

Elections and the left in India

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The elections of 2009 to the Indian Parliament have now resulted in a revived United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, tilted even more to the right than in the last five years. The bourgeois media has given it an exuberant thumbs up, while the stock market has been steadily moving up since the complexion of the new government became clear, crossing the 15,000 mark recently. On the other hand, a series of commentators on the secular, democratic, and left of the spectrum have put forward analyses that try to come to terms with the huge decline of the left between 2004 and 2009. This is certainly an important dimension, and though we will briefly consider the other actors, our chief aim will be to look at the questions of how and why the left had such a bruising electoral fortune, and what rebuilding a revolutionary left should mean in India. But even that calls for looking at the class aims of the bourgeoisie and the contradictions of bourgeois democracy, the roles and the gains and losses of the UPA and National Democratic Alliance (NDA), before we focus on the mainstream left. [\[1\]](#)

The Congress victory: Verdict in favor of “reforms?”

The first thing the election results reveal is that there was no great wave in favor of the ruling Congress Party. The wave exists in the imaginations of media barons and their paid journalists, who are arguing that this wave means an end to communalism, caste-based politics, as well as the left’s attempts to pull back India from advancing triumphantly along the path of reforms. The imagined wave has also been accepted by those left leaders like Biman Bose, the CPI(M) state secretary, who wish to deny or minimise the swing in West Bengal’s favor of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and its allies (Congress, SUCI) and the responsibility of the CPI(M)’s policies for its radical decline in this state, its traditional stronghold.

True, the Congress significantly increased its tally by sixty-one seats. But that was from an extremely low figure of 145 seats (won in 2004). Even now, it is a minority party (206 Members if Parliament [MPs] in a Lok Sabha [Legislature] of 543 seats), and the pre-poll UPA got fewer than the required 272 seats, though it now has enough assurances from others (Samajwadi Party [SP], Rashtriya Janata Dal [RJD], Bahujan Samaj Party [BSP], etc.) who were not its pre-poll allies to ensure the survival of its government. [\[2\]](#) Among these, the SP and the RJD are splinters of the Janata Dal, the most ambitious attempt at creating a national “third party.” Both are based on particular caste-community alliances, and while both speak some kind of populist rhetoric, they are best seen as smaller bourgeois formations. The BSP is the most ambitious attempt so far to forge a

Dalit (former “untouchable”) party, but vitiated by the fact that its main leader, Mayavati, has a totally autocratic style, and thrives more on symbolic gestures like putting up statues of dalit heroes than practical work.

Secondly, the Congress did not fight the elections on a program of “reforms.” It fought the elections by talking about the “aam admi” (ordinary person) and what it had done for them. It targeted the rural poor, the urban poor, as well as the salaried (government employees and government aided) in a number of ways. It ensured that the success of the NREGP (National Rural Employment Guarantee Program) was attributed to the Congress. [3] It implemented the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission (March 2008) unusually quickly. It cancelled a series of peasants’ debts. Some of these can be written off as populist gimmicks. But the NREGP has certainly been a significant gain for the worst hit rural poor. In effect, NREGP claimed to have given an average of forty-eight days’ employment to 44.6 million workers. In other words, it was less than half successful, but even that did mean a degree of employment for the rural poor. Of the total 2.16 billion days of employment generated, women got 47 percent, a high enough proportion to enthuse, one would suggest, many poor rural women, who often might not find it worth their while to vote, to have done it this time. Of the 2.7 million projects, 1.2 million were completed. [4] In other words, while this was merely bourgeois reformism, for once, this reformism did deliver, and that after one-and-a-half decades when state support to the poor was being systematically tapered off in the name of “reforms.” In addition, we can say, that if the Congress today is projecting Rahul Gandhi’s campaigns as one of the major factors in its turn-around, then that campaign focused clearly on the poor.

This does not mean that the Congress is a party of social-democratic reform. This is actually a contradiction of bourgeois democracy in a country like India. [5] Periodically, the parties have to go to the common people for votes. The elections of 2004 showed dramatically that class does matter, even if in an extremely limited and distorted way. The BJP had gone in with its India Shining campaign, stressing high technology and economic growth. It and the NDA, its alliance, lost contrary to not only its own expectations but the hopes of Indian big capital and the bulk of the pollsters. At the same time, other votaries of globalization, of cyber-development, whether Chandrababu Naidu (Telugu Desam Party, Andhra Pradesh) or Digvijay Singh (Congress, Madhya Pradesh), also lost. In 2004, the left won its most seats in the Indian Parliament in the history of the country, not for what it had done, but for what it promised to do, i.e., fight globalization, or neoliberalism, which does exist, contrary to those who try to argue that it is an invention of the left. The urban workers and the rural poor, in so far as possible, voted against their most determined enemies. In that sense, the mandate of 2004 was for a halt to privatization and for restoration of state intervention in the economy, and for some redistributive justice.

Once the elections were over, however, a different kind of pressure came into play. Big capital does not operate by the “one person, one vote” principle. It operates by the force of its wealth. With Manmohan Singh, the original finance minister who had kicked open the doors to foreign (imperialist) capital as well as Indian big capital through his policies of 1991-96, and P. Chidambaram, the creator of the United Front government’s (1996-98) “dream budget” in charge, reforms went forward. For the first four years, most of the economic policies of the government simply ignored popular needs. Even the growing incidence of farmers’ suicides did not lead to any major measures till quite late, when the next round of elections was already casting its shadows ahead. Thus, in 2004 as in 2009, the idea that the Congress was a party of pro-market reforms was based on the links between the Congress and the ruling class, not because of the election campaigns of the Congress. The debacle of the BJP in 2004 suggested that in India, the time had not come for a party to project itself openly as a party championing the economic policy of the big bourgeoisie. The one exception to this is the ability of the BJP to project itself as both the party of monopoly capital and the party of the people in Gujarat.

The NDA and the BJP

In general, however, the NDA, and particularly the BJP, had received important electoral blows. Between 1989 and 1999, it had been riding an ascending curve. In 1989 it won 88 seats. In 1991 it got 120, in 1996 its seats rose to 161. In 1998 it had 179 seats to start with, and by the time parliament was dissolved its seats rose to 182. In 1999, it got 182 seats again. This came down in 2004 to 138 and to 116 in 2009. The “secular” bourgeois media and official ideologues and hack writers are happy, seeing in this proof that communalism is steadily declining after the high watermark of 1998–99.

