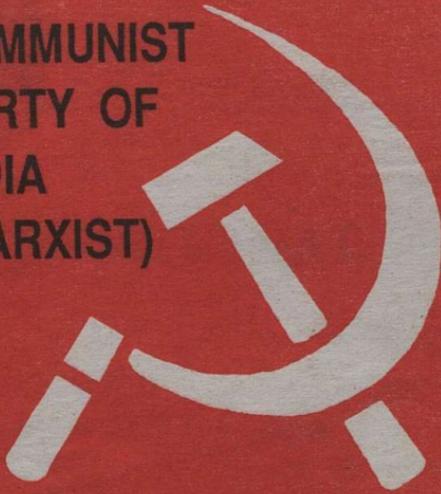


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**COMMUNIST
PARTY OF
INDIA
(MARXIST)**



*16th Congress of CPI(M)
5-11 October, 1998, Calcutta*

**Draft Political
Organisational Report
Part-II**

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Part II

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Implementation of the Political Line since 15th Congress

The period since the 15th Congress has been one of intense activity which involved two general elections. The Polit Bureau and the Central Committee had to constantly intervene in the evolving situation to implement and carry forward the line worked out in the 15th Congress.

This period can be divided broadly into three distinct phases. The first, the period upto the 1996 general elections with the Central government under the Congress. The second, the 1996 elections and the period of the United Front government, and the third, the 1998 general elections and the period since the BJP-led government came to power.

The Political Resolution of the 15th Congress had anticipated that political instability will deepen during this period. This has been confirmed by the developments during this period. The 15th Congress also highlighted the growing dangers arising out of the new economic policies of liberalisation; the increasing threat to national unity and social harmony arising from the growth of the communal forces; rampant corruption in high places and the separatist threats mainly in Kashmir. The 15th Congress had also stated that the popular discontent arising out of the Congress policies was sought to be exploited by the BJP and its communal combine. In the absence of a coherent Left democratic and secular combination, the BJP could take advantage of the situation. Hence,



the 15th Congress decided that an important task before the Party was to forge the unity of the Left democratic and secular forces in the ensuing electoral battles; strengthen Left unity both for strengthening the unity of democratic and secular forces as well as united mass movements against the economic policies and communal forces; and, called upon the Party to further strengthen the resistance against the anti-people policies through mass movements.

The Period Upto 1996 General Elections

That the Congress(I) was steadily losing popular support and the people chose the third alternative wherever it emerged as a viable force was confirmed in the assembly by-elections that were held soon after the 15th Congress. Of the 28 seats spread over 13 states, the Congress could barely retain its position by winning 10. The BJP won only 3, while the constituents of the third alternative put together won 13. Thus, with the proper projection of the third electoral alternative it was clear that the people's response could have been consolidated.

Growing Struggles: This period also saw big working class actions. The five day telecom strike against privatisation was important in the sense that the strike was being conducted on a direct political issue and not on economic demands. Though sections of the reformist leadership of the unions vacillated leading to the withdrawal of the strike after five days, this strike was important in drawing the attention of the working class against the larger impact of the economic policies and privatisation. This period saw a big movement against the Enron agreement. There was a big one-day strike in Mumbai of about 10 lakh workers and employees against the pension scheme at the initiative of the CITU. Over 5 lakh coal workers went on a strike; lakhs of fishermen went on a strike against the loss of their livelihood due to deep sea trawlers and forced the government to review the decision; the bank employees strikes; strikes of the workers of the jute mills in Bengal; the all-India students strike which was observed in 125 universities and over 2900 colleges against privatisation. The big mobilisations at the call of national platform of mass organisations and various state level actions mobilised lakhs of working people

throughout the country against the economic policies. This deep resentment that was growing amongst the people was strengthening sections of the Left democratic forces where they were able to present themselves as a viable alternative. In other areas, the communal forces were rallying the discontent by giving deceitful slogans like 'swadeshi'.

The Party played an important role in ensuring that the Patent Act Amendment Bill brought by the Congress in conformity with the WTO was blocked in the Rajya Sabha. Similarly, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill that would have perpetuated the misuse like in the case of TADA was also defeated in the Rajya Sabha.

Corruption: This period saw a sordid record of corruption under the Narasimha Rao government. The protection provided by that government to people like Chandra Swami etc and the subsequent exposure of the Jain hawala case evoked large scale condemnation amongst the people. Our Party had taken the lead in exposing the various scandals like the bank/security scandals, the sugar scam, petroleum and gas deals etc. This also strengthened the growing disaffection amongst the people to the Congress rule.

Kashmir: The burning down of the Charar-e-Sharief shrine had a serious impact. The fundamentalist forces who had been active and trying to foil the revival of the political process in the state perpetrated this destruction. The bungling and mishandling at the shrine sharply illustrated the total failure of the Narasimha Rao government's policy on Kashmir. Supporters of the CPI(M) was specially targetted by the extremists in the Anantnag district and atleast three persons were killed including a leading CPI(M) cadre.

At our Party's initiative, a meeting of the Left parties was held in the wake of this incident and called upon the Central government to take the following immediate steps:-

- 1) Effective and speedy steps must be taken to rebuild the shrine at Charar-e-Sharief and all the houses destroyed by fire in the town;
- 2) The present governor has to be replaced and the set

up revamped. The governor must have a political vision. To motivate the administration and to provide access to the people, an advisory committee with people of political background should be constituted;

3) The vital question of providing maximum autonomy within the Indian Union must be taken up. The agreement of 1975 between Sheikh Abdullah and Smt. Indira Gandhi provides the basis for this. The Centre must announce its initiative in this regard;

4) Serious efforts must be made to open a dialogue with sections who stand for the protection of Kashmiri identity. All round efforts must be made to isolate and combat the force who are directly backed and sustained by Pakistan; and

5) There has to be a massive campaign in Kashmir and the rest of the country to explain how the extremist activities have disrupted the economic and social life in the valley and to rally the people for the defence of secularism and national unity.

Efforts to forge a third alternative: During this period, the BJP succeeded in its manoeuvres to split the SP-BSP alliance in Uttar Pradesh. The SP-BSP alliance had a lot of problems mainly due to the absence of any socio-economic programmatic understanding. Both confined themselves merely to caste appeals and the conflicts between their respective caste bases also contributed to the breakup. Our Party opposed the formation of the BSP government backed by the BJP. Unfortunately, the state units of Janata Dal and CPI took a narrow opportunistic stand of supporting the BSP because of their opposition to Mulayam Singh Yadav.

During this period, our Party made all efforts to try to create an effective electoral alternative to the Congress and the BJP. This was based on the 15th Congress Political Resolution which stated:

"The CPI(M) and the Left must strive for an understanding with the secular opposition forces to present an effective electoral alternative to the Congress(I) and the BJP. The Left alone cannot, in the present situation, defeat both these forces. The secular opposition parties have, though constrained by the absence of a

coherent programme, a important role to play in projecting the immediate electoral alternative."

On this basis, at the national level, the joint appeal was issued to the electorate by the Left parties, the Samajwadi Party and the Janata Dal. At the state level, our Party had forged electoral understanding with the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh; with Assam Gana Parishad in Assam; apart from Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Karnataka and elsewhere. In Maharashtra, a Progressive Democratic Front was formed with the Left parties and the Peasants and Workers Party. In Tamilnadu, while the CPI chose to go with the DMK and the TMC, we aligned with the MDMK.

1996 General Elections and the Formation of the United Front

The elections to the Eleventh Lok Sabha resulted in no single party or formation winning a majority. The results revealed the decline in the Congress(I)'s mass base with a sharp decrease of 6.7% of its vote and the number of seats coming down to 142, the lowest ever in the history of the party. This decline of the Congress, instead of paving the way for advance of the Left, democratic and secular forces led to the situation wherein the reactionary BJP with its communal platform made gains though its voting percentage registered only a marginal increase of 0.7%, i.e., from 20.1 to 20.8%. It won 160 seats and emerge for the first time as a largest single party in the Lok Sabha. With its allies like the Shiv Sena, Samata Party, Haryana Vikas Party and the support of the Akalis, the BJP had a strength of 194 in the Eleventh Lok Sabha. The third force consisting of the Janata Dal, the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party got 113 seats alongwith the regional parties like the AGP and the TDP, the total came to 134. In Tamilnadu, the DMK-TMC alliance secured 37 seats. However, the Left parties could just maintain the position, though there was a small decline in strength from 56 to 54. Thus, the third force could only acquire the third position after the BJP and the Congress(I).

The 1996 Election Review of the Central Committee, after analysing results, took serious note of the failure of the Party and the Left to make significant electoral advances. The resolution

stated:

"The failure to make any significant electoral advance in the country as a whole over a long period, the inability to utilise the favourable situation of mass discontent against the bourgeois landlord policies of the Congress and the success of the BJP in such a situation does raise some basic questions. Some of these issues have been raised in the discussions in some of the state committees while reviewing the elections.

"Critical Examination Required: Since 1991, we had conducted at the all-India level and in the states, a number of struggles and campaigns against the economic policies of the Rao government and played a leading role in the broad based resistance which has developed through formations like the National Platform of Mass Organisations. Similarly, our Party has been consistent in organising anti-communal campaigns and rallying the wider sections in defence of secularism. We have also been in the forefront in exposing the corruption scandals. Despite all these activities by the Party and the mass organisations we are not able to go beyond our existing areas and increase our electoral strength. This requires deeper consideration.

"In those weaker states, where the Party has some presence and pockets of influence, our political tactical line enjoins us to forge alliances with the secular bourgeois parties which are opposed to the Congress and the BJP. Over a considerable period of time we have adopted concrete tactics which have resulted in alliances and joint election campaigns with the bourgeois parties who are stronger than us. The experience of how our Party has utilised these joint platforms and united fronts must be examined. In successive Party Congresses we have stressed the importance of developing the independent activities of the Party in the political-ideological and organisational spheres. We have set out the importance of increasing Left intervention and Left unity in the context of forging the wider alliance and for paving the way for the advance of the Left and democratic forces. However, both in mass movements and in elections such joint platforms and fronts have not led to the commensurate growth of the independent strength of the Party and its mass organisations. It is a common experience in many of the weaker states that our independent strength has

stagnated or declined compared to the advance made by other bourgeois-landlord parties.

“Lag in Independent Party Positions: In projecting the independent political line of the Party among the people, in taking ideological and class positions distinct from the bourgeois parties, the Party is lagging behind. When such wider alliances and joint fronts with other political parties are forged and this independent political ideological stand is absent or lagging, the Party’s growth gets limited. It is difficult for the people to see the distinct identity of the Party.

“Secondly, the call for independent activities of the party is often ritualistically observed in a formal manner without sufficient initiative taken at the grassroots level to take up the class and mass issues and launch struggles and movements. The capacity to take up independently issues by the Party and to wage militant struggles has been giving way to general campaigns and reliance on electoral tactics not very dissimilar to bourgeois parties. In such a situation the methods utilised by the bourgeois allies such as caste mobilisation, populist slogans devoid of a class content and tendency to tail behind the slogans of the dominant bourgeois partners is becoming increasingly manifest.

“In such a situation, neither the Party’s independent strength nor its electoral influence grows and the tendency to tail behind the bourgeois parties ends up in strengthening them and not the Party and the Left forces. How seriously the Party takes the task of projecting the independent political line of the Party, building up the all sided independent activities, political ideological and organisational and guarding against the tendency to tail behind the bourgeois parties must be seriously looked into. This will entail further self-critical examination of our political- tactical line since the 10th Congress particularly our experience in allying with the bourgeois parties both electorally and in general political terms.”

Formation of the United Front

In the context of the new situation in the Lok Sabha with the BJP emerging as the leading party, the country was faced with the

very serious prospect of a reactionary communal party coming into power at the Centre. The Central Committee noted the dangerous consequences of such a prospect. The Central Committee came to the conclusion that given the strength of the formations within the Lok Sabha, it was necessary to strive for bringing into existence a broadbased non-Congress secular government which could be supported by the Congress from outside. Therefore, the Party decided to make all efforts to rally all non-Congress secular parties to forge a broadbased combination to stake its claim to form a government. This led to the formation of the United Front. Following the defeat of the 13-day BJP government in the motion of confidence, the UF staked the claim and formed the government with Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister. This was supported by the Congress from the outside. The Central Committee decided that the Party would not join the government but would support it from outside.

On the Question of Participation in Government

Immediately after the elections, when we succeeded in forging a broad non-Congress secular alliance, the question arose as to who should lead the government. After discussions the constituent parties suggested that Com. Jyoti Basu would be the most acceptable choice for the post of the Prime Minister. We had to take the decision whether to join the government and lead it.

