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*18th Congress of the CPI(M):
Favourable Situation for Party Advance*

Prakash Karat

The 18th Party Congress held in the capital of India for the first time has established one fact before the country - the CPI(M) is the one Party which can consistently put forward an alternative to the present bourgeois-landlord policies and it is the only Party which can rally all the left, democratic and progressive forces to carry forward the struggle for a left and democratic alternative. For many people, the Congress was an eye-opener. They came to know how the CPI(M) functions, how inner-Party democracy works, how the leadership is collectively exercised and how the CPI(M) is different from other bourgeois parties in the country.

The 18th Congress was held in the background of the success achieved in removing the BJP-led government from the Centre in the 14th Lok Sabha elections in May 2004. The CPI(M) had pursued the tactical line adopted in the 17th Congress and gave three concrete slogans for the elections on that basis. The Party called for the defeat of the BJP- led alliance, the formation of a secular government at the Centre and the strengthening of the CPI(M) and the Left in parliament. The success in achieving all these three aims and the correct approach evolved in forming a new government at the Centre and extending support to the UPA government without joining it found widespread acceptance in the Party at all levels. This was reflected in the discussions in the state conferences and the pre-Congress discussions on the draft political resolution.

The entire Party is focused on how to build on this success. The Party Congress was called upon to formulate a suitable political line which can advance the Party and the Left and democratic movement. Utilising the favourable political situation, the Congress was required to set out the organizational measures, which could help the Party accomplish steady expansion so that it becomes a powerful all India force.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION: OUR TASKS

The tasks set out in the Party Congress have to be accomplished in an international situation wherein US imperialism is continuing its

offensive. The re-election of Bush as President in November 2004 confirms that there will be no let-up in the aggressive posture of the US.

This is an imperialism, which does not hesitate to violate the sovereignty of independent nations. In its quest for total hegemony, the USA is prepared to utilize its military might to make countries fall in line. The prime example is Iraq. Iraq was not willing to acquiesce in the US plans to dominate the region. The occupation of Iraq is part of the plan to reorder West Asia to control the oil resources of West Asia. Talk of restoring democracy and liberty is the façade for this naked plan for recolonization.

The US under Bush has set forth a strategic doctrine which states that no country will be allowed to match or surpass the strength of the United States. If necessary, the US will militarily intervene to prevent this happening. The doctrine of pre-emptive strike is meant to be used against countries who the US perceives or decides is a potential threat to its security, instead of an actual threat. This is the convenient pretext coined in the so-called war on terrorism which will be used against any country or government which defies the will of the US.

It is this aggressive and illegal approach which motivates the US to threaten the DPRK, Iran and Syria and covertly work against the Venezuelan government. The blockade and hostile measures against Cuba is stepped up because it refuses to surrender its right to decide the social system it wants to live under.

The political resolution of the 18th Congress has pointed out that the contradiction between imperialism and the developing countries has intensified further in the recent period. Resistance to the imperialist offensive has grown on various fronts. The heroic resistance by the Iraqi people is at the center of this worldwide resistance to imperialism. The Palestinian movement is fighting against heavy odds against the Israeli occupation which is backed by the US. The popular and democratic forces in Venezuela have repeatedly foiled the US sponsored efforts to destabilise the government of President Hugo Chavez.

While this resistance is developing, there are difficulties too. One is the state of inter-imperialist contradictions. While they exist and conflicts occur as seen in the opposition to the war on Iraq by France and Germany, there is also side-by-side cooperation between the imperialist countries. They are broadly united on intensifying the exploitation of the third world countries. The US is able to act as the leader and arbiter to keep the unity of the bloc. The second difficulty is that the ruling classes of the lesser-developed capitalist countries are by and large collaborating with imperialist finance capital and are unable or unwilling to protect their sovereignty or autonomy.

It is keeping these problems in mind that the struggle against imperialist globalization and defence of national sovereignty has to be conducted. While all fissures in the imperialist bloc are to be utilized and any degree of resistance by the bourgeois governments of the developing countries, such as the G-20 forum are to be supported, the main reliance in the struggle against imperialism lies in developing the struggles against imperialist globalization and in developing the direct resistance to imperialist war, occupation and intimidation. It is the increase in this resistance, especially in Latin America, which is the heartening feature in the current period.