The reality is far more complex. The fountainhead of communalism is the Rashtriya Swayamsavak Sangh (RSS). It has a plethora of front organizations. The BJP is its electoral arm. It is true that this electoral arm has suffered a setback. But the period since 1989–92 (the Ram Janambhoomi campaign [6]) has seen the RSS extend its tentacles in civil society, through a variety of organizations. Moreover, it has been successful in redefining the terms of debate. Thus, under its years of attack, “secularism” has been substantially redefined. India’s nuclear policy, though it had shifted much, from a pledge not to build weapons to the first Pokhran test under Indira Gandhi and the refusal to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty later, was pushed into openly building nuclear weapons by the NDA government.

The defeat of the BJP therefore exists along with a considerable success of the RSS in spreading its views. Since all parties took an authoritarian stance after the Mumbai attack by terrorists, and Parliament passed draconian laws unanimously, the BJP did not gain by its “national security” posturing. But it cannot be doubted that the turn by all, including the left, to such a position represents a victory of those who most strongly fought for an authoritarian turn in the polity, i.e., the RSS. In that sense, to see the decline in the BJP seats as a collapse or rout of the RSS is to be blind to realities. In addition, it must be recognized that none of the secular parties, including the mainstream Stalinist left, have been willing to fight the RSS and its affiliates by confronting them on the streets or by sustained political-ideological battles, making electoral defeat of the BJP their sole tactical line. This means that the RSS penetration of civil society is challenged only by relatively small radical and committed groups.

The rout of the left

Of great importance is the need to analyze why the Stalinist left parties’ votes declined. In this discussion, most of our emphasis will be on West Bengal. This is not due to some Bengali provincialism on our part. Rather, for more than three decades, West Bengal has been the staunchest supporter of the mainstream left. Even during the genuine pro-Congress wave of 1984, it was in West Bengal that the left vote held reasonably steady. And of course, the West Bengal model has been projected by the CPI(M), not only all over India, but even abroad, as a genuine alternative path of development. That makes an in-depth assessment of what happened in West Bengal the key to understanding the prospects before the left. Apologists for the left parties, whether Vijay Prashad on Counterpunch [7] or others in India, have tried to put forward a series of half truths and inanities.

First, there is the story of the Congress wave, a fable we have already disposed of. Second, there is the advocacy of a political line of crass class collaborationism. From the (correct) observation that the RSS is a fascist force, even serious Marxist commentators like Sobhanlal Dutta Gupta have fallen into the error of arguing that advocating a third alternative between the BJP and the Congress was similar to the sectarianism of the Communist International and the German Communist Party between 1929 and 1933, an error that allowed the Nazi rise to power. [8] This is to make the

mistake of thinking that the electoral face of the Congress, its aam admi rhetoric, as well as its token genuflections to secularism, are serious and confer on it the credentials of an Indian equivalent of a social democracy. A third argument is to recognize that there has been a sharp drop in seats, only to cover it up, as the CPI(M) political bureau has done, by talking about a marginal reduction in votes. As the politburo says: "The serious reverses suffered by the CPI(M) and the left parties in West Bengal and Kerala are of deep concern. The CPI(M) has lost 25 sitting seats from these two states. The CPI(M) has won 16 seats with a vote share of 5.33 per cent which is marginally less than the 5.66 per cent it got in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections." [9] This fudges some other figures. Thus, it conceals the fact that the CPI(M) contested many more seats in 2009 (eighty-two) than in 2004 (sixty-nine) so that total votes cast for its candidates went up for that reason. It conceals the fact, that in West Bengal, its vote share went down from 38.57 percent in 2004 to 33.1 percent in 2009, with the same number of seats being contested (thirty-two). In Kerala, it contested fourteen seats this time as opposed to thirteen in 2004, yet its vote share went down from 31.52 percent to 30.48 percent. Even in its most successful base, Tripura, its vote share has gone down from 68.8 percent to 61.9 percent (two seats). [10]

Prakash Karat, the CPI(M) general secretary, has written an article that makes curious reading. [11] Karat rightly argues that there is no Congress wave. However, by lumping the votes at the all India level, Karat makes it appear that the Congress gain has been at the cost entirely of the BJP. But the significant factor is, while Karat can pretend to give a full explanation for why the Congress victory is not a victory, whereas the BJP defeat is a massive defeat, when it comes to explaining his own party's strategy and its collapse, he is silent. He has to record the number of seats, of course. But interestingly, he does not record the 5 percent drop in votes in West Bengal. More important, he does not look at what the elections show about his brand of building a "Third Front." This was a hastily cobbled, utterly unprincipled alliance. One partner, the Biju Janata Dal of Orissa, had been a member of the BJP-led NDA for a long time. It broke only during the elections of 2009, with Patnaik calculating shrewdly that in the aftermath of the anti-Christian communal violence at Kandhamal, the BJP was an electoral burden. That this had nothing to do with principled secularism can be seen from his long tolerance of Narendra Modi and the other BJP luminaries (and his silence over the 2002 pogroms in Gujarat), or for that matter the growth of the Bajrang Dal and VHP in Orissa during his government, till electoral compulsions suggested a rupture. Another ally was the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra. In 2004, the CPI and the CPI(M) had denounced the TDP for its support of the NDA as well as for its role in Andhra. So even by the logic formally put forward, this was not a very principled formation. Its equidistance from the Congress and the BJP was based on electoral calculations, not secularism. And this is of course not the end of the story. As we propose to discuss later, Karat's model does not break from popular frontism and class collaboration.

More subtle are those like Vijay Prashad. But they trip themselves up every so often. Prashad, for example, observes that good governance has allowed the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Orissa or the Janata Dal(U) in Bihar to do well on a regional basis. Leaving aside the question of whether Kandhamal [12] is an instance of good governance by the BJD, this is in fact a damning indictment of the CPI(M)-led government in West Bengal. In West Bengal, the left citadel for the past three decades, the election was fought almost entirely on local issues as if it were a state assembly election rather than a national parliamentary election. The left did try to inject some national policy issues in the campaigns (e.g., the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal), but was repeatedly forced to confront the almost entirely localist campaigns of a united opposition. As a result, it ended up responding to the relationship between industrialisation and agriculture (and the rights of peasants), in a defensive vein.

