPM worked overtime trying to capture the unions of minor parties but the CPM was by far the most aggressive, in keeping with its stated intentions. A survey in May by the CPI recorded ten 'captures' by the CPM in the previous three months, and 60 other cases where the struggle for control was still in progress. The CPI also noted with concern the fact that its rival had made efforts to set up unions where CPI-linked organisations already existed in over 200 industrial establishments. (Franda, 1971, p.195)

93. The CPI supported the policy since it was also strong among unions and Bangla Congress was persuaded by harassed management groups that this system was by far the easiest to deal with.

In fact it was this issue which split the AITUC, which had somehow remained united until late 1969. Although the CPM was very much in a minority at the national level, its unions had control of the state BPTUC. Since 1967 the latter organisation had been busy recognising and working with all the new communist-led unions that had come into being, but in the numerous cases where a new CPM union had been formed in an establishment where an AITUC-affiliated body was already in place, the national organisation refused to recognise them. When the Secretariat threatened to discipline officers connected with such 'rival unions' the CPM anticipated an attack on its representation on the General Council, and its supporters left to form their own trade union centre. No mere personality or factional conflict, this dispute developed as a direct result of the mobilisational approaches advocated by the two parties and especially the CPM's determination to secure organisational independence and control as part of its long-term strategy.

The Use of Government and Relations Within the Front

As was clear from their respective party programmes, the CPI and CPM had rather different beliefs as to what could be accomplished by a Front government in power at the state level. In 1969, while lamenting the aggressive tactics of the CPM vis-a-vis its partners, the CPI leader Bhowani Sen stated in

1969 that despite the aggressive tactics of the CPM vis-a-vis its partners,

"the United Front has at least introduced that amount of democracy which makes the mighty strike struggles take place and even succeed. The arrogance of capitalist owners has been broken in many cases and thus industrial crisis resolved to a very great extent. The food situation is very much improved. Every department is yielding better results than before..."⁹⁴

The party was in agreement with the Bangla Congress that the Front had "achieved more for the working class and the peasantry than had ever been achieved before."⁹⁵ From this statement it may be gathered that Sen attached much importance to administrative efficiency as well as class justice.

CPM leader Namboodiripad also spoke in 1968 of trying to "utilise the institutions" available in parliamentary democracy "to further consolidate and strengthen the struggle of the working people for basic social transformations."⁹⁶ (Namboodiripad, 1968, p. 3) Ranadive's assertion in June, 1969 that the task of the UF governments was to unleash discontent and not to give

94. Quoted in Franda, p. 195.

95. Ibid, p. 198

96. This statement leaves scope for different interpretations; Sengupta (1979) assesses the policy adopted by the National Council of the party as a "revolutionary" politics designed to "wreck the system from within." (p. 73)

relief pointed in the same direction. Yet earlier in the year the Central Committee had stated⁹⁷ that during periods of Front government at the state level, the party should

"... undertake to expand the democratic rights of the people, undertake legislation for recognition of trade unions, settle outstanding wage disputes in industries, take measures to provide employment or unemployment relief to the workers and educated youth; pass immediate radical agrarian legislation for land distribution and stopping of eviction, and grant homestead land, fair wages and gratuitous relief during lean seasons to the agricultural labourers."

This is much more reminiscent of its rival's approach.

To explain the contradictions apparently involved in holding of both these positions one should understand the degree to which the Centre-state dimension pre-occupied the CPM. The success in the electoral and governmental fields of Kerala and West Bengal state parties were to be "rallying points for the fighting masses all over India". Namboodiripad spoke of the "serious danger" of the consequences of Congress handling of Centre-state relations; he was well aware of the propaganda value to be wrung out of this (Namboodiripad, 1968, p. 16).

97. Resolution Published in *People's Democracy*, 20, April 1969 after the elections.

As Nossiter (1982) writes of the other major stronghold,

"the state should administer Kerala but agitate against the Centre at every opportunity." (p. 246)

But the most visible use of government made by United Front partners, and not just the communist parties, was that of patronage, or furtherance of partisan interests.⁹⁸

The experience of power, it seems, helped the smaller leftist parties both psychologically and politically : Subodh Banerjee and the SUC provides a good example of this phenomenon at the ministerial level. Similarly the importance the CPM placed on securing the portfolios of Land, Labour and Police (in which they were successful in the second United Front government) indicates the centrality of these to the implementation of their strategy.

Indeed, from the reaction of its partners one would draw the conclusion that the CPM was certainly the one making the most gains from its use of the ministries as well as from the conditions on the ground. The CPI accused the CPM of "hegemonism"

98. The RSP admitted that "no UF constituent can be fully absolved of the charge of partisan use of its Ministries (Franda, 1971, p. 199).

and believed it was determined to pursue a policy of exterminating the United Front in order to build itself up as the only alternative to the Congress. Its control of key ministries in the government only reinforced this impression. In the 1971 mid-term poll the party gained an extra 31 seats, achieving a "landslide" in Hooghly and Burdwan, due to the rural land appropriation movement under the UF governments and the strenuous efforts made to strengthen the party organisation. (Ghosh, 1981)⁹⁹

However, these benefits were not immediately obvious during the tenure of the ministries, when day-to-day concerns intruded, more often than not connected with interparty relations and ideological or policy disagreements. In Kerala "there were basic ideological differences between the two parties in almost every single issue of policy during the tenure of the UF Ministry" (Subramanian, 1983, p. 179); so also it was in West Bengal.

99. Franda (1971) sums up the value of the tactical line pursued by the CPM in the period : pursued by "it has united both the electoral and organisational wings of the party, if only temporarily, behind militant mass movements that have been effective in strengthening state party organisations. By concentrating on limited programs designed to secure greater benefits for peasants and workers..., and by creating at least the preconditions for a confrontation with the Union government on center-state issues, the CPM hopes to... solidify the hold of the party on the electorate in West Bengal and attempt to gain new organisational bases in other Indian states as it seeks to radicalise the population in CPM strongholds." (p. 207)

Due to its own assessment of the situation in West Bengal, the *CPI* was not disposed to stress such differences and instead made efforts to patch them up, asserting throughout 1967 that the Front was "truly united" and playing down the conflicts between its supporters and those of the CPM. The party worked hard for the unity of "Left and Democratic forces" in the 1969 elections and was instrumental in bringing about striking anti-Congress unity at the polls. Repeatedly calling for "united action" or even "united organisation" by the peasant movement, the *CPI* initiated unity talks with the CPM in June 1969 that were seen as of decisive importance - but these came to nothing and relations worsened when Bangla Congress organised a satyagraha against CPM violence and the Mini Front (excluding the CPM and ultimately joined by Congress(R)) was formed in Kerala. The *CPI* West Bengal State Council did declared in November that the party had no desire to topple the existing United Front government in West Bengal, but it also accused the CPM of "super-bossism, misuse of administrative machinery in narrow partisan interest, and political gangsterism", and of "adopting the weapon of physical annihilation of the cadres of other parties of the UF".¹⁰⁰

100. Quoted in Franda (1971), pp. 226 Bhowani Sen also produced a pamphlet entitled 'CPM's Fight Against the United Front'.

Yet the same statement asserted the "supreme need for unity of all Leftist and democratic forces, including the CPI(M), because such unity is "the surest guarantee of replacing Congress rule at the Centre." Comparison of data for the 1967 and 1969 elections show the contribution made to communist success by the United Front, not solely in terms of the simple mechanics of vote transfers, but also of greater credibility of the anti-Congress candidates (Field & Franda, 1974, pp. 51-9).

The conflict developing between the two communist parties was a powerful catalyst for factionalism within and disputes among the other parties of the United Front. In the first Front ministry there had been a 'United Front Committee' with an all-embracing membership to deflect the problem of the smaller parties, not having representation in the Cabinet. In the second it was decided to enlarge the Cabinet instead. But since the institutionalisation of debate was diametrically opposed to CPM tactics¹⁰¹ such measures were never very productive of peace.

101. As was demonstrated in Deputy Chief Minister Basu's comment that he "nothing wrong" in criticising the decisions taken by his own government; and in the bypassing of the Chief Minister in the matter of the takeover of the Calcutta Tramways (Irani, 1971).

The CPM's reaction to opposition from its partners to its activities and attitude varied. Throughout the second ministry, it juggled its desire to increase and demonstrate its strength as the real alternative to Congress with declarations of the need for unity to defeat Congress or defend the state against a central offensive. Franda believes that

"To a certain extent the inconsistency of the party has been the result of a lack of inner-party discipline, but such indiscipline has in turn stemmed from the party's interest in maintaining organisational flexibility while implementing its policy." (1971, p. 199)

The party has sometimes given as good as it got in the way of criticism, for example in accusing the CPI of having "struck a clandestine deal" with Congress in Kerala, the implication being that this justifies CPM caution and suspicion when dealing with the CPI in West Bengal (Franda, 1971, p. 226). In general the CPM has been scathing about the motives of its partners. Ashok Mitra, a decade later to be Finance Minister, in Left Front government wrote somewhat dismissively in 1969:

"If so many try, never mind even if severally, we are bound to arrive somewhere. Let a thousand thoughts contend, each thought will have a representation on West Bengal's United Front, or on the anti-United, if only somebody cares to get up one such... the revolution is all things to all Bengalis."¹⁰²

102. 'Calcutta every day', reprinted in Mitra (1979).

Accusing the self-styled Marxists of "ordinary petty bourgeois jealousies", a few years after the dismissal of the second Front ministry he commented :

To keep the United Front going would have been to allow one amongst the Left parties to come to the fore. Who knows, that party, given its superior clout, could soon have swallowed the others. Such a thing could not be permitted to happen : it was better that the Left, the great revolutionary Left, rather ceased to be in government."¹⁰³

1970-'77 : TOP ALLIANCES AND MASS MOBILISATION

The period after the imposition of President's Rule in March, 1970, was one in which national political events had an ever greater impact on political formations in the state. The effects of the Congress split - this time at a national level - were central in determining the tactics of the CPI, and, less directly, the CPM. Over the next half-decade, while the CPI sought to form a constructive alliance with progressive forces in the Congress leadership, supplemented by pressure from below, the CPM concentrated on strengthening its base,

103. 'The legacy and the led' (1974), reprinted in Ibid.

notably in the rural areas of the state. This section of the chapter analyses the differences of CPI and CPM as they tried to integrate theory with the developing reality - from the beginning of the Congress split to the emergency.

THE CONGRESS SPLIT & THE WEST BENGAL COMMUNIST PARTIES

Already in 1969 Bhowani Sen of the West Bengal leadership of the CPI was arguing that the Presidential Election of August of that year

"marks the beginning of a new period and a new correlation of forces in the country's political set-up... [The events] symbolised the confrontation between the combined forces of Right Reaction on the one side and the forces of the Centre and the Left on the other."¹⁰⁴

Nationalisation of the banks was an equally significant by Mrs. Gandhi. These events seemed to him to be a vindication of the line taken by the CPI since 1964 : that the split in the bourgeoisie would widen as the crisis of the capitalist path worsened. The ultimate outcome would be a National Democratic Front as outlined in the party programme.

104. In *Mainstream*, Annual number, Sept., 1969.

The CPI held that the electoral reverses of the Congress in 1967 and 1969, and the split of the party in the latter year, were results of accelerating mass discontent. To channel this perceived feeling the party held a series of demonstrations in support of Indira Gandhi's faction in the run-up to the presidential election. According to the CPI,

"the point for the Indian left... is to make up its mind as to which side will be more helpful in the realisation of Left objectives, which side will be more responsive to the pressure of mass sanctions."¹⁰⁵

which would also bring about further differentiation within Ruling Congress.

Nevertheless, partly due to the indifference or hostility of other Left parties, particularly in West Bengal and particularly the CPM, the emphasis over the next few years was on warnings of the gathering of the "forces of right reaction" and, later, of the violent tactics of the CPM.¹⁰⁶

The new approach of the CPI found its most concise expression in the 'Cochin line' of the Ninth Congress in

105. Quoted in Subramanian (1983) pp. 238-9)

106. See *New Age* editorials during February, 1971, the month before the mid-term elections in West Bengal, e.g. 'CPM's Campaign of Murder Continues (14 February) and 'CPM's Sinister Plans for Poll' (21 February).

October, 1971. Here the Congress split was said to have "reflected the advance of the process of differentiation in the Indian capitalist class to a qualitatively new level". The CPI was trying to "carry forward" the emerging leftward trends (and indeed had saved the Prime Minister in no-confidence motions in the Lok Sabha). There were still felt to be some vacillators - and even reactionaries - within the Indira faction but this seemed not to worry the CPI unduly at this stage. The solution was to build up "mass pressures" for concrete progressive measures and to reserve support for the government in a conditional fashion. But since the radicalisation of the masses would make it difficult for the national bourgeoisie to dominate in the new circumstances, and anti-communism in the ruling Congress was now "rare", the situation was favourable for mass struggles.¹⁰⁷

For the CPM the same events were not nearly so significant - or if significant, then only as representing a political crisis for the ruling class that might be made use of. *People's Democracy* equated Indira and her opponents as "two reactionary combines" and dismissed her socialist slogans as a "hoax".¹⁰⁸

107. CPI IXth Congress, Cochin, 3-10/10/71, pp. 128-130, 189-191.

108. *People's Democracy* editorial, 17th January, 1971.

These very basic attitudinal differences were expressed nowhere more clearly than in West Bengal and were there reinforced by the conflicts of the preceding four to five years. During 1970 there had been a large rise in the incidence of violent activities and political murders, and by the time the non-Congress parties began preparing for the mid-term poll there was a marked move towards the isolation of the CPM. In the end that party formed a Six-Party Combination with some minor leftist allies, the CPI contrived an Eight-party Combination (still railing at the CPM's "bo sism" and "naked utilisation" of the governmental machinery) and the Bangla Congress, notwithstanding its approving opinion of the 'progressive' policies of the Indira Congress, stood alone (Ghosh, 1981, pp. 112-13).

After an unprecedentedly violent election campaign, the results showed all the effects of extreme polarisation of the electorate : the CPM received 111 seats and the Congress (R) 105, with only 61 left to share among the remaining 17 parties that obtained any seats at all. In rural Nadia and Burdwan the CPM achieved a veritable landslide, although its image suffered in Calcutta due to its association with violence. (Ghosh, 1981, pp. 116-8).

The CPI saw its opportunity. In March it and its allies pledged to support a Congress (R)-led coalition, thus thwarting the CPM's efforts to have itself recognised as the prime candidate for forming the new ministry.

CPI and the Alliance With Congress

As mentioned above, the CPI at its Ninth Congress explained its assessment of Indira's Congress in terms of the advancing process of differentiation within the capitalist class. However, in West Bengal not only did it say of the 'anti-Congress front' called for by the CPM: it "would have been an act of worst opportunism", but it was felt that the elections had anyway been held on the issue of the CPM's power.¹⁰⁹ Soon the 'halthy trends' asserting themselves within the Congress (R) made the CPI impatient with the "blind anti-Congressism" of its partners in the erstwhile Eight-Party Combination, which posed an insufficient challenge to the CPM's "extremist policies".¹¹⁰ Meanwhile Congress at the Centre was busy nationalising banks and other large enterprises and moving than ever before to the Soviet Union,¹¹¹ while the state unit had come out with a seventeen-point programme for the 1972 elections that was felt to be radical, democratic and progressive.

109. CPI IXth Congress, *Documents*, p. 189.

110. A 1972 party document, quoted in Ghosh, pp. 139-40.

111. The Indo-Soviet treaty of friendship and alliance was signed for a period of twenty years.

The Progressive Democratic Alliance ultimately formed by CPI and Congress for the 1972 general elections was extremely valuable to the CPI in terms of electoral gain. The party was later to claim that the campaign itself had been important in 'rousing the masses'.¹¹² The leader of the Congress in the new Assembly, Siddhartha Sankar Ray, was careful to declare that his would be a "workers' government, peasants' government and a government of the people". (Ghosh, 1981, p. 147)

Nevertheless, over the next few months there was growing mutual disenchantment on the part of Congress and CPI : but in any case by June 1974 the State Council was disgusted enough to describe the West Bengal ministry as "dominated by Rightists and anti-Communist elements, who are not prepared to tolerate any progressive and democratic ideas even within their own party."¹¹³ The Political Report of the Tenth Congress in 1975¹¹⁴ singled out the lack of response from Congress 'progressives' to the CPI-organised bandh of July, 1973 (on the issue of price rises) as an example of the anti-democratic instincts of

112. *Documents of the Xth Congress of the CPI, (1975).*

113. See Ghosh (1971), pp. 149-152)

114. CPI, *Documents of the Xth Congress*

Congress in West Bengal. The CPI declared the PDA to be hollow and, worse, to be "damaging the image of the party", but was reluctant to sever links with Congress completely, still hoping that forces within that party could be polarised.¹¹⁵

Nationality the CPI was yet more sanguine. The 1975 congress bewailed the rise in inflation and in unemployment, but heralded the significant nationalisations that had taken place under Mrs. Gandhi's regime. The CPI's 'Implement the mandate' campaign in May of 1972 and the satyagraha of October; the 'Great March' to parliament of half a million people in March, 1973; and the July bandh were examples of the kind of 'mass pressure' on the government that was a necessary part of the CPI's tactics. Yet despite these actions, the Political Report admitted, the Left in Congress "lacks consistency and assertiveness". The party had failed to bring about the much-desired leftward shift of Congress but this failure was explained in part by left-opportunism (by which was meant CPM tactics) and the disunity of the left and democratic forces in Congress, as well as by CPI failings.