The role of the socialist countries in the current situation has to be understood. China, the biggest socialist country has been steadily developing its economy and making all-round progress. For more than a decade China has registered above 9 per cent growth of GDP. The growing strength of China will have a determining effect on international relations in the coming days and strengthen the trends towards multipolarity. Vietnam has been also making steady progress and its economic performance is one of the best in the developing countries. Both Cuba and DPRK are targeted by US imperialism. Cuba has successfully fought back all the hostile manoeuvres by the United States to destabilize its socialist system. Its close ties with Venezuela is setting before Latin America an alternative to neo-liberal policies and imperialist dictated policies.

In the case of the DPRK, it has successfully resisted the US blackmail on the nuclear issue. The US stance of hypocritically talking of the nuclear threat posed by the DPRK while keeping tactical nuclear weapons in and around the Korean peninsula has been exposed. The socialist countries have to continue to work in an international environment, which is hostile to the existence of the socialist system. Hence it is vital for them to strengthen the economic base and raise the living standards of the people while safeguarding the socialist system and its ideological basis.

India is a target of imperialism's attention given the sheer size of its market and the immense possibilities for the forays of international finance capital. The US also strategically sees India as counter-weight to China whose growing power, it wishes to contain. The US has been wooing India's ruling classes since the 1990s for making it a strategic ally. This began at the time of the Narasimha Rao government and has been taken forward under the Vajpayee regime. The US succeeded in making India part of its global strategic design. It is the struggle to make India act as an independent power which can contribute to checking the unipolar proclivities of the US which is one of the key tasks set out by the Party Congress.

While engaging ourselves in this task, the political resolution has pointed out that the US has made inroads into our neighbourhood, in South Asia. The Musharaff regime in Pakistan was told to become an

ally in the “war against terrorism”. The US has signed security and military collaboration agreements with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The US is helping the King of Nepal in the name of fighting the Maoist insurgency. It is essential therefore to step up the cooperation between the Left and democratic forces in India and the South Asian countries. This has not been happening enough in the past.

Building a powerful anti-imperialist movement in India and bringing about a shift in India’s foreign policy towards a more independent policy is the responsibility which the CPI(M) has taken up in the Party Congress. Success in this will be a big contribution to the worldwide struggle.

NATIONAL SITUATION: MAJOR FEATURES

Let us take up the national political-tactical line formulated in the Congress. The Political Resolution noted seven major features of the current situation. They can be summed up as follows:

i. Though the BJP was defeated in the Lok Sabha elections and this electoral setback is a significant victory for the left, democratic and secular forces, the strength of the BJP-RSS combine must not be underestimated. Though they are in some disarray at present, as seen in the bickerings between the BJP and RSS about the responsibility for this debacle, eventually they will regroup and try to use the Hindutva agenda to make a comeback. Six years of BJP rule has led to the entrenching and penetration of communal elements in the State institutions and society which should not be underestimated.

ii. The bourgeois-landlord combination headed by the Congress is in power at the Centre. Though secular in character, the Congress cannot be relied upon to carry out a consistent struggle against the communal and divisive forces. It benefited from the popular discontent against the BJP-led government’s economic policies but it has no intention of making any major changes in these policies.

iii. The class character of the Congress and the performance of the UPA government which pursues policies of liberalization are bound to impact on the livelihood and living conditions of the people. On the ground, people cannot experience any change – the agrarian distress continues, the crisis of small and traditional industries is getting worse, the repeated increases in prices of petroleum products is heaping additional burden on the people. All this is bound to generate discontent in the coming days.

iv. The regional parties continue to play an important role in national politics. Most of them have displayed opportunism by joining hands with the BJP and some have gone with the Congress. Most of them decide their stand based on their state interests. When they are in state government, they are following the same policies of liberalization and privatization that are advocated by the BJP or the

Congress. Due to this, they are also facing the problem of maintaining their support and seek to continue in the state government by various manoeuvres.

