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CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION:
INDIAN AND AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES
University of Hyderabad, India, December 7-9, 2006
Sponsored by the Political Science Department, University of Hyderabad, and the School of International and Political Studies, Deakin University, Australia.

Tentative Schedule

December 7, 2006

2.00 – 3.30 pm: Inaugural Session

Inauguration: Dr. Seyed E. Hasnain, Vice-Chancellor, University of Hyderabad
Keynote addresses: Manoranjan Mohanty (Delhi University)
Geoffrey Stokes (Deakin University)

3.30 – 4.00: Tea Break

4.00 – 5.30: First Session

Indo-Australian Relations in an Era of Globalization

Chair:
Gary Smith (Deakin University), Indo-Australia Relations: Will New Interests Outweigh the Old Differences?
Yagama Reddy (S.V. University), India-Australia Relations: An Amalgam of Impercipience and Non-chalence
Christopher Snedden (Deakin University), Pakistan: How its Problems Impact – or Could Impact – on India and Australia

December 8, 2006

9.00 – 10.45 am: Second Session

Panel - A: Philosophical Critique of Globalization

Chair:
A. Raghurama Raju (University of Hyderabad), Ontologies of Permanence: A Critique of Globalization

Michael Leahy (Deakin University), Justice, Globalization and Diverse Conceptual Worlds
Purushottama Bilimoria (Deakin University), Hyperglobalization's Causality: The Numerical Small

Panel - B: Security Issues

Chair:

P.V. Rao (Osmania University), Indian Navy: Australian Perspective

Md. Badrul Alam (Jamia Milia University), Balancing Security and Democracy: A Study of Legislator's Role and Responsibilities in India and Australia

Craig A. Snyder (Deakin University), Australian and Indian Approaches to Maritime Security in South-east Asia

10.45 – 11.00 am: Tea Break

11.00 am – 12.45 pm: Third Session

Panel - A: The Theoretical Limit of 'Global' Culture

Chair:

Stan van Hooft (Deakin University), Cosmopolitanism and Tolerance

Gurpreet Mahajan (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Multiculturalism in the Age of Terror

Geoffrey Stokes (Deakin University), Neoliberal Hyperglobalism in Australian Political Thought: Problems of Inevitability, Voluntarism and Critique

Panel-B: Technological Implications of Globalization

Chair:

E. Haribabu (University of Hyderabad), Human Genome Research: Implications for Society

Hans Lofgren (Deakin University), India's Drug Multinationals: Growth Strategies and Global Industry Dynamics

G. Vijay (University of Hyderabad), Addressing Environmental Resource Conflicts -- Institutional Framework and Processes under Globalization: The Case of Inorganic Chemical Industry
12.45 – 2.00 pm: Lunch Break

2.00 – 3.45 pm: Fourth Session

Panel-A: Transformation in Organizational Values

Chair:

B. Ramesh Babu (ICFAI University), Legitimate Globalization: Towards Truly Universal Norms and Values

Geoff Boucher (Deakin University), The Integration Crisis: Australian Neo-Conservatism and Post-Fordist Globalization

P. Arjun Rao (ICFAI University), Privatization: A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Sectors in India: Theoretical perspectives and Alternative Models

Panel - B: Globalization’s influence on State and Society

Chair:

Harihar Bhattacharya (Burdwan University), Globalization and Indian Federalism: Reassertion of States’ Rights

P. Eashvaryaiah (University of Hyderabad), State and Challenges of Globalization: Some Reflections with reference to India

Prakash C. Sarangi (University of Hyderabad), Globalization and Democracy

3.45 – 4.00 pm: Tea Break

4.00 – 5.45 pm: Fifth Session

Panel-A: Transformation in Economy and Business

Chair:

John Spierings (DSF, Melbourne), Australia’s Challenge: Developing Skills and Knowledge for the age of Globalization

V. Venkataramana (University of Hyderabad), Challenges of Globalization: Opportunities for Indian Business Schools

Mathew Sharpe (Deakin University), Postmodern Management and Neoliberal Globalization: The Rhetoric of Self-Expression
Panel - B: Cultural Implications

Chair:

Chandrashekhar Bhat (University of Hyderabad), Indian Diaspora and Dual Citizenship

Glenn D’Cruz (Deakin University), The Good Australians: Anglo-Indians, Multiculturalism and Literature

Mangesh Kulkarni(Pune University), Globalization and Changing Cultures of Masculinity in India

December 9, 2006

9.00 – 10.45 am: Sixth Session

Panel A: Whither Ideology?

