

# What Kind of Party?

Document adopted at the Second National Consultative Conference of the Communist Ghadar Party of India, held December 29-30, 1993.

---

The Communist Ghadar Party of India  
New Delhi, December 2016

© Lok Awaz Publishers and Distributors

First Edition April 1994

Second Edition December 2016

Rs. 20.00

Published by

Communist Ghadar Party of India

E-392 Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase – 2,

New Delhi 110020, [www.cgpi.org](http://www.cgpi.org)

Printed and Distributed by

Lok Awaz Publishers and Distributors

E-392 Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase – 2,

New Delhi 110020, Phone No: 09868811998

email: [lokawaz@gmail.com](mailto:lokawaz@gmail.com)

## **Publisher's Note**

This document, *What Kind of Party?*, was presented by Comrade Lal Singh on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Ghadar Party of India to the Second National Consultative Conference held December 29-30, 1993. It was approved by the Consultative Conference and released for discussion in April 1994 by the decision of the Central Committee of the Party.

The second edition of this document is now being published by the decision of the Central Committee.

December 2016



# Preface

We are standing at a very particular time in history, a time when the world bourgeoisie and reaction are launching their greatest offensive against the livelihood of the people and against the progress of society.

There is a great offensive against communism and many parties have turned their backs on the ideology and vision crucial for the working class to emancipate itself. This is a period of the retreat of revolution, the ebb of revolution, a period when the forces of counter-revolution are on the offensive.

The Second National Consultative Conference was organised by the Communist Ghadar Party of India (CGPI) as part of the struggle to preserve the progressive forces and expand their ranks, to extend the space where the doctrine of communism can flourish and to prepare for the time when the working class and people will launch their own offensive against the world bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie in India has launched an unprecedented attack on the livelihood and rights of the people. It is blocking the path for the progress of society. At the same time it is caught up in a profound crisis, especially in the political sphere. To say that this

crisis is because of the refusal of the working class and people to go along with the political system as it exists in the country today will be to state the obvious. It cannot be denied that the present economic and political system just does not work. It does not provide for the people. The system cannot benefit society and is only exacerbating the contradictions inherent to it. It is also doing the same internationally.

It will be another truism to say that the reason why the people of India suffer such problems as poverty, communal and other forms of violence, state terrorism, national strife and every kind of diversion, is because they do not have power. Hence the most important question which presents itself is how to provide the people with power. This is the key question of modern democracy and it is a challenge to the communists, to the working class and all those who are genuinely concerned about the plight of the people in India to provide a solution to this problem. Such a question cannot be answered without the clearest possible enunciation of the theme, *What Kind of Party?*

Addressing the problem of how people can come to power poses a number of burning questions. There is the question of dealing with the existing parliamentary system, especially the role of the political parties; there is the question of the political process and the question of empowerment of the people. In reality, these problems are organically linked with one another and it is within this context that the question – what kind of party is needed to ensure the empowerment of the people – has emerged as the most important problem requiring immediate theoretical and practical answers.

The CGPI has organised itself as a political party of the working class. However, the reality is that the vanguard of the Indian working class is split into many parties and groups. This is the single most important subjective factor holding back the revolution. To build the unity of the working class, and to restore the unity of its vanguard communist party, is the need of the hour. The discussion on unity can no longer be delayed because, even in such critical times, various factions of the fractured communist movement are sending entirely different and contradictory messages to the class. The time has come to elaborate these matters in full view of the class and answer the question, ***What Kind of Party?*** Once such a question is elaborated, all those in whose interest it is to build such a party will join together while those who persist on the path of disunity will part company.

It is for this reason that for Party estimates that the work initiated by this conference is one of the most important tasks of the present period.

No party can carry on on the basis of an outmoded programme or obsolete tactics. The communists of today must have the resilience to deal with the present problems of the movement and of society, as was done by the communists before within their own conditions.

In the course of elaborating the question ***What Kind of Party?*** the CGPI will work for the restoration of communist unity as the main means of strengthening the working class movement, while at the same time uniting with all the political forces for the empowerment of the people.





# **What Kind of Party?**

## **The Political System in Modern India**

### **Indian Political Parties**

India is a class-divided society in which the intense exploitation of the vast majority of people takes place.

It is fairly obvious that it is not possible for any class to fulfil its class aims without first organising itself into a political party. There existed classes in India before independence and they organised themselves into their respective political parties. It can be said that their features were conditioned, both in form and content, by the circumstances of the colonial period. However, even though these parties had taken up the national struggle as their goal, they had a definite class character which was reflected in their approach to and conception of the anti-colonial struggle.

The leadership of these parties was either bourgeois or proletarian, even though it may be said that before 1947, because of the anti-colonial struggle, people became members of these parties for the sake of national independence. Thus the Indian National Congress (INC) was, despite the nature and size of its membership, essentially a party of the bourgeoisie, both national and international, while the Communist Party of India was a party of the proletariat.

During the anti-colonial struggle, the split in the bourgeoisie created two camps, the main one which compromised with British Colonialism and world imperialism, and the uncompromising one. Such a division still exists today, although to a much lesser extent than before.

Today several bourgeois parties exist at the national and state levels.

The bourgeoisie, because of its very class nature, is always split into extremely antagonistic political parties. The Congress (I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party are just two examples which illustrate how two parties can be bourgeois and still be at logger-heads with each other.

The petty bourgeoisie does not have political parties which strictly serve its interests. The petty bourgeoisie does not have distinct interests of its own which it can fulfil without either going to capitalism or socialism, the only two systems possible within the present conditions.

