

The Marxist

Volume XXIV, No. 1
January-March 2008

TAMILNADU STATE CONFERENCE

Extracts from the Political-Organisational Report

TAMILNADU SITUATION

Tamilnadu, which is considered to be one of the developed states of India, is faced with a series of crises. The Eleventh Plan Approach Paper of the State Planning Commission states that the GSDP growth rate was 4.9% during the 9th five-year plan period (1997-2002) and 5.9% during the 10th five-year plan period (2002-2007). Economic growth in the state was lower than the All India GDP growth during the same periods, which stood at 5.5% and 7% respectively.

Moreover, the GDP growth measure conceals the underlying disparities. The per capita income of the Villupuram district, which is the lowest in the State, is only 32% of the average per capita income of Chennai City. This shows the extent of disparity.

Agriculture, which is the main source of livelihood for the rural population is facing an unrelenting crisis since the past several years. Total cultivable area has declined from 56.2 lakh hectares in 1980-90 to 50 lakh hectares in 2005. Uncertainties surrounding rainfall, other climatic conditions and water supply from irrigation plagues agriculture. Cultivation has also become an economically unviable activity. Along with industrialization and urbanization, land use changes are taking place rapidly, with diversion of agricultural land for purposes of real estate development, commercial activities and educational institutions. Total cultivated area of the State, which was 50% during 1976-80, came down to 44% during 2001-2005. Total fallow land increased from 13.5% in 1976-80 to 20.5% in 2001-2005, exceeding more than 20 lakh hectares.

Tamilnadu, which has one of the fastest rates of urbanization in the country, still has about 56% of the population living in rural areas. The rural population earns only 14% of the total income of the State, which shows the extent of rural-urban disparity. The Government's own statistics show that the number of persons living below the poverty line increased by 2.5% between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005.

Agricultural production along with the production of milk and meat has declined over the last 5 years. The share of agriculture in the GSDP has come down to 13.3% in 2005-2006. The value of agricultural production, which was

Rs12873 crore in 1993-94 marginally increased to Rs13060 crore in 2005-06. With rural banking on the decline, only 25% of the peasants are receiving credit from institutional sources. Bulk of the peasantry continues to be under the grip of usurers.

On the day of its assuming office, the DMK Government waived Rs 6866 crores of co-operative loans. It provided some relief to the small and marginal peasants. At the same time all the loans availed by the rural rich also got waived. However, the State Government has not reimbursed the waived amount to the co-operative bodies, which has destabilized the co-operative sector.

The industrial sector is also facing crisis. The share of the industrial sector in employment is still quite small in Tamilnadu, as is the case elsewhere in the country. Small-scale industries and home based enterprises in the handloom and textile sector are facing crisis and closure. Rising prices of cement and steel have adversely affected infrastructure development.

Self-sufficiency is a far cry in the power sector. Shortages leading to power cuts have become a norm, even before the advent of the summer season, affecting common people as well as the industrial, trade and agricultural sectors. Attention was never paid to the power sector by the rulers to augment power generation in keeping with the needs of the State. Reliance on private plants for power supply may accentuate the crisis. The potential for low cost hydel power is not being harnessed.

According to the NSS, average annual employment growth, which was 1.74% from 1983 to 1993-94, reduced to 0.2% from 1993-94 to 2004. Employment opportunities for women have dwindled. The new trends in employment generation have two aspects: job opportunities in the organised sector, i.e. in factories and offices are on a decline and the existing opportunities are mostly for contract based or daily wage type employment. Most of the employment is being generated in informal industries and the services sector. The basic character of such employment comprises low wages, lack of job and social security and non-implementation of welfare measures.

As far as Human Development is concerned, schemes such as the mid-day meals programme are having some impact on reducing malnutrition. However, the Report of the State Planning Commission itself states: "it has to be acknowledged that there are many gaps and disparities to be addressed in terms of access to services and the quality of these services".

