

## Lost in the Middle

It doesn't matter whether they call it Left Front or Left Democratic Front. It's neither left nor democratic. Right now it stands for reaction, and it stands for self-destruction as well. Essentially it is a CPM-led front having little relevance to class-alliance strategy that serves as a bulwark in any revolutionary transformation of society in a backward country like India. Everything people have so far been told about left, rather communist left, is wrong. They are a failure. They offer no radical solution to the perennial crisis situation people are being forced to live in. They look very reluctant to do what is necessary. They never talk of how to stimulate India's fragile economy, promote sustainable development, address poverty and tackle global warming. These issues are not on their agenda. Instead they support obnoxious policies created by deregulation that rewards corporate tycoons and burdens consumers, free trade that shamelessly favours multi-national corporations over workers and indigenous communities, and business as usual responses to extreme poverty and environmental degradation. Today they appear as a bigger problem which the wretched want to get rid of by any means—ballot or bullet. They—the so-called red—symbolise the continuation of the unjust system that has robbed so many millions of the chance for a decent and normal life. They are no socialist. Nor do they feel proud of being called communist anymore. They are all status quoists, trying hard to save the “cult of the market”. They have imposed restrictions on dissent so wide-ranging in their spheres of governance that even civil liberties activists and liberal intellectuals are being termed as terrorists or Maoists.

If the results of numerous by-polls in Bengal and Kerala are any indication, they are virtually on the run. They simply do not know how to cope with the growing demands for a leap from the rhetoric of change to the ground reality. The decline of the official left seems irreversible because they are not interested in championing their ideological superiority. They are no longer interested in fighting power that breeds social inequality and continually widens the gap between rich and poor. They talk of democracy that perpetuates systematic exploitation, oppression and marginalisation of the voiceless. They encourage police brutality in the name of combating Maoism, they execute partisan violence with a vengeance to silence political opponents. What is more in a way they are instrumental in criminalising the youth in a hopeless atmosphere marked by profound antagonistic contradictions. All they are asking for is a safe place in the heaven called parliament. They cannot hear the people's voice because they have already sold their leftist souls.

In many ways anti-left wave as it is surging in recent months resembles East European scenario. People celebrated the fall of communist regimes one after another while demolishing the symbols of communist authoritarianism with anger and hatred. Every electoral defeat, local or national, of the left, in India is being greeted by the very people who are supposed to be their constituency. They have not learnt any lesson from the European communist movement. Gone are the days of Euro-communism. The mighty communist parties of Europe that once influenced the communist international, at best invoke academic interest

these days. They are dead—and resurrection seems impossible. The communist left in India is likely to go the European way to the dustbin of history.

Too much dependence on legalism and useless debate in parliament while occasionally resorting to one country-wide labour strike or two in a year, almost as a ritual is just not enough to sustain a radical movement, not to speak of radical change. Out of frustration and desperation there emerged even in Europe armed guerilla bands but that too failed as the Red Brigade of Italy generated sensation at the initial stage only to be crushed by the brute security establishment in a short time. Isolated armed actions and taking hostage in European theatre proved futile, if not suicidal.

The point is the communist parties of Europe destroyed themselves by totally alienating from the working masses and became irrelevant in political arena even before the super power Soviet Union collapsed like a pack of cards.

Encouraged by the limited parliamentary success of some European communist parties, particularly in France and Italy, in the fifties and sixties communists in India, abandoned the hazardous and laborious path of mass mobilisation, leaving mass political space to the right-wingers.

Whether they like it or not, changes are coming, may be for the worse. They take shape outside, in the streets, in the jungles, where the victims of the race to the bottom are fighting for survival. □□□