115. CPI, *Documents of the Xth Congress*.

Nevertheless, the other obvious option, namely the anti-Congress line purveyed by the CPM in West Bengal, was held to be "barren" and based on a sectarianism that hindered day-to-day work on the ground. More substantially for a Marxist party, the CPI assessment was strongly defended on the basis that it visualised the situation in terms of class forces, not, as with the CPM, of bourgeois 'government' and 'opposition'.¹¹⁶

The CPM and the New Situation

The CPM had always been more sceptical about the Congress 'manoeuvres' and regarded as the priority the combination of the left opposition to take full advantage of a political crisis that it regarded as accompanying the worst economic period in the country's history (in 1972).¹¹⁷ Congress's progressive moves were merely necessitated by the requirement to "constantly claim the attention of the people" in the deteriorating national situation.

116. Ibid

This argument had the advantage of giving the CPI the air of purists in spite of their association with Congress, but the approach had in it a striking element of programatism, especially where state affairs was concerned : Bhupesh Gupta would have it in January 1974 that "Congress was the same everywhere but the situation were different"

In the *Hindu*, quoted by Nossiter(1982), p. 257.

117. *Political Resolution* of the CPM Ninth Congress at Madurai (1972).

Electoral, the 1972 elections in West Bengal were spectacularly damaging for the CPM. Its complement of seats fell from 111 to 14, partly due to the CPI-Congress alliance but more noticeably because of the new-found unity of the Congress forces (Field & Franda, 1974, pp. 63-5). There were allegations of rigging and intimidation but there is no doubt that the result seems mainly to have been due to the revival of Congress (Ghosh, 1981, pp. 141-6; Nossiter, 1988, p. 135)¹¹⁸

The party faced attacks on other fronts than the electoral, too. When the Congress ministry (as 1972 CPM resolution declared)¹¹⁹ introduced a "semi-fascist terror" into the trade union sphere, with systematic strike-breaking and occupation of offices of unions of the CPM union federation the CITU,¹²⁰ this seems to have ensured the CPM boycott of the new state Assembly (Nossiter, 1982, p. 255). In March 1973 CPM writer Biplab Dasgupta reported that the Congress regime had further degenerated into "fascist terror". According to him, 40,000 party cadres have so far been evicted from their offices, 700 had

118. In this the energy and determination of the Youth Congress-dominated party committee, the popularity gained by Mrs. Gandhi among Bengalis for the victory over Pakistan in Bangladesh and the well-judged appeal to the voters distilled in such slogans as 'Garibi hatao' were major factors.

119. CPM, *Political Resolution*, Ninth Congress (1972)

120. The Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

been killed, 16,000 were in prison and there were warrants pending on 100,000 others (Dasgupta, 1973). The CPM itself admitted at its Madurai congress that "the functioning of trade unions has been brought to a stand-still in many places."¹²¹

These circumstances were hardly ideal for any kind of re-assessment of Congress along CPI lines but there was a realisation of the increasing dangers of isolation, which led to the calls for "unity of Left democratic forces" directed towards the CPI in July, 1973. There was even a top-level meeting of leaders in Calcutta to discuss a joint movement against hoarders and profiteers. But as neither party was willing or able to revise its tactical line nothing came of this. (Ghosh, 1981, pp. 151-2)

Major national events like the uprising in Gujarat and the burgeoning JP movement in Bihar complicated the picture and tended to drive a further wedge between the two communist parties rather than to unite them. The CPM leadership was cautious about the nature of some of JP Narayan's backers¹²²

121. CPM, *Political Resolution*, Ninth Congress.

122. Some of whom were "right reactionaries" according to Namboodiripad (Nossiter, 1988, p. 257).

but gave a certain amount of support to the movement when a rally against the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and for the restoration of civil liberties was organised in Calcutta in June 1975. The CPM rejected the 'for-or-against' attitude of the CPI towards the JP movement.¹²³ M. Basavannaiah accused the CPI of facilitating the "the victory of fascism" by failing to fight Congress. The ideological chasm between the two parties had never been greater. In a piece written before the general elections in 1975, Namboodiripad dismissed CPI talk of 'Left-democratic forces inside the Congress' as

"obviously the shamefaced way in which the champions of unity with the whole Congress want to conceal the unconcealable reality that they are in alliance with the whole Congress, rather than with a section within it."
(Namboodiripad, 1982, p. 263)

The Mass Fronts

Work by the two communist parties in the industrial and rural spheres were clearly reflections of the political lines expressed in the previous pages. Thus towards the end of the second United Front's tenure in West Bengal, some of the CPM's

123. 'Second Report on CPI's Vijayawada Congress', *People's Democracy*, 23 February 1975.

trade union activities had earned it almost complete isolation in this field. Almost as soon as Union 'West Bengal Affairs' Minister S.S. Ray announced his intention of giving serious attention to the law and order situation in the state the CPM and its five small allies organised a bandh and for three months there were numerous inter-party and police-CPM clashes.

Meanwhile the CPI organisation, AITUC, had made itself amenable to the advance of the Congress federation INTUC¹²⁴ and by May Day of 1972 had progressed from joint conferences and meetings with the government to united mass meetings in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, where the leaders of three trade-union federations "spoke from the same tribune".¹²⁵ The whole aim of the 1971 Cochin line was to build the Unity of the Left and Democratic parties and/or forces, including those within the Congress, and to create a firmer working-class and poor peasant-rural labourer base. It was with these objectives in mind that the AITUC was trying so hard for unity of action with INTUC and others.¹²⁶

124. Indian National Trade Union Congress.

125. ATUC, *Twenty-ninth Session*, January-February 1973 at Calcutta, pp. 65.

126. CPI, *Political Report to Xth Congress*.

The CPM remained more than suspicious¹²⁷ the attempts by the Congress to create a 'National Council of Trade Unions' were part of the Congress plan to establish the supremacy of the Congress among unions and to use them as a "sphearhead" in the attack on CITU. The INTUC and other front organisations¹²⁸ were merely being used to "carry on class warfare" against the CPM.

The CPI, however, denied the charge that it was a mere pawn in the Congress game. While it recognised the serious difficulties involved in implementing its tactical line¹²⁹ it believed the "mass radicalisation" resulting from the joint actions was a major engine for change. Here was a clear example of the putting into practice of the CPI's advocacy of mass pressure from below on the authorities : the AITUC meeting of early 1973 in Calcutta noted that one line from within the government had "progressive features", representing the sought-after differentiation.¹³⁰ Even a January 1973 ordinance prohibiting stikes and lock-outs in any dispute in vital undertakings was seen as a circumstance offering the opportunity for unprecedented trade union unity rather than as evidence that the Centre had become reactionary. The attacks of which the

127. CPM, *Political Resolution*, Ninth Congress, Madurai, 1972.

128. Such as the Chhatra Students' Parishad in West Bengal.

129. The 1972 talks with INTUC had broken down over the issue of the scrapping of industrial relations legislation - which differed from state to state; and the November proposals of the Labour Ministry were definitely anti-worker.

CPM was complaining did not feature in the AITUC discussions.

However, in assessing the application of the line in the five years to 1975¹³¹ the CPI was self-critical. The urgent need to stepup mobilisation of workers nationwide was noted. The objectives of strengthening the party "inside its own class" (i.e. the workers) and developing "an enhanced political role" for its trade unions had not been successfully pursued. The jute strike in West Bengal, however, was held up as "a model of united mass action" the action by which class unity was to be "preserved and strengthened".

On the peasant front, too, the CPI line expressed at Cochin involved work for unity among the left and democratic forces in order to create a "firmer" base with a sound class foundation.¹³² However, in this sphere it had to contend with a rival greatly strengthened by events in the countryside under the United Fronts. In the 1971 elections at least experience of class confrontation had seemed to give the support of the CPM a boost (Ghosh, 1981, p. 118) and its leaders were still continuing their fighting talk. Harakrishna Konar declared :

131. CPI, *Documents*, Tenth Congress (1975).

132. CPI, *Documents*, Tenth Congress.

"We have found the way in West Bengal to build a militant peasant movement; we know how this is to be done, and we also know that this is the only way the Indian revolution can win." (Sengupta, 1979, pp. 53-4).

He elaborated :

"For our revolution we must have strong impregnable bases in the countryside, and an organisation that can withstand the most ruthless oppression"

if necessary by armed resistance but without armed warfare.

The 1971 manifesto¹³³ of the CPM spelt out the policies proposed at the ministerial level : "complete elimination" of feudal interests, including the annulment of compensation amounts due to zamindars; the takeover of large estates; "vigorous measures" to improve wages and conditions of agricultural labourers and other rural poor; and an overhaul of the aid and credit systems, as well as "a total reversal" of procurement and price policies in favour of the poorer peasants on the one hand and the consumers on the other.¹³⁴ Shortly after this P. Sunderayya declared in the national party journal :

133. For the state mid-term elections.

134. Reproduced in "Communist Party of India (Marxist)" in Namboodiripad (1982), p. 266.

"It is only by developing a powerful mass movement culminating in land seizure that we will ultimately get 'land to the tiller'.¹³⁵

Yet the party *was* conscious of the need for discipline, especially after the experiences of 1967-70. Namboodiripad identified feudalism as one of the "three main enemies of the people",¹³⁶ but in the "very broad front of struggle" needed to combat this combination attention must be paid to keeping it "under the firm and vigilant leadership of the working class and... based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism."¹³⁷

Since the CPM had developed such effective techniques for increasing its support in the rural areas - and since the CPI soon found its Congress partners emulating these tactics - the CPI became more open to selective coooperation with the CPM in the peasant movement (Ghose, 1981, p. 150) As food policy once again became a central issue for the West Bengal government and the rich farmers and traders enjoyed the "dazzling day" following the "grim inter-regnum",¹³⁸ the opportunities for cooperation on issues could not but increase.

135. In *People's Democracy*, 30 July 1971.

136. Along with imperialism in the form of foreign monopoly and Indian monopoly capital.

137. Namboodiripad (1982), p. 265.

138. 'The species of make-believe' in Mitra (1979).

Parliament and the Masses

What Nossiter (1988) calls "the dialectic of mass movement and Marxist ministry" was much in evidence in the activities of the communist parties in the 1970's. The CPI attempted to give credibility to its alliance with Congress by talking of radicalising the masses and creating mass pressure on the government for a leftward shift in policy; and the CPM was attempting, according to Sengupta (1979), to mobilise the peasantry and working class through "militant parliamentarism" and a "controlled militancy in the countryside" that the tentatively labels as "Leninist".

But neither party was completely satisfied with its own achievements. The Political Report presented to the Ninth Congress of the CPI was heavily self-critical :

"There have been tendencies to treat parliamentary struggles and elections as if they are our goals instead of treating them as a means to develop militant mass movements and mass struggles."¹³⁹

Not only was there a danger that Left and democratic unity was "understood as almost something like CPI-Congress unity", but the demarcation line between the two parties was becoming "blurred". The most urgent need - for left and democratic unity - was hampered by the low level of party education in the ranks.

139. CPI Congress, *Documents*.

Meanwhile there was conflict in the CPM over the correct balance in implementing party policy. Namboodiripad is alleged to have criticised his Bengali comrades for risky over-indulgence in extra-parliamentary methods when they boycotted the state Assembly in 1972 (Nossiter, 1988, p.255) and on the other hand to have commented on the bourgeois parliamentary mentality prevalent in the CPM generally.

Both CPI and CPM saw the issue of the relative power of Centre and States within the Indian system as crucial to the future of the revolution. The CPI, finding the Congress government at the Union level "rigid" and acting "against federal principles",¹⁴⁰ wanted an amendment of the Constitution to provide more power to the state units "consistent with the basic unity of the country", and an increase in the number of autonomous districts and regions within the states' tribal areas.¹⁴¹

The CPM was inclined to appear more thoroughgoing in its attack. With the Constitution itself "an instrument of

140. CPI, Ninth Congress, *Documents*, p.116.

141. 1971 Manifesto, quoted in, Subrata Sarkar (1972) p. 173.

capitalist-landlord rule" and the Fundamental Rights "now reduced to the sanctity of private property",¹⁴² the party journal declared that 'The Constitution Must Go Lock, Stock and Barrel'.¹⁴³ The 1971 manifesto devoted a whole chapter to Centre-state relations : the Constitution was "federal only in name but unitary in content and practice",¹⁴⁴ the "monstrous concentration" of resources and power reducing the states to "mere supplicants". Since, according to the CPM, unity would only be possible "on the basis of equality of constituent units" the party demanded the abolition of Governor's and President's Rule, a revision of the current allocation of subjects, the turning over to state governments of control of all officials (even the All-India Services), and a 75 per cent share of central revenues to be given to the states.¹⁴⁵

This last demand was seen by the *CPI* as "mischief", and "extremist and destructive" to boot. There was still the need to safeguard the unity of the country.¹⁴⁶

142. 'The Constitution of India', *People's Democracy*, 14 February 1971.

143. *People's Democracy*, 21 February 1971.

144. Quoted in Sarkar (1972)

145. Ibid.

146. *CPI, Ninth Congress, Documents* The importance of the constitutional Centre as a focus of power in the strategy of the CPI was demonstrated by the series of pages in *New Age* on 'Why a Left-Oriented Parliament?' in early 1971 (14 February)

The CPM, by contrast, showed little interest in national electoral success.¹⁴⁷ But the state coalitions in Kerala and West Bengal *had* successfully been used "as instruments in the hands of the people in their struggle against the reactionary ruling classes." (Namboodiripad, 1982, p. 270) No doubt with a view to facilitating this, noted CPM economist Ashok Mitra in 1975 advocated the "controlled decentralisation" of the administration and "equal rights" for states the Centre.¹⁴⁸ For the CPI, with its emphasis on the National Democratic Front and 'top alliances', this was going too far.

The Emergency

The CPM could certainly lay claim to have foreseen the 1975 declaration of Emergency : its Madurai Congress of 1972 had called for basic changes in the constitution to prevent its misuse by the ruling party, and a guarantee of constitutional liberties. (Namboodiripad, 1974, pp. 157-8) However, and despite its lukewarm support for the JP movement, this did

147. Its 1975 boycott of the West Bengal Assembly, even more than that of 1972, demonstrated the degree to which the party viewed it as a political tool.

148. Mitra, 1975 R.K. Kale Memorial Lecture *Growth and Diseconomies*, (Gokhale Institute, Pune).

not save it from the effects of the Emergency, which the West Bengal unit called an "authoritarian and... savage assault on democracy".¹⁴⁹ And there seem to have been no plans for underground operation for any prolonged period (Nossiter, 1988, p. 258). It therefore suffered greatly from the widespread detentions of its cadre that occurred almost immediately after the Emergency was proclaimed. In fact the state Secretariat even directed front organisations to put off their programme of activities for the present because of the risk of losing the activists themselves.

The CPI, whose leaders had been exceptional among non-Congress politicians in escaping the attentions of the police, was far less concerned at the supposed threat to democracy. It was, rather, inclined to welcome the 20-point economic programme accompanying the declaration of Emergency, although it wished there had been "at least some measures... in the direction of structural change."¹⁵⁰ The Emergency was even heralded as "an entirely new phase", whose events "signify that political differentiation and conflict within the Indian bourgeoisie has reached a new stage."¹⁵¹ There was to be a

149. Press statement made just prior to the CPM's receipt of the order of precensorship of news. Quoted in Ghosh, p. 158.

150. *New Age* (editorial), 6 July 1975.

151. 'The National Emergency and Our Tasks' *New Age*, 6 July 1975.

continuation of the old combination : joint work with the Congress to "expose the conspiracies of right reaction"; at the same time striving to popularise the party and point out the "shortcomings" of government policies.

The CPI's accommodating attitude was rewarded by the decision of the Congress High Command in July to enter into campaigns of joint action but there was some uneasiness among CPI leaders at the Emergency declaration. But as Nossiter comments : whatever the immediate gains, the CPI "would still sink if the Congress boat went down". He adds : "It was also clear that conflict would develop on the mass front as Congress intensified its efforts to erode its rivals' hold on sections of organised labour". (pp 258-9) Strains soon appeared within the party.

It is impossible here to go in detail into the events of the conditions of the communist movement during the Emergency as the nature of the subject requires more in depth study than is feasible in this work. However, it cannot be doubted that the effects were far reaching : Bhabani Sengupta (1979, pp. 93-6) summarises these succinctly :

- i] the emergence of the CPM as the strongest of the communist parties and with a strong base in east India;

- ii] paradoxically, the resolution of the old problem¹⁵² of the isolation of the movement from the mainstream political struggles of the Indian people;
- iii] the destruction of the CPI's strategic-tactical line and the subsequent search for new links;
- iv] the establishment of the credentials of an independent communist movement;¹⁵³
- v] reduced prominence for the assessment of Congress as the single most important problem facing Indian communists;
- vi] a change in the CPM's short-term goal to the strengthening of representative democracy and protecting civil rights.¹⁵⁴

THE LEFT FRONT - I: REVITALISATION OF THE PANCHAYATS

The results of the 1977 Assembly elections in West Bengal were strikingly clear-cut and a surprise for many,¹⁵⁵ although the state Congress Party had been beset by factionalism for some

-
- 152. Since the 1940's People's War line, non-participation in the Quit India movement, and support of the British effort in the Second World War after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.
 - 153. Partly due to Soviet support to Indira during the Emergency.
 - 154. This concern was to metamorphose into an increased emphasis on states' rights when the danger of one-party rule had receded.
 - 155. Notably Janata, who over estimated their strength on the basis of the March national poll results.

time. (Nossiter, 1988, p. 137). The CPM, fighting in a fighting in a basically three-concerned contest against Congress and Janata, won an absolute majority of seats (although with 36 per cent of the vote)¹⁵⁶ and dominated the Left Front government it subsequently formed with its smaller leftist partners.¹⁵⁷ The year 1977 can now be seen as a watershed in West Bengal electoral politics, the Left Front (with the later addition of the CPI being in government continuously since then, and with a state majority of the vote in the 1982 and 1987 state elections.