Chair:

Aparna Devare (Johns Hopkins), Globalization, Hindutva and Modernity

Geoffrey Robinson (Deakin University), Communism After Communism: The Indian Experience in Global Perspective

Douglas Kirsner (Deakin University), Psychoanalysis and Political Leadership

Panel B: Local Politics and Leadership

Chair:

Sudha Mohan (Mumbai University), Challenges of Globalization in Local Governance

Anna Macgarvey (Deakin University), Women and Local Government: The Australian Context

Kevin O’Toole (Deakin University), Understanding Community Governance in Rural Regeneration

10.45 – 11.00 am: Tea Break

11.00 am – 12.45 pm: Seventh Session

Panel -A: Terrorism, Violence and Human Rights
Chair:

Andrew Vandenberg (Deakin University), *Terrorism: A Fourth Dimension of Power*

Russel Grigg (Deakin University), *Trading in Torture: The Shadowy Practice of Rendition*

G. Haragopal (University of Hyderabad), *Globalization and Human Rights*

Panel-B: *Global Influence on the Regional Politics*

Chair:

Leena Avonius (Deakin University), *Old and New Cosmopolitanism: Acehnese Responses to World Trajectories*

Damien Kingsbury (Deakin University), *The Prospect of Tamil Eelam: A Comparative Assessment*

S.K. Sitrampalam (Jaffna University, Sri Lanka), *Prospect of Peace in Sri Lanka*

12.45 – 2.00 pm: Lunch Break

2.00 – 3.45 pm: Eighth Session

Panel Discussion: *The Impact of Globalization on Social Sciences Research: Indian and Australian Perspectives*

Chair:

Panelists:
Gary Smith (Deakin University)
E. Hari Babu (University of Hyderabad)
Geoffrey Stokes (Deakin University)
G. Haragopal (University of Hyderabad)

Summing Up:
Hans Lofgren (Deakin University)
Prakash C. Sarangi (University of Hyderabad)

3.45 – 4.00: Tea
‘We have no role model’: Indo-Communism, globalisation and governance in the postcommunist era*

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* Quotation is from B. Bhattacharjee, ‘We are trying to find an alternative path for our development’ (26 June 2006) http://www.thehindu.com/2006/06/26/stories/2006062604471109.htm (12 October 2006). My thanks are due to Hans Lofgren for assistance with sources. This is a draft paper only, hence the incomplete references. Please contact author if any are unclear.
Politics means slow drilling through hard boards (Max Weber, 1919)

1. Introduction: parliamentary communism:

Leninist Communism began as a staunch opponent of parliamentary governance. In *State and Revolution* Lenin condemned parliament as irrelevant talking-shops that served only to disorient and divide the working-class. Yet within a few years Lenin responded to the ebb of the post-war revolutionary wave and in *'Left-wing Communism': an infantile disorder* called on Communists to participate in parliamentary elections. Parliamentary Communism was born. Until the mid 1930s Communist parties used parliament largely as a platform for revolutionary rhetoric. The Popular Fronts saw the parties adopt a patriotic, moderate and anti-fascist appeal and they began to function as parliamentary parties that sought to influence government policy. Even the 1936 Stalin Constitution in the USSR established a parliament with geographical electorates based on residence. The 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact briefly evicted the parties from parliamentary participation, but in the aftermath of World War Two Communist parties made major political advances in the parliaments of a liberated Europe. Communist ministers served in many post-war governments. In the east this advance proved but a prelude to the establishment of Communist dictatorships. In the west however Communists were evicted from governments as the Cold War developed. Despite this rebuff European Communists did not return to the pattern of the 1920s they continued to participate actively in parliament and sought to participate in government. In the first round of Indian national and state elections in 1952 Communists entered several Indian parliaments. In 1957 India saw a landmark in Communist history with the election in Kerala of a Communist government.

In retrospect the late 1940s were the highpoint of European parliamentary Communism. Most of the smaller Communist parties declined steadily from the 1950s, but the French party remained a massive political presence and the Italian party grew steadily. In the 1970s the French and Italian parties seemed on the edge of power, and espoused 'Eurocommunism'; this revision of Communist doctrine emphasised the continued presence of political pluralism in a post-capitalist order. Eurocommunism was a false dawn. From the 1980s support for the Western Europe Communist parties declined steadily. Then the revolutions of 1989 cast the former governing Communists of Eastern Europe into the uncharted waters of electoral competition.

