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Bombay

Much has been made of the thirty-two-point programme announced by the United Front in West Bengal -- which is dominated by the Communist party of India (Marxist) -- before it was swept into office in the midterm election of February 1969. The programme promised the people of the state -- known to be the most radicalised in the country -- "a clean and honest administration," albeit, within the capitalist framework. It committed the United Front government to steps that "will ensure efficient economy and impartiality in the administration."

The performance of the UF ministry has demonstrated, however, that its constituents, both "leftists" and moderates, have got themselves seriously entangled in the task of defending capitalist property relations even at the risk of alienating themselves from the masses of workers and the rural poor.

The deputy chief minister, Jyoti Basu, of the Communist party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], recognised as the virtual chief minister, is now compelled to go on his bended knees before the big industrialists in the country and beg them to invest their capital in West Bengal, ostensibly in the name of creating "new employment opportunities" in the state.

In its first three months in office the UF government had some political luck. It had two opportunities to divert the attention of the masses by working up their sentiments against the central government headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi of the Congress party. (The masses had expected quick relief for their social situation from the "leftist" ministry.)

There was a demonstration of workers in the state-owned Durgapur steel plant in West Bengal and a contingent of Central Reserve Police (CRP), posted in the plant, opened fire, causing some casualties among the workers. There was a wave of protest against "central intervention" and popular sympathy went for the UF ministry as a "victim" of the caprices of Central Home Minister Chavan. There was a demand for the withdrawal of the CRP, a special central police force, from the state.

Again on April 8 another unit of the CRP opened fire on a group of security guards of the Cossipur Gun Factory who were demonstrating in support of their trade-union demands. Four demonstrators were killed. This was yet another op-

portunity for the UF ministry to rouse popular sentiment against the centre.

On April 10 there was a statewide strike in which all sections of the working class in West Bengal participated. It was a unique demonstration of solidarity of the working class behind the UF government. The state government took a dramatic step by ordering the general manager and some other officials of the gun factory arrested and placing them on trial -- an event hitherto unknown in India. The central home minister made amends by ordering the CRP units not to interfere in the "internal" law and order problems of the state government.

The sweeping victory of the UF in the midterm poll had indeed unnerved the big bourgeois interests who have large financial stakes in West Bengal. All kinds of attempts have since been made by the reactionary parties, represented by the Congress party, the Jan Sangh, etc., to discredit the UF government.

Hindu-Muslim riots were engineered in at least two suburban towns near Calcutta. There was an incident in Calcutta on April 6 when some clashes took place at the end of a cultural function organised in a large stadium. Some private cars were burnt and several men and women were allegedly molested by hooligans. The bourgeois press, which did not report the events for nearly a week, found it convenient to raise a howl later, after the successful "Bengal Bandh" on April 10. Reactionary rightist parties, both inside and outside parliament, have alleged unheard of atrocities against women -- exaggerating the incidents out of all proportion. A judicial enquiry into the episode has been instituted.

While all these campaigns conducted by capitalist parties can be understood, what is striking about the developments in West Bengal is the total failure of the UF government to take a firm stand about implementing its own electoral promises to the people. The UF ministry has behaved precisely in the same manner as its predecessor Congress party ministry, dutifully playing its role of a faithful defender of bourgeois property in the face of growing discontent among the masses.

It is not as if the UF government is pledged to achieve socialism in West Bengal and transform existing capitalist property relations into social ownership. It had promised to bring about "reforms" like the introduction of a state monopoly of wholesale paddy and rice and imposition

of suitable control over the entire trade in food grains within the capitalist framework. Under the pressure of big merchants and rich landlords represented by some of the constituents of the UF -- notably the bourgeois Bangla Congress -- it has failed to implement even this item of its programme.

Many of the clauses of the thirty-two-point programme have remained just pious wishes and they are going to remain so. The only convenient excuse the UF ministry has had is that it has no financial resources to carry out the reforms and that the centre is not helping it out of its difficulties.