Analysis of communist mobilisation strategy under the Left Front will be done in two sections : one focussing on the time immediately preceding and following the election of the government, when the differences between it and the 1967 and 1969-70 United Front ministries were so striking; and the second covering the period following the revitalisation of the panchayats - the local government bodies neglected for almost a decade by Congress - in June 1978, when new patterns of mobilisation emerged requiring integration with communist theory. Inevitably, given its predominance in state politics

156. On a turnout of 54 per cent (Nossiter, 1988, p. 137).

157. The Forward Bloc was allocated four, the RSP two and the RCPI one post in the Cabinet.

since 1977, the CPM will be more prominently dealt with in these sections than the CPI.

The 1977 Elections

The communists cannot be said to have been prepared for the watershed Lok Sabha elections of March, 1977. In November of 1976 they were still urging "our Congress friends" to settle on a programme to achieve the long-awaited "breakthrough" to the socialist stage of development.¹⁵⁸ At the Central Executive Committee meeting of January, the CPI nationally settled for the status quo, although it did give encouragement to some Congress rebels. (Ghosh, 1981, p. 160) Nevertheless there was scope for regional variation and in West Bengal the keynote was 'selective support', i.e. electioneering for progressive congressmen only.¹⁵⁹

For the CPM the problems were of a rather different nature. The police policy of the state and national governments since 1972 had sapped the party's strength was sapped to an extremely severe degree. *Economic and Political Weekly* estimates

158. *New Age*, 21 November 1976

159. It seems that the Youth and student wings of the party were unhappy even with this, and from the point of view of the electoral prospects this was understandable : the party obtained no Lok Sabha seats from the state.

that 1,000 cadres had been killed and 20,000 forced to flee during the 'Five-Year Emergency', so that the CPM was confined to its central offices.¹⁶⁰ According to one observer, the party did not have the requisite 'submarine-like' qualities of being "built and equipped primarily for underwater (that is, underground) operations, but capable of surfacing when conditions permit."¹⁶¹

In these circumstances the seat adjustment with the Janata Party, was of great use to the CPM, which was left free to campaign on its own platform. Its manifesto for the Lok Sabha¹⁶² held out the prospect of the "Left and Democratic Alternative" to the capitalist path pursued by Congress, which was "inflicting on the millions avoidable unemployment, poverty and misery." The manifesto advocated the abolition of landlordism by the taking over of all landlords' land and distributing it free to the landless and poor; and a minimum wage of Rs.8/- a day for labourers among other 'pro-people' promises.

160. EPW, Annual no., February, 1977, See also Ashok Rudra in EPW, 3 September 1977.

161. Ashok Rudra, 'Elections and Marxist-Leninists', *Frontier*, 28 May 1977.

162. Reproduced in *People's Democracy*, 6 February 1977.

The *CPI* manifesto¹⁶³ was certainly less dramatic : it offered "adequate credit" for the rural population, the abolition of bonded labour, "living wages" for workers, the restoration of tribal lands and the *protection* of tenants and shre-croppers. Its reward was the failure to secure a single seat.

In the *Assembly* elections - held in June - the results were startlingly different from those in the March polls (where the CPM/Janata shares were 17 and 11 respectively). Negotiations with Janata had failed and the CPM was thus reduced to its five partners in the same Left Front as had contested the March elections (Ghosh, 1981, pp. 167-8).

The Left Front campaign in West Bengal was based on its Minimum Programme, which, recognising the limited sovereignty of the state as opposed to the Union, was less far-reaching than the Lok Sabha manifesto. The Front proposed the distribution of surplus land to the rural poor and "radical changes" in the law to do away with the concentration of landholding "and to give substantial relief to bergadars and landless peasants and agricultural workers." "Provision of round-the-year

163. Reproduced in *New Age* , 13 February 1977.

work" for agricultural labourers was promised, along with the enforcement of minimum wages (by unspecified "steps"), the imposition of an agricultural income tax and "encouragement to agricultural cooperatives". "Democratic measures" to be taken were the immediate holding of elections to panchayats and municipalities under proportional representation and moves "to confer more powers and resources on all local bodies".¹⁶⁴

The New Industrial Policy

One of the most immediate and striking features of the new ministry was that in comparison with the United Front governments, it expressed more clearly its awareness of the constraints on its choice and application of policy in the industrial and industrial relations sphere. Firstly, newly-appointed Finance Minister Ashok Mitra was quick to declare that the Indian states had almost no power with respect to industry and commerce (although he did promise that whatever capabilities existed would be exercised with "class bias").¹⁶⁵

164. All from 'The Left Campaign in West Bengal', *People's Democracy*, 29 May 1977.

165. Quoted in Sengupta (1979), section on 'Industrial Policy'.

Secondly, it seemed to the CPM leaders that the economic consequences of an approach similar to that tried in the earlier ministries might have fatal consequences for a government to the survival of which the party now attached great importance. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, at the Left Front victory rally itself, addressed the state's big capitalists :

"it was understood by the Left that this was not a Socialist country... Hence, their State Government would have to proceed with a policy and programme within the constraints of a capitalist system and coexist with capitalists and landlords."

Clarifying the proposed new approach, he continued :

"On the other hand these owning classes must accept the fact that the Left Front had come to power with the people's mandate and massive verdict."¹⁶⁶

Within two or three weeks Basu had had meetings with the West Bengal Chambers of Commerce and by August he had had talks with representatives of almost all the leading business houses. According to one observer,¹⁶⁷ the CPM and its allies in the Front were "keen to spread the message that they do not want a repetition of what happened during the two earlier

166. Jyoti Basu's speech at the June 26 Victory Rally reproduced in *People's Democracy*, 10 July 1977.

167. 'Tight-rope walking', *EPW*, 27 August 1977.

United Front regimes." At another Chambers of Commerce meeting on August 19 Basu is reported to have told the assembled businessmen :

"We have decided to accept you and we want you to accept us."¹⁶⁸

Ashok Mitra contributed to the mood of pragmatism by calling multinationals and big business "exploitative" but welcoming them to share their expertise for the development of the state's economy. The Left Front had, he declared, the "desire to deliver the goods at any cost."¹⁶⁹

The other side of the coin was, of course, the attitude of the trade unions. At the victory rally five days after the formation of the ministry Basu had summed up his vision of the industrial climate in the coming period : factories would run smoothly as the government would settle disputes by talks with management; owners would refrain from making efforts to topple the government; but the right to strike was not to be surrendered.¹⁷⁰

168. Quoted in D.P. Mukherjee, 'The Industrial Climate in West Bengal', *Economic Times*, 1 January 1978.

169. Quoted in *EPW*'s review of the Left Front's first budget, in the 31 September 1977 edition.

170. *People's Democracy*, 10 July 1977.

The handling of the dock-workers' agitation over retrenchments of 300 of their number and the restriction of a jute strike to one day were examples of CITU unions 'reining in' their members to conform to the new approach.¹⁷¹ Significantly, it was not government policy to encourage gheraos: if instances arose, it was urged that "the government should be immediately informed in order that they may take appropriate steps."¹⁷² As the Chief Minister summed it up to a gathering in September, "We have learned what to do and what not to do."¹⁷³

It became clear that the government planned, by heightened interventionism in the industrial sphere, to obviate the necessity of trade union militancy to a degree that could result in threats to its own survival. At the same time the government tried to instil a sense of 'responsibility' among its own employees, offering a new partnership. Sengupta (1979) Ashok Mitra as having announced that "A Left regime does not treat its employees as hired wage-labour, but as comrades in the struggle for social transformation."(p.158)

171. EPW, 27 August 1977.

172. Quoted in D.P. Mukherjee (see n. 25).

173. The Labour Minister, again Krishnapada Ghosh, was later reported to have resolved 500 disputes in less than a year (Sengupta, 1979).

Apart from these 'atmospherics', the Industrial Relations legislation introduced in September marked a definite change in approach : the bargaining agent to represent workers in the new judicial bodies would be directly elected by all employees, with no direct say for the trade unions in bargaining over principal issues.¹⁷⁴

Although industrialists were apparently apprehensive about the new government's policy within a few weeks there could be seen "the beginning of a purposeful dialogue between the new leadership and Calcutta's business community", with initiative taken by both sides. *The Statesman* judged the Front after a year to be "moderate, business-like and well-intentioned" and capable of providing a good "political and administrative order". (Sengupta, 1979)

There was even talk of "a reverse flow of capital", with companies that had earlier moved out now returning in the new conditions.¹⁷⁵

174. 'The New Industrial Relations Legislation', *EPW*, 24 September 1977.

175. 'Red is Non-Red Money', *EPW*, 17 December 1977.
Another factor in this 'detente' was the fact that the economic policy of the previous Congress government had completely lost its momentum by the end of its term. The alternative to the Front then, even had it been likely to materialise, did not have the attraction it might once have done.
see, for example, 'Unfulfilled Promise', *EPW*, 14 May 1977.

The trade unions, too, had suffered in the preceding years, with peace in several industrial establishments in the previous 18 months achieved sometimes by disciplinary means of dubious legitimacy.¹⁷⁶ However, in areas such as the industrial heartland of Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan and 24-Parganas, although all the trade union federations were active it was CITU and AITUC that had the most control, and for any action INTUC must link up with them.¹⁷⁷ It certainly was not easy to persuade trade unionists in the current favourable conditions that they should restrain the demands of their members, and at the November meeting of the state CITU Council the restiveness of workers in some industries was evident.¹⁷⁸ CITU threatened "prolonged struggle" in the already stricken jute industry and there was disruption in the Calcutta Corporation, banks and Dock Labour Boards. Inter-union rivalry became an ever more significant feature, affecting gas and electricity supplies and causing heavy losses of production (Mukherjee, 1978). There was much criticism of the new police policy,¹⁷⁹ as

176. K. Chaudhuri '1972 : More than a Memory', *EPW*, 26 February 1977.

177. Ibid.

178. Ajit Roy 'Substituting Reform for Revolution', *EPW*, 31 December 1977.

179. For example Ashok Rudra in *EPW*, 3 September, 1977.

serving the wrong class interests, and also of the new legislation, as ignoring the importance of collective organisational strength in the bargaining process.¹⁸⁰ But with the increasing strength of the CITU unions and a few well-judged moves by the government¹⁸¹ turmoil was averted. In July and August of 1977 (the delicate pre-puja period) there were only seven instances of lock-outs in the state (Mukherjee, 1978). Basu showed his approval by praising the "maturity" of the trade unions in correctly balancing their priorities. (In the Bengali CPM weekly, *Ganashakti* (Sengupta, 1979, p. 148).) Sengupta attributes the CPM's trade union cadres' "understanding of the political requirements" of the government to their high level of discipline and organisation, by contrast with the more 'radical' peasant cadres.

The CPI's response to the Front government's industrial policy was to continue its work in the trade unions, on the one hand to organise a "broad-based united popular movement to

180. EPW, 27 September 1977

181. For example restoration of the puja bonus to its 1975 level.

strengthen the state government's hands" and to "weaken vested interests",¹⁸² and on the other to defend its own base. Its national journal called for an attempt to break the hold of the vested interests

"by persistent, consistent and principled united struggle of all left and democratic parties, forces, classes and elements in the state not only within the legislature but more so outside it."¹⁸³

A few days later the state council of the CPI declared the formation of the Left Front government to be a "positive development" towards Left and democratic unity "[if] the CPI (M) leadership reorientates its policy on the basis of a sober, realistic approach".

Class Strategy in the New Situation

Shortly before the Left Front's victory in the polls in June 1977, the CPM journal 'People's democracy' reviewed a collection of essays on 'Agrarian Problems of India' written by ex-Minister for Land and Land Revenue (and ex-General Secretary of the All-India Kisan Sabha and its West Bengal arm)

182. *New Age*, 11 September 1977.

183. 'On the election results in West Bengal, *New Age*, 26 June 1977.

Hare Krishna Konar. According to the reviewer Konar had shown the importance of "organising and awakening" the agricultural workers and peasants, but also that the idea of peasant unity was today "obsolete", in fact holding the peasant movement back. Whereas the peasant movement had once been based on the middle peasant, this was not now the proper basis for it.¹⁸⁴

In 1977, Konar's counterpart as Land Minister in the Left Front government was Benoy Choudhury (himself very much an admirer of Konar, and with his roots in the same peasant movement in Burdwan). Some months later Choudhury was to declare that the Front government "will always act in accordance with the interests of the poor peasants, share-croppers and agricultural labourers".¹⁸⁵ This was echoed by his Chief Minister at the same gathering : the government was one of "the workers, peasantry and other toiling sections of the people. Hence the government will protect the interests of the agricultural workers."

The 'Food For Work' programme launched in the first few months of the ministry was ostensibly an attempt to inject

184. *People's Democracy (PD)*, 5 June 1977

185. Report of agricultural workers' demonstration, *PD*, 16 October 1977.

a class bias into relief programme. *People's Democracy* explained¹⁸⁶ that by the time the harvesting season arrived "much of the potentiality for struggle" over wages had been "devoured" by the long-drawn-out hunger" of the agricultural labourers. The new government programme would not only help prevent starvation, then, but also "create a material basis to preserve their spirit to organise and struggle". As the Janata government at the Centre had reversed the unhelpful relief policy of Congress there was the prospect of enough wheat to allow 50 million man-days to be realised under the programme, and that "no one should die of hunger", and on the other hand the "political-organisational aspect" was "to intensify the struggle of the agricultural labourers for a minimum wage fixed at Rs.8/- a day."¹⁸⁷ Similarly, a literacy drive that had been started in the Sunderbans "itself will raise their consciousness to organise and fight against exploitation."¹⁸⁸ The Left Front's harvesting policy that "One who cultivates a plot of land will harvest its produce," seemed just as explicitly class-based. *People's Democracy*

186. Ibid

187. Ibid

188.

reported :

"This policy has, on the one hand generated enthusiasm among the peasant masses and received widespread support, and, on the other, caused perturbation among the rural vested interests..."¹⁸⁹

For its part, the *CPI* was willing to admit that a "new vista" had opened for agricultural labourers since the Left Front victory.¹⁹⁰ But it claimed to detect certain opportunistic and hegemonistic tendencies in the CPM's activities, disrupting the routines worked out by the CPI in those areas where it had influence for the harvesting and sharing of the crop.¹⁹¹ The CPI foresaw the danger that the CPM's "sectarian partisanship" would cause rifts among the poor.¹⁹²

Nevertheless the CPM continued to press its advantage, and proclaimed its intention to extend the class approach to the previously moribund panchayats in the state by politicising the elections. 'Pepole's Democracy' commented on the eve of the poll that it had that

189. *PD*, 18 December 1977.

190. 'Fotedar Offensive', *New Age (NA)*, 11 December 1977.

191. West Bengal : Shave-croppers harvest the crop', *NA* 12 February 1978.

192. 'Jotedar Offensive', *NA*, 11 December 1977.

"conspicuously turned into a struggle between the rural vested interests and the deprived and exploited rural masses, between the politics of the latter and the 'non-politics' of the farmer - in essence, it has become part of the class struggle... being waged in the rural sector".¹⁹³

The Left Front was trying to "unleash" the initiative of the population. Since the implementation of the Front's programme would inevitably be, detrimental to the vested interests, these would retaliate. So it was "necessary to corner" them in the panchayat elections.

It was here that another aspect of the CPM strategy came to light. The aim of the CPM was

"to turn the panchayat elections into a political battle to firmly establish that politics, which alone will help the vast majority of the rural population to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of the rural exploiters."¹⁹⁴

But there were also compelling reasons for the CPM to keep class conflict under control.¹⁹⁵ Sengupta (1979) quotes a kisan front leader to demonstrate the "considerable ideological reorientation" that had already taken place in the CPM:

193. 'Issues in West Bengal Panchayat Elections', *PD*, 4 June 1978.

194. *Ibid.*

195. As Timur Basu pointed out in early 1979, through implementation of the minimum Wage Act (which had fixed rates at Rs.8/- per day) would "have far-reaching consequences in the villages if the government implements it in its true essence. The contradiction between the middle layer of the peasantry and the landless labourers will be sharpened to the delight of the jotedars and rich peasants."