In the early 1990s it seemed that parliamentary communism was defunct. The former governing parties in the east seemed a discredited remnant, whilst in the west the Communist tradition seemed fated to either merge back into social democracy or to become subsumed in the new post-materialist radicalisms of the left. The first challenges to this conclusion came when some former Eastern governing Communist parties seized the social democratic space on the political spectrum. The leading examples here were the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) and the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP). More surprisingly was the ability of some former Communist parties, in some cases joined by new arrivals, such as the ex-Maoist

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Dutch Socialist Party, to carve out a significant electoral presence distinct from the Greens and official social democracy. At the 2004 European election these ‘left socialist’ parties polled 4.5% of the vote to 5.3% for the Greens.

In India the Marxist left seemed unchallenged by the collapse of Soviet communism. In 2003-06 the left parties the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and its allies secured the balance of power in the Lok Sabha and were elected to office in three states. Yet the left’s organisational strength obscured fundamental uncertainty, despite much rhetorical bluster, about long-term prospects, what influence it could exercise at the centre, and what it should do in state government. In this paper I consider key aspects of the recent history of Indian Communism, at the ideological, electoral and governmental levels in relations to the parliamentary left in the developed capitalist world. My focus is primarily on the CPM due to its size and the greater availability of material in Australia but I will give some attention to the smaller Left parties, in particular the Communist Party of India (CPI).

2. Comparative analysis:

Why should such a comparative analysis be of any value? For a comparison to be meaningful the objects to be compared must both be different but also have similarities. We must choose attributes which we wish to compare and this depends on the problem that we wish to solve. My major question is whether it is possible for parties of the left to retain policy distinctiveness but I am also interested in the question of how Communist and successor parties came to terms with the collapse of Soviet Communism.

Approaches to comparative analysis vary; at one basic level we have the simple contrasting comparison that describes similarities and differences between two cases. This approach often takes the traditional model of the comparative work that consists of alternating separate chapters on the objects compared. An example would be the 1999 work Federalism; Comparative Perspectives from India and Australia. At a much higher level is historical sociology where a range of countries is compared within an explicit methodological framework to develop general theories of social evolution. My approach in this paper is intermediate between these two; that of mid-range comparison. Rather than seeking a general theory or simply a general comparison I seek to closely compare closely different aspects of the Indian Communism and left parties elsewhere. An example of the type of comparison I seek is Stefan Berger’s comparison of British Labour and German Social Democracy. Berger by closely comparing different of the two parties challenges the traditional image of these two parties as respectively reformist and pragmatic vs. Marxist and ideological. He then develops a new typology that defines them as examples of a European type of labour movement distinct from non-European labour movements such as the American.

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3 I. Copland & J. Rickard, eds., Federalism; Comparative Perspectives from India and Australia, Manohar, New Delhi, 1999.
In comparing Indian Communism with the parliamentary left elsewhere we are analysing movements that share a common ancestry in the 19th century European left but have largely evolved independently in recent decades. Ideas of the 'third way' have been diffused across Europe through personal and parliamentary connections and we cannot regard social-democratic parties in Europe as having evolved independently of each other. But the ideological isolation of the Indian parties means that the similarities between their record and that of the left elsewhere sheds light on the global forces that confine the evolution of the left.5 We are 'tracing similar process of change in cases that are as diverse as possible'. As Amrita Basu argues this makes the parallels between the Indian and European Left particularly worthy of analysis.6

3. Theorising post-communism:

To understand post-Communism we need to look at the evolution of Communist parties since the 1980s in detail, and how this recent history has informed their present responses. We can identify five possible responses to the revolutions of 1989 among European Communists, these strategies contended for support among party members and leaders and even parties as a whole had adopted one road or the other, competing strategies often maintained substantial support among party members:

1. Pure denial. Small political sects defend the pre-1989 regimes and attribute their collapse to betrayal and counter-revolution, sometimes tracing this betrayal to Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalin. Parties committed to this position have been unsuccessful in attracting any significant electoral support (the Russian Communists might be an exception), although these views have some support among the membership of left socialist parties (category 3);

2. Social democratisation. Some parties have seized the opportunity to convert themselves into orthodox social democratic parties, affiliated to the Socialist International, and implicitly or explicitly rejecting the Communist past. The Polish and Hungarian Communist successor parties are the leading example, together with the Italian Party of the Democratic Left;

