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Central Committee Office

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Report On Political Developments

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International

The Central Committee is meeting three months after the Bangalore meeting held in May 2002. The political report adopted in Bangalore had dealt with the major international developments since the 17th Congress of the Party. The report had noted Israel's war against the Palestinian people, the various aggressive steps being taken by the United States, the conspiracy to topple President Chavez in Venezuela and the successful resistance to it and the developments in South Asia.

The current report focuses only on some major events in the last three months.

US Threat of War On Iraq

We had noted earlier that the United States has embarked on a more brazen phase of aggression after the September 11 events. The way US imperialism is now targeting Iraq illustrates this clearly. The United States is preparing to launch another war against Iraq. This time President Bush has himself arrogantly declared, the aim is to topple Saddam Hussein from power and institute a "regime change". There is no pretence of any threat to US security interests. After more than a decade of economic embargo, repeated aerial assaults and inspections by UN weapons inspectors, the United States has run out of pretexts for invading a sovereign country. It has once again raised the bogey of Iraq making weapons of mass destruction. But in the present world climate, President Bush and the ruling circles in the US are arrogantly going about their plans to launch a military aggression.

But the situation however is different from the time of the US-led war against Iraq in 1991 after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. At the time most of the Arab countries were against Iraq and Iraq's occupation of Kuwait had alienated world opinion. At present, all the Arab countries are against any attack on Iraq. Even

the pro-US regimes like Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are asking the US not to launch a military attack but solve the problem through other means. Except for Britain, the major European countries are against any military intervention. The German Chancellor, Schroeder, has announced that Germany will not participate in the war. Even in Britain, a big section of the Labour Party and a majority of the people are against Blair's support for the US stand. Russia has also announced its opposition to a military attack on Iraq.

In this context, China and Russia have presented an alternative framework for security and countering terrorism. The joint communique issued after a meeting of the Prime Ministers of the two countries stated that any anti-terrorist strikes should be undertaken only on the basis of international law and observance of the UN charter.

In such a situation, there is a serious debate going on within the US ruling circles. One section including some in the Republican Party, is advising restraint on the part of Bush, asking him to gather more allies before launching a war. A more vocal section is pressing for an immediate attack. The Bush administration convened a meeting of so-called Iraqi opposition leaders in Washington. There are reports that military material and equipment are already being shifted to the Gulf region. The US has also advised friendly countries to stockpile petroleum products anticipating a disruption in oil supplies.

The Iraqi government has stated its willingness to continue the negotiations with the United Nations regarding UN inspectors in the country and demanded that the question of ending the sanctions against Iraq must also be taken up.

With the talk of war, the prices of oil in the world market have already risen to nearly \$ 30 per barrel . A full-fledged military attack on Iraq will mean enormous civilian casualties and largescale destruction in the country.

It is important that worldwide opposition be built against the US plans for war. In India, neither the Prime Minister nor the external affairs minister has made a statement expressing India's opposition to the US war plans. Only the external affairs spokesperson made a statement that India wants Iraq's national sovereignty respected. India is getting oil supplies from Iraq. Further, there are a large number of Indians in Iraq and the Gulf region and various other business interests. If US wages war, it will have serious consequences for the Indian economy and the people.

It is important therefore for the Party and other democratic and progressive forces to demand that the Indian government take a firm stand on the issue and mobilise the Indian people against this yet another threatened onslaught on an independent country.

World Economy and the US Situation

Such war like moves against Iraq are taking place in the background of the continuing difficulties for the US economy. The political resolution of the 17th Congress had noted that the US economy is undergoing a period of recession. The recession lasted all through the year 2001. At the beginning of 2002, the end of the recession was officially announced and the beginning of the recovery. Very soon it became apparent that the recovery was halting and sluggish. While in the first quarter between January to March the rate of growth of the GDP was 5 per cent, in the second quarter, April to July, the rate fell to 1.1 per cent. Consumption grew by only 1.9 per cent. This has raised fears about a double dip recession.

Corporate Fraud

The recent period also saw dramatic developments, which have exposed the seamy and volatile character of American capitalism. The Enron scandal broke out and it was declared bankrupt in 2001. There were many who tried to project this as an individual case of fraudulent dealing. But the last three months have seen a spate of accounting scandals affecting top US corporations. Worldcom, the second biggest communications provider in the country was found to have cooked its books to the tune of over \$ 7 billion. This company, whose assets are three times that of Enron has filed for bankruptcy and 17000 employees were sacked. This was followed by revelations of accounting frauds in Aldelphia, Dynegy, Global Crossing, and Xerox corporations. More than 35 corporations are being investigated for fraud. All these companies manipulated accounts to show inflated profits and revenues to jack up their share prices and to siphon off wealth. The scandals hitting the corporate sector have also accelerated the fall in the stock markets. According to one estimate the American markets have lost a third of their value i.e. almost \$ 6 trillion since its peak in March 2000.

