

THE COMMUNIST PARTY & ORGANISATION

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“The working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed from the propertied class.” (Resolution, drafted by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, adopted at the Hague Conference of First International, 1872)

The Communist Party works as the centralised vanguard of the working class the world over and aims at fusing socialist theory and socialist consciousness with the struggles and movements of the proletariat. The Communist Party has necessarily to function in the diversity of the evolving realities across the countries. The Communist Party has to fix and implement its programme and its tactical line in accordance with the social, political, and economic situation present. Lenin has noted that the Communist Party must correctly adapt the fundamental principles of communism to the features peculiar to each country. However, the common and immutable characteristic of every Communist Party is that it is guided along its path by the tenets of scientific socialism. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels spoke about how the theoretical consciousness and the *Selbsttätigkeit* or the spontaneous self-activity of the working class, complemented each other as constant elements in the conception of the Party, combining in different proportions in different countries. The idea finds a classical expression in the *Communist Manifesto* (1948). Here, Marx and Engels wrote about the communists' clearer theoretical understanding of the “line of progress, the conditions, and the ultimate results of the proletarian movement.” The Communists are the most advanced and the most resolute precisely because of this clear understanding of the three ultimate results. The Communists move towards a unique and basic ideology as the struggles develop and the level of political consciousness rises.

V I Lenin always stood opposed to the theory that spoke about the spontaneous development of society. Lenin was always careful to distinguish between “trade union consciousness” which the workers could acquire spontaneously (*Selbsttätigkeit*) and “social democratic consciousness” which it was the Communist Party's function to develop among them. The “new kind of a political party” that the Bolsheviks sought to build and towards which they waged a struggle within the then Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was based on the postulate that the socialist movement must not be left alone to spontaneity in any circumstances if it was to be a viable success. We recall in this connection the dictum of Mao Zedong who while

speaking about revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers-peasants called upon the proletariat to be the “soldier-activists of the revolution” and to accomplish “with grit and resolve” the “programme of the revolution.” (*On Contradiction*, original text, 1937) Mao did believe that otherwise the Communist Party was in danger of losing its relevance as the centralised vanguard of the proletariat. J V Stalin firmly believed that politics and ideology should be “in command, all the time” in organising, motivating, and driving forward the communist Party.

The question of Party discipline is innately - almost organically - bound up with the political goal of the Communist Party. The Communist Party is deeply integrated into the entire range of issues and questions that are thrown up in the realm of society, politics, and economy. The Party has to build up and organise movements, struggles every day, and has to tackle a variety of circumstances and happenings that take place. It is natural that an exchange of opinion and even debate within the Communist Party becomes a necessary part of the process of development itself. It is a given that the Communist Party harbours the highest form of democracy. When V I Lenin first spoke about democratic centralism as the core of the Party exactly one hundred years ago, he was careful to emphasise the democratic content itself. Its task, difficult and involved, is to transform the inimical society within which it functions. It is not hard to realise that unless the highest forms of discipline guide along the Communist Party, it would face severe and mounting assaults from without. The conflict is an ongoing process—only the form changes from time to time. Sometimes it is open and overt, and at some other times, it is covert and hidden. The way to strengthen and integrate the strength of the Communist Party in this long-term conflict is to combine democracy with centralisation.

THE THREE FORMS OF CLASS STRUGGLE

“The inexorable growth of the Communist Party is a function of the growth and social position of the working class” (Resolution, adopted at the Amsterdam conference of the Second International, 1904)

“Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle” V I Lenin in *Collected Works*, vol. V, p.422

The Communist Party can never achieve its political goal without class struggle and mass struggle. The oft-repeated words of Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) need to be recalled: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” The three forms of class struggle are: *economic, political, and ideological.*

The economic struggle is the daily struggle for livelihood. It is bound up with leading one's daily life. Even within the folds of the capitalist system, the economic struggle is able after a fashion to secure the interests of the working masses and even to bring about a modicum of improvement in their conditions. No basic problems could be solved. The economic struggle, however, helps in the advancement of the workers' rights including higher wages, better working conditions, and enhancing other rights of the workers to some extent. The economic struggle has many manifestations and forms. The struggle waged by the Party and the mass organisations to implement a programme for the interest of the working mass is certainly a part of the economic struggle. It is a mistake to dub economic struggle as devoid of importance. It is in the arena of economic struggle that the mass of the toiling people could be organised. We must not let slip the fact that the success of the higher forms of movements and struggles depend to a large extent on the success or otherwise of the economic struggle.

