

THE FASCIST DANGER AND OUR TASKS

A document from PCC, Communist Party of India (M-L)

December 1998

World capitalism went through twenty years of unprecedented expansion in the aftermath of the second world war, but since around 1967 it has been passing through a very deep structural crisis. There are differences among observers on the timing of its onset, but all are agreed that it is the longest in the history of capitalism.

Like the other kind of crisis, the crisis of overproduction or what boils down to the same thing, over-accumulation, the structural crisis also stems from within the process of accumulation. Accumulation is the driving force of capitalism. "Accumulate, accumulate! That is the Moses and the Prophets!" wrote Marx. Goaded by this driving force, capitalists attempt the extraction of higher surplus value from labour and compete with other capitalists by reducing unit costs of their product. In the period after the early phases of capitalism, both of these objectives are achieved by increasing the organic composition of capital, especially fixed capital. This increase in the organic composition of capital is effected through the concentration and centralisation of capital, the latter developing with the development of the credit system and eventually becoming the principal aspect during the era of imperialism.

This increase of fixed capital is given shape by the scientific and technological innovations that are available. Steam engines based on coal, fuel-oil based technologies and now, cybernetics and robotisation have thus been utilised at different times as the leading elements in the creation of new kind of fixed capital. The arrival and introduction of each leading element devastates weaker capital, precipitating a structural crisis that requires a period of adjustment and re-organisation of capital. As soon as that re-organisation stabilises, another period of accelerated growth commences. The present structural crisis follows that pattern, but it has failed so far to fuel a period of accelerated growth. The multinationals, those quintessential products of the concentration and centralisation of capital, and the imperialist governments they dominate in the unholy combine known as state monopoly capital have tried frantically to overcome this structural crisis. But instead of a sustained growth in the system as a whole, we get what has come to be known as stagflation and the periodic crisis of over-production are not overcome or entirely managed away. The two types of crises together have intensified the general crisis of capitalism.

Structural crisis and crisis of over-production are both results of the contradictions between the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the various countervailing forces that arise against it. The latest phase of globalisation (i.e. the new international trade regime, the unprecedented mobility of capital but as in all period of crisis, no mobility for labour across international borders, etc.) and the world-wide structural adjustment programmes are meant to strengthen these countervailing forces. The devastating effects of these forces can be seen both in the imperialist countries and in the peripheries where the ex-communist countries have become the new entrants.

The imperialist countries, the centre of world capital, have not been able to wholly transfer the effects of the generalised crisis to the periphery. Various concrete parts of the system in both the centre and the periphery, such as the stock markets, the credit and financial systems, some national and regional markets, etc. fall into crisis, exacerbating the general crisis all around. Short business cycle upturns in one area fails to translate generally and those upturns are soon followed by long downturns. The general effect is one of persistent stagnation. But the stagnation is accompanied by severe inflationary pressures, a new phenomenon in crisis capitalism.

In the metropolitan countries, capital has responded to the crisis by all round attack on labour and all its entitlements. This attack rode the ideology bearing the names of Thatcher and Reagan. Thatcherism and Reaganomics consist of the prescriptions concocted in the boardrooms of finance capital. These prescriptions are therefore universal in their scope in a globalised world. So it is hard to distinguish Thatcher or Reagan from Clinton or Bush, Kohl from Schroeder, Chirac from Jospin irrespective of the labels or rhetorical flourishes. The "social democratic consensus" that flourished during the twenty years that followed the second world war has collapsed. That collapse was an important defeat of the international working class movement and the world-wide national liberation movements. This defeat suffered by the working class movement is not usually viewed as such because the unstated assumption is that the consensus was merely the result of the boom and capitalist largesse. But the fact is that the world working class emerged out of myriad struggles during the Depression and at the anti-fascist frontline and it fought for what it got along with its most reliable ally, the national liberation movements. The economic boom was the objective condition, but decolonisation and the welfare state came as a result of strong struggles. That the working class movement in the metropolitan countries was later emasculated and atomised is however a fact. Robbed of the political goal of socialism through cold war machinations and the non-socialist character of the so-called actually existing socialism and disarmed by the growing you-never-had-it-so-good type of consumerism (the metropolitan version of

economism), the movement could not withstand the sabotage of media - and state-sponsored leaders such as the likes of Gaitskell, Mollet, Saragat, etc.

With the crisis persisting over decades, the result of the working class defeat in the metropolitan countries is now clear. Social security is becoming more and more restricted; healthcare has deteriorated drastically; education languishes for funds; survival has become an uncertainty for old age pensioners, the mentally ill and the increasingly larger homeless population. The great industrial centres have been abandoned due to restructuring and the search for cheap labour in other metropolitan enclaves or, as is the case increasingly, in the Third World. Each downturn in the business cycle brings worse. The women and the children, those who belong to the minority groups, the recent immigrants and the youth waiting to enter the labour market suffer the most.

Increasing proletarianisation of the middle classes is a fact of life in the metropolitan countries due to the mechanisation and routinisation made possible by cybernetics. People who had some decision-making and judgmental activities associated with their work - the white-collar workers - are now more and more mere video watchers and button pushers for programmed decisions. The independent small traders are vanishing as the multinationals move into retailing while small and medium capitals are becoming a vanishing breed. The proletariat itself is sinking further into destitution and the reserve army of labour grows.

The resistance to this process in the imperialist countries is now recuperating from its pernicious anaemia. But it is still almost purely economic and paralysed by a lack of vision regarding socialism, the only and the inevitable alternative to capitalism. The "actually existing" socialism which self-destructed a decade ago is understood as the paradigm of a socialist future. Such a future is rightly rejected out of hand by workers who would otherwise be excellent builders of the new society. Imperialist propaganda had a great deal to do with this tragic outcome, but the state of Marxist analysis of the post-revolutionary societies is the main culprit. No one believes fables such as a coup in 1956 to explain the emergence of social imperialism. Even in the Third World, the turning away from the socialist project has been very strong, especially since the degeneration of China into dependent capitalism. Throughout the world today the Marxists will have to abandon illusions and second international left-overs and return to the founding theoretical positions and judge the history since the October Revolution. That will help us to reconstruct the vision of socialism cleansed of historical mistakes and the serious mistakes in outlook with which it is still swaddled. This work is absolutely necessary and should become the foundational element of all other works. Economic and social struggles without the agitation and propaganda for socialism is reformism, no matter how militant or how powerful they are. Without a world-wide struggle that focuses on the principal world contradiction between imperialism on the one hand and the countries, nations and the peoples of the Third World and aims at political power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there can be no liberation from the cynicism and cruelty of imperialism. But, if the dictatorship of the proletariat (or some variations of it in the Third World where allied classes join the ruling dictatorship) is itself without a properly thought-out, scientific outlook that opposes the structures that have failed universally, the aim of proletarian political power will remain distant.

Without such political work to inform the anti-imperialist struggles, imperialism will always transcend its crises and begin another long recovery through further globalisation and structural adjustments.

Globalisation is accumulation's innermost tendency from capitalism's very inception. In the era of imperialism, the focus of globalisation is the export of capital. In the present phase of globalisation, when world capitalism is teetering on the edge of volcanic eruptions of the kind seen in the 1930s and whose indications can now be seen in SE Asia, the export of capital has taken on a very hectic pace. The newspapers and other media are full of tendentious news about foreign direct investments and the mergers of foreign and domestic firms.

An economist has summarised the findings of UNCTAD (1997) on foreign direct investments. "The global (foreign direct investment) stock increased four fold between 1982 and 1994. Over the same period, it doubled as a percentage of world GDP to 9 per cent." These figures show a qualitative leap in the export of capital. The principal destination of this export of capital during the present phase is also interesting. The UNCTAD survey shows that, "although developed countries received a record \$208 billion FDI flows in 1996 there has been a steady decline in their share of global inflows since 1989. The share of developing countries rose from 30% in 1995 to 37% in 1996." This UNCTAD finding should be viewed with the fact that there has been a significant change within the policy of capital transfers. It has become increasingly the case that state of the art machinery and processes are being directly installed by the multinationals in the Third World along with the old system of transferring machinery redundant in the metropolises on account of comparatively high wages there. Whole industries have been moving out of the metropolitan centres to graze in the lands of cheap labour power and many of the great industrial locations in Europe and America stand ruined and decimated by unemployment, the break down of all civic amenities, crime, extreme poverty, homelessness and the ubiquitous (perhaps, state sponsored) drug culture.

What of the Third World to which the attention of globalisers have turned so significantly?