Thus it vacillates between bourgeois and working class parties. Sometimes it gravitates towards capitalism and at other times towards socialism or towards a vision of a hybrid system, which objectively cannot exist. There are parties of this stratum, but in the objective sense, they either end up siding with the bourgeoisie or with the working class. Such is the case with the various transient formations which have appeared in India from time to time (like the Socialist party, Janata Dal, Lok Dal, etc.). The working class, on the other hand, because of its very class nature objectively gravitates towards socialism and is characterised by the singularity of its class aim of eliminating all forms of exploitation of persons by persons. To realize this aim, it must transform itself into a singular and united political force with the advanced section organised into the vanguard of the class and the broad section into a united front linked integrally with all the oppressed and toilers of the land.

However, looking around at the situation, as it prevails in India at this time, the vanguard of the working class is split into various tendencies, as is the united front. Some of these tendencies are openly bourgeois. The bourgeoisie wields massive influence on the working class. For all intents and purposes, the bourgeoisie has paralysed the working class movement, depriving it of independent action, and is trying to transform it into the strategic reserve of bourgeois rule.

The adoption of the Nehruvian model of socialism at the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress in 1955, the reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis, the measures on land reforms and so on, were part of

a major drive of the big bourgeoisie to consolidate its power and strengthen its base by weaning away the middle and petty-bourgeoisie from the side of the proletariat. It was an attempt to create the greatest illusion about the *socialistic pattern of society* and thereby eliminate the independent role of the working class. The parliamentary system adopted was presented as the highest form of democracy through which society could be changed by the people into any form or shape they wished. These illusions, both about socialism and about democracy, were to create havoc in the movement for complete independence and for deep-going social transformations. During this period, agrarian revolution was crushed by force and the age-old aspirations of the Indian peasantry for land remained unsatisfied.

It was also at this time that the Communist Party of India (CPI) failed to organise the working class to steer clear of these illusions.

It could not provide the working class with its own programme, both in relation to the democratic revolution and the resolution of the agrarian question, and to socialism, the question of the proletariat seizing political power. Major changes were taking place in the country at the time of India's formal independence in 1947. Those changes were not great when measured against the yardstick of *what might have been achieved*, had the national movement been led either by the working class or the uncompromising sections of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless they did create a space for the doctrine of communism and for a political party based on it to make headway. The promulgation of the Indian Constitution in 1950 was an advance in the objective

sense. The setting up of democratic institutions, flawed though they may have been, was also an advance.

At the same time, these transformations could not have been considered final as they were not deep-going. Within these circumstances, not to have made a sober assessment of what had changed was as dangerous as having illusions about the institutions which had been created. The CPI wavered between these two extremes and could not take advantage of the post-independence situation to present people with a concrete programme for the democratic revolution on the road to socialism. It could not dispel the illusions about bourgeois socialism and parliamentary democracy from its midst, thereby creating the condition for splits and divisions. The splitting of the Communist Party of India at the end of 1964 was the single most damaging blow to the unity of the vanguard and to the independent role of the working class. It signified the defeat of the working class in the following period and the transformation of the communist party into factions organized as separate political parties whose main aim became to simply compete with the bourgeois political parties on a terrain guaranteed to ensure that the working class and people could make no advance.

Looking at the experience of the communist movement with parliamentary democracy and at the communist parties which became its ardent participants, it can be concluded that these communist parties have fully accepted the notions of political power as enshrined in the Indian Constitution, notions which preclude the possibility of power ever passing into the hands of the people.

The major factions of the communist party, particularly the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), approach the question of political power in a manner that does not differ in any qualitative way from the bourgeois political parties – that is, of capturing power for themselves. For them, parliamentary struggle is not one of the arenas of class struggle for the empowerment of the people, but one of the ways they can preserve themselves and extend their influence within the existing system. The 1960's and the 1970's was a period of spontaneous mass struggles in both the cities and the countryside, but with the communist party split into factions and the main ones succumbing to the illusions about bourgeois socialism and parliamentary democracy, the working class and the toilers fought without emerging victorious. They did not succeed in defending their rights and opening a path for the progress of society. The Marxist-Leninists strove to transform this situation in favour of the people. The taking up of the question – What Kind of Party? – is the continuation of this struggle. It is dedicated to the unity of the working class and its independent role and the unity of the working class with the toiling masses. At the heart of this question is the restoration of the unity of the Indian communists without which the unity of the working class and the united front of the working class with the toiling masses is an impossible dream.

## Need for Renewal of the Political Process

The parliamentary system is in deep crisis not only in India but all over the world. The party in power, the Congress (I), and the Party in opposition, the BJP, openly declare that they will abide by nothing and that they are a law unto themselves. There are other political parties who also think in this way. How else is it possible to have riots, disappearances, murders and fake encounters if these parties were not a law unto themselves? The present system, besides not solving any of the problems for the benefit of the people, also appears unable to provide a smooth transfer of governance from one political party to the other. The main cause of this is not that the Congress (I) and BJP are deviants, but that the system demands the existence of such parties for its perpetuation.

People are putting forward their demands and all sections of the people are discontented with the situation, but the system cannot satisfy them. There is a real pressure for the creation of a new kind of party, a party which would ensure that these political parties do not keep the people out of power.

People have a lot of experience with this parliamentary system in which every struggle of the people, whether in Kashmir, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and elsewhere, whether on the question of livelihood, environment and control over resources or some other issue, is labelled *extremist* and *terrorist*. Political and economic problems are deliberately rendered into *law and order* issues.

This has meant a huge increase in the use of force and state terrorism, on the one hand, and a growing perception about the illegitimacy of New Delhi's rule, on the other. The various struggles which have broken out also cause political divisions in the ruling circles, who try to speculate on the situation for their own ends. Such divisions create a potentially favourable situation for the proletariat to make an advance. However, such a situation can only be utilised by a party which has as its aim the empowerment of the people.

