

WEST BENGAL -- WHAT NEXT?

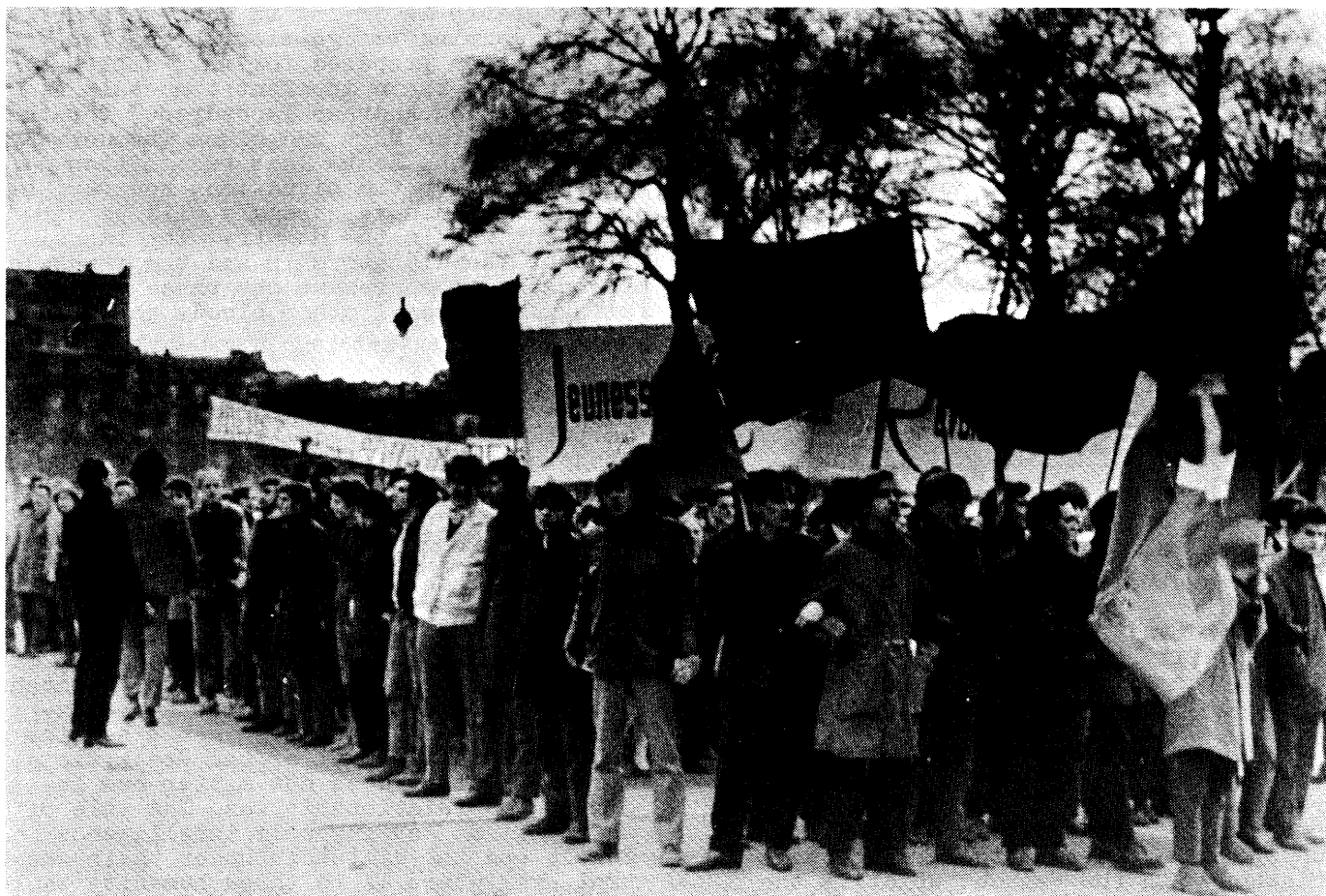
[The following editorial appeared in the March 1968 issue of Marxist Outlook, journal of the Socialist Workers party of India.]

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The imposition of the presidential rule in West Bengal and dissolution of the State Assembly comes in the wake of a statewide mass upsurge "led" by the United Front [opportunist alliance of the "left" Communist party (CPI-M) with capitalist and communal parties in a "non-Congress coalition" -- W.O.] against the Congress-sponsored P.C.Ghosh ministry in-

stalled after the dismissal of the government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee. The left constituents of the UF have hailed the development as a victory for them, the goal set before them being only that of a mid-term poll [election].

The mass resistance movement against the bourgeois state and brutal police repression was cleverly diverted into "civil disobedience" and "token defiance of law," etc., by the leaders of the left parties, who deliberately sabotaged the possibilities of the masses of workers and poor peasants entering the vortex of the struggle with their own class de-



IN PARIS a crowd of several hundred youth under the leadership of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire [Revolutionary Communist Youth] demonstrate in front of the Polish embassy March 28. They expressed solidarity with students in Po-

land who have been imprisoned for voicing sympathy with the democratic reforms won in Czechoslovakia. The Paris students demanded the immediate release of the Polish rebels. They closed their demonstration by singing the "Internationale."

mands. The whole strategy of the traditional left in West Bengal was that of containing the mass discontent within the bourgeois constitutional framework and to utilise the threat of mass action to force a presidential rule as a temporary constitutional solution and not of challenging the bourgeois social order as such. The bourgeois centre, shrewd enough to realise the game of the "left," acted in time before the mass upsurge assumed more serious proportions and got out of control.