This crisis has led to the weakening of the dollar against all major currencies like the Euro and the Yen. The United States receives huge flows of capital from around the world and the confidence of investors has been shaken. Without maintaining the huge foreign inflows it will not be possible for the United States to cover its huge deficit in the current account and trade. Any devaluation of the dollar will have extremely adverse consequences for the world economy as a large part of the exports of many countries are to the United States.

The significant fact to note is that all these developments have punctured the myth that American neo-liberal type of capitalism is the best model for all other countries to adopt.

Argentina: The Crisis Spreads

The volatility of the financial flows and the plunging stock markets has a contagious effect. Argentina which was plunged into a deep crisis last year has been unable to stem the crisis. The situation has in fact worsened in the recent months. Half the people are now living below the officially declared poverty line. The value of its currency, Peso, continues to fall and Argentina's foreign exchange reserves will soon fall below the minimum level of 9 million required for its existing accord with the IMF.

The effects of the Argentinean collapse has now spread to its neighbouring countries Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. Brazil is the largest Latin American economy and in the recent weeks its currency was devalued by 19 per cent against the dollar and the value of government bonds have fallen by half of their face value. The Bush administration which took the stand that it will not bail out countries which cannot manage their economies properly, has now been forced to reverse its stand. After US approval, the IMF has now extended \$ 30 billion loan to Brazil, the biggest loan in IMF history. The US government stepped in and has approved a loan of \$ 1.5 billion to Uruguay whose banking system is in crisis.

The struggles against the neo-liberal policies imposed by imperialism is meeting with stiff resistance in many Latin American countries. Steps to privatise public sector utilities have met with stiff resistance and popular revolts in Peru and Paraguay.

With the European recovery being sluggish and the Japanese economy showing no signs of getting out of the prolonged crisis, overall the prospects for the world economy making any substantial recovery seems bleak.

Palestine

The duplicitous stand of the United States towards the Palestinian cause became further evident when President Bush declared that the US will support an independent Palestinian State in three years time, but the condition being that Yasser Arafat must be removed from the leadership. Bush also demanded a series of measures before US support could be ensured. The United States is continuing to exert tremendous pressure on the Palestinian Authority to revamp its security and administrative apparatus to make it become a pliant tool of the United States. The Palestinian Authority has announced that elections for the President and to the legislative council will be held in January 2003.

Israel is continuing military attacks on the West Bank towns and killing a number of civilians. Israeli forces continue to hunt down and kill activists of the Palestinian organisations. There is a blockade imposed on the Palestinian

people preventing their entering Israel for jobs. But all these measures have not stopped the attacks by suicide bombers.

Israel is urging the United States to launch an immediate attack on Iraq. The people in all the Arab countries are furious with the United States for its double standards in supporting Israel in its military aggression and killings of Palestinians while targeting Saddam Hussein and Iraq.

Resistance builds up

The three-month period has been notable for the growing resistance to neo-liberal policies, struggles in defence of the working people's rights and steps taken by Cuba to mobilise people in defence of its socialist system. The struggles against privatisation in Latin America are significant. Militant protest against privatisation of electricity companies took place in Peru. Protests against privatisation of the national telephone company in Paraguay blocked its sale. Politically, the Left is asserting itself in the struggle against the neo-liberal policies in the region. In Europe, widespread working class actions have taken place in Spain, Germany, Greece and Britain against the attacks on the living standards of the workers. In Cuba, after Bush's arrogant demand that it change its political system, seven million people out of the total population of 11 million, participated in a signature campaign that the socialist system of Cuba be made "untouchable" to change. The National Assembly amended the Constitution to confirm Cuba as a socialist workers state.

In the coming period, we should be active in mobilising popular opinion against the US threats against Iraq and extend full support to the struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent state. These attacks of US imperialism must be seen in the context of the growing American intervention in our region and the threats to India's national sovereignty.

National

Presidential Elections

Though the NDA adopted a resolution authorising the Prime Minister to select the presidential candidate after consultations with other parties, the BJP was intent upon choosing its own candidate for the post of President. Right from the beginning the BJP was against the re-election of K.R. Narayanan. All the consultations held by the Prime Minister were meant to eliminate the choice of K.R. Narayanan. Most of the opposition parties favoured the re-election of Narayanan. But the Prime Minister stated that there could be no consensus in the NDA on his name. Further, Vajpayee took the unprecedented step of informing President Narayanan that the NDA was not for a second term for a President, as a matter of convention.

