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Report On Political And Current Issues

(Adopted By The Central Committee At Its October 29-31, 2004 Meeting)

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Iraq

In the three months since the last Central Committee meeting held in end July, the American occupation of Iraq has run into further difficulties with the guerilla resistance intensifying in various parts of Iraq. The US armed forces found itself no more in control in some of the towns like Falluja, Samarra, Ramadi and the Sadr City, a suburb of Baghdad. It is estimated that there are atleast twenty towns where the US has no control. Realising that such a situation would make elections in January untenable, the US armed forces have now embarked on a policy of attacking these towns through relentless bombings and sending in armoured troops. Such an attack on Samarra and its occupation led to the killing of 125 people, mostly civilians, including women and children. Falluja is being bombed from the air continuously leading to heavy loss of life. The American policy is to raze to the ground towns in the name of pacifying the resistance.

The tenuous grip of the interim government set-up by the Americans is being exposed. The US commander of Iraq has already said that more troops would be required for holding the elections in January.

Israeli Tactics

The Israeli armed forces launched a major military operation in Gaza from end-September which has left over 100 Palestinians dead. The armed forces are shooting down Palestinian children deliberately. This attempt to suppress the Palestinian resistance preceded the Sharon government's decision to put to vote in Parliament, a planned pull out from Gaza. The Sharon government wants to evacuate 8000 settlers from the 21 settlements in the Gaza strip while consolidating its hold over the West Bank. The decision to evacuate Gaza has met with fierce opposition from the settlers, the ultra rightwing parties and the orthodox clergy. The United States is backing Sharon's plan to annex the bulk of the West Bank by withdrawing from Gaza. The efforts of Israel backed by the US to isolate Yaser Arafat in the Palestinian Authority and movement have failed so far. With the serious illness of Arafat, they will be hoping to utilise

his absence to disrupt the Palestinian movement. As noted in the previous reports, both the resistance in Iraq and the Palestinian struggle, are in the forefront of the fight against imperialist aggression and in defence of national sovereignty and self-determination.

Continuing US Intervention

The US-led intervention on various issues in different parts of the world continues with the aim of extending and consolidating the imperialist hegemony. The United States is bent upon sanctions against Iran for pursuing its uranium enrichment programme. The European countries favour a negotiated approach. The Bush administration, alongwith Israel, is for aggressive action on the ground that Iran's nuclear potential is dangerous.

On Sudan, the Security Council adopted a resolution pushed by the United States and Britain which threatened sanctions against Sudan on its handling of the rebellion in the western region. Instead of allowing the Organisation of African Union to tackle the problem, the US is pushing for sanctions and intervention. In contrast to this interventionist approach, the United States vetoed a resolution adopted by the Security Council calling upon Israel to halt the attacks on civilian population in Gaza.

Venezuela Referendum: Chavez Triumphs

The referendum calling for the removal of President Chavez in Venezuela was held on August 15 at the initiative of the rightwing opposition which had collected the necessary number of signatures for holding the poll. The referendum has resulted in a 60 per cent vote in favour of Chavez, rejecting the call for his removal. This step of the rightwing opposition has boomeranged on them with Chavez acquiring greater democratic legitimacy. This is the third attempt to dislodge Chavez which has failed following the abortive coup and the oil strike meant to paralyse the economy. This victory of Chavez has galvanised the forces fighting in defence of national sovereignty and against the imperialist-dictated neo-liberal reforms in South America.

World Economy

The IMF, in its world economic outlook, has forecast a 5 per cent growth in world output for the year 2004. China's phenomenal growth which averages 9.5 per cent increase in real GDP annually has made a major contribution to the global growth rate. The global economy is growing after the recessionary spell which lasted until 2002. But this growth is halting and uneven with the United States registering growth without any increase in jobs. The world oil prices which have shot up is casting a cloud on the growth prospects for the next year.

The G-7 and the rich countries failed to come up with any substantial relief for the poorest countries despite promises. At the G-7 summit in June, no substantial proposals were adopted. On the other hand, in the WTO talks for

the framework agreement, the rich advanced capitalist countries have succeeded in pushing through the agenda of protecting their interests while conceding very little to the developed countries.