Fairly unskilled and untrained labour power in the Third World sufficed to man the mainly extractive industries in the earlier phase of globalisation. But today that commodity must more and more be embodied by skills that are equal to the technology that it must confront. Not only that. The countries of the Third World where capital may flow must also have infrastructural and other capacities to accommodate that capital. By these two counts, many countries of the world, like those in sub-Saharan Africa and quite a few Asian and Latin

American ones, have been sought to be written-off the map of the human family by capital. They are only useful to capital to the extent their earth and water contain valuable raw materials and food. And that is also quite a curse for most of them on account of capital's insatiable desire for raw materials. Various imperialist countries contend for those raw materials and that contention has made these countries or many of them the foci of proxy wars such as in the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. Where there is no real contention due to the exclusive hegemony of one particular power, such as the US has in most of Central America, the people suffer the worst that imperialism is capable of in terms of wages, human rights etc. In situations of contention short of proxy wars, imperialist rivalries express themselves in coups and counter coups as in West Africa today. Clandestine arms supplies are the main means of conducting both coups and proxy wars, as was very strikingly exposed in Sierra Leone recently when the British breached their own rather sanctimonious sanctions in violation of their own laws.

At the other end of the scale from this "written off" countries are the "miracle" countries which have imported foreign capital on a large scale and are following an essentially export-led-growth strategy. All other countries fall between these extremes with various admixtures of policies that emerge out of the various alliances between imperialism and domestic reactionary classes.

Brazil, Mexico and the Confucian wonders of the Pacific rim have all at some time or the other, some even repeatedly, been touted as the miraculous children of the world capitalist system. They had caught up with the imperialist centre or were about to do so. They have overcome their peripheral, dependent status. Over the years, failures and sudden collapses in all such countries other than the tiny little moles on the body of Asia, such as Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, promoted the latter as media examples that are to be emulated by all Third World countries wishing to develop. That was just prior to the recent violent crises that shook all of them to near collapse. Now only the Dengist Chinese are left as example but they are loved for the profits they deliver to imperialism and feared for their size and military might. But their doomsday, in a world-shaking collapse is not far away. All these countries are or have become the quintessential sub-contractors of imperialism. At the present moment, their crisis have to a certain extent dragged down their imperialist principal, Japan. But that is only a premonition of the earth-shaking disasters that are on the card for all imperialist centres if things go on as they have been over the last few decades.

Countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Thailand and Indonesia were never really in an economic position strong enough to withstand the ghoul's dance of speculation that has gripped the world due to the financialisation of capital on a staggering scale, capital flight and other factors not to be controlled by individual Third World countries. But Taiwan, South Korea, and China have been in a stronger position. In all of these latter countries, meaningful land reforms had taken place. All had put into place fairly comprehensive systems of elementary education and diversified institutes of higher learning in science and technology. Also, access to health care and preventive medicine were fairly universal in all these countries. Until they moved into the chimerical world of export-led growth and openness, they all had strong government controls and planning over finance, export and import, investment decisions and research and development programmes, all necessary features not of autarchy but of self-reliant growth. In China, these achievements were the result of socialist construction in the period before the Great Reversal. In the other two countries, these elements of self-reliance, especially land reforms, were undertaken by order of their US overlords in the fifties when the latter was mortally afraid of an insurgent peasantry inspired by Mao's China and the inspiring struggles of their Indo-Chinese fraters. Moreover, they could build on the extraordinary circumstance of the US imperialists pouring in huge amounts of dollars into those two tiny countries as striking exception to the rule for every other Third World country. This pouring in of dollars through "aid" and military spending was in order to use them as springboards for aggression in the region. The scale of this dollar input can be gauged by the fact that tiny South Korea received during the cold war more than six times the amount received by the whole of West Europe during the massive Marshall Plan.

Since the Indian bourgeoisie, led by Indira Gandhi armed with a massive Rs. 5000 crores IMF loan in the early eighties, launched into the path of globalisation and restructuring ordered by the creditor, we have heard from academia, the media and some unexpected quarters about the successful capitalist transformation of Korea etc. even within the imperialist dominated international division of labour. Some so-called Marxists in Britain started quoting some journalistic pieces by the early Marx and began praising imperialism as a progressive force that is developing a vigorous capitalism in the Third World. Our pundits were naturally reluctant to mention land reform, education, health care etc. since they would not quite fit the rosy prospects that were being touted for India and the Indians. The burden of the Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong song rose to a crescendo when Indira Gandhi's former minions began in 1991 the completion of the job started by her. Since the collapse, the song survives as embarrassed nostalgia among those hooked on bourgeois economic models, especially those, favoured by the IMF-WB, that promote very busy academic traffic on the seminar circuit.

The collapse in East Asia and other impending collapses there and elsewhere show that there is no scope for escape from abject dependence on imperialism, for a national, independent development in the Third World by the capitalist route. In all Third World countries, pre-capitalist relations and their re-invention through a formal subsumption under capital result in an overall "retention-erosion" process. This condemns agriculture to a serious lack of accumulation, persisting absence of extended reproduction and a distributive system that locks the majority of the country's population at levels below subsistence. Almost necessarily, this starves industry of both capital and markets. The bourgeoisie then tries to make up for these shortages by extracting a

huge tribute from agriculture, condemning it to further stagnation. An agricultural revolution that distributes the land to actual producers is the foundation of agricultural development, but it alone is not sufficient. Land reform must be followed up immediately with consolidated peasant ownership at various levels, maintenance of equitable terms of trade between agriculture and industry, adoption of a basically equalitarian income policy and the integration of all these policies in a coherent, democratic and many tiered planning process. These are tasks beyond any bourgeoisie in the imperialist era. So even in countries that have witnessed a few basic reforms such as Korea etc., agriculture does not stimulate industry and industry does not turn back with research and appropriate technology to develop agriculture. The result is the ubiquitous dependence on imperialism for technology, capital and market. "Import substitution" or "export-led growth", no matter what the latest phase of policy, the processes of compradorisation intensify and lead towards puppetisation. When world prices are politically decided and mediated through complex, hierarchically structured multinational conglomerates, when capital flight or entry depends upon the production of ever cheaper labour power and when raids on currency or portfolio investments are always possible, such a process of deepening slavery to foreign capital is inevitable. Upto 1982 or thereabouts, the CPI(M) and the other revisionists would proclaim the independence of the Indian big bourgeoisie with some confidence, however misplaced. After the 1982 IMF loan, the confidence was somewhat shaken. At least, there was some doubt in the assertions, although the formulations in the programmes remained more or less the same. After 1991 there is a loud silence from all revisionist quarters. Two major planks of their programme, independence of the big bourgeoisie and the socialist character of the Soviets, came crashing down over their heads. Reeling from such a political disaster, the CPI(M) leadership has now surrendered to imperialism as the vacillating partners of the big bourgeoisie, creating serious problems for the followers.

The present phase of globalisation tends to produce, with some deliberate policy planning of course, an approximately ten percent of the population capable of becoming a market for the world goods produced by the multinationals while the rest are written off to increasing misery. As a result, the market in the Third World that springs into being is quite considerable, given the sheer numbers involved. The luxury consumption may not be of US-EU standards but is still quite attractive for multinationals in a period of acute crisis. It is therefore not surprising that the multinationals and their supra-state bureaucracy in the IMF-WB push for more and more skewed incomes and distribution policies, writing off whole sections of people and many regions while promoting a satiric or nymphomaniac lifestyle in an ambience of grab and grab consumerism. The result is a despicable cultural homogenisation that atomises people, fosters cynicism about collective effort, strips men and women of feelings for the next person and paves the road to aggressive right wing politics.

In all Third World countries where foreign investments have been sustained in a big way over fairly long periods, there is an important common thread linking them all together. They all have authoritarian regimes where the ruling domestic reactionaries allow little or no democratic right to the people. Military dictatorship and party dictatorships of the totalitarian kind are the rule in these countries. This is not accidental. When basic human entitlements are sought to be withdrawn from the overwhelming majority of the population, then such forms of governance become inevitable. Moreover, the obvious linkage between such forms of governance and the traditional extra-economic means of coercion make the former eminently suited to the supreme task of depressing real wages. Brazil, Argentina, South Korea, Indonesia, China and other imperialist success stories have ruling classes that have waded through innocent blood to come to power and to remain there. The question for us is: How far have the Indian ruling classes advanced into the authoritarian system in order to become star performers for imperialist capital? The present situation in the country demands a long hard look into that question. Will the "opening up" and "restructuring" on imperialist terms that the Indian ruling classes are pursuing now allow for the continuation of the present parliamentary system? We will have to return to those questions presently.

The international situation during this period of protracted crisis and turbulence is still marked by three major contradictions: 1) That between imperialism on the one hand and the countries, nations and the peoples of the Third World; 2) That between the various imperialist powers; and 3) That between capital and labour.