The Central Committee at its meeting on May 13, 1998 discussed this issue. The majority in the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee rejected the proposals for joining the government. When its decision was conveyed to the allies by Com. Surjeet and Jyoti Basu they requested the Party to reconsider the decision. The CC therefore met on May 14 once again and reiterated its decision not to join the government.

Differences of opinion had arisen in the Central Committee on the question of the participation of the CPI(M) in the central government with Jyoti Basu as the Prime Minister. The majority in the Central Committee rejected this proposal. The Central Committee also decided to place these differences before the Party Congress so that it can be finally clinched.

The minority position is given below:

The understanding of the majority of the C.C is based on the 1967 resolution of the CC on New Situation and Tasks. This issue came up for discussion when in eight states the Congress monopoly of power was broken and many parties and combinations were able to form governments. Taking into consideration the correlation of forces and the combination of parties in different states, the CC decided about the approach to be adopted in different states. But lot of developments have taken place since this approach was formulated.

Firstly, the total assessment of the situation existing at that time was based on the premise that we are passing through a period where capitalism is collapsing and Socialism is becoming the decisive factor. All the communist parties were laying down their tactical approach on the basis of this understanding. It undoubtedly had its impact on our documents too. This understanding has proved to be incorrect. This fact was accepted by us in the ideological resolution adopted at the 14th Congress.

Secondly, there is a big change in the correlation of class forces existing in the world after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and dismantling of socialism in the East European countries. As against the understanding mentioned above, after this development, a radical change has come about in the international situation. From a bipolar world it has changed to a unipolar world for the time being with US imperialism trying to impose its hegemony all over the globe. This has adversely affected the revolutionary movement the world over. In many Latin American countries people fighting for liberation with arms in their hands had to come to understanding with the existing regimes on the basis of restoration of democratic rights and protection of the gains of the revolutionary movement made in some areas. The Palestinian liberation movement had to go in for a compromise. They are trying to defend their rights in a very difficult situation. From the documents of various fraternal parties, we will be able to understand how these parties have adapted to the new situation and are working out tactics commensurate with the new situation obtaining today.

Since we were not able to carry on further discussions on the

ideological issues and its implications in India, though we had promised to carry out a deeper study of the same in the 14th Congress resolution on ideological issues, it is natural that some serious controversies arise in working out the tactical line in certain respects.

Thirdly, there is complete agreement in the Central Committee about the communal danger facing the country. The Draft Political Resolution for the 16th Congress rightly has pointed out that the fight against the BJP and its allied outfits is the central task facing the Party today in the coming period. However, differences have arisen on how to combat this danger and what is the attitude that we have to take towards it.

Fourthly, we have to understand how the slogan of Left, democratic and secular alternative came to be evolved.

At the 7th Congress we gave the slogan of People's Democratic alternative. This was repeated at the 8th Congress. From the 9th Congress onwards, however, there was a change. Realising that the slogan of People's democratic front, as an immediate alternative was unable to click, we had to change to the slogan of Left Democratic Front. This slogan was reiterated at the 9th, 10, 11th and 12th Party Congresses. The situation had changed by the time we went in for the 13th Congress. The rightist forces were seeking to utilise the discontent arising from the anti-people policies of the Congress government. The Left and democratic forces, however, were unable to make sufficient headway. To meet this growing danger the 13th Congress advanced the slogan of working for a Left, democratic and secular alternative to defeat the Congress and isolate the BJP. By the time we went in for our 14th Congress the situation had changed further with erosion in the mass support of the Congress and the increased strength of the BJP. The 14th Congress therefore came out with the slogan, commensurate with the changed situation, of defeating both the Congress and the BJP. Again this was reiterated at the 15th Congress. The 15th Congress resolution stated: "The CPI(M) and the Left must try for an understanding with the secular opposition parties to present an effective alternative to the Congress and the BJP. The Left alone cannot in the present situation defeat both these forces. Secular opposition parties have though constrained by the absence of a coherent pro-

gramme, have an important role in projecting the immediate electoral alternative". This does not mean that we have given up the slogan of Left and democratic front that was being projected in the various Congress resolutions, but in the present situation it could not yet emerge as an electoral alternative. The character of the bourgeois parties was also known. Most of the parties with whom we had been cooperating at the regional or central level have been pursuing the World Bank/IMF dictated policies of liberalisation and are in no way different from the Congress or the BJP in this respect. But it is also true that despite this we have been cooperating with these parties, whether it be the DMK, TDP or the AGP. We have had both electoral adjustments and joint election campaigns with them. We have been opposing them in the states on issues concerning liberalisation but at the same time at the crucial time of the election battle, which is the biggest political battle, we cooperate with them. Last time the reason of parting of ways with the DMK was not on economic policy issues but the efforts of the DMK to try for an alliance with the Congress. That is why the 15th Congress resolution underlined that "these parties are constrained by the absence of a coherent programme".

Subsequently, however, the threat of the BJP coming to power became a reality, after the worst defeat suffered by the Congress in the 1996 elections and the emergence of the BJP as the single largest party. This development alarmed all the Left, democratic and secular minded people. How to meet this situation, was the question that had to be answered in that situation. There were no two opinions inside the Party that every effort should be made to unite all secular forces to ward off the danger of the BJP coming to power. It was in this context that the question of who would lead and head the government was posed.

In the past, in the struggle against Congress monopoly of power we have joined hands with the bourgeois parties in spite of our basic differences on economic policies with them, that too without any conditions. In 1977 the combination of rightist parties along with the socialist party and the Lok Dal formed the government on the slogan of demolishing authoritarian framework. Our Party joined hands with them, conducted a joint campaign and supported the government from outside with a view to demolish the emergency framework. Even while doing so, we knew the history of these parties ó the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh and other

forces. When the possibility of demolishing the emergency framework got exhausted, we did not hesitate in voting against the government.

Again a situation arose in 1989 when the Congress lost its majority. Our Party took the initiative in bringing into existence of the National Front government which was also simultaneously supported by the BJP from outside. We were quite aware that the N.F had no difference with the Congress as far as economic policies were concerned. However, the NF and the Janata Dal took a firm stand on the Ramjanmabhoomi issue. This government again was brought down by the BJP on the one side and the Congress on the other.

After the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 a big change had come about in the situation, with the communal danger becoming more serious. It was in this situation that the 15th Party Congress reiterated the slogan of Left, democratic and secular front ó to defeat both the Congress and BJP, since by this time the BJP had become a serious danger. Various CC documents have elaborated the implications of this danger and it is not necessary to elaborate it since there is no difference of opinion in the CC on this question. But it seems that the significance of this slogan is not being properly appreciated.

To substantiate their point, the majority view apart from referring to the 1967 document New Situation and Tasks has also advanced the argument that Para 112 of the Party Programme does not envisage the formation of a government at the Centre.

Yes, this is true. But if we go into the history of Para 112, one will find that the original draft does not contain this para at all. This para was incorporated on the basis of an amendment proposed by Com. E.M.S Namboodiripad (amendment No. 118 to the original draft). Such an amendment was necessitated by the situation obtaining then. Immediately after the Party Congress, the Party in Kerala had to face election. The issue arose whether being a major party in Kerala, we were to raise the question of an alternative or not. It was in answer to this question that the amendment was proposed and incorporated. During the debate on the programme we did not receive many suggestions with regard to this para.

Nobody at that time had visualised that our advance would be slow and it will take time to present a people's democratic alternative.

There is no doubt that there is a difference between occupying office in a state as opposed to that at the Centre. Even with regard to the states, in the same para the programme points out the limitations. Practice shows that the formation of such governments had helped the development of our movement and we were able to gather more and more strength, uniting the Left and democratic forces. These governments, despite limitations have been sources of inspiration for our movement in the rest of the country. Here the specific question arose in a situation where at our initiative the UF was formed after the elections. The constituents of the UF, were parties many of whom had fought against each other. But all of them had fought against both the Congress and the BJP.

When the programme was being drafted, we had not visualised that events will take such a turn where we will have to support a government pursuing policies favouring the bourgeois-landlord classes, or even participate or head such a government at the Centre. But due to various changes in the political situation and differences which arose, among the ruling classes and the formation of political parties like the Janata Party and other regional parties after breaking away from the Congress, the Party decided to support different governments, as mentioned earlier.

During the 1996 election campaign when we were asked whether we would participate in a future set up that would come about to replace the Congress at the Centre, our allies advised that propagation of non-participation is bound to harm the prospects of the proposed alternative set up. The December 21-22, 1997 CC resolution noted: "Other important question which is being posed is about the alternative government. One fact which forced us last time to say that we will consider the question about the participation after the elections arose because of the concrete situation to enthuse the people in the elections. After the United Front had come to power some hopes are raised in the minds of the people for this alternative as against that of the BJP and the Congress. This is of great significance. It is not a mean achievement that it has stood us together. We have to present the question in a way where we do

not declare non-participation in government and the concrete decision will be taken after the election." It was also known that such a government can come into existence only with the support of the Congress from outside. Even after the 1998 elections when the BJP could not muster a majority of its own until the TDP deserted the UF, the CC did not find it improper to state that we will support a Congress government from outside, if it came into being. Earlier, we have never talked about supporting a Congress government. But we had to resort to these tactics after taking note of the grave danger from the BJP to the democratic fabric of our society.

This proposal of making Jyoti Basu as the Prime Minister did not come from our Party. It was made by the 12 parties that had come together to form the United Front. It was made due to the respect in which our Party was held and our record in West Bengal where we are leading a coalition for the past 20 years, with Jyoti Basu as the Chief Minister. It is for the first time in history that parties of the bourgeoisie came forward unanimously proposing the name of a Communist to take over the PM's office. They were aware that in the wake of the opposition to the Congress and the BJP the government needed some credibility. Since the Left's prestige was high, since it had given a governance in the states ruled by it free of corruption and other scandals, since it had an unblemished record, as it was fighting uncompromisingly against the imperialist forces and in defence of the rights of the common man and also to consolidate their own position, was this proposal made. Opposition to this proposal came only from imperialist sources and the monopoly houses.

But the CC did not accept this proposal. However at the same time, it decided to be part of the United Front, supporting the government from outside, while being part of the Steering committee of the UF. Though our Party did play a big role in keeping these parties together, nothing much could be done about implementing the pro-people content of the CMP, the achievements in the realm of foreign policy, improvement of relations with neighbours, holding of elections in Kashmir, paying attention to the North-East, strengthening federal structure etc, notwithstanding.

However, it must be understood that under our parliamentary system, the PM's office is vested with great powers. He holds

the key in the Cabinet and has a great say over all matters of administration.

The majority opinion had argued that the government could not do anything and no change in the economic policies could be brought about. Moreover, it would not be allowed to function properly. In the obtaining political situation, a government headed by us with three other Left parties also participating, much more could have been done to implement the CMP and confront to some extent the IMF-WB dictated policies for some time. At the ground level also it could have generated a new enthusiasm among our supporters which could have helped in strengthening our Party and mass organisations. This is not to deny that basic policies could not have been changed. But we could have accorded priority to implementing the pro-people content of the CMP. No party could have dared to oppose such items such as strengthening the PDS etc. We could have put a halt to the disinvestment of the PSUs. But pressure would have come from the big business and multinationals and such a government would not have lasted very long.

Such a government which did not fall due to its failures but for adopting pro-people policies and measures would have generated sympathy for itself from the people. Such a feeling among the people would have helped us and stood the party in goodstead for the future of the Party and the Left movement, the future struggles ó both parliamentary and extra parliamentary.

We would surely not have surrendered and compromised our position and given into reactionary pressures to remain in government. As a result if the government fell, the people would not have blames us. We had no illusion that we could really carry on for long especially with the outside support of the Congress.

The prestige of our Party and the example of the Left Front and the LDF is our strength, what has been achieved by these governments has not been achieved elsewhere. Existence of such a government at the Centre would not have been a bar on our movements and struggles.

Now we are facing a more difficult situation with the BJP coming to power at the Centre leading a 18 party coalition govern-

ment. They are attacking the secular fabric of our society, attacking democratic institutions. This has created a new awakening among the masses. The spontaneous response of various political parties to the Union Cabinet's recommendation for dismissal of the Bihar government is an indicator.

