

EDITORIAL

'Secularism' and 'Third Front': Empty Phrases Vs Real Challenges

Friday 8 February 2008, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 25 January 2008).

FOUR States had faced Assembly elections in 2007 and the Congress has lost all of them enabling the BJP-led NDA to end the year with four more state governments in its kitty. The Congress had been in power in three of these states (Punjab, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh), and its defeat in these states may be attributed to what psephologists describe as the so-called anti-incumbency factor. But the party's failure in Gujarat defies this simplistic logic of anti-incumbency; if anything, it has only underlined the utter bankruptcy of the party in facing up to the BJP's challenge. And the Congress's inability to prevent the BJP from coming to power also robs the UPA of its *raison d'être*. It is now up to Karat and his comrades to reconcile with this reality and hence the CPI(M)'s opportunist tactical reinvention of the 'third front' on the eve of its forthcoming 19th congress.

The BJP and the Sangh brigade are predictably upbeat after Gujarat, and in Orissa and Chhattisgarh we have already seen fresh communal assaults on churches and the Christian community. The Congress and its 'secular' ideologues on the other hand are either busy interpreting the Gujarat results as a victory for Modi's new-found plank of 'development' as distinguished from a victory for the BJP or blaming the fledgling third forces in Gujarat for causing a division in non-BJP votes! It has no courage to examine its own track record and acknowledge the fact that all these years it has done precious little to challenge the BJP's aggressive communal politics, whether in Gujarat or at the Centre. All that it did was to bank on the Keshubhai factor hoping to harvest the presumed dissidence within the BJP, and the result is now here for all to see!

If Gujarat is the most revealing example of the bankruptcy of the Congress, another case in point is Jharkhand. For the last sixteen months, the Congress and two of its UPA partners - RJD and JMM - have been involved in propping up one of India's most corrupt and non-performing state governments headed by an 'independent' MLA! Three years after the heinous killing of Comrade Mahendra Singh, the CBI is yet to submit its report. In spite of the CBI interim report questioning the subsequent role of the police in the case, the UPA government has only reinstated Dipak Varma - the infamous Giridih SP of that period and a key accused in the Mahendra Singh assassination case - as the SP of the crucial Palamu district. The dubious deals struck by the previous regime with corporate bigwigs still remain in place while fresh bids are on to weaken the tenancy laws in the state and displace more people and destroy more jobs.

From Gujarat to Jharkhand and in every sphere of policy and governance, the Congress has been singularly instrumental in bolstering the BJP and its rabid rightwing politics. Yet except for its belated and hesitant opposition to the nuclear deal, the CPI(M) has by and large advocated and practised what can only be termed an increasingly strategic partnership with the Congress in the name of checking the BJP. The 'concept' of a third front mentioned in the CPI(M)'s draft political resolution does not signify any departure from this political course. In states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura where the CPI(M) remains objectively pitted against the Congress, it zealously champions the same neo-liberal policy course as the Congress in the name of the objective compulsion of building capitalism today. And in most other states where the CPI(M) adopts an

oppositional stance to the ruling policies, it can hardly think of moving in the direction of any meaningful independent assertion of the Left identity and agenda.

True to its trajectory of political opportunism, the CPI(M)'s draft resolution remains a prisoner of this characteristic dilemma and bankruptcy. For real advocates and architects of a political alternative, the CPI(M)'s hypocrisy however only serves to underline the basis without which no alternative can ever be built - principled, consistent opposition and independent political assertion.

P.S.

* From "Liberation" (editorial), February 2008.