3. Left socialism. These parties claim to stand for a fundamental transformation of capitalism by democratic means rather than the increasingly tepid reformism of social democratic parties. They aspire to revive traditions such as reform Communism exemplified by the Prague Spring of 1968, or the pre-1917 'Marxist centre' of international social democracy.7 Some of these parties retain the name Communist such as the French and Czech parties, but others do not.8 In the early 1990s it might have been possible to subdivide this category this category further by the question of

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5 Linden, 'Comparative Labour History', in Wells, Australian Labour, pp. 79-80.
8 Oswald, Party That Came Out of the Cold War, p. xii, 143.
whether the Soviet experience was 'globally positive' (a notorious French Communist phrase) or fundamentally flawed⁹;

4. Dissolution: many of the smaller parties simply dissolved or declined into sects or merged into new political forces, such as the Dutch Green Left, that preserved almost nothing from the Communist past;

5. National-socialism; attempt to remain in power by appeal to xenophobic nationalism and defence of a strong state, the Milosevic era Serb Socialist party is an example.¹⁰

These views contend among the membership of the Communist successor parties. It is sometimes suggested that substantial portions of the member of category 2 and 3 parties, particularly in Eastern Europe, hold views closer to those of category 1. Over time parties can move from one category to the other, the Bulgarian Socialists have evolved into an explicitly social-democratic party after initially being closer to category 3.¹¹

The Indian Communist parties did not enter a post-1989 crisis phase, rhetorically their appeals, replete with Stalin quotes, has sometimes seemed close to a denialist approach but they are governing parties and their practice has sometimes seemed close to a social democratic model. One issue to consider is whether the continuation of many of the organizational features of Communism, particularly democratic centralism, has aided the Indian parties shift towards an effectively social democratic politics.

There is a longer history of 'left socialist' parties than many realise, many of those who left Communist parties after 1956 hoped for a new radicalism, and in Denmark in 1958 ex-Communists formed a Socialist People’s Party which soon supplanted the orthodox Communist Party. These parties have attracted the sympathetic interest of some Anglo-Saxon observers, who hail them as representatives of a 'new European left' that rejects the 'third way’ and the new moderation of the Greens.¹² Their success has influenced attempts in both Britain and Australia by the Marxist revolutionary left to enter electoral politics in the belief that the rightward drift of social democracy has opened up electoral space on the left. This was represented by the largely unsuccessful 'Socialist Alliance' project in both countries.

4. The goals of the left:

On one level these debates have had little impact on Indian Communists; at the level of rhetoric the parties have maintained an exceptional continuity with their pre-1989 position. Yet their role in Indian politics and the responsibilities of government meant

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that well before 1989 they were compelled to undertake substantial theoretical innovation, even although this innovation was cloaked in Stalinist rhetoric.

The equation of Indian Communism with social democracy is an observation that has been made by some authors, most notably Atul Kohli but little attention has been given to the multiple forms of social democracy. The economic and political upheavals crisis and upheavals of the 1980s inspired major rethinking on the left but this crisis was merely the last of many in the history of socialism. In 1899 Eduard Bernstein had evoked outrage when he declared that he cared little for the 'final goal' of socialism but preferred to focus on socialism as process as a program of reforms. At this stage Bernstein's view went beyond even the reformist end of European socialism. Before 1914 the majority view, at least the level of rhetoric, was that socialism was qualitatively distinct from capitalism and that the transition from one to the other would be the result of a revolution, regardless of whether this was achieved by armed force or the election of a socialist government. In this view the role of a socialist party in government under capitalism was to commence a rapid transition to socialism. This approach reflected the determinist Marxism of the Second International that saw the political superstructure as the reflection of the economic base. To a degree the Bolshevik revolution challenged this with its recognition that a socialist government might have to fulfil some of the tasks of a bourgeois revolution, but the initial Bolshevik assumption was that such a phase was a necessary anomaly, part of a complex revolutionary transformation, and within a short period the alignment of economic base and political superstructure would be restored by proletarian revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries. The Great Depression and Stalinist industrialisation initiated another shift, socialism was defined not just an end state but as technique of economic management. In this view a working class minority could take power and implement a policy of economic development that would create a working-class majority.