South Asia

In Bangladesh, the assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka by a bomb blast at an Awami League rally and increasing attacks by fundamentalist forces on secular intellectuals and the minorities shows the situation has worsened under the right-wing Khalida Zia government. In Pakistan, the technocrat Shaukat Hussain has become the prime minister and got elected to Parliament. Musharaff has got Parliament to vote for his remaining the Army Chief while being the President, going back on his earlier decision to quit the Army post by the end of 2004. In Sri Lanka, efforts to resume the peace talks with the LTTE have so far yielded no results though the cease-fire continues to hold.

Other Developments

The existence of terrorism in various forms is impacting on political developments in a number of countries. Usually, terrorist attacks strengthen rightwing and authoritarian forces who play upon the fears and insecurity of people. In Russia, the horrific killings of school children and their guardians at a school in Beslan in North Ossetia led to Putin strengthening his grip over the political system and changing the way Governors are appointed. He has now proposed Governors be appointed instead of being elected. In Indonesia, the perception that Megawati Sukarnoputri has been ineffectual in dealing with bomb attacks in Jakarta amongst other reasons has contributed to her defeat in the Presidential elections and victory for the former General Yudhoyono. In Afghanistan, under US and NATO supervision, elections have been held for the presidency which Hamid Karzai has won with ease, as was expected.

NATIONAL SITUATION

Maharashtra Assembly Elections

The BJP suffered another setback with the defeat of the Shiv Sena-BJP combine in the assembly elections held on October 13. The Congress-NCP alliance won 141 seats, which enables them to form a government with the support of its rebel candidates who have won the elections. The fact that the BJP-Shiv Sena could not cash in on the poor record of the Congress-NCP coalition government shows that the people of Maharashtra are not willing to subscribe to the rabid communal platform advocated by the Shiv Sena.

For the BJP, this defeat coming in the wake of the shocking loss in the Lok Sabha elections has further deepened the confusion and disarray within the party. Even before the Maharashtra election results, the party was struggling to

come to terms with its defeat in the Lok Sabha polls. In the Mumbai national executive meeting of the party, under Advani's leadership a call was given for going back to the basics i.e. falling back on the Hindutva ideology and relying on the RSS.

It is this approach, which led the BJP to try to whip up feelings on the Savarkar issue and launch Uma Bharati on her "tiranga yatra". Both these programmes failed to meet with much response.

With the Maharashtra defeat, the line of going back to Hindutva and relying on the RSS to give a new direction is going to be strengthened. The organisational fall out of the Maharashtra defeat came swiftly with the change over in president from Venkaiah Naidu to L.K. Advani. L.K. Advani, after assuming presidentship, in his speech to the national council of the party declared that if Vajpayee had come back to power, the Ram temple would have certainly been built at Ayodhya. It is inevitable that the BJP will adopt a hardline Hindutva communal approach under Advani's leadership giving up the face of moderation that it had assumed during its period in government.

Even though the Savarkar and Uma Bharati episodes failed to rouse the people, the BJP will bide its time to pick up such issues again as its mobilisation plank in the coming days.

Advani's exhortation to his ranks not to be apologetic about Hindutva and his attempts to present the Hindutva platform as "nationalism" reflects the necessity to balance the projection of a hardcore Hindutva platform with the compulsion to keep its NDA allies with it. As for the NDA allies, there was a noticeable lack of support for the BJP's stance on Savarkar and Uma Bharati's yatra.

As the BJP under RSS guidance steps up its Hindutva rhetoric, some of its allies will find it uncomfortable to maintain their association. The JD(U) has come out criticising Advani's speech at the national council regarding the building of the Ram temple. Other allies have also expressed their apprehensions and maintained that their alliance with the BJP is based on the exclusion of the hardcore Hindutva agenda. George Fernandes has been trying to approach some of the non-Congress secular parties in the hope of setting up a third front which would only benefit the BJP at the present juncture. The talk of reviving some sort of a third front which can include forces like Chandrababu Naidu's TDP stems partially from the uneasiness which the BJP's allies in the NDA experience with the resurgence of the Hindutva platform.

The Maharashtra election results have provided an important space for the UPA government to consolidate. With the BJP on the defensive, with its confrontationalist stance meeting with popular disapproval, the UPA government has more manoeuvrability and time to push through its own agenda.

UPA Government & The Left

During this period, our Party adhered to the approach, which we worked out in the last Central Committee meeting vis-à-vis the UPA government. We have by and large succeeded in keeping the focus on policy issues and debates centering around them. This was in contrast to the BJP's negative and confrontationalist attitude which further isolated it from the people.