It appears as if the Congress leadership has taken a calculated risk. It was clear that Dr. P.C.Ghosh did not command a majority in the Legislative Assembly in spite of the decision of the Congress party to join the coalition with the Progressive Democratic Front, especially after the revolt inside the Congress led by Ashutosh Ghosh.

Strangely enough Ajoy Mukherjee and Jyoti Basu as leaders of the UF despite their claim to be saviours of (bourgeois) "democracy" were prepared to support the Ashutosh Ghosh clique to form a government although this very clique was initially responsible for toppling the UF ministry earlier. What more blatant opportunism could there be for the self-styled Marxist and leftist leaders than this unprincipled horse-trading? Perhaps the faith of the leaders of the CPI(M) [Communist party of India (Marxist) -- the pro-Peking CP], CPI [Communist party of India -- pro-Moscow CP], RSP [Revolutionary Socialist party], SUC [Socialist Unity Centre], etc., in bourgeois parliamentarism has become so strong that they are prepared to make any "sacrifices" (even of their loudly proclaimed principles) to see that they regain their "ministerial gaddis" [throne cushions]. The





anxiety now is to see how soon the centre is going to order a midterm election in the state.

There is no indication when the centre will hold the midterm poll. The president's rule can last for six months "legally" and can be extended further under "special circumstances" although the prevailing mass combativity is a deterrent against any such dilatory tactics.

Even if the election takes place, the bourgeois leaders at the centre have no reasons to be unduly perturbed since the "Marxist" leaders of the UF are committed to playing the parliamentary game, strictly within the capitalist constitutional framework.

The poll might result in an increased strength for the left constituents of the UF in the new Legislative Assembly. The UF as a multiclass opportunist coalition, however, still continues. The real character of the UF during the nine months it remained in office has indeed undergone a change with the Bangla Congress (now the BKD) having gone through a split and the parties like the PSP [Praja Socialist party] and SSP [Samyukta Socialist party], discredited in the eyes of the masses. But the CPI(M) as the dominant partner of the UF, a prisoner of its own parliamentary cretinism, cannot forsake its bourgeois and middle-class allies. Another opportunist group of defectors from the BKD led by Jehangir Kabir is being admitted as a constituent of the UF.

There will be new horse-trading for redistribution of seats among the constituents of the UF. The Ashutosh Ghosh clique also might worm its way into the UF. So West Bengal is entering into another spell of "United Frontism" -- fundamentally the same as it was during the first nine months.

The only positive factor in the situation is the still sustained combativity of the masses of workers, urban petty bourgeoisie and land-hungry peasants and their growing realisation of the limitations of their basic problems being solved within the capitalist framework.

In several districts forest land or land owned by absentee landlords have been occupied and are being cultivated by landless peasants. The spectacular revolt of the Naxalbari peasants under the UF ministry was only an open manifestation of the new mood of the rural poor in West Bengal. Faced with prospects of large-scale unemployment, following the closures of the engineering, textile and other establishments, the working class

is left with no other alternative but to come in direct clashes with the state apparatus protecting the capitalist employers. Discontent is mounting among the petty-bourgeois masses and the students in the urban areas.

The growing restlessness of the masses is also reflected in the dissensions within the CPI(M) and the revolt against the party's present opportunist leadership staged by the so-called Naxalbari group influenced by Maoism. The leadership of the Chinese CP has begun to openly attack the leaders of the CPI(M) as "neorevisionists." The CPI(M) leadership on its part has adopted a political line which is critical of the Chinese CP.

Whatever be the outcome of the midterm poll, it cannot be gainsaid that West Bengal is passing through an advanced pre-revolutionary situation. The mass discontent cannot be contained within the capitalist framework very long. The newly formed unit of the SWP has a special responsibility in the present context despite its organisational weakness in that it has to generalise the experience of the mass movement and give it a new revolutionary orientation.

The main task before the revolutionary Marxists in West Bengal is to develop and coordinate the emerging struggles of the working class, students, and the rural poor on the basis of a clear anticapitalist, antilandlord programme. The student struggles should centre round demands like democratisation of university administrations, reduction in tuition fees, etc. Struggles of the working class must be built around demands like nationalisation without compensation of all partially or fully closed industrial establishments under workers management, unemployment wages for jobless workers, creation of elected factory committees, etc.

The movement of the rural poor should be developed to a higher stage around demands like land to the actual tiller, abolition of all debts, legalisation of all land occupation by poor peasants, minimum wages for agricultural workers, etc.

The opportunist policies of "multi-class coalitions" pursued by the traditional left parties must be thoroughly exposed. What is needed in the place of the present UF serving the needs of the capitalist class, creating illusions among the masses, is a united front of workers and peasants parties which will strictly subordinate their activities on the electoral front to the extra-legislative class struggle outside.