The recent election results, especially those in Uttar Pradesh where people rejected both the Congress (I) and BJP and denied a majority to any other party, reflect a certain sense of disgust towards the existing political parties and politicians as a breed. Indeed this disgust and rejection of the establishment is not limited to India alone, but has had its reflection in Italy, New Zealand, Russia, Peru, Canada, Japan and elsewhere as well. With political parties and politicians so much in disgrace all over the world, the question naturally arises as to whether something is inherently wrong in the organisation called a political party or with the profession of politicians. Obviously, this is not the case. The existence of political parties is one of the greatest achievements of modern political life, especially the formation of the communist party. Political parties will disappear only with the disappearance of class society.

But if the problem is not with political parties, where does the problem lie? It can be said that the quality of a politician or a political party is determined by the kind of political process which exists in a society. This is true unless, of course, a political party is organising



to deliberately change the system. What kind of political process exists in India where a number of the members of the Lok Sabha can be bribed into saving a government or achieving the opposite or where elections are used merely to legitimise the already existing rule and sort out contradictions within the ruling circles? If people have contempt for political parties and politicians, they feel even greater hostility towards a political process that allows such parties and politicians to dominate the scene. It stands to reason that within these circumstances a political party has to be extremely conscious of not merging with such a political process. Far from merging and subordinating itself to such a political process, a communist party will have to educate the working class to not be taken in by such a system and make it conscious of the need to create a new system which will empower the people. The communist party must draw the proletariat into a contest with the bourgeoisie about the creation of a truly democratic society and prove that only the proletariat has the ability and interest to do it.

The origin of the political system that exists in India and the roots of the crisis of this system can be traced to the Government of India Act of 1935, the transfer of power that took place in 1947, and the Constitution that was adopted in 1950.

The transfer of power which took place on August 15, 1947, following the ratification by the British Parliament of the India Independence Act, transferred sovereignty from the British Crown and Parliament to the Constituent Assembly. In spite of all the obstacles which were put up by the British and

native vested interests, the national movement in 1935 was able to win the franchise for about one quarter of the adult population. While considerably less than universal franchise, and based essentially on property and educational qualifications, this was still an advance when compared to the situation in the earlier stages of colonial rule. The Constituent Assembly of 1946 was not elected by the free and sovereign Indian people – as colonial rule still prevailed – but by the members of the Viceroy’s Council and the Provincial Legislatures of British India, the latter of whom were themselves elected on the limited franchise established in 1935. In addition there were some representatives from the Princely states. The mandate to elect the Constituent Assembly was given to these Councils and legislatures not by the Indian people, but by the then sovereign power, the British Parliament, under the Cabinet Mission Plan of Sir Stafford Cripps in 1946. The vast majority who were elected to the Constituent Assembly belonged to the compromising sections of the bourgeoisie.

Although it was members of the Provincial legislatures – who were themselves elected in 1945 on the basis of taking the oath of upholding and defending the rule of the British in India – who made up the Constituent Assembly, the feelings for independence amongst the people ran so high that they had to go for the direct and immediate transfer of power. By the time the Indian Constitution took effect as the fundamental law of the land on January 26, 1950, the people of India had won, besides other things, universal franchise – an achievement of strategic importance for them. They also compelled the bourgeoisie to establish a democracy that had to acknowledge that its aim was to work for

the benefit of the Indian people. While the democracy that came into being was objectively an advance for the Indian people, it did not lead to their empowerment. This was because this democracy was based on the theory of concentrating power in the executive, in order to deprive the masses of power. The role of the President of India, the frequent declaration of President's Rule at the advice of the cabinet, the ruling party's power to define and redefine state boundaries, the very notion of *cabinet rule*, are all different features of this concentration of power in the hands of the executive.

The Indian Constitution did not fully take advantage of what was the most advanced at that time in terms of constitutional jurisprudence, and seek to make a contribution by basing itself on that body of knowledge. On the contrary, it was based on what was the best for the compromising sections of the class in whose hands power had been transferred in 1947. The experience of close to forty-five years since 1950 has proven just how reluctant the bourgeoisie is in providing democracy to the people. Now people are increasingly demanding that the advance of 1950 be taken to its logical conclusion, the empowerment of the people.

## **Political Parties and Political Power**

A political party, by dint of being political, is a party which, in the final analysis, will have to recognise that as society is divided into classes, so a political party will have to serve either the interest of the bourgeoisie or of the working class. There can be no political formation which can claim that it is neutral or in-between and serves no one. A political party has

to be politically committed to the resolution of all political problems, the most important of which is the question of political power. To whom should political power belong? Should it belong to a political party or to a class or classes? Should political power belong to a class which is in a minority in a society? What kind of democracy is it where a minority class wields all the economic and political power? What about the other classes and strata in the society, the ones which are in-between the minority dominant class, the bourgeoisie, and the majority, the working class and toiling masses of both city and countryside? Being a party of one class or the other, all political parties necessarily fight for a class rule. There is no such thing as a party fighting for its own rule in the strict sense. Even though it may appear that a political party is striving merely to bring itself into power, in essence, it will bring either one or the other class into power. This is inherent in the nature of political power as it is presently constituted.

The parliamentary system as it exists in India and elsewhere, or a Presidential system in the style of the US or Yeltsin's Russia, accords recognition only to those political parties which strive to keep the people out of power. The President of India, for instance, has the power, at the advice of the cabinet to dismiss any elected government. This power exists only because if, as a supposition, a revolutionary communist party wins a majority, then the President can deprive such a political party of political power. This actually happened in August 1959 when the CPI government in Kerala was overthrown for proposing some agrarian reforms and changes in the educational system.

In other words, only those political parties which fully accept the parliamentary system and will defend the economic system will be recognised as political parties. The bourgeoisie, split as it is into its own sectional interests, boasts of being democratic as long as there is no threat to its political power. It is very democratic until such times when it becomes impossible to keep the system going, whereupon it resorts to the open use of force. The Indian state, in fact, has been resorting to the open use of force right from its reconstitution in 1947 under the new conditions of post-colonial India. State terrorism has been developed as a weapon in order to guarantee that power remains in its own hands. The parliamentary system as it exists is so unsuitable for the Indian conditions that even the bourgeoisie cannot sort out contradictions within its own ranks peacefully. There are many examples of the use of open violence as contradictions burst open in the bourgeois class itself. Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency in 1975 was such an example and there are many others, especially the passage of laws which even deprive sections of the bourgeoisie of their civil liberties, as is the case in Punjab, Kashmir, Manipur and elsewhere.