All of these contradictions have sharpened over the past decade. The contradiction between labour and capital has sharpened throughout the world. In the imperialist countries, deregulation, unemployment and the curtailments of all social entitlements is provoking a mild reaction at the hustings: Thatcherites are no longer sure winners, but the alternatives are not even Keynesians, merely old Thatcherites with a new rhetoric, such as we have seen in Europe recently. Large-scale industrial actions in Europe over the last two or three years and, more recently, in the US has marked a certain degree of change. Most of these actions have materialised in spite of the entrenched union bureaucracies, sometimes in defiance of it. But lacking the unifying vision of a new, socialist future, the struggles get bogged down in economism. Some of that economism even produces anti-immigrant, anti-minority and anti-Third World sentiments. The metropolitan contingents of the working class are still far from challenging the hegemony of the bourgeoisie at a time when Marxism is itself fighting from a defensive position against a resurgence of subjective idealism that has contaminated all branches of knowledge, including the natural sciences. The bourgeoisie and its philosophy will remain credible as long as it is able to thwart social disintegration by utilising a part of the huge tribute it extracts from the Third World, i.e., in the absence of a mass ideological reorientation in the working class movement.

The focus of the contradiction between labour and capital is now firmly in the Third World. Increasing mass unemployment, casualisation, withdrawal of hard-won benefits etc. is shifting this, the largest contingent of the world working class, away from revisionism and all other varieties of economism, including those very

"left" ideologies that attempt to harness militancy to nothing beyond the bread and butter issues. Economism's organisational reach in the Third World has been mostly confined to permanent workers in what we in India call the organised sector. The vast majority of the working class, including those in the most modern sectors and those who are the progeny of several generations of workers, are casual and contract labourers from whom the lion's share of imperialist super-profits are extracted. These remained basically unorganised. In the present phase of crisis and globalisation, the organised sector is shrinking and that opens up the objective condition of unifying the working class. This condition is political and it ramifies into issues such as privatisation, imperialist take-overs, deregulation, liberalisation, etc. These political questions are large, systemic ones and demands socialism as the conscious basis of all other work on a mass scale. This has disadvantaged the revisionists considerably on account of the emptying out of their concept of socialism after the Soviet collapse. The masses of the left who are still trapped within the revisionist organisations are already stirring and are already becoming sensitised to revolutionary alternatives. This is a great opportunity and the revolutionary forces must not dissipate it by phrasemongering. To the extent that this opportunity is already being lost due to the ideological, political and organisational disarray on the revolutionary left, rightist anarchism, the harbinger of fascism, is already making serious inroads into the working class movement, as is the case in West Bengal and elsewhere in India.

Globalisation has deepened the objective basis of the unity of the working class world-wide. The call for equal remuneration for equal productivity on an international scale demolishes the very basis of the globalisation that is taking place and it is very significant that such a call is rising from the revolutionary working class movement in some metropolitan countries. Much organisationally concrete work to establish co-operation between the national contingents of the working class will be necessary to make this slogan a real threat to the imperialists.

Imperialism means imperialist rivalries and the law of these rivalries is a tendency towards wars of various kinds among imperialist powers, especially the world-embracing wars. As long as the USSR did not collapse and was still in contention for world hegemony with the US imperialists, the other Great Powers had to submit to the military protection of the US. But within the cold war context, the US hegemony over those Great Powers was getting progressively eroded through intense economic rivalries in a world crisis. The rise of Germany with the EU in tow, and Japan, with much of East Asia in tow, during this period testifies to this process. As a result, as soon as the military umbrella became unnecessary, the stage was set for rapid multi-polarisation of the world in spite of the might of the US imperialists. That multi-polarisation was however so rapid because of the intensity of the economic crisis. The globalising moves of all the imperialists to stave off the crisis has created a phase of temporary interdependence that keeps open hostilities between those powers at bay. The present moment is therefore not one in which a world war is imminent. But this is a fragile moment that is dependent upon the staving off of cataclysmic upheavals in the imperialist economic order. World war will become imminent during such upheavals and, if then, war is not transformed into revolution, another regime of accumulation will take off under a new system of imperialist hegemony.

The most intense inter-imperialist contentions are now focused on the Third World. This is because of two reasons: 1) the traditional, familiar reason of food and raw material control; and 2) the trend of a massive shift of investments to the Third World and the development of a significant market there. In Africa, West Asia and Latin America where imperialist rivalries are in their most intense forms, the local reactionary groups fissure and fuse according to affiliations to various imperialist interests. Imperialist sponsored coups or other types of authoritarian take-overs are the common currency of such changes. The currency gets harder with proxy wars. The US imperialists' latest weapon of suppression against Third World countries - sanctions - is continuously challenged, covertly and overtly, by the other imperial centres. The sanctions, for example, against Cuba, Iran and Libya have become more or less meaningless on account of the countless and substantial breaches of it made by the EU and the Japanese imperialists. Such a situation is developing in Iraq also. This is not to say that the US retreat on all these sanctions was solely the result of inter-imperialist rivalries. They were not. The opposition of the world's peoples and the valiant peoples of the countries concerned along with their governments was the prime factor without doubt. But that such opposition yields results shows that in the anti-imperialist struggle, each moment or conjuncture must be studied carefully and flexible policies found to evolve the most effective means to defeat imperialism. That the US has to retreat at all in spite of being the undoubtedly greatest economic and military power has to do with the causes we have discussed above, but it should be stressed that the US, in its search for world hegemony, had already overstretched itself during the cold war and that overstretch has increased since, leading it gradually into passivity. But this passivity should not be assessed without considering US imperialism's extreme venality and practised adventurism.

The focus of the two major contradictions just discussed is in the Third World precisely because the contradiction between imperialism on the one hand and the countries, nations and peoples of the Third World on the other, constitutes the principal contradiction in the world today. The existence and development of this contradiction regulates the other two basic contradictions. This is still the era of imperialism, Lenin's era, and the theory of the "weak link" still holds. The thesis that the present phase of globalisation has made a qualitative change in the situation does not accord with objectivity. This qualitative change is sought to be located in this thesis on the undoubted fact that we have also noted, viz., the massive transfer of high technology to the Third World. This argument proceeds from this fact to the conclusion that the contradiction between the working class and capital has become the principal contradiction. This leap into an erroneous conclusion assumes that the present phase of capital transfers has homogenised the world capitalist system and that production in the Third

World has more or less overcome a mere formal subsumption under capital to become really subsumed under capital. This does not accord with objectivity and underestimates the need of a democratic revolution in the Third World to put an end to pre-capitalist relations of production which change but persist in a symbiotic relation with imperialism.

Imperialism is still the principal aspect of this principal contradiction. The rapid decline in the armed national liberation movements since the late seventies is an important datum for all communists. The main causes of this decline are: 1) the ideological and political confusion created by the Dengist clique's capitulation to imperialism in pursuit of the path of dependent capitalism; 2) the pernicious influence of Soviet revisionism on many communist parties leading such movements; and 3) the dangerous adventurism which detaches guerrilla warfare from the one thing that gives it life and dynamism, viz., large scale insurrectionary movements arising out of persistent political struggles. This decline and, along with it, the degeneration of countries which had liberated themselves after arduous anti-imperialist struggles, such as in Indo-China, at a time when imperialism's crisis was deepening has meant a serious setback to all anti-imperialist forces.

The anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World have gained in one important way due to the disintegration of social imperialism. The illusion of a "third path" between socialism and capitalism has lost its objective basis and ideological moorings. This has shattered the Nehruvian, Nasserite and, more importantly, revisionist ideologies that chained down many Third World countries in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism. As a result, most domestic reactionary cliques which pretended a commitment to progress without in any way hurting their class interests are now competing with each other quite shamelessly for the crumbs thrown at them by imperialism. As a part of this fall-out from the disintegration of the USSR, the non-aligned movement has become a ghost that walks and talks funny.

During this moment of temporary setback in the genuine anti-imperialist movement, some space has been created by militant Islam to mobilise the popular masses against imperialism. The ideological and political centres of this militant Islam are located in the vast Arab world, Iran, Central Asia and parts contiguous to them. The core of this area has been kept continuously at war by various imperialist powers, especially the US imperialists. The despicable Zionist usurpers of Palestine have been the chief imperialist agents for imperialism, but the numbers of local reactionaries serving the cause of imperialism and Zionism, the racism that threatens to exceed Nazism, are extremely large, with the Saudi and other desert chiefs heading the list. The aim of all imperialist machinations in this area is cheap petroleum. The loot of that product and the miserable destitution of the masses in the region are achieved not by some market mechanism but by war and armed suppression. For reasons that should be studied seriously by communists in the region and elsewhere, the communist movement in the region has remained weak. The masses remained terrorised in communities centred on the mosque and the ideological resources of semi-literate Imams who shared their misery and anger. Imperialism has no quarrel with fundamentalism in its extreme forms as practised, for instance, in Saudi Arabia, but all the anti-fundamentalist anger in the imperialist media is actually directed against the anti-imperialist content of militant Islam. Communists must defend this anti-imperialism while creating the conditions for a mass-level dialogue on unacceptable, medieval social values that permeate this movement.