The uneven development of our movement and the inability to spread to vast areas of the country has nothing to do with the existence of the UF government. Parliamentary deviation must be shunned. At the same time along with struggles on various issues affecting the people we must take up measures to participate in the electoral process. Whereas intensifying class struggle is necessary for the growth of the movement drawing in all sections of the common people into electoral battles also enables us to politicise them. This would enable them to understand the difference between us and the other parties of the bourgeois-landlord classes with regard to our approach and solutions to various issues.

The majority of the masses including the working class are under the influence of the bourgeois-landlord class ideology. Change has to be brought about in the correlation of class forces in our favour.

While participating in the elections, we will have to be opposed to both the Congress and the BJP. In such a situation what is the alternative that we propose to build and put in place has to be concretely placed before the people. But if we say that we want to build a Left, democratic and secular alternative but will not join any such government, this will only alienate us from certain sections of the masses. We have to bear in mind that we are not on the verge of a revolution. In such a situation, if the masses come to know that we are not going to participate, they will not be enthused to support us. We have also to understand that by refusing to participate, large sections of the masses have considered us to be refusing to take responsibility.

Why did the CC conclude that in the current situation obtaining in the country, if the Congress forms a government, our Party would extend issue based outside support, despite our differences?

The majority decision is going to isolate us, since we will not be able to play our rightful role in the present political situation. In fact with the BJP danger being underestimated we will not be able to rally all the Left, democratic and secular forces and carry out an ideological campaign against the BJP and its ideology.

In the last Lok Sabha elections the UF was not taken seriously by the people. In fact there was no united campaign in vast areas of the country.

The BJP has been able to make use of the discontent generated from the policies of liberalisation in the absence of any other alternative to it in those areas. This was true in 1967 also. In the 1967 document *New Situation and Tasks* it is nowhere mentioned that the people rallied behind the Jan Sangh because of its programme. The argument about the West Bengal experience does not tally. In the early days, in that period, in many parts of the country, the Party had led mass struggles and movements. It is because of this factor that we succeeded in rallying majority of the Party members behind our Party. In West Bengal too our influence was confined to five districts as far as the peasant movement is concerned. It is the combination of parliamentary and extra parliamentary activities which brought the Communist Party in the fore and after joining the government in 1967 with flexible tactics with the same approach of unleashing mass movements as well as skillfully making use of the parliamentary forum we succeeded in expanding our base throughout Bengal. It is because of our growing influence that the ruling Congress party unleashed semi-fascist terror against our movement.

The whole argument given by the majority would lead us to the conclusion that the formation of the UF was a useless exercise because the correlation of forces is not such where the Left can have its way. By this the danger of the BJP, the fight against which the draft resolution characterises as the central task, is sought to be underestimated. The statement that the entire experience of the UF underlines the validity and the correctness of the decision taken in May 1996 completely ignores the achievements of the UF government in the sphere of foreign policy, improvement of relations with neighbours, restructuring centre-state relations, strengthening federal structure and taking a non-confrontationist attitude to-

wards strikes of the workers. In fact the party has recently started underestimating the role of imperialism which in no case should be minimised.

The majority in the Central Committee while rejecting the above minority arguments has stated the following:

The 1996 election results confronted the Party with a complex situation which required an immediate response. The emergence of the BJP as the largest single party, facilitating its claim to form the government, created a new situation. The threat of the BJP, guided by the RSS, coming to power at the Centre became a real possibility. It would have created a dangerous situation for the country and the Left and democratic movement. The Polit Bureau and the Central Committee which met in Delhi in May concluded that keeping the BJP out of power at the Centre should be the immediate priority. How to ensure the formation of a non-BJP, non-Congress government keeping in view the electoral verdict, was the main question before us.

The PB and the CC correctly decided to thwart the BJP's efforts to come to power and help the formation of a non-Congress government. To accomplish this, it was necessary to rally all the non-BJP, non-Congress forces and groups including those who were not allied with our combination before the elections.

Even after this combination could be forged, a non-BJP government could be formed only with the support of the Congress which had 136 members. Our Party decided that there should be no coalition government with the Congress which would be contrary to the decisive verdict of the people against the Rao government. But in order to keep the BJP out of office, a coalition government could be formed by getting the support of the Congress from the outside. The Congress would have no choice but to support a secular coalition rather than allowing a BJP government to be formed.

It was in the context of the formation of a wider combination to make the bid to form the government that the question of our participation and leadership in such a government arose. The parties in the alliance, after the refusal of V.P. Singh to head the

government, came to the opinion that the most acceptable choice would be Com. Jyoti Basu to lead the government.

It was this issue of our participating and leading the government which was debated in the Central Committee meeting on May 13. The majority in the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee rejected the proposal for joining the government. When this decision was conveyed to the allies by Coms. Surjeet and Jyoti Basu, they requested the Party to reconsider the decision. The CC, therefore, met on May 14 and once again discussed the matter and reiterated the decision not to join the government.

After the formation of the CPI(M) we had taken a consistent stand that the Party should join a state government only if it were in a position to shape the policies of that government and implement them. When the question of joining state governments was posed in 1967 after the Congress lost power in eight states, the Central Committee had explained this stand on the basis of the Party Programme position as spelt out in Para 112. This was contained in the CC document "New Situation and Tasks."

It was based on such an understanding that the Party joined or formed state governments in West Bengal and Kerala (and later Tripura). We did not join other non-Congress governments in UP, Bihar, and Punjab as the CPI did because the Left and democratic forces did not have sufficient strength in terms of mass support to influence policies.

There is a fundamental difference between joining state governments and participating in a Union Government. State power resides at the Centre and successive governments have represented the interests of the bourgeois-landlord combine led by the big bourgeoisie.

We have assessed in all the successive Party Congresses that there has been no change in the correlation of class forces in favour of the Left and democratic forces. The strength of the Party inside Parliament and outside in the situation following the 1996 elections was not such that we would be able to shape policies or have the strength outside to translate these policies into action. The Party had only 33 seats in the Lok Sabha. We had to keep the basic

position of the Party and the existing correlation of forces in mind in deciding the matter. The majority in the Central Committee felt that supporting the government from outside would place us in a better situation to intervene in policy matters while at the same time maintaining our independent positions and freedom to oppose wrong policies.

In the combination which was being formed (later called the United Front) the majority sections would belong to the bourgeois parties. While cooperating with the secular bourgeois parties we have to be conscious of the class limitations of such formations particularly in a situation when the Party and the Left is not a strong independent force at the national level. The 15th Party Congress resolution while stressing the necessity of allying with the secular bourgeois parties had also stated that we have to demarcate ourselves from them on basic policies whenever it is necessary. The composition of the United Front with parties of a disparate character would place severe restrictions on our Party's capacity to implement alternative policies especially when it would be a minority government dependent on the support of the Congress from the outside. The problem of depending on the Congress to maintain the government became evident in the experience of running the UF government subsequently.

For the Party, the essence of being in government is for implementing alternative policies. The real alternative policies can only be those spelt out in the Left and democratic alternative. In a coalition where the majority of the parties are of a bourgeois character, it would be sheer illusion to expect to implement alternative policies. This is all the more so when such a coalition government is in a minority in Parliament.

It is one thing to extend support to a bourgeois combination at the Centre to keep out a more reactionary combination. This was a valid consideration in the face of the threat of the BJP coming to power. It is another thing altogether to join such a government. To argue that we would be "leading" such a government by having our leader as Prime Minister overlooks the basic class nature of the central government.

The decade of the 1990s has witnessed a major change in the

international situation with the reverses suffered by socialism and the renewed offensive of imperialism. Change in tactics is necessary in keeping with the change in the international situation and this will vary from country to country according to the specific conditions. But this cannot lead to any conclusion as argued by the minority that participation in government is warranted in the new situation even though we will be in a subordinate position in a bourgeois dominated coalition. The ideological discussions which we began in 1992 at the 14th Congress needs to be continued with in-depth discussions so that our Party can effectively withstand the ideological offensive hostile to Marxism and be able to work out correct positions.

Using its dominant position imperialism has increased its onslaughts on the third world countries through IMF-World Bank-WTO imposed liberalisation and structural adjustment policies. We see its impact on India too where not only the Congress but all other bourgeois parties have embraced the ideas of liberalisation and market economy in varying degrees. It is all the more necessary in such a situation for the Party and the Left to fight back this offensive and not accept the ruling class consensus, leave alone becoming party to its implementation by being in a Central government.

The call for forging an understanding between the Left and secular bourgeois opposition parties was raised from the 13th Congress onwards. It was meant for rallying the Left and secular bourgeois opposition parties to fight the Congress and the BJP. This slogan became all the more relevant in the context of the growth of the BJP subsequently. The 15th Congress at Chandigarh, based on this understanding, called for the forging of an immediate electoral alternative which we call the third alternative. Unlike what the minority position argues, the tactical line spelt out in the 15th Congress cannot be taken as an endorsement for joining the Central government as a minority partner with a common minimum programme.

After the Party Congress, the CC in three consecutive meetings in July and October 1995 and January 1996 discussed the concrete election tactics on how to forge "an effective electoral alternative" as set out in the Chandigarh Congress. The Central

Committee discussed the question of having a common minimum programme with the JD-National Front allies and ruled out such a possibility.

In the Report on Political Developments Since the 15th Congress in July 1995 we had stated: "On the basis of the JD-NF formulating a clear-cut common programme, our Party can extend cooperation to them to project an effective third force in the electoral arena. To reach this stage we must continue to press them to come out with alternative policy positions... This means that the Left would cooperate in ensuring that an effective electoral alternative is presented before the people together with the National Front and other secular opposition forces. At the same time, we should not give the impression that this is the real alternative for which the Left is working. This means that our Party cannot subscribe to a common minimum programme with the National Front. Such a joint programme would project a front committed to a common manifesto for the elections. This is not only impractical but would also blur the Left's independent position and image. Instead, from the Left, we can at a later stage issue an appeal jointly with the National Front to the electorate."

In the subsequent CC meetings also we came to the conclusion that while striving our utmost to forge the widest alliance of all the left and secular bourgeois opposition parties, at the same time we must maintain our independent position and demarcate on policy questions where necessary. The fact that the Central Committee did not propose an alliance based on a minimum programme was itself because we did not consider it possible to join a government based on a minimum programme in which we will have to make basic compromises.

The comrades who advocated joining the government and assuming the prime ministership argued that the failure to do so would doom the efforts to forge a viable alliance. Our wrong stand would thus be responsible for facilitating the BJP coming to power; in fact it would amount to betraying the aspirations of all the secular and democratic forces. This rationale for accepting the offer of prime ministership is not convincing. First of all, the Central Committee decision was to actively work to rally all the non-Congress secular parties to forge an alliance. Our Party would have

to take the major initiative for this. Secondly, all the parties had a common basis for coming together as they had not aligned either with the BJP or the Congress in the elections. The CC majority was confident that all these parties were interested in coming together to form a government even though there was no common programme beforehand. It would, therefore, be possible to find a suitable candidate for the prime ministership. Hence the insistence that only if we led the government that the alliance could be forged was incorrect. Subsequently, the formation of the United Front government and it lasting for 18 months proved these fears were misplaced.

On the contrary, with a communist prime minister who would be unwilling to adopt policies promoting liberalisation, the conflicts would have precipitated in a quick exit of the government. The entire big bourgeoisie and the imperialism would have worked to destabilise the government. This would have negated the purpose of the formation of a secular, non-Congress government meant to block the way of the BJP. If, on the other hand, we had made major compromises on economic policy in the name of keeping the unity against the communal forces our Party's image would have been compromised and this would have helped the reactionary forces.

Moreover, once such a government headed by us is pulled down either through internal contradictions within the UF or withdrawal of support by the Congress, it would have led to a situation of disarray of the front itself. For under these circumstances, we would have had to decide to go in for fresh elections. This would not have been accepted by the other UF partners and there would have been a distinct possibility of the bourgeois partners of the UF either ranging behind the Congress or the BJP depending on their regional considerations. This would have led to the virtual negation of all efforts we had made for the evolution of the third alternative.

A major argument for joining the government presented by the minority in the PB and the CC is that this step was essential to fight the growing threat of the BJP and rally all the secular-democratic forces. This view was rejected as there would have been no benefit in being in the government with the limited strength and

mass base of the Left which is confined to a few states. If we are to project the government's policies and translate them into action, it would require the Party's active intervention and mass base. In large parts of the country, particularly where the BJP has a strong base in the north and the west, our Party does not even have the minimum strength to reach out to the people to explain our role in the government. If we are not able, in such a government set up with the sole purpose to keep the BJP out, to adopt some alternative policies particularly in the economic sphere, it would have an adverse effect on the working people whose support we depend on. Given the economic crisis and the burdens being imposed by the process of liberalisation, the living conditions of the working people are badly affected. By being in government we would be unable to counteract the policies in favour of the big bourgeoisie and international finance capital.