In the Stalin period Communist parties further the developed the idea of a disjunction between the economic and the political and developed options in which it was possible that Communist parties might exercise state power without necessarily forming a socialist economy. The post-1935 Comintern formations identified fascism as a dictatorship of the most reactionary sections of finance capital and this perception pointed to the possibility of detaching non-monopoly sections of capital for the left. In the 1930s such views were refracted through a prism that identified the definition of progressive as support for the Soviet Union. After the Second World War this was further developed by a definition of imperialism as the main enemy. In the immediate post-war period Communist parties developed the idea of people's democracy as a lengthy transitional stage. This caution was always contested within Communist parties however and in the late 1940s many in the rank and file welcomed the opportunity that the Cold War presented to move towards socialism. In Western Europe however Communist parties even in the late Stalin period, continued to deny

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14 Dimitroff, *The United Front*
that their immediate objective was the establishment of socialism, rather it was
defined in terms of support for peace and anti-imperialism.15

Interwar social democratic parties were surprisingly ambivalent about the exercise of
power under capitalism. Most however continued to see socialism and capitalism as
distinct, socialist parties could exercise power under capitalism but there were
fundamental limits to what they could achieve. Hence in part their inability to propose
an effective alternative to fascism. A majority socialist government would be
expected to embark on a transition to socialism, which was defined as an end state
characterised by public ownership of the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy.
From the early 1950s this was challenged by revisionists, but most revisionists, such
as Tony Crosland, did not deny the validity of a distinction between socialism and
capitalism rather they argued that the post-war ‘mixed economy’ was no longer
capitalist. This position attracted substantial opposition from many rank and file
members of the non-Communist left who continued to assert that the post-war order
remained capitalist and that it was the task of the left to initiate a transition to
socialism. This defence of an orthodoxy that looked back to the pre-1914 Marxist
centre would be echoed by western European Communist parties in their
‘Eurocommunist’ phase. 16 In the 1970s and early 1980s this approach gained
substantial support in some parties formerly seen as archetypes of pragmatism, such
as British Labour and the Swedish Social Democrats, but in the end it was not only
defeated but largely replaced by a more radical ‘new revisionism’ exemplified by
Tony Blair that sundered socialism almost entirely from any institutional definition
and defined it largely in terms of classless universal values entirely compatible with a
capitalist (universally mislabelled a ‘market’ economy’).17 Today the left socialists of
Europe defend the post-war mixed economy as the role model and claim the ground
of the old revisionism.

The Communist party of India faced unique challenges in the aftermath of Indian
independence. It had to function in a parliamentary democratic system within an
Asian region in which Communists parties mostly pursued an insurrectionary road to
power. At first the party pursued an insurrectionary road and argued that the
parliamentary system of India was a facade that obscured control by imperialism. But
this phase was short-lived and the Party shifted ground to accept the reality of
parliamentary institutions and that a socialist revolution was not on the agenda. Here
the Stalinist concept of ‘people’s democracy’ became the guiding star and it has
remained the foundation of CPM strategy.18

According to the CPM People’s Democracy is to be led by the working class, but as
the leader of a broad alliance including not only the mass of the peasantry but even

576-86.
16 L. Minkin, The Labour Party Conference, Allen Lane
17 T. Blair & G. Schroeder, ‘Europe: The Third Way’ (8 June 1999)
Hundred Years of Socialism
in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 294-301. The Portuguese Party adopted
‘advanced democracy’ in 1988 (M. T. Patricio & A. D. Stoleroff, ‘The Portuguese Communist Party:
incorporating some rich peasants, the urban middle class and the non big bourgeois.\textsuperscript{19} We can see 'people's democracy' as an attempt to justify the participation of the party in parliamentary politics. The continued existence of the socialist bloc was crucial to the project of people's democracy. It made the left's activities those of a holding operation. It could engage in parliamentary manoeuvring in the expectation that one day there would be a revolutionary transformation. Stalinist Communist parties in government could pursue quite pragmatic policies, the Spanish Communists' opposition to collectivisation during the Civil War is well known, but the Portuguese Communists in government after the Portuguese revolution of 1974 did not seek withdrawal of Portugal from NATO.\textsuperscript{20} This was despite their leaders boast that there would be no parliaments in a socialist Portugal.\textsuperscript{21} The French Communists were desperately keen to enter governments with the Socialists in the 1980s. Generally the left socialist parties of Europe have been open to the option of participation in government, The notable exception has been the German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) where a substantial, but shrinking, section of the Party has argued that it must maintain a position of 'system opposition' and commitment towards the establishment of a socialist order that will be qualitatively distinct from capitalism.\textsuperscript{22}