The anti-imperialist struggles are now divided by sectional outlooks such as on the environment, gender, healthcare, education, children, weaponry etc. That all such issues have been raised with great force and conviction is a very good thing and they go quite a way towards further developing socialist theory on many particular issues, especially the environment and gender. But these outlooks often miss the totality that constitutes the imperialist system. And that acts as a barrier to the development of unified anti-imperialist struggles. It is our task to theoretically unify these partial outlooks on the basis of a renewed socialist project in order to unleash vibrant anti-imperialist struggles.

The collapse of East Asia and the cataclysmic events in the former USSR show the real weakness of imperialism today. The Thatcherite ideology peddled by the IMF-WB and the media lies in ruins in those theatres of imperialist depredations. People, world over, are becoming more and more aware of the deceptions of capitalist reason. Storm clouds are building up everywhere in the Third World. Representatives of certain domestic reactionary groups leading governments in the Third World, such as Mahathir Mohammed, have responded to the recent aggravation of the crisis by taking up, to a certain extent, an anti-imperialist agenda. Such examples will multiply in the near future.

To sum up the international situation,

1. The crisis of the world capitalism has become extremely exacerbated. Great seismic waves are shaking the very foundation of the system;
2. This is shattering the anti-people imperialist offensive since the reversal in China and the collapse of the USSR;
3. As a result, the anti-imperialist tide which was ebbing over the last two decades is now in flow, but it is still dammed up by the lack of a clear vision of socialism, the only alternative to the imperialist system;
4. Authoritarianism in governance and proxy wars along ethnic fault lines are imperialist instruments to suppress the development of genuine and united anti-imperialist movements. The struggle for democratisation, self determination and federal union are therefore on the agenda of anti-imperialist struggles.

The people of the world must unite to oppose imperialism in all its aspects. This unity must proceed to utilise all positive forces, however short-lived or vacillating, in order to overcome weaknesses and to build

progressively greater movements. Ethnic and national problems must be solved by greater democracy, the right of self-determination and federal union.

The socialist vision must be renewed to expand the core anti-imperialist forces before the flow of anti-imperialist struggles rise into flood.

Fascism and India

When an analysis is made of the trajectory of India in the midst of the world crisis, we see a trend towards IMF-WB style restructuring and "opening up" during Indira Gandhi's second stint in power from 1980. Under Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership, a regime of reckless borrowing took place to finance luxury sector production. When the external creditors called, he was dead and the inheritors of the Gandhi family jumped wholeheartedly into the IMF-WB bandwagon to escape the consequences.

The revisionists and well-meaning liberals and social democrats have made much of a supposedly radical break in the Indian state's economic orientation. We do not see it. There may be differences in emphasis here and there, but the basic approach in action (rather than rhetorical and legal flourishes regarding socialism and land reforms) was and still is a dependence on imperialism for capital, technology and markets. The emphasis on heavy industry has been much exaggerated. In today's terms that translates to the need for physical infrastructure. Earlier, the state's direct intervention was called upon because of acute local capital shortages. Now, in the name of privatisation, the state is paying through the nose indirectly, through capital transfers at throw-away prices. It should not be forgotten that the earlier strategy was not only not opposed by the imperialists, but was positively rewarded by so-called aid. Pre-crisis imperialism was also able to make some concessions and did make them in the light of the cold war and the development of genuine socialism in China. That had changed radically by the eighties. Instead of caution, now there are the bullyboys of the IMF-WB dictating our policies from Delhi itself. The corporate raiders and the financial speculators are more blatant. The terms of trade are extremely adverse and are getting worse. The same leaders now merely look more naked.

The compradors are now looking more like puppets, but is there a basic difference? The fact is clear that if you chemicalise agriculture rather than go through a thorough land reform, if you neglect elementary education, healthcare and social security, if you push more than half of your population to near starvation levels, if you scoop up all savings to serve a handful of bureaucratic bourgeoisie with long feudal and mercantile tails, if you pamper the landlords while squeezing the agrarian capitalists and peasants by extracting a huge tribute through adverse terms of trade, if you refuse to do away with the main feudal institutions of caste and other loci of extra-economic coercion in an ancient land, then any development will be dependent upon imperialism and that dependence will further exacerbate your internal contradictions in a spiral of deeper dependence. When Sonia Gandhi or Manmohan Singh claim the Nehruvian mantle, it is they who are right and not the others who criticise the present in terms of the "good old days" which ended for some in 1975 and for others a little earlier.

But of course there has been a difference. But that is an external factor working itself out internally. During the cold war, the Indian ruling classes could bargain with both the imperialist camps for relatively substantial concessions. This was the era of the famous neutrality. With the final decimation of the USSR, a process that took a few years for completion, the Raos and the Singhs had very little by way of such bargaining power. The comprador character of the Indian big bourgeoisie went beyond debate in 1991.

What are the political consequences of the policy of "openness" and export-led growth since 1982? First and foremost, it was clear that the new economic policy was prepared for, and later sustained by Indira Gandhi's post-Emergency avatar, initiating an anti-minorities communalism. She and the Congress party gave a despicable communal turn to Indian politics from 1980 onwards by cultivating a Hindu-Hindi-Hindusthan constituency. The RSS could not miss noticing such a turn, because it was being assiduously courted. So it was no surprise that the RSS extended electoral support to Mrs. Gandhi in certain elections. Why? Why was Mrs. Gandhi and, later her son Rajiv Gandhi taking this road which has now brought communalism to the centre of the Indian scene? Part of the answer lies in the Congress party's very own ideology from the days of Mohandas Gandhi's ascendancy. Extreme centralism, the one-nation thesis, the Hindi chauvinism, the upper caste bias, etc. were all there from the pre-independence days. But these unsavoury items were rarely articulated in a comprehensive communalist position. This lack of articulation was an asset for the Congress for many years as it took advantage of the people's lack of experience with universal franchise to get votes and stay in power by pretending to be all things to all men while the upper caste-Hindu-Hindi ethos that was built into the political system continued its work quietly and efficiently. This process met its Waterloo when the Sangh Parivar stepped into the Mandal breach with a line that clearly articulated what the Congress used to keep silent about.

Another part of the answer lies in the diverse challenges to the ruling classes posed by a people who had emerged victorious after an eventful struggle against Emergency fascism. First of all the challenge was precisely from the minorities who were no longer ready to be treated in the manner prescribed by the state system in India. Insurgents in Kashmir, Punjab and the North East were defying the bullets. The Muslims were reacting furiously since the massacre at the Turkman Gate. Anti-minority policies could support the guns and the series of undemocratic laws repugnant to all human values. But these anti-minority policies could be even more useful in containing the greatest challenge to the system which came not from minorities hailing from social and geographical peripheries, viz. the challenge of the subaltern castes from the Hindi heartland and elsewhere. The demands of these subalterns stood some chances of being diverted to anti-minority pogroms as before, in the names of the Hindu religion.

Army, paramilitary and police raj has been too frequent during the long years of Congress rule to need enumeration. Large-scale challenges such as those which emerged in the aftermath of the Emergency and the brief Janata rule could be handled by the Congress in the only way it knows - massive repression. But the failure of the Emergency had taught Indira Gandhi and the Congress that India cannot be ruled by repression alone. She chose the communalist ideology in order to mobilise the overwhelming majority of Indians who are census Hindus (i.e. a diverse lot with rituals, practices and beliefs that are countless and contradictory) for a death dance of chauvinism and xenophobia. Unable to articulate the communalist ideology openly, Indira Gandhi worked through new and old organisations, such as the Viswa Hindu Parishad, to do the work of articulation, while she and the Congress government unleashed the armed forces (e.g., the PAC in UP) for frequent massacres on the Muslims. Soon the Congress would lose those articulating organisations to the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.

The appearance together of statist communalism and the economic turn towards a further and deeper integration into the imperialist division of labour was objectively necessary and subjectively assimilated by the shrewd lady and her ruling class advisors and patrons. The objective necessity is that, as we have shown above, imperialist capital travels massively towards those states which suppress their broad masses ruthlessly. Authoritarian regimes can push through anti-people policies that create and sustain cheap labour power directly and indirectly in conditions of stability that do not allow protests to crystallise into movements. Functionally the most effective form of such regimes is one in which repression can be backed by a hegemonic ideology such as xenophobia, communalism, racism etc. which thrive on various accretions of false consciousness. Mrs. Gandhi did not require a great deal of perspicacity to instigate communalism in order to set up a repressive regime conducive to her surrender to IMF-WB prescriptions.

The last two decades of ever-closer integration to the imperialist system has naturally fattened and strengthened the communalist monster. In the process the Congress has lost out to the more hard line Sangh Parivar. This loss began on a large scale during the anti-Mandal agitation by the upper castes when the Congress orchestrated the student and youth ruffians from behind the curtains, fearing a low caste voter backlash should it be exposed as the prime mover. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar, however, did not have any such qualms as they had never had a massive mandate that they could lose. In order to divert the anti-feudal tide demanding reservations, the Sangh Parivar raised the spectre of violent communalism by launching the Ram Rath. The blood of the innocents began to flow freely. This bloodletting is continuous at the grassroots, while the episodes of massive bloodletting on a country-wide scale are appearing more regularly.

