

The election provided a test for our party's basic line, as well as its approach to the pressing problems of the democratic movement. And it is over these that a bitter clash of ideas with the CPM developed. The latter denounced our line and tactics as 'revisionism' and even publicly rejected our bona fides as fighters against the congress misrule. Let us now examine our basic positions in the light of the experience of the greatest political battle of the recent time that the fourth general election was.

In the programmatic sphere, we hold that in order to complete the tasks of national democratic revolution all democratic classes, including sections of national bourgeoisie can and must be united in a common front—National Democratic Front. Our conception of national democracy, which is always distorted and misrepresented by the CPM leadership, provides the theoretical basis for building up such a front and for seeking socio-economic transformations. Our Programme stresses the non-capitalist path and rejects the present capitalist path.

We stress the unity of left and democratic forces. But we have laid—and still lay—great emphasis on the need for uniting the masses that follow the democratic opposition and that follow the Congress, basing ourselves on the growing popular disillusionment as well as differentiation among the national bourgeoisie.

Our Programme stresses the possibility of peaceful transi-

tion not as a mere tactical utterance but as a major theoretical proposition in the new epoch. The Programme envisages the possibility of winning a stable majority in Parliament and using this majority, basing on a revolutionary mass movement, for bringing about the transition. But this still remains one of the two possibilities. In this context, our line is one of strengthening and extending democracy to enhance the possibility of the peaceful way. Our Programme visualises the sharing of power between the working class and national bourgeoisie in the national-democratic stage, even without the leadership of the working class but by increasingly playing a leading role. Our Programme also takes into account that exploiting classes are not going to surrender power voluntarily when it comes to transition to socialism.

Armed with this programmatic and political line, we have tried to build the mass movement and also to prepare the masses for the election. In both these regards, we have always laid special stress on the need for unity of communists, at least unity in action. Unlike the CPM, the CPI has always held that area of agreement between the CPI and the CPM is wider than that of disagreement and that the unity in action is not only desirable but also possible. Our entire electoral strategy was based on our stand in favour of unity of the left and democratic forces in general and the two communist parties in particular.

In its appeal for "Left and Democratic Unity" for facing the election, the National Council of the Communist Party of India said in November 1966:

The National Council of the CPI once again appeals to the leadership of the CP (Marxist) to ponder over their present election tactics, especially their attitude towards the CPI. The great cause of our party in the coming election battles be not sacrificed at the alter of the ideological differences and conflicts in the communist movement or on the prejudices and spitefulness which the CP (Marxist) leadership unfortunately entertains towards our party.

The election has shown what great possibilities exist for uniting all patriotic and democratic forces, including sizable sections of national bourgeoisie in a common front. They have also confirmed our thesis (which the CPM leaders have always pooh-poohed and ridiculed) of uniting the congress masses with the non-congress masses who are to follow the democratic opposition. It is enough to say that the non-congress governments now formed by the broad democratic opposition in which the CPM leaders Jyoti Basu, Harekrishna Konar and Niranjana Sen function as ministers under the leadership of Ajoy Mukerjee and along with our comrades, are an eloquent confirmation of precisely of our correct thesis. Assuming such a non-congress government representing similar correlation of forces comes into existence at the centre, would the CPM keep out of it or denounce it on the ground that it does not have 'hegemony of the proletariat'? Frankly speaking, their participation in these non-congress governments is essentially a rejection of their erroneous, dogmatic understanding, whether they admit it or not.

Here one must also see the essential substantiation of our concepts regarding national democracy. Political life of the country is moving, as far as the democratic movement is concerned, in that direction and not in the direction of the dogmatic concepts of the CPM. On the contrary, those concepts are getting disproved and this is happily admitted in some of their actions and public utterances.