Yet this holding position is inherently unstable. It was thrown into crisis by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indian Communism was uniquely resistant, apart from irrelevant Stalinist sects, to a considered evaluation of the Soviet experience, but with the keystone of the socialist world gone there is the danger that parliamentary Communism's holding operation will degenerate into a spurious legitimacy for parliamentary manoeuvring, in which the means overwhelm the end. The CPM has been criticised as a party afraid to lead, which oscillates between a demagogic populism and economic pragmatism, as exemplified in its attitude to foreign investment.\textsuperscript{23}

5. The Soviet model:

The attitude of Communist parties to the Soviet Union from the 1950s cannot be pigeonholed either as dependence or autonomy. As Ernest Mandel argued the seeds of Eurocommunism were laid in the Stalin period with the doctrine of 'socialism in one country'.\textsuperscript{24} As proposed in the 1930s it meant blind allegiance to the Soviet Union as the incarnation of socialism made flesh, but what if socialism could be made manifest elsewhere? It posed the possibility that the interests or actions of the Soviet Union might endanger the domestic political prospects of Communist parties. The prioritisation of the defence of the Soviet Union in the 1930s had encouraged the involvement of Communist parties in domestic politics, and deradicalised their domestic objectives, they were encouraged to focus on foreign policy goals directed to the survival of the Soviet Union. After 1945 however the Soviet Union was a superpower. Its survival was not in doubt. The turn of Soviet foreign policy in 1939

\textsuperscript{19} CPM, Program, 7.2, 7.5-7.6, 7.8-7.12.
\textsuperscript{20} Mandel, Stalinism to Eurocommunism, pp. 31, 191.
\textsuperscript{21} P. Morris, 'The French Communist Party and the End of Communism', in Bull, West European Communist Parties, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{22} Oswald, Party That Came Out of the Cold War, pp. 53-54. V. Grossman, 'Hopes of German Left Unity Endangered' (March 6, 2006) http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?ItemID=9860&sectionID=1 (18 October 2006).
\textsuperscript{23} A. Nigam, 'Logic of Failed Revolution', EPW, 29.1.06
\textsuperscript{24} Mandel, Stalinism to Eurocommunism, p. 16.
Indian Communism had done great damage to Communist parties but their leadership had remained loyal. Yet it had made clear to party leaders that the interests of the Soviet Union as manifest in its foreign policy could clash with domestic political objectives.25

From the 1950s Communist parties began to distance themselves from the Soviet Union in the pursuit of domestic political success. India led the way as the party majority reacted against the pro-Congress line of Moscow. In 1960 one CPI leader called for emancipation from the Soviet 'godhead.'26 In France one factor impelling the French party's shift towards Eurocommunism in the 1970s was the Soviet Union's partisanship for the governing Gaullist party.27 From the 1960s rising living standards in Western Europe made the Soviet Union less attractive to workers and Soviet policies in Eastern Europe placed the parties at a disadvantage in the electoral battle. However this disadvantage varied from country to country, it depended on the extent to which the party's constituencies were embedded in network of institutions and norms that excluded them from external political influence. The image of the Soviet Union as a utopia on earth was more credible to an illiterate Portuguese agricultural labourer than a skilled and affluent Italian worker.

The post-1989 crisis of European Communism made clear however that many sympathetic observers of the Eurocommunist parties, such as Joan Barth Urban, had underestimated the significance of the Soviet Union even for the most independently minded European Communist parties.28 Beyond patronage and support the existence of the Soviet Union as the incarnation of 'October' provided a reason for the Communist parties to maintain an independent existence from social democracy. Indeed the Gorbachev phenomenon initiated a brief revival of interest and enthusiasm for the Soviet Union among the more reformist western European parties.29 The electoral setbacks of Communist and post-Communist parties across the spectrum of attitudes to the Soviet Union in 1989-91 were similar and this demonstrated the extent to which a faith, however attenuated, in the possibilities, if not the realities, of the Soviet Union influenced Communist voters.