The State Planning Commission has also emphasized the need to take additional measures to reduce the infant mortality rates, particularly female infants and to reduce the mortality rates of expectant mothers in some districts of the State. In many districts, female infanticide became a major social issue.

Problems related to urbanization have intensified in the State, especially with greater migration towards the urban centres. The urban population, which was 34.7% in 1991-2001, increased to 44% in 2005. Urban areas are facing multiple problems such as increasing urban poverty, lack of basic

facilities of housing, drinking water, sanitation and drainage and predominance of private medical facilities.

Availability of potable drinking water is still a big issue. The State Planning Commission states: "At present, only 41 of the 152 Municipalities provide their citizens the minimum 90 lpcd of water and only 18 urban local bodies have underground sewerage schemes. It is obvious that the gap between the funds required and the available and potential resources of local bodies is so great that it will take more than a couple of decades for the urban local bodies to be able to generate the resources required to bring civic services up to the desired level on their own steam."

The disparities in the sphere of education are widening, from the primary level to the higher and technical level, with commercial-ization of education emerging as a major problem in the State. Imparting education through the mother tongue, single method of education, strengthening measures for social justice, establishing social control over private educational institutions and increasing the budgetary allocation for education are the measures urgently needed.

Regressive trends such as caste oppression, atrocities against women, murder and robbery and criminalisation of politics are on the rise.

Besides other problems being created by globalisation and the policies of liberalisation, the State Governments are coming under fiscal stress. The issues of State Government's revenue mobilization as well as Centre-State relations, which are affecting the federal structure, need to be considered seriously.

POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE STATE

The AIADMK rule in the State continued for another 16 months after the 18th State Conference. *The Political resolution of the 18th State Conference firmed up our duty to "unite the peoples' power to throw away the anti-people, anti-labour, anti-democratic and oppressive AIADMK Government in the next elections"*.

By opposing the economic policies of the UPA Government and pressurising them to fulfill the promises made in the NCMP and by conducting struggles and rallying the masses with the aim to unite peoples' power to remove the anti-people State Government led by the AIADMK, we have been successful in meeting the call of the 18th State Conference. Our activities were guided by the direction given by the 18th State Conference: "While maintaining friendship with the DMK leadership, we shall differentiate ourselves on issues we have not accepted. At the same time, we have to have more action against communalism and the anti-people policies of the AIADMK Government."

During the period between the State Conference and the State Assembly Election, we have conducted many struggles and movements on peoples' issues, independently and jointly. At the same time, as per the guideline of

the 18th State Conference, we had to counter the efforts of the DMK to create an impression that the DMK-led front formed during the 2004 Lok Sabha elections was continuing.

The political direction laid down by the 18th State Conference was duly followed during the State Assembly elections of May 2006. We arrived at seat adjustments with the DMK. This electoral understanding which also included the Congress, PMK, CPI and IUML helped to dislodge the AIADMK Government from power. The MDMK joined with the AIADMK. While the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal (led by Thirumavalavan) had contested the election as a part of the AIADMK led front, it changed its allegiance to the DMK led front after the elections.

Changing its past practise, the DMK's election manifesto contained an assurance to reverse the anti-people policies of the AIADMK Government and promised some pro-people steps like two acres of land for landless families, rice at Rs. 2 per kg, waiver of farmers' loans, filling up of vacancies etc.

The election campaign focussed on the issues concerning the downtrodden, who were severely affected by the policies of liberalization pursued by the Central and State Governments. Our slogan of "Democracy vs. Dictatorship" became the main election plank after the electoral pact was finalised with the DMK.

For the first time in the history of Tamilnadu, a situation developed wherein a State Government was formed with parties lending outside support to the single largest party, which did not have majority of its own. The DMK came to power with the support of parties including the CPI (M), with which it had an electoral pact. Since then, the DMK Government has completed 19 months in office.