Bourgeois democracy, both in its essence as well as in appearance is really the dictatorship of the party. It is the dictatorship of the most powerful sections of the bourgeoisie on the side of who stand all the state institutions, especially the army and the police. It is the dictatorship of the smallest section of the people who rule through the help of those political parties who agree to govern in defence of their interests. It cannot be otherwise as the bourgeoisie is democratic only to

the extent that it agrees to sort out the contradictions within its own ranks peacefully, so long as this is possible. However, it does not always succeed in this. The bourgeoisie has resorted to open dictatorship when liberalism has failed to defend its own interests.

Parliamentary democracy provides the bourgeoisie with the tool for sorting out contradictions in its own ranks, and such a sorting out can only take place by handing over the right to govern to a political party. Such a political party, once in power, participates in handing out favours to its own group and governs through corruption, while the parties in opposition scream about it only to discredit it for the sake of coming to power themselves. Once in power, the opposition party will do the same as has been proven in India from 1947 to date.

A proletarian party, on the other hand, is known to be proletarian because it seeks power not for itself but for its class and it does not establish its own dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is quite well known that for a proletarian party to achieve such a goal, it must seek the united front of all oppressed classes and strata and imbue the proletariat with the consciousness to lead them in frontal war against the bourgeois rule and its systems. A proletarian party in this case cannot present itself to be a substitute either for the class or for the united front of the oppressed classes. It has to be and remain as the main subjective force, the decisive force for the realisation of the class aim of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing socialism. For a communist party to play parliamentary

games means that it has ceased to be a party of the proletariat, i.e., it has lost its class character. It may still have some progressive policies but such policies should not be confused with the fundamental requirement of a communist party that it must have a class character, i.e., it must be the vanguard of the proletariat.

This loss of class character leads such parties into conceptions which are hostile to democratic rule. They begin to advocate the dictatorship of the party in place of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They begin to eliminate the leading role of the Party as the vanguard of the class in organising the working class and people for the wielding of the class power in their own interests. They begin to create illusions about the use of the ready-made state machine of the bourgeoisie for effecting the deep-going transformations necessary for the benefit of the class and society. They begin to look at revolution as a future prospect while parliamentary struggle is placed as the most important question of the time. They begin to give up even the pretence of being the party of the proletariat and begin to change its class composition. In sum, they begin to transform the political party of the proletariat into a political party of the bourgeoisie. It can be concluded from the above that if a political party insists on coming into power for itself, it will necessarily be a bourgeois party.

A political party can be recognised and its character established merely on the basis of whether it is itself striving to come to power or not. Having said this much, the question arises, what kind of political party does the working class need in this period? It is a pertinent question and it should be answered. In whose spirit

should a party be organised? A party in the spirit of the bourgeoisie, a militarist and Bonapartist party which seeks to monopolise power in its own hands by force of arms, or a party which organises and mobilises the oppressed for the creation of a new society in which the people are empowered and in which power is defended by the armed people themselves? This question has assumed urgency and has to be settled amongst all the communist and progressive people.



# Political Theory and the Political Process

Before the question of a new political process or a new political party can be seriously addressed, what must be deeply appreciated is that behind every political process, there exists a political theory.

Any new political process will also have to have its political theory.

It is not coincidental that the Indian bourgeoisie shuns away from discussion on political theory. It gives the impression that this political system is the best for all times and for all people, or at least for the vast majority of them. It hides the fact that according to its own political theory, people should be deprived of political power. Our party, on the other hand, openly proclaims that it stands for a political theory and process which will empower the people.

The CGPI welcomes the opportunity to elaborate the kind of political process and political party that is needed and it welcomes discussion on the political theory which is to underlie these. Communists must not only carry out this discussion but also inspire the progressive intelligentsia to battle with the bourgeoisie in the field and establish the most suitable political theory for the empowerment of the people of India.

Political theory, by definition, concerns itself with political power, its origin, its metamorphosis and

development and, finally, its dissolution. The issue of the political process comes within the scope of political theory. Political theory determines the form, the mechanism which will be most suitable for it. Modern bourgeois political power in India has its origin in James I's theory of the Divine Right of Kings. Modern proletarian political power has its origin in the political theory of Karl Marx, who gave the proletariat the role of grave-digger of the bourgeoisie. Only political theory can explain how every form of political power is merely the personification of the will of very definite human beings belonging to very definite classes, as expressed in the form of the political superstructure, the fundamental law and the entire political process.

## **Bourgeois Political Power**

The recent conduct of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin presents a glimpse of the true face of political power, the role of political parties as groupings of individuals seeking power for themselves and the political process as a mechanism to legitimize this. Boris Yeltsin has established a constitution and a political process which can personify the will of a select few, even as it creates the impression of a power which is democratic. The Russian army is the main instrument of this will, as was clearly seen when Yeltsin ordered the tanks to move in against the Congress of People's Deputies at the beginning of October this year. Now that the main political superstructure, including the political process, has been established, Boris Yeltsin is presented as a democrat. He looks like a democrat in the style of Bill Clinton or Narasimha Rao! With the adoption of the Yeltsin Constitution on December 12,

1993, rival political parties whose aim it is to capture power for themselves have already come into being.

Political power appears in the first instance in its most grotesque and ugly form, as was the case at the beginning of October this year in Russia, and in its final form, as a justification for its absolutism.