v. The intensification of the caste appeal in electoral politics and the rise of political forces on caste lines is a marked feature of the current situation. Caste based political mobilization hampers the development of the democratic movement and helps perpetuate patronage politics revolving around caste leaders who switch allegiances without any political or ideological convictions.

vi. Imperialism is constantly exercising pressure and seeking to expand its influence in the country. In domestic economic, political and foreign policy affairs, the influence of imperialism, particularly the US has grown. The BJP-led government facilitated this, but with the UPA government in office, except for some shift in emphasis, the strategic collaboration with US and its deep inroads remain.

vii. Finally, the role of the Left in the current situation. Though its strength is limited on the all-India plane, it is playing a significant role. The crucial position it has acquired must be utilized to advance the struggle against communalism, the pro-big business economic policies and imperialism.

The Political Resolution has taken into account these features of the present situation and set out the Party's approach and tasks.

POLITICAL-TACTICAL LINE

In the present situation, the Party has to build on the success of dislodging the BJP from the Centre and initiate a broad campaign to roll back the vantage points gained by the communal forces in different spheres of society. Every day reports are coming of the RSS and its allied outfits launching attacks on minorities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa and other places. In Gujarat, the Modi government is shamelessly protecting the culprits who participated in the communal pogroms and is working to reduce Muslims and Christians as second-class citizens. The all sided struggle against the communal forces, political ideological and organizational must be carried on. Wherever manifestations of minority communalism and fundamentalist trends emerge, the Party must counter them while defending the legitimate rights of the minorities.

The Party has extended support to the UPA government with the clear understanding that in the present situation, it is not possible to have a secular government without the Congress-led combination. The continuance of the UPA government in office depends on its willingness to implement the pro-people measures in the Common Minimum Programme and how it maintains the unity of the UPA coalition. As far as the Party and the Left are concerned, they will continue to press for the implementation of the pro-people steps. To accomplish this, the

Party will build mass movements and conduct struggles. The Party has no illusions about the basic approach and policies of the Congress-led government. It should act as the sentinel of the people's interests and fight against all those measures which affect national sovereignty, harm the working people's interests and give unjustified concessions to foreign capital.

So the task is to carry forward the struggle against the communal forces and at the same time intensify the struggle against the policies of liberalization. As the resolution points out: "The struggle against communalism and the economic policies are in fact connected to the anti-imperialist task, as both the Hindutva forces and the liberalisers are distinguished by their pro-imperialism."

The Party was active in the past three years in conducting a number of movements and struggles against the policies of the BJP-led government. It is the innumerable campaigns and struggles launched by the Party and the mass organizations which mobilized the working class, the peasantry, the rural poor and the ordinary people to fight for their rights and which contributed towards isolating the BJP-led government. However, the 18th Party Congress has after reviewing the past movements and struggles pinpointed certain important aspects which need to be taken up if the Party is to expand.

The Party has to give utmost importance to building the independent strength of the Party. In order to reach out to new sections and rally the economically and socially oppressed who are outside the ambit of the Party, the resolution has stressed the importance of some key tasks:

Firstly, the numerous issues thrown up by the agrarian crisis which has caused acute rural distress to crores of people must be taken up by the Party to mobilize the peasantry and to launch movements. Land, wages, availability of cheap food, employment, prices of agricultural commodities, supply of power, water, seeds, credit and taking up innumerable such issues are the key to establishing the Party's links with the rural masses.

Secondly, the Party must concentrate on organizing the basic classes and building the united struggles of the workers, peasants, agricultural workers, artisans and other sections of the working people. The NPMO at the national level must be activated for this.

Thirdly, the Party must launch struggles on local issues and build sustained movements so that some partial demands can be achieved. This will help the development of the overall movement and expand the Party's influence. The recent struggles on water in the Ganganagar and Bikaner districts are examples of how an impact has been made if the Party and the Kisan Sabha have taken initiative.

Fourthly, the Party must take up directly social issues. Here the fight for dalit rights and against caste oppression assumes importance.