Leading the charge was of course Ms. Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress. She has developed, over the past couple of decades, a finely honed one-point agenda—remove the CPI(M)

from power. For this she has swung from one ally to another, from one slogan to another. But this time, she had not only the Congress as ally, but also a large number of leftists—both dissidents from the Left Front and far left parties, along with left and liberal intellectuals who broke with the CPI(M). This last force, not an inconsiderable one, was turned into a consolidated force and projected as the sole voice of civil society, partly due to the brutal land grab and state and party violence unleashed over the last few years, and partly by effective media projection. This force was possibly also responsible for the nearly ninety-page manifesto of the TMC, with its populist rhetoric ranging from jobs for all to land for the landless and gender justice.

The Stalinism of the CPI(M) and the eventual backlash

In the end, this was a feat achieved by the CPI(M). Its thirty-two years of continuous rule in West Bengal has seen a development of what can best be called Stalinism in one province. What distinguished the rule of the CPI(M) in West Bengal from the rule of bourgeois parties in other provinces, or rule by social-democratic reformists anywhere, was the retention of most of the Stalinist political culture. As in Eastern Europe in the past, the first targets of Left Front rule were actual or potential left-wing challengers. Any time “Naxalites” have raised their heads; there has been repression, documented year after year by the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) and others. Repeatedly, the state under CPI(M) rule, as under rule by other parties, has arrested political activists from the left, launched false legal cases, and unleashed massive state and party-cadre violence. In recent years, this has increased in a big way. [13] The “Maoist threat” has been one of the standard pleas (the other is “secessionism”) used in order to unleash massive repression. Thus, popular resistance to the building of a “special economic zone” (SEZ) and state repression in Lalgarh has been termed Maoist, and efforts are under way to destroy the movement. [14]

From the village to the capital, real power lay with the “party machinery” in general and “party office” in particular, backed up by an increasingly tight grip over the police, including the political surveillance of all left opponents. This has been construed by the CPI(M), as well as by its opponents, as “vanguardism” in operation. Though this is an election analysis, we feel there is a necessity to discuss this misconception in some detail. The Leninist concept of the vanguard party had nothing to do with imposing party control and silencing the masses. In *What Is To Be Done?*, the book for which Lenin is most often attacked, he argued that the revolutionary party could be built only by drawing together the most conscious working-class elements and fusing them with the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia. His talk about the vanguard was not based on any idea that a party only had to proclaim itself to be the vanguard. His thrust was to proletarianize and democratize the socialist organization. Moreover, Lenin talked about the working class being the vanguard of the revolutionary struggles. [15]

Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, in his important essay, while exploring the possible reasons for the alienation of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, has argued: “What needs to be recognized today is that in a liberal democratic and plural polity like India the theory of vanguardism has lost much of its relevance.” [16] We would have no dispute with this comment, if two corrections were inserted. The first is this “vanguardism” was never Leninism but a debasement and distortion of Leninism imposed by Stalin, and that it had never been a revolutionary strategy. It was a useful strategy for bureaucratic control over the mass movements by a substitutionist force, in India chiefly a Stalinist force dominated by a petty bourgeois intelligentsia. In a liberal democratic set up, Leninism would have taken on a somewhat different outlook than in Russia, the kind of strategic development being discussed in the Communist International in its early years (the working-class united front, less stress on the underground, more stress on elections as a mobilization strategy, systematic work in

trade unions and other mass organizations, and so on).

A Leninist party is built as a revolutionary party. When Lenin talked about the vanguard, he stressed the need to unite the most militant and politically alert workers in the party. The concept of professional revolutionary meant a serious attempt to create working-class leadership within the party, formed of working-class militants so as to centralize and coordinate their efforts against the system. The idea was to give these activist-workers a respite from daily wage-work enabling the vanguard to be active on a more permanent basis. A study of Lenin's tactics shows that he was actually quite flexible. During the Iskra period he was urging the unity of revolutionary intellectuals with worker-militants. During the revolution of 1905 he wanted to open wide the doors of the party for militant workers. During the dispute over liquidationism he wanted to ensure the unity of the underground with the open movement, without letting go the gains of the past. [17] He rejected both minority revolutionism and any idea of parliamentary socialism to be accomplished on behalf of the working class. The revolutionary organization has to help the working class understand collectively the need for a socialist transformation of society, for the socialist revolution. That is the dialectical relationship between the vanguard party and the mass self-organization of the working class.

Stalinist vanguardism, as we see practiced in India, asserts that the party has all the wisdom, and its task is to correctly transmit its ideas to the masses. And in bourgeois countries, whether in the developed or in the underdeveloped ones, the Stalinist parties have ceased to be revolutionary parties a very long time back. In the case of West Bengal, what we have seen since 1977 (we could argue the same for earlier years too, but leave them out here) was the Stalinist model, where the party organization controls the state, the mass organizations are mere transmission belts, and the party does not learn from the masses but merely seeks to direct them.

Some economic concessions did come to workers and peasants, especially in the early years of the Left Front regime. This was not a by-product of revolutionary struggles, but grew out of the need to cater to a constituency in order to ensure votes kept on flowing. These concessions included land distribution, though that had been more widespread during the short-lived united front regimes, or Operation Barga, or the registration of sharecroppers so that evictions became more difficult. [18] At the same time, decisions about who would be the beneficiaries of policies, from land distribution or the recording of names under Operation Barga, to more recent actions like listing of names under the BPL scheme [19] have been used as a weapon to force working people to line up with the CPI(M). The state bureaucracy was also pressed into the service of the party.

A systematic attempt was made to capture the bastions of civil society. There had always been a powerful left presence among West Bengal's intellectuals. But in power, the CPI(M) used institutional bases in a ruthless way. First came its assault on Calcutta University, where substandard party hacks and lackeys willing to toe the party line, were selected into academic positions across the province. The College Service Commission, and then the School Service Commission, ostensibly set up to ensure fair selections, became weapons to control the intellectual element at lower levels. Dissident intellectuals found every avenue blocked. Between 2007 and early 2009, those intellectuals, theater personalities and other artistes who opposed the CPI(M), found all their programs being cancelled under pressure from local party committees. On the other hand, tame "progressives" received much patronage, including state level funding, Rabindra Puraskars (awards) were handed out to the "deserving," (few are those, like Sumit and Tanika Sarkar, who donated the money toward the relief measures necessary for the victims of violence in Nandigram) as were the party level Muzaffar Ahmed awards (reminiscent of the Stalin prizes). The result of this bureaucratic control was the transformation of Marxism, that most critical instrument, into a debased and establishment doctrine.