It is the Party and the Left which has played a consistent role in combating the communal forces. If this capacity gets weakened it would only help the BJP cash in on the popular discontent.

This was not an abstract or unrealistic position taken by the majority. We have to see it in the context of the deep financial and economic problems faced by the country. The problems of budgetary deficit, oil payments crisis, foreign debt, adverse balance of trade were all very acute. Even the meagre land reforms achieved were under attack. The new government would be compelled to take unpleasant and unpalatable decisions which would affect the living conditions of the common people. With the Congress party supporting the government from outside and exerting continuous pressure on the new government, with our limited strength we would not have been able to counteract and would be placed in difficult situation. Our capacity to defend the interests of the people would be severely restricted. The BJP and other reactionary groups are bound to use the potential discontent and attack us and the new government and pose themselves as the real champions of the interests of the people. Such a situation would be ideal for the BJP to channelise popular discontent.

The main reason for forming a post-election alliance bringing together all the non-BJP, non-Congress parties and groups in Parliament was the imperative need to foil the BJP's efforts to form

the government. In such a coalition, the struggle against liberalisation and the need to change the economic policies could not be the priority. For the CPI(M) to join such a government which does not pay priority to this issue would have been extremely harmful. If we were compelled by circumstances to compromise repeatedly on basic questions of economic policy, it would undermine the struggle against the IMF-World Bank dictated policies ó a struggle which the 15th Congress had termed as a central task for the Party.

The twin fights against liberalisation and communalism and its interconnectedness was emphasised in Party documents since the 14th Congress in 1992. In order to discharge our duties in this regard, the best course was to support from outside a government whose primary job was to keep the communal forces at bay and retain our independent role to continue the struggle against liberalisation.

Another argument advanced in the Central Committee was that being in government even for a temporary period of six months would help the Party project alternative policies and bring forth legislations on these lines. Even if the government falls this would have a lasting impact favourable for the Party. Such arguments stem from not properly estimating our strength and capacity, and relying only on parliamentary manoeuvres. Just declaring some policies and promises without being able to implement them and provide tangible benefits to the people would have been counter-productive. In large parts of the country, our Party would not be able to even take our positive message to the people while the BJP and other class forces hostile to us would be able to exploit all the weaknesses and contradictions of a minority coalition government.

In the 1996 elections, the fight against high level corruption of the Congress government was a major issue. Given the impact of liberalisation and the degeneration of values which has set into the state apparatus, corruption has become institutionalised. The Central Committee majority were of the firm opinion that, being in government, our capacity to check corruption among our bourgeois partners would be limited, thereby damaging the Party's image.

In order to counteract the argument that the Party does not have the requisite strength inside and outside Parliament to join the government at the Centre, some comrades cited the experience of the United Front governments in the 1960s in West Bengal. It was argued that though we were having a minority of MLAs in the assembly we joined the first United Front government in 1967 and advanced our strength and our position in the government in subsequent elections. This comparison is untenable as it ignores the concrete situation in West Bengal at that time. The Party was a growing force based on the advancing class struggles and mass movements of the working class, peasantry, and other sections of the people. The policies and legislations of the UF governments became an instrument to further the struggle and movements to expand our base. No such situation exists at the national level currently. We were not working out tactics on the basis of the rising class struggles and advance of the Left and democratic forces. What was being discussed after the elections was a purely defensive tactic of how to keep the BJP out of power by bringing together a new parliamentary combination.

Unlike the united fronts forged in West Bengal through mass struggles and movements based on common demands, the "United Front" formed at the Centre after the elections of 1996 was an exception to our basic understanding of united fronts. The July 1996 Central Committee report explained the difference by pointing out that "the present United Front is unlike the normal united fronts in which parties come together for joint struggles and movements based on a common set of demands or a programme."

The combination formed in the aftermath of the 1996 elections was based on all the parties and individuals represented in Parliament, including some with whom we did not have even an electoral understanding.

The majority opinion saw the United Front as a temporary formation to stave off the imminent threat of the BJP forming the government. It did not envisage such a combination to evolve into a general United Front which could begin the process of implementing alternative policies. It was an immediate tactic which would give time for the Party and the Left to work for a more favourable situation to carry on the struggle against the rising

threat of BJP and communal forces.

The minority cites the decision of the December 1997 CC meeting at Calcutta on the eve of the 1998 elections on how to pose the question of participation in government as a "reversal" or "reconsideration" of the earlier decision taken in May 1996. This is not the way the decision should be interpreted. Comrades holding the minority position had raised the question of how the issue of participation in government should be posed in the elections. Hence, it was decided that "We have to present the question in a way where we do not declare non-participation in government and the concrete decision will be taken after the elections." The CC recognised that the issue of participation or non-participation should not be taken up during the election campaign and it is only after the election results that the matter can be taken up for consideration. This in no way was meant to be a reversal of the May 1996 decision, but accepting the fact that depending on the situation after the elections, the issue may be discussed afresh. However after the election results the question became irrelevant.

It is by assessing the experience of the line adopted by the Party and its implementation that we can come to conclusions about its correctness. After the decision taken in May 1996 the United Front government lasted for 18 months till the Congress withdrew support. An examination of this period and our experience of the United Front and the government confirms the correctness and validity of the decision taken by the Central Committee.

The Party made an important contribution in the functioning of the United Front. We contributed to the positive steps taken by the UF government in the sphere of foreign policy and Centre-state relations. The beneficial effect of such a government at the Centre was experienced by the states as it was not hostile or discriminatory. But the basic policies and the continuance of the government was not in our hands. They were dependent on a lot of other factors on which we had no control.

As the assessment of the performance of the United Front in a later section shows a major handicap proved to be the dependence on Congress support. Within 10 months, the Congress party withdrew support to the Deve Gowda government. Behind this

move was the anger of the Congress leaders that corruption cases against them were not suppressed. After the change of the leader, within eight months the Congress again withdrew support after demanding the removal of the DMK ministers citing the Jain Commission Report.

The experience of the implementation of the Common Minimum Programme confirms that the UF government pushed through economic policies which favoured the big bourgeoisie and foreign capital while refusing to take up the pro-people economic measures in the CMP. It is not only in the economic sphere but other commitments such as the women's reservation bill, the agricultural workers bill, the Lok Pal bill which remained unfulfilled. This confirmed the assessment of the CC majority that given the composition of the Front and the strength of the Left it would not be possible to push through alternative policies.

The disparate and unstable nature of the United Front also manifested itself in the conflicts between the constituents and between individual leaders which did not heighten the image of the front. The crisis created by the fodder scandal in Bihar and the chargesheeting of Laloo Prasad Yadav led to a sharp struggle in the UF and Janata Dal leading to a split. This highlighted how the issue of corruption could also pose obstacles for the functioning of the government.

The overall assessment shows that despite our continuous intervention and demarcation on policy matters we could not sufficiently mobilise the people to launch mass struggles and movements on a whole range of issues. Much of our energies was devoted to keeping the unity of the front and ironing out the difficulties. If we had joined the government we would have been in an unenviable position. Our independent identity would have been blurred. The Party would not have come out of government backed by a rising movement and with a stronger position among the people.

The entire experience of the United Front underlines the validity and the correctness of the decision taken in May 1996. While striving to forge alliances with the secular bourgeois opposition parties to project and build a third alternative, the situation

is not mature for participation at the national level in a government where we cannot shape policies and carry them out.

The Period of the United Front Government

The Central Committee meeting in July 1996, after the formation of the United Front government had outlined the tasks before the Party by stating:

"Utilising the presence of the U.F government at the Centre all positive measures to strengthen federalism, secularism, democratic reforms and providing relief to the people must be pursued. At the same time, the Party has to preserve its independent identity, demarcate our position on policies which adversely affect the people, mobilise and launch struggles and movements to defend the interests of the working people.

"The advance of the Left and democratic forces can be ensured only if we carry out the major tasks of combating the communal danger and resisting and reversing the imperialist sponsored economic policies. Success in this direction can be ensured only if the Left is strengthened and united.

"Following from the election experience, the Party has to address itself to the following tasks immediately.

"1. Build up independent movements and struggles of the Party based on the charter of demands of the Left and Democratic Programme set out in the 15th Congress Political resolution. At the same time strengthen the united struggles of the different sections of the working people on their economic demands and against harmful economic policies.

"2. Strengthen and widen the anti-communal mobilisation and step up the struggle against the communal-divisive ideology."

Following the defeat of the 13-day BJP government and the installation of the United Front government headed by Deve Gowda, the United Front constituents setup a Steering Committee to help the effective functioning of the new formation. We decided

to participate in the Steering Committee and also draw up a Common Minimum Programme which could be the framework for the government's policies. On the nature of the CMP and the United Front itself, the Central Committee adopted the following understanding:

"CMP: Given the diverse nature of the formation, the common commitment being opposition to the BJP, the Common Minimum Programme represents what is common in the understanding of all these constituents while at the same time there are compromises and divergent views on other subjects. The CMP has a positive content on subjects such as secularism, centre-state relations, defence of secularism, commitment to social equity and democratisation of the polity including electoral reforms. These aspects of the CMP provide a political platform for the secular and democratic forces to combat the BJP and demarcate from the previous Congress government's approach. However, on certain basic questions of economic policy, the CMP does not represent the views of the Left. In key areas of the economy, the thrust is towards carrying forward the liberalisation policies of the Rao government and the IMF-World Bank framework. Such areas are in foreign investment, privatisation of infrastructure, opening up of insurance sector, tax reforms, import liberalisation and concessions to the landlords and rich peasants. But there are some provisions such as increased allocations for the social sector like education and health, strengthening of the PDS and poverty alleviation and employment generation schemes which are on correct lines.

"Nature of United Front: The present United Front is unlike the normal united fronts in which parties come together for joint struggles and movements based on a common set of demands or a programme. The present United Front combination has emerged out of the efforts of the left and secular parties represented in parliament to keep the BJP out of office. The bulk of the parties in the UF government are those who wish to continue with the economic policies of the Congress. However, it is in the interests of the Left and democratic movement that such a government continue in office, implement policies which help strengthen secularism, restructure centre-state relations to strengthen federalism and provide even limited relief to the people. This will help meet the expectations of the people who voted out the Congress and who

did not want the communal forces to capture power.

"It is in this framework that our Party must define its attitude to the United Front government."

In the subsequent period, our party's approach was; while extending overall support to the government and pushing for implementation of these measures in the CMP which help mobilisation of the people to strengthen the Left democratic and secular forces we have to maintain our independent position and demarcate on specific issues and policies which are detrimental to the interests of the country and the livelihood of the people.

Our experience during this period has been such that on many issues, we took the initiative in the Steering Committee such as the approach towards the Kashmir elections; Centre-State relations; Chief Ministers' conference on minimum needs programme; on foreign policy matters to improve relations with our neighbours etc. The holding of the elections in Jammu & Kashmir was a significant achievement. In the sphere of Centre- State relations, the Inter State Council was revived. Its Standing Committee headed by Com. Jyoti Basu had concretely suggested proposals to prevent the misuse of Article 356. Important decisions like transfer of funds under the Centrally sponsored schemes to the states were taken. The short life of the UF government prevented its full implementation.

In the sphere of foreign policy, the United Front government achieved many successes. Relations with our neighbours markedly improved. The signing of river water agreements with Bangladesh and Nepal removed longstanding irritant between the countries. The visit of the Chinese President and the significant agreements signed between India and China on confidence building measures carried forward the process of improvement of Sino-Indian relations. The visit of Indian Prime Minister to Russia further strengthened the traditional ties between the two countries and cooperation in the spheres of defence and space technology. The improvement in dialogue with Pakistan was creating the ground for reducing tensions. The Summit meeting on economic cooperation between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was held for

the first time. The SAARC accepted our proposal to establish a South Asian Free Trade Agreement.

However, as was anticipated, the United Front continued to pursue virtually the entire framework of the economic policies of liberalisation in great earnest. The process of privatisation, opening the economy for foreign capital in the core sectors, imposing greater burdens on the people through increased indirect taxes, big concessions given to the rich through cuts in the direct taxes etc. The whole thrust of the Congress(I) economic policy was being continued and many of the pro-people policies in the CMP like providing foodgrain to people living below the poverty line at one half of the prices were being ignored.