"We have to convince the dispossessed farm worker that the marginal, small, even the middle peasant is his friend, not his enemy... he just does not have the means to pay the minimum wage now... we have to reorient the ideological outlook of our own cadres"

and through them convince the poor. (p.117) Because of what Sengupta calls the "formidable obstacles to horizontal class mobilisation" the policy was to be polarisation rather than confrontation.¹⁹⁶

The critics of the CPM's new policy were vociferous enough. One said of the the panchayat election that the CPM aimed at the "pacification of rural people through engagement in an election race..."¹⁹⁷ But, as we have seen, the CPM had at least on the face of things made strenuous efforts to push the 'no illusions' line. As an article on the panchayat results argued, the "real purpose" of the elections had been to involve people, and so make them

"aware of the actual power that can exercises and the nature and degree of the limitations imposed on them by the present socio-economic set-up".¹⁹⁸

196. At the same time the effort would be made to persuade the industrial workforce that it was better off that the rural; hence another reason for trade union 'moderation'.

197. Timir Basu, 'Calcutta Notebook', *Frontier*, 22 April 1978.

198. *PD*, 25 June 1978.

The Peasant Front

However problematic Konar's insistence that the time for peasant unity was over, his emphasis on warning potential beneficiaries of land reform measures against the illusion that the problem could be completely solved via legislation was, in 1977, as central as ever to the party policy.¹⁹⁹ Konar had said that the agrarian revolution must necessarily be preceded by a political revolution. Correspondingly, while the West Bengal State Committee of the CPM (meeting at Calcutta in later December 1976) was keen to begin an 'anniversary campaign' for the enlargement of the Kisan Sabha membership,²⁰⁰ the need was also stressed by the party to re-orient the organisation away from the middle and rich peasants. Unity, yes - but unity based on the involvement of labourers and poor peasants.²⁰¹

There was scope for legislation. At a "mammoth" rally held by the Front in Calcutta in October 1977 Promode Dasgupta announced that on the economic front, the principal task was

199. (As the CPM General Secretary writes in 1980, "In a country like India where the democratic revolution remains unfinished, the principal force of revolution is the peasantry." (Namboodiripad, 182, p. 283).

200. *PD*, 2 January 1977.

201. Draft Political Resolution for the Xth Congress the CPI(M).

land reform, and that surplus land had to be recovered and distributed among the landless.²⁰² The Front's 36-point programme had pledged it to take certain measures in the way of land reform but the immediate problem was one of "mass eviction of bargadars" whose solution could not await the promised comprehensive Bill. Consequently a Land Reform (Amendment) Bill was to be introduced to protect the bargadars in the interim and to reduce the increasingly heavy burden of land revenue on poor peasants. The Amendment Bill definitely had "limited objectives" but it was hoped that it would "identify the real peasant" and establish the legal rights of peasants in share-cropping.²⁰³ The CPI was soon accusing the CPM of shrinking its responsibility of bringing in real reform.

The Amendment Bill failed to receive Presidential assent for some five months and during that time the character of the CPM's programme in the rural areas became clearer. CPM leaders had earlier "sought the assistance of peasant organisations" in identifying and distributing benami and surplus lands "in an organised manner"²⁰⁴; now Promode Dasgupta called for "the -----

202. Subrata Pal, *PD*, 23 October 1977 Benov Choudhury appeared to contradict this statement when he argued that there should be no land seizure movement because there was "hardly any surplus land" to seize. (Sengupta, 1979, pp. 101-2)

203. 'Protection to Sharecroppers', *PD*, 23 October 1977.

204. Report on Agricultural Workers demonstration, *PD*, 16 October 1977.

launching of a massive campaign for which the mass organisations have to take the initiative" to help with the procurement of paddy.²⁰⁵ In his November radio broadcast announcing the Left Front's harvesting policy (see previous section on Class Strategy) Benoy Choudhury urged that where there was controversy over who was the 'real cultivator' in any instance (and therefore who should harvest the produce), block-level committees should be called in to decide or arbitrate. These committees were to consist of representatives of the Left Front and other parties, local MLA's, Block Development Officers and Junior Land Revenue Officers for the area. While Janata and Congress were reluctant to participate the move was welcomed by the *CPI*, since the committees were viewed as "instruments for popular participation",²⁰⁶ but the party also complained that the formation of representative committees was being hampered by the bureaucracy.²⁰⁷ Basu, as Minister

 205. 'West Bengal State Committee - Campaign Plan', *PD*, 11 December 1977.

206. *CPI* State Executive Committee Resolution, reproduced in *NA*, 18 December 1977.

207. This criticism echoed by that of a columnist in the journal 'Frontier' if the CPM's slogan of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' still held good, this implied "the building up of effective village, taluk, district, state-level people's committees", because dependence on the bureaucracy would be "the death knell for social transformation." (Ambuj, *Frontier*, 24 September 1977).

responsible for Police affairs, had ordered that there should be no more comping at the house of the jotedar, but something more fundamental was recognised to be necessary. Presenting the new budget, Ashok Mitra asserted in March of 1978 that

"The success of the programme for the rural sector can be ensured only if the present centralised organisational pattern is drastically modified."

There was a need for a "sense of participation" by the population in the implementation of government policy. It was planned that the lowest panchayats should formulate as well as implement the schemes.²⁰⁸

The New Government and the Centre-State Issue

The experience of the Emergency had invested the distribution of powers between Centre and states with a new importance for the CPM. The Left Front's 36-point programme, in addition to proposing the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the murder of political leaders and other 'excesses', recommended to the Centre the amendment of Article 356 of the Constitution in order to prevent the over-use of Emergency powers in the states. The November, 1977

208. S. Pal 'West Bengal Budget', *PD*, 19 March 1978.

session of the West Bengal State Committee, faced with an already two-month delay in Presidential assent for the Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, continued the emphasis on the importance of a shift in the balance of power in the direction of the states (as well as the strengthening of democratic rights and civil liberties.)²⁰⁹ Soon after this the West Bengal Cabinet adopted and subsequently circulated to other state governments a memorandum²¹⁰ exhaustive elaboration of the Left Front's views in favour of sweeping decentralisation of powers and safeguards against interference from above. This memorandum has continued to be cited by CPM leaders as a succinct summary of the Left Front's views.²¹¹

There were several reasons why the CPM felt the need to elaborate its stand on the issue. Firstly, the Ninth Congress of the party had seen a shift on the 'Nationalities Question': the united CPI had found that once linguistic movements succeeded, their supporters had a tendency to go over to the bourgeoisie, so the decision was taken not to back "bourgeois movements" for linguistic states, class exploitation being

209. PD, 11 December 1977.

210. Reproduced in Sharada Rath, *Federalism Today*, (1984), pp.40-1 & p.317.

211. see, for example speeches by Jyoti Basu and Nripin Chakravarty at meetings of Opposition leaders between May and October 1983 reproduced in Sahni (1984).

deemed to be more prevalent than political exploitation.

Secondly, as Jyoti Basu was reported to have said,²¹² the CPM was engaged in an experiment to find out if power in a country could be gradually captured by the proleteriat through parliamentary means. However this was to be achieved, it would require a certain amount of time and political space to see it through. The rapprochement with business and the attempts to change the terms of the Centre-state equation can be seen as part of this.²¹³ The majority they had gained in the state Assembly offered an opportunity of a new kind to create a comprehensive programme of rural mobilisation (Sengupta, 1979) impossible during the United Front's tenure, and to work for at least limited socio-economic change that could be used as an example for its campaigns in the rest of the country. As one commentator noted with regard to the handling of industrial relations, "nothing succeeds like success".²¹⁴ The "revival of co-operative bargaining" (Pal, 1983) in Federal relations would help in this.

212. 'Marxism Through the Looking Glass', *Frontier*, 8 April 1978.

213. The Organisation Report to the January-February 1978 conference of the West Bengal party declared: "The durability of the left front government is a particularly important requisite of the advance of the left and democratic forces all over India." (Sengupta (1979), p. 21.

214. 'Tight-rope Walking', *EPW*, 27 August 1977.

The emphasis on Centre-state financial issues in Mitra's 1978 budget was such that Ashok Rudra called it the CPM's "principal and almost only political programme"²¹⁵ Another thought the CPM's stress on the issue "mere diversionary tactics".²¹⁶

The CPI, meanwhile, had been campaigning on the very same issue. Its 1977 manifesto had repeated its 1971 stand : that there was a need for a "more meaningful" federal set-up without affecting the unity of the country.²¹⁷ In September 1977 it organised a rally against price rises as part of its efforts to "strengthen the state government's hand and a year later it organised a satyagraha, ostensibly against the Centre but probably also a response to the mobilisation programme of the CPM, over the previous 18 months. However, not being a part of the state government the CPI could not make the same use of the Centre-state issue for purposes of mobilisation as could the CPM, nor link it with the rest of its programme in a similar way.

215. Ashok Rudra, *Frontier*, 29 April 1978
Unfortunately, he felt, this "cannot possibly involve any mass struggles".

216. S. Bhowmik, *Frontier*, 11 March 1978.

217. Quoted in Rath (1984), p. 40.

THE LEFT FRONT II - THE PANCHAYATS, LAND REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT

The politicisation of the panchayats in 1978 was a new departure for rural West Bengal, where local government had been moribund for many years. On June 4, 1978 about 25 million voters in rural West Bengal voted to elect 56,000 panchayat representatives to the new three-tier bodies set up by the Left Front government.²¹⁸ These elections have been described as "a democratic experiment of which there is no parallel in contemporary political history",²¹⁹ while others felt their most significant feature was the "pacification" of the people through involvement in the polls.²²⁰ While the class polarisation resulting from the election campaign seems to have been an end in itself for the CPM, the boost that the politicised panchayats gave to the land reform efforts of the Left Front subsequently drew more attention. In particular, the share-cropper registration drive well publicised as 'Operation Barga' was the focus of much debate on the subject of the CPM's use of the panchayats for mobilisation of the poorer sections of rural society. Its objectives, methodology

 218. Government of West Bengal, Department of Panchayats and Community Development, *The Working of Panchayat System in West Bengal*, (March, 1980).

219. Sen Gupta (1979), p. 124.

220. Timir Basu, *Calcutta Notebook*, 22 April, 1978.

and achievements have been seen as central to any assessment, or at least an understanding of the Left Front's programme in its first term in government to 1982. For the purpose, the subject will be dealt with in two parts : a] the context in which Operation Barga was implemented, that is previous attempts and failures at land reform in West Bengal, and b] the methodology and achievements of the drive itself.

The 1978 Campaign

The 36-point programme of the Left Front for the state elections had promised that elections to panchayats and municipalities would be "held immediately" under proportional representation and "measures [taken] to confer more powers and resources on all local bodies". However, despite the fact that the same programme heavily criticised Congress for having "miserably failed to move towards abolition of landlordism and implement the basic principles of land reforms", and promised "radical changes in the land reform laws" and implementation of existing legislation, no attempt was made at this stage to link the two points (i.e. panchayat elections and the implementation of land reform).

As we have seen the CPM publicly cast the panchayat elections in an explicitly class light. On the day of the polling itself 'People's Democracy' wrote of 'cornering' the

"vested interests" in elections that had become "part of the class struggle".²²¹ Promode Das Gupta said the panchayats themselves would "intensify the class struggle in the countryside".²²² Thus both the elections and the panchayats once elected were given a class construction by the CPM's propaganda.

But since the new panchayats were politicised (for the first time in the state), the party element was also a very strong one. CPM rebuffed the approaches made by the CPI to form a 'Left and Democratic Front' for the elections (thus "jeopardising the full mobilisation" otherwise possible, according to 'New Age');²²³ it went it alone with its small partners in the Left Front. Despite only having less than 30,000 party members the CPM put up 40,000 candidates, not all of them tried and tested, according to the CPI,²²⁴ but claimed to be "mainly" from the rural poor.²²⁵ The CPM campaign mobilised 50,000 village-level cadres immediately (drawing on the strength of the kisan front) and sent them into the villages to organise meetings and demonstrations.

221. 'Issues in West Bengal Panchayat Elections', *PD*, 4 June 1978.

222. In a 12th May pamphlet, quoted in Sen Gupta (1979), p. 131.

223. *NA*, 23 April 1978

224. Figure from 'CPM's Hegemonistic Stand', *NA*, 4 June 1978.

225. 'Issues in West Bengal Panchayat Elections.'

Sen Gupta comments : "Never in the history of Indian politics did a political party penetrate so deeply and methodically the ancient fastness of the village."²²⁶ Report in the Bengali-language party weekly 'Ganashakti' over two months mentioned campaigns in 15,000 named villages.

The degree to which the villagers responded to the CPM's slogan of 'more power to the panchayats' - and to the argument that victory for the Left Front would strengthen its demand for a revision of Centre-state relations to transfer the necessary resources - was shown when the results emerged. The CPM alone won about 70 per cent of the seats in the gram panchayats (the lowest tier) and about 75 per cent in the panchayat samities and zilla parishads.²²⁷ Since the Left Front government had not, by the time of the elections in 1978, had the time for any policy programmes to make any great impact in the rural areas one would find plausible the assessment that the CPM's victory was "the cumulative result of the party's peasant-oriented strategies pursued since the late sixties".²²⁸

226. Sen Gupta (1979), p.131.

227. Results reproduced in *PD*, 16 July 1978.

228. Sen Gupta (1979).p. 133.

Although the election was fought on such sweeping issues the state government's budget three months before had given an indication - missing in the Front's earlier programme - of a concrete role of the panchayats. As Subrata Pal wrote in his review of the budget,

"The success of the programme for the rural sector can be ensured only if the present centralised organisational pattern is drastically modified."²²⁹

The emphasis in the budget on rural development meant there was a need for immediate elections to the panchayats (as the Front programme itself, published ten months before, had also promised). With the help of the elected representatives the Left Front could loosen the hold of the vested interests and devolve responsibility for the implementation of rural development schemes.²³⁰

Interestingly, although the holding of elections had been planned for some time, it was only as the results were coming in that the Left Front Committee met to discuss the exact powers and responsibilities of the new bodies.²³¹

229. *PD*, 19 March 1978.

230. *PD*, 2 April 1978.

231. *PD*, 25 June 1978. The Committee meeting was reported to have taken place on 6 June.

Rs.25 lakhs had already been spoken of as an amount available for interest subsidy for share-croppers and small peasants;²³² now another Rs.50,000 was to be set aside in cash and materials to enable gram panchayats to implement development schemes. However, the "real purpose" was still to involve people and raise levels of awareness.²³³

The Context - Landreforms in West Bengal

Land reform may for our purposes be defined as "all measures that redistribute property and/or disposal and utilisation of land radically in favour of the ultimate agricultural producers and as a consequence redistribute land-rent."²³⁴ The 'land utilisation' portion of the definition will cover what has generally been known in India as 'tenancy reform'.²³⁵ Even go so far as to represent tenancy reform of any kind as an unsatisfactory substitute for land reform proper. For the present, however, the all-inclusive definition will be used; its inherent contradictions, and whether there are such the staff of political dispute in West Bengal.

232. PD, 19 March 1978.

233. PD, 25 June 1978.

234. This, functional rather than prescriptive definition is suitable for use in this brief account of land redistribution in West Bengal.

235. In Lipton's words, "if you can do a land reform you don't need tenancy reform, if you can't, tenancy reform won't work." (Lehman, 1974).

Land reform started in Bengal in 1859 with the Rent Act of that year and continued with the 1885 Tenancy Act. These were aimed at giving ownership rights to the tenant and at fixing the rent on a stable basis.²³⁶ There was no settlement of what was called the "problem of peasant proprietorship". By 1928, however, the need was felt to extend the rights of ryots (occupancy tenant) to 'under-ryots' (protected tenants), but non-cash-rent tenants (i.e. bargadars) were left out.

In 1939 the Bengal Land Revenue Commission (better known as the Floud Commission) was set up. Its Report a year later was to fix the agenda for much subsequent legislation. It looked into the question of whether the government should i.e. abolish intermediaries.²³⁷ It recommending that bargadars should be recognised as ryots or in some cases as under-tyots. However, the Commission also laid the ground for decades of evasions by landlords by arguing for leaving khas lands with proprietors if cultivated by themselves or with hired labour. This pre-Independence Commission thus

 236. Planning Commission, *Land Reforms in West Bengal - a Study on implementation* (1963).

237. Ibid.

influenced subsequent government policy on the subject. Moreover, the Tebhaga movement of 1946, led by the Kisan Sabha in 19 districts of West Bengal and its demands²³⁸ were given legitimacy by the Commission's work and in turn added to the pressure for the legislation of the 1950's.

The 1950 West Bengal Bargadars Act can be seen as a false start to reform. It was a temporary measure with no real guide-lines for landlord-tenant relations. Its provisions have been dismissed by a knowledgeable observer as "inconsequential" (Thomer, 1956). The 1953 Estates Acquisition Act was, on the face of it, more promising. It was aimed at acquiring intermediary interests in land and hence contained details of the proposed method of acquisition, assessment and payment of compensation, and preparation of record-rights. The Planning Commission's 1963 Study on Implementation calls the EAA a "belated execution of a measure that had long been an accepted part of India's agrarian reform programme". But it was also a "remarkable departure" in putting a ceiling on direct possession (25 acres of agricultural and 20 acres of non-agricultural land) although Thoren

238. That 'two thirds' of the crop should be given to the share-cropper.

239. 'Protection to Sharecroppers', PD, 23 October 1978.

was more sceptical.