As time passed, even the older generation Stalinists, who had fought trade union or agrarian battles,

dwindled. The overwhelming majority of CPI(M) members in West Bengal today are muscle-flexing elements who have joined the party after 1977 (i.e., they are people who never fought against ruling-class oppression or state violence), and see the party as the road to self-aggrandisement. The party provides them with jobs, income, power, and so on. Even in the trade-union field, where a basic working-class organization is involved, tremendous corruption has set in. However, we have no wish to use this corruption to debunk the trade unions, as the bourgeois media and wide sections of middle class “civil society” forces do.

Ultimately, it was this politics, arrogance, intolerance, and violence, this attempt to capture all levels of society, that led to massive popular rejection of the CPI(M) in West Bengal. The popular anger boiled over when peasants felt that their land was being taken over by the state against their will, to be handed over to Indian or foreign big business for the profit of a handful of people. Singur, Nandigram, and Lalgarh were the flashpoints of these struggles in between 2006 and 2009.

Singur, Nandigram, and Lalgarh

The CPI(M) has been arrogantly pushing a neoliberal agenda without taking the people into confidence. West Bengal has been among the forerunners in enacting legislation on SEZ, even before the Central SEZ Act. [20] In Singur, land was acquired, not for an SEZ, but for the Tata Motors, but using the same Land Acquisition Act, 1894, that would be used if land were targeted for SEZs.

The Singur announcement came on May 18, 2006, when Tata group chairman Ratan Tata announced a small car project at Singur, forty kilometers from Calcutta, on the same day when Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was sworn in the state's chief minister after the massive electoral victory of the Left Front. They wanted to take over peasants' land to build industries, granting that land at throwaway prices to Indian and international big capital (the Tatas in Singur, the Salim group in Nandigram, the Jindals in West Midnapur). And they flatly ignored peasant protest, which began in Singur from May 25, just a week later. When unprecedented popular resistance forced the Tatas out of Singur, the government refused to accept defeat and return the land to the peasants.

In Nandigram, peasants retained their land, but at a high blood price. In Lalgarh, the battle is still on. Singur and Nandigram are better known, partly because of the TMC connection. Since the Lalgarh struggle (which began in November 2008) is waged mainly by “tribals,” and without connections with mainstream parties, it is least reported outside West Bengal, and when it is, the West Bengal government's claim that it is all the handiwork of the CPI(Maoist) is often accepted. In reality, in all these struggles, the starting point was the decision of the government to impose its fiat. In each case, land takeover was decided without any democratic consultation, and with paltry compensations being offered. A British colonial law was used to take over the land. An ostensibly left-wing government had at least the duty of holding consultations, hearing popular opinion, before going in for a land takeover. Instead, the government used typical liberal-democratic methods. It claimed that since it had been elected by the people (with 235 MLAs in a House of 294), it had the right to decide what the people needed. That local people could have their own ideas of what constituted development, and what kind of development they really needed was simply ignored, and opponents of the land-grab labelled “anti-development.” [21] It is only now, after the total rout, that the West Bengal chief minister is reported to have said that in no development project would land be taken unless there is local acceptance. [22] Yet even now there is no reference to returning the land forcibly taken from peasants in Singur.

After the elections, a number of CPI(M) leaders have noted that there was a significant swing of the

Muslim vote away from the CPI(M). It is not known whether the CPI(M) has carried out a careful scrutiny of whether there was also a significant swing of women's votes away from the left. But gender and community issues are not unimportant.

Bengal politics, as we noted earlier, has a strong left ambience. The left has had a long history of mobilizing women, since the days of the Mahila Atma Raksha Samity (Women's Self Defence League) in 1942-43. But in recent years, the role of the CPI(M), in connection with "development" and land grab, with repression of dissidents ("Maoists," "separatists," etc.), and even in connection with protecting "its own" police when the police commit atrocities against women, have led to an image of the CPI(M) as a party that is unconcerned about women's rights. The elections saw the CPI(M) issue a series of sector specific slogans. The one about women began by charging, quite correctly: "There was no effort on the part of the [UPA] government to prioritize social mobilizations against continuing retrograde practices such as sex-determination tests, dowry demands, child marriages, and violence against women." [23] It also went on to condemn the central government for not being serious about passing the Women's Reservation bill, for having retrograde economic policies, and for not doing anything to change the educationally marginalized condition of women. The charges are quite legitimate. No bourgeois party does anything more than pay lip service to gender justice.

But when we look at the practice of the CPI(M) and the Left Front in West Bengal, do we really see anything different? In West Bengal, violence against women has been widespread. The APDR, Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha (NNPM—Forum Against Women's Oppression), Ahalya, Sachetana and Pragatisheel Mahila Samity (Progressive Women's Association) listed in a leaflet forty-two cases of custodial rapes between 1982 and 1992. [24] Government and party leaders repeatedly used patriarchal discourses in talking about rapes. [25] Indeed, this general patriarchy is revealed when we look at the Left Front women's wing's call to women in the 2009 elections. The appeal calls on "mothers and sisters" to vote for the left and the anti-Congress and anti-BJP Third Front. And while the left stressed reservation of seats for women, it had such a dismal record in West Bengal, that even Mamata Banerjee, who has never been known for any feminist sensibilities, trumped them. Out of the forty-two left candidates, only two were women (Susmita Bauri and Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, both of the CPI(M)). The TMC had twenty-seven candidates in West Bengal, of whom five were women. The demand for reservation sounds hollow, because there is inadequate gendering of the party structures. Few women are put up as candidates because calculations suggest there are few women capable of winning the elections.

As for alternative economic policies, the support for SEZs of course affected women as badly in West Bengal, as elsewhere in the country. And the terrible violence, including against women, is on record. This includes the gruesome murder of Tapasi Malik in Singur. [26] Malik is indeed an example. Women in Singur related to members of the NNPM (including one of the present authors) that supporters of the ruling party had threatened them with utterances like "we will turn you into another Tapasi Malik." So women who dare to protest will be threatened in such a manner by activists of the ruling party. Finally, in the most recent agitation, that of Lalgarh, on the night of November 6, 2008, the police, led by the superintendent of police of West Midnapore district, went on a rampage, arresting and attacking tribals in retaliation for the Maoist attempt at attacking the West Bengal chief minister in Shalboni on November 2, 2008. Women were brutally kicked and beaten with batons and butts of guns. Chitamani Murmu was hit in the eye and eventually lost that eye. Panamani Hansda was kicked on her chest and suffered multiple fractures, and had to be hospitalized. Eight other women were badly wounded. These police brutalities sparked off the now months-long revolt. [27]

The swing of Muslim voters away from the Left Front also requires deeper discussions. We would argue that instead of seriously looking at the interests of Muslims, who, as the Sachar Committee report shows, are placed economically and educationally in very backward conditions in West

Bengal, the Left Front in recent times has been indulging in tokenism and the occasional liaising with minority communalism, just the same as their opponents, the TMC. With a 25.2 percent Muslim population, the Left Front government over thirty-two years has provided just 2.1 percent of government jobs to Muslims. West Bengal has the worst record of all Indian states in this respect. By comparison, with 9.1 percent Muslims, Gujarat's government employees include 5.4 percent Muslims. This is the worst indictment of the secularist mantle of the West Bengal Left Front. And since West Bengal is the flagship of the left, this has all-India implications.