Can it be said that this is the case with all forms of political power? No, it can be said only about a definite kind of political power which personifies the will of definite kinds of human beings and the collectives to which they belong. These are human beings who want power for themselves. They are not for power for the benefit of society, for the opening of the path for its progress. They do not wish to end the class society or the exploitation of one person by another. It is for this reason that these parties cannot be called political in the strict sense of the word.

The fact that political power appears in the first instances in its arbitrariness proves that the power is actually created by human beings. Whatever justification may be given in its favour is an entirely different and secondary matter. Boris Yeltsin justifies his rule by decree by saying that he is for reform, which means that he is an advocate of the capitalist system. The existing political process and the constitution on which it was based were, according to Yeltsin, obstructing reform. Such a justification cannot obscure the fact that he is creating a political power which will be defended by a professional army which represents the interests of a definite class of people. All the imperialist and capitalist powers are hailing Yeltsin precisely for this reason.

Yeltsin has created the position of a President who stands above all. He has put in place a constitution in which the elected house will be subordinate to the President and in his service. Whenever such a house does not play the intended role, the President can dismiss it and call for another. In other words, the position of President appears sovereign and everything else is subordinate to it. As a starting point, all the citizens of Russia will have to swear in the name of a constitution which endows the President with the position of a sovereign. In other words, all the citizens of Russia will have to hand over their sovereignty to the President. This is the first demand of the new political power which is being created in Russia.

What kind of political parties will there be which will seek this power? It is quite clear that the character of these parties will be one of keeping the working class and people out of power. Once sovereignty is in the hands of the President, what kind of a role will political parties have within this political process? They will either be vying for power themselves, vying to elect their own president, or they will be organising for the overthrow of such a constitution and for the empowerment of the people.

There have been democracies and political theories for a long time, but all of them have kept the people out of power under one pretext or another. James I, King of England at the turn of the 17th century, created a similar form of power in which the entire sovereignty was vested in the monarch. Following his reign, this form or conception of political power was not questioned by anyone. Instead, a contest took place

as to who should wield it. James I had established the *Royal Prerogative* as the ultimate form of power and he justified it in the name of the Divine Right of Kings. This *Royal Prerogative* has never been removed from the statute books of England and exists, in various forms, in the constitutions of Canada, Australia, etc., as well as in India, albeit in a slightly different form. When all is said and done, the *Royal Prerogative* or its equivalent is the final guarantee that the form of political power established by James I remains untouched, even as certain changes are brought about in terms of the political process. This 17th century conception of political power and the kind of political process it spawned in the 18th and 19th centuries has remained virtually intact to date, with the difference being that it is the cabinet formed by the ruling party which really wields this power and not a monarch. The only political parties which were able to emerge in consonance with this unfolding of political power were those which wanted to usurp power for themselves, or, more precisely, for the section of the bourgeoisie which they represented. This was the role these parties played in history, even though during the hey-day of capitalist development, the conditions of the time put them at the head of development as instruments for the opening of the path for progress of society. However, no sooner did conditions change, the same parties transformed themselves into instruments to block the progress of society.

When the working class attained maturity, its political parties were thoroughly distrusted until such time that the bourgeoisie was confident that they too had leaders who also had the desire to usurp power for themselves,

they were also for titles, for the accumulation of power for their own vainglory. Those parties which did not go along with this system, such as the parties of the Third Communist International, and who stood against this conception of political power, were made (and continue to be made) the targets of the “due process of the law” and stopped from ever coming to power. People were bribed from their midst and revisionist and opportunist theories spread amongst them in order to protect bourgeois power and to impose bourgeois conceptions of political power upon the working class movement.

The political system established by James I evolved into the modern systems of government which require and function best with two political parties, one in power and the other in opposition. Such a system prevails as long as there is only one most powerful class. However, with the working class growing in terms of its numbers and consciousness, such a system became obsolete by the beginning of the 20th century. The more the form of power based on the *Royal Prerogative* became contrary to the interests of the vast majority of people, the more the political parties could be seen as bodies which manipulate the people to justify their government in various ways. The conditions of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, as the objective condition of a system which is thoroughly moribund and parasitic, also brought forth political parties which were moribund and parasitic and a political process which was also moribund and parasitic. These political parties, which were directly linked with the bourgeois power, openly defied the people and pushed their own interests in broad daylight. There is no need to mention the political

scandals which have been shaking Italy, Japan, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and other countries, besides India, because all the countries where such a system exists also have such scandals all the time, not to speak of the bourgeoisie resorting to fascism and militarism when liberal democracy no longer yields what it wants.

A political party and its usefulness is determined by the bourgeoisie these days strictly on the basis of its ability to manipulate public opinion. A political party or a politician who swears allegiance to the status quo and is skillful in hiding the same from the people and in manipulating public opinion, is the one most suited to the bourgeoisie.

This is the reason why these political parties and politicians are so much discredited.

## **Proletarian Political Power**

The USSR was the first example of the executive power passing over into the hands of the working people. It was guaranteed in the fundamental law established in 1936. However, this fundamental law did not change the form of democracy. The working people played the decisive role but it was still a representative democracy in which the working people did not yet govern themselves on their own behalf.

In the fifties, Nikita Khrushchev in declaring that there were no classes in the Soviet Union, ignored the fact that class struggle remained the basis of motion in society. Khrushchev could not solve the complexity that while there was still the need for a working

class political party, its aim must be to bring about the empowerment of the people so that they could directly rule on their own behalf. Far from introducing innovations, he began to speculate and came up with the concept of the *party of the whole people* and the *state of the whole people*, in the spirit of those who seek to hide the real state of political affairs. Far from contributing to political theory, the executive power became more and more detached from the working people. A new stratum of politicians was given rise to, which opened the path for a new division of society based on class differentiation, privileges and power. This opened the way for socialism to be overthrown.

Khrushchev needed to conceal his political theory in order to encourage the restoration of the exploiting classes and class differentiation and the role of privilege and power. He used leftist phrases and bombastic statements like *burying capitalism* in order to divert attention from the restoration of capitalism.