The striking failure of the government comes on the industrial front. The UF government had promised to take all possible steps "to encourage, assist and cater to all possibility of industrialisation, specially cottage, medium and small scale industries calculated to serve the people honestly and faithfully." It has also promised to set up more agro-industries in rural areas. But its emphasis has been on exerting pressure on the central government for securing licenses, finances, and raw materials for the industry in the state, and taking "effective steps to maintain peace in industry"!

The UF government has certainly retreated from the "fighting stance" it adopted during its earlier tenure in office immediately after the 1967 elections. The "gherao" movement introduced by the (Socialist Unity Centre) labour minister, Subodh Banerjee, of encouraging workers to surround employers or managers to get their demands fulfilled on the spot, has been completely given up and the new CPI(M) labour minister is making an all-out bid to bring about "industrial peace" by appeasing the capitalists in the state.

The UF programme, of course, does not promise the working class anything more than mere "help" in their struggle for (a) a living wage; (b) unemployment benefits; (c) adequate bonuses, including a needed modification of the Bonus Act; and (d) prevention of retrenchment, rationalisation and automation. In practice, all militant trade-union struggles of the working class are being given up and workers find themselves cheated even in their isolated struggles for a living wage or unemployment benefits.

In its attempt to appease the capitalist class, the UF government announced a series of "relief measures," not for the workers but for the capitalist employers, after discussion with "representatives of trade and industry" convened to "consider the problems of industry and measures to facilitate the industrial growth."



JYOTI BASU

On April 24, Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu made an important policy speech while addressing the West Bengal state board of the All-India Manufacturers' Organisation. His speech was a pathetic appeal to the industrialists "to give up their feeling of nervousness and lend the UF government their hand of cooperation."

This speech has been widely publicised and gleefully commented upon by the capitalist press to illustrate, if anything, the bankrupt policy of the UF ministry. The Times of India (April 25, 1969) reported Jyoti Basu's speech as follows:

"Addressing the State Board of the All India Manufacturers' Organisation he said that 'if industrialists had a little money to invest they should invest it so that there might be a little more employment in West Bengal.'

"He asked industrialists and businessmen to send their representation to the U.F. Government for a 'fuller, maybe, a little franker and more detailed discussion' so that the situation might be tackled immediately. 'Let us see if we can cooperate.'

"Industrialists and businessmen had to realise that the Government had to work under severe limitations. The U.F. Government had a common minimum programme. There were different parties in the U.F. with various ideologies. In the Government, we are not concerned with the different ideologies of the various parties. The parties

may propagate their ideologies and it was for the people to decide which ideology they will accept."

Thus the CPI(M) leader wants the Indian capitalists not to take his party's ideological profession of communism seriously. This is perhaps a new interpretation of the concept of "people's democratic front" which the CPI(M) as the "vanguard party" of the Indian proletariat seeks to establish with the national bourgeoisie in order to achieve the first stage of an anti-imperialist and antifeudal "people's democratic revolution" in India. To quote the Times of India:

"Mr. Basu did not understand why some people should think that the U.F. Government was 'a sort of communist Government.' This impression had grown, perhaps, because 'some of us who believe in communism are in it.' But the communists in the Government did not strive for advancing their theories of communism or putting into practice their own programme. 'Whatever wish we may have, that is an impossibility. We know our powers and limitations. The Government is a United Front Government with a common minimum programme and we are guided by that programme.'" [Emphasis added.]

And the CPI(M) leader propounded a new strategy of the Communist movement as represented by his party and its allies, including the "Marxist" parties like the CPI [Communist party of India -- the pro-Moscow CP], RSP [Revolutionary Socialist party], SUC [Socialist Unity Centre], RCP [Revolutionary Communist party], etc., not to speak of the "nonleft" Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc, etc.