Mohammad Salim, the CPI(M)'s deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, lost from Calcutta North. Salim was banking on Muslim votes. The results indicated that Muslims, a traditional support base for the left, had shifted loyalties to the opposition. Apart from the long years of neglect, glaringly pointed out by the Sachar Report, this constituency saw the direct impact of the CPI(M)'s shameless handling of the Rizwanur Rehman case (late August 2007), where the party conspired with some of Calcutta's top police officers. CPI(M) tried to protect them after police had violated laws and seemed to be the persons responsible, at least, for the suicide of Rehman, following their collusion with well-known industrialist Ashok Todi to force his daughter, an adult woman who had married Rehman, to abandon him and return to her father by repeatedly calling the duo to police offices and threatening them. Three of the policemen have subsequently been indicted by a court. That Rehman was a middle-class Muslim boy and his wife the daughter of a rich Hindu was what gave this not just a class, but also a communal angle.

In rural areas too, the impact of the land grab effort was serious. A large number of Nandigram peasants are Muslims. And when the CPI(M) did wake up to the threat that Muslims might vote against it, their reaction was to try to cultivate Muslim communalism, rather than look after genuine socioeconomic needs of this single largest minority. A small communalist organization held Calcutta to ransom on November 21, 2007, (a few days after party cadres and police had "liberated" Nandigram from its rebel peasants), demanding the ouster of novelist Taslima Nasreen from West Bengal, allegedly because she was anti-Islam. The government responded with alacrity, forcing her out of West Bengal, and putting pressure on the central government so that when her visa ran out she was pushed out of India altogether. Of course, Taslima Nasreen, born a Muslim and a woman, did not have any votes, even if she campaigned for women's rights. So deporting her was seen as an easy way to gain support from (or stop losing the support of) the Muslim community. Sadly for the CPI(M), the Muslim community did not rally behind the communalists, so driving out Nasreen did not fetch it great gains, but instead tarred the party with an anti-woman stance.

So, in the first place, the vote in West Bengal was a rejection of the rule of the CPI(M) and its combination of Stalinism and aggressive neoliberalism. And the main force tapping into this rejection was the TMC. This had to do with Ms. Banerjee's excellent malleability to ally with anyone from the BJP to the small Maoist groups if it brought down the CPI(M). When people got fed up with the CPI(M), her party seemed the obvious one to turn to, since the TMC alone has never supported the CPI(M), and because building left-wing alternatives seemed a hard and long-term task, while people wanted short cuts and a quick success. Secondly, of course, she did position herself with the popular mood in 2006-09, opposing the takeover of peasants' land and condemning violence on protesters.

The CPI(M) thought it could respond by arguing before the middle class that the TMC was anti-development, highlighting the departure of the Tata Nano car plant project from West Bengal. In the urban seats, they made this a major campaign plank. But clearly, this did not cut much ice. Calcutta North, Calcutta South, Dum Dum, Barrackpur, Barasat, Jadavpur, and Howrah, all urban seats, saw a total rout of the CPI(M). In the two Calcutta seats, they lost every assembly segment. One explanation for this is that while the rich may have been angry at the TMC, the ordinary middle class, forced to pay donations to the "party funds," forced to vote in mass organizations the way the

party wants, forced to buy the Ganashakti (the CPI-M daily) in many localities under compulsion, did not see the air conditioned shopping malls and the Nano as reasons to vote CPI(M). In the home of Nano itself, Singur, the CPI(M)'s campaign claimed that the departure of Tata meant a huge loss of jobs. Singur falls under the Hooghly parliamentary constituency, where eight-time winner Rupchand Pal of CPI(M) lost. Dr. Ratna De (Nag) of the TMC received 574,022 votes, against Pal's 492,499.

In Kerala, the CPI(M) vote declined by more than 1 percent. There, Congress's share went up 8 percent, while the BJP's share went down about 4 percent. In 2004, the Left Democratic Front, led by the CPI(M) got nineteen seats. Since then, factional conflicts in the CPI(M) have come out in the open, discrediting the party. Party Secretary Vijayan has been accused of corruption, and that too has tarnished the party's image. In a bid to cut into the Muslim League votes, the CPI(M) this time decided to form an alliance with a rank Muslim communal organization, the People's Democratic Party, something that did not go down well with the voters. On top of that, the huge mandate of 2004 clearly went to the head of the party, and it started ignoring its partners and making decisions on its own, with the result that the cohesion of the front was far less evident in 2009.

Apart from party-level issues, the changes in Kerala also have to be noted. The vaunted "Kerala model" has been steadily eroded, as the left-led government opted, even if on a lower key than West Bengal, for shopping malls, information technology parks, private higher educational institutions, and so forth. Kerala is a small province. As land began to go out of peasants' hands, often legally as they sold it, the expectations the toilers had from the left government gave way to disillusionment. These were the factors that led to the Kerala debacle. [28]

The electoral victory of the CPI(M) in Tripura is significant. There, the NREGP was well implemented. Nor was there any attempt to forcibly take away land from peasants in order to gift it to rich industrialists. This shows that if reformism is practiced then some votes do hold, particularly considering the terrible attacks on the livelihood of workers, peasants, and the urban poor carried out since 1991 all over India.