In keeping with the approach worked out by the Central Committee, our Party supported those measures which were in keeping with the commitments made in the CMP or the country's interests; the CPI(M) and the Left parties continued to oppose those measures which erode national sovereignty or give unjustified concessions to foreign capital and continued to impress upon the government the necessity to implement some of the pro-people measures in the CMP on a priority basis.

Our Party welcomed and supported the repeal of Pota; the disbandment of the enquiry commission on Tehelka and handing over the Tehelka tape exposure related investigation to the CBI. It welcomed the setting up of an enquiry commission on the Godhra railway arson case. The Left parties also appreciated the decision of the government to bring a bill for enacting the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in the next session of parliament. At the foreign policy level, the Party welcomed the outcome of the meeting of the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan and the subsequent talks held between the prime minister and the Pakistan president in New York.

Conflict On Policy Issues

The CPI(M) and the Left have had to criticise and oppose a number of policy issues in this period. As far as the raising of the FDI cap in telecom and insurance are concerned, the Left parties have taken a firm stand. It has been raised in the Coordination Committee and taken to the people explaining why allowing control by foreign companies in these two vital sectors will be harmful. Our Party and the Left must continue to resist any move to raise the FDI cap in telecom and insurance sectors.

The Left parties opposed the inclusion of representatives of the World Bank, ADB and the McKinsey firm in the consultative groups set up by the Planning Commission. This was done for the first time since the Commission was set up. Our Party objected to representatives of these multilateral organisations which are controlled by the US and G7 countries being given representation in an institution which is part of the Indian State and who have no accountability to the Indian people but to their employers in Washington. The CPI(M) made it clear that it is not opposed to "foreign experts" per se but to any representative, whether foreign or Indian, being represented in the Planning Commission's bodies who are in the employ of these international agencies. The stand taken

by the Party and the Left found support amongst many outside the Left circles. The government had to respond by disbanding these bodies.

The trend dominating the UPA government as represented by the finance minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission is to push for further concessions to foreign capital and relying on foreign capital flows for investment. After the proposal to raise FDI caps, the government contemplated the scrapping of Press Note 18 which provides protection to domestic industry when they enter into joint ventures with foreign companies. Our Party is opposed to the scrapping of Press Note 18 and demanded that any modification made should be done after consultations with domestic industry.

Another proposal mooted by the Finance Ministry is to allow foreign banks to acquire 10 per cent equity every year in private Indian banks. By this process, after some years, the foreign bank can convert the Indian bank into its subsidiary. Further, the 10 per cent voting rights cap is also proposed to be done away with. The UPA government would be facilitating the takeover of the private Indian banks by foreign banks with this measure. This measure has to be opposed.

The Finance Minister has also called for the merger/acquisition of banks. This is in line with the Narasimham Committee report. Along with the entry of foreign banks in a big way, it is said that the merged banks will be better placed to meet the competition. Merger/acquisitions will lead to the closure of a large number of bank branches particularly in the rural areas. Secondly, it will render a large number of the bank staff surplus. The next step would be to allow foreign and Indian private banks to buy stakes in the mega banks, paving the way for privatisation of the industry. The Party cannot therefore accept this proposal.

The government has also set up an empowered group of ministers to decide on the price of shares to be disinvested in public sector undertakings. The finance ministry has prepared a plan to disinvest shares in all profitable PSUs which will result in tens of thousands of crores of rupees being realised by the government for its budgetary requirements. It is being argued that upto 49 per cent of the shares can be disinvested as it will not lead to privatisation, as 51 percent will remain under government ownership. The public sector units are not having a decision of their own accord to go to the market but are being directed by the government to sell shares in the market to provide resources for the government. For the profit making PSUs based on its own financial and fiscal preferences kept together, freedom to mobilise resources in the debt market or through debentures in the capital market without tinkering with public equity, the present move of the government is a tact to revert back to disinvestment as part of the budgetary effort of the finance ministry.

The government is going ahead with the privatisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports. As per the group of ministers' recommendations, nine proposals from private consortiums have been cleared for further processing. The government

is not taking seriously the alternative proposals including that given by the Airport Authority employees.