The BJP leadership first chose P.C. Alexander as their candidate. This was done after the Prime Minister had floated the idea that the Vice President Krishna Kant could be an acceptable candidate. When Alexander's name was proposed, the entire opposition including the Samajwadi Party decided to request Narayanan to be the candidate. A joint delegation went to him to request him to contest the election. This delegation included the Secretary General of the Samajwadi Party. However, the BJP, seeing the unity around Narayanan backtracked and decided to propose Abdul Kalam for the President. The Samajwadi Party, which had earlier agreed in the People's Front meeting to support the candidature of Narayanan did a volte face and broke ranks and declared support for Kalam.

The disruption in the opposition ranks by the stand taken by the Samajwadi Party helped the BJP-NDA to push its candidate forward. The Congress which was earlier willing to go along with a joint candidate backed out and decided to support Kalam. The Congress party was divided on the issue and instead of taking a firm stand to fight the BJP-NDA nominee, it went along with the argument that a non-political candidate of the minority community should be supported.

In such a situation, our Party decided that the presidentship should not go uncontested. The Left parties jointly decided to contest the elections and put up Dr. Laxmi Sahgal, veteran freedom fighter of the INA as its candidate. The JD(S) also supported her. Within the People's Front, except for the Samajwadi Party, no other constituent or leader was prepared to accept the argument put forward by the SP leadership.

The candidature of Dr. Laxmi Sahgal and the stand taken by the Left parties regarding the presidential elections was appreciated by wider sections belonging to the democratic and secular fold. The Congress was seen as compromising, once again, in the fight against the designs of the communal forces. Though in electoral terms the contest was weighted heavily in favour of the NDA candidate, the issues raised in the campaign for the presidential election showed the consistent and principled opposition taken by the Left vis-à-vis the BJP and its communal politics.

Disruptive Role of the Samajwadi Party

At the Bangalore meeting itself, the Polit Bureau had reported to the Central Committee that on a number of issues the SP was taking positions which compromised the struggle against the BJP-led government and were motivated by other interests. On Yashwant Sinha's connections with Flex Industries, the SP was not prepared to condemn him, unlike the rest of the opposition. On George Fernandes's virulent speech defending the Narendra Modi government's

criminal record in Gujarat, the SP leadership was not prepared to condemn him. On the Presidential election, the SP was not for Narayanan's candidature and was floating the name of Kalam even while consultations were going on.

Our efforts were to see that there was a united stand on the presidential elections given the importance of the post. But the manner in which the Samajwadi Party betrayed the common commitment to back Narayanan resulted in its exit from the People's Front. The People's Front was set up with the main aim of fighting the BJP and the communal forces. The role of Mulayam Singh and the SP on the presidential election went against the basic premise of the Front.

The situation is such that on a number of issues we have to work together with the secular bourgeois parties in the fight against the danger posed by the BJP-RSS combine and in defence of the people's interests. There has to be floor coordination in parliament between the opposition parties. Many issues will come up when such unity will have to be forged but to have a more enduring combination of the non-Congress secular parties, there must be a minimum understanding on some policy issues. Our efforts to unite with these forces on issue to issue basis should continue. While doing so, we must also give emphasis on taking up common issues and launching joint movements.

Vice-Presidential Elections

The BJP had decided to put up its own candidate for the Vice President's post. It selected Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, a senior BJP-RSS leader as its candidate which was endorsed not only by the NDA but its other allies like the TDP and the BSP. The AIADMK also extended support to his candidature. To fight the BJP-NDA candidate efforts were made to put up a joint opposition candidate. In the absence of any effective independent candidate with stature, the Congress party decided to put up one of its leaders, Sushil Kumar Shinde. The Left parties and other opposition parties decided to support his candidature. In the elections where only members of parliament of both houses constitute the electorate, Shekhawat was elected with a big margin of 149 votes. The expectations of the Congress that Shinde would attract the support of scheduled caste MPs were belied. It is clear that some MPs belonging to the opposition parties have voted for Shekhawat based on caste and other considerations.

