

CPI(M)

Election Manifesto



15th Lok Sabha 2009

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

MANIFESTO FOR THE 15TH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS, 2009

PART I

Elections to the Lok Sabha are a significant event in the political life of the country. For the fifteenth time, the people of India are being called upon to elect a new government.

In the sixty years of independence, the people of India have suffused life into the democratic system by exercising their right to elect representatives to parliament. Yet, the aspirations of the people remain unfulfilled. The rich, urban and rural, have reaped the benefits of “development”, while the vast majority has sunk further and further into poverty and hunger.

These elections are being held at a time of unprecedented global economic crisis. The jobs and livelihood of millions of Indians are at stake. Economic progress and the social well being of the people face uncertain prospects.

In the May 2004 elections, the people rejected the BJP-led NDA combine, which had ruled the country for six years with disastrous effects. The CPI(M) was committed to keeping the BJP and the communal forces out of power. Accordingly, the CPI(M) and the Left parties extended support to the Congress-led UPA coalition so that a secular government could be formed at the Centre. This was done with the understanding that the UPA government will implement its own Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

The CPI(M) and the Left parties consistently worked to see that the UPA government implemented the pro-people commitments made in the CMP. Legislations such as the Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Forest Tribal Bill were adopted only due to the continuous pressure of the Left. The CPI(M) constantly demanded increased allocations in agriculture, education and health in keeping with the promises in the CMP; it demanded measures to curb the communal forces and strengthen the secular principles; it emphasized the pursuit of an independent foreign policy.

However, the Congress-led government did not adhere to the understanding of the CMP. It persisted in pushing through neo-liberal, anti-people policies and violating the commitment for an independent foreign policy.

The results are there for all to see:

Five years of the Congress-led UPA government have widened further the divide in society. The rich have become super-rich while the poor have been further impoverished.

Neo-liberal economic policies have resulted in distorted growth accompanied by agrarian crisis, rising prices, unemployment and depleting wages.

The forces of communalism have continued their divisive and violent activities. Parallel to this is the terrorist violence which continues to stalk the land.

The Manmohan Singh government betrayed its own Common Minimum Programme to forge a strategic alliance with the United States to sign the unequal Indo-US nuclear deal, thus undermining our independent foreign policy.

A minority government determined to push through neo-liberal policies and a strategic alliance with the United States denigrated parliament and displayed contempt for democratic procedures.

Tolerance of bribery and corruption and misuse of public institutions became the hallmark of a regime hell bent on survival.

For all its supposed concern for the *aam admi*, the UPA government worked overtime to pamper the super rich. The government flaunts a 8.6 per cent growth in GDP for four consecutive years till 2008. What does this growth mean? Till 2007, India recorded the fastest growth rate of billionaires in the world. Four out of the ten richest people in the world are Indians.

We are a country with rich natural resources, skilled manpower and scientific and technological prowess. Yet, predatory crony capitalism has condemned us to be a society with some of the worst human development indicators in the world:

- 230 million people are undernourished
- More than half of India's women are anaemic
- 40 per cent of children under three years are underweight
- 2,19,000 habitations have no access to clean drinking water
- 39 per cent of adult population is illiterate
- 77 per cent of the population spends less than Rs. 20 a day
- The share of wages in the organised industrial sector is among the lowest in the world

Under the Congress-UPA dispensation:

- The agrarian crisis continues. Suicides by farmers have not abated.
- The public distribution system has been further enfeebled. The BPL category excludes large sections of the poor. 52 per cent of the agricultural labour households are excluded from the PDS. Allocations for the APL category have been drastically cut.

The food policy is callous and inhuman. Three crore tonnes of foodgrains lie in the godowns but the government refuses to undo the cut in the allocations to the states.