Likewise, many legislations proposed in the CMP like the Lokpal Bill, Central legislation for agricultural workers, women's reservation, electoral reforms, recognition of trade unions through secret ballot etc never saw the light of the day.

On many occasions, both inside the Steering Committee and outside we had demarcated ourselves from these policies. The hike in petroleum prices on the first occasion was reduced at our initiative from 30 to 15 percent. On the second occasion, our campaign helped in postponing and finally lessening the burden on the common man. With relation to the Pay Commission recommendations, bonus for Central government staff etc, our intervention proved decisive in ensuring that these are implemented.

However, such demarcation by itself was not sufficient to convince the people that we are championing their interests while, at the same time, supporting the government.

During this period, the pre-occupation with keeping this government in office and the running of the Steering Committee diverted our attention away from developing the mass struggles and mass movements against the anti-people policies. This led to a lull in the movement, particularly in the background of the big actions against the economic policies during the Congress rule. On the one hand, we were seen as an important element in keeping the United Front together while, on the other, our demarcation and opposition to policies appeared to be only formal. Though we

succeeded on some issues, it nevertheless was not sufficient to help us in rallying the popular discontent behind the Left.

UP Episode

During the period of the Gujral government, the BSP withdrew support from the BJP in UP reducing the Kalyan Singh government to a minority. With regard to the Supreme Court judgement regarding the Bommai case, we took the position that it was applicable only in cases of a single party government which lost its majority through defections. In such a case, the majority must be tested on the floor of the House. But since a coalition partner withdrew support in this case and there was no possibility of a majority being acquired except through open horse-trading we had taken the stand that the Kalyan Singh government cannot continue.

However, once the UF government decided to give time to the Kalyan Singh government to prove its majority on the floor of the House, we took the position that the decision of the House must be honoured. When even after Kalyan Singh government showed its majority, despite the violence and corruption, we opposed the move by some sections of the UF to impose President's rule.

The role of the Congress

All through this period, the Congress with no other option but to support the United Front government from the outside, started creating problems for its functioning. Under the presidency of Sitaram Kesri, the Congress seeking to protect its corrupt leaders from any possible action and with an aim of joining the government as a coalition partner and later claiming leadership as the single largest party of the coalition, chose to destabilise and bring down the Deve Gowda government. Our Party had taken a principled position that as the Congress(I) was decisively rejected by the people, it cannot be provided the opportunity to enter the government through the backdoor. This would be tantamount to betraying the people's verdict. If the Congress persists, we had taken the stand of going in for fresh elections. But bowing to the position of all other parties of the UF who did not favour elections, in the interest of maintaining UF's unity, we agreed for a change in

leadership. Primarily because of our efforts and the position taken by the Left, the Congress's gameplan could not succeed and they had to eventually support an alternative UF government headed by Gujral.

The developments within the United Front, particularly Janata Dal, were not conducive to putting up a stiff resistance to the Congress efforts. The contest for the JD presidential election between Laloo and Sharad Yadav led finally to a split with the formation of the Rashtriya Janata Party and a sizeable erosion of the JD in Bihar. The differences in the JD leadership finally led the UF to settle for the candidature of I.K. Gujral as the Prime Minister. The wrangling that took place for berths in the new ministry and the public discord discredited the United Front further amongst the people.

Our Party took the position that a UF government without Congress participation must be there to foil the attempts by the BJP to come to power. We, hence, supported Gujral as the Prime Minister though a majority of the UF had favoured Mulayam Singh Yadav.

As events proved subsequently, even this government could not last long. The Congress now, using the pretext of the Jain Commission Interim Report, demanded the ouster of the DMK ministers from the Cabinet. We had taken the position that the Congress is being unreasonable and foisting another general election on the country only for its political bargaining and prevented the United Front from succumbing to this demand. We had stated that the unity of the UF was important in the present context and the Congress's efforts to disrupt it by raising such demands and forging understanding with Laloo Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal on the other was only an effort to change the correlation within the UF and to somehow manoeuvre itself to head the government. By rallying the UF parties together we had succeeded in keeping the United Front united till 1998 elections and foiling the Congress designs.

However, forced by the internal logic of their own opportunism and manoeuvring, the Congress withdrew support to the

Gujral government thus foisting another general election in 1998.

Tactics During The 1998 Elections

The CC at its December, 1997 meeting stated:

"The tactical line to be adopted in the elections depends on the concrete situation prevailing today. The Congress party which had the monopoly of power for long is weakened very much. Whether they will be able to maintain the present position is doubtful. But one should not underestimate its strength because of the old mass base which exists in the country. Even during the last elections the Congress polled 28.8% and the impact in the minds of the masses about the traditional organisation is still there. It also depends on the new alliances which they will be able to build. It seems that in some of the states where the Congress can benefit BSP will go along with them such as in Bihar, MP and Punjab. In Bihar may be the BSP does not count which except in the areas adjoining Uttar Pradesh is not a force. In Madhya Pradesh it can become a determining factor in favour of the Congress. Similarly it can help the Congress in Punjab too to an extent. In the North-East and the South, BSP does not count.

"The BJP is trying to do everything to emerge as a major force if not getting majority and is developing alliances with regional parties. It has come to an understanding with Laxmi Parvati in Andhra Pradesh and the AIADMK in Tamilnadu. But in Uttar Pradesh as it seems the BSP will not go with the BJP. We are not a force there. Nor are the other Left parties. We have to watch how the SP will be able to supplement its strength to fight the BJP which is the main contender in UP elections where 85 seats are at stake.

"Bihar position is not certain because of the attitude of the central government towards Laloo Prasad Yadav. But the mass response to our combination has been there. Laloo Prasad Yadav banks upon the support of the Yadavs, SCs and minorities. While the bulk of the Yadavs are with Laloo Prasad, it is not the same position with the scheduled castes and minorities who can shift to the UF combination. If the United Front constituents like the Janata Dal, SP and Left parties go together, then it has to be seen whether

the minorities shift and come this side and this becomes quite a strong force. There is a split in the Congress party with Jagannath Mishra forming his own party . Its impact has to be seen.

"The situation in other states is complex as in Maharashtra. The earlier alliance which had got 20 percent of votes, has broken with the RPI coming to an understanding with the Congress and they want to rope in the SP also. PWP is also inclined towards that. Because of the aggressive attitude of the Shiv Sena and the BJP minorities are very much frightened there. In view of that it is likely that SP also comes to understanding with the Congress on seat adjustments. Janata Dal and the Left is a very weak force and the combined strength of Janata Dal, Communist Parties and the PWP and RPI is quite significant, which was seen during the last elections. But is the division of votes that the Shiv Sena came to power. There has been a shift in the Congress base towards BJP-Shiv Sena. It has to be assessed.

"The present situation is complicated and we have to work out the tactical line to meet the present challenges. There is no difference of opinion in the party now on the formation of the United Front. The Central Committee has also endorsed in the draft political resolution for the 16th Congress, the line followed in this respect. In consonance with our position we have taken a consistent stand that the Party will have to fight against both the BJP and the Congress but in consonance with our line we have to see that where the Left is not a force and the United Front is not effective viz Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Himachal and Delhi fire should be concentrated against the BJP. Such cases can be concretely discussed in the state committees. The Left and UF constituents should contest in those seats where they can put up an effective fight. But the line must be worked out from the Centre and the state units should not be allowed to go their own way without the approval of the Centre. We have earlier also taken such a position in the elections even when the Congress was more powerful. Now the Congress is a declining force while its place is being taken by the BJP. This poses a big danger to the democratic movement.

"Other important question which is being posed is about the

alternative government. One fact which forced us last time to say that we will consider the question about the participation after the elections arose because of the concrete situation to enthuse the people in the elections. After the United Front had come to power some hopes are raised in the minds of the people for this alternative as against that of the BJP and the Congress. This is of great significance. It is not a mean achievement that it has stood together. We have to present the question in a way where we do not declare non-participation in government and the concrete decision will be taken after the elections.

"Regarding the manifesto, we should go in for a joint manifesto of the Left parties in which we can put forward the main points based on the Left and democratic programme so that the Left's independent position on all issues goes before the people. At the same time we should come out with a common declaration on policy issues on behalf of the United Front in which apart from the political issues like defence of secularism, strengthening of federalism, national unity and democratic steps like electoral reforms and anti-corruption measures, we should also highlight some pro-people economic measures that can be taken.

"For the election campaign, we should go with the following slogans: elect the United Front with a majority to form the central government; defeat the BJP and the Congress; strengthen the representation of the CPI(M) and the Left parties."

Results Of 1998 Elections

In the elections, the BJP was able to emerge with 180 seats with 25.47% of votes and with its allies like the AIADMK, the Samata Party, the Trinamul Congress etc, its strength came to 262. The Congress party could only get 141 seats, though it secured 25.88% of the votes. The decline of votes of the Congress was mainly due to its losses in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Punjab and Orissa.

However, the United Front which had won 170 seats in 1996 elections secured only 99 seats in 1998. The setbacks suffered by the Janata Dal, DMK, TMC and AGP contributed to the decline of the United Front. The Janata Dal which had 46 seats in 1996 won only

6 seats in 1998. The major setbacks of Janata Dal were in Bihar, Orissa and Karnataka.

The Left parties, which got 52 seats in 1996 have now only 48 seats in the Lok Sabha. CPI's strength has been reduced from 12 to 9 and Forward Bloc's from 3 to 2. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the RSP have been able to retain their seats. The percentage of votes polled by Communist Party of India (Marxist) declined from 6.1 percent in 1996 to 5.18 in 1998. The percentage of votes polled by CPI(M) declined in many states except in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. We lost our sitting seats Barpeta in Assam and Khammam in Andhra Pradesh.

The Central Committee Election Review, however, noted:

"The party has to undertake a deep and thoroughgoing analysis of the reasons for the serious defeats suffered by the third force as represented by the UF. Some of the reasons for the major setbacks to the UF have to be gone into to draw proper lessons for the immediate as well as long term tactics.

"It is very clear that the UF, which was formed to meet the specific situation that arose in May 1996, was unable to project itself as the effective alternative to the BJP or the Congress. Even in this election, the United Front had decided to fight against the BJP and the Congress. But this objective could not be realised due to various factors.

"The continuous disunity, mutual conflicts and the absence of any purposeful efforts to strengthen its unity had vitally affected the image of the UF.

"Though a Common Minimum Programme had been worked out to endow the UF with some commonality of purpose, some of the bourgeois parties were not much bothered even about these guidelines.

"The dissension and conflicts in the UF manifested themselves in a most acute manner in the course of the run up to the elections. In most states leave alone agreed common lists of UF candidates there were not even electoral adjustments among the

constituent parties. Except for the Left parties, all the parties were interested only in their narrow interests and the resultant mutual conflicts vitally affected the very image and standing of the UF.

"Most state reports indicate that the JD was adopting a high and mighty attitude to the Left parties with regard to seat adjustments refusing to even concede one or two seats.

"As a result of all these, practically there was no common campaign by the United Front in the country as a whole. Only in Hyderabad and Calcutta, mass UF rallies were held.

"Absence of a common campaign is highlighted by the fact that Common Manifesto and Policy Declaration was adopted belatedly just three or four weeks before the elections. This Policy Declaration was hardly referred to by most of these parties.

"A very important reason for the setback is the most unsatisfactory performance of the United Front government in very many respects.

"The CC had repeatedly warned that the BJP would benefit by this growing discontent. The election results have confirmed the correctness of our warning."

United Front Experiences

Since the 15th Congress of the Party, in the context of the major changes in the political line of the country in the period from 1996 to 1998, the Party has gained very significant and valuable experiences in the relations with the bourgeois opposition parties and the application of United Front tactics. These rich experiences flowed from the general elections in 1996, the crisis that followed the formation of the United Front government and actual functioning of the government and the mid-term elections in 1998. These experiences have to be analysed in depth, self-critically to enable the Party to draw proper lessons.

The CC in its two election review had stressed the need for an integrated in-depth review and analysis of entire experience from

the 10th Congress to the present Congress. But this task requires much more study and discussion because the United Front tactics are closely connected with the total political situation of periods. Such a study calls for a total historical review of more than 20 years in the history of the Party. Though this task cannot be undertaken now, certain lessons on the basis of our experience deserve to be noted.

Concepts Behind

UF Tactics

But in all Party documents since the 7th Congress, the concepts of forging joint actions, electoral alliances and united fronts have been emphasised. These aspects of our work coming broadly under the category of united front tactics is based on the concepts adopted by the Communist movement throughout the world, especially after the 7th Congress of the Communist International.