There have been several commentators both within the left and among mainstream journalists, for whom Prakash Karat's decision to break with the UPA was the key factor in the collapse of the left. This is partially true. Karat chose to break, not on economic issues (the left had been propping up the UPA for over four years despite its anti-people policies, and West Bengal had followed those same policies) but over the nuclear deal. And then, neither the CPI(M) nor the Left Front as a whole, made the nuclear deal the central plank of their electoral campaign, or of the politics of their hastily cobbled Third Front. The debate between Karat and his opponents within the mainstream Stalinist left is purely tactical. Both sides agree that they need to form an alliance with progressive bourgeois forces. For Karat, those progressive bourgeois forces exist outside the Congress. His opponents within the Stalinist left fall into two groups. One group is simply opportunistic, arguing that if the left had been supporters of the UPA at the Center, TMC would have been unable to forge an alliance with the Congress in West Bengal. The other group takes a position going back to P. C. Joshi, arguing that the progressive forces are in the Congress, and therefore the left must forge alliances with such forces. [29] The dispute is ultimately a tactical one. Neither side has any strategy that calls for building an independent working-class pole in Indian politics. Given the historic role of the Congress as the major party of the Indian big bourgeoisie, to call for an alliance with the Congress is to perpetuate the subordination of labor to capital. But to equate an alliance with a group of regional parties of dubious antecedent and linkages with local as well as big capital, does not provide any break with the core of this class collaborationism. The CPI(M), as we saw, hailed Navin Patnaik as one of the new stars of its alliance. But Patnaik's government in Orissa was responsible for the Kalinganagar massacre, where tribals were gunned down for taking over land of Tata Motors. [30]

The bourgeois journalists who are expressing their glee at the left's discomfort are of a different

type. For them, the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal is a matter of “national pride.” Now “we” are beloved of the Empire. Moreover, it enables “us” to not have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to have scuttled the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, to have tested nuclear bombs, and then to have gained “status” as a member of the nuclear club. However, what is important is to note that during the elections, the nuclear deal did not figure prominently as a campaign issue.

The break with the UPA was not on key principled grounds. The CPI(M) election manifesto talked critically about the economic policies of the UPA. Yet those policies had been “tolerated” by the CPI(M). And opponents of Karat are in an even more unenviable position, for they are therefore suggesting that those policies should have been tolerated all the way to the elections. It is therefore our submission that no revival of the left as a principled force is possible as long as the debates remain stuck within these polarities.

The issues of the Indian people

As we commented earlier, parliamentary elections in bourgeois democracies distort the picture. Yet in a country where the democratic system exists, the call for boycott and insurrection is not a very realistic one, and it is moreover one that reveals more about the potential authoritarianism of the so-called vanguards who would have nothing to do with multiparty democracy as such. So how are the real aspirations of the people to be reflected? No short cuts exist, though one is perpetually trotted out—this is the advocacy of some kind of alliance with bourgeois parties who appear as the lesser evil. From expanding the NREGP, to fighting to reopen closed mills and factories, to increasing wages in the unorganized sector, to fighting for land rights and the right not to be displaced for “development” that benefits only the ruling class and the circles around it, real demands of people can be supported not by alliances with bourgeois parties, but by mass movements.

Failure to recognize this and a belief that the CPI(M) is such an evil incarnate that one can ally with any force to get rid of it, led a large number of non-mainstream Stalinist and Maoist parties and groups to line up behind the TMC-Congress alliance. They seek to replace Stalinist control with right-wing populism. What is the TMC? It originated from the Congress, and its politics was the typical West Bengal Congress politics reminiscent of the 1970s—including hooliganism and right-wing violence. It has always been a very authoritarian party, where one leader makes all decisions, and any disagreement with her expressed in public will get the member tossed out of the party before you can say Trinamool Congress. How can a party that is internally authoritarian be a real upholder of democracy? Alongside this, the CPI(M) with its regular party congresses, state conferences, central and state committee meetings, appears to be a model of democracy, despite all we have said about it.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that despite its huge rightward shift, the mainstream left in India has not cut off all links with the working class. Ultraleftists and apologists for the line of alliance with the TMC will argue that, in India, all political parties have trade-union wings. While this is true, it is also true that left-led trade unions, whether blue collar (the CITU, the AITUC, and the UTUC), or white collar (the AIBEA, the BEFI, the Government Employees unions, and so on), have played a militant role. Throughout the previous two decades, the bank and finance sector privatization has been resisted by these unions. It is not just by the number of left MPs that aggressive capitalist attacks have been resisted. As late as September 2008, a united movement of bank employees shut down most nationalised banks, with over 900,000 employees taking part in the strike. Opposition to privatisation, outsourcing of jobs, and merger of banks were part of their demands.

It is by such specific struggles, rather than by beginning with an abstract call for opposition to globalization, that working-class resistance can be built up. Just as peasant resistance was about land, not primarily throwing the CPI(M) out of power, so the trade-union struggles are primarily about saving jobs, wages, and pensions. But a clear asymmetry can be seen on this issue between the most reformist and most Stalinist left, on the one hand, and its opponents on the other. The chief media patron of the TMC, the Ananda Bazar group, has been extremely vocal in campaigning for privatization. The supporters of globalization have been long demanding “reforms” of trade-union laws, i.e., making it even more difficult to form trade unions and even easier for bosses to ignore them even when they exist. Attacks on the Contract Labour Act and the Industrial Disputes Act have been repeatedly mounted from the capitalist class. [31] The left-led trade unions, including those led by the Stalinist and reformist left, are parts of the struggle to defend labor rights.

There are two ways that one can criticize these unions. A revolutionary Marxist would argue that these unions are often bureaucratic, that rank-and-file democracy is particularly absent in many blue-collar unions, that sensitivity about gender, or other forms of special oppression (e.g., about dalits or low-caste people, Adivasis or “tribals” and minorities, especially Muslims) is often very low. Thus, it has often happened that union leaders have struck a deal, and the full text has not even been translated into all the languages known to the workers of that particular mill or factory. It has often happened, that “general class goals” have been essentially male-defined discourses, while “women’s issues” have been relegated to the fringes as considerably unimportant (though there have also been efforts to organize women workers separately, or to create women’s cells, in some cases). One example, from an area both authors, as teachers, are familiar with, is the rule for college teachers even in West Bengal, that maternity leave with pay is not given unless the teacher concerned was in employment for at least nine months. Despite women activists (including on one occasion one of the present authors) moving resolutions in the teachers’ union, this has never figured as an important issue to be resolved through serious discussion and agitation.