The DMK Government, at the outset, fulfilled some of its promises like implementing the scheme of supplying rice at Rs. 2/- per kg, waiver of all co-operative loans and providing 3 eggs per week in mid-day meals.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach both within and outside the State Assembly has been to push the State Government to fulfill its promises to the people, to develop movements by rallying masses, to support the correct decisions of the Government, oppose its wrong decisions and to demarcate our basic stand.

The sudden announcement for local bodies' elections and the way it was conducted exposed the anti-democratic approach of the DMK. While rules were flouted in many parts of the State, the autocratic and violent means witnessed during the elections to the Chennai Corporation exceeded all limits.

The Review of the elections by the Party State Committee noted: "*The violence and violation of rules in the Elections held on 13th October 2006 for Chennai Corporation were shocking and unheard before. In all the 8 wards where the CPI (M) contested, the polling booths were captured by professional*

hoodlums, voters were chased away and the poll was rigged. The brutal attacks on the party's candidates, frontline leaders and cadres were carried out against democratic norms and election regulations. The Election Commission, which was supposed to conduct the elections in an impartial manner, as well as the Chennai City police and administration were fully complicit in these malpractices."

The DMK came to power by raising the issue of democracy vs. authoritarianism and with a promise of safeguarding democracy. But its actions in the local bodies elections raised many serious questions. While parties including the Congress, PMK, CPI and VC gave full support to the atrocities of DMK, the AIADMK withdrew from the elections and filed a case in the Chennai High Court. We also raised our voice against these atrocities and took steps including filing a case in the High Court.

Our open criticism of the undemocratic activities of the Government and the High Court judgement delivered on the case put pressure on the DMK Government, forcing it to cancel a part of elections in the Chennai Corporation and announce re-polling in many wards.

Refusing to learn any lesson from the local bodies elections, DMK once again tried to rig the elections to the co-operative bodies and got fully exposed before the public.

We have openly criticized the Government on this occasion too. The State Committee in its Resolution stated: *"To allow all those who wish to contest in elections to co-operative bodies, to allow all the members to cast their votes and to ensure proper counting of votes are the basic tenets of democratic elections. The CPI (M) has always reiterated that this should be ensured. These tenets were flouted by the ruling party and officials in charge of the elections, which resulted in the cancellation of the elections"*.

The attack on the Tamil daily *Dinakaran's* office at Madurai and the resultant loss of lives exposed the ruling party's patronage and planned use of anti-social elements. These incidents, which occurred within 14 months of the DMK coming to power, created controversy and considerably affected the image of the Government.

However, the overall public mood, reflected in the wrath against the corruption and anti-people actions of the AIADMK Government during the last elections, has not changed significantly.

It has been our decision to continue our approach of criticizing and opposing the wrong actions and policies of the DMK Government, strengthening movements on peoples' issues and pressurising the Government to solve the problems of the people.

The Review of the performance of the State Government after the completion of one year in power by the Party State Committee states: *"While supporting the DMK Government, we shall organize movements against its wrong policies and violation of democratic rights on behalf of the ruling Party. We shall demarcate ourselves from the wrong actions of the State Government*

and build a strong movement on peoples' issues to rally the discontented masses". This is the basic aspect of our approach about the State Government.

The DMK is also a partner in the Central Government holding many important portfolios. In the State too, the basic policies followed by them is similar to the policies of liberalization followed by the Central Government.

While the State Government is facing a grim fiscal situation in the overall context of the neoliberal policies, the ruling party is trying to retain its support base by making some concessions to the people.

During the AIADMK rule, its move to privatize the State Transport Corporations faced stiff opposition. We had undertaken mass movements and workers' struggles on this issue and also initiated legal action. The DMK Government has abandoned the privatization move. It has also stopped the move to bifurcate the State Electricity Board.