The 1955 West Bengal Land Reforms Act ostensibly represented another breakthrough. Its goals were to fix a ceiling, distribute surplus land above this and clear up the murky legal situation concerning the rights of share-croppers. The Act was to be a "blueprint of the new agrarian structure based on peasant proprietorship". (Planning Commission, 1963). This is a curious characterisation as a major feature of the Act was its definition of and provision for the continuance of share-cropping as the dominant form of tenancy. It was also responsible for very many evictions by landlords resuming land for 'self-cultivation' - a major loop-hole and "contrived legal laxity" according to Tai - and for another rise in the number of agricultural labourers.

As far as implementation of these provision went even in 1961 the position was still clearly unsatisfactory. The final draft of record of rights in land was only just ready by then and only 165,000 acres had been distributed to the landless. The situation of bargadars was particularly discouraging. The Commission found that in only around a tenth of cases was the law on shares of output (according to the bearing of input costs) followed and that on only a

quarter of plots were the share-croppers recorded (this figure itself probably being an over-estimate). The fixing of ceilings on individual rather than family holdings had undoubtedly left the way open for illegal transfers on a large scale. While the law could be better implemented, commented the study, the real solution would be to push the programme to its "logical culmination". The employer had the role of intermediary and should be treated as such (Planning Commission, 1963).

The period to 1967 saw few significant events on the land reforms front, although the 1973 Report by a Planning Commission Task Force asserted that :

"a certain degree of politicisation of the poor peasantry militant lines is a pre-requisite for any successful legislative-administrative action for conferring rights and privileges".

The United Front government of 1967 altered the bargadars' shares from 60 per cent to 75 per cent of the crop but registration remained low. There was a moderate increase in the acreage of land vested in the government. (Datta, 1988) Under Congress in 1972 the 1955 Land Reforms Act was amended : share-cropping was made heritable and receipts were introduced as compulsory for the crop. The 1975 Acquisition of Homestead Act helped many labourers to escape the bonds of their employers to some extent.

But much of this was standard fare in India of the 1970's and legal support was insufficient to make the measure effective. The Task Force's conclusions on the subject of politicisation of the peasantry could be taken as a sub-text for the argument for the new approach that came to be adopted by the Left Front after 1977.

'Operation Barga' - Methodology and Achievements

The West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill of October, 1977 was framed to remedy the defects of the 1955 Act. A comprehensive Bill was promised at some unspecified time in the future but in the meantime, "the problem of mass eviction of 'bargadars' needs immediate solution" (Guha, 1978). The definition of 'personal cultivation' applicable where landlords wished to resume land for this purpose was narrowed to require that : i] the person resuming (or a member of his/her family) must reside locally for most of the year; ii] the land might not be cultivated either by servants or wage labourers. Other features of the Bill were that unlawful eviction was made a punishable offence, as was the failure to grant a receipt to the bargadar on presentation of the crop share. Moreover, the onus was put onto the owner to show that a non-family-member cultivating his land was *not* a bargadar. The Act took some months to gain Presidential

assent (in the process, as we have noted, becoming a major issue in the Left Front's campaign for 'states' rights').

Inevitably, the previous experience of the United Front governments was influential in the implementation of this experience prevalent in the Bengal Kisan Sabha had been voiced by M.A. Rasul in his report to the Twenty-first Conference of that organisation in 1970 :

"The existence of the United Front Government and its correct land and police policy on the one hand, and, on the other, the initiative and the struggle of the peasants - the correct correlation of these two factors led to unprecedented advancement of the peasant movement";²³⁹

leading, among other things, to a halting of evictions. To this declaration - perhaps one of intent rather than fact - he added another :

"The peasants were made conscious that rights achieved by them were not bestowed upon them by someone from above but earned by their own collective strength."

Konar, too, had laid emphasis on intangible gains, as we have seen : under the United Fronts the achievements were of political consciousness, not economic. In fact the ministry relied on the mass movement to "overcome the

239. 'Protection to Sharecroppers', PD , 23 October 1978.

constitutional limitations" of the state government.²⁴⁰

Moreover, Konar explained,

"We resolved that without waiting for new enactments we would unleash mass movements first on the basis of existing laws".

Guhar (1978) writing at the very outset of OB agreed that "History shows that it is easier to mobilise the people for unleashing a broad democratic movement, in defence of the existing laws for enforcement", through which the people a] win their partial demands and b] see the "hollowness" of the very laws they are fighting to have guaranteed. But Guha goes farther to say that the Left Front government was itself an obstacle to the enforcement of the 1977 Act:

"Without a massive movement arousing the confidence of bargadars, recording of their names as bargadar by legislation is a day-dream."

Guha was not alone in these fears. At a seminar on land reforms at Jadavpur University in February 1978 in Calcutta²⁴¹ (inaugurated by Finance Minister Mitra). H.K. Chakraborty explained that illiteracy among bargadars meant they were as a whole ignorant of their rights even under the

240. Quoted in *PD*, 5 June 1977

241. Proceedings published in Bose (1981).

1955 Act; their "constant economic hardships" made them dependent on the rich landowners and moneylanders (frequently the same persons) and the interplay of these two facts usually resulted in a vicious circle : any attempt at recording their names as bargadars would result in fresh exploitation, even the loss of the land. Meanwhile the survey and settlement personnel of the local bureaucracy were too hard-pressed to deal with the situation effectively. There were cases of bargadars not being given implements, thus being unable to cultivate, and being evicted on those grounds. Chakraborty summed up :

"Practically, the real cause of the distress of the bargadars is that they are ignorant and unaware of their legitimate rights... [T]he socio-economic conditions of these poor distressed exploited bargadars put a stumbling block on the path of attainment of such awareness from within. So, the alternative way is to impart the awareness from 'without' and the real responsibility of doing so rests on the Government machinery."²⁴²

Another contribution²⁴³ agreed with this, but put emphasis on the organisatioⁿ of the potential beneficiaries themselves. He acknowledged that the 1977 Act did plug the loop-holes in previous legislation, and regulation bargadar in favour of the poor,

242. Ibid., p. 106

243. N. Bandopadhyay in Bose (1981).

"But the very nature of these provisions show that their effective implementation necessitates on the one hand considerable augmentation of the bargaining power of the rural poor by the building up of organisations committed to agitation in their interest and on the other a proper machinery determined to implement the legal provisions."²⁴⁴

However he also warned that "Land reform, as such has not much to offer such [marginal farmers] unless a determined effort is made to complement it with other vital items of agrarian reform", including some degree of co-operative working.

These opinions have been reproduced here to demonstrate the degree to which a consensus had been reached in West Bengal, even outside the CPM, that a totally new approach to the registration of bargadars - and the land reform in general - was needed. And the CPM itself was fully aware of this consensus. Its national journal in November of 1978 reproduced the recommendations of a UN-ESCAP group on the way forward "genuine development". This group had been unanimous that unless the power of the authorities was committed to pro-poor policies, the administrative system would not be responsive to the poor or help them to assert their rights. Decentralisation could even lead to a *weakening* of the poor's position;

"It is, therefore, essential to create conditions conducive to mobilisation and organisation of the rural poor."²⁴⁵

An institutional approach was needed to "strengthen the political and material base of the poor".

In the four months between the granting of Presidential assent to the 1977 amendments and the issuing of the first Board of Revenue circular ordering the intense drive to register share-croppers that became known as Operation Barga (OB), 400,000 share-croppers had been recorded, according to *People's Democracy*, and evictions become rare. But the circular, issued on July 5th, heralded the introduction of a new methodology that promised to be yet more effective.

On the administrative side the post of Land Reforms Commissioner had been restored after a 20-year hiatus, and after July 5th the land management and land settlement wings of the bureaucracy at various levels was formally brought together through regular meetings. The programme of OB itself was a five-stage process :²⁴⁶

245. PD, 19 November 1978.

246. Outline based on P.K. Datta (1988); D. Bandopadhyay (then Land Reforms Commissioner), 'Rural Workers' Camps show the Way', *Mainstream*, 4 July 1981, supplement; and Suhas Chattopadhyay, 'Operation Barga' leaflet, reprinted from *Social Scientist*, no. 87.

- i] identification of 'priority pockets' where there was a concentration of bargadars;
- ii] formation of 'squads' consisting of land reform officials, surveyors and tribal welfare officers where appropriate;
- iii] fixing of dates and venues of bargadar camps, *with the convenience of the bargadars themselves paramount;*
- iv] evening camps to remove the fear psychosis, elicit details of problems faced by participants in their daily lives, and outline the benefits of registration;
- v] reconnaissance and verification of claims, taking place the next day.

It was hoped to work with peasant and workers' organisations and panchayats in this enterprise to understand the subtle structures of exploitation otherwise impenetrable to bureaucrats.

Given almost as much emphasis in public²⁴⁷ were the Reorientation Camps in selected districts that enabled the poor and landless to voice their grievances for two days to officers. These bureaucrats interacted with the beneficiaries and by all accounts received some jolts to their perceptions

247. For example in D. Bandopadhyay's lengthy 1981 article.

of themselves and their role.²⁴⁸ At a higher level there were workshops on Land Reforms but many policies - indeed the whole methodology of Operation Barga (location, timing and format of camps included) - was shaped by the suggestions of peasants, bargadars and labourers themselves (Bandopadhyay, 1981). Meanwhile the traditional methods of evading land ceilings and retaining one's land became vulnerable to the involvement in the benami and surplus land detection process of peasant organisations and panchayats, whose members had an intimate knowledge of their local areas.

In this way, after one year of OB some 7,30,000 bargadars were recorded compared with 2,40,000 in the previous Settlement Operation.²⁴⁹ By 30th June, 1981, as many as 1.1 million bargadars were reported to have been recorded.²⁵⁰ Moving on a few years, by October of 1986 1.35 million had been registered, out of an estimated total of two million (according to government figures) (Datta, 1985). Meanwhile the intensification of the programme for redistribution of land vested in the government among the landless had been rewarded by the middle of 1981 with as much as 7 lakh acres (out of the

248. Ibid; also P.K. Datta (1988)

249. Figures from the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys of the West Bengal Government, Cited in S.C. Chattopadhyay, op. cit.

250. A.V. Jose, 'Poverty and Income Distribution : The Case of West Bengal' in Azizur Rahman Khan and Eddy Lee (eds.), *Poverty in Rural Asia* (I.O.O. Asian Employment Programme - ARTEP) p. 161.

12.3 lakhs held) having been distributed to 1.28 million beneficiaries in the state nearly half of whom belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes (although this programme was not a part of OB).

Operation Barga - Controversies

Operation Barga was conceived as a crash programme for recording of bargadars within a specified time frame and not as a measure for bringing about any definite change in the economic condition of the bargadars. The urgency of the programme was because i] once the bargadar was recorded and given a certificate it became more difficult for the landowner to evict him; ii] the certificate itself was to entitle him to financial assistance from institutional sources, which was not a part of OB itself.²⁵¹ The Land Reforms Commissioner said that the methodology for OB had partly been based on that devised by the National Labour Institute (in its experience of implementing the Bonded Labour Ordinance) but that these earlier attempts at putting it into practice had failed to take further action to utilise the new consciousness generated among

251. S. Chattopadhyay, op. cit.

the participant. In his view those involved in the programme gained in confidence and become more active in group affairs. The most important follow-up to OB, however, was the introduction of institutional finance to replace the funds normally provided by landlords.²⁵² Land Minister Benoy Chowdhury, in his 1980 Budget Statement to the state Assembly, called the provisions of this scheme a "breakthrough" and reported that "after a lot of persuasion", the commercial banks had agreed to open about 80,000 new "borrowal accounts" for the 1979 kharif season. The panchayats were involved in the selection of the beneficiaries from lists of share-croppers provided by the (now reorganised) Land and Land Reforms Department, and 50,000 out of the 60,000 cases sponsored in this way were financed by the banks.²⁵³

252. D. Bandopadhyay, *Mainstream* article.

253. Benoy Chowdhury, Budget Statement for 1980-81, Land and Land Reforms Dept. (Government of West Bengal Publication, 1980).

The clearest and most concise expanding the theoretical basis of OB was given by CPM theoretician Biplab Dasgupta (1984a) - now, since the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, a Calcutta M.P.²⁵⁴ His stated objective was to review the Left Front's policy with respect to the sharecroppers in the context both of earlier land reform and of socio-economic developments, thus providing "a broad perspective for a proper understanding of what the Left Front is attempting to do. (p. A-94) It is thus quite useful to summarise his arguments here.

On the matter of the efficacy of OB, Dasgupta acknowledged that coverage of sharecroppers by the programme had been "far from total", but argued firstly that the large proportion recorded was anyway a great achievement in comparison to what had gone before, and secondly by citing various recent studies, that sharecropping as a form of tenancy was a declining phenomenon and that estimates of the *total* number of bargadars in the state would thus tend towards over-estimation rather than otherwise. Similarly, with regard to the newly-instituted credit schemes and their coverage, he comments,

254. Biplab Dasgupta, Sharecropping in West Bengal - From Independence to Operation Barga' *EPW Review of Agriculture*, June 1984.

"Of course, one can always argue that it is not enough, in terms of their need and the coverage of the sharecroppers, but who can deny that a substantial advance has been made compared to what had been the position before?"

He also adds that even if credit facilities are insufficient, the added security offered by OB means "the sharecropper probably works harder after recording and manage to augment his income (pp. A-89-90)

Denying allegations of unjustified partisanship in registration of share-croppers, Dasgupta is clearly unwilling to agree that the sharecropper - CPM/landowner-right party equation are less than clear-cut. He gives the example of a poor man subservient to the landowner being put up against the real sharecropper on a plot of land in order to deprive the latter of his rights, the Left parties supporting the real tenant and the right parties supporting the other. "But", asks Dasgupta, "would it be fair to see that as a conflict between two sharecroppers belonging to two different parties, or would it not be more realistic to view this as another manifestation of the sharecropper-landowner conflict..?"(p.A-90)

He this reduces the arguments given by the critics to a simple issue of class conflict.

On this issue OB had accused of 'entrenching' sharecropping Dasgupta takes two different lines. As mentioned earlier, he considers that other types of tenancy - based on fixed rent and taken by larger farmers wanting to increase the area under their cultivation ('reverse tenancy') - will spread more widely "with the growth in capitalist relations". (p. A-91) Technological changes in agriculture had "created conditions for a change of social environment surrounding agricultural production" and this has been "eroding the basis on which the sharecropping system was erected and maintained until recently." Unfortunately Dasgupta does not deal directly with the question of how Left Front policy, including the registration and financial support of sharecroppers, has interacted with or disrupted the development of these trends he reports.

The other line Dasgupta takes on the issue - a rather distinct one - is that the complexities of the class situation at the micro-level do not admit of "immediate revolutionary transformation". He produces figures to show that about three-quarters of those leasing out on a crop-sharing basis are small or marginal farmers of households, accounting for more than half the area of land leased. Opposition to the recording of sharecroppers comes to a great degree from this

from this group (and, one must presume, so would opposition to the conferring of proprietary rights on bargadars). This touches directly on the fourth criticism of OB, that relating to the class strategy of the CPM. As Dasgupta acknowledges, political opposition from this group of small landowners and from middle peasants who use sharecroppers to cultivate part of their land is "of more serious concern to the Left Front government than that coming from the rich peasantry or the bigger landlords." Here we see clearly the CPM broad front strategy coming to the force : "... the domination of the village life by the jotendars and other bigger landed interests, the exploitation by the traders and money-lenders, the bureaucratic and partisan functioning of the village level officials, the attack on civil liberties during the oppressive years as in the seventies... In those fights these groups, or a part of them, would often prove to be valuable partners of the poor. It would therefore be wrong, taking a long-term perspective of the struggle, to cast them off as reactionaries and thus to actually force them to join the reactionary camp". Dasgupta explains how the government planned to prevent this happening and to achieve "the broadest possible unity of the peasants and labourers" : important concessions were to be given to the middle classes (input subsidies and land revenue exemptions) to demonstrate government awareness of their

interests, and assurance would be made to them that tenant's security and higher crop share "would not necessarily be against their own interests since they too would benefit from the increased effort the tenant would now make for the improvement of land and production." (pp. 490-1) Dasgupta backs up his assessment with a statistical exercise to show that the lumping together of all landholders between 2.5 and 7.5 acres is open to question, on the grounds of the large differentials in the percentage of leased-in area in farms across the whole category. He prefers the 2.5-5 acres category to be classed with the marginal farmers in socio-economic analysis.

The final type of criticism of OB - that it lacked political and economic direction - is again approached from the point of view of stated CPM strategy. Dasgupta makes the firm distinction between long-term objectives ("very much related to the question of state power at the *national* level") and short-term ones. Since the former is concerned with the carrying out of the 'people's democratic revolution',²⁵⁵ involving "the kind of reform which the industrial bourgeoisie itself would have undertaken had to been free from its ties with

 255. *Not* any 'bourgeois democratic revolution' as Dasgupta accusing Khasubis of implying.

the land interests, but without the participation of the bourgeoisie", Dasgupta explains that "state objectives cannot be met until the state power in the country as a whole has been captured by the working class and the peasantry by replacing the bourgeois-landlord regime." He accuses the Front's critics of "the failure to understand this basic point, that agrarian relations in West Bengal cannot be segregated from that prevailing in the rest of the country." The state government's hands are thus tied by administrative, constitutional and political limits. He concludes, "While abolition of landlordism is an important slogan, it cannot be translated into an immediately realisable programme." (1984, pp. A-88-89). Dasgupta does not even mention the issue of land consolidation or collective enterprise, seeming to imply that this programme is no part of the current stage of revolution. (Indeed he states that in the people's democratic revolution itself the object is "to place the land in the hands of those who actually till the land.") However he does note, as we have seen, a slow rise in the incidence of more capitalist forms of farming.