In contrast, when the bourgeois press talks about unions and corruption, it is a joke. Who corrupts the union leaders? Is it not the ruling class? The demand for getting rid of unions, for getting rid of “outsiders” (i.e., organizers who are not employed by the factory), all these are aimed at further intensifying exploitation. The judiciary has likewise been attacking general strikes. In India, historically, general strikes have gone beyond the working class, turning into bandhs, or closures, of entire cities or even attempts to shut down the entire country. The declaration that this is illegal, is a clear indication that this attack is not one merely ideological in nature, or that only sections of the rulers are involved. Using the relatively “clean” image of the judiciary (in contrast to the corrupt image of bourgeois parliamentarians and the executive) it has been used as the instrument to try and ban the more militant, and more political, forms of strikes. This has to be seen as one more in a series of attacks. And in this struggle, whatever their shortcomings, the trade-union leaders have an interest in opposing the state.

The task of the revolutionary left has to be one of participating in every such struggle, and within the struggles, to push for greater trade-union democracy, greater accountability of union leaders to the rank and file, struggles for real attention to all special oppression, and struggles to unionize the unorganized. Of course, in these areas, the mainstream Stalinist left is bad. One example is bureaucratic unions and their attitude to women workers and their simplest of demands, such as toilets for women, or ensuring that rules regarding equal pay for equal work are strictly implemented—instead of women being shunted into poor-paying jobs or their jobs being reclassified. But if we want to fight for women’s rights in the workplace, if we want to resist using women as sex objects, we cannot rely on the representatives of the ruling class as better supporters than the unions. The revolutionary left cannot assume the posture that in the battle between unions and the bosses and their state, they are neutral.

The politics of the TMC is simple—anticommunism. Leftists who side with it are deluding themselves if they think it is only an opponent of the CPI(M). The one-point agenda led Ms. Banerjee to line up behind the BJP, and to keep silent during the Gujarat pogroms of 2002. As a then-partner of the NDA, the Trinamool Congress has to take responsibility for the SEZ policy pushed by the NDA. Given this, its anti-SEZ rhetoric for West Bengal should be viewed with deep skepticism, as a ploy to win votes. And if we wish to ignore the past, Banerjee's present is simple—in order to overthrow the CPI(M), she allied with the Congress. She is thus committing herself to the economic policies of the Congress, since the finance and commerce ministries will be retained by the Congress.

An additional dimension must be stated unambiguously. We have no expectations from the TMC. But there are plenty of leftists, from organizations to independent intellectuals, who have voted for the TMC in the hope that there will be a positive development. They have a grave responsibility. Already, the TMC-Congress bloc has begun showing it has its own brand of politics of violence. The leftists who support the TMC cannot take the position that they condemn the murder of Tapasi Malik, activist of the Singur peasants' movement, but support, at least by remaining mute spectators, when Sumana Mandi, the minor daughter of a local level CPI(M) leader Loncho Mandi, is murdered by being set on fire. [32] Nor can they claim the moral high ground if they remain silent when an agricultural labourer, Bhagan Mahato, is brutally beaten up for the crime of being a member of the CPI(M), and his daughter is compelled to write posters announcing his resignation from the CPI(M) to save his life. [33] Once before in West Bengal's history, the right had come to power by combining middle class hostility to the CPI(M) with huge violence. This time, *revanchisme* is widely heard in popular discourse among the urban middle class, the traditional base of the TMC.

Can the mainstream Stalinist left revive? Of course they can revive electorally. If the Congress-TMC alliance falters at the center, the left's votes can increase. But should such electoral ups and downs be taken as the main marker of a left revival? The answer is an unequivocal no. Building a genuine revolutionary left alternative has to start by returning to the politics of class independence and self-emancipation. The Stalinist left and its allies (the former anti-Stalinists like RSP and RCPI who have now succumbed to the charms of parliamentary cretinism) have long forgotten the meaning of that politics. Returning to such politics means fighting to reverse ruling-class policies, fighting to restore and expand democratic rights, and forging an alliance of the oppressed. It means, in the field of elections, fighting for working-class united fronts and a complete break with all bourgeois parties and popular front alliances. And it also calls for building a revolutionary party that draws into it the best, the most militant elements of the toiling masses, and develops its program by looking at the real struggles of the people for survival and for ending exploitation.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

- [1] The ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is led by the Congress Party. The right-wing National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP). The electoral left is led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which heads up the ruling Left Front government in West Bengal.
- [2] In an attempt to make the public forget this reality, bourgeois journalists, whether or not they support the Congress, have adopted a systematically false manner of presentation. Few care to mention the actual seats tally. Instead, it is carelessly tossed out that the Congress has a majority. Thus, the *Anandabazar Patrika*, on May 29, in its editorial, says that “the Congress Party has obtained a good majority in Parliament.” Swapan Dasgupta, a pro-BJP author, writes about the “awesome advance” of the Congress in *The Telegraph*, May 29, 2009.
- [3] The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005, enacted by the UPA, was supposed to provide at least 100 hours of guaranteed employment to a member of every rural household.
- [4] The data is taken from Ashok V. Desai, “Beginning of change—Success after some near-failures is appreciated all the more,” *The Telegraph*, May 19, 2009.
- [5] The English language media in India functions virtually as the voice of the ruling class, given the essentially elite readership of these papers. So it is not surprising to read in an editorial of *The Telegraph*, “It is striking how much of the Congress’s manifesto is missing from the programme... all the populist promises that found a prominent place in the manifesto, such as empowerment of the weaker sections, welfare of farmers’ families and health security for all, have been put on the back burner. If, therefore, a skeptic were to conclude that the Congress’s populism was just a way of selling itself to voters, he would be justified. This may upset someone who believes that parties should keep their word; but it would come as no surprise to those who understand the difference between politics and policy.” *The Telegraph*, May 27, 2009. Interestingly, even bourgeois journalists are arguing, at times, that the decline of the left vote is due to its moving away from its historic promises. This suggests the bourgeois media are actually paying a compliment to communism, arguing that while bourgeois parties are under no compulsion to keep their promises or to be honest, people claiming to be communists should be more accountable.
- [6] The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign began when the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi tried a game of balancing Hindu and Muslim communalisms. The Hindu communalist side of its equation was to allow the revival of a dormant communalist claim, about how an alleged temple honoring the mythical Hindu hero Ram had been destroyed to build a mosque. The RSS seized on this with glee, and built a massive mobilization campaign. For general discussions on the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, see Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi Issue* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991). For assessments about its role in the development of the BJP’s politics see some of the essays in Kunal Chattopadhyay, ed., *The Genocidal Pogroms in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism* (Vadodara: Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, 2002).
- [7] Vijay Prashad, “One step forward, one step back: The Indian elections: a game changer?”, May 19, 2009, <http://www.counterpunch.org/prashad05192009.html> (accessed on May 25, 2009).
- [8] Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, “Left’s exit: Notes for Cconsideration of all,” *Mainstream*, Vol XLVII, No

23, May 23, 2009, <http://www.alterinter.org/auteur2467.html?lang=fr> (accessed on May 25, 2009). The history of the struggle against fascism shows that Stalinist sectarianism of the “third period” variety was damaging, but further study also shows that class collaborationism in the name of popular fronts, where bourgeois parties were brought in as allies, as opposed to the working-class united front, was equally damaging, as in the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, or the collapse of the radical wave in France after the general strike of 1936. For this, see Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007). For a discussion on contemporary (1930s) Marxist critique of popular frontism, see Kunal Chattopadhyay, *The Marxism of Leon Trotsky* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2006), chapter IX.