BJP -- Shift to Hindutva Agenda

The Political Report of the May Central Committee had noted that faced with the erosion of electoral support, the BJP had decided to go ahead with its Hindutva agenda disregarding the views of its allies on issues such as Gujarat. After the Goa meeting of the National Executive, the aggressive posture of the BJP in pushing its Hindutva agenda became evident. The reorganisation carried

out in the BJP leadership and the cabinet reshuffle which took place simultaneously have resulted in the strengthening of the RSS's grip over the Party. The promotion of L.K. Advani as the Dy. Prime Minister and the appointment of Venkaiah Naidu as the BJP President signifies a shift in favour of the Advani camp and the pursuance of a more aggressive Hindutva line. The appointment of Vinay Katiyar as the President of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the party further confirms this trend.

The results of this shift are already evident. The premature dissolution of the Gujarat assembly and the decision to go for early polls is a stand which was advocated in the Goa meeting and which was carried out subsequently. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has announced that it will not abide by its earlier promise to abide by the court decision on the Ayodhya dispute. It has announced it will begin another phase of agitation for the temple construction to begin later this year. The RSS at its national executive meeting announced support for the trifurcation of Jammu & Kashmir with a separate state of Jammu to be formed on communal lines.

By putting up a RSS-BJP nominee for the Vice Presidentship and refusing to heed the criticism of its allies on the removal of Narendra Modi and the Gujarat situation, the BJP has made it clear that it will try to recover ground by raising the issues which appeal to its hardcore following.

Gujarat Election

The manoeuvre of the BJP to hold early elections in Gujarat and its brazen attack on the Election Commission for not complying with its wishes reveals a new authoritarian approach. The dissolution of the state assembly was planned so that the BJP could demand that the election be held before October 6 to fulfill the requirement that not more than six months should lapse between two sittings of the assembly (under Article 174 of the Constitution). By dissolving the house on July 19, the BJP calculated that the Election Commission would be compelled to hold the election early on the basis that the new house should be convened before October 6. The Election Commission has under the constitutional authority assigned to it, under Article 324, of holding a free and fair election exercised its independent judgement as to whether polls can be held in the state in the prevailing atmosphere. The nine member team sent by the Commission reported that an adverse situation existed wherein a substantial section of the minorities would not be able to exercise their franchise. This was followed up by the visit of the full Commission headed by the CEC to Gujarat. The forty page order of the Election Commission has recorded the ground realities wherein a large number of people, particularly those belonging to the minorities, are today not in a position to stay in their homes or lead normal life. The Election Commission has therefore said that the imperative of a free and

fair poll under Article 324 has to override the requirement under Article 174 regarding the six month gap for holding two sittings of the assembly.

BJP Attack on Election Commission

The BJP has reacted furiously to the decision. It went to the extent of charging the CEC of acting at the behest of the Congress and the opposition parties. It has made repeated efforts to denigrate the Commission and its authority. The Home Minister L.K. Advani has been particularly vehement in criticising the Election Commission. The authoritarian face of the Hindutva forces which cannot tolerate any constitutional authority which thwarts its aims has been revealed in a striking manner.

The decision of the Union Cabinet to refer the Election Commission's decision for a Presidential reference under Article 143 is another move to undermine the authority of the Commission. Instead of going directly to the Supreme Court to challenge the Election Commission, they have chosen to route it through a presidential reference. The Supreme Court has to now give an opinion on the reference made by the President on the jurisdiction and powers of the Election Commission regarding the holding of the Gujarat elections.

Narendra Modi made a vicious attack on the Chief Election Commissioner questioning his integrity by citing his religious identity. The same Narendra Modi is set to take out a 'gaurav rath yatra' which will further aggravate the situation in Gujarat. Even after five months after the violence, a large number of people are unable to return to their homes or resume their normal life. It is essential that the Narendra Modi government be dismissed and elections held under President's Rule.

Jammu & Kashmir

The Election Commission has announced the schedule for the elections to the state assembly. Prior to that, the Central government as a sop to the Farooq Abdullah government announced that Arun Jaitely, one of the General Secretaries of the BJP is being empowered to hold talks with the state government and others concerned regarding "devolution of powers" to the state. The official announcement scrupulously avoided using the term autonomy. This is in keeping with the stand of the BJP which is opposed to giving autonomy for J&K under Article 370 of the Constitution. The Arun Jaitely mission was meant to provide the National Conference with a plank to say that due to its fight for autonomy the Centre has now decided to discuss the issue. This step is not taken seriously by anyone in J&K and is obviously seen as a manoeuvre.

The necessity to hold elections and give it some credibility has led the Vajpayee government to make a number of adhoc and contradictory steps. Just on the eve of the announcement of the elections, another unofficial committee, the Kashmir Committee headed by Ram Jethmalani was sent to Kashmir with the approval of the Dy. Prime Minister. The last minute effort was made to talk to the Hurriyat and other separatist groups to draw them into the elections. However, such a move was doomed to fail given the fact that the BJP-led government is not even prepared to talk about autonomy.