To demonstrate that the issue of co-operativisation was not the exclusive preserve of CPI intellectuals or other critics of the Left Front, it might be well to quote a CPW



leader on the issue. B.T. Ranadive, writing in 1977 on the Janata government's 'decentralisation' programme for industry,²⁵⁶ complained that that party did not see the protection of small industries as "a transitional problem", and failed to realise that "the State and the country must gradually plan to take all small production forward and enable them through voluntary co-operative efforts to go in for large production and overcome the limitations of small-scale production." Importantly, Ranadive extends the same logic to agriculture, where the problem of raising the standard of living can be solved only if the landlord monopoly is broken land distributed to the tillers and they "persuaded to form voluntary co-operatives for common production... to enable the peasants to take advantage of the latest scientific advances and increase production and march towards plenty."

Another comment on the Left Front's programme proves to be more immediately relevant. Suhas Chattopadhyay writes:²⁵⁷

"It must not be forgotten that radical land reform is the beginning not the end of rural development. It should also be pointed out that within the framework of a bourgeois-landlord state a radical land reform is an impossibility. Even a Left-led State Government like the Left Front Government of West Bengal is incapable of implementing radical land reform. However within the existing socio-economic structure land reform measures can be made more effective and turn out to be the basis of a meaningful rural development. This alternative model has been presented by the Left Front government of West Bengal..."

256. In *PQ*, 17 July 1977.

257. Suhas Chattopadhyay, 'The State of Land Reforms and Rural Development in India' (Calcutta : Indian Statistical Institute)

Rural Development, Class and the Panchayats²⁵⁸

Indeed since the effective petering out of the Left Front's programme of share-cropper registraion the attempts at what Chattopadhyay called "a meaningful rural development" have been drawing more attention. Through the public employment programmes such as Rural Works Programme, the state government made financial outlays of at least Rs. 300 million a year in the years from 1977 to 1980. Per worker availability of public employment during these years was 15.05, 28.69 and 15.05 days respectively.²⁵⁹ This seemed to some to have had "a decisive influence on incomes of the rural poor in West Bengal". The integrated Rural Development Programme, which was launched in the greater part of the state in 1978-79, and which has given a "major boost" in 1980-81 (Ranade, 1989 p. 564) in time for the Sixth Five-Year Plan, have over the years attained "a significant role in rural development" according to the West Bengal

258. The term 'development' is not one the CPI(M) would use to describe its plans for forwarding the present stage of revolution in the rural areas. However, it has currency in Government of West Bengal publications especially concerning panchayats; and has in any case many different meanings even in the development literature itself, W.B. Government figures, quoted in A.V. Jose, p. 162.

259. Ibid.

miniter concerned.²⁶⁰ Its implementation by the Left Front government, which after all is led by parties that regard the problem of how to deal with the small-propertied at each stage of the revolution as an important one, is therefore very much of interest. (Ranade, 1989, p.542)

Soon after the panchayat elections of 1978, the new bodies were given the job of overseeing relief and reconstruction work in the aftermath of the massive floods of that year. It was not long before their involvement in rural works was put on a more permanent footing, with panchayats taking on the responsibility of identifying beneficiaries for loan schemes and ultimately for planning developmental works.²⁶¹ The government pledged itself to expand the role of panchayats, stating in its 1980 review of panchayats activities that it was "committed to building up Panchayat Institutions at the grass root level for comprehensive and integrated rural development", and further claiming that "Planning from below is now a reality".²⁶²

-
- 260. Benoy Chowdhury BUDGET SPEECH, Rural Development, Government of West Bengal, 1988-89.
 - 261. See examples given by G.K.LIETEN in his 'Panchayat Leaders in a West Bengal District', ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY, October 1, 1988, p.2069.
 - 262. Government of West Bengal, Department of Panchayats and Community Development, THE WORKING OF PANCHAYAT SYSTEM IN WEST BENGAL (W.B. Government publication, March, 1980), p.10.

Over the years the field of operation of panchayats has grown to such a degree that Benoy Chowdhury as Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Panchayats has been able to announce in the State Assembly that "there is hardly any development scheme worth the name which is not handled by the Panchayats in rural West Bengal."²⁶³ The Projects Evaluation Committee of the Planning Commission of India has praised the performance of the West Bengal government regarding implementation of the various centrally-sponsored development programmes and credited the involvement of the panchayats with this relative success, particularly with regard to minimisation of leakages.²⁶⁴

However, an analysis of the Left Front approach to poverty alleviation and development programmes cannot rest content with outlining how other see it. The most authoritative and detailed outline of the CPM'S attitude towards the early employment programmes has been given by Biplab Dasgupta. He wrote in 1984²⁶⁵ that

263. Benoy Chowdhury, BUDGET SPEECH 1989-90, Department of Panchayats, Government of West Bengal.

264. See ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY, July 23, 1988.

265. Biplab Dasgupta, 'Agricultural Labour under colonial, Semi-capitalist and capitalist conditions - A case study of West Bengal', EPW Vol. XIX, No. 39, September 29, 1984.

"The objective was not to end exploitation, because that could not be accomplished within the framework of the Indian constitution by a state government, but to ensure that the highly personalised dependency relationship, a remnant of feudalism, was reduced as far as possible. Furthermore, it was intended to create conditions which would make it possible for the labourers to organise themselves politically and in support to their demand for wages".

He continues,

"While the programme did bring a great deal of relief and economic support, the objective was primarily political".

Similarly, the "psychological impact" of land distribution in reducing the dependence of the landless on their patrons is, according to Dasgupta, more important than the direct economic benefits. (Dasgupta, 1984, P.A.-146) Nevertheless, the government has since described as part of its 'alternative approach' to planning the attempt to "reorder the existing distribution of land and other productive assets in rural areas towards a more equitable situation".²⁶⁶ This is "essentially a productive move on the basis of hard evidence of superior production performance on the part of working peasants". Moreover,

"When the priorities of planning are thus placed in favour of the common people... an objective condition is created for involvement of the common people in an organised manner in both formulation and implementation of rural development programmes."

266. Jyoti Basu in Government of West Bengal Directorate of Panchayats pamphlet, quoted in PAXLANCE (Calcutta), September/October, 1989.

Benoy Chowdhury has spoken of the "pivotal role" played by land reform in the implementation of a "comprehensive programme of rural development". The financial and constitutional limitations within which the government has to work are great, as is the scale of the problem, but "we were confident that despite the limitations and various constraints something could yet be done for the suffering of rural masses if only the existing land reform laws were strictly enforced and loopholes in it effectively plugged..."²⁶⁷ Chowdhury draws attention to the granting (in 1986) of President's assent to the 1981 Land Reforms Act bringing all classes of land under the same ceiling limit.²⁶⁸

For a number of years, therefore, there has been a continual emphasis on the importance of participation, without which there is mere "de-centralisation on paper and.. mechanical disaggregation of schemes."²⁶⁹ As the various

267. Budget Statement 1989-90, Land and Land Reform Department.

268. Some observers have detected a marked lack of enthusiasm in the government's implementation of this "once-made-much-of" bill (Ranade, 1989, p.567 n.22) and some have also looked for an explanation to the changing membership and mode of functioning of both the CPM and the panchayats.

269. Basu, in PAXLANCE, Sept./Oct., 1989.

development programmes and the government's approach in implementing them have become institutionalised, so the focus of interest of observers has shifted to the functioning of the panchayats themselves. The three main areas of interest have been the composition of the panchayats, decision-making within them, and the functioning of the panchayats in relation to organs of the local administration and other agents in the implementation of programmes.

An early official survey of a hundred gram panchayats in the state, conducted in 1979, produced figures to show that 'owner cultivators' comprised 50.7% of members surveyed (as well as 5% landless labourers and slightly under 2% share-croppers).²⁷⁰ Further calculation with the data given reveals that a bare majority of the members came from the poorer sections of the villages (i.e. under five acres of land held). A smaller independent study came to a similar conclusion, noting that "the overall picture is not one of dominance by the very poor." (Westerguard, 1986, p.85) Another study (Lieten, 1988) following the 1988 panchayats elections in a block in Birbhum

270. Government of West Bengal, March 1980, pp.42-3.

district, did, however, reveal a steady increase in the number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe members and candidates (partly due to the improving share of the votes of the CPM) between 1977 and 1988. Insufficient figures are given for comparison of occupational distribution of candidates or members over the years, but in 1988 59% of CPM candidates (most of them successful) were share-croppers, landless, or small peasants (in this case classed as under three acres). The study describes as "disappointing" the almost complete absence of women in the panchayats (only two out of the 480 candidates for gram panchayat and panchayat samity elections) and quotes a CPM leader as admitting that the party itself had still many "feudal leanings" preventing improvements of this situation.

Lieten heralds the establishment of a "new type of leadership" in the panchayats but in several of the panchayats by Westergaard the nomination of scheduled caste members was of little consequence, as "these members stand at the entrance door to the room during meeting and do not participate in any discussion at all." (pp. 87-8) and nominated female members were found to show little interest.²⁷¹ This is not to

271. See also Hartman et.al., 1989, pp. 163-4, where a government-nominated panchayat member (a Muslim widow) is interviewed who admits herself to be "quite unaware" of the proceedings and who is told by her male fellow-villagers what to do at the meetings.

trivialise the importance of representation of depressed sections of the population in the panchayats but rather to show that the degree of involvement of these representatives must also be taken into account.

Similarly, the wider context of operation of the panchayat need to be considered whatever perspective of the study is used. A 1981-82 study of a village in West Bengal noted that the decentralisation power to the panchayat had "brought about the same spectacular changes in the exercise of authority". (Hartman et.al., 1989 p.173) Lieten argues that the prominence of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe members of panchayats has institutionalised the disintegration of the caste hierarchy. (p. 2072) At the block level, another researcher²⁷² identified the main characteristic of the functioning of the panchayat system as a complete shift of control of local patronage from the bureaucracy to the politicians.

From the Marxist perspective the issue of class as relates to the panchayats has necessarily drawn much attention.

272. Chanwadha Bose, unpublished 1989 represent to the Nuffield Foundation on field research in Orissa and West Bengal on the implementation of poverty-alleviation programmes/functioning of the local bureaucracy and political elites.

Rudra (1981) argues that since the class composition of an effective body has very little to do with class interests (as the CPI and CPM themselves agree when it comes to state assemblies and Parliament), and since elected members will be acquiring vested interests of their own once elected, excessive emphasis on class composition is a red herring. (pp. A-67-68) Moreover, no attempt has been made to fund the Food for Work programme by paying workers with foodgrains collected from rural rich of the local area, which might, believes Rudra, advance the class struggle. And as Chatterjee (1982) argues, the mobilisation of the lower strata of the peasantry as a group against their economic exploiters does not necessarily lead the group to perceive itself in class terms. (p. 96)

The most convincing Marxist argument against giving too much importance to the class composition of the panchayat membership, however, is that these bodies have to operate within a society wherein power remains centred in the hands of the wealthy. "It is a central principle of Marxian Political Theory" points out Rudra, "that as long as there is private property, democracy can be ensured merely by the adherence to the principle of one vote for one individual." Moreover, the smallness of the panchayat and its closeness to the grass roots

makes it "all the more vulnerable to be captured by the members of the rural rich". (1981. p.A-67)

In this connection it is rather puzzling to read in another, recent, article in a government publication²⁷³ that the question of whether poverty eradication can be successfully undertaken "against adverse forces of monopoly capitalist economy" is "wide open"! Apparently the class character of the panchayat representatives is "crucial" and happily, in West Bengal "the balance of power in the village could be tilted in favour of the poor because land reforms have been meaningfully implemented there". Since the majority of the panchayat members come from the weaker sections, it is 'natural' that 'there is certainly a basis for the poor people in the functioning of the Panchayats'. However, it is concluded that it would be "illusory" to project any real change in the lot of the poor under the current socio-economic structure. And the article comes back into the CPM track, by stating that

"we believe that through these processes of democratic exercises, the people will feel where the crux of their basic problems of life lies and where lie the solutions."

The fact that this belief-supposedly so central a part of the

273. WEST BENGAL : article by Mehboob Zahedi in December 16, 1988 issue, pp.400-408.

CPM's view of poverty alleviation, at any rate - is here given so little prominence is not surprising in a journal of general interest. However, some of the other statements quoted above are some what surprising coming from the Sabhadhipati of a Zilla Parishad.

It is notable, given the Left Front's emphasis on the establishment of "rural institutions for rural development based on people's participation",²⁷⁴ that most of the praise for its relative success in combining growth/development with redistribution has had almost no relation with the participation aspect of the functioning of panchayats. Kohli(1987) for example, refers to the functioning of these bodies as "a sharp break from the past political patterns in rural India" but he explains the success of the goverment in overcoming socio-structural and bureaucratic obstacles in terms of the CPM's leadership, ideology, organisation and class base, not in terms of 'people's participation. Similarly, Westergaard(1986) attempted to discover whether the political changes in the

274. GWD, 1980.

previous few years had

"created their own dynamic whereby the previously dispossessed may ultimately and autonomously redefine the nature of the development strategy",

but was forced to conclude that although representation of the poor had been increased,

"by and large this representation has not resulted in any significant increase in their control over these institutions." (p.89)

Like Kohli's, her praise is for the relative success of the Left Front government in introducing and implementation reforms, and the creation of the political/institutional conditions for further success.²⁷⁵

Bose (1989) is more categorical:

"the CPM's handling of the poverty-alleviation programme cannot be seen as an exercise in 'participation'".

She reports observing in the block under study

"a massive spoils system the control of which had passed from the bureaucracy to the politicians who were using it very effectively for vote maximisation purposes." (p.10)

She concedes, however, that the CPM has broken new ground in

275. She does, however, identify several aspects of the situation (failure to oppose corruption and vested interests due to a "preoccupation to secure votes", lack of full and open discussion outside gatherings of CPM panchayat members, and party favouritism) which in her view constitute serious threats both to widened participation and to the long-term support base of the party.

creating political institutions that are capable of rural development and redistribution.

It is uncertain how the CPM views the (qualified) praise of those assessing the degree to which poverty alleviation and development programmes have had impact.²⁷⁶ Although it has constantly emphasised the participation aspect of its approach to the implementation of rural development programmes, this has never been phrased either in general Marxist terms or in terms of the CPM strategy and tactics (or those of any party in the Front). We also have on record other statements confirming the CPM's continued belief in the impossibility of 'real' relief to the people under the present state and socio-economic set-up. The implications of this combinations of positions will be discussed in the conclusion.

276. Ranade(1989) notes its "studied indifference in public" to the writings of observers such as Kohli.

CHAPTER IV

THEORISING THE EIGHTIES

The ascent of Rajiv Gandhi to the Prime Ministership after the assassination of his mother in October 1984 seems to a large degree to have removed one of the major obstacles to improved prospects of communist unity in the 1980's. Rajiv's "Business school approaches to managing India" (Nossiten, 1988, p.13) and the "definite pro-rich, anti-working-people bias"¹ of his government's policies provided much less scope for disagreement among communists on the correct line to take towards it. After just over four years of the Rajiv government, the CPM's Thirteenth Congress regarded its removal as "an essential prerequisite for the solution of all other problems in the country (Namboodiripad, 1989), and even the CPI, with its history of 'top alliances', now stressed the importance of playing an "independent political role"² and initiating mass struggles.

-
1. Parakal (1985), CPI's Concept of Left and Democratic Alliance, p. 8.
 2. Ibid, p.11.

THE CPM, BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY AND CENTRE-STATES ISSUE

In the new situation, the oppositional stance of the CPM seemed to it to be as appropriate as ever. In Mrs. Gandhi's time the party had been concerned with the dangers of authoritarianism. With this in mind Dass (1984) wrote in the CPM theoretical quarterly that:

"When parliamentary institutions are under attack, it is all the more necessary for the working class to defend these institutions as they provide an effective auxiliary forum to the representatives of the working-class to advance its cause".

Since the CPM - the "working-class party" - had the task of 'channelising' discontent it had to make effective use of parliamentary institutions. In the party's experience election campaigns resulted in "intense political activity which very much influences the masses", and enabled the party to take its programme to the widest sections of the people and thereby 'unmask' the class character of the state.³

Once in parliament or state assembly, the party representatives worked in close connection with the CPM leadership, "exposing" measures of the government especially those in the labour, agrarian and budgetary areas, the most sensitive, according to Dass.

3. Dass also quotes Engels and Lenin to back up this statement.

As for state governments led by the CPM,

"It is only in these states that the repressive machinery of the state, the police etc., is not used against struggling workers, to help landlords against agricultural workers and sharecroppers".

Dass clearly believed that this "limited relief", which would not solve any of the basic questions of politics, would

"make the people realise more quickly that unless the entire set-up is changed, no radical improvement can take place in their condition, and, with the confidence of protection from the Left Front Governments, carry on the struggle for the basic aims with even more determination".