The DMK had never opposed any moves of privatization or disinvestment of Central Public Sector Units in the past. It is generally supportive of neoliberal economic reforms. But it took a position in the case of disinvestment of stakes in the Neyveli Lignite Corporation, where it has got a support base among the employees. The officers and employees of the NLC continued their strike against the disinvestment proposal, overriding the opinion of the Chief Minister. Finally, in order to stop the sale of NLC shares, the DMK went to the extent of threatening that their Ministers will be asked to resign from the Union Cabinet. The DMK Government also accepted the expansion of the Chennai Airport by the public sector Airports Authority of India. It also came forward to rally people and conduct a movement on the Sethu Samudram Project issue.

All this is not because of any basic change in the correlation of forces in the State but a result of the compulsions of the ruling party, wherein unlike earlier occasions, they lack absolute majority in the Assembly and have to depend on outside support for its existence.

Our political approach has been to pressurize the DMK Government to fulfill its promises of land distribution, provision of house sites and proper implementation of the welfare schemes announced by the Government; to demarcate our stand on education, employment and reservation; to counter the vacillating approach towards trade union and democratic rights and to fight increasing corruption and violence.

Through campaigns, struggles and agitations we are raising the issues and putting forth demands related to the people who are organized under our class and mass organizations, oppressed sections, minorities and women and trying to compel the State Government to resolve them.

The stand taken by the DMK on certain issues were helpful to our Party at the national level. We took that into consideration while formulating our approach.

Our activities stated above, carried out with a clear vision and independent issue-based approach, have enhanced the prestige and image of the Party.

Our approach and policy interventions at the all India level have also helped us at the State level. The victories of the Left Front in the Assembly elections in West Bengal and Kerala in 2006 and the successes of Left Front Government in Tripura have been favourable aspects of the current political situation.

We have carried out movements on issues affecting the working people and the poor, particularly the movement for pattas for house sites; on dalit issues, particularly on the issues affecting the Arunthathiyar community; and issues affecting the minorities. These initiatives have opened up possibilities for expanding our mass base.

WORK REPORT PRESENTED AT THE TAMILNADU STATE CONFERENCE: EXCERPTS

Against Untouchability

After the last State Conference, our Party's intervention on the issues of untouchability and atrocities against dalits has increased. We have conducted movements against untouchability and reached out to the dalit sections, and achieved particular success in rallying the Arunthathiyar community. We have organised a Conference against caste atrocities at Sirkazhi in Nagai district, a Conference demanding land pattas for the dalits at Lalgudi in Trichy district and an anti-Untouchability Conference at Manapparai. Thousands of people have participated in these Conferences. In the Dalit Convention organised by the All India Centre of the Party, 42 delegates participated from Tamilnadu. The Resolution adopted in this convention was distributed among thousands of people.

Studies

The State Committee decided to undertake studies on untouchability and other atrocities against dalits in all the districts. Accordingly, studies were conducted in 1863 villages covering the districts of Virudhunagar, Trichy, Pudukottai, Dindigul, Thanjavur, Villupuram, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Tiruvannamalai, Perambalur, Kovai, Erode, Tiruppur, Nagai, Krishnagiri, Salem, Madurai City, Tiruvallur and Pondicherry. Other districts have not conducted these studies. These studies have revealed that untouchability and other caste atrocities are quite prevalent in different parts of the State. All such cases were documented and petitions submitted to the concerned district collectors on that basis. Some instances could be highlighted through the newspapers and TV channels. In many places where the administration refused to accept the existence of untouchability and caste atrocities, our exposures embarrassed them.

Direct Actions Against Untouchability

On the basis of the above studies, direct actions were undertaken in the districts of Virudhunagar, Dindigul, Villupuram, Erode, Pudukkottai, Tiruvannamalai and Perambalur. The direct actions involved removal of the two tumbler system, hair cutting of dalits, ironing their clothes, making them draw water from public taps and ride bicycles in the areas resided by higher caste people and temple-entry. Local people from the dalit communities participated in these actions. However, the participation of the Party ranks in these actions was not satisfactory. In Pudukkottai, Tiruvannamalai, Perambalur and Villupuram districts, we had to face stiff resistance from the castiest forces and a partisan administration. Pudukkottai District Conference Report states that because of our strong and consistent intervention against untouchability over the past 3 years, the entire dalit population in 14 villages has rallied behind our leadership and in more than 20 villages new party branches and mass organisation units were formed. Similar expansion of our influence is reported from Virudhunagar, Villupuram, Dindigul and some other districts.