In the earlier period, especially during the period before the Constitution of the USSR was put in place in 1936, a struggle took place over the definition of political power. For instance, what kind of political party should the political party of the working class be? Should it be filled with factions or should it be a unified party? What should be its relationship to the state? Should it be the instrument of the new political power or should the state be the instrument of the political party? In other words, should there be a party dictatorship or a dictatorship of the proletariat? What should be the relationship of this party with other parties, associations, groups, etc.? What should be the relationship between the working



class and other classes? The enrichment of political theory can be seen in the 1936 Constitution where, for the first time in the history of the election of the executive and legislative power, no political party was permitted by law to select candidates. The significance of this enactment was not fully appreciated in the course of subsequent developments and it was never taken to its logical conclusion. The subsequent introduction of the conception of the dictatorship of a single party made the change a dead letter.

Nonetheless, the introduction of universal franchise, the right to select and elect candidates, the right to recall, etc., were particular achievements in this direction on the basis of which further progress could have been made.

Thus the path along which progress had to be made was quite clear. It was in the direction of enhancing the vanguard role of the political party of the working class, on the one hand, and increasing the role of the working people in governance, on the other, so as to achieve the ultimate aim where the people govern themselves. As far as the fundamental law of the USSR is concerned, no progress was made towards the empowerment of the people beyond the decisive advance achieved in 1936. What transpired, especially once Khrushchev came to power in the fifties, was that the Communist Party became more and more entrenched in the executive role, culminating in the dissolution of the USSR itself and eventually, the adoption of the draft constitution of Boris Yeltsin which finally enshrines the political theory of James I. Instead of the Crown having the ultimate power, this is given the form of a President

concentrating all the power in his hands. What Yeltsin has established is what was actually being practised during the past forty years in the form of all power being concentrated in the hands of the Party in power and its Politburo. From the Communist Party of the Soviet Union being the dictator, this power has gone into the hands of the President of the Russian Federation, who is now the dictator.

The Soviet Constitution of 1936 was a big advance in terms of representative democracy. However, the CPSU(B) was not able to make the transition from being the leading force of a proletarian state to leading the people to govern themselves. In other words, the transition was not made from one kind of political party to another, from one form of political process to another; in sum, from one form of political power to another.

One kind of political party is needed when there is one form of dictatorship, as is the case within the countries which have a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie; another kind of political party is needed when there is a dictatorship of the proletariat. However, there is a difference.

A political party within the capitalist democracy (dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) has to guarantee that the working class does not snatch this power from its hands, on the one hand, and formulate policies and promulgate laws which would deprive the working class of its ability to defend its own interests. A political party under the proletarian democracy (dictatorship of the proletariat) on the other hand has to guarantee that

all exploiting classes are eliminated as classes and that the political power is transferred to the working people, opening the path for the creation of a new society.

The CPSU(B) was a political party capable of guaranteeing the elimination of the existing exploiting classes but it was not able to transfer political power to the working people. This was the problem posed by the objective developments. Refusal to tackle it, for whatever reasons, led to degeneration instead of an advance. In time, the CPSU itself degenerated and became the instrument for the transformation of one form of political power to the other, from the dictatorship of the proletariat to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

## **Modern Definition of a Political Party**

Where should sovereignty lie? Suppose that the role played by the *Royal Prerogative* in whatever form it exists were eliminated from the political process, where then would sovereignty lie? Can it be said that sovereignty would lie with the people and that they could exercise it by handing it over to their representatives by means of elections? This is precisely what already takes place in India and many countries of the world. Unless people directly participate in laying down the law and in governance, in other words until they are empowered, there will be no radical and deep-going changes. What should be done within the present conditions in order to change the situation? Where should sovereignty be vested and how should it be exercised? Should it be handed over to the governing party as it is being done at this time? There is no use arguing that the answer

will depend on the size of a political entity and/or the homogeneity of populations. Can it be said that small states with a homogenous population can afford to have sovereignty lie in the hands of the people while this becomes impossible in bigger states like India with large and diverse populations? The issue is really one of content and not of form. If the interests of the vast majority are to be served, then sovereignty will have to be vested in the people. If the interests of the entire populace are to be served, sovereignty must rest in the hands of all. Such a thing cannot happen without the empowerment of the people and having political parties which work for it.

Whether a country is small or big, all human beings throughout the world have rights by dint of being human. A modern definition of a political party is one which enshrines this in its constitution as the most important principle. In order to do that, it must include a clause which states that nothing can override the principle that all those who are human have rights by dint of being human.

The question will then be immediately posed: What are these rights which exist by dint of being human? A modern political party would have to clearly define them. This is not the place to discuss these rights but it is important to note that once this principle is recognised as a fundamental guide, concrete interests will arise which at first appear to be contradictory. An individual interest seems to contradict the interest of the collective, while the individual and collective interests seem to contradict the general interests of society. A political party, if it is to truly stand for the sovereignty

of the people, must be capable of harmonising these interests. Another form of political power would then be created – one which rests in the hands of all the people in society. The creation of such a political power is in fact one of the greatest problems facing modern political theory.

If it is to be assumed, as is the case in the modern parliamentary or presidential system, that the only aim of a political party is to come to power, i.e., to govern in the name of the people, such a political party will never be able to provide enabling legislation to ensure that people have rights by dint of being human and that the individual, collective and general interests have to be harmonised.

If, however, a political party were to lead the people to come to power and innovate a modern political process in order to ensure this, then the people would be able to provide themselves with the enabling legislation they require. A modern political party, as a conclusion, must be one which provides the people with a leading force so that they can govern and exercise their sovereignty. The modern definition of such a political party would include not the aim of capturing existing power for itself but to create a new political power for the people. It would not seek political power once the new political power is created as its very mechanism will bring the people to power. Of course, political parties would still have a crucial role in guaranteeing the empowerment of the people and in presenting a vision for society.