The CPM in West Bengal had made clear to the people that the Left Front "can only be the instrument of people's mobilisation and struggles and not of solving basic problems" (emphasis added). This was a learning process for the benefit of the people, "with regard to the source of real power", that is, the Centre. Dass concluded that

"It is in the interests of the working class to defend parliamentary institutions as they provide facilities, which an authoritarian regime denies, to advance the revolutionary struggle".

The phrase 'State Governments as Instruments of Struggle' had featured in a CPM Central Committee Report of 1967, and,

still further back in time, in Paragraph 112 of the Party Programme. This section, which dealt with the participation in as well as the formation of governments, did not according to Basavapunniah (1985) give a license to bring into existence a "transitional" government at the Centre.

Basavapunniah, writing after the accession of Rajiv and looking back over the nearly two decades since the 1967 Report, sees four questions as crucial :

- i] has the CPM successfully utilised the state governments "as instruments of struggle in the hands of our people" for mobilising more people behind the programme?
- ii] have people been made more aware that state governments do not possess real political power?
- iii] is the CPM "doing what is realistically possible to render help to the common people"?
- iv] has it adhered to the Central Committee line? --or is it reconciled to being part of the bourgeois - landlord state?

Basavapunniah indicates how fundamental these questions are by summing up that the issue concerns

"Whether our continued work in the state governments is corroding our revolutionary consciousness, allowing the bourgeois democratic and parliamentary illusions to grow and thrive, or sharpening the edge of our revolutionary outlook".(p.36).

Although he admits that none of the higher Party bodies has so far reviewed the CPM's work in state governments in a thorough way - and therefore, it is "difficult" for a single Party leader to undertake the task - he pledges to attempt an assessment of the experience of government.

According to Basavapunniah, the ruling classes have always seen Left governments as a challenge. As a result the "scope" of "this specific form of class struggle" had become enlarged to cover Centre-state relations and the defence of the federal structure. He writes:

"The concept of the Left oriented state government as a transitional instrument for providing some immediate relief to the people and thus expanding the mass base of our party has acquired additional political significance as a means of keeping our multi-lingual and multi-national Indian Union united and integrated".

The defence by the CPM of non-Congress governments is a political form of the struggle against the "imperialist plot of disintegrating the Indian Union", and it "has a radicalising and politicalising effect on the mass of the common people.

In a similar vein, Basavapunniah declares of the CPM's performance in West Bengal and Tripura (then also governed by a CPM-led LF) that it is "yielding proper dividends" and of the governments there that they are a "source of inspiration" for the people and for non-Congress governments elsewhere.⁴ However, he warns that there must be continual political and ideological struggle with front partners to consolidate "political unity"; and that if the government, "propping it up at all costs". For this to be avoided, firstly a correct line on relations with allies in the front and on the working of government is necessary and secondly care should be taken that bourgeois parliamentary habits and "bureaucratic methods" do not "corrode" consciousness in the party.

The 'Centre-state issue' features heavily in another piece in the CPM theoretical journal, this time by veteran leader B.J.Ranadive (1984). The "vendetta" of the Centre (then headed by Indira Gandhi) against the West Bengal and Tripura governments was

"a part of the class struggle which the bourgeois-landlord government wages against the people fighting against the present social system."

-
4. In Kerala the task is to change the correlation of political forces away from communal and casteist machines, rather than to form non-Congress governments.

The Centre attacks (obstructing industrial development or withholding assent to legislative measures) because

"Every successful step forward of the Left Front Governments consolidates left unity, increases the influence of the left forces over the people and becomes a weapon for changing the present correlation of forces among the people".

Ranadive goes so far as to say that the Centre-states issue

"secures wide mass support isolating the Government and the ruling party far more effectively than any other issue".

Clearly, for both Basavapunniah and Ranadive this issue is central to the theorisation of CPM practice in the 1980's. A brief look at the developing Centre-state conflict and the Front response to it is therefore in order.

Given that it had been partly by utilising central assistance in the form of employment and development schemes that the Left Front parties (and the CPM in particular) had enlarged and maintained their rural support base, it might seem a little ironic that the Front should have increasingly berated the Government of India for its failure to sympathise with the state's financial needs. But the 1980 national elections, which restored Indira Gandhi to power at the Centre, undoubtedly, changed the rules of the federal game.

Between 1978-9 and 1983-4 the total cash and food-grain expenditures under the Food for work and other rural works programmes in the state fell from Rs. 43 crore and 150,000 tonnes to Rs. 14 crore and 15,000 tonnes (S.K., 1985). This squeeze seems to have been felt at the grass-roots⁵ and the question was asked how the schemes could continue to fulfil the material expectations raised in the prevailing conditions of "near bankruptcy" of state finances (Ray, 1983). The Front did attempt to convert the alleged culpability of the Centre into a major political issue, but it itself faced the accusations that it had failed either to fully utilise existing allocations, or to step up food procurement at a time (1983-4) when agricultural output in the state was hitting a high (S.K., 1985). Critics had earlier drawn attention to the paradoxes of the Left Front procurement policy (Rudra, 1981). The system in use was also felt to be particularly prone to leakages, concentrating as it did on extracting a percentage of paddy only at the processing stage (Sengupta, 1981).

However, the sector in which the Centre-state dimension has loomed largest is the industrial. At the end of the 1970's the state had for some years already been slipping

5. See Westergaard (1986), p.83 - data collected for 1981/2 and 1982/3.

behind relative to other industrialised states both in terms of output and of current licences.⁶ But the continuing effects of the truncation of Calcutta's hinterland at Partition, poor communications and the uncertain political situation have since been compounded by central neglect. Per capita central Plan assistance to the state between 1980-1 and 1984-5 was only Rs. 132 compared with the All-India average of Rs. 214, despite the ongoing refugee problem (Nossiter, 1988, p.142).

In an effort to improve the situation, the West Bengal government in 1983 outlined its case for a better deal to the Finance Commission, and was looking forward to an extra Rs. 25 crore in 1985-6, but these hopes were dashed by the unprecedented delaying tactics of the Union Finance Minister. After a year (1984-5) that was "one of the most difficult faced by the Left Front government in its eight years in office so far" (S.K., 1985) it had to cope with a renewed and yet more acute financial crisis, even having to suspend payment of salaries to the employees at one point.

6. 'Trade Winds' page, India Today 1-15 November 1979 and December 1981.

The 1980's on the industrial scene have been an on-again, off-again tale of nascent industrial revival eagerly promoted by the State Industries Minister and rashes of confrontations between labour and management.⁷ Throughout this time the state government has continued to accuse the Centre, periodically taking direct action in the form of bandhs (12 in the eight years to 1988) which, according to erstwhile Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee,

"popularise our demands and highlight the continuous injustice done to West Bengal."⁸

While state, central and private enterprises incur crores of rupees in lost production on bandh days, communist unions seize the opportunity to increase their strength. CITU leader are reported to have called the September 1988 bandh "a warning for bigger agitational programmes to come", and an AITUC boss admits: "The bandhs help us retain power".⁹

7. See, as a sample, India Today articles 'Open Door Policy' (15 July 1985) 'A Wave of Closures' (15 November 1988) and 'Sparking off a Revival' (31 January 1990).

8. 'An Expensive Ritual', India Today, 15 October 1988.

9. Ibid.

THE CPI AND THE LEFT AND DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE

It was not until 1982 that the CPI was to join the Left Front government in West Bengal, having in the state elections of that year come into the alliance for the first time. (In the 1977 Assembly polls the party had gained only two seats.) Therefore, it was hardly confronted with the issues of use of state governments as instruments of struggle or of whether Centre-state conflict was an expression of class struggle.

Instead, and despite its admission of error in supporting Indira Gandhi so long and so vociferously, the CPI continued to emphasise the "task of building a left and democratic alternative". A 1985 pamphlet outlining the CPI's concept of this¹⁰ makes amply clear the party's. While the Rajiv Gandhi government would not implement a "pro-working-people strategy", nor would any other bourgeois parties :

"Only a change in the balance of power between the bourgeoisie and the working people can bring about any change in policies in favour of the masses of working people".

10. CPI's Concept of Left and Democratic Alternative, Pauly V.Parakal, December 1985.

This would be difficult to achieve, and would require "united mass and political struggles". The declaration that "No parliamentary combinations or top negotiations with different parties can by themselves bring about such an alternative"¹¹ was perhaps an indication that the party had learnt its lesson.

Implying that a new phase of struggle had now begun, the CPI

"believes that never before in the history of the party has its independent political role and the role of the mass organisations in initiating united mass struggles and key importance as in the context of the present situation."

Left "unity in action" would be particularly important with regard to the CPM, with the "ultimate aim" of reunification. When Left unity became evident "the democratic forces will begin to gravitate to it." This should happen on a national scale, with the working class taking a "leading role" in the economic, political and ideological struggles and attracting the progressive intelligentsia and other groups "interested in national democratic advance" to the worker-peasant alliance.¹²

11. Ibid, p.p. 10-11.

12. Ibid, p.p. 11-12.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that the practice of the West Bengal communist parties has shifted a great deal over the past twenty years or so. The CPI has moved from participation in two United Front governments through alliance with Congress, and then isolation, to membership in the 1982 Left Front. By 1977 the party was willing to admit to mistakes in its previous understanding, but then if its influence among the masses as compared to the CPI's was anything to go by it has had plenty of opportunities to admit to them.¹

Meanwhile the CPM has 'played the constitutional game' extremely successfully, its adjustment of tactics demonstrated by its acknowledgement in 1977 that it knew "what to do and what not to do". On the organisational front the West Bengal party added its voice to the Tenth Congress call for a genuinely mass party² (although some years later the ability

-
1. In 1985 the National Council of the CPI made public a resolution 'On Certain Harmful Practices in Internal Party Life', continuing the tradition.
 2. The state party conference report announced that "the time had come to increase the membership a hundredfold". (Sengupta, 1979, p.17).

of the local leadership to maintain the quality of such a membership was doubled(CPM, 1986). From the earlier land seizure movements the CPM turned to the revitalisation of the panchayats, which have been seen as a "sharp break" from the previous patterns of rural politics (Kohli, 1987) and "a creative contribution to the diversified career of Communism" (Sengupta, 1979, p.124). That the West Bengal party perceived its own role as an enterprising, innovative one is demonstrated in the title of a 1985 pamphlet published by the state committee: 'Marches on an Untravelled Path (1977-85)'. .

As Pramode Dasgupta explained to Sengupta (1979), the aim of the new rural strategy involving the panchayats was to bring about.

"an awareness of aggregate interests contributing to the unity of the poor and middle peasants because all... are victims of the same exploitative system".(p.134)

Yet soon the CMP was being accused of naivety in believing the panchayats could perform this role in a society still dominated by the landlord classes (Rudra, 1981); and one critic labeled it 'extending parliamentarism to the grass roots' (Sengupta, 1981).

Meanwhile, as the panchayats increasingly took on the role of implementing central employment, works and loan schemes the CPM's ambivalence towards this development aspect became evident. As Ranade (1989) notes, 'development' cannot be expected to have the same meaning for a Marxist party as for a 'bourgeois' Centre; Sengupta (1979) explains:

"a Communist party's model of development grows out of the interaction between its theoretical formulations of strategic goals and its actual tactical operations to achieve those goals."

However, despite the need for such interaction, Ranade can find no formulated CPM position on the subject of the development programmes initiated and funded by the Centre and implemented by state. In 1978 the CPM leadership had stressed the 'participation' aspect of the panchayats, both in implementing land and tenancy reform and in using relief funds to make the 'common man's' life "a little more liveable".³ Yet neither the 'reformist' praise for the Left Front's redistributive efforts (Kohli, 1981) nor the 'radical' criticism of the encroachment of vested interests into the panchayats (Westergaard, 1986) provoke anything but studied indifference from the CPM. (Ranade, 1989).

3. The only approximation to such a position is the emphasis on the importance of 'no illusions' where relief to the people is concerned.

Given its early professions of intent, therefore, and its subsequent silence on the subject of the development programmes that the panchayats it dominates have been implementing, the CPM might well attract the accusation that it has failed to take its own innovations seriously. There have been accusations (Sengupta, 1979; Bose, 1989) that there is a serious lack of intellectual ferment in the party; and there has been no real effort since 1978 to theorise the experience of panchayats, in terms of participation and development. Conversely, the CPI, whose practice has on the whole followed a less innovative pattern, has been much more willing to speculate and to make "efforts of creativity".⁴

An indication of this is given in the way the two parties deal with the subject of 'Eurocommunism', as expounded by Spanish Communist leader Santiago Carrillo (1977). The CPI's Eleventh Congress at Bhatinda had already expressed its disagreement with "certain erroneous and harmful views" (in its response to Carrillo's exposition of 'eurocommunism' in 1976 and the subsequent discussion over it); but in 1979 a pamphlet was brought out on the subject (Sen & Bose 1979) by People's Publishing House. Here, although taking an

4. Jyoti Basu, quoted in Sengupta (1979), p.24.

202

approach of "implacable opposition and ruthless criticism" towards 'alternative anti-Soviet communism' (p.23), the CPI announces that it seeks to learn from the "great communist parties" of Europe "in the spirit of brotherhood; equality and autonomy". The CPM, by contrast, takes the view (expressed by Ranadive (1978)) that Carrillo is a 'revisionist' pure and simple. Tellingly, the only mention of Marxist creativity is an ironic one when Ranadive describes Carrillo's view that social differences would be overcome by a natural process as 'creative Marxism indeed'.

Strangely, while it is the CPM whose practice has been compared to that of the Italian Communist Party (Sengupta, 1979), it is the CPI that has made a sympathetic theoretical assessment of Togliatta and his comrades (Sen & Bose, 1979). Similarly, although elements in the writings of Gramsci bear some affinity with the practice of the CPM (the use of the Centre-state issue as a 'terrain' on which to fight; the setting up of panchayats close to the 'productive organism'; the cautious eye to elections as a measure of the Party's strength), it is only in CPI publications and the works of CPI academics that Gramsci is thought is seriously considered.

The single major issue that the CPM and especially Namboodiripad⁵ has theorised is Centre-state relations. This area, where the parameters of 'class struggle' are very firmly fixed by the centre and by the constitution is one where there is little room for initiatives on the part of a CPM-led state government. Whereas in the case of panchayats and development, where there is scope for, it not the preparation of revolutionary cases, then at best the creation of new forms of political and productive organisation through mobilisation and participation; here little effort has been made to theorise the experience since 1978 in a way that would indicate possible future strategy. Praxis involves the changing of consciousness through participation: this requires mobilisation by communist parties of the masses. The CPM, by emphasising the Centre-state dimension (in which the terms are dictated) and neglecting the grass-roots dimension (in which innovation has been possible) seems to be restricting this mobilisation to being a reactive rather than a productive process.

As we have seen in Chapter III the CPM has been a 'thoroughly opposition' party with regard to Congress and the Centre. The discipline and determination of its cadres

5. Mohit Sen, "Communism and Eurocommunism" in Sen & Bose(1979).

were evident throughout the 1960's and 1970's as it fought for hegemony on the Left and in state politics. However, this oppositional tradition seems to have left it psychologically unprepared to take seriously its own innovations made in the first few years of the Left Front government. The result has been the evolution of two levels of discourse : one a 'developmental' one, concerned with 'participation' and redistribution; the other a Marxist oppositional one, concerned with the 'class struggle' as expressed in the form of Centre-states relations. As the years go by and the Indian revolution remains as apparently distant a goal as ever, the gap between these two levels yawns larger. Indeed, it is into this very same gap that the 'action groups' have been trying to move, to the obvious annoyance of the CPM.⁶

In conclusion, therefore, it is difficult to disagree with Sengupta (1979) that the CPM has tried "to sculpt its own strategical and technical lines, doing its own theoretical homework, learning from its own experience" (p.11). It has made a 'creative contribution' to the practice of winning elections and building a strong base. However, given its

6. See, for a summary, his 'Centre-State Relations Over the Years' in a 1987 edition of The Marxist.

weakness in almost all the other states, it can at best be said to have found a Bengali, not an Indian, "methodology of revolutionary social change" (p.13). At the same time the initial advances made in politicising and mobilising the population through use of democratic institutions do not seem to have been capitalised on in the way necessary to create a prototype for future economic and social development. By contrast, the CPI's party intellectuals continually make public their musings on trends in the economy⁷ and on what modernisation might mean in the Indian context⁸; but in West Bengal that party is organisationally weak and incapable of sustained resistance to open conflict. The CPM labels the CPI 'revisionist'; the CPI calls the CPM "opportunism".⁹ In neither case has theory and practice been integrated successfully enough for communists to feel confident for the future of the Indian revolution.

7. See the arguments between Sethi (1984) and Karat (1984) on the issue.

8. Y.V.Krishna Rao, Trends in Agrarian Economy, P.P.H., 1989.

9. Sunil Sengupta (1989) asks this question.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

Labour in West Bengal 1972

Department of Panchayats and Community Development,
March 1980. *The Working of the Panchayat System in
West Bengal.*

Budget Statement 1980-81 Benoy Chowdhury (Minister-in-Charge,
Land and Land Reforms Department).

Budget Statement 1982-83 Benoy Chowdhury (Land and Land Reforms)

Labour in West Bengal 1987

Budget Speech 1988-89 Benoy Chowdhury (Rural Development
Department)

Budget Speech 1989-90 Benoy Chowdhury (Department of Panchayats)

2. COMMUNIST DOCUMENTS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Programme of the Communist Party of India. Adopted at the
Second Congress. M.V.Kaul for CPI, 1948.

