

# **Draft Political Resolution for CPI(M)'s 19<sup>th</sup> Congress: Reconciling 'Anti-imperialist' Rhetoric with 'Neo-liberal Constraints'**

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The draft political resolution released by the CPI (M) for its ensuing 19<sup>th</sup> Congress provides quite a revealing commentary on the opportunist political trajectory of the party. The resolution is characteristically elaborate about the description of the international and national situation. But when it comes to spelling out the concrete positions and role of the party, the resolution is rather vague and evasive. And as for the debate that the party now increasingly faces in its own circles, the resolution dismisses everything as a big anti-CPI (M) conspiracy!

The draft resolution devotes several paragraphs to the global economic situation under imperialist globalization and the US-led 'war on terror'. It calls for a mighty worldwide anti-imperialist resistance that combines both anti-war and anti-globalisation sentiments and struggles on a global scale. But what task does the CPI (M) derive for itself from this global analysis and advocacy? The answer sounds pretty innocent – "rousing the anti-imperialist sentiments of the Indian people and mounting pressure on the Indian government to pursue a steadfast role in promoting multipolarity, defending sovereignty of nations and the non-aligned movement."

Let us probe a little deeper. The CPI (M) resolution quite correctly identifies imperialist globalization and the global war on terror as the two principal prongs of the global offensive spearheaded by US imperialism. Now, where do the Indian ruling classes stand in relation to these key components of the imperialist agenda? There can be no denying the fact that in both economic and foreign policy spheres the Indian ruling classes are moving towards ever closer integration with imperialism in general and US imperialism in particular. And this integration is increasingly assuming a strategic and military dimension as well. This policy course has remained unchanged through all the periodic changes of governments over the last two decades and the UPA government has officially embarked on a course of strategic partnership with the US. Yet the CPI (M) resolution talks of mounting pressure on the Indian government to promote "the non-aligned movement"!

The CPI (M) never offered any serious opposition to the Indo-US strategic partnership. The official announcement regarding the partnership was made during Manmohan Singh's US visit in July 2005. 'Non-aligned' India also voted duly with the US against Iran at the IAEA, not once but twice. The CPI (M) did nothing 'commensurate with its strength and stature' except making some noise in the media. It was only when negotiations over the nuclear deal entered the near-final stage that the CPI (M) stepped up its opposition. That too was diluted in the wake of Nandigram and the government was allowed to proceed with the 'nuclear safeguard' negotiations in the IAEA. While the UPA government binds India into ever closer strategic integration with the US, the CPI (M) voices only piecemeal opposition from time to time. So much for the CPI (M)'s claimed contribution to the anti-imperialist consciousness of the Indian people.

What about the CPI (M)'s role in 'resisting' imperialist globalization? Its governments in West

Bengal and Kerala are now routinely borrowing funds and 'vision' from imperialist funding agencies and consultancy firms. Asian Development Bank (ADB), Department for International Development (DFID), McKinsey are not only well-known names in the CPI (M)-ruled states but they are increasingly the last word in the CPI (M)'s new-found discourse of 'development'. Regarding the economic direction to be pursued by the Left Front government of West Bengal, the draft resolution calls upon the government to maintain a careful balance without accepting wholesale privatization in all economic and social spheres. How is this talk of 'careful balance' and moderated, calibrated privatization any different from the economic policy advocated by governments of other hues in other states or at the Centre?

The CPI (M) resolution claims credit for 'slowing down' the pace of neo-liberal reforms. Insofar as neo-liberal policies have to co-exist in India with a parliamentary democratic framework and the ruling classes have to renew their license every five years, an element of moderation or cautious calibration is built into the very scheme of things. The credit for slowing down of reforms should go to the popular protests that are building up against the predatory policies of the government and it is no secret that in CPI (M)-ruled states such protests have to face stiff resistance from the party and the government.

Let us take some recent examples. The SEZ Act was passed unanimously in Parliament in 2005. The CPI (M) owes an answer to the people of India why its forty-plus MPs voted in favour of the Act; or for that matter, under what 'compulsion' its model government in West Bengal had to anticipate the Central Act with its own 2003 version of the same land-grabbing legislation. If the UPA government has now been forced to introduce some elements of 'moderation', it has been in the wake of the people's resistance at Nandigram and popular mobilization against SEZs elsewhere in the country. And the whole country knows what role the CPI (M) has played at Nandigram - it has only perpetrated and patronized massacres at regular intervals in a desperate bid to thwart the resistance of the people. Likewise, if there is now talk of amending the Land Acquisition Act 1894, it is all because of the debate that has been generated by what has happened at Kalinganagar and Singur. It is indeed strange that a party that fraudulently uses an arbitrary law like the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to acquire one thousand acres of fertile land for monopoly capital should wax eloquent about the need for 'amending and updating' this antiquated legislation! We know how CPI (M) ideologues rationalize this hypocrisy. To them it is simply a case of 'distinction' between a state government operating under 'neo-liberal constraints' and a communist party applying its 'freedom of expression', and if we are not able to grasp this distinction we are guilty of 'inversion of reason'!

'Liberalism' in economics is always complemented by illiberalism in governance. The deepening of neo-liberal reforms in almost every sector of the economy has been matched by a proliferation of special legislations of control to incriminate every form of public dissent and protest. The so-called 'national security' doctrine of the UPA government is fast degenerating into a gospel of unmitigated state repression and systematic truncation of democracy. The CPI (M)'s critique of neo-liberalism is remarkably reticent, if not silent, about this growing danger. Even when it comes to the demand for repeal of the most draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the CPI (M) merely advocates replacing the AFSPA "with a suitable law which can enable the army to be deployed in disturbed areas to combat insurgency that will do away with the draconian features of the existing law!" Obviously, one will look in vain for any word of criticism in the CPI (M) document regarding the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act that has incorporated several features of the POTA or draconian state laws like the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act which is being invoked by the BJP government in the state to trample upon press freedom and civil liberties. The CPI (M)'s opposition to the BJP revolves only around the issue of communalism, with very little attention paid to the fundamental question of democracy.