The Communist Party keeps in mind while it takes part in the economic struggle, the limitations of that struggle. The economic struggle is essentially one that is fought for the enhancement of rights and opportunities within the capitalist system itself. It never strikes directly at the capitalist edifice. According to Marx and Engels, the benefit of the economic struggle would lie not in its immediate consequence but in the continuous advancement of the unity of the toiling masses. Neither the people nor, indeed, the Communist Party would stand to benefit in general if the struggle is confined to economic issues alone. Lenin has reminded us repeatedly how political struggle can never be left for the uncertainty of the far future. Indeed, the conduct of economic struggle itself would become fraught with difficulties to an extent if the political struggle could not be launched with vigour. Lenin's words ring true for the situation prevailing at present in our country. He said: "A wide economic struggle could never be carried out if there is an absence of rights to conduct meetings and organise trades union, and if there is no mouthpiece of our own, and if one is not able to send representatives to the parliament." Lenin concluded that a political struggle was essential to earn these rights.

The core issue of the political struggle is the political intervention of the working class in the basic issues concerning capitalism. These include, for example, organising struggles on issues related to the state, the government, and the judiciary. It is a part of the political struggle to advance from the issues of working conditions of the toiling people and the ensuring of rights in the workplace to the greater and larger issue of securing and safeguarding democratic rights. Issues like the sovereignty of the nation, the foreign policy of the country, the struggle against authoritarianism and separatism go to augment the political struggle of the working class itself. The development of the political struggle instils in the consciousness of the working class the necessity of uprooting the capitalist system and to involve them in the greater struggle against capitalism.

A principal aim of the Communist Party is to enhance the level of political consciousness of the working class and of the toiling masses. The development of class struggle and mass struggle depends on the advancement of this consciousness. The task of building up of class-consciousness of the working people, of advancing their democratic consciousness, and the development of their socialist consciousness is not a small matter. It is a part of the class struggle itself. The system within which we function contains within itself the ideology of sustaining the status quo. The political philosophy of capitalism, the education system, and the cultural mores and traditions act to uphold the status quo. Thus, unless an ideology alternative to and opposed to the capitalist system can be advanced, there could never be any automatic development of consciousness of the working class and of the toiling mass. The reality that surrounds us teaches us the need to conduct ideological struggles on an emergent basis. In India, the working class is divided within itself by considerations of religious mores, of caste divisions, and of regional and popular diversities. The fissures are constantly being opened out by the forces of religious fundamentalism and by other divisive forces. The corporate media is getting stronger every day. The task of the big and corporate-controlled media establishments is to organise a constant campaign in favour of the capitalist class. This influences both the toiling masses and the middle classes. Unless one is able to put up a continuous stream of ideological campaign against this, it is difficult to build up the required level of political consciousness of the people. We have often seen how massive mobilisation could be organised in the realm of economic struggle. However, we are also witness to the fact that of many of those involved could be taken out of and beyond the arena of economic struggle. One notes that at the present point of time, attempts are being essayed to extend the hegemony of imperialism worldwide. There are sustained effort on to try to reject the concept of socialism itself. The question of organising an ideological struggle thus becomes a crucial and a tough challenge before the Communist Party.

PARTY BUILDING AND THE RECTIFICATION CAMPAIGN

In a country as large and as diverse as India, the Communist Party has necessarily to be large with a deep and wide foundation among the mass of the people. It was from this realisation that the resolution was taken at the Salkia Plenum (1979) to make the Communist Party a mass revolutionary Party. The Salkia Plenum also issued a warning to say that the Party was not a 'mass' Party only, but a *revolutionary* Party. If the increase in the number of Party members is not in consonance with the advancement of the consciousness of the members, the apprehension about mistakes, errors, and deviations could be a reality. Beyond the improvement of the political consciousness of the individual members, one needed to look to the improvement in Party functioning. The two tasks must be carried out at the same time.