This means concretely that while communists may participate in the elections in order to push their

programme, they must not fight to come to power themselves. The parliamentary front should be used in order to advance the struggle but it is not the only or even the most important front of struggle. A communist party has to educate the proletariat and people about the nature of political power and about what changes are necessary to enable them to have power. What it means for people to be empowered has to be elaborated within the context of the present crisis India is passing through, a crisis of its parliamentary system. The Indian people have to be organised on a non-partisan basis in order to contest the power of the bourgeoisie. Such people's formation will have to participate in all forms of struggle to create the new political power, including participating in the elections when suitable. As opposed to a political party being the guardian of the existing political power, a modern political party has to emerge as the leading force for the creation of a modern political power in the true sense of the word; a political power which reflects the will of all the people in society and internationally and which puts, in the first place, the need to organise society so that it fulfills the claims of its members upon it. It cannot take up the aim of a bourgeois party whose aim is to keep the people away from the corridors of power like St. Peter acting as the gate keeper of heaven or like Chitrugupta, the celestial accountant, who decides who can enter heaven and who has to be taken away by Yamaraj! Furthermore, such a party can only be of the proletariat: a vanguard party which leads the entire people to create a new society in which people have rights by dint of being human and the individual, collective and general interests of society are harmonised.

A political party with the class character of the working class cannot establish political power for itself or for the working class in the narrow sense of the word. It has to establish political power which eliminates all conditions which enable the exploitation of one person by another. Such a political power must be wielded not by any political party but by all those in whose interests it is to end class society.

Communists must enter the political contest with the aim of empowering the people. They must call for the democratic renewal of the political process in order to empower the people. The key point in democratic renewal is not just the right to recall or to initiate legislation, but to guarantee the right to elect and be elected. There is no enabling legislation at this time in India to transform this right from an abstraction into reality. Such a political party would naturally fight for the right of the people, organised on the basis of *mohallas* and workplaces, to select candidates and put them forward for election.

Those who are elected would constitute the government, while the people would hold on to the right to recall, to initiate legislation and to participate in governance. Such a political process would be dominated not by political parties but by the people. To call for the elimination of the domination of the political process by the political parties is not equivalent to calling for the elimination of political parties. On the contrary, political parties are absolutely essential to the functioning of such a system as it is political parties which fight for definite class interests and organize people to achieve those.

Political parties will have to prove themselves to their members and not to this or that leader who happens to either have a lot of money or be connected with those who do i.e, the privileged strata of society. It will be in the interests of the political parties to work for the democratic renewal of the political process as it would provide the people with real power and deprive the old type of parties of privilege of their power base. It is not only a political party of the working class which will have a genuine interest in bringing about such changes but there will be others who will fight for such a power too, those who are fighting for genuine democracy.

### **Elimination of all Privileges – the Demand of Modern Democracy**

The greatest problem facing modern democracy is to provide itself with a content which is not only completely detached from the old forms in which it appeared but also represents their opposite. Political power as conceived by the ideologues and theoreticians of either ancient Greece or ancient Rome or by the representatives of medievalism – especially by James I of England – was explicitly based on depriving the mass of the people of not only a role in governing but also in determining the fundamental law and the character of political power.

The expansion of the franchise to the point that it was made universal did not provide the people with the ability to elect and be elected, because it did not change the character of political power and the role of privilege in determining it. The Indian Constitution recognizes the right of Indians to elect and be elected but there is no enabling legislation to give it effect.



Representatives of workers and peasants, as well as of political parties that represent any section of the exploited and oppressed masses, face an inherent discrimination in the electoral process, as a result of the unequal distribution of wealth. Moreover, electoral laws discriminate between independents and candidates of recognized political parties. TV and radio time are provided for the five so-called national political parties – the Congress, BJP, Janata Dal, CPI and CPI(M) – and in the states to the so-called “recognised state parties”, while others are deprived of it. Electoral and other laws favour those with privilege and wealth to further assert their power.

One of the greatest problems which faced old democracy as it emerged in England was the fight against the privilege of the Crown. In sum, the struggle against feudal privilege was one of the major planks of that democracy. Those who fought against that privilege only fought in class terms. They fought feudal privilege so as to establish capitalist privilege. They did not finish all privilege. They deprived the Crown of its use of the Royal Prerogative in its favour, and provided themselves with that power. They did not hand it over to those to whom it belonged – people of the country. They did not seek its dissolution for purposes of giving rise to a new political power. Having fought only feudal privilege, capitalist democracy has pushed only those aspects which it fought to establish – civil rights. But it does not touch on what is crucial – equality of political rights – and as the crisis deepens, even civil rights have proved to be dispensable, as the evolution of black laws and state repression in not only India but other parts of the world shows.

In sum, political theory will therefore have to resolve two of the most important problems that have remained unresolved from the era of feudal and capitalist privilege.

The first is the content of political power. Who should rule and in whose interests? A modern definition of a political party cannot ignore this question. Secondly, what should be the political mechanism which will guarantee that the people, those who want to rule, can do so and guarantee that the rule serves them. The political process or political mechanisms, i.e., political forms, are not inert and indifferent to political power, the political content and the people it serves.

Modern definitions must pierce through all the fog which has been created and resolve the historical problem of ensuring that privilege is deprived of any role whatsoever.

## **Political Parties and the Empowerment of the People**

The question naturally arises: What is the solution under these circumstances? The solution can only be the creation of a mechanism through which people can contest the power of the most privileged and come into power themselves, subordinating the executive power to the requirements of the empowerment of the people. New political power will also change the political process in order to perpetuate itself until such times that the state withers away with the dissolution of the class society.

There is a need, not just for a coalition or an alliance of parties, but for an association, a mechanism in the hands of the people, for their own empowerment. Communists will have to work towards the establishment of such a mechanism both in theory and in practice.