The domestic reactionaries and their imperialist bosses are now trying to domesticate the communalist monster to turn fascist repression into a routine affair. This has become imperative to sustain the IMF-WB treatment for our poverty - deregulation of labour power, withdrawal of social security entitlements, shrinking of educational and healthcare facilities, privatisation of the lucrative state sector enterprises at throw away prices, increased military spending on hardware, full convertibility of the rupee, export of agricultural products at the cost of the food entitlements of the basic producers, withdrawal of most state controls over the financial sector and the handing over of the rest to the non-elected bureaucrats at the Reserve Bank who are well schooled by the IMF-WB and hugely amenable to multinational pressures, ad nauseam. But as the partial implementation of these policies bite into the people's lives, they have begun to protest in myriad ways. The bosses know that these protests are building up to an anarchy, as best exemplified by Bihar, that has far-reaching revolutionary potential. They are therefore moving swiftly into the fascistisation of the state.

These protests are most strikingly expressed by the wild fluctuations of the parliamentary barometer. The bourgeois pseudo-science of psephology has gone to town recently on the concept of the "incumbent factor" after the last general elections. Heavy losses were suffered by nearly all parties in the states where they were in power. According to psephology, being in power meant loss of votes, period. The conjunction of two factors on the surface of things satisfies a moribund bourgeoisie unable to look at a rigorous science of society with any sense of equanimity. But if one asks why and why now, then the conjunction becomes a mere datum requiring scientific activity. That scientific activity shows that while the incumbent parties lost in states of their incumbency, some of them, such as the Congress and BJP gained in others. For example, the Congress was routed in Orissa, but it gained significantly in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The BJP's case is also similar. Factors such as alliances, although important in themselves, cannot account for hazards of incumbency, because these alliances were in place more or less everywhere and according to political equations that were fairly homogenous throughout India. Incumbency was itself quite abstract and nebulous because it was hardly an electoral issue that seriously engaged the agency of the voters in a conscious way. But there is one common and latent factor which can explain the 'incumbency factor' quite adequately. Parties in power in the states, including CPI(M) ruled West Bengal, have been devastating the lives of the ordinary voters by implementing the IMF-WB policies, while the same parties elsewhere were not seen as the cause of the voters' miseries in the same immediate way. It was a question of sending a clear message: we do not like the policies in place and their consequences. The understanding from which this measure emerges may not have heard of the IMF-WB or become acquainted with the miracles of the market place. It certainly does not grasp, except among a minuscule vanguard, the class linkages and their international ramifications that has led the country and its people to the present dislocation of civil society and the crisis of subsistence. Consequently, it does not grasp the real political tasks beyond the hustings and the polling stations. But the last fifty years of universal franchise has given it the confidence to express its clout in no uncertain terms.

It is this clout, this determined resistance to the realities imposed upon the people's lives that has disintegrated the National Front, especially its main force, the Janata Dal (JD). The JD emerged and consolidated its position as a fairly united platform of the diverse social peripheries (SC, ST, OBC and minority groups) which make up the majority in India. It also managed to arouse sympathy and support among such groups whose various, complex situations did not permit a merger with it. Its call for social justice catapulted it to the national level as a leading force. Various federalising steps taken by its governments elicited support from the states and the regions. The Naga leadership, the one and only genuine movement for self-determination and secession in the Northeast under the leadership of Swu and Muviah, began serious negotiations with the JD government, but that government's record in Kashmir was dismal. But its quiet but firm attempt to lessen tensions in the region held out some hope of a negotiated settlement in Kashmir and it was generally welcomed by the progressive forces. Lessening of regional tensions and the first tentative steps towards some forms of cultural and economic integration that the JD undertook could have become a strong position from which the countries of the region could defend economic and political independence against the worst forms of imperialist arm-twisting. Above all, its clean secular credentials were an important component of resistance to the communal-fascist depredations. And yet this party has all but vanished. Many have seen this denouncement as the result of the malevolence of sectional and regional leaders of the party. While we do not deny that on the surface, this factor was extremely important, but then all the major parties suffer from such malevolence to the same or greater degree without disintegrating so swiftly. The JD cracked up basically because it could not stand up to the policies dictated by the IMF-WB mafia which were meant to and were hurting the very groups which rallied round it. The resistance from the latter, expressed in the form of extreme internal tensions, intensified all its other contradictions.

It is of course not the Janata Dal alone which is in crisis. The Congress, having been reduced to insignificance by the voters in the populous states of UP and Bihar, is also going through a process where it is no longer a hegemonic party and has to try and recoup through various alliances the vast territory it has lost. Large and influential factions of the party have already left to form new parties or join others. The need for alliances has pushed the Congress into a retreat from the combination of liberalisation and communalism initiated by Indira Gandhi. The party's latest policy conclave at Panchmarhi has already paid lip-service to a left-of-centre stance reminiscent of its good old days. The Congress party's innate anti-popular make-up lets it learn nothing and forget nothing, so this stance reduces to cosmetic changes which make it easier for the CPI(M) leaders to sell their cretinist package of pro-Congressism to their followers. "Left-of-centre" is at any rate quite meaningless when the so-called Left Front is hardly any different from the other parties in the implementation of economic and fiscal policies. Even a party such as the CPI(M) which is ideologically more coherent than the other ruling parties is now deeply divided vertically and across the country over policies and the divisions cannot any longer be continued within the disciplinary boundaries of undemocratic centralism. Open violence between party members is now quite common.

But the greatest achievement of persistent voter protest has been the total instability of the parliamentary system. Frequent fusion and fission of party fractions, in response to voting behaviour and in anticipation of rejection by numerically powerful groups that often express their interests with a vigour incommensurate with their economic power in the system, has become endemic. This people's resistance is the result of the intensification of the principal contradiction in India between the broad masses and the alliance of imperialism and the domestic reactionaries. Its greatest achievement so far has been the empowerment of a plurality interests, some of them reflecting working people's interests directly and many, as in cases of reservations and minority rights, represent working people's interests both directly and indirectly.

It is this instability that has driven the IMF-WB script into a stop-go process as parliamentary parties scamper to save their power bases in the face of people's protests. All the ruling parties are agreed on the TINA (there is no alternative) factor with regard to imperialist arm twisting, but the really qualitative steps such as full convertibility or opening up the whole of finances keep getting retracted or delayed as the pulse of the resistance quickens. This increases imperialist pressures and further aggravates instability.

The parliamentary system, the way we are ruled, is, therefore, in a profound crisis. The Indian people's resistance, within and outside the parliamentary system is making it very difficult to rule India in the old way, the way of the last fifty years. In spite of the great weaknesses and disunity of the mass movement, this is a tell-tale sign of a revolutionary situation. Given the world-wide crisis of the capitalist system, this situation is not going to recede. The revolutionary content of the situation will continue to mature. So will the mass movement, especially as the ruling classes and their imperialist bosses are forced to play the ace in the fascist-communalist pack.

The ruling classes have already launched a vigorous attack on the parliamentary system. They criticise and ridicule every parliamentary leader who commands the support of sections of the subaltern masses such as Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mayavati et al, while the alleged crimes they are accused of pale into insignificance when compared to the venality of the likes of Rajiv Gandhi, Narasimha Rao, Advani and company, Bal Thackeray etc. The bureaucrats of the Election Commission are racking their brains to evolve ways of saving the ruling class parties. The judiciary, one of the strongest bastions of casteism and shameless class bias, has become quite adept at usurping the sovereignty of parliament and diverting the self-activity of the masses into passivity. The bureaucracy is openly contemptuous of the parliamentary system. And now the ruling fascists have floated the Presidential system with a chorus of support from the dens of intellectual and moral perdition called the media. Some enthusiasts are even proposing military rule. One of the most effective

weapons against universal franchise and the parliamentary system is the presence of corruption and crime in the parliamentary system. Those who wield this weapon conveniently forget that corruption and crime have become endemic in every institution in India, touching every institution of the state and so-called non-governmental institutions. To single out the parliamentary institutions and keeping the others intact is to eliminate the one institution through which the people may get rid of what is precisely at their expense and not at the expense of all those who pretend to be ever so solicitous about the prevalence of it and are in fact the main culprits. If you want to eliminate corruption and the criminalisation of public life, you will have to deepen the processes set in motion by universal franchise by effective decentralisation to the grass roots and the establishment of the right of recall and referendum, recognised as matter of fact instruments in many democracies.

That means that what is required is more power to the people. But no one, especially those who are so agitated by corruption and crime, is interested in giving more power to the people. The proposals are always to eliminate that power as the Great Satan of public life. And that is the crux of the matter. The people's resistance to the semi-feudal power structures, to the communalist ethos, to the suppression of identities and to the depredations of finance capital must be silenced. If the people have spoken through parliament, get rid of parliament.