Despite assurance of consideration in the August 25, 2004 coordination committee meeting, the government has not taken any step to restore the interest rate of the Employees' Provident Fund. Without waiting for a review of the Electricity Act, the government has put out a national power policy draft for discussion. Similarly, the draft national tribal policy prepared by the previous government has been reissued by this government without making any changes.

The WTO framework agreement arrived at in Geneva is not a step forward in advancing India and the developing countries interests as projected by the commerce minister. Too many concessions have been given to the rich advanced capitalist countries in return for very limited and nebulous terms. The whole question of subsidies given to the rich countries has been circumvented by giving minor concessions on ending export subsidies while the developing countries have made more far-reaching commitments to reduce tariffs for providing access to their markets. The patents amendments bill which is due to come up in the next session of parliament is also a legislation which concedes too much to the multinational drug companies and doing too little to protect domestic interests.

The UPA government is working on the basis that the core issues of liberalisation and privatisation should be left to the government to pursue while the Left should confine itself to its concerns to increase resources for employment generation, food supply and health.

Our Party cannot accept such an approach. The basic content of economic policies, nature of investment, mobilisation and allocation of resources and fiscal policies are very much in the purview of the Left's concerns as they have a direct impact on the working and living conditions of the people.

Step Up Struggles

Reports from all around the country show that at the ground-level, the problems of the rural poor in terms of lack of food and work continue. Suicides by farmers in Andhra Pradesh and other places are going on. There is no substantial relief available for the rural poor and the tribal people. Workers are losing jobs due to the closure of industrial units.

In the coming days, more emphasis will have to be given to mobilisation and struggles by the different sections of the working people in defence of their interests and for changing the government's policies in this regard.

Situation In The North East

In Manipur, with the killing of Manorama Devi after her arrest by the Assam Rifles, popular anger led to big mass protests. The demand for the scrapping of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act became the main focus of the protest movement. The state government decided to withdraw the application of the Act in the three police station areas of Imphal. But the agitation continues with the demand for the withdrawal of the Act throughout the state. Our Party supported the demand for the shifting of the Assam Rifles headquarters from out of Kangla; strict action against those guilty for the killing of Manorama and a review of the jurisdiction of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Given the complicated situation in Manipur, it was important that the situation be handled carefully and sympathetically for the popular feelings. The excesses committed by the security forces on the protesters and demonstrators worsened the situation. The delay in prompt intervention by the Home Ministry and the Centre aggravated the situation.

Some of the draconian powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act need to be amended and the Centre should work out the legal basis for keeping the armed forces to perform certain duties in the North East without recourse to such draconian provisions.

The bomb blasts in Dimapur and in various parts of Assam have led to the deaths of a large number of persons and injuries to many. Both the ULFA and the NDFB have been responsible for these attacks. Since the uprooting of the camps of the ULFA and the other extremist groups in Bhutan, the ULFA has been seeking to retaliate by bomb blasts which have targeted innocent people including school children. Such reprehensible violence has further isolated the ULFA from the people of Assam. The Tarun Gogoi government is seen to be soft on the ULFA and has failed to take firm measures in time to check these violent activities. Our Party has been calling for negotiations between the extremist organisations and the Centre and the state governments provided no conditions are set. The ULFA's demand that the sovereignty of Assam be negotiated is one such condition which cannot be accepted.

The ULFA, the NDFB and the Tripura extremist outfits like the NLFT and the ATTF are operating from camps based in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has been consistently denying the existence of the camps and the activities of the extremist leaders from the territory of Bangladesh. Such a stance has become a serious matter in view of the escalating violence indulged in by these groups. The Central government must take up the matter with the Bangladesh government in a manner, which makes it clear that it cannot evade the issue of sanctuary found by the terrorist groups any longer.

Jammu & Kashmir

While progress has been registered in the dialogue between India and Pakistan, there is a stalemate as far as initiating a political dialogue with the forces within

Jammu & Kashmir. The ascendancy of Geelani and the announcement of the formation of a political party by him with the endorsement of the Jamaat-e-Islami has changed the situation which existed earlier when the moderate faction heading the Hurriyat was prepared to hold talks.

The attacks by militant outfits against political parties continues. The CPI(M) has been specially targetted with four Party workers being killed in the recent period. The cadres of the PDP and the National Conference have also been targetted with the aim of crippling the political system. The Mufti Mohd. government has to take more effective steps to tackle the extremist influence which is now concentrated in South Kashmir, including Anantnag district.