The AIDWA, Kisansabha, Agricultural Workers Union, DYFI and SFI have also made some interventions on the issues of untouchability and other problems faced by the dalits. Such interventions should be strengthened further.

Temple Entry

After identifying those public temples under the control of Hindu Religious Board, where Dalits were denied entry and prevented from offering *puja*, we decided to rally them and make them enter such temples. This was possible only in Tiruvannamalai (Thamarai-pakkam), Dindigul (Ayakudi) and Virudhunagar (Pavali) districts. Dalit women and youth from these villages participated in this agitation. It was also given wide coverage in newspapers and TV channels. These initiatives have created waves among the other dalit organisations.

Pappapatti - Keeripatti

The Party had laid emphasis on restoring the democratic rights of the dalits in panchayat bodies, which were reserved for dalits. Though dalits were elected as presidents in Panchayats like Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Nattarmangalam and Kottakachiyendhal, they were not allowed to function by vested interests. While we demanded that these village panchayats should continue to be reserved for dalits instead of being changed on rotation basis, the State Government refused to accept the demand. A hunger strike against this was launched at Madurai under the leadership of the Party State Secretary. The demand was also forcefully raised in the State Assembly and finally the state Government was forced to withdraw the move to dereserve the village

panchayat seats for dalits. The Madurai Rural District Committee undertook a powerful campaign and made efforts to ensure democratic elections to these panchayats. In all these 4 panchayats, elections were held again and dalits were elected and they are now functioning as panchayat presidents. Party's role in resolving the issue enhanced our influence within the dalits. A function to felicitate these dalit panchayat presidents was also organised by the Party. During this period 7 party branches were formed in these villages. Membership of Kisansabha and Agricultural Workers Union also increased significantly. A short film titled "... (It's another Idhihas???)" was brought out by the Progressive Writers' Association.

Interventions against Caste Atrocities

Several movements and struggles were waged during this period against atrocities on dalits and against police excesses at Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Virudhunagar, Madurai Rural, Sivaganga, Ramnad, Trichy, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Nagai, Thiruvarur, Villupuram, Tiruvanna-malai, Perambalur, Erode, Theni, Dindigul and Cuddalore districts. During this period, the panchayat presidents of Nakalamuthanpatti and Marudhanvaazhvu of Tirunelveli district were murdered by vested interests. Movements against these murders were launched in Tirunelveli and Virudhunagar Districts. Similarly, whenever dalit panchayat presidents or members of local bodies or women representatives have been attacked or harassed in districts like Dindigul, Pudukkottai and Virudhunagar we have condemned such incidents and organised movements against such atrocities. The influence of the Party has increased because of such actions.

Intervention in Arunthathiyar issues

Arunthathiyars are the most oppressed sections within the dalits people. Special studies on their socio-economic status were carried out in Dindigul, Virudhunagar, Nellore, Pondicherry and Chennai city. They are burdened with jobs including removing human waste and manual scavenging. Very few of them are educated and have a Government job.

Hence we decided to attention to their socio-economic and livelihood issues and mobilise them. We focussed on issues like education, sub-reservation in employment, ridding them of their age-old occupation of removing human waste, modernization of sanitation work, alternative employment and rehabilitation etc.

The Arunthathiyar Conventions for Right to Life were held with great fervour in districts such as Virudhunagar (4000 participants), Dindigul (5000), Tirunelveli (4000), Salem-Sangagiri (2000), Ramnad-Sayalkudi (2000), and Pondicherry (500). We launched massive awareness campaigns among the Arunthathiyar community. In the rally to the State Secretariat we mobilised more than 20,000 people from this community. Meanwhile, after talks with the Tamilnadu Chief Minister, a Welfare Board was constituted with immediate

effect for sanitation workers. Two of our comrades were inducted in this Board. Following pressure from us, one member from this community was also included in the Board.