In India, these united front tactics have the basic objective of rallying the widest possible support for the building of the Left and Democratic Front as a necessary step for advancing to the People's Democratic Revolution.

In the concrete circumstances in different periods, we have been following these tactics in the fight against the monopoly of power of the Congress, against authoritarianism of the ruling class parties and in defence of national unity, in the fight against imperialist intrigues, and the fight against the advance of reactionary Hindu communalism threatening the democratic fabric of Indian politics.

Need for Allies

Hence, the need for rallying allies is a cardinal concept. The possibility of rallying wider allies have been enhanced with the emergence of bourgeois opposition parties and combinations at the Centre and of regional parties in the states. Since the rise of these parties is closely linked with the decline of the major bourgeois-landlord party ó the Congress ó and the weakening of its monopoly of power, these parties had certain democratic content in their policies and activities. Similarly, the uneven development,

over-centralisation and authoritarian attitudes at the Centre and the nationality aspirations have contributed to the emergence of regional parties. Some of these parties also take certain democratic positions. They also perform a big role in the fight for major changes in the Centre-State relations. Of course, the continuing crisis in the country has also led to the formation of various splinter parties.

Key Aspects of UF Tactics

In deciding on our tactics in relation to these parties, the Party has repeatedly stressed certain key points. The first of these is the need for allies in the struggle for democracy and national unity. Secondly, we have noted that these parties have behind them, considerable sections of the masses who have to be won over to the democratic cause. Thirdly, the Party has taken into consideration the Leninist principle that every schism or rift in the rival camp have to be skillfully used to advance to our objective.

It is on the basis of these tactical concepts that we have been organising joint action on common issues, electoral adjustments, electoral alliances and even united fronts at various levels. Only in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, where the CPI(M) and the Left parties are leading, have we succeeded in forging stable alliances on the basis of agreed common programmes for many years. In other states, we have had electoral alliances or seat adjustments to fight elections and in many cases we extended outside support to some of these parties to form governments. At the Centre, we have had the specific experience of the United Front with support extended from outside.

We have characterised these parties as bourgeois opposition parties or secular bourgeois opposition parties. These parties have their own class characteristics, but our Party have taken the view that these parties can play a positive role in the matter of strengthening democracy, including Centre-State relations, providing immediate relief for the people etc. Our Party has been consistently striving to have common understanding with these parties on specific issues and have been also trying to draw the parties and the masses to common mass activities.

Negative Features

However, it is our experience that these parties have serious shortcomings with regard to their policies and practices. In many Party Congress documents, we have stated that limitations of their policies and practices give them a vacillating character, and hence on many occasions, our relations with them are beset with difficulties and are unstable. It is our experience that since the leadership of these parties are motivated by the eagerness to come to power in the States or aspire to share Central power, on many occasions, they take up opportunist positions. In the Party Congress and in the Central Committee resolutions, we have pointed out that most of these parties, including regional parties like TDP, DMK etc, accepted the IMF- World Bank dictated economic policies. This is due to their class limitations. We have also noted that these parties being very much dependent on the active support of the rural rich (the landlords, the rich peasants, the contractors etc) take a negative attitude towards land reforms and even to measures for the improvement of the condition of agricultural labourer. In many cases, the state governments led by these parties adopt hostile attitudes towards the struggles of the toiling people. In the context of the intensification of caste polarisation, some of these parties are mainly carried away by the need to strengthen their caste support-base and hence in various ways strengthen caste consciousness and conflicts. On social issues, such as equal status for women, some of these parties have a retrograde approach.

The very recent experience with the TDP has revealed the vacillating character of some of these parties even on the question of secularism.

It is common experience of this period that though the leaderships are keen to win the support of the Left parties, especially during elections, they are very reluctant to have electoral adjustments or allotment of seats to Left parties.

These negative features have certainly affected the forging of genuine unity. In spite of all our sincere and efforts to build joint actions, electoral alliances etc with these parties.

The Correct UF Tactics

The actual experience of our efforts have to be properly analysed and grasped. Despite the negative factors, we should continue to carry forward the line of building the broadest possible unity, based on the correct concept of continuously striving to win allies. At the same time, as the Party Congress resolutions have repeatedly warned, we have to consciously guard against the tendencies of tailing behind these parties. As a working class party, we have our distinct programme and policies. We seek to follow united front tactics to strengthen the common mass activities and to unite the broad masses in the common struggle. With these views, our tactics should have the following distinct features.

- a) We seek to come to an understanding with these parties for joint campaigns on specific issues for specific periods or for particular junctures.
- b) While we will have joint actions, electoral seat adjustments or electoral alliances, these cannot be equated with united Fronts on the basis of common programmes.
- c) Even when we have unity in action, we have to demarcate ourselves from the policies and practices of these parties which we consider to be harmful. There cannot be any unity without such demarcation. The tone and tenor of our demarcation or criticisms have to be such that they contribute to further strengthening of common understanding.
- d) Even when we have a common understanding with these parties on specific issues, the Party has to constantly project its independent political line before the masses.
- e) We have to always bear in mind that drawing the masses behind the bourgeois parties into common activity is the prime objective of our United Front tactics. This implies that the real united front can be forged through mass activity, strengthening of mass consciousness.

Project Real Alternative

As our draft Political Resolution states, we have to continuously make efforts to build the Left and Democratic Front as the true alternative in the context of the deep crisis in which the country find itself. Such a Left and democratic alternative can emerge through building the unity of the masses and raising the political and ideological consciousness. This requires conscious efforts to establish, maintain and strengthen links with the masses, the activists and leaders of other parties. As earlier Party Congresses have pointed out: "Simultaneously we have to put forward a political and economic programme distinctly and sharply opposed to the platform and policies of the bourgeois-landlord parties and fighting for it to enable the masses to move away from these parties."

Post-BJP Led Government Situation

The assumption of State power by the BJP-led coalition marks a significant shift in the political situation. The monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress in the past has been broken. As a traditional party of the ruling bourgeois-landlord classes, the Congress has lost ground. The BJP, on the other hand, is growing and sections of the bourgeois-landlord classes are rallying behind it. The Congress and the BJP today enjoy a nearly equal support base in terms of the percentage of votes polled.

The decline of the Congress does not mean that its class character has changed. It remains a party of the ruling classes against whom we shall have to wage a political battle. The BJP which has emerged as a major party has as its ideological and philosophical basis, the pernicious theory of 'Hindu Rashtra'. In this sense, the BJP functions as the political wing of the RSS. This suits the interests of imperialism and sections of the ruling classes but is disruptive of national unity and social harmony in a country as diverse and plural as ours. Its ideological basis is contrary to the fundamental pillars of secular democracy which forms the basis of independent India's Constitution. Its assumption of the reins of

State power poses great dangers both to national unity and to the democratic movement. The communal forces seek to disrupt that very unity of the toiling classes — poor peasants, agricultural workers and the working class— which we seek to strengthen and on that basis change the correlation of class forces in favour of Left and democratic forces.

A proper appreciation of the dangers posed by a communal party holding the reins of State power must be made. It is not accidental that the BJP is getting a favourable response from imperialist countries who have promptly welcomed the formation of this government. Further, both the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes and imperialism would not prefer any government which requires the support of the Left. They will make all efforts to foil such a possibility.

Attitude To An Alternative Government

After the 1998 elections, the Central Committee in its April meeting discussed the possibility of an alternative government being formed in case the BJP was defeated in the confidence motion after being called to form the government. In the event of the Congress being prepared to lead an alternative government, the Central Committee decided that we should support it from outside.

The Central Committee, at the same time, reiterated that, "No question arises of having any front or alliance with the Congress. But in order to prevent the BJP from consolidating its hold over state power, and the infiltration of administration that it seeks to do, we had decided to support the Congress, if and when the situation arises, from the outside."

Subsequently, when the inner conflicts within the BJP coalition heightened and Jayalalitha threatened to withdraw support, the issue of an alternative government again came to the fore. Regarding this, in the July 1998 CC meeting, we stated: "Our Party indicated that in the eventuality of the downfall of the Vajpayee government there has to be a secular alternative government as mid-term elections cannot be thought of immediately. In such a

situation, we reiterated the stand taken at the time of the confidence vote that we would extend support from outside to the formation of a Congress-led government in the framework spelt out in the last CC report."

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

Nuclear Jingoism

Following the nuclear tests, India's security concerns have worsened. India has become more vulnerable to imperialist pressures and the BJP government seems now ready to capitulate on India's long-standing position of not signing discriminatory treaties like the CTBT and the NPT.

In the post-Pokhran-II phase, India's international standing has received a severe drubbing. This was glaringly evident at 12th Non-Aligned Summit held recently in South Africa.

India has thus become more vulnerable to imperialist pressures. In the name of fighting sanctions, the BJP-led government is further opening up our economy which precisely suits the interests of foreign finance capital. The economy is being made more accessible for imperialist loot and the country is being made more vulnerable to political diplomatic and military pressures by imperialism.

The PB statement came out firmly against the reversal of the longstanding nuclear policy and strongly opposed the jingoistic stance of the BJP and the government and spelt out the harmful consequences for relations with our neighbours and for peace in the region. Prior to that, a joint statement was issued by the CPI(M) and the CPI demarcating our position from the BJP government's stand.

Subsequently, a Central Party letter was issued to all Party members and sent to the state committees. A Hindi version of the letter was also printed and distributed to the Hindi-speaking states.

Our firm stand and our discussions with other parties helped to rally them to demarcate them from the BJP government's stand.

After the reporting of the Party stand on the issue, the Party Centre also approved the idea of holding broad based conventions involving intellectuals and other eminent citizens to mobilise public opinion against nuclear weaponisation and the jingoism of the BJP. The CPI(M) has called for (a) not going in for weaponisation and deployment of nuclear weapons (b) India should continue to oppose discriminatory treaties and not sign the CTBT (c) India should continue to campaign for non-discriminatory agreements to check nuclear proliferation and for achieving universal nuclear disarmament.

A convention was held in Delhi on 9th June, sponsored by a committee of intellectuals and eminent citizens. The PB advised the state committees to organise similar conventions. So far conventions have been held in Mumbai, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Madras, Lucknow, Shimla, Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikkode and elsewhere.

The PB gave a call for the observance of 6th August, Hiroshima Day, against nuclear weapon and for universal nuclear disarmament. This was observed in many places through broad committees mobilising wider sections by holding protest demonstrations, rallies, seminars and photo exhibitions. Notable was the massive 400000 strong rally taken out in Calcutta on the occasion.

Growing Insecurity

The BJP-led government and the RSS affiliates have unleashed actions that only increase the sense of insecurity and fear amongst the people, particularly the minorities. The direct fallout of the nuclear tests has been the sudden spurt of terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir. The several episodes of violent killings in Jammu and later Chamba have clearly belied the government's claims. In fact, reports have clearly exposed the RSS attempt to utilise the terrorist attacks as a pretext for whipping up communal passions that is leading to attacks on innocent Muslim families.

Likewise in Gujarat and north east, the attacks against the

Christian minorities have intensified. The Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad, through their own programmes under state patronage, are whipping up fear and insecurity amongst the minorities. They have gone to the extent of seeking to monitor inter-community marriages and examine the credentials of Hindus marrying non-Hindus.

In protest against the deportation of Bengali Muslims in the name of Bangladeshi immigrants, the Party took the initiative in Bengal and Maharashtra. Our MLAs in Maharashtra Assembly took the initiative in exposing the Shiv Sena-BJP government. Party MPs visited the areas in Bombay which received good support and publicity. The Party condemned the communal attacks on artists.

Temple Issue

Media reports appeared about the construction work for the Ram temple being carried out in two sites in Rajasthan and at Ayodhya. This matter was raised in Parliament and there was a lot of apprehensions among the minorities and the secular people. In order to focus on this issue, a Left parties MP's team was sent to Ayodhya to find out what sort of work is going on for the temple construction. A seven-member team of MPs visited the workshop where pillars and other materials are being prepared by the VHP. Their report confirming this work was timely and highlighted the plan of RSS combine to go ahead with the construction work irrespective of the court order to maintain the status quo and to subvert a future court decision.

Srikrishna Commission Report

The contempt with which the BJP-Shiv Sena government outrightly rejected the Srikrishna Commission report reflects their deep-rooted urge to destroy the democratic structures of modern India, apart from sending a chilling message to the minorities that they cannot expect even elementary rights and natural justice under their rule. The Maharashtra chief minister has gone to the extent of saying that he shall not arrest the Shiv Sena supremo even if the courts order to do so.