The UPA government must consider fresh initiatives to revive the political dialogue and to announce an economic package of measures for the state which can boost development activities and employment opportunities.

Naxalite Talks

In Andhra Pradesh, the People's War group has begun negotiations with the state government for which its leaders came overground. They also utilised the period after the ceasefire and lifting of the ban to hold rallies in major cities. The People's War leaders made it clear that they are not giving up the armed struggle. They will use the time to regroup their forces. The merger of the People's War and the MCC to form the CPI(Maoist) has been announced. With this the attacks in states like Chattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and pockets of West Bengal can be expected to be stepped up. What will be the direction of the CPI (Maoist) remains to be seen but upto now there is no indication of their giving up their disruptive stand of targeting the Left parties along with other political opponents. The statement announcing the merger while talking of defeating the "more dangerous Hindu fascist forces" also talks of "keeping the edge of the people's struggles directed against the new Congress rulers in Delhi alongwith the CPI/CPI(M) and their imperialist chieftains". Our Party must keep up the political and ideological struggle to isolate their disruptive moves.

Declining Sex Ratio

The 2001 census figures have revealed an alarming state of affairs with regard to the child sex ratio in the age group of zero to 6 years. If the scheduled caste/tribe figures are taken out, the ratio of female to male children had fallen below 900. This highlights the necessity to rouse social consciousness to fight the evils of female foeticide, infanticide and discrimination towards the girl child. There has to be the political will to reinforce the laws prohibiting these social evils.

The declining sex ratio is mirrored in other ways in the violence against women. Such violence has grown by leaps and bounds, whether it be sexual assaults or decisions by caste panchayats reinforcing the subordination of women.

Foreign Policy

After the secretary level talks between India and Pakistan, the foreign ministers meeting was held in the first week of September in New Delhi. It was agreed to continue “serious and sustained” dialogue on all bilateral matters including Kashmir. Thirteen proposals including the series of high level meetings to push forward the peace process were announced. President Musharaff recently floated some proposals to deal with the Kashmir problem. All such proposals can be taken up as part of composite dialogue to be held.

It was followed up by the meeting of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with President Musharaff in New York at the time of the UN General Assembly session. Both sides have expressed their commitment to continue with the dialogue process and for further steps to improve relations. There was a meeting of the foreign ministers of India, Russia and China at Almati, Kazakhstan which provided an opportunity for the three countries to exchange views on the international situation and take steps for trilateral cooperation on agreed issues.

The UPA government must seriously undertake a review of the ongoing relations with Israel. The Sharon government has stepped up its military attacks on the Palestinian people in Gaza. It has stepped up its annexation of the West Bank territories by building the security wall. The minister of state for external affairs visited the West Bank and met Yaser Arafat to express solidarity with the Palestinian cause. However, the UPA is continuing with the security and military cooperation with Israel. The recent visit of the Indian Air force chief to Israel is part of this policy. The UPA government must disentangle India from the security and military ties with Israel established by the Vajpayee government as they militate against India’s interests in the Middle East and promotes suspicion about USA-Israel-India axis.

Conclusion

In the coming days, the emphasis has to be on organising and mobilising the different sections of the working people to come out in defence of their rights and for changes of the policies adopted by the previous BJP-led government which have adversely affected the livelihood and interests of the people. It is only through the building up of such popular movements and struggles that pressure can be built upon the government to take corrective action.

In the coming period, the Party will have to pay attention to the continuing efforts by the US to entangle India in a host of strategic and military relationships. A concerted effort should be made to focus on the reorientation of foreign policy towards a more independent one.

The Party while resisting the moves for greater liberalisation and privatisation in vital sectors should build up campaigns for popular mobilisation and struggles. The Party should call upon the organisations of the working people to initiate struggles to compel the government to heed the verdict of the people and address their needs.

The Party should counter the ideological and political attacks on the Left by the pro-imperialist and rightwing bourgeois circles, which cannot stomach the Left influencing policy decisions. Special attention should be paid to exposing and isolating the disruptive communal activities and Hindutva ideology of the BJP-RSS combine.

The Party should utilise the conferences at all levels to discuss the political-organisational issues which can help give the Party a new thrust for expansion and strengthen it organizationally.
