NOTE

Required: New Left Thinking

Bharat Jhunjhunwala writes:

IRRESPECTIVE OF THE PEOPLE'S verdict in the recently held electionsin Bengal and Kerala it is quite logical to hold that the world has changed in fundamental ways and Left theory needs to be revised. Left is the only political formation that is still primarily committed to further the interests of the poor. Congress and BJP only deceive the poor. But the Left thinking has become rigid and the Left is losing its relevance.

Left theory holds that welfare of the poor cannot be secured within the capitalist system. The businessman establishes a factory to earn profit. He tries to reduce the wages in order to increase the profits. Wages of workers decline as competition becomes intense and businessmen try to survive. Karl Marx called this 'immiserization' of the working class. This decline in wages leads to the reduction of demand for goods in the market. On the other hand, use of machines leads to increase in production. As a result there arises an imbalance between demand and supply in the market. Goods are produced but remain unsold on the shelves of the shops. This leads to economic recession.

But one doesn't see, such recession today, however. Economic growth rate is strong in China, India and other developing countries like Brazil and South Korea. Reason is the wages of the workers are rising within the capitalist system. Salaries of the middle class are rising fast because of demand for their skills such as in call centers. Those of the organized workers are rising because of protection provided to the workers through the Trade Union and other laws. Wages of the farm workers are rising because of Employment Guarantee Scheme. Politicians have learnt the lesson from the Russian and Chinese revolutions. They understand the entire system may be destroyed and they may lose their power if the poor are 'over-exploited' and pushed to revolt. It is also necessary to increase the purchasing power of the people in order to sell their goods. Thus the very reason for the poor to revolt against the system is being eliminated at its roots. Marx had said that "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains." Not so the workers of the present times. They have their refrigerators and scooters to lose.

The number of organized workers in the country was 236 lacs in 1997. It has become 214 lacs in 2005. About 22 lac lobs have been lost in the period that the growth rate increased from about 5 percent to 8 percent. Increase in production and decline in employment are going hand-in-hand. But the Left parties continue to glorify job-eating production in modern factories.

Also, Left ideology considers the government to be the center of society. They believe that the capitalist government promotes the interests of capitalists. Similarly, the people's government will promote the interests of the people. The government continues to be the center around which the society revolves. But the experience of Russia and China establishes that the basic character of government is exploitative and anti-people. The 'Glasnost' launched by Gorbachev was designed to cut the power of the corrupt government. Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution to cut the tyranny of the bureaucracy. Sociologist Max Weber has said forcefully that the government servants owe allegiance only to themselves. Hegel also said that the middle class appropriates facilities of the society for itself. Manu Smriti says that "Government servants are mostly engaged in taking the wealth of others." One of the key reasons for the decline in popularity of the Left parties in Bengal and Kerala is rampant corruption in which the party functionaries are engaged.

Unfortunately, the Left theory continues to eulogize the government as the protector of people despite all this evidence.

The country needs a party that fundamentally seeks welfare of the people. Roots of the Left ideology are rooted in people's welfare. The Left parties must revise their thinking in keeping with these changes in the human experience. □□□