PRICE RISE

The people have suffered from continuous price rise of all essential commodities. Even though the government claims the rate of inflation has come down below 4 per cent, the prices of food items continue to rise at above 10 per cent. When the international prices of oil dipped to \$40 a barrel, the government reduced the prices of aviation turbine fuel eleven times between September 2008 and February 2009 to help out the private airlines. But the prices of petrol and diesel was reduced only twice during this period and cooking gas only once. The inability to curb price rise and protect the people from the ravages of inflation has been one of the biggest failures of the Congress-led government.

The Manmohan Singh government promoted policies favouring big business and big corporates, both Indian and foreign. SEZs were designed to help these interests grab large tracts of land and they were given a bonanza of tax sops. The refusal to restore capital gains tax in the stock market and stop the massive tax evasion through the Mauritius route is meant to help Indian and foreign speculators to reap huge profits. The backdoor entry of FDI in retail trade is jeopardising the livelihood of lakhs of small shopkeepers and traders.

There has been rampant privatisation of health and education systems, thus depriving the common people of health and education facilities.

Allowing FDI in real estate and encouragement of real estate speculation has led to land grabbing and a massive increase in land prices in and around urban areas. It has become impossible for the poor and the middle classes to own a decent home.

The Congress-led government has promoted public-private

partnerships in various infrastructure projects whereby the public sector bears all the costs and the private party reaps all the profits. The Hyderabad Metro, now mired in the Satyam-Maytas scandal, is one such glaring instance.

The rights of workers and employees have been curtailed. The EPF rate of interest was reduced to 8.5 per cent. The government has promoted contractualisation and casualisation of labour. Ignoring the recommendations of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector and the Standing Committee on Labour, the government passed an Act in parliament which makes a mockery of the rights and protection for workers of the unorganised sector.

The UPA government went back on its commitment to implement one-third reservations for women in the legislatures and parliament, as promised in the CMP. The dependence on the Samajwadi Party after the Left's withdrawal of support sealed the fate of the women's reservation bill.

The UPA government failed to implement the main recommendations of the Justice Sachar Committee on the status of minorities. The key suggestion, of working out a sub-plan for the Muslim minority, was rejected by the Government.

During the last six months of the Congress-led government, the country has experienced the adverse impact of the global economic crisis. The government's response has been both inadequate and wrong. The fiscal stimulus packages announced by the government have been grossly inadequate and mainly aimed at providing tax concessions to bail out big corporates. Even such concessions have not been linked to any conditionalities to protect the workers from lay-offs and retrenchment. No measures have been undertaken so far to protect the peasantry from price crashes and import competition. The Centre has ignored the plight of the overseas migrant workers and not included them in the stimulus package. The only way to come out of the crisis is by creating demand and new jobs. This requires massive public investment in employment generation, rural development, agriculture, social sectors and infrastructure. This is exactly what the government has refused to undertake.

The neoliberal policy framework is today discredited worldwide. The Congress-led government, however, stubbornly clings to neoliberal dogma.

Even after the crisis unfolded, it liberalised financial flow even further by lifting some restrictions on participatory notes and revising FDI guidelines to facilitate backdoor entry of FDI in all sectors.

DANGER OF COMMUNALISM

The BJP-RSS combine and their many outfits have been fomenting communal violence and targetting the minorities. In these last five years attacks on Muslim minorities have taken place in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Kandhamal district in Orissa saw the worst violence against Christians, with churches and houses being burnt and large scale attacks on priests and nuns. In Karnataka, there were vicious attacks on Christians in Mangalore, Davanagare and other places after the BJP assumed office. Instead of taking action against the perpetrators of the attacks, the BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka often arrested the victims of the violence.

Whether it is Gujarat under Narendra Modi, or Karnataka, or any of the other BJP-ruled states, artistes have been intimidated, cultural performances and films attacked, and writers threatened. The assault on young women by gangs of Hindutva thugs in Mangalore and other places display the symptoms of a fascist mentality.