Like Hitler who emerged as the Chancellor of Germany from within the parliamentary system in order to devour it, the BJP's emergence at this juncture is no accident. The German big bourgeoisie, the Krupps, the Thyssens, et al all backed Hitler to suppress the great German proletariat just the Tatas and the Birlas are doing now about the proletariat and the peasantry of our country vis-a-vis the Sangh Parivar. The international financiers were happy then and they are happy now. Then there were the Hindenburgs, now there are the Fernandeses, the Badals and the other jackals.

The BJP's communal-fascists policies are well known and need no reiteration. Its own versions of the Brown shirts and the Black shirts - the Bajrangs, the VHP, the RSS and the fraters such the various Shiv Senas - are doing their incendiary work at the grassroots (places where the national press does not reach) while building up to some Indian version of the Reichstag fire such as building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. They cannot forget that they owe their present rise precisely to such a conflagration.

What happened at Pokhran was a conflagration of a different sort, but the intention was the same - the consolidation of BJP rule. In analysing the Pokhran blasts one should be very clear that, by provoking the Kahuta explosions, these nuclear blasts have converted the Indian expansionists' clear-cut strategic superiority over Pakistan into a strategic parity. Pakistan had never been able to match India's air, naval and land forces or even come close in spite of spending a far greater share of GDP on defence than India. The government's clutch of warmongers who call themselves strategic analysts (with a curious preponderance of Southern Brahmins) could not have known of this inevitable consequence, even if the likes of George Fernandes, the defence minister, no less, are quite oblivious to such details and sing hallelujah (sorry, Haribol) to the Bajrang and Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) chorus. It is certain that the BJP government exploded the bombs at Pokhran for reasons which have nothing to do with military or defence strategies. Then, what were the actual considerations?

First, the criminals and fanatics who man - "man" is the right for the misogynist Hindu fanatic - the Parivar's increasingly ramified organisational networks were becoming increasingly restless. The power these fanatics had wrested for the operators in Delhi by wading through a sea of innocent blood was not turning back in gratitude to implement their extremist slogans. The leaders can be said to have faced a crisis of expectations, with the Bajrangs staging riots and the VHP calling for the immediate building of the Temple etc. as a backdrop to the crisis. But the politics of the coalition government has restrained the leaders' options. The bomb blasts came in handy as a temporary measure to quell serious internal unrest by displaying the external face of communalism, baiting Pakistan in season and out, in all its splendourous xenophobia.

The second reason is more complex. The BJP is fairly new as a ruling party and its rise to power has been swift enough to leave it in an extremely heterogeneous condition. As a party of the status quo, it has to establish its credentials with the domestic reactionaries and their imperialist bosses. The ruling factions of the BJP have already established their comprador credentials by the traitorous Enron deal, the surrender before the Suzuki samurais, the promise to open up insurance and the rest of the financial sector, the anti-people, pro-finance capital budget for 1998-99, etc. But a prominent part of the BJP's ideological baggage is an atavistic swadeshi which could not possibly go down well in corporate boardrooms across the world. But the swadeshi faction, led by powerful figures such as Murli Manohar Joshi who could not care less about swadeshi but who use it for their power games within the parivar, cannot be jettisoned immediately, especially with an unstable government and a motley crowd for a party. Hitler had similar problems with the Brown Shirts who played more on the socialist keys than on the nationalist ones in the National Socialist credo. Vajpayee, Advani and company are clearly not in the position of Hitler who simply annihilated the Brown Shirts. But the agenda for a full and unequivocal surrender to imperialism was pressing relentlessly in the economic front and on the question of signing the CTBT, that charter of near-colonial subjection which allows the imperialists the freedom to reduce any non-nuclear signatory to the condition of Iraq since the Gulf war. The Narasimha Rao government had also prepared to explode nuclear bombs at Pokhran, but the US imperialists threatened dire sanctions on receiving prior information through the CIA, so the BJP government clearly knew that it would attract sanctions after Pokhran. But it attracted them and is using them to surrender on the CTBT and on economic issues across the board. It is therefore clear that the blasts were designed by the BJP to kill two birds with one stone: surrender to imperialism and at the same time to placate the swadeshis and all patriotic Indians with ultra-nationalist patter

about India's self-sufficiency, scientific prowess and self-respect! As in all desperate measures of political survival, patriotic Indian people have seen through the BJP game, even if their own swadeshis have been silenced.

The Indian people's reaction to the blasts, especially after those at Kahuta, has been cold. There never was that universal warmth which could have put a charismatic halo on Vajpayee to make him into another national icon of the Indira variety. So he failed to go the Indira way of propping up his tenuous hold on power by declaring Emergency rule. That option would now appear closed as the immediate fall out of nuclear bomb. Authoritarian rule and the total fascistisation of the state must now emerge from non-nuclear issues such as the stepping-up of conventional war across the LOC or the Siachen glacier or in Kashmir, or more likely, in view of the US imperialists' insistence on a US-brokered and US-monitored normalisation between India and Pakistan which will make the US the geopolitical boss of both countries, it will emerge from another round of genocide for the minorities.

The comprador credentials of the BJP are firming up quite well. The Tatas are betting on the BJP heavily in Jharkhand Bihar and they have developed quite an enthusiasm for the moth-eaten Jharkhand that is on sale as Vananchal. Relatively sidelined in the political arena since the days of Indira Gandhi, the Tatas, especially their mouthpiece, The Statesman, are almost unable to contain themselves on occupying a place in the political sun. Except for some pretentious sermons on secularism and democracy in The Statesman, the contradiction between the Tatas' Parsee minorityism and Hindutva seems of no consequence. The Birlas who have carried the Hindi-Hindu-Hindusthan flame since way back in the twenties are of course delighted to be in the Sangh stable, especially when they have financed the worthies of that Parivar over many years, even when they themselves were firmly with Indira Gandhi. These two houses and their associates have carried off ASSOCHAM and FICCI into a business-as-usual attitude towards the BJP. The bureaucratic networks which control land use and all outputs and inputs in agriculture and the traditional, feudal landlords who are overwhelmingly from the upper castes cannot seem to contain themselves at the rise of the BJP. The largest chunk of the middle classes are also from the same background. These white collar professionals, traders, petty businessmen, etc. hog education and jobs and presently dream of a pale version of metropolitan lifestyles as seen on satellite TV which they sit glued to as the essential admiss. They are mostly with the BJP in the Hindi heartland and are moving strongly towards that party elsewhere, especially in West Bengal and the Bengali diaspora. This class wants reservations scrapped, the lower castes and the Muslim "put in their place", and while not all of it would like to see the domination of Hindi, unlike the Tamil Brahmins who react to a lower caste-led vernacularisation of the Tamil vocabulary by rooting for Hindi, most of it is strong on "national unity and integrity", the poisonous Congress and revisionist line of chauvinism and ethnic suppression now come home to roost in the BJP parivar.

This is indeed a strong internal position. The external environment could not be better for fascism in India. India has a significant market, at least potentially. Its major parties are willing to implement the IMF-WB and the WTO packages in its entirety. But the Indian people are resisting, primarily through parliamentary elections but not eschewing various human rights platforms, public interest litigations, and pocket-wise armed resistance at various levels of consciousness. This has repeatedly stalled the implementation of the whole policy package demanded by the imperialists. Fascist suppression by doing away with the launching pads of protest such as universal franchise, human rights institutions, a fairly free press and a well-established right of association, could open up a potentially very large economy at a time when markets are collapsing all over the world at an alarming rate for the finance capitalists. India, tailored by the IMF-WB designers, will not be just admissible to the party, but could become the centre of attraction for the corporate beaux, another China not teetering on the brink. The CEOs of the multinationals could then temporarily set aside their Confucian texts and start thumbing through Vedic mathematics.

Every democratic and patriotic Indian should stand alarmed at this developing objective situation. But even more alarming is the thoroughness with which the Sangh Parivar has infiltrated every civil and political institution. Its despicable ideology is now clearly, shamelessly and confidently articulated by the press, the other media, academic institutions, and government organisations. The RSS has been relentless since its inception and it has patiently and logically worked for the organisation required to crown its pathological ideology with political power. This is more than can be said for Hitler's Nazis even though they had the support and organisational backing from people like Heidegger, now touted by the lunatic fringe of the bourgeoisie, the post-modernists, as the Great Icon. It is this combination of an excellent objective situation for fascism and the all-round subjective advance of the fascists that makes fascism the main enemy of the Indian people at the present time. The alliance of imperialism and feudalism is now sharply focused around the fascist danger.

