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Assam Fertile Ground For Left Democratic Alternative

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THE political situation in Assam has become very complex since the Assembly elections in March this year, with chauvinist and regionalist forces emerging in an organised way on the one hand and on the other the new Janata Government failing either to take a definite stand against such forces or enunciating any policy for the economic development of the State. In their enthusiasm to do away with the legacy of the Congress misrule of 30 years, the Janata rulers have begun undoing a lot of good things done in the past for the weaker sections.

The recently-concluded State conference of the CPI has taken note of these disturbing trends and traced them to Assam's economic backwardness which was responsible for unemployment and consequent social unrest. The conference went on to evolve a perspective of united action by the Left and democratic forces in defence of the vital interests of the people by building up mass movements. Emphasising the need for such action, the political report highlighted the specific features of the State's backwardness and analysed the correlation of class forces. It noted that no party secured an absolute majority in the Assembly elections and yet the Janata Party, securing only 27.5 per cent of the total votes polled, has forged a coalition with the support of the Plains Tribals Council—a party committed to the dismemberment of Assam to create a separate State called "Dudyachal"—and some independents.

INVITATION TO WB
Feudalism is still the dominant feature of agriculture, though there is some capitalist

penetration too. Instead of adopting radical land reforms, the Government openly invited World Bank intrusion, paving the way for capitalist development of agriculture and neo-colonialist exploitation. Of the 21,995 villages, only 2093 have electricity. Irrigation does not cover even a fraction of the cultivated land while floods destroy crops and property worth seven crore of rupees every year. Three-fourths of the people live below the poverty line, with the highest percentage among the States. The per capita investment by banks in productive industries is Rs 18 against the all-India figure of Rs 100.

Because of the Janata Government's policy of "free movement" of foodgrains, prices have doubled in the last 12 months. A large number of industrial units in this backward State have been closed in the last few months, throwing thousands of people out of work. Unemployment problem is assuming dangerous proportions. At the end of 1977, there were 2.43 lakh jobseekers registered with the employment exchanges, 91,000 of them being educated unemployed. The official estimate of the total number of unemployed people, both rural and urban, is 1.5 million.

RETROGRADE STEPS

Central sector projects like the Bongaigaon Refineries and Petrochemicals Limited, the two paper mills in Cachar and Jagi Road etc, are progressing slowly and the much-needed extension of broad gauge track from Bongaigaon to Gauhati is getting inordi-

nately delayed. At the same time, the State Government has taken a number of retrograde steps. Surplus lands acquired by the previous regime, as a result of land reforms, have been returned to their former owners especially the tea gardens. Some such land had already been settled on tenants, who are now being forcibly evicted. The administration is working against the poorer sections of the society.

It is in such a situation that chauvinist forces, helped by certain sections in the ruling party, are rearing their heads. Communal and disruptive agents have become active. The Government has neither tried to fight these forces on its own nor sought the cooperation of other parties to combat them. On the other hand, there is evidence that communal and chauvinist influences are strong in the ruling party itself.

On the positive side, there has been a spectacular accretion of strength by the Left parties. The number of Left MLAs has gone up from five to 25 in the present Assembly in spite of the fact that there was no electoral unity among the Left parties. This disunity has cost the Left quite a few seats. About the CP-M, the CPI report says that the Marxist Party has succeeded in building up mass bases over the years. It has entered the legislature for the first time with a dozen MLAs. The Marxists have also made headway among the peasantry, the working class and the students and have built up organisations among them. Other Left parties

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like the RCPI, SUCI and RSP have also gained. This strength, according to the CPI, is a "silver lining". It also showed the people's desire for unity among the Left parties.

The need of the hour is to build up a Left democratic alternative to Janata and the Congress. It cannot be treated as a long-term objective but as an immediate and imperative task. The complexities and potentialities of the present situation demand that the Left parties, especially the two Communist parties, engage in joint actions like the successful joint rally of peasants organized by the Kisan Sabhas of the two parties before the State Assembly on 21 June. However, the CP-M's continued support to the Janata Party and its tendency to regard the Congress as the main enemy is a big hurdle in forging such unity of action.

RECENT GAINS

Despite this, the political report says the CPI will have to work for and strive hard to build up mass movements for accelerated industrial and economic development of the State, for protecting the rights of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and other weaker sections and wage a relentless struggle to combat and isolate the chauvinist and communal forces out to destroy the social fabric of the State.

In the four years since the last party conference in 1974, the party has considerably improved its strength. Its membership has gone up from eight to thirteen thousands, while the party has not only been able to maintain its strength in the Assembly but to further increase it from four to six members.