For the last four years the CPI (M) has been actively associated with a government at the Centre.

How does the CPI (M) describe its association? The CPI (M) is a signatory to the Common Minimum Programme which is the ruling UPA's commonly drafted and commonly monitored manifesto of governance. Yet the CPI (M) would have us believe that its association with the government is only selective. In fact while it claims credit for legislations on rural employment guarantee (will the CPI (M) tell us if it has been instrumental for the NREGA, why the rural poor in CPI (M)-ruled states have not even got ten days' employment a year instead of the assured 100 days?), right to information and prevention of domestic violence, and for the presumed slowing down of reforms, it blames the Congress for everything neo-liberal and pro-imperialist in UPA policies! Whatever may be the CPI (M)'s formula for apportioning credit and blame, the fact remains that the CPI (M) cannot hide its actual status as a participant and major stakeholder in the UPA government.

The draft resolution boldly rules out any alliance or united front with the Congress. In state after state the CPI (M) enters into electoral adjustments with the Congress (Gujarat was the most recent example), and at the Centre the CPI (M) underwrites a Congress-led coalition government, albeit without any ministerial portfolio. The resolution would like us to believe that it is a one-way relationship where the Congress depends on the CPI (M) with the latter remaining completely independent! Jyoti Basu was clearly closer to the truth when he had once famously described this relationship as one of mutual interdependence. The CPI (M) has no problem with sharing a common minimum programme of governance with the Congress and with having seat adjustment wherever possible, yet it claims to be steering clear of any 'united front' with the Congress.

With Lok Sabha elections approaching, the CPI (M) will of course now be more in the denial mode regarding its relations with the Congress. A typical expression of this denial mode is the renewed advocacy of a third alternative. The notion of the third front would come in handy particularly in states like Andhra Pradesh and Assam where the CPI (M) may well seek electoral adjustments with regional parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Assam Gan Parishad (AGP). Never mind if the CPI (M) had teamed up with the Congress against the TDP in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh – the draft resolution describes the TDP as a regional party that seeks cooperation with the Left! In a way the draft resolution marks a near-complete liberalization of the CPI (M)'s political line where ideology, elections and governance are neatly compartmentalized. Phrases like 'left and democratic unity' and 'third front' are used more for ideological posturing and political consumption while policies regarding electoral adjustment and governance are sought to be rationalized in the name of 'neo-liberal constraints' and 'constitutional compulsions'!

The draft resolution calls upon the entire party to "defend the Left-led governments from the attacks coming from the ruling classes, right wing reactionaries and the ultra-Left." The call must be read in the context of the countrywide opposition and criticism that the CPI (M) has had to face following the forcible land acquisition at Singur and the massacres at Nandigram. Now this opposition has come primarily from the affected and aggrieved people of Singur and Nandigram which in turn has found widespread support from the broad democratic opinion not only in West Bengal but in every corner of the country. In the case of Nandigram, the local people who opposed the West Bengal government's move to set up a chemical hub were all long-standing supporters and activists of the CPI (M) itself. But a rattled CPI (M) establishment could not tolerate this unexpected resistance from within its own base and responded with a series of massacres.

The violence naturally evoked all-round condemnation. Yet instead of paying any heed to the voice of protest senior CPI (M) leaders took it upon themselves to justify the killings – following the third massacre in November 2007 the Chief Minister openly said that trouble-makers had been "paid back in their own coin" – while heaping scorn and ridicule on whoever condemned the killings and questioned the CPI (M)'s discourse of corporate-led 'industrialisation' and neo-liberal 'development'. Even a thoroughly partisan Prabhat Patnaik who had questioned the neo-liberal direction of West Bengal was dismissed by the Chief Minister as an armchair economist devoid of any connection with

reality! An eminent Marxist historian became an enemy of the people in the eyes of Prakash Karat simply because he had drawn a parallel between Gujarat and Nandigram! This paranoid arrogance has now been made Party policy in the draft resolution.

The CPI (M) may club the ruling classes, rightwing reactionaries and the revolutionary left (ultra-left in its vocabulary) as its common enemy. This does not however prevent the CPI (M) from doing brisk business with significant sections of the ruling classes and their oldest political party, the Congress! In sharp contrast to this arrogant sectarianism of the CPI (M), the revolutionary left knows how to distinguish between the ruling classes and the opportunist left. The CPI (ML) has serious differences with both the CPI (M) and the self-styled Maoists, but it never subscribes to the anti-communist tirade of the ruling classes and their ideologues. Inside West Bengal, the CPI (ML) has been the only party to have always maintained its independence and demarcation from the entire spectrum of rightwing forces, working consistently for a Left and democratic alternative. The misdeeds and arrogance of the CPI (M) are providing a fertile ground for the right and the CPI (ML) is there to counter this process in the best interest of the Left movement. The CPI (ML) does not have to indulge in any exercise to malign the CPI (M), but it is certainly the political responsibility of the CPI (ML) to counter the negative impact of the CPI (M)'s utterly indefensible acts like Singur and Nandigram. And this is not a separate task for the CPI (ML), but only an integral part of its overall mission: "people's resistance, left resurgence".

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