Indian Communism was distinctive in its early declaration of independence from the Communist great powers. The CPM quickly emerged as the dominant Indian Communist party after the split of 1964.30 Yet the CPM's dissent was driven by concern with the domestic implications of Soviet and then Chinese foreign policy. The Party committed to a road of parliamentary action rejected both the Soviet encouragement of subordination to Congress and then the Chinese call to pursue armed insurrection and reject the parliamentary road altogether. However the CPM largely avoided any critical analysis of Soviet or Chinese internal policy. The CPI simply pursed a naive idealisation of the Soviet Union, the party leadership suppressed with ease internal dissent that followed its endorsement of the Soviet

26 Franda, Radical Politics, pp. 55-56, 95.
28 J. B. Urban, Moscow and the Italian Communist Party
29 Mandel, Stalinism to Eurocommunism, pp. 22, 44-45, 61.
30 The Dutch Communist Party was another early example due to desire to maintain ties with the pro-Chinese Indonesian Party (G. Voerman, ‘Premature Perestroika: The Dutch Communist Party and Gorbachev’, in D. S. Bell, ed., Western European Communists and the Collapse of Communism, Berg, Oxford, 1993, p. 159.
invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The result of this silence was that the Communists lacked adequate theoretical tools to respond to the events of 1989-91.

The CPM's response to the Soviet collapse was mostly evasive but occasionally insightful. The Eurocommunist critique of Soviet Communism had echoed, usually without acknowledgement, a line of left socialist and dissident Communist analysis that had merged in the 1930s. These critics had defended an orthodox Marxism against the voluntarism of Leninism or ethical absolutism of Communism's liberal and moderate social-democratic critics. In their analysis the undemocratic character of Soviet society reflected the undeveloped economic base, and in particular the need to forcibly mobilise resources for industrialisation at the expense of living standards in the present. This position informed 'reform Communism' in Eastern Europe, which called for democratic reforms whilst maintaining the validity of the Communist past. Paul Baran's work linked this model to a critique of capitalist imperialism providing an effective rationale for critical defence of Marxist regimes in the third world. Yet this critique identified the flaws of Soviet Communism as political rather than economic. After 1989 this critique could be taken up belatedly by former pro-Soviet Communists. In the end however the collapse of European Communism was driven by economic as well as political failures, the desperate 1989 attempts of the former governing East German and Czech parties to wrap themselves in the clothes of the reform Communism that they had once despised, were not only unconvincing but also irrelevant to voters who had determined that Communism was an economic as well as a political failure.

The electoral base of Indian Communism was little affected by the fall of European Communism. At its 1992 conference the CPM took pride in its Communist title and its commitment to Marxism-Leninism, and continued to reject social democracy and Eurocommunism. Only occasional admissions hinted at disorientation within the Party, that the party had taken on trust reports of conditions in the socialist countries and that the Party leadership had failed in 'the task of equipping the Party rank and file with a proper understanding of the process building socialism and not idealising the socialist countries' experiences was wanting.' Some more frank discussion may have taken place within the higher ranks of the Party but it was kept well hidden. The Portuguese party made a similar self-criticism. The CPI referred to "temporary

34 Gryzymala-Busse, Redeeming the Communist Past, pp. 60-61
36 CPI (M), 1992 resolution, pt. 7.
37 A. Nigam, 'Logic of Failed Revolution', EPW, 29.0.06
disorientation following the demise of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{39} Forward Bloc argued that as an independent revolutionary Marxist party it was not affected.\textsuperscript{40}

Overall the public position of the CPM on the collapse of the Soviet Union was defiant. Its defence of the actions of the Chinese government in 1989 placed it at the far end of international Communist opinion, even if such views were probably had more currency among the rank and file of reformed Communist parties than their new-look leaders admitted. More recently the Party’s extravagant praise of the anti-globalisation movement, Hezbollah, Iraqi insurgents and the new Latin American left echoes the windy rhetoric of the contemporary revolutionary left.\textsuperscript{41} The image of a socialist alternative may be able to survive the Soviet collapse in a party of ageing true believers such as the French Communists but how long can it survive in a Party that seeks a future?\textsuperscript{42} Yet compared to the contemporary revolutionary left, exemplified by Kate Hudson, the CPM faces the practical tasks of governance and economic development and it was forced to address the Soviet Union’s economic failure, rather than to explain them away altogether.\textsuperscript{43} Rather like some former east European leaders the CPM admitted that economic administration had been overcentralised and that serious errors had been made.\textsuperscript{44} Like the more traditionalist European parties the CPM has denied that it has made any errors comparable to those it belatedly identified in the former socialist bloc.\textsuperscript{45}