The Party took the initiative to organise protest against this

decision all over the country. Public meetings and rallies exposing the Shiv Sena-BJP combine were held in many places. In Maharashtra, our state unit organised many protest actions. Efforts are being made in the state to organise broad-based citizen committees on this issue.

The Party Centre published the first part of the Srikrishna Commission's findings as a Party booklet.

Authoritarian Trends

In a blatant violation of the Constitutional rights of the States, the BJP-led government had sent Central teams to report on the law and order situation in Tamilnadu, Bihar and West Bengal. The stiff resistance put up by the West Bengal government and its refusal to entertain the Central team forced the BJP-led government to backtrack. But this clearly reveals their intentions and willingness to subvert the Constitution to further its political agenda.

The repeated threats for invoking Article 356 against the duly elected State governments to please its coalition partners reflects once again that the BJP is willing to subvert the Indian Constitution and mercilessly attack the rights of the State governments. Our Party has openly opposed invoking of Article 356 in Tamilnadu and Bihar.

Despite opposition, the BJP government went ahead and recommended President's rule in Bihar. This was done in a brazen manner, a few hours after the Rabri Devi government established its unambiguous majority on the floor of the Bihar Assembly. Our Party, while strongly condemning this, took the initiative to meet the President alongwith the Left parties and asking him to return the recommendation. Correctly seeing this as an authoritarian attack on democracy, we took the initiative to organise a joint protest action. The Left, Congress and the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha issued a joint statement calling for protests all over the country on November 25, 1998. The same evening the President returned the recommendation to the Union Cabinet. With many of its allies opposing the returning of the recommendation to the President for a second time, the BJP was forced to retreat. In doing so, the BJP not only lost face but its malafide intentions were

completely exposed.

The attempt to review the Constitution and introduce a presidential system is also being made in tune with the BJP's current needs. This is a dangerous step. The RSS had publicly on a number of occasions declared the present Constitution is 'un-Hindu'. In the name of reviewing the Constitution what will be attempted is to negate the secular democratic foundations of our present Constitution. Our Party has opposed such moves and stated that any review of the Constitution can be done only when the Parliament discusses and decides on the terms of such a review.

The BJP's authoritarian streak was also evident in the manner in which it chose to affect large scale transfers of officials. The transfer of the Enforcement Directorate chief, who was in the midst of pursuing cases against prominent people smacked of malafide intent. Public outcry and the Supreme Court's intervention and its strong indictment of the government forced the reinstatement of the Enforcement Directorate chief. The BJP government was forced to eat its humble pie.

Formation of New States

By announcing the decision to form three new states, Uttaranchal, Vananchal, and Chhatisgarh—the BJP government has opened up a new divisive issue with demands for new states getting a fillip in different parts of the country. This will pose a danger to the linguistic principle of statehood as similar demands have already surfaced in Telengana, Vidharbha and elsewhere.

Our Party has opposed these steps and instead called for the creation of autonomous councils in these regions with adequate financial powers to tackle the problems of economic backwardness. Disregarding this, if separate states are created, the Party has stated that the opinion of the people like in Uddham Singh district in Uttar Pradesh must be taken before any decision. The CPI(M) MLAs in Bihar voted against the Vananchal Bill in the state assembly. The Rashtriya Janata Dal which had earlier championed the creation of Jharkhand did a volte face by opposing Vananchal. Though this was done due to opportunistic reasons against BJP ma-

neouvres in the state, it nevertheless roused passions against the division of Bihar. This the RJD is seeking to exploit to bolster its political support.

Corruption

The BJP's promise of freedom from corruption looks more hollow than other promises. The BJP's betrayal on this score began well before its government was formed. The unscrupulous manner in which it sought the support of the corrupt — Jayalalitha, Buta Singh, Sukh Ram et al — set new records in the degeneration of political morality. The same BJP stonewalled Lok Sabha proceedings for 13 days earlier demanding action against the very same Sukh Ram in the telecom scam! The worst was the manner in which the BJP engineered defections in UP and rewarded all 70 defectors with ministerial berths!

The brazen manner in which it virtually sold Maruti Udyog to a Japanese multinational smacks of large kickbacks. It is not the BJP's detractors but its own allies that have raised embarrassing and pertinent questions of "hefty bribes," leading to transfer of top officers. The decision to delicense the sugar industry on the eve of the festive season when the demand for sugar soars, benefits traders who have stocks of sugar will reap super-profits. The timing of this decision is gravely suspicious.

The Party has openly opposed these and other scandals that have surfaced in BJP-led states.

Economic Policies

The economic policies being pursued by the BJP-led government are further intensifying the attacks on people's livelihood while mortgaging the country further. The relentless rise in prices of all essential commodities has become the order of the day. Since the BJP government assumed office, the domestic industry is in the grip of a recession which, far from easing, is worsening. The inflation rate has soared unprecedentedly. The stock markets lost over 1000 points (BSE index) during these five months. The exports have declined by eight per cent in the quarter ending June. Trade

deficit has widened to \$6.8 billion in 1997-98. Foodgrain production is expected to fall by 5 million tonnes compared to last year. The rupee has stumbled from under Rs 39 to a dollar in March 1998 to Rs 43.65 on August 19. This has resulted in India's foreign debt increasing by Rs 33,900 crore.

During these five months, the opening up of the Indian economy to the plunder of multinational corporations has gone on unabated. First came the removal of import restrictions and the "freeing" of 340 items by the commerce ministry. This was followed by over-enthusiastic clearances of pending MNC projects in core sectors including petroleum, mining, steel and power. Counter guarantee schemes like in the notorious Enron case have been signed with three other multinational corporations. The Indian ports have been privatised. The government has now drawn up plans for a large scale privatisation of the public sector.

The Party called for widespread protest actions against the railway and union budgets. Joint Left actions were held in June. In many places rail rokos and demonstrations outside railway offices took place. The LDF in Kerala gave a call for action on June 15th followed by a picketing at Central government offices on June 25th. In West Bengal, a massive campaign was organised including rail roko.

In Orissa, a rail roko agitation was organised by the Party at various centres. In Tamilnadu, there was a one-day picketing outside Central government offices all over the state against the rail fare hikes. In Andhra Pradesh, demonstrations were held in many centres, some of them jointly with CPI. Demonstrations against the railway budget were held in many other places in different states.

On 3rd July, at the call of the Central trade unions, West Bengal observed a one-day industrial strike. The general strike was very successful in all sections including all public sector units, transport services and educational institutions.

Growing Struggles

At the call of the National Platform of Mass Organisations

(NPMO) protest actions were organised in various places on 3rd of July. The NPMO also organised protest actions on 14th July. Subsequently, convention of Central Public Sector unions on 11th August gave call for 2 days nation-wide general strike in public sector on 10-11 December, 1998 and the NPMO from their convention on 12th August gave call of all India general strike on 11th December, 1998.

Various sections of the people have been rising in struggles against these policies. During the last five months, major strikes by health workers (nurses in particular), the postal workers, the university and college teachers apart from other sections reflected the growing discontent amongst the people.

The Central Committee in July 1998 gave a call for a jatha campaign to cover all parts of the country from the third week of August culminating in a big rally at New Delhi on the 16th of September. All the state committees had conducted this programme. Some of the states faced difficulties due to the unprecedented flood situation. Despite this, the Delhi rally was a big success attended by a lakh of people.

Caste Question

During this period, the Party attempted to implement the 15th Congress's understanding of taking up issues of social oppression. This was based on the understanding of the dual nature of the caste polarisation that is taking place. The growing upsurge among the dalits and other oppressed sections for social equality is a positive development which has to be integrated with the democratic movement. While at the same time, the negative aspect of caste exclusiveness promoted by certain leaders which lead to tensions are being opposed.

The developments in Tamilnadu recently show that the atrocities against the dalits, at times perpetrated by sections belonging to the OBCs continues to create tensions and conflicts. Our Tamilnadu Party unit has intervened in an effective manner to protect the dalit riots and ease the caste tensions.

While the caste polarisation and political mobilisation on caste and sub-caste lines is becoming an acute problem in the Hindi speaking states, such a trend is not confined here alone. Growing caste identity/consciousness and their electoral appeal on caste lines is growing in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and so on in the non-Hindi regions too. While we continue to ally with the non-Congress secular bourgeois parties, the Party will have to seriously address the problem of casteism and its political and electoral implications. Here the Party's independent political-ideological stand on the caste question must be spelt out and widely propagated. The concrete situation in each state must be studied and proper tactics and slogans worked out so that the potential of the awakening of the communities subject to caste oppression is carried forward on democratic lines while the narrow, sectarian and opportunist electoral manifestations which lead to dividing the working people and disrupting class unity is properly countered.

Attitude to Rashtriya Janata Dal

The question of our attitude towards Laloo Prasad Yadav came up during this period. The Party had expressed his involvement in the fodder scam and demanded that he step down from the post of the Chief Minister till the enquiry is completed. His refusal to do so initially and later installing his wife as the Chief Minister was opposed by us. Further, his attitude of seeking to isolate and destroy the Left movement in Bihar which manifested in the attacks against our comrades during the land struggles and the efforts to marginalise the Left electorally had to be opposed in order to safeguard and expand our influence and following in the state. The Party Centre, accordingly, advised the state committee to oppose the state government's policies and carry on the struggle against corruption.

The Central Committee at its meeting in July 1998 evolved our stand in the changed situation after the formation of the BJP-led government by stating: "In Bihar, the RJD still remains the major party which is fighting the BJP. At the same time the record of the state government is such that it has affected the common people

badly and the government is hostile to the movements of the rural poor and the working class. Laloo's caste based politics has also proved damaging to the democratic movement in the State. In such a situation, we have to maintain our opposition to the state government's policies and demarcate from the RJD in the state. However, at the national level, we have to take into account that the RJD has 17 MPs and will play a role in the anti-BJP issues."

Attitude towards Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha

The formation of the RLM by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav with the support of Shankar Singh Waghela was a new development. In this regard, the July 1998 CC meeting said: "Laloo and Mulayam Singh coming together will have a good impact in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as far as the fight against the BJP is concerned. But at the same time, their attitude can hamper wider unity of the Left and secular opposition parties which we want to forge as the third alternative. It is therefore necessary for the CPI(M) and the Left parties to adopt such an approach whereby the new front and other secular opposition parties can be brought to work together. This means, we should have an attitude of cooperation with the new front while at the same time maintaining our ties with the constituents of the United Front such as the Janata Dal, DMK, TMC etc."

Observance of 150th Anniversary of Communist Manifesto

All over the country, the Party's state units have been observing the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto. Seminars have been conducted in Thiruvananthapuram, Chennai, Guwahati and elsewhere. The CITU also is planning a series of seminars and it held the first one in Delhi on June 26th. Many of the Party journals are bringing out special numbers devoted to the manifesto and its relevance. We should use this anniversary as an occasion to propagate the basic Communist principles and educate our cadres and ranks to have a correct Marxist-Leninist orientation.

Anti-Imperialist Struggles

Solidarity with Cuba: Our Party had taken the initiative to organise the National Committee for solidarity with Cuba. Various initiatives and campaigns were undertaken during this period. Calcutta hosted the Asian Regional meeting of Cuban Solidarity Committee's. 163 delegates from 12 countries participated. Later, another meeting was held in Hanoi in June, 1997. A large delegation led by Com. Surjeet attended this meeting. A nation wide programme commemorating the 30th anniversary of the martyrdom of Che Guevara was observed during October and November, 1997. Che Guevara's daughter Aleida was invited. She participated in big solidarity meetings and activities at Delhi, Calcutta, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

During this period, Rs. 40 lakh worth of detergents (300 tonnes) was sent to Cuba. Currently the National Committee is in the midst of a campaign to collect "medicines" for Cuba. Medicines worth Rs. 10 lakh have already been collected and the campaign will culminate in December, 1998.

Solidarity with Cuba today constitutes the concrete expression of solidarity with socialism and its defence against the all out effort of imperialism to destroy socialism. This is a task that our Party will have to undertake and strengthen in the future.

US Imperialist Pressures: During this period, US imperialism has consistently followed a policy of curbing India's independent positions and potential for defence and security. It had mounted pressure on Russia not to sell nuclear reactors to India. Russia refused to succumb. As noted earlier, such pressures are now multiplying after the Pokhran-II tests by India.

The Party had strongly condemned, in this background, the decision of the Indian government to continue to have military collaboration with US armed forces. Various rounds of joint naval exercises have been held. In 1997, the exercise code named "Malabar IV" was conducted. The Party had asked the UF government earlier to review the agreement on military cooperation signed during the time of Narasimha Rao. However, the UF government

too pursue the same earlier policy.