The 2004 verdict against the BJP should have been utilised to act firmly against all forms of communalism and their regressive activities. The Congress-led government was unable to adopt a firm and consistent stand against the depredations of the communal forces. Minorities are being harassed and terrorised in various parts of the country. The Centre should have cracked down on organisations like the Bajrang Dal after the violence in Kandhamal and elsewhere in the country. But it did not do so.

TERRORISM

During the last five years, the country experienced a spate of terrorist attacks, starting with the October 2005 serial blasts in Delhi. The Central Government failed to tackle the problems of terrorism adequately. It should have revamped the intelligence system and ensured better coordination between the intelligence and security agencies. It required the horrific Mumbai attack to awaken the Government to the defects in the intelligence and security systems. In the name of combatting terrorism,

there have been innumerable instances of the police and security agencies indiscriminately rounding up innocent Muslim youth, detaining them and torturing them. Such targetting of a community only alienates the youth and provides a breeding ground for extremism.

Terrorism has diverse origins in India. There is terrorist violence involving some extremist elements from the Muslim community. In the recent period terrorist attacks like in Malegaon and certain earlier blasts in Maharashtra were perpetrated by extremist Hindutva elements. In the North-East, terrorist attacks by ULFA and the other ethnic chauvinist groups have taken place.

The CPI(M) has consistently advocated firm steps to tackle the terrorist networks and elements irrespective of their source or origin. As for the terrorist attacks emanating from Pakistan, India should mobilise international opinion to mount pressure on the Pakistan government to crack down on the terrorist and extremist outfits there.

MAOIST VIOLENCE

The self-styled Maoists are indulging in indiscriminate violence in certain states, which they claim is revolutionary activity. Devoid of any political platform except the use of the gun, the Maoists are resorting to killings of their political opponents. While it is necessary to curb such terrorist violence, it is equally important to implement a programme of socio-economic development in the backward and remote areas where these groups operate so that these anarchist elements are isolated.

CURB REGIONAL CHAUVINISM

The growth of regional chauvinism and the attacks on people from other states by parties like the MNS in Mumbai required a firm response. However, neither the Congress-led state government, nor the Central government displayed the political will to check the violence and bring the culprits to justice. The CPI(M) strongly opposes all forms of regional and ethnic chauvinism which targets people of other regions or communities.

VIOLATION OF FEDERALISM

The Congress-led government has been insensitive to the rights of states and failed to implement steps to devolve more powers and resources to them. Despite the CMP commitment, the debts of states were not

substantially reduced nor was the share of the states in the divisible pool of taxes enhanced.

The Inter-State Council was not activated, nor were Centrally sponsored schemes transferred to states. The UPA government violated the CMP in framing the terms of reference for the 13th Finance Commission and the Commission on Centre-State relations.

The Congress-led government has sought to use Governors for its partisan purposes. The attempt to dismiss the Uttar Pradesh state government in December 2006 was a reminder that misuse of Article 356 by the Congress party at the Centre is not a thing of the past.

Neither the Congress nor the BJP can promote the federal principle which needs to be strengthened to democratise our system.

CORRUPTION

The ruling alliance vitiated the parliamentary democratic system by large scale use of money, bribery and intimidation to purchase and encourage defections from the opposition to win the vote of confidence in July 2008. Earlier, in 1993, faced with a no-confidence motion, the Narasimha Rao government had bribed opposition members of Parliament. The Congress-led government, however, took this to new and sordid heights.

The government displayed complete contempt for Parliament by extending the July 2008 special session till the end of December, and doing away with the winter session altogether. Thus, the number of Parliament sittings in 2008 were reduced to a mere 46. Misuse of public institutions and investigative agencies was also the norm under this government.

The UPA government has presided over a massive telecom scam. It first sold 2G licences to favoured companies. The companies then divested their shares at huge profits. In the process, the exchequer lost at least one lakh crore rupees. The government has refused to order a probe into this massive scam.