In the Kashmir valley, the people are apprehensive that any free and fair poll will be held in the present situation. Given the history of repeated rigging and manipulations there is every possibility of the misuse of the state machinery. Further, the threats of the hardcore extremist groups can lead to low participation in many parts of the valley.

Our Party will be participating in the elections notwithstanding the difficult conditions. The Party will contest in some seats where it has maintained its links with the people and has been taking up their problems continuously. We cannot have an understanding with the National Conference, unlike the last time, as it has joined hands with the BJP and the NDA and due to its record of misrule. Our Party will oppose the fundamentalist-extremist forces and advocate a peaceful and democratic settlement based on provision of maximum autonomy.

The Vajpayee government after seeking US intervention in its confrontation with Pakistan after the December 2001 attack on parliament is now facing continued pressure from the Bush administration. Further, the United States put pressure on Gen. Pervez Musharraf to halt the infiltration of the extremists across the border and got a commitment from him that he would check it. Then it asked the Vajpayee government to reciprocate. Colin Powell on his last visit to the subcontinent stated that Kashmir is an international issue. The Americans are putting pressure on the Vajpayee government to hold elections by widening the participation by involving the separatist groups. It is in this light that the last minute clumsy efforts made by the Vajpayee government to have some talks with the Hurriyat and the separatist groups must be seen. The BJP's basic stand denies autonomy for Kashmir under Article 370. With this approach, there is no scope for any meaningful political settlement which can help to rally the Kashmiri people and isolate the fundamentalist pro-Pakistan elements.

Step by step the BJP and the Vajpayee government are succumbing to the US plan for Kashmir. The RSS demand for trifurcation and the defacto acceptance of the US in a mediatory role in the Kashmir dispute has heightened the danger of the US plan succeeding. It is important therefore to use the occasion of the J&K elections to tell the people all over the country that the BJP-RSS combine

will communalise the situation in J&K and help US imperialism in its gameplan and endanger Kashmir remaining as a part of the Indian Union.

Massive Corruption

At the very time when the BJP has adopted its brazen posture of defending the carnage in Gujarat and the role of the Narendra Modi government, the massive corruption within the BJP-led government has been exposed in a manner never before. After the Tehelka exposure dented the image of the Vajpayee government, the huge scandal in petrol pump allotments has rocked the country. Parliament was stalled for a whole week and was prematurely adjourned as the government refused to meet the opposition demand for the resignation of the petroleum minister, Ram Naik, and a high level enquiry into the whole affair. Nearly more than half of the total 3857 allotments have gone to the family members and near relatives of the BJP and the RSS leaders. In some states its NDA allies have also benefitted. The whole system of dealership selection boards headed by retired judges has been subverted and petrol pumps given out on the recommendations of the BJP-RSS leaders in all parts of the country. Such an extensive nepotism far exceeds what was done under Satish Sharma during the Narasimha Rao government when the discretionary quota was utilised to allot pumps to their favourites.

Given the enormity of the scandal, the response of the Prime Minister was to cancel all allotments. This has no legal basis and is now being successfully challenged by the allottees in the various courts. The petrol pump and gas agency allotment scandal must be taken effectively through a mass campaign to the people to show how venal the BJP-led government has become. The exposure of the petrol pump scandal has been followed by other corruption cases coming to light. The allotment of prime plots of land to BJP-RSS leaders and their organisations in Delhi and the BJP President Venkaiah Naidu's acquisition of land meant for SC/ST through fraudulent means when he was an MLA in Andhra Pradesh have become public. The speed with which the rot has set in at all levels in the Sangh combine has come as a shock to even many of its supporters.

Severe Drought

The failure of the monsoon rains this year has led to a drought like situation in many parts of the country. The scanty rainfall or delayed rains have led to drought in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. The bajra, oilseeds, pulses and paddy crops were destroyed by the failure of the rains in many states. There is no fodder for cattle and there is lack of drinking water. From mid-August, there has been substantial rains in many parts, but the first crops are already lost. It is

not the quantity of rains but its distribution pattern which is important. The severest conditions are in Rajasthan where it is estimated that 30 lakh families need to be brought under famine relief works.

Many of the peasants, particularly the poorer sections, who are in debt are facing ruination. The state governments in most cases were unprepared to deal with the drought and the central government seeks to pass the responsibility on to them. With 63 million tonnes of foodgrains lying in the godowns, it is shameful that urgent steps were not taken to release foodgrains on a large scale for the drought affected areas for food-for-work programmes and for free distribution.