The women's struggle for equality and against oppression must be championed and taken up by the Party and not left to the women's movement alone to take up. The experience of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh must be absorbed and taken up in other states. The campaign against untouchability in Tamilnadu and the movement against caste discrimination in Andhra Pradesh have resulted in the Party spreading its influence among the dalits and the oppressed castes.

The fight against social evils and for social reform must be taken up in areas such as the Hindi-speaking states to create a democratic atmosphere. It is not enough to talk of fighting the caste system in general but study the nature of the caste and class correlations in specific areas and work out appropriate tactics so that class issues of land, wages and access to the resources is combined with the struggle against caste oppression.

Finally, there are 8.4 crore adivasi people, who are the most exploited by feudal and capitalist forces. Fighting for their rights to land, forests and their displacement for development projects along with the protection of their languages, culture and regional autonomy has to be taken up seriously. In the states of Central India where there is substantial tribal population, the RSS has made inroads which must be countered.

All this work has to be carried out to strengthen the CPI(M) and its mass base.

The Party will also work to build a third alternative. It is not in the interests of the left and democratic forces, that two bourgeois combinations, one headed by the BJP and the other by the Congress monopolize the political space. There is a need for a third alternative. Building such an alternative requires the Left, democratic and secular parties coming together by conducting joint movements and campaigns. A viable alternative will emerge only if there is a common policy framework at least on some major issues. Experience has shown that this cannot be just an electoral alliance.

Left unity and strengthening of the Left is essential if we are to successfully rally the other democratic forces. It is important to underline that all these activities of the Party are to go forward to build a left and democratic alternative which alone is real alternative to the bourgeois-landlord set-up. In the recent period, the Left has been able to show the country that it has a set of alternative policies whenever it has opposed the UPA government's policies. Whether it be the issue of FDI in certain sectors, the electricity policy, the patents bill or public sector reforms, the Party and the Left have come out with their positions, which must be utilized to gather support for alternative policies.

UNDERSTANDING ON CERTAIN POLICY MATTERS

The Congress discussed certain policy matters in the political organizational report.

India is bearing the brunt of imperialist globalization. The nature of capitalist development has undergone a major change, a fact noted in the CPI(M) updated programme in 2000. What should be the attitude to foreign capital flows into the country, which are of two types - foreign direct investment and financial flows for investment in the stock markets and financial markets. As far as speculative financial flows into the country, the Party wants regulation of these flows. The Party has to mobilize all democratic and patriotic forces to demand regulation of the speculative financial flows, a demand which will face stiff resistance as such a stance is considered anathema by imperialism and also by the domestic ruling classes. As far as foreign direct investment is concerned, every country in the world has FDI in its economy. The question is what should be the policy towards FDI. The FDI should come based on some national priorities. They concern acquiring new technology, increasing productive capacities and increasing employment potential. FDI in certain sectors must not be allowed, if it compromises national sovereignty and security and displaces domestic investment.

Imperialist globalization seeks to undermine economic sovereignty. Our efforts should be directed towards protecting this sovereignty. An essential feature of the present phase of globalization is the movement of finance capital in search of super profits. While this is taking place, we should work to put in the safeguards mentioned above. Building popular people's resistance to the erosion of national sovereignty will help sharpen the class struggle.

The second area where the Party's approach has been spelt out is the public sector. Here again, international finance capital demands the dismantling of the public sector and privatization of public assets. In our struggle against imperialist globalization, the defence of the public sector assumes importance in the context of protecting economic sovereignty. Further, the public sector plays an important social role. While defending the public sector, we have to see how this sector can be streamlined to face the new challenges. The public sector in the key and strategic areas must be maintained and strengthened. There are giant enterprises usually referred to *navaratnas* which should not be allowed to be privatized. Secondly, there are profit making public sector units which are being eyed by the Indian and foreign big business which should not be privatized. Thirdly, there are public sector units which have an important social role and also there are public utilities which provide basic services. These may be in sectors like power, water supply, public transport, etc. The criteria cannot be solely profit-making in such enterprises. It is necessary to retain these public sector enterprises. Finally, there are some totally unviable units many of which were sick private sector

units which were taken over in the earlier years. As far as this last category is concerned, efforts must be made to restructure these units so that they can be revived. If these do not succeed then other options may be considered including joint sector ventures or the disposal of these units. In such cases, the interests of the workers must be protected and the decisions made by taking into confidence the workers and the trade unions.