The Fight against Fascism

The BJP's rise to the position as the major party in government gives the exact measure of the strength of fascism today. This party does not yet have an absolute majority in parliament, although its numbers in that body is on a rising incline. Coalition government has forced it so far to act more or less within the parliamentary norms, but its basic election manifesto contains enough incendiary material to set India on fire, a fire that could become as far reaching as the Reichstag fire, given India's strategic position and the ruling party's attempt to cosy up to the Israelis and to resume partially the role of the British Army as the "peacemaker of the region between the Straits of Malacca to Aden". The ideological moorings of the BJP manifesto lie in the rabidity of the

VHP sadhus, the manic violence of the Bajrangs, the US far-Right pickings garnered and Hinduised by the Swapan Dasguptas and the Arun Shouries and the vicious inner core of the RSS doctrines. These are enough to ignite communal conflagrations and aggressive wars.

The major manifesto items that threaten federalism, secularism and growing empowerment of the people have been noted by various people and parties. They are: 1) The abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution; 2) The promulgation of a uniform civil code; 3) The building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya; and, 4) The proposal to amend the Constitution.

Not much is left to Article 370 after the Congress began to amputate it after the arrest and long incarceration of Sheikh Abdullah. The ground reality in Indian-occupied Kashmir is that it is precisely that. So the debate over Article 370 is basically infructuous. The BJP's desire to abrogate it is only a strong signal that it will continue the massacre of Kashmiris on a large scale and will not concede to the Kashmiri nation any form of self-determination. The path of bi-lateral negotiations between India and the Kashmiris is barred.

The demand for a uniform civil code and the temple at Ayodhya require no analysis further from what we and like-minded people have stated elsewhere. Terrorisation of the Muslims is the sole purpose behind these demands.

The shape of constitutional changes that the BJP wants is now more than clear. Vajpayee has been floating and his media-savvy minions are arguing that the parliamentary system must be replaced by the presidential system. The operative part of this fundamental policy thrust is not the presidential system but the dissolution of the parliamentary system. We know that the RSS argues openly for the authoritarian state and would like to have a government, if presidential in form, which will be very much like what Suharto created after killing millions of innocent people. But that can wait. The need of the moment is to get rid of the parliamentary system through which the Indian people have learnt and are learning to express their diversities and their resistance to anti-people policies.

It is true that the pressures of coalition government has forced the BJP to remove these obnoxious manifesto items from the programme of the government it leads, but BJP leaders and potentates are adamantly sticking to them as the foundation of their party's policies.

The sum of these policies is precisely to dismantle the Indian bourgeois democratic framework that sits contradictorily on a semi-feudal, semi-colonial reality and to turn India into a fascist-communal political system more in tune with that reality and designed for its vicious perpetuation.

Some people and organisations believe that the contradictory co-existence of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society with a bourgeois democratic framework is a myth with no foundation whatsoever. A bourgeois democratic framework is impossible, according to these revolutionaries, when the bourgeois democratic revolution is awaited. We believe they are wrong. The concrete context within which the parliamentary system under universal franchise became a constitutional fact (1950) was anti-imperialist upsurges (throughout the early and middle forties), partition and a massive uprooting of people, a war with Pakistan, people's insurrectionary movements such as at Telangana and in the Tebhaga movement and a storm of anti-government upsurges in a country which is as diverse as India. For the ruling classes, this was a chaotic situation fraught with revolutionary potential that had to be scotched. The ruling classes deemed that concessions to the masses were necessary to do that. The earlier commitments of the "national" leaders to democratic rule after the transfer of power was also an important factor, given that a retreat from those commitments could have inflamed the mass movement. Universal franchise legitimised the new regime to a very large extent and created, among other factors, the conditions for relative stability over the long term, 1951 to 1966. It is because of such concrete conditions which give rise to historical zigzags, leaps, resistances, concessions etc. that original situations emerge in history. To deny such emergence on the basis of conceptual deductions from theory, howsoever correct, is to abandon dialectics. To miss the tension between the underlying social reality and the historically evolved political forms is to leave one open to both rightist and leftist errors. The right abandoned itself to parliamentary cretinism while the left fell into the trap of a mindless boycottism.

It is an entirely different matter that the parliamentary system in India has subverted the genuine interest of the people. But that is what bourgeois parliaments do in the most bourgeois of nations, nations that have gone through textbook examples of armed revolutions. Lenin knew that and still thought it mandatory to participate in bourgeois parliaments except when "insurrection is on the order of the day".

Participation is mandatory because it is advantageous to the development of the class struggle. Fascist conditions remove those advantages and create infinitely more difficult circumstances for the development of the mass political struggle. That is why it is necessary to draw a line between class dictatorships that follow the parliamentary path and those that are openly fascist. The Comintern began with an absolutely wrong policy on this question. Mussolini had come to power in 1922 and he had more or less completed the fascistisation of the state by 1926, prohibiting all political parties other than his own and resorting to an openly terrorist government. But even in 1931, two years before Hitler seized power, the Comintern refused to draw the line between fascism and bourgeois democracy, between the parliamentary form of bourgeois dictatorship and its openly fascist form. The purpose of drawing such a line is to isolate the fascists as the main enemy and to unite with all forces opposed to them. But on the question of such unity, the Comintern's sectarianism was such that even in 1928 it was branding the social democrats (with considerable working class following) as social fascists, while many of those social fascists were languishing in Mussolini's jails as members of proscribed parties. Only after 1933, the year Hitler came to power, did the Comintern revise its policy towards the social democrats by

asking the member parties to negotiate with the leaders of social democracy for joint, anti-fascist action. The way was now clear for Dimitrov (1935) to conceptualise the broadest united front which would include, not just social democrats, but all positive forces in the anti-fascist struggle. Lucidly and purposively, Dimitrov had drawn the line between bourgeois democracy and fascism. The foremost historical lesson that communists must learn from this episode in our history is that it is better to take up policies that prevent the rise of fascism than to try and oust it once it has gained the advantage of possessing state power. The correct united front may come too late.

The time has come in our country to draw this line in view of the rise of communal fascism in the shape of the Sangh Parivar. Drawing that line and getting down to the work of building the united front requires revolutionary vigilance in order to avoid tailism.

This question of tailism is extremely important. An example of it is there right in front of our eyes in the shape of the CPI(M) leadership: this leadership has clearly seen the danger of fascism emanating from the Sangh Parivar, but its approach to the United front is confined to giving Sonia Gandhi and the Congress a *carte blanche*. It cannot and will not step out of the parliamentary cretinist framework and is trying pathetically to induce Sonia Gandhi to engineer defections from the BJP coalition in order to form a government which the CPI(M) and the left Front will support. This is tantamount to asking the working and oppressed people of India to support both imperialism and communalism. Congress was the party to give the first run to fascism during the Emergency and it is the Congress which brought the two main ingredients of fascism on the country-wide stage - upper casteist communalism and complete surrender to imperialism. It is another matter that it has been pre-empted on both communalism and imperialism by the Sangh Parivar. It is now trying to retreat from the consequences of its own policies, but most of that lies in an obscene desire for power and pelf. Its traditions and instincts are against a successful retreat. An unsuccessful retreat will mean further disintegration and that is the most likely outcome. If it does not retreat, it will have to outbid the BJP (without or, again, with the support of the RSS) to become the main fascist force. But if circumstances force it to retreat and it still counts as a party with a substantial hold on forces that may be utilised for the battle against fascism, then as fascistisation deepens, the anti-fascist forces will have time enough to assess the situation and if it is favourable to the struggle at that time, joint action with even the Congress may be visualised, provided that that party is forced to overcome its hegemonic practices. The key word here is 'circumstances' and those circumstances are not created by tailing after the Congress. They are created by mobilising the people for vibrant movements against their main enemy, but the CPI(M), the main social democratic party in India, cannot envisage anything beyond the arithmetic of parliamentary seats.

The work of building the anti-fascist front must begin, for us, at the level of a concerted struggle to unite all communist revolutionaries on an anti-fascist programme of joint activities. Right now, the communist revolutionaries lead relatively small forces, but they hold the potential of developing into the core of an anti-fascist front. But it is not easy to unite them. Many of them will be outraged at the idea that the parliamentary system should be defended at all, even against the fascist hordes. Others will continue to assimilate both the fascist and parliamentary systems of the bourgeois (and their allies') dictatorship. Many of these people and still others believe that the united front can be built only after base (red) areas have appeared. These various views, Left in appearance, but Right in essence, often go with a sectarianism that is as opportunistic as the Brahminical sense of purity-pollution. There are still others who have leaned dangerously into parliamentary opportunism and the negligible successes they have had seem to have inflated their egos into proportions adequate to their petty bourgeois posturing.

But unite they must and our party should concentrate a great deal of its energies to bring that about. The methodology should be to prepare a list of issues on which a more or less common set of demands exist. All the communist revolutionaries should then be approached with it, adding, subtracting and modifying it as opinions crystallise. Given the dismal record of previous efforts towards unified action, this process should be undertaken by all in a spirit of keeping present differences on hold, for later resolution. While common actions emerge, wider discussions on political approach could take place to better integrate the actions organisationally.