The drought will result in decline in farmers incomes due to loss of production and livestock. The shrinkage of employment opportunities will badly affect agricultural workers and migrant labour who will lose their livelihood. It will also lead to a sharp increase in food prices. With the public distribution system already inadequate and with the food for work programmes long redundant, it will be difficult to provide quick relief to the affected people.

The demands of the peasants and rural poor in the face of the drought, provision of direct relief and supplies, the writing off of loans to the small farmers, waiving payment of instalments of interest, supply of seeds and fodder, emergency drinking water supply and food for work programmes -- all have to be taken up. All over the country the Party must support the Kisan Sabha and the Agricultural Workers organisation to raise and fight for these demands effectively.

Economic Onslaughts

The government announced yet another price hike of petroleum products in June. The prices of petrol, diesel, kerosene and cooking gas cylinders were increased. In the past four years the petrol prices have gone up from Rs 22 to Rs. 29 per litre; diesel from Rs. 10 to Rs. 18 per litre; kerosene from Rs. 2.56 to Rs. 11 per litre and LPG from Rs. 136 per cylinder to Rs. 244.

With Arun Shourie as the minister for privatisation, the drive for selling off the profitable public sector units continues relentlessly. The way public assets are being stripped became evident after the VSNL was taken over by the Tatas. The Tatas paid Rs. 2591 crores for taking over the VSNL which had a cash reserve at that time of Rs. 3000 crores. Even this amount paid by the Tatas was raised as credit from financial institutions. Soon after the Tatas siphoned off Rs. 1200 crores from the VSNL to one of its companies, the Tata Tele Services. The government failed to take steps to stop this unethical transfer of funds despite some noises being made. The government is bent upon selling off the

shares of the highly profitable public sector oil companies. Plans are being drawn up for the sale of shares of the BPCL, HPCL and other companies.

For the last number of months the build up of troops on the border and the tensions which arose after the extremist attacks in Jammu were used to deflect criticism of the policy measures being taken by the government. The series of economic policy measures and attacks on the people's livelihood were undertaken in such a situation and with the attention on the grave situation in Gujarat. Most of the bourgeois parties are unable to mount an effective attack on the economic policy measures taken by the government. The Congress, in particular, is unable to mount any effective attack as it also shares the basic economic policies and are implementing them in the states where they have governments.

Congress Policies Same

The Congress-run state governments are active in implementing the policies of the BJP-led government at the Centre vis-à-vis liberalisation and privatisation. The Antony government in Kerala is in the forefront with its declared policy of cutting back the state's role in the economic sphere in the vital social sectors like education and health. It has agreed to all the conditionalities set out by the Asian Development Bank for a loan. There is a sharp increase in the electricity and transport charges and other public services. It is the pursuit of such policies, which makes the Congress no different from the BJP, as far as the problems of the working people are concerned.

In such a situation the CPI(M) and the Left parties have to conduct their own independent campaign and mass mobilisation against such policies. In the states and at the local levels we must take up such issues and doggedly fight to defend the people's rights. The corruption scandals must also be used effectively to expose the government and discredit it.

In the coming days, alongwith the various programmes being taken up by the mass organisations and united platforms, the Party should ceaselessly take up all the issues which affect the people's livelihood and conduct struggles in a sustained manner.

Foreign Capital In Print Media

The Vajpayee government is so deeply entangled in its pro-imperialist commitments that it does not hesitate to take any measure which effects national sovereignty. A glaring example is the opening up of the print media to foreign capital. Despite the rejection by the parliamentary standing committee on information technology which was asked to look into the question whether any foreign equity or ownership should be allowed in the Indian print media,

the Union cabinet took a sudden decision to amend the 1955 order of the cabinet in this regard. The BJP-led government has sought to cover up this harmful decision by citing that there are safeguards like the share of foreign capital is limited to 26 per cent. But this is sufficient for a foreign company to control a newspaper. The plea that only Indians shall be appointed in key positions is meaningless as all multinational companies in India have Indians in key executive positions. The print media being controlled by foreign monopoly media has grave repercussions for our democratic and political system. The print media plays a key role in shaping political views and opinions in our system and big foreign monopoly media will be in a position to project their views through Indian newspapers. It is significant that the pro-BJP owners in the newspaper industry have actively worked to get this decision taken. The opening of the print media was opposed by many of the NDA allies like the TDP and AIADMK.