The number of Party members has gone up in the wake of the Salkia Plenum. The number of Party members has also gone up, although not as per

expectation, in the different states. The bulk of the increase has taken place in the three states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. In 1992 at the 14th Party Congress, a review of the post-Salkia organisational development was done. It was found out that not enough emphasis had been attached to improving the standard of Party members and that a laxity in this regard continued to prevail. The three areas of weaknesses generally identified were: drawback in the realm of political-ideological consciousness; inactive behaviour; and the trend not to work in a mass organisation. The question of the special situation prevailing in West Bengal can be brought in now.

In West Bengal, the number of Party member went up after the formation of the Left Front government in 1977. The Party had to modify its pre-1977 method of working to an extent and to fix the Party functioning in tune with the new situation. There is no doubt that the situation arising out of the existence of the Left Front government caused errors, mistakes, and deviations to occur to an extent in the Party. A campaign to maintain revolutionary purification was launched in West Bengal by the Party as far back as in 1983. In the decades that followed, it was found out that the Party had started to suffer from the same kinds of errors and mistakes all over the country. Even in states where the Party was not in office, and is not sufficiently strong, harmful tendencies including parliamentarianism had become manifest.

The issues of the perception of Communist ideals and the erosion of the principle of democratic centralism have been included in the agenda of each Party Congress and state Party Conference. At the fourteenth Party Congress in 1992, the ideological and organisational document were adopted. The issue gained prominence during the fifteenth Party Congress, and following a detained discussion at the meeting of the Central Committee in October 1996, the resolution on a Rectification Campaign was adopted. The conduct of inner-Party struggle to keep the Party free from the damaging aspects of the rotten and class-divided bourgeois society is a continuous and ongoing task. In special circumstances, with the creation of favourable circumstances within the Party for the infiltration of bourgeois vices, it becomes imperative to strengthen the struggle within the Party against the tendency.

In 1996, the central committee noted the circumstances that acted as the source for the errors and deviations that were against the Party ideals. These were:

- (1) The predominance in the society of peasants and of the petty bourgeoisie, and the bourgeois and quasi-feudal ambience
- (2) The debacle of Socialism in the International scene and the ideological attacks
- (3) In the economic field, liberalisation and the spread of its innately unequal and perverted consumerism, and the impact of the campaign in the mass media in favour of the bourgeois self-centred

and egoist values

- (4) The circumstances that are created by the aggression of the reactionary, sectarian, ultra-nationalist, and fundamentalist forces are not conducive for progressive and scientific thinking
- (5) In the background of the need for a long-term and vastly difficult struggle to bring about changes in the correlation of class forces, there is the fact of an uneven and slow development of the all-India Communist movement and its surrender to or the existence of circumstances favourable to make adjustments with the bourgeois system and the bourgeois moralities
- (6) The induction into the Party of very many people who are devoid of the proper outlook on the basic Party stance, on Party programme, and about the method of Party functioning; the inability to properly train and educate this vast number of newcomers to the Party and the lacunae in re-educating existing and older Party members
- (7) The impact of the role enunciated by the bourgeois parties during the past two decades in terms of lack of principles, money power, pattern of economic functioning.

The *principal* content of the rectification campaign was the struggle against parliamentary opportunism. The deviation was not limited to the people's representatives of the Party. A crass ignoring of the tasks of organising mass struggles and building up and strengthening the Party organisation marks the parliamentary deviation. *Another important issue* of the rectification campaign concerned the fight against the erosion of the principle of democratic centralism. From these deviations appear factionalism and individualism within the Party. The *third content* was the preservation and safeguarding of Communist principles and progressive values. The *fourth issue* had to do with the advancement of ideological education in the Party and to improve the political-ideological standard of the party members.