In this context, it is relevant to recollect the observation made by the Central Committee in February 1997. "There has been insufficient campaigning on anti-imperialist issues and mass mobilisation on the manoeuvres of US imperialism in India. The Party should pay due attention to launching anti-imperialist campaigns both in terms of expressing solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles abroad and in taking up the issues where imperialism seeks to affect India's vital interests."

Tripura

The Left Front Government which came back to power in 1993 had to tackle a difficult situation created by the violent activities of the extremist groups which was going on for quite some time. The state government adopted a dual policy. It firstly called upon the extremist groups to lay down arms and enter into negotiations with the government and get rehabilitated in society. Secondly, the government decided to firmly tackle the violent activities, preserve tribal-non-tribal unity and protect the lives and security of the citizens. The first call met with partial success. But the hardcore NLFT and ATTF groups did not give up their terroristic activities.

By the end of 1996, the situation worsened. Despite the improvement of relations with Bangladesh in the difficult terrain of the borders, the extremist groups continue to get shelter and conduct their activities which were increasingly aided by foreign agencies including the ISI. A new conspiracy to destabilise the situation by large-scale killing of innocent people became evident. At this juncture, the Tripura state committee of the Party after a thorough discussion felt that parts of the state will have to be brought under the Disturbed Areas Act and the armed forces deployed there. This would be necessary to prevent any provocative activities resulting in inter-ethnic violence. The Polit Bureau discussed the matter. The Party in Tripura had so long not approved of the idea of deployment of the army under the Disturbed Areas provisions as there was every danger of the security operations targeting innocent tribal people. The Party and the left Front government felt that promulgating Disturbed Areas Act was essential. The PB and the CC approved this plan as all steps had to be

taken to prevent the provocative attacks which can lead to large-scale communal violence. The United Front government's attitude was positive and helpful in this regard. Subsequently, the Party Centre has been assisting the Tripura State Committee to deal with the situation. It has been due to the continuous work and campaigns among the people by the Party that the tribal-non-tribal unity have by and large maintained their unity and rebuffed the forces who want to disrupt normal life and amity.

Kerala Tribal Land Legislation

An issue which came up for discussion is the decision of the LDF government in Kerala to amend the Kerala Tribal land legislation. This amendment bill was introduced by the government to meet the situation created by a High Court directive. The matter came to the attention of the PB only after the bill was adopted by the assembly and send to the Centre for approval. There were certain provisions in the bill which were not in the interests of the tribal people and did not conform to our all India stand regarding restoration of alienated tribal land. Therefore, the PB proposed two amendments; first, a distinction be made between small and big settlers and secondly, to annul the change in the retrospective period for the enforcement of the act. The Kerala state committee decided to conduct discussions in the LDF on how to bring about the necessary changes.

Mullaperiyar

The question concerning inter-state waters between Kerala and Tamilnadu arose in this period. It concerned the utilisation of waters by Tamilnadu from the Periyar dam and the question of the height of the dam. In Kerala Com. V.S. Achuthanandan made some public statements regarding this matter. The issue became a matter of public controversy in both the states. The Polit Bureau discussed the matter in August 1997. It was of the opinion that the issue should not have been raised in public. Given the fact that we have a government in Kerala the matter should have been discussed with the Party there and then in consultation with the PB discussions should have been held with the Tamilnadu Party to arrive at

an understanding. For this the PB asked the Kerala secretariat to submit a note giving its position on the issue. After which the PB would ask the Tamilnadu secretariat to give its opinion and then work out a mechanism to resolve the matter. The note of the Kerala secretariat was received and this was sent to Tamilnadu where the secretariat has discussed and sent its own note. This has come only recently. After the Party Congress the PB will have to pursue the matter.

Conclusion

The present developments pose a great danger not only to our secular fabric but to the democratic movement as well. The pursuit of BJ-RSS policies and the consequent disruption of national unity is bound to breed insecurity amongst the minorities leading to a spurt in minority fundamentalism. This, in turn, would benefit majority communalism, feeding on each other with serious repercussions. Further, the spread of communal poison will seek to disrupt the unity of the toiling people. That very unity which we seek to strengthen and on that basis to advance towards the Left and democratic alternative. Such are the dangers that cannot be underestimated.

With the BJP-led government in power at the Centre, we have to deal with a new situation. Despite the fact that the BJP-led coalition is unstable and ridden with conflicts, it should not be forgotten that the RSS is making systematic efforts to penetrate the State apparatus. The BJP government's economic policies constitute an outright attack on the public sector and in favour of privatisation. It will add to the burdens on the people.

In such a situation, the Party and the Left forces must take the initiative to rally all the democratic and secular forces to fight the BJP politically and to dislodge it from power. Simultaneously, the Party has to step up the struggle against the economic policies which are ruining the people of the country. In order to build up an effective and broad-based struggle against the BJP's policies and the communal danger we must pay utmost importance to the building of Left unity as it is the Left which has the most consistent positions in defence of secularism and against liberalisation. The

strengthening of Left unity and its growing intervention through mass campaigns, struggles and movements will help in mobilising the other secular and democratic forces.

To fulfill the tasks set out in the political resolution to accord priority to the defeat of the BJP, the Left will have to strive to regroup and reforge the third alternative. The United Front which was constituted after the 1996 general elections is now in disarray. But the parties and forces which constitute the United Front are present even today. Some have taken opportunistic positions and deserted the secular combination but many others remain. The Left will have to take the initiative to regroup these forces. This can be done by uniting on issues against the BJP-led government and by building up powerful united movements on the people's issues. It is only in this process that the third alternative can again become a vital force.

The need for a third alternative in the immediate context to fight the BJP-led government and the threat from the right-wing reactionary forces requires us to formulate tactics to draw in the secular bourgeois parties on political issues on common platforms and for united mass movements on specific issues. This will help us to deal with the immediate situation where the Left requires allies for a broader mobilisation to fight the BJP.

In the absence of such a third alternative, many of the regional forces may be forced to rally behind the BJP or the Congress. With the consolidation of its hold over State power, the BJP is seeking precisely to do this and isolate the Left. In the absence of a third alternative, the minorities gripped by a sense of growing insecurity may rally behind the Congress. Hence, under these circumstances, we shall have to make efforts to reforge this third alternative.

Distinct from this immediate task we must emphasise the need for a real alternative which is the Left and democratic alternative. The left and democratic programme which has been set out in the political resolution provides a set of policies and demands which are distinct from the approach of the bourgeois-landlord parties. These are not meant only for propaganda. It is the duty of the Party and the left forces to pick up the issues from this platform for struggles and united movements. Our appeal to the masses

following the bourgeois parties including our allies must be geared to draw them in for united actions on the demands spelt out in the Left and democratic platform.

While concentrating our fire against the dangers posed by communalism, we have to simultaneously ensure that the popular discontent which is bound to grow further against the economic policies should be channelised behind the Left and democratic forces. But this discontent will not rally behind the Left and democratic forces automatically. The BJP would seek to divert this discontent on the lines of communalism and jingoism. It is only when a powerful struggle is conducted that the mass of the people will rally behind the Left and democratic forces. Such struggles, however, will not be conducted by many of our secular bourgeois allies who in their states are pursuing similar policies. The Left should take the initiative to draw the masses behind these parties into these struggles.

Increasing the independent activities of the Party and the Left forces, projecting the Left and democratic alternative and drawing in the masses into struggles on the basis of their platform and allying with the secular bourgeois parties to fight the threat posed by the communal and authoritarian BJP is the perspective on which we should base our work.

We should attach special importance to the development of the united struggles and mass movements by the Party and the mass organisations. Here in the coming days the call given by the National Platform of Mass Organisations for a general strike on December 11 and the campaign associated with it must be taken up by the entire Party. The struggle against liberalisation is one which will be taken up firmly and consistently only by the Party and the left. If we are able to develop powerful mass movements on economic policy matters we will be able to draw in some sections of the secular bourgeois parties also into this movement.

Strengthening the independent role and activities of the Party is crucial for the advance of the Left and democratic forces. Our relatively weak position at the all India level has been the major obstacle in translating into action the development and growth of

the let and democratic forces. Here the Party must draw the lessons from the recent period. Political ideological work of the Party must be stepped up in such a manner as to consolidate the influence gained through the various struggles led by the Party and mass organisations. Continuous political campaigns to counter the slogans of the bourgeois-landlord parties and systematic ideological work to combat the communal and reactionary ideologies must be conducted and the Party organisation must be equipped for such a task.

Under these circumstances, the Left, of which our Party is a main component, will have to play an important role in safeguarding the unity and integrity of the country, its social harmony and secular fabric, protecting the mass of the people from further economic assaults and advancing the rights and interests of the people. We have to undertake the following tasks immediately.

First, to expose the designs of the BJP and its communal allies. We have to intensify the ideological campaign against the communal agenda which is disruptive of national unity. In this campaign, we must make all efforts to rally as many democratic and secular forces as possible.

Secondly, a militant campaign must be undertaken against the economic policies that mortgage the country's economic sovereignty and impose greater hardships on the people. The concrete impact of these policies on various sections should be properly studied and correct slogans worked out accordingly. This requires the strengthening of the Party's mass organisations and for that purpose proper allocation of cadres at all levels must be made.

Thirdly, the Party itself has to strengthen its ideological and political content. Improvement of the circulation of the Party organs and other periodicals along with regular programmes of Party education has to be undertaken systematically at all levels.

Party Programme Updating

The Political-Organisational Report of the 15th Congress noting

that the task of updating the Party Programme could not be completed as decided by the 14th Congress due to the demise of the Convenor of the earlier committee, Com. Basavapunniah and other reasons endorsed the Central Committee Resolution of March, 1995 which stated:

"Important national political developments have taken place which require the immediate intervention of the Party. Therefore, the Central Committee has decided to postpone the discussions on the updating of the Party Programme. This has been necessitated due to the urgent task of intensifying the mass movement against the new economic policies of the Narasimha Rao government and the forthcoming assembly elections in major states where the Party will be engaged in the task of fighting the Congress and the BJP.

"Changes in the international and national situation need to be evaluated and the programme updated. However, since the basic postulates of the Programme concerning the stage of the revolution, the character of the state, strategy and class alliance remains valid there is no difficulty in working out the tactical line of the Party.

"The 15th Congress will evolve a suitable mechanism to proceed with the updating of the Programme."

The 15th Congress, on this basis, entrusted the newly elected Central Committee with the task of working out a time table and mechanism to proceed with the updating work.

Subsequently, the Central Committee constituted a new 6-member Commission comprising Comrades Harkishan Singh Surjeet (Convenor), Jyoti Basu, EMS, Anil Biswas, P. Ramachandran and Sitaram Yechury.

The Commission met a number of times and prepared a draft. However, due to the intense political activity during this period, the discussion on this draft could not be completed and brought before the Central Committee.

This Congress has to decide on the mechanism to finalise the updating of the Party Programme.

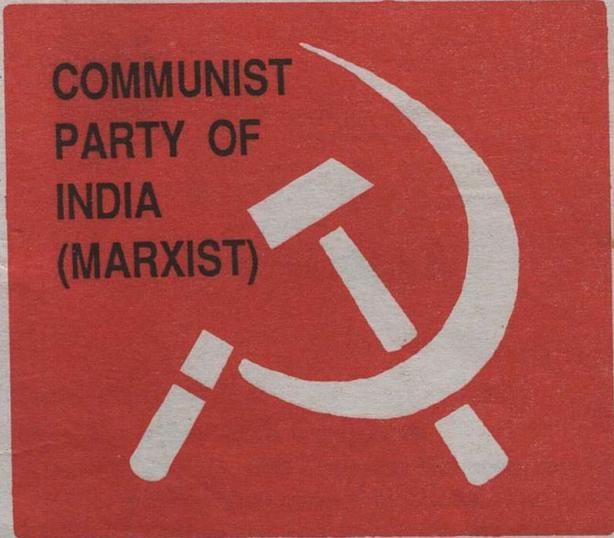
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September, 98

Published by Hari Singh Kang, on behalf of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), A K G Bhavan, 27-29, Bhai Vir Singh Marg, New Delhi-110001. and Printed at Progressive Printers, A-21, Jhilmil Industrial Area, Shahdara, Delhi-110095

P. Govinda Pillai



16th Congress of CPI(M)
5-11 October, 1998, Calcutta

**Draft Political
Organisational Report
Part-II**

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