Significant gains have been made by this movement so far. The government has agreed to constitute a committee to study the demand for sub-reservations for the Arunthathiyar community. Throughout Tamilnadu, Vettiyanas (burial/ burning ground workers) will now be called Burial Ground Employees and will be treated as government employees. An order to this effect has been issued in Chennai with such change of designation. Shoe menders have now been included in the Welfare board for Leather Workers. Memorials for freedom fighters including Ondiveeran have been raised. Another victory for this movement is that the Pondicherry Government invited the Party leadership for talks and agreed to implement many of our demands including sub-reservations within a time frame.

Emphasizing the aspects already accepted by the Government and demanding their immediate implementation, Dharnas were held at 94 places on 26th July 2007. Following this, on 2nd November 2007 picketing was held at 39 centres and more than 7500 persons were arrested. A significant number of Arunthathiyars participated in these movements. As a result of our constant struggles on this issue, unlike in the past, people of this community are coming into the arena of the struggle for social justice. Most of the associations of this community have come forward to work with us. Many other dalit outfits and human rights groups are also approaching us, and have developed a favourable disposition.

Unable to digest these developments, the leader of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal (VC), a dalit Party, opposed the demand for sub-reservation for the Arunthathiyar community and criticized our Party. The Arunthathiyar community and their organisations have raised objections to the comments made by the leader of VC. We responded to the accusations and explained our stand through newspapers articles and columns. These debates have not only generated confidence among the Arunthathiyar community, but have also helped in developing close bonds with our Party. The Reports of various District Conferences and the discussions reflected growing membership of our mass organisations and formation of new party branches within this community.

Concrete attention and planning are required to mobilise the people of this community who are coming close to us. Recruiting them into our mass organisations into a more powerful movement and rallying them under our leadership by politicizing them is an important task. Economic and local issues facing them in their residential localities also have to be taken up seriously.

While returning from participating in the massive rally held at Chennai on 12th June 2007, a young student from this community, Bhupathi Raja from Dindigul district, died while taking bath at sea. Considering the poor

condition of his family and in order to provide some relief to them we gave Rs. 2 lakhs to his family.

Front for the Eradication of Untouchability

We have made significant progress in strengthening our intervention among dalits in general and the Arunthathiyars in particular. A federation of mass organisations called the Tamilnadu Front for the Eradication of Untouchability was formed on 16th August 2007 at Madurai. We formed this front in order to involve our party and mass organisations more firmly in the task of expansion and consolidation on such issues. More than 50 mass organisations including dalit and Arunthathiyar outfits have joined this front.

District level bodies of this front have been formed in the Trichy, Tirunelveli and Sivaganga districts. We have to gradually form such bodies in other districts too. On behalf of this front, demonstrations were held at Thiruparankundram and Virudhunagar condemning atrocities on dalits. Special conventions were held against untouchability at Tirunelveli and Karaikudi. 600 and 850 persons participated in these conventions, respectively. Our aim is to activate this front as a broad mass front in order to focus on issues of untouchability and the rights of dalit people.

In preparation for this movement, untouchability eradication training workshops were held for fraction members and unit secretaries in 4 centres, namely, Villupuram, Coimbatore, Tanjore and Virudunagar. When activities were being planned on Aruntha-thiyar issues, special GB meetings were held for District Committee members in May 2007 in Tiruppur, Virudunagar and Chennai. Several articles were published in *Theekkathir* regarding eradication of untouchability and the Arunthathiyar problems. Small leaflets titled 'Marxists in Eradication of Untouchability Struggle!' and "We are coming!" were released. Efforts have to continue in the coming days to further improve the understanding of our Party cadres on these issues and to strengthen our interventions.