Given the development of joint communist revolutionary action on common issues, the problem will arise regarding those communist revolutionaries who will follow their own understanding to participate in joint actions on other fronts that are socially and politically broader than is agreed upon among the communist revolutionaries. This is a complex issue but our general stand is that it is undemocratic and counter-productive to insist on imposing limits on other organisations as a price for joint actions. Such insistence, especially when common activities are at their initial stages, will spell the doom of a common communist revolutionary effort against the clear and present danger of fascism.

As far as our party is concerned, we will continue to work as relentlessly as we have done over the years to unite the communist revolutionaries in joint activities. But we insist on the independence of any initiative we might take up to have joint actions with anti-fascist forces that are not revolutionary or, as during moments of extreme crisis such as a communal holocaust, the threat of aggressive war by India or on India by the world gendarmes in the US or their proxies or the promulgation of Emergency, to take a few examples, with even reactionary forces which emerge at these moments as helpful to the anti-fascist struggle.

With the CPI(M) and the other revisionist parties such as the CPI, the RSP, the FB, the SUCI, joint anti-fascist activities should take place. But this presents problems. SUCI apart, all these parties belong to the ruling

Left Front which has capitulated to IMF-WB policies to a very large extent and has thus alienated itself from the basic masses quite considerably. Wherever it has ruled, this Front has a record of bureaucratic or authoritarian suppression of dissent. At the same time, however, it still attracts many positive forces thrown up by the great awakening of the peasantry in West Bengal that began with Naxalbari and continued through the land grab movement into the Left front's Operation Barga. It has therefore been very effective in thwarting a new democratic thrust to that awakening. The Panchayati Raj initiatives of this Front has not allowed the Panchayats to develop into anything more than as delivery points for bureaucratic planning. In the process, they have become corrupt, quite inevitably. But even this tiny involvement with self-governance has given the poor in the countryside a measure of their power and a movement for greater power to the grassroots is gestating well in the countryside. The CPI(M)'s centralist and sectarian ideology is now coming into a sharp contradiction with that movement for more power to the people. The working class in West Bengal and elsewhere who have upheld the banner of opposing wage slavery have been, in overwhelming numbers, with the Left Front parties. The capitulation of these parties to the IMF-WB policies coupled with their sectarian and strong-arm methods has disillusioned many into passivity while a large chunk of unemployed and destitute workers, along with a growing number of employed ones, are becoming a volatile mass that shows definite tendencies towards becoming cannon fodder for the fascists and the proto-fascists such as Mamata Banerjee. But the fact, and this is the most important fact regarding the development of a strong anti-fascist movement, is that the overwhelming majority of leftist workers, peasants and intellectuals are still within organisations run by these Left Front parties and not many of them are about to see the communist revolutionaries as viable alternatives, even though their respect for the latter is often expressed. In short, these Left Front parties are now occupying a social democratic space similar to the one occupied by the social democrats in Europe during the rise of fascism. The communist revolutionaries must interact with this mass in common anti-fascist programmes. If necessary, this might require negotiations with their leaders, but this is not easy. The sectarian CPI(M) leadership keeps its partners on a tight leash, making it difficult for them to participate independently in joint activities with communist revolutionaries, especially where their Front is in government. This leadership has a bias towards snuffing out any independence not only within the Left Front but also within any and all forces with which it interacts. To succumb to this type of sectarianism and hegemonism or even to tolerate it is to surrender the struggles of the people to the whims of the revisionists. The CPI(M) leadership has of late shown some signs of an opening towards communist revolutionaries in West Bengal and some other states, being quite unnerved by the progress made by Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and the BJP on a country-wide scale. That opening should be used with caution, while realising that the CPI(M)'s anxieties are still more or less centred on the electoral process and majorities for governance in their pockets. While the economic and political crisis deepens, many urgent problems will emerge, such as the ones mentioned earlier or others such as the signing of the CTBT, use of Article 356, etc., which the communist revolutionaries should utilise to hold the CPI(M) to its opening up and approach the problems with a desire for joint action. If joint actions are denied, then that should be used for exposure campaigns among the CPI(M) followers. If the communist revolutionaries maintain their political independence then they have nothing to lose. In fact, it is this fact which has always given the CPI(M)'s leadership pause.

Another large chunk of the working masses are now with various political and social organizations that oppose the Sangh Parivar, but basically on two points only, viz., communalism and upper caste hegemonism. The Loktantrik Morcha of the Ganga valley is one such organisation. There are many others, all of them not necessarily organised as parliamentary formations. All these organisations have together penetrated deeply into the lives and aspirations of the oppressed identities that represent the base of the Indian social pyramid. To the extent they are represented in the parliamentary arena, these groups have been opposing the Sangh Parivar quite effectively. Outside that arena, their mass mobilisations and various important struggles have been quite impressive. But their challenge to the old order is confined solely to the feudal institutions, lacking any perspective on imperialism or its vital relation to those very institutions. And yet their struggle is objectively anti-imperialist and joint actions with them on the anti-fascist front should be mandatory. Apart from their anti-fascist efficacy, the joint struggles will help in developing a deeper consciousness among the masses belonging to such organisations.

Corruption, opportunism and criminalisation are rampant among the leaders of these organisations. The upper caste bias of the media in India is most clearly seen in the continuous demonisation of such leaders in it. But the legions of leaders belonging to the Congress, the BJP, the Shiv Sena, etc. who display such characteristics in far more organised and vicious ways get off lightly. This can be seen if one compares the treatment of Laloo Yadav and Jagannath Mishra in the media. This is not unexpected precisely because of the objectively progressive results that emanate from the political activities and policies of the leaders of these subaltern organisations. While we will not support or condone the wrong doings of such leaders, we cannot and will not join the forces of fascism and the status quo to destroy them and their organisations. Their destruction will come when the masses they lead gain in self-awareness and confidence. The communists must work with the masses to that end.

Another anti-fascist force that has emerged consists of groups with a narrow focus on a single or a few issues. The women's organisations, the environmentalists, the human rights groups, various cultural groups and other people's organisations constitute this force. Most of these groups are very open to joint anti-fascist activities and some of the best anti-imperialist fact-sheets, analyses and agitations have come out of these groups. Many of these groups are however tinged with NGOism, to coin a word, and some are compromised by foreign money. Revolutionaries must tread with caution in this territory.

Unlike the many communist revolutionaries, we have not fallen to our knees every time some nationality or ethnic group has uttered the word 'secession'. We have discussed elsewhere the issues arising out of the demand for secession. It is sufficient here to say that we support the demand for secession by the Nagas and the Kashmiris, while demanding a "multi-layered system of autonomy" within a confederal structure for other identities to fulfil their desire for self-respect and self-determination. In a clever set of moves reminiscent of the South African apartheid regime's concessions to the great Zulu nation in order to create a contradiction between it and the majority Xhosa nation, the tilak and sacred thread fascists are trying to co-opt the Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttarakhand movements. To a certain extent and for a short period of time, the opportunist leaders of these movements will collude with the fascists, but the movements are bound to break loose from the fascist yoke sooner or later. Moreover, the fascists, in conceding these regional demands, will help stoke the fire of regional autonomy in myriad other regions, giving rise to contradictions that cannot be contained within the present system. Basically, the identity struggles are anti-fascist in their objective configuration and joint activities with their organised forces will give a new dimension to the anti-fascist struggles.

Conclusions

World capitalism's crisis is deepening every day. All its intellectual hirelings have exhausted their work of overcoming the crisis without being able to stop the slide to the cataclysmic events that have already overtaken many countries and continents, Japan, South East Asia, Russia, the whole of Africa and Latin America being the most prominent. But the rest of the world is only a step away and the whole system is threatened by collapse and untold misery.

Ideologically, this has meant the beginning of another massive retreat for the bourgeoisie and the beginning of a renaissance of Marxism which is overcoming the errors committed during this century of struggles. Communists must build upon these new developments the theoretical paradigms that are necessary to establish socialism as the hegemonic idea throughout society. But that theory must follow upon arduous struggles by the proletarians and the oppressed peoples in a joint adventure of the masses. Without practically posing the issue of socialism, the imperialist system, howsoever deep its crisis, cannot be superseded or destroyed.

Politically, imperialism is now forced to abandon democratic or human rights norms in the periphery. If the crisis continues, media manipulations of a contrived consensus in the metropolitan countries will break down and authoritarian solutions will appear there too. In our country, the package of policies laid down by the imperialists is well on course to produce communal fascism. The Indian people, in full consciousness or merely in an objective way, have opposed this fascist development. But that opposition requires greater awareness and a deep organizational effort. These can be achieved through the formative processes of a broad anti-fascist front. Such a front will build and broaden the struggle against the long established (colonial and semi-colonial) alliance between the domestic reactionaries and imperialism.

Building the United Front Against Fascism Is the Order of the Day!
Down with imperialism and its Fascist Allies!

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