"The Deputy Chief Minister said some of them would like to abolish the system under which they were working for they believed that capitalism was not for an underdeveloped country like India. But only the future would reveal what would happen to India. Now we want the cooperation of everybody, labour, manufacturer, trader, businessmen."

"Mr. Basu said even within the short time the U.F. had been in office, it had meetings with representatives of the business community, industrialists and chambers of commerce. There had been formal meetings and 'we have decided to have business meetings where we can sit across the table and discuss various problems facing West Bengal and India. I have assured the business community that we shall do all in our power for the advance of trade, industry and commerce in West Bengal because, as the situation stands today, there can be no prosperity and no advance if we do not concern ourselves with the interest of trade and commerce.'"

"Mr. Basu said if the U.F. Govern-

ment looked after the interest of labour, [that] was tied up with the preservation of existing industries and industrial growth. The U.F. had to adopt this policy not out of love for any industrialists but it had to take into account the 'sheer reality.'"

In other words, when a working-class party or a Marxist party -- or a coalition of them with bourgeois parties -- undertakes the responsibility of running a bourgeois state it must play the role of armed defender of capitalist property. That is the naked "reality" of a capitalist society, more so in an underdeveloped country like India where the ruling bourgeoisie cannot make any "reformist concessions" to the masses, unlike in the advanced capitalist countries like Great Britain, France, West Germany, or Italy, where certain limited reforms might be extorted from the capitalist class under the so-called left-oriented Social Democratic governments.

Confessing that "he did not know of the problems of trade and industry," Basu said that the government "had a lot to understand so that it could render whatever help it was capable of giving. The U.F. Government could take the problems up with the Union Government."

Jyoti Basu also said he had been told that "a lot of injustice" had been done to West Bengal by accusations that the UF ministry was not sufficiently loyal to the centre. "We are for the unity of India," he said, "not only for its preservation but also its strengthening. We do not want India to disintegrate. We feel this kind of feeling that is being done to a State or group of States has to be obliterated."

A regional chauvinist posture as opposed to the centre had been a gimmick of the left-dominated UF ministries in West Bengal and Kerala to conceal their own failure to deal with the local proletariat classes. But of late the UF governments in both states have given up this anticentre posture to some extent.

To quote the Times of India again:

"Mr. Basu said he wanted to understand the problems and find out how the U.F. Government could help on this process of development and growth. He had some talks with representatives of commerce and industry, and they had given him some material. He was studying how in various States added opportunities were given by the State Governments. He had not yet been able to find any guidelines to induce the business community to invest more capital in West Bengal."

"As far as foreign countries [making investments] were concerned, those

were dealt with by the centre. The U.F. Government could still help in this sphere by discussion with the Central Government. 'The Central Government also represented the various states in India.' It is not a Government aloof from all of us."

This is an allusion to the large plantations and various other industries owned by foreign capitalists in West Bengal. In dealing with them, the UF ministry admits its total impotence. There is not even a threat of nationalisation of the foreign enterprises although the demand occupies an important place in the election platform of all the "Marxist" constituents of the UF, including the CPI(M).

Now Jyoti Basu talks of the need "for the problems of governmental and institutional finance for industries to be studied and pinpointed." He says, "We must start [the] process immediately. We cannot delay, for the serious problems facing West Bengal are problems for the whole of India. The rising unemployment and the complete frustration among the youth who have no future cannot be allowed to continue for long."

About the labour situation, however, Basu told the manufacturers' representatives that there would be "no stability unless they were able to guarantee a minimum living condition for the vast masses of the people. Just because there had been a good harvest it could not be said that the country was out of its difficulties. Could anybody guarantee that unemployment would go down after five years? All of them would have to be conscious of the situation and then alone could they be able to understand the problems arising in today's society. Otherwise, all talks would be one-sided and ideological!"