There has been a great improvement in the strength of the Party in West Bengal. The Party members have exceeded 2.5 lakh. They are organised in nearly two thousand Local Committees and 26 thousand Party Branches. The Party runs most of the rural Panchayats and the urban municipalities and corporations. The pattern of functioning has changed and the Party has to undertake responsibilities keeping with the times. It is wrong to believe that the Party strength has increased solely due to the presence of the Left Front government. There are constituents of the Left Front other than the CPI(M) and their strength has not gone up. The chief reasons behind the increase of strength of the CPI(M) are: the correct stand of the Party, the Party programme and its implementation, the intense political campaign conducted amidst the people, and the role of the Party in the developmental work. At the same time, two factors have contributed to the enhancement of the political consciousness of the masses. These are: the intensity of work among the

masses and without any personal interest, by the vast bulk of the Party members, and the pro-people policy of the Left Front government.

However, weaknesses and lacunae persist in maintaining the revolutionary character and standard of the Party, the highest standard of principles and morality, and keep the Party disciplined based on democratic centralism. The West Bengal CPI(M) has acknowledged and in public several issues concerning errors and deviations in the spirit of self-criticism and has stressed on the need to strengthen the rectification campaign. We can summarise the issues here.

The political-ideological level of the Party members is not upto the expected standard. There is a lack of clear perception about how a Communist Party is a Party of a new type, how it is different from other parties, and what are its principal goals. This hampers the spirit of disinterested work among the masses. The level of political consciousness of the Party members must be enhanced through an extension of Party education at every level and through education and training in the reality of circumstances.

Weakening democratic centralism means the deterioration of Party discipline, rise of factionalism, and unprincipled work. We have seen how after opposing democratic centralism and speaking out for "freedom of work," leading comrades have alienated themselves from the Party and have joined hands with the enemy. It is necessary to enrich the inner-party democracy even further. There is no harm if the process of debate within the Party is kept active and alive. It is often seen that Party members involve themselves in debate and discussion after trying to fathom the process and direction of thinking of the leadership. The leadership must take the initiative in clearing the fog of fear and apprehension within the Party.

The erosion of democratic centralism helps the spread of unprincipled behaviour and immoral acts further weaken the principle of democratic centralism. The report adopted at the 20th state conference noted: "Without democratic centralism and discipline the Party cannot be united, nor can morality be upheld." A sworn enemy of democratic centralism is bureaucratism and selective sycophancy. This tendency continues to exist within the party. Promotion to the higher rung of the leadership in Communist Party means more work and more responsibility. Some believe that such a promotion involves wider privileges and more power. We have to stand firm against this kind of deviation.

There are instances of erosion of morality at various tiers of the Party. These include large-scale corruption to petty self-serving of interests. The people are witnesses to these acts of commission. Despite the rectification campaign, it cannot be claimed that a great deal of success could be achieved. The 20th

state conference of the Party stated that the question of immorality had remained largely as an abstract conception. Thus, there is a perceived inertia in investigating charges and taking appropriate steps. Unethical behaviour and lack of principles are deeply bound up with factionalism. The task before the Party leadership at all levels is to watch out for immoral and unprincipled acts. If the improvement in the standard of living is not in keeping with the sources of income, one needs to start asking questions, brooking no delay. It is unprincipled to show a lack of initiative in probing unprincipled behaviour. If the leadership is to retain its dignity, it must remain active here in detecting and dealing with corrupt behaviour.

There are a few instances where undesirable persons are trying to keep in touch with the Party. Why should the Communist Party allow persons who are hated by the people to its proximity? These unwanted persons serve no purpose in undertaking mass struggles. If the Party remains close amongst the people, there is not perceived need for it to keep in touch with such unwanted elements. It must be understood that an undesirable person can never be a Party person. The tendency must be fought with firm resolve.

In some instances, sections of the Party leadership are seen to avoid accountability to the Party structure. They are more interested in floating and running a variety of platforms, committees, and concerns. The leaders and workers of the Communist party, especially in West Bengal, get themselves involve in every aspect of social activities. However, it is manifestly wrong to keep out the Party itself while they are doing so.

Lacunae remain in the manner of inducting Party members. First, the task of organising Party membership among the urban and rural poor is not satisfactory. Second, it had been resolved that Party membership would be given after the leadership had spoken to the candidates chosen about the Party and its aims. This is not followed in many instances. If the standard of a Party member is not high enough, the task of fighting against the erosion of the society becomes impossible.