[9] CPI(M) press statement, May 25, 2009, in <http://cpim.org/>.

[10] *The Telegraph*, May 20, 2009.

[11] Prakash Karat, “Those writing the epitaph of the CPI (M) will be proved wrong,” May 21, 2009, <http://vote.cpim.org/node/2054>.

[12] In Kandhamal, a province in the state of Orissa, Christians were brutally attacked by Hindutva mobs, and several churches were burned.

[13] For the early years of the present decade, there is a large Bengali collection, Amit Bhattacharya, Parimal Ghosh, Mihir Chakaborty, Subhendu Dasgupta, and Madhubanti Maitro, eds, *Rashtro, Shantras, Protibaad (State, Terror and Protest)* (Calcutta: Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights, 2003).

[14] On Lalgargh, one of the best resources is the Web site Sanhati, which has a whole section on Lalgargh. See <http://sanhati.com/front-page/1083/#19> (accessed on May 25, 2009).

[15] For discussions on Lenin, see the following: Soma Marik, *Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy* (New Delhi: Aakar, 2008), Chapter VI; Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context* (Haymarket Books, 2009); and Paul Le Blanc, ed., *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism. Selected Writings, V.I. Lenin* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

[16] Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, “Left’s exit: Notes for consideration of all.”

[17] See Soma Marik, 2008. See also Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1993).

[18] For our assessment of the Left Front’s reforms and limitations, see Soma Marik and Kunal Chattopadhyay, “[The Left Front and the United Progressive Alliance](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article1037).” 2005, *Europe Solidaires Sans Frontières* (article 1037), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article1037>.

[19] Central government subsidies for people living below the poverty line.

[20] See Shalti Research Group, *SEZ In West Bengal* (Kolkata, Shalti Samiti, 2008), for a detailed study of the Left Front’s SEZ policies.

[21] We had gone to Nandigram, along with others, after the first round of party-state violence in March 2007. We met a number of women who asserted that they were not anti-development, but wanted the kind of development that would improve the conditions of peasants (e.g., better roads,

better terms for agriculture. etc). Debasish Sen, Kunal Chattopadhyay, Kuntal Ghosh, Maroona Murmu, Safiul Mollick, and Soma Marik, "A Brief Report on Nandigram," May 27, 2007, <http://kunal-radicalblogger.blogspot.com/>. Similarly, when the members of the Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha (Forum Against Women's Oppression) went along with other Calcutta-based women to meet militant women of Singur, in course of their interviews these women told us that they did not want cash compensation, but land for land. They stressed that being uprooted is something that cannot be met by compensations. Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha, *Capturing the Voices of the Women of Singur: Before and After Land Acquisition* (Calcutta, 2007), i.

[22] The Telegraph, May 25, 2009.

[23] CPI(M) Lok Sabha Elections 2009, "Aam Admi Suffers in 'High Growth' India Women A Litany of Broken Promises," http://vote.cpim.org/sites/default/files/Women_1.pdf.

[24] NNPM, APDR, Ahalya, Sachetana and Pragatisheel Mahila Samity, Mathura theke Neharbanu - Hefajate Dharshan Bandho Hok, Calcutta, January 10, 1993.

[25] On this see Mira Roy and Soma Marik, *Women Under the Left Front Rule: Expectations Betrayed*, Vadodara, Documentation and Study Centre for Action, Revised Edition, February 2007, 13-15.

[26] Sudhanva Deshpande and Vijay Prashad, "The political economy of a crisis." *Counterpunch*, May 23, 2007, "The most sensational was the murder of a young woman, Tapasi Malik, who had been a leader in the Singur struggle against the land acquisition. The blogs and the capitalist media blamed this death on the CPM. The Central Bureau of Investigation is now of the view that she was killed by her father and brother. Whatever the outcome, this is a criminal matter that was cavalierly taken as evidence of the decadence of the Left." Now of course two CPI(M) activists have been convicted in a trial court (they have appealed in the High Court and are out on bail). But this is not noted in Prashad's analysis of the CPI(M)'s electoral debacle, let alone Prashad or Deshpande tendering an apology.

[27] Partho Sarathi Ray, "November 13, 2008: Background of the movement," <http://sanhati.com/front-page/1083/> (accessed on May 25, 2009).

[28] See K. Saradamoni, "Communist parties have let down the people of Kerala," *Mainstream*, Vol XLVII, No 23, May 23, 2009.

[29] P.C. Joshi was one of the most successful general secretaries of the undivided CPI. While the political line the CPI pursued under his leadership was certainly popular frontist, and while it also included the opposition to the Quit India movement, the CPI grew rapidly and was able to make inroads in a number of areas, including the peasant movement, among intellectuals, among women, students. After independence, there were major differences within the CPI over the line to be taken (though Moscow's interventions had a big role to play in that, too). Joshi argued that Indian independence was a living reality, and the task of the communists was to build a National Front comprising the Congress, the Communists, and other democrats to defend national independence, safeguard the country's integrity, and protect and further the interests of the toiling masses. For a detailed discussion see Gargi Chakravartty, *P.C. Joshi: A Biography* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007).

[30] See Pramodini Pradhan, Secretary, PUCL Bhubaneswar Branch, "Police firing at Kalinagar," <http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Dalit-tribal/2006/kalinaganagar.htm> (accessed on May 29, 2009).

[31] See on this Rohini Hensman, "The impact of globalization on employment in India and responses from the formal and informal sectors," CLARA Working Paper, No. 15, <http://www.iisg.nl/clara/publicat/clara15.pdf> p.13 (accessed on 6. 3. 2009).

[32] Ananda Bazar Patrika, April 24, 2009.

[33] The Hindu, February 24, 2009, <http://www.hindu.com/2009/02/24/stories/2009022457930100.htm> (accessed on May 26, 2009).