The deputy chief minister said "industrialists were a little worried as they thought there might be more labour trouble in the State because the U.F. Government was a representative of labour." There were also people "who wanted to invest money in the State but were afraid to do so."

"I do not understand this," Basu continued, "We have been trying to say as soon as the Government was formed that we shall look to the interests of all."

Asking businessmen "not to be nervous," he said they would find that, in actual practice, "the U.F. Government was trying to help trade and industry so that there might be more investment in West Bengal without which the State would go down and down."

The response of big Indian industrialists was also "positive." Naval H.

Tata, president of the Employers' Federation of India, while delivering his presidential address at a meeting of the federation in Calcutta on April 26, assured the UF government of West Bengal that "its political ideology need not cause a change in the employers' attitude to the problem of industrial relations."

Tata said that so long as the government's policies were based on the principle of "peaceful co-existence, giving the management full scope for performing their legitimate managerial functions and not directed towards the annihilation of the entrepreneur through sheer political vendetta, there need be no conflict."

G.D. Birla, India's number one industrialist, who is currently touring Tito's Yugoslavia, exploring investment prospects in that country, has already given a chit of good conduct to the UF government in West Bengal, saying that he can "do better business with communists than Congressmen." He has been given big concessions by the Nambudiripad ministry to start new industries in Kerala.

There have been some rumours about traditional Marwari and Gujarati capitalists shifting their capital investment from West Bengal to their home states of Rajasthan and Gujarat because of fears that their industries will be nationalised by the UF government. These hitherto backward states are indeed undergoing a quicker rate of industrialisation of late. But the farsighted section of the Indian capitalist class realises that its class interests are better protected under a left-dominated government, especially in a period of crisis, than under a traditional capitalist party government.

If Jyoti Basu's speech has been welcomed by the capitalist press, it has caused consternation among the ranks of the CPI(M) who consider it a total surrender to the capitalist class.

Virtually the only positive thing the UF government did after it assumed office was to release all political prisoners including the Maoist "Naxalite" leaders like Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal who were arrested last year in connection with the peasant revolt in Naxalbari. But, according to the Naxalite journal Liberation (April 1969) "several peasant militants, both convicted or under trial, are still languishing in jail."

Liberation, true to its Maoist spirit, has characterised "Jyoti Basu and Co." as a "bunch of counter-revolutionaries masquerading as Marxists." The journal says: "Hypocrisy is said to be the tribute that vice pays to virtue. Lies and falsehood are today the political stock-in-trade of these counter-revolutionaries!"

We are not yet prepared to call the leaders of the CPI(M) "counter-revolutionaries" although objectively they play the role of defenders of bourgeois property. That is a logical consequence of their opportunist class-collaborationist policies emanating out of their erroneous and unhistorical strategy of a "people's democratic revolution" in India.

But then the Naxalites, despite all their fiery pronouncements regarding armed action and "guerrilla warfare," are also committed to the strategy of a four-class "people's democratic front" -- a front of the proletariat with the peasantry, middle class, and the national bourgeoisie to achieve a "people's democratic revolution."

What is worse, the Naxalites under-rate the role of the urban proletariat as the leaders of the coming socialist revolution in India. Their emphasis is on a peasant-led revolution against "imperial-

ism, feudalism and comprador-bureaucrat capital"! -- whatever that might mean.

Indeed the "Naxalite" revolt against the leadership of the CPI(M) reflects to an extent the growing revolt of the rank and file against the opportunist sins of the leadership. The ranks react in a blind and often adventurist manner to the betrayals of the masses by the traditional Stalinist parties.

For the present, Maoism, with its slogan "power flows from the barrel of a gun," has a romantic appeal to these revolutionary romanticists. But the honest revolutionaries among them will be convinced in the course of emerging mass struggles that the alternative to the opportunism of the CPI(M) is not Maoist adventurism but a consciously planned revolutionary struggle of workers and peasants, aimed at overthrowing the capitalist state and achieving a socialist revolution in India.