Fight Against Revisionism political-Organisational Report
adopted at the Seventh Congress. (CPM) Calcutta, 1964.

Programme Adopted at the seventh Congress October 31-November 7,
1964. (CPM) Calcutta, n.d.

Constitution of the Communist Party of India. Adopted at the
Seventh Congress. CPM, Calcutta, 1965.

Proceedings of the Seventh Congress. CPI, New Delhi, 1965.

*Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party
of India, Tenali, June 12-19, 1966.* CPM, Calcutta, 1966.

Election Review and Party's Tasks. Adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India-Marxist. CPM, Calcutta, 1967.

Ideological Debate Summed up by the Polit Bureau. CPM, Calcutta, 1968.

Our Tasks on Party Organisation. Adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India-Marxist. Calcutta, October 28-November 2, 1968. CPM, Calcutta, n.d.

Political Resolution Adopted by the Eighth Congress. CPM, Cochin, 1968.

Political-Organisational Report of the Eighth Congress of the CPI(M). CPM, Calcutta, 1969.

Forward to Unity and Struggle. Report to AITUC Conference, 1970.

Documents of the Ninth Congress of the CPI. CPI, New Delhi, 1972.

Political Report. Adopted by the Ninth Congress of the CPI(M). CPM, Calcutta, 1972.

Documents of the Tenth Congress of the CPI, CPI, New Delhi, 1975.

Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI. CPI, New Delhi, 1978.

Naxalbari and After: a Frontier Anthology. 2 vols, Calcutta, 1978.

A Critical Review of Indian People's Revolutionary Struggle with reference to the past. Central Team, CPI(M-L), February, 1980.

Liberation (Organ of the Central Team of the CPI(M-L), Special edition, June 1981.

Political Organisation Report of the 11th Congress of the CPI(M). CPI(M) 1982.

Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI(M). CPI 1982.

Documents of the Twelfth Congress of the CPI. Reports and Resolutions Adopted by the National Council of the CPI, New Delhi, September 17-20, 1983.

CPI'S Concept of Left and Democratic Alternative. (Pauly V. Parakal).
CPI, New Delhi, 1985.

CPM 1986. *Documents of the Twelfth Congress of the CPI(M).*

CPM 1986. *Documents of the Thirteenth Congress of the CPI.*

People's Democracy (CPM English-language weekly), 1966-85.

New Age (CPI English-language weekly), 1966-85.

SECONDARY SOURCES

1. BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Addy, Premen & Azad, Ibne 1973. 'Politics and Culture in Bengal',
New Left Review 79, May-June.

Aggarwal, A.P. 1968. *Gheraos and Industrial Relations.*
N.M.Tripathi; Bombay Agro-Economic Research Centre
(Visva-Bharati Universtiy) 1986. *An Evolution of Programme
of Barga Operation in West Bengal.*

Balagopal, K. 1987. 'An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied
Class', *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), 12 December.

Bandopadhyay, D. 1981. 'Rural Workers' Camps show the Way',
Mainstream West Bengal supplement, 4 July.

Bandopadhyay, N. 1981a. 'Land Reform and the Rural Poor in
West Bengal' in Bose (ed.) q.v.

————— 1981b. 'Operation Barga and Land Reforms Perspective
in West Bengal', *EPW Review of Agriculture*, June.

Banerjee, S. 1981. 'Left Front's Agrarian Programme', *Mainstream*
supplement, 4 July.

Banerjee, Sumanta 1984. *In the Wake of Naxalbari.* Subamarekha,
Calcutta.

Bardhan, Pranab 1984. *Political Economy of Development in India.*
Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Basavapunniah, M. 1985a 'One Para 112 of Our Party Programme',
The Marxist, January-March.

————— 1985b 'The Statement of Policy Reviewed',
The Marxist, July-December.

Bates 1975. 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36, April-June.

Bergmann, Theodor 1984. *Agrarian Reform in India*. Agricole, New Delhi.

Bhattacharya, A.K. 1978. 'An Examination of Land Reforms With Special Reference to West Bengal', in Bose (ed.) q.v.

Bose, Anuradha 1989. Report to Nuffield Foundation University on Birmingham 1989 field research project (unpublished).

Bose, Manjula(ed.) 1981. *Land Reforms in Eastern India*. Jadavpur University.

Brass, Paul & Franda, Marcus 1973. *Radical Politics in South Asia*. M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Broomfield, I.H. 1968. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Cabral, Amilcar 1973. *Return to the Source*. Africa Information Service.

Carrilo, Santiago 1977. '*Eurocommunism*' and the State. Lawrence & Wishart, London.

Chandra Pal 1983. *Centre-State relations and cooperative federalism*. Deep & Deep, New Delhi.

Chatterjee, Pantha 1982. 'Caste and Politics in West Bengal', in Omvedt (ed.) *Land, Caste and Politics in South India*. Author's Guild, Delhi.

Chattopadhyay, Suhas (n.d.). *The State of Land Reforms and Rural Development in India*. India Statistical Institute, Calcutta.

————— (n.d.) *Operation Barga*. (reprinted from *Social Scientist* 87)

- Crouch, Harold 1966. *Trade Unions and Politics in India*.
Manaktalas, Bombay.
- Dasgupta, Biplab 1973. 'West Bengal Today', *Social Scientist*
vol. I, no. 8, March.
- 1974. *The Naxalite Movement*. Allied Publishers, Bombay,
- 1984a. 'Sharecropping in West Bengal: From Independence
to Operation Barga', *EPW Rev. of Agro.*, June.
- 1984b. 'Agricultural Labour under Colonial, semi-capitalist
and capitalist conditions: a case study of West Bengal', *EPW*
Rev. of Agric., September.
- Dass, Ram 1984. 'Working Class and Bourgeois Parliamentary
Democracy', *The Marxist*, April-June
- Datta, P.K. 1988. *Land Reforms Administration in West Bengal*.
Daya Publishing House, New Delhi.
- De, Nitish R. & Srivastava, Suresh 1967. 'Gheraos in West Bengal-I',
EPW, 18 November.
- Democratic Research Service 1957. *Indian Communist Party Documents*
1930-1956. Democratic Research Service and Institute of
Pacific Relations, Bombay.
- Draper, Hal 1977/8. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* vol. I & II.
monthly Review Press.
- Dutt, Kalyan 1981. 'Operation Barga: Gouris and Constraints',
EPW Rev. of Agric., June.
- Dutt, R. Palme 1979. *India Today*. Manish, Calcutta.
- Femia 1975. 'History and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio
Gramsci', *Political Studies*, 23 March.
- Fic, Vidor M. 1969. *Peaceful Transition to Communism in India:*
Strategy of the Communist Party. Nachiketa Publi., Bombay.
- 1970. *Kerala: Yenan of India*. Nachiketa Publ., Bombay.

- Field, I.O. & Franda, M. F. 1974. *Electoral Politics in the Indian States: The Communist Parties of West Bengal*. Manohar Book Service, Delhi.
- Franda, Marcus 1968. *West Bengal and the Federalising Process in India*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- 1971a. *Radical Politics in West Bengal*. M.I.T. Press,
- 1971b. *Political Development and Political Decay in West Bengal*. Firma K.L.M., Calcutta.
- Frankel, Francine R. 1971. *India's Green Revolution*. Princeton University Press.
- Frolich 1972. *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*. Pluto Press, London.
- Getman, Harry 1963. 'The Communist Party of India: sino-Soviet Battleground' in Doak-Barnett (ed.) *Communist Strategies in Asia*. Proager, New York.
- Ghatak, Maintreya 1978. 'West Bengal: A base study - implementation of minimum wage legislation for agricultural labourers and the role of peasant organisations', *Marxist Miscellany* 11, March.
- Ghose, A.K. 1979. 'Institutional structure, technological change and growth in poor economies: An analysis with reference to Bengal and Punjab', *World Development* no. 7.
- 1983. 'Agrarian Reform in West Bengal: Objectives, Achievements and Limitations' in Ghose (ed.) *Agrarian Reform in Contemporary Developing Countries*.
- Ghosh, Anjali 1981. *Peaceful Transition to power: A study of Marxist Political Strategies in West Bengal 1967-1977*. Firma, K.L.M., Calcutta.
- Ghosh, R. 1981. 'Agrarian Programme of Left Front Government', *EPW*, June.
- Gopalan, A.K. 1973. *In the Cause of the people*. Orient Longman, New Delhi.
- Gaugh, Kathleen 1968. 'Communist Rural councillors in Kerala', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 3 no. 3-4.

- Gransci, Antonio 1971. *Prison Notebooks* (ed. Hoare and Nowell-Smith). Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Griffin, Keith 1979. Introduction to Special Issue of *World Development*, no. 7.
- Guha, Moni 1978. 'Land Reform and the Left Front Government', *Frontier*, 8 July.
- Hartman et. al. 1989. *The Mass Media and Village Life*, Sage, New Delhi.
- Hunt, Alan 1980. *Marxism and Democracy*. Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Irani, C.R. 1971. *Bengal: The Communist Challenge*. Lalvani, Bombay.
- Jose, A.V. (n.d.). 'Poverty and Income Distribution: The base of Rural West Bengal in Azizur Rahman Khan & Eddy Lee (eds.) *Poverty in Rural Asia* (I.N.O. Asian Employment Programme).
- Joshi, P.C. 1975. *Land Reforms in India*. Allied Publishers, Bombay.
- Karat, Prakash 1973. *Language and Nationality Politics in India* Orient Longman, Bombay.
- 1984. 'Action Groups/Voluntary Organisations; A Factor in Imperialist Strategy', *The Marxist* vol. II, 2, April-June.
- Kautsky, Karl 1983. *Selected Political Writings* (ed. Goode), MacMillan, London.
- Khasnabis, Ratan 1981. 'Operation Barga: Limits to Social Democtatic Reformism', *EPW Rev. of Agric.*, June.
- Kohli, Atul 1987. *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Krishna Rao, Y.V. 1989. *Trends in Agrarian Economy*. People's Publishing House (PPH), New Delhi.
- Lehmann (ed.) 1974. *Agrarian Reforms and Agrarian Refomism*. Faber & Faber, London.
- Lenin, V.I. 1968. *Collected Works*. Progress, Moscow.
- 1975. *On the National and Colonial Questions*. Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.

- 1976. *Selected Works*. Progress, Moscow.
- Lieten, G.K. 1988. 'Panchayat Leaders in a West Bengal District', *EPW*, 1 October.
- Lipton, D. 1974. 'Theory of Land Reform' in Lehmann (ed.) q.v.
- Luxemburg, Rosa (n.d.). *Social Reform on Revolution*. Merlin, London.
- Mao Ise-Jung 1940. 'On New Democracy', reprinted in *Selected Works*, vol. II. Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.
- Marx, Karl 1961. *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (ed. Bottomore & Robel), Penguin, London.
- 1977. *Selected Writing* (ed. McBlellan). Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Masani, M.R. 1954. *Communist Party of India; A Short History*. Derek Uerschayle, London.
- McBlellan, David 1979. *Marxism After Marx*. Papermac, London.
- Mencher, Joan P. 1980. 'The Lessons and non-lessons of Kerala: Agricultural labourers and poverty', *EPW* Special no., October.
- Mishra, G.P. 1977. *Some Aspects of Change in Agrarian Structure* Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore.
- Mitra, Ashok 1979. *Calcutta Diary*. Rupa & Co., Calcutta.
- Mouffe, D. 1979. *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Mukherjee, D.P. 1978. 'Industrial Climate in West Bengal', *Economic Times*, 1 January.
- Mukherjee, P. 1983. *From Left Extremism to Electoral Politics*. Calcutta.
- Namboodiripad, E.M.S. 1965. *Revisionism and Dogmatism in the CPI*. New Age Press, New Delhi.

- 1968. *The Republican Constitution and the Struggle for Socialism*. (R.R.Kale Memorial Lecture). Gokhale Institute, Pune.
- 1974. *Conflicts and Crisis, Political India: 1974*. Sangam Books Orient Longman, New Delhi.
- 1982. *Selected Writings* vol. I. National Book Agency, Calcutta.
- 1989a. *Class Struggle in India-Before and After Independence*. (Seminar at Nehru Memorial Library (Teen Murti), 19 February.) Muineo.
- 1989b. 'Thirteenth Congress of CPI(M)', *The Marxist*, January-March.
- Nanda Prakash 1989. 'CPM'S thirteenth Congress - A critical Review', *Third Concept*, April.
- Nossiter, J. F. 1982. *Communism in Kerala : A study in Political Adaption*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- 1988. *Marxist State Governments in India : Politics, Economics and Society*. Pinter Publishers, London.
- Oomen, J.K. 1985. *From Mobilisation to Institutionalisation : The Dynamics of Agrarian Movement in 20th Century Kerala*. Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
- Ovenstreet, Gene D. & Windmiller, Marshall 1959. *Communism in India*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Planning Commission, Government of India 1963. *Land Reforms in West Bengal - A Study on implementation*. New Delhi.
- Pzeworski, A. 1985. *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Ram, Mohan 1969. *Indian Communism : Split Within a Split*. Vikas, New Delhi.
- 1971. *Maoism in India*. Vikas, New Delhi.
- Ranade, Sudhanshu 1989. 'A Communist Perspective on Development Strategy for Rural India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, August.

- Ranadive, B.J. 1978. 'Eurocommunism and the State', *Social Scientist* 75, October.
- Rao, M.B.(ed.) 1976. *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol. VII. PPH, New Delhi.
- Rath, Sharada 1984. *Federalism Today*. New Delhi.
- Ray, Rabindra 1988. *The Naxalites and their Ideology*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Retzlaff, Ralysh 1965. 'Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India' in Scalpino (ed.) *The Communist Revolution in Asia*. Prentice Hall, Berkeley.
- Roy, Ajit 1983. 'Panchayat Elections : Class Mobilisation Without Class Struggle', *EPW*, 25 June.
- Roy, A.K. 1975. *The Spring Thunder and After*. Minerva, Calcutta.
- Roy, Ranajit 1973. *The Agony of West Bengal : A Study in Union-State Relations*. New Age Publishers, Calcutta.
- Roy, Subodh (ed.) 1972. *Communism in India : Unpublished Documents 1925-1934*. CPI, Calcutta.
- (ed.) 1976. *Communism in India : Unpublished Documents 1945-1945*. CPI, Calcutta.
- Rudra, A. & Bandhan, P.K. 1983. *Agrarian Relations in West Bengal Results of two surveys*. Somaiya, Bombay.
- Rudra, Ashok. 1977. 'The Left Front Government', *EPW*, 3 September.
- 1978. 'All Quiet on the West Bengal Front', *Frontier Anniversary no.*, 29 April.
- 1981. 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward', *EPW Rev. of Agric.*, June.
- S.K. 1985. 'Diminishing Returns for Blaming Centre', *EPW*, 13 April.
- Sahni, Sati 1984. *Centre-State Relations*. Vikas, New Delhi.
- Sarkar, Subrata 1972. *Centre and the States*. Academic, Calcutta.

- Sen, Bhowani 1962. *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India*. PPH, New Delhi.
- Sen, Mohit (ed.) 1971. *Documents of the CPI*. PPH, New Delhi.
- Sen, Mohit & Bose, Dilip 1979. *Eurocommunism for Scientific Socialism*. PPH, New Delhi
- Sen, Sunil 1988. 'Thoughtsof Antanio Gramsci : Agrarian Question, Revolutionary Strategy and Contemporary India', *Socialist Perspective*, June-September.
- Sengupta, Bhabani. 1972. *Communism in Indian Politics*. Columbia University Press, New York.
- 1973. 'India's Rival Communist Models', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 22, January-February.
- 1979. *CPI(M) : Promises, Prospects, Problems*. Young Asia, New Delhi.
- Sengupta, Sunil 1989. 'West Bengal Land Reforms and the Agrarian scene', *EPW Rev. of Agric.*, June.
- 1989. 'West Bengal Rural Scene - A Review', *Science and People* (Joshi-Adhikari Institute of Social Studies), vol. I, no. 1.
- Sethi, Harch 1984. 'Groups in a new politics of Transformation', *EPW*, 18 February.
- Sharma, J.R. 1984. *Communism in India*. Sterling, New Delhi.
- Subramanian, K.S. 1983. *Ideological Evolution of the Indian Communist Movement*. Thesis submitted for D.Phil. to Karnatak University.
- Surjeet, Harkishan Singh 1983. 'Marx and the Peasant Question', *The Marxist*, July-September.
- Thorner, Daniel 1956. *The Agrarian Prospect in India*. Delhi School of Economics, Delhi.
- Vaid, K.N. 1972. *Gharaos and Labour Unrest in West Bengal*. Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, New Delhi.

Varkey, Ouseph 1974. *All the Crossroads : Sino-Indian Border Dispute and CPI, 1959-63*. Minerva Associates, Calcutta.

Weiner, Myron (ed.) 1968. *State Politics in India*. Princeton University Press.

Westergaard, Kissten 1986. *People's Participation, Local Government and Rural Development in West Bengal*. Centre for Development Research, Gopenhagen (Mimeo).

2. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

Economic and Political Weekly

The Statesman

India Today

Social Scientist

Mainstream

The Telegraph

The Marxist
(CPM theoretical quarterly)

The Times of India

Marxist Miscellany

Seminar

1582