Attacks on Media

The authoritarian stand of the Vajpayee government is also illustrated by its increasing intolerance of criticism from the media. The Tehelka website which exposed the corruption in defence deals has been mercilessly attacked. Its journalists are being arrested on frivolous reasons and a financial promoter of the company has been subjected to vindictive arrests and harassment. Another Kashmiri journalist based in Delhi has been arrested on flimsy grounds. A number of attacks on journalists and the press are being orchestrated by the BJP especially after their coverage of the Gujarat events and the exposure of the communal pogroms.

Creation of New Railway Zones

The Vajpayee government announced the setting up of seven new railway zones created out of the existing nine zones. This was preceded by the announcement of the bifurcation of the Eastern Railway. Our Party has opposed the creation of new zones without any administrative and technical rationale. In 1997 during the United Front government also our Party had disapproved of the announcement of the new zones. The manner in which the bifurcation of Eastern Railway was announced is a reflection of the internal squabbles within the NDA with Mamata Banerjee trying to make her come back as the railway minister. The railways have suffered from the policies of liberalisation and the cutbacks in investment in the railway sector. Instead of ensuring that adequate resources are ploughed into the railway sector, the creation of new zones will be harmful for the railways and adding to its financial burdens.

The Party has demanded that the creation of new zones be not proceeded with and a high level expert committee should be set up which should look into the whole matter and give its recommendations.

Tripura

The report of the May Central Committee meeting had sharply criticised the Congress party's opportunistic and harmful alliance with the INPT which is a front of the extremist NLFT which is responsible for terroristic violence in Tripura. Subsequently, the Congress party went ahead with its alliance and joint meetings are being held. The President of the INPT is Bejoy Kumar Hrangkhawl, a former TNV leader, whose organisation was responsible for the communal carnage in 1980. The separatist character of the INPT came into the open with Bejoy Hrangkhawl's speech in Geneva where he defended the activities of the NLFT and the ATTF and characterised their struggle as the right of self-determination of the Tripura tribal people. He had not a word of condemnation for the killings, kidnappings and extortions by the extremist gangs.

In Tripura, the NLFT gangs are continuing their murderous campaign against the CPI(M) and the GMP leaders. In the last three months at least 20 important cadres and leaders of the CPI(M) and the GMP have been assassinated including some women cadres. In a recent ambush 20 policemen of the Tripura State Rifles were killed by these gangs. The Congress party in Tripura is silent about these murderous gangs of the NLFT while lending support to the INPT (the overground front of the NLFT). The national leadership of the Congress approved this alliance with the INPT. It is an opportunist step harmful to the people of Tripura, ethnic harmony and national unity. The CPI(M) and the Left Front will resolutely fight this harmful alliance and all over the country this opportunist game must be exposed.

Jharkhand Domicile Issue

The BJP-led government in Jharkhand has announced a domicile policy which is meant to divide the people for narrow electoral gains. The policy has already led to sharp divisions and clashes between different sections of the people. A series of bandhs and violence has led to the death of atleast 11 persons so far. The domicile policy rakes up a 1982 circular of the labour department of the Bihar government. It seeks to define domicile based on records of land settlement of 1932. The pro-domicile agitation is led by the landlords and vested interests. They call themselves 'moolvasis', but it is these sections who have usurped tribal lands. The CPI(M) is for the rights of the tribal people being protected. For this, instead of addressing the exploitation of the tribal people through the landlord-contractor-mafia combination, the present policy is to divert their anger against the non-tribal sections who have come into the state over a period of time.

Growing Attacks on Women

The recent period has witnessed a sharp increase in sexual attacks on women. Rape of minor girls is a growing crime. The rape of a 12-year old girl in a Mumbai suburban train where five co-passengers did nothing to stop the rapist was the most shocking of the incidents. Sexual harassment of women in urban areas, particularly working women who have to commute is a common occurrence. It is essential that this problem be not seen as one for the women's organisations to take up, but the Party and other mass organisations should campaign against such trends and intervene when such attacks take place.

Election Commission Order on Filing of Nominations

The Election Commission issued an order giving fresh guidelines for candidates who contest assembly and parliament elections. It was implementing a supreme court judgement in this regard. The EC order requires that all candidates who contest elections must file an affidavit stating all the criminal cases that they have against them. Secondly, all income and assets of the candidates and his family will have to be filed. Thirdly, educational qualifications are also to be declared. The EC order states that if any false information is given at the time of scrutiny, the returning officer can reject the nomination. The Party opposed this order. Firstly, it is practically impossible for candidates of political parties in particular of the CPI(M) and the Left parties to compile a list of all the cases that they have faced in their life time. Secondly, the returning officer being empowered to reject nominations if wrong or incomplete information is given about filing of income and assets is a power which can be misused. Returning officers are bureaucrats, many of whom will be subject to the influence of the ruling party and other vested interests. Thirdly, educational qualifications are totally irrelevant for the filing of a nomination.