The Satyam-Maytas scandal is a shocking example of how crony capitalism is leading to institutionalised corruption. The patronage given to the Satyam-Maytas combine by the Congress government in Andhra Pradesh involves lucrative contracts and transfer of thousands of acres of land. Special Economic Zones have become the instruments for large scale transfer of land to corporates depriving the farmers and the rural poor of their meagre landed assets.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES

The biggest betrayal by the Manmohan Singh government was to forge a strategic alliance with the United States of America and to resile from the commitment to pursue an independent foreign policy.

- The Congress-led government signed a ten-year Defence Framework Agreement with the US for military collaboration. This was done secretly without any discussion or information given to the country.
- The Manmohan Singh government shamelessly lined up with the United States to vote against Iran in the IAEA in order to get the nuclear deal through the US Congress.
- In place of the CMP, the agenda of the Indo-US CEO Forum, which recommended FDI in retail trade, insurance, banking, education, etc., became the guiding light of the Manmohan Singh government.
- The Manmohan Singh government has pursued the US-Israel-India axis, an idea mooted by the BJP-led government. It has entered into deep security and military collaboration with Israel. Israel has become the biggest supplier of weapons to India and the billions of dollars spent by India helps Israel suppress the Palestinian people.

NUCLEAR DEAL

The Congress-led government signed the nuclear deal with the US with conditions no self-respecting government should accept. The Hyde Act passed by the United States Congress directed India to adopt a certain course in foreign policy and set conditions for nuclear cooperation which dovetailed India into security and military collaboration with the US. The UPA government misleadingly raised the issue of shortage of uranium, a lie nailed down by the recent report of the CAG. The Congress is propagating that the nuclear deal will result in electricity being provided to all villages and homes. This is a cruel joke when the cost of electricity from an imported nuclear plant will be Rs. 8 per unit – far out of the reach of the common people.

BREAK WITH UPA GOVERNMENT

The Left parties withdrew support from the UPA government on July 9, 2008 after the government decided to go ahead with the Indo-US nuclear deal as part of its ongoing quest for a strategic alliance with the United States. In December 2007, when the matter was debated in parliament, it

became clear that a majority of Members of Parliament were not for the deal. The Manmohan Singh government concentrated its entire energy to pursue the deal without caring for the people's suffering due to galloping price rise and the growing rural distress. The CPI(M) and the left parties could not support a government which was so intent on acting at the behest of the US agenda for India to the detriment of an independent foreign policy and strategic autonomy.

ROLE OF CPI(M) AND LEFT VIS-À-VIS UPA GOVERNMENT

The CPI(M) and the Left acted as sentinels of the people's interests vis-à-vis the UPA government. At least two major legislations – the NREGA and the Forest Tribal Rights Act – would not have come about in the present form without the CPI(M)'s intervention.

The Left parties made crucial interventions in NREGA legislation which have proved to be of great benefit to the people. These include: (1) the deletion of a clause which gave Government the right to terminate the programme if it so wanted; (2) to ensure that it be made a universal right for anyone who was willing to do manual work and not limited to BPL families alone as suggested by the Government; (3) a special provision to ensure that at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women; and (4) to ensure more flexibility in the type of projects that may be taken up through the introduction of a clause that gives State Governments the scope to make suitable project proposals.

It was the sustained intervention by the Left and particularly the CPI(M) that led to the enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. Here again without the Party's intervention, the Act in the present form would not have been possible. The interventions by the CPI(M) and the Left resulted in (1) change in the cut-off year from 1980 to December 2005; (2) inclusion of other traditional forest dwelling communities as beneficiaries; (3) increase of land ceiling from 2.5 hectares to 4 hectares; (4) inclusion of expanded rights to minor forest produce; (5) expanded role of gram sabhas and panchayats; (6) right to development projects in forest areas within a limited area; and (7) securing equal rights of women.

Similarly, the CPI(M) intervened to modify the Patents Amendments Act of 2005 to protect the interests of the country with regard to the provision of less expensive generic drugs for the people. The Left did not