The CPI(M)-led state governments have to function in a situation where the central government has withdrawn from its commitments to fund major economic and developmental activities. The fiscal crisis brought about by the central government's policies are being imposed on the states. There is very little resources in the hands of the state governments to fulfill their commitments to the people. Under these circumstances, the state governments led by our Party have to resort to loans for specific projects and grants for developmental activities from foreign governments and international agencies like the World Bank, ADB, DFID, etc.

The Party has been approaching this question based on the following framework. The governments run by the Party and the Left may accept grants and assistance for developmental projects. But they should be not have such conditions which will compromise the Party's policies or the state government's autonomy in economic decision-making. The governments led by us should not accept any loans which involve structural adjustment programmes such as those from the World Bank which were accepted by the Chandrababu Naidu government in Andhra Pradesh or the Congress government in Karnataka or the UP government. These are loans which have wide-ranging conditionalities including downsizing of the government staff and privatization of certain sectors and services. The loans or grants taken from a foreign government will also have to be scrutinized to see that no harmful conditionalities exist.

While foreign funding to governments is one category, another category is foreign funding to voluntary organizations or what are known as Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Our Party has consistently warned that a large amount of foreign funds are coming in to finance a host of activities of NGOs. Such funds from western agencies are meant to de-politicize the people and to keep them away from the organized Left. The Party Congress report has laid down guidelines on how the Party should approach different types of NGOs. Secondly, it prohibits organizations connected to the Party from taking recourse to such funds from abroad. The document has also spelt out our approach to Self Help Groups.

These are certain policy matters which the Party Congress has clarified and which should help the Party meet the situation created by neo-liberal reforms in the country.

BUILD THE PARTY: EXPAND ITS BASE

The central question facing the Party is how to rapidly expand the organization to make the CPI(M) a strong all-India force. The Party Congress reviewed the work done in the past three years in implementing the organizational tasks set forth in the 17th Congress.

The political-organizational report adopted by the Party Congress has noted the progress made in building the Party organization. Since the 17th Congress, the Party membership has increased from 796,073 in 2001 to 867,763 in 2004, an increase of 9 per cent. It should be noted here that the CPI(M) did not suffer any decline in its membership at any time after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the setbacks to socialism. Between 1991 and 2001, the Party membership increased by 37 per cent, without a fall in any of the intervening years.

How was this possible? Firstly, due to the political-ideological level of the cadres and the membership; secondly, because of the constant work and living touch with the people and thirdly by adhering to the organization principle of democratic centralism. However, we cannot be satisfied or complacent. The reports of the state conferences, particularly of the stronger states, note a dilution in the quality of membership. One of the reasons for the lack of growth of the Party in the weaker states is the inactivity of a section of the Party members. Many Party members are not working in mass organizations, as required by the Party's organizational principle. Further, the increase in our membership is primarily a result of the growth of the membership in five states – West Bengal, Kerala, Tripura, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Since the 17th Congress efforts have been made to implement the guidelines for membership recruitment, scrutiny and renewal of Party membership and formation of auxiliary groups. There has been some progress in ensuring that the norms for recruitment and renewal of membership are observed by the branches and the higher committees. The Political-Organizational report has stressed the importance of improvement of the class and social composition of Party members and activation of Party membership and the branches. The district committees and the intermediate committees should organize annual review of branch functioning at the time of renewal based on the guidelines chalked out by the state committee.

While building the Party, attention should be paid to see that there is recruitment of more Party members from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who constitute a big section of our basic classes. The composition of the working class and agricultural workers in the Party has to be improved too. As far as the membership of women in the Party is concerned, there has been some improvement since the 17th Congress. For the first time, the number of women members in the

Party has crossed 10 per cent. More attention has to be paid to see that women recruited in the Party are provided adequate attention and training and steps taken to increase their representation in the Party committees.