The elderly comrades are on their way out; at every stage, the average age is increasing. The space is to be filled up by the induction of fresh blood. If the process were done mechanically without qualitative enhancement, the standard of the entire Party would go down. It had been decided in the past that for new Party membership, an eight point charter of qualities will be invoked; and then the concerned persons will sit together with the higher leadership and with members who are considered fit for local committee membership, and then the issues concerning the goal of the Party, its ideals, duties, rights, and withdrawal of rights would be brought up and those who are willing to accept the conditions will be provided with Party membership.

The process is in operation only in a few instances. This has caused harm to the Party. In cases where the process is set in motion, it is done mechanically without realising the central theme of the process. Experiences show that many have to be expelled while at the stage of Candidate Membership on grounds of immorality and other anti-Party stance.

In the present situation, the gap in the position of leadership at every level cannot be filled up unless the ideals and the levels of consciousness of the Party workers can be improved and the factional-mindedness done away with. There is a crisis brewing over the issue of whole time workers of the Party. The problem is on the rise in most of the districts. In a period of long-term status quo, it is very difficult to find wholetimers with an ideology-driven frame of mind that rejects selfishness and without a wage that would at least meet the minimum needs for a living. There is no situation where mutual sacrifice of interests can be said to exist. Factionalism and lack of principles have exerted an antithetical influence. The decline in the rate of Party Levy has inconvenienced the districts. At the same time, the weaknesses pertaining to making mass collections has not been done away with. In spite all this, one can cite instances of several districts to show that if planned moves are made, the number of wholetimers can be increased.

The Party has initiated disciplinary actions in manner that is keeping with the Party Constitution and Party Programme. Within the space of a year, more than 300 party members have been expelled from the Party.

The rectification campaign has been going on in West Bengal. District-level campaign is going on. Three rounds of meetings in this regard have taken place with the district secretariats, and the district committees. It has been found that the bulk of the grievances and complaints received about "corrupt acts" have, in fact, little actual basis. Nevertheless, the Party has initiated the following steps as tasks for the days to come in making the organisational base of the Party bigger and stronger.

THE TASKS AHEAD

To succeed in the task, we shall have to take the steps described below:

- i) The issues of wrong practices, deviations, and unprincipledness should be discussed at every level of the Party and we shall have to inspire the Party workers against these trends. The entire Party should be inculcated about the reasons why the Party cannot survive without the principle of democratic centralism, and what is the goal and ideal of a Communist Party.
- ii) As a preliminary step, the drive towards the implementation of the principle of democratic centralism must start with the members of

the state committee. Without dragging in the fall-out of the past and rejecting personal preference and personal dislikes, an initiative should be taken to further unite the Party on the basis of principles and to take the initiative down below. Unless there is unity, there cannot be a struggle launched against unethical and unprincipled acts.

- iii) On spotting an unethical act, there should be no fear in drawing the attention of the committee to which the person belongs or the higher committee. If the accusation is false or motivated, the higher committee would take a decision about the person who had lodged the complaint, and the committee to which the person accused belongs shall have no decision to make in the matter.
- iv) In the event of spotting an extension of property moveable and immovable without an adequate source of income, the concerned worker should be interrogated and if sufficient grounds cannot be shown steps should be taken against him.
- v) On a complaint being lodged, a one or two member enquiry committee should be formed and the work should be attached priority and completed promptly. If a specific complaint is lodged at the level of the district, the concerned comrades should be summoned to the district committee office and the prima facie viability of the complaint should be ascertained and, if necessary, an enquiry should be made and the case disposed of quickly. The same procedure can be followed at the level of the zone as well. When a comrade is seen to have committed an error, he should be spoken to first, to help him correct his mistake.
- vi) A political struggle should be organised to win elections and resistance to the terrorist attacks of the opposition should be conducted by taking along the people. In offering resistance, one must never depend on anti-socials.
- vii) In order to do away with all opacity in the relation between the Party and the mass organisations, it must be ensured that the mass organisations and TUs are organised and run democratically. In place of the predominance of the individual and the authority of a single person, joint leadership and joint organisation must be established. The policy of proper maintenance of accounts and submission of the same regularly to the concerned Party committee must be ensured.
- viii) No amount of money should be collected without receipts and spending the funds collected as one wishes would be regarded as an offence. We should stress upon mass collections and collections from Party sympathisers at least twice a year regularly and the Party fund must be augmented to meet the need at all levels. It would be considered an offence if used and unused receipts and coupons are not returned. Stress should be on collection of funds from factory workers and the rural poor. Similarly, importance should be given to collection of funds from workers when they receive bonus and from the peasants when crops are harvested.
- ix) People's representatives and office-bearers in the administration must be guided by high ideals and they must abide meticulously and

