

WEST BENGAL LEFT COMMUNISTS HOLD STATE CONFERENCE

By Himoo Kalani

CALCUTTA -- The Left Communists of West Bengal, together with their centrist allies, met in a five-day state conference here October 22-27 to consider the draft programme of the pro-Chinese Communist party of India [see World Outlook June 12], preparatory to the All-India Congress of the Left CPI, scheduled to be held here October 31-November 7. When it is remembered that West Bengal constitutes one of the three most important bases of the Left Communists in India (the other two being Andhra and Kerala) and that in 1963 it was the Left Communists of this state who took the initiative in organising the Left Communists all over India around a political platform of opposition to the reformism of the Dange leadership, the political significance of this state conference and its impact on the coming congress can be properly understood.

M. Basavapunniah, representing the central leadership of the left wing, placed the programme before the 365 delegates assembled. Sensing the considerable volume of left opposition to this programme, he made a very conciliatory speech, admitting its lapses, inviting "constructive criticisms" and appealing to the delegates to judge the programme as a whole.

Despite this appeal, most of the speakers were highly critical of the vague and ambiguous formulations of the programme on many crucial issues. These criticisms mainly centred around the draft's treatment of the Indian government's foreign policy, class characterization of the present government, the precise definition of the People's Democratic Revolution and its relationship with the socialist revolution, the prospect of peaceful transition to socialism, attitude towards parliamentary democracy, and the role of the different sections, of the peasantry and of the Indian bourgeoisie in relation to the People's Democratic Revolution.

The resolution, drafted by the leadership of the West Bengal party and finally passed by the conference, partly reflected these criticisms. However, it also showed that the left cadres, despite their obvious radical orientation, still lack ideological clarity

and also courage to defy their leadership when necessary.

The resolution can be divided into two parts. The first part expresses its broad agreement with what it interprets as the basic themes of the draft programme, while the second part puts forward certain amendments to it. However, the interpretation of the programme, given in the resolution, seeks to impart a more radical twist to it and differs, in some interesting respects, from the formulations of the draft itself. The following points in the resolution are worth noting in this connection:

(1) The Indian bourgeoisie is utilising the aid from the socialist countries to strengthen its bargaining capacity vis-à-vis the imperialists, to consolidate its own strength against the masses, and to subserve its own class interests within the framework of compromise with imperialism.

(2) Economic dependence of India on foreign imperialist capital is growing instead of lessening.

(3) In the realm of India's foreign policy, the anti-imperialist element is becoming feebler and feebler; compromise and collaboration with imperialism is becoming much more pronounced and, in fact, the neocolonialist policy of the imperialists is being aided by India. However, the Indian bourgeoisie has its own class conflicts with the imperialists; it is not absolutely subservient to imperialism.

(4) India is facing a People's Democratic Revolution. The ultimate aim of the working class is socialism. After completing the People's Democratic Revolution, it would be possible to enter the phase of socialist revolution as the next step. (Our emphasis.) (This is a regression from the Draft Programme which speaks of the democratic revolution continuously growing over into the socialist revolution.)

(5) The leadership of the People's Democratic Revolution will be in the hands of the working class, the People's Democratic Front being based on the alliance of the workers and peasants. The poor peasants and the agricultural labourers are the chief allies of the revolution, the middle peasants are close allies and the rich peasants, despite their vacillations, are allied forces. (In the Draft, there is no clear distinction among the different sections of the peasantry.)

(6) The section of the bourgeoisie having feeble or no connection with foreign capital has its place in the Front. However, the extent to which they may be actually available, which section of them and when -- all these will depend on the national and international situation and the strength of the worker-peasant alliance.

(7) The Programme must clearly state that the Indian revolu-

tion would be an integral part of the world socialist revolution.

(8) The Congress leadership betrayed the postwar mass upsurges in India, instead of organising and advancing them.

(9) Instead of saying that Communists defend parliamentary democracy, the programme should say specifically that Communists defend parliamentary democracy against reactionary bourgeois attacks to subvert it.

The centrists, led by Jyoti Basu, leader of the opposition in the West Bengal legislative assembly, fared very badly in this conference. The dissenting note on the Draft Programme, submitted by their chief spokesman E.M.S.Namboodiripad (ex-chief minister in the Communist ministry in Kerala) was not supported by a single delegate at this conference. The conference elected a delegation of fifty-four members to represent the West Bengal party at the All-India congress in which the centrists have only three delegates. In the newly formed state committee, composed of thirty-nine members, the centrists were mercifully given four seats by West Bengal's left leadership to maintain the alliance.