The notion that people must come to power themselves must find concrete expression, but this does not mean it is not important for the political party which takes up this task to have a class character. It must be the political party of the working class. There is no question of the Communist Party changing its class character. It must openly declare that it is a political party of the proletariat and conduct its affairs in that fashion.

At the heart of the political crisis at the present time is the need to empower the people. The question of empowerment is a non-partisan issue which must be taken up by all political parties.

Only the proletariat and its party has the broad-mindedness and the courage of conviction to present such a problem on a non-partisan basis. It is a problem which faces society as a whole because the present process and institutions have become superfluous. The Communist Party is strictly a partisan party. It has its own ideology and political line and it is committed to the creation of a communist society through revolution. Can such a party take a non-partisan stand on such an important question as the empowerment of the people? Not only can it take such a stand but it must. Why is this the case? The contest over political power is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the capitalist class will never agree to

be deprived of political power. As a class, the capitalists look at the empowerment of the people purely from their own interests. They do not care what happens to society. They care only what happens to their own interests.

In other words, they do not take an enlightened and broad-minded approach to this question. They neither want to resolve this political crisis in favour of the people or society nor will they stop creating the illusion that the political crisis can be overcome. They want to preserve the status quo. The working class, on the other hand, wants space to manoeuvre against the capitalist class. As leader of all the exploited, it is in its own interests to be non-partisan on the question of the empowerment of the people. It is in its own interests to be enlightened and broad-minded.

All literature available at this time in the sphere of political theory concerns itself only with the form in which political power is constituted and exercised, without regard to the content. It presumes that as far as the content of political power is concerned, there is no need for innovation or renewal. There is no questioning of the fundamental premise of political power, of the sovereignty of the executive or of the role of political parties. Furthermore, even when the form is discussed, it is done only on the basis of making the existing institutions credible. By accepting political theory as is and taking up the aim of strengthening the existing forms, many intellectuals are contributing to fueling the political crisis. An enlightened and broad-minded approach necessarily means starting from investigating the present-day reality. It is only by analysing facts

from the present political experience all over the world that it will be possible to find a cure for what ails the political system in India.

A political investigator must first look at what is going on at this time and then look at the past, from seventeenth century England to the present time, going all the way back to the conceptions of political power in the anti-colonial struggle, the Mughal period, and earlier. The sum total of the Indian speculation and theorising on an experience with power and politics has to be deliberated upon from the vantage point of the present. An investigator will have to reckon with the contradiction inherent in present-day political systems which preserve by force of arms the right of the executive power to govern on behalf of the rulers, while using elections to make this naked power credible to the ruled. In a democracy, is it not the case that one section has all the power while another has none? Why is it that in democracies of the kind which exists in India, only a tiny minority has all the political power? Why should the working people who constitute the vast majority not enjoy their right to govern? Why should they not enjoy their right to elect and be elected? Indian communists are confronted with these problems. Why should communists not raise the demand that Indian democracy be taken to its logical conclusion, the empowerment of the people?

There is no reason why deep-going democratic reforms should not be carried out at this time. If a Constituent Assembly could come into being under the conditions of colonial rule with all the attendant limitations, why cannot a new Constituent Assembly

be convened at the present time? We are not, of course, raising this as a demand at this time, but the question does arise as to why a new constitution should not be drafted on the basis of the experience of the past forty-five years or so? While the Constituent Assembly was elected under the colonial rule on the basis of a limited franchise, there is a sovereign Indian Parliament now. Why does it not call for the election of a Constituent Assembly to deal with the democratic renewal of the political process and other questions? There is no reason why a new Constituent Assembly cannot be elected on the basis of universal franchise, to which all the basic questions of universal franchise, to which all the basic questions confronting the country can be put for deliberation. One of the most outstanding of such questions will have to be the empowerment of the people. The members of such a Constituent Assembly would have the responsibility to work out a new political process guided by political theory and the aim of empowerment of the people.

One of the most important questions which arose during the First War of Indian Independence in 1857 needs to be recalled at this time.

Bahadur Shah Zafar elaborated his political theory at that time that after the people win victory, it is they who will decide who will constitute the executive power and the kind of system which will prevail there. The British were horrified by this explicit reference to the role of the people in determining the affairs of society. The role and consciousness of the people in determining the state of affairs has grown tremendously since that time and is reaching its culmination during

this period. In spite of the splitting of the polity on the basis of caste, religion and language, there is a growing and explicit demand that it is the people who must be sovereign, that it is they who must lay down the fundamental law and it is they who must govern and protect the new system themselves. From the time of the consolidation of British power in India down to its formal dissolution and the emergence of a new polity in the post-independence period, material conditions have matured to the extent that society can and must take up this task of the empowerment of the people.

Indian political parties have a history of well over 100 years, the oldest being the Indian National Congress which was founded in 1885. The communist movement has also had a history of well over 70 years and the Communist Party of India will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of its founding at the end of 1995. Is this not the most opportune time to sum up this experience and think over what kind of party is needed for India? A political party presents the aim of a class in the most concentrated form. Its ideology is a reflection of the kind of future society will have. Should the Indian people not think aloud as to what they are going to do with the political parties which oppose their empowerment? Such questions must be raised, and on a dispassionate basis, without prejudice.

As a conclusion, we should note that these questions of restoring the unity of Indian communists or of *What kind of Party?* or of the empowerment of the people – even though being raised here with a fresh nuance

– are not in any way different from what the central preoccupation of the movement has been since the time of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Communists must treat these questions as matters of first-rate priority for the working class and the broad masses of the people. A great task of historical significance is ahead of us. Let us march together under the banner of Marxism-Leninism in order to open the path of socialism for Indian society through revolution. Let us work to restore the unity of the Indian communists and built the unified vanguard party of the working class as an instrument for the empowerment of the people.