with devotion to the directive policies and principles of the Party.

- x) There are many occasions when the administration has to be spoken to. It must be made specific which comrade would speak to which tier of the administration. It is better if state committee members in a district committee, district committee members in a zonal committee, and the secretary of the local committee and members of the zonal committee in the local committee should, as per need, speak to the concerned and concomitant tier of the administration. If the designated comrades are not there, some other comrade can speak in case of an emergent need. However, whether the matter is emergent or not, the administration should not be spoken to with a factional attitude. Cases where difference of opinion may surface should be discussed earlier for amelioration.
- xi) The comrades who work in top administrative tiers of private institutions should remain accountable to the state, district, zonal, and local committees depending on the area of operation of the concerned institution. In cases of fairs and festivals, too, organiser comrades must engage in discussions at the appropriate committee again keeping in mind the area of functioning of the fair/festival, and the functions must be organised under the stewardship of the concerned committee. In these institutions and in the fairs/festivals, no collection of funds should be made in exchange of an unethical safeguarding of interests and no collection is allowed without receipts. If necessary, the concerned Party committee can verify the name and the amount of contribution made by the donors.
- xii) In assigning zonal responsibility of the secretariat members, no more than two comrades should be assigned per zone. The comrades responsible can always take the help of other comrades if found necessary. They should lead based on unity among themselves. They must not merely remain present in the zonal committee meetings but render help as per the necessity of the zonal units. The same principle shall prevail in the committees below. When attending the meetings, state committee members at district committee meetings, district committee members at the zonal committee meetings, and zonal committee members at local committee meetings must not give out different views and opinions. If there is a difference of opinion, that difference must be ironed out at the next higher before speaking at the concerned committee meetings.
- xiii) Importance must be attached to the increase in the readership of Party publications. A mass drive for the sale of Party publications including the dailies and the weeklies must be attempted at least once a week in the cities and urban areas, and at least once a month in the rural areas. The habit of not making prompt payments and allowing arrears to pile up should be done away with. The comrades, who are able to, should purchase Party publications.
- xiv) Emphasis must be given to the building up of Party members from among the toiling masses and the poor peasants. It is not an easy task

to ensure their promotion to the rank of leadership but the task must be attempted nonetheless. If necessary, separate political camps should be organised for those Party members who are poor, who belong to the toiling masses, and who remain backward in general education but who show a lot of promise. The progress made in the case of women members is not satisfactory. Not all branches have women members. A special plan must be initiated to induct into the Party those women who are leading workers in various movements, and who have been elected in the three-tier Panchayat system.

Proper preparation and placement of quarterly reports based on the evaluation of work done at every level based on an objective evaluation of the workers should be given importance. Equally important is the examination of the reports at the higher level and to the removal of weaknesses that catch the attention.

The vast mass base of the CPI (M) in West Bengal has not grown in a vacuum. Nor is this mass base hollow in any manner. The Party has earned this massive popularity and organisational strength through the correct political stance, ceaseless political campaign, and a burgeoning political, economic, and ideological struggle. The Party is in the forefront of the anti-imperialist struggle. We are continuously engaged in the task of making the people aware of the aggressive character of imperialism and organising them in the anti-imperialist struggle. We have also emerged in the forefront of the struggles and movements against the neo-liberal economic policies. We are resolute in struggling for the safeguarding of the interests of the working people. The Party is engaged also in the task of organising a proper ideological struggle against religious fundamentalism. These struggles -- economic, political, and ideological -- are innately bound up with the rectification campaign, and the more the campaign becomes stronger, the stronger the Party shall become.