In this connection, special mention must be made of the experience of Bangla Congress. Our party correctly saw the great potentialities of the emergence of the Bangla Congress, and, what is more, did its best to draw it closer to the left movement. Guided by their dogmatic and sectarian understanding, which was a manifestation of class opportunism, the CPM leadership took a patronising attitude towards the Bangla Congress, virtually demanded that it accept the CPM's hegemony in the front and ultimately went to the length of denouncing it as 'unofficial Congress' and of decrying us for having sought the Bangla Congress' alliance. In its resolution of 17 November 1967, the West Bengal

State Committee of the CPM said:

The Bangla Congress came into existence only recently. They do not yet speak against the basic policies of the Congress and the central government. Their role in mass struggles is still to be judged by the people. We have explained again and again that the right revisionist party's programme is subservient to the bourgeoisie. They always find 'progressives' in the big bourgeois leadership of the Congress and want to unite with them.

At Jaipur, B. T. Ranadive told newsmen on 22 January that his party had 'promised about 35 seats' to the Bangla Congress which he added 'was confined mainly to two districts.' One wonders what he will say now!

The entire attitude of the CPM towards the phenomenon of Bangla Congress was one of sheer opportunism and it had nothing to do with any Marxist-Leninist standpoint. Yet it is the historic emergence of the Bangla Congress that has made possible the fall of congress power in West Bengal, electrifying the entire political life of that state. Today, similar developments are eagerly looked forward to by people not excluding the CPM and its supporters all over the country. It could be added here that the CPM for all its revolutionism, betrayed a lack of confidence in the possibility of the defeat of the Congress in West Bengal. Even when they accepted the possibility, they argued that 'it is an illusion to think that the defeat of the Congress at the poll will automatically lead to the formation of an alternate government' (CPM West Bengal Committee resolution, 17 November 1966). They cited the example of Kerala but missed the changed political situation. Our party, however, gave no quarter to such defeatism.

The fourth general election has also indicated the real possibility of winning the majority in Parliament through election. In fact, but for the splitting of votes among the CPI, CPM, SSP a majority would have perhaps been won even in this general election although that majority in its class content or political complexion would not still have been what makes a national democratic majority.

However, if a decisive majority is won by the left and democratic parties firmly basing themselves on mass movements that would pave the way for peaceful transition. Whether the peaceful way will actually materialise would still depend on a variety of other important factors, both national and international. The concept of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on this question is what the dogmatists in the world communist movement peremptorily denounced. The election has added weight to the thesis and confidence in our striving and working for the peaceful path. That does not imply that the danger of the other possibility is ruled out or is not to be reckoned with.

On the question of sharing power and leadership of the working class, its leading role etc., the election is a refutation of the CPM thesis. It clearly emerges that there may be a broad democratic front in which the working class will not still have established its leadership but in which the class will increasingly play its leading role through concrete policies and concrete actions during the stage of the completion of the tasks of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic revolution.

The upsurge for unity of all left and democratic parties and people's most enthusiastic response where such unity came into being is again a solid confirmation of our party's stand. The election in particular has been a repudiation of the CPM line, in its essential—of split and division in communist movement. As a matter of fact, while trying to bring down the CPI and carrying on a vitriolic and vicious campaign against our party, the CPM leaders had to pay lip service to united front between the CPI and CPM just to be on the right side of the masses. They had to modify their open declaration of 'no truck with the revisionists' which had been issued early in 1966 in West Bengal, for example. Other *alibis* were sought by the leadership to stall unity in election, the exaggerated and unconscionable claims for seats being their main stratagem in this respect.

The CPM denounced us as pro-congress and their leaders in many places publicly questioned our bona fides in fighting the Congress. In Jaipur B. T. Ranadive said that

'it is easy to indulge in anti-congress talks during election' (meaning the CPI). This has now been proved to be a sheer calumny unworthy of any responsible political party. It did not of course occur to the CPM leaders that by running down the CPI in this manner they were really helping the Congress. After all it was the CPI which in most states bore the burden, as the election results would now show, for fighting the Congress on behalf of the country's communist movement.

It was our party that emphasised right from 1965 the need for a united front of all left and democratic parties and progressive individuals, based on a minimum programme. We repeatedly made this proposal at the left parties' meetings held in Delhi in 1965 and 1966. But our proposal did not find much active support among the SSP and CPM, specially on the question of common minimum programme. Now everybody talks about united front based on a minimum programme and such programmes are now formulated in no time.

Whatever might be our shortcomings and weaknesses—we certainly had them—our party and our comrades upheld the banner and line of the party worthily for which they deserve the warm congratulations of the National Council.