Membership of the all India mass organizations have registered a growth in the last three years. In the Kisan front there has been an increase of 17 per cent; in the trade union front 4.2 per cent; in the agricultural workers front 14 per cent; in the women's front 27.9 percent; in the youth front 26.8 per cent and in the students front 28.9 per cent. But this expansion is uneven and more attention has to be paid to develop the mass organizations in the weaker states.

The Central Committee had adopted a document on *Approach to Mass Organizations* in October 2004. This document covers: (i) developing the independent functioning of the mass organizations so that they acquire a broad character and reach to new sections of the people, (ii) the democratic functioning of mass organizations and in the case of youth, students and women's organizations, maintaining its character as a democratic platform and (iii) the proper understanding of the Party's guiding role and Party building.

It was decided in the Party Congress that state committees shall review the state of the mass organizations and the relations with the Party. This task has to be taken up immediately and a fresh direction given to the work of the mass organizations particularly in the weaker states. Without expanding the influence of the mass organizations and broad basing its work, it will not be possible for the Party to reach out to new sections and expand its influence.

The 17th Congress had decided that the Central Committee should select some states as priority states and concentrate attention and resources to develop the Party there. The 18th Congress taking stock of the work done regarding this decided that the concept of priority states should be adhered to. Last time, five states were selected as priority states - Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. In these five states and also in other states, one-year plan for work was drawn up. After one year, the implementation of the plan was also checked up and reviewed in the five priority states. Some improvement in the work was noted. But what is necessary is to ensure that there is a concentration of work and resources in the priority districts and fronts which are selected. Deployment of adequate cadres in these areas is the key to ensuring that concentrated all-round work takes place so that the mass base of the Party is developed.

The ideological work of the Party needs to be strengthened keeping in mind the necessity to educate and train all Party members to imbibe the Marxist-Leninist outlook and to act on the basis of the programmatic understanding. A major weaknesses was the inability of

the Central Committee to initiate an inner-Party ideological discussion on the basis of a document as promised by the 17th Congress. In order to rectify this shortcoming, it was decided that within one year the new Central Committee will prepare an ideological document for discussion in the Party. The system of Party education at the central level is still lagging behind the requirements. This is seen by the fact that there was only one central Party school to provide in-depth understanding of the updated Party programme organized in the year 2002. Some schools for frontal cadres were also held. More central schools have to be planned in the coming period.

At the same time, the state reports show that in West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, permanent Party schools are functioning. Much more attention has to be paid to the political ideological and organizational education of the party members.

The CPI(M) has built up its publications in the form of dailies, weeklies and fortnightlies in a much more systematic manner than other political parties. Apart from the six daily newspapers coming out in West Bengal, Tripura, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, there are more than a dozen weeklies and fortnightlies in various languages. In the Hindi-speaking states, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are now publishing a fortnightly.

At the central level, circulation of *People's Democracy*, *Lok Lehar* and *Marxist* have to be increased. The CPI(M) publications brought out 58 titles including Party Congress and Central Committee documents apart from the folders and booklets brought out for the Lok Sabha campaigns. More attention has to be paid to bring out a series of popular booklets on various issues which can help our agitational and propaganda work among the people.

The major state committees have underlined the importance of maintaining communist norms and the communist style of work among cadres and Party members. Many state committees have issued guidelines for maintaining communist norms for cadres holding public office. The organizational report has emphasized the need to continue the rectification campaign against the violation of communist norms. Party members should be educated to shun social practices which are reactionary and conservative. Customs which are demeaning to women, which encourage religious superstition and casteism must be fought against within the Party.

In order to cleanse the Party of wrong trends, violation of democratic centralism, factional tendencies and violation of communist norms, it is necessary to conduct a rectification campaign. Such a campaign has to be a continuous process and the Central Committee must initiate the rectification campaign after updating the experience from the previous years.

With more and more Party members working in elected bodies starting from gram panchayats to the district council/zilla panchayats and municipalities, increasingly the need is felt for monitoring the work of the elected members. The state committees should frame guidelines and supervise and monitor the work of the elected representatives of the Party. Adequate organizational arrangements should be made for this.