By this judgement the judiciary sought to introduce extraneous factors in the electoral process. The Constitution provides the right for every citizen to contest the election. The Representation of People Act specifies grounds on which candidates can be disqualified which includes conviction on crimes which entail two years or more in prison. All the political parties were against this order because of its serious implications.

Our Party is for a candidate declaring the cases he or she faces which attract the disqualification clause under the Representation of People Act. Secondly, no nomination should be rejected by the returning officer at the time of scrutiny on account of this information. As this would mean that there is no redressal for the candidate till after the elections are over by going to the court. The government in response proposed that candidates who have chargesheets of two serious crimes should be disqualified from contesting the elections. Our Party's

basic stand has been that chargesheets cannot be the ground for disqualification. Only conviction in a court can do this. Finally after another all-party meeting the government has decided not to include chargesheets for grounds of disqualification and only proposed for information on serious crimes which attract disqualification. The power of the returning officer to reject nomination provided in the election commission order has been deleted. There was agreement that it is only after election, a candidate who is elected must compulsorily file a statement of income and assets. It was decided to bring legislation to amend the law on this subject.

In the public the overwhelming opinion is that the political parties have sought to cover up criminalisation by refusing to accept the Supreme Court EC order. The general middle class opinion is that all political parties are harbouring criminals and therefore the steps proposed by the judiciary and the Election Commission have to be implemented. There has not been sufficient explanation and campaign amongst the people in this regard and therefore misunderstanding about the opposition to the proposals continues. There are other measures which must be taken to stop the use of money and illegal means in the electoral process. The Party must explain our stand to the people in a more comprehensive manner.

West Bengal

There has been a series of by-elections in West Bengal for the assembly and the local bodies. A significant feature of the results of the elections are the huge victories for the Left Front candidates. For instance, in the Onda assembly elections in Bankura district, the Left Front candidate who was from the Forward Bloc won by a margin of 63,267 votes. This is a rural constituency. Later in South Howrah seat which is an urban area, the CPI(M) candidate won by a margin of 66000 votes. In both cases the Congress and the TMC lost their deposits. In the Haldia municipal corporation elections all 22 seats were won by the Left Front with the Trinamul and the Congress trailing far behind. In the by-elections to a ward of the Kolkata Corporation, the CPI candidate won with a big margin and the Congress and Trinamul lost their deposits.

The big victories are a reflection of the increasing acceptability of the Left Front and the government's policies and the collapse of the credibility of the Trinamul Congress and the inability of the Congress to make headway.

It is in this context that certain groups like People's War Group (PWG) and Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO) are targeting the CPI(M) and the Left Front and trying to disrupt their activities. The PWG has been resorting to murders of CPI(M) cadres in the Midnapore area. The KLO recently attacked the Dhupguri zonal committee office of the CPI(M) in Jalpaiguri district and killed five comrades, including a district committee member, and injured 13

others. Such terrorist activities cannot be, in any way, justified as democratic or revolutionary political activities. The West Bengal state committee is taking the necessary political and organisational measures to combat the menace posed by such activities.

Call for September Movement

The Central Committee, taking stock of the overall situation in the country and the policies of the BJP-led government has decided to launch a countrywide campaign and movement on six major issues affecting the people and the country:

1. Investigate corruption cases concerning the BJP-led government and prosecute all those guilty.
2. Immediate relief measures for the drought-affected areas by the Central government.
3. Dismiss Narendra Modi government and put Gujarat under President's rule.
4. Protect Jammu & Kashmir state's composite character and oppose demand for trifurcation by RSS. Hold free and fair elections in the state.
5. Provide adequate security forces to Tripura by the Centre to combat terrorist outfits. Unmask the opportunist alliance of the Congress and the INPT.
6. Oppose the US plans to militarily attack Iraq. The Vajpayee government must come out firmly against the war plans.

The Central Committee has called upon all Party units to launch a campaign and movement from September 20 to 30 on these issues. On September 20, all over the country, the Party will observe "Drought Relief" day in the form of demonstrations outside Central government offices and FCI godowns. On the last day, September 30, the Party will observe "Tripura solidarity day" through public meetings and demonstrations. During the rest of the period, campaigns on other issues will be conducted through public meetings, marches and other forms of mass campaigns and mobilisation.