Unlike the revolutionary left in the west however the CPM admitted that it and other Communist parties had underestimated the continuing potential of capitalism to contribute to the development of the means of production, and that the market remained significant:

It would again be erroneous to conclude that under socialism the market will cease to exist. So long as commodities are produced, the market exists. The crucial question is not planning versus market but which dominates what. Under socialism, market is one of the means for the distribution of the social product. Centralised planning, utilising the market forces and the market indicators, will be able to efficiently develop the productive forces and meet the welfare demands of the people. Therefore, ignoring market indicators leads to greater irrational use of resources, which will adversely affect the plan process itself. Instead of improving such a combination, the attempt to replace state planning by market and allowing the decisions on the priorities for

\textsuperscript{39} CPI, Political Resolution Adopted at the 19\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress, Part 10.
\textsuperscript{40} Forward Bloc.
\textsuperscript{43} An approach exemplified by Kate Hudson.
\textsuperscript{44} R. Daskalov, ‘Communism in Retrospective: memoirs of Bulgarian Communist Leaders’, East European Politics & Societies, vol. 16, no. 3 (2003).
investment under socialist construction to be decided by the market forces, is only paving the way for the restoration of capitalism.\textsuperscript{46}

The Party continued to see the central contradiction as that between the forces of world socialism and imperialism.\textsuperscript{47} Socialism was equated with the socialist countries in particular China and Vietnam, and their record of reforms was praised in general terms.\textsuperscript{48} Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, West Bengal Chief Minister from 2000 and the CPM’s leading political figure developed the argument further when he argued that China and Vietnam had learnt from the failures of the command economy and autarky that it was necessary to encourage foreign investment and to make use of market forces.\textsuperscript{49} But as we shall see the CPM remained unclear about the role of markets.

6. Democracy, federalism and governance:

The decision of Communist parties to participate in elections was initially controversial within the movement but it could be justified on Leninist grounds as the employment of a new terrain to campaign for communism rather than an acceptance of the legitimacy of parliament. Classical Leninism saw parliament as an individualising form of indirect democracy inherently inferior to the direct democracy of workers’ councils. In this perspective Soviet power was not a dictatorship of a minority but rather a higher form of democracy that enlarged the sphere of social life subject to democratic control and which enabled worker-citizens to identify a general will.\textsuperscript{50} Yet from the 1930s Communists came to evade the Leninist critique of parliamentary democracy, the 1936 Stalin Constitution erected a facade of parliamentary governance complete with parliament and single-member geographical electorates. Eurocommunists sought to square their defence of western parliamentarianism with their defence of the Bolshevik revolution by interpreting the early Bolshevik regime as the necessary dictatorship of a working-class minority rather than a true fulfilment of the democratic ideal. Thus they could dismiss the Bolshevik critique of parliament as no longer applicable to Western Europe where an overwhelming majority of the population comprised the working class or their allies.\textsuperscript{51}

In the great post-war upsurge of parliamentary Communism the parties either served as junior Coalition partners or else as in Eastern Europe as minority parties whose leading position in government was enforced by the Red Army. Only in Czechoslovakia did the party hold the leading position in a government by democratic means.

Indian federalism meant that the CPI faced a unique environment. In Western Europe federalism was largely non-existent. In the immediate post-war period European Communist parties had supported political centralisation in the hope that they would reap the benefits as a national governing party, but after their exclusion from power anti-Communist governments opposed federalism precisely because it would give

\textsuperscript{46} CPM, 1992 resolution, 2, 5.5.
\textsuperscript{47} CPM, On Certain Ideological Issues. Resolution Adopted at the 14\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 3.0
\textsuperscript{48} Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the CPM (April 2005), 1.37-38.
\textsuperscript{49} B. Bhattacharjee, ‘We are trying to find an alternative path for our development’ (26 June 2006) http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=200606???
Indian Communism (Hyderabad conference, December 2006)

Communist parties, whose support was regionally concentrated access to political power. The only significant case of Communist participation in a state level government in a European federation was much earlier in two German states in 1923 but here participation was a preliminary step to insurrection. The rhetoric of some in the CPM in the late 1960s such as West Bengal Party secretary Pannal Das Gupta seemed close to this; ‘our goal is socialism and for that is required the bloody revolution. We want to reach the state of clash between the Centre and the State through the path of Parliamentary democracy to such a level that it would spark off the bloody revolution’. But as Franda argued in 1971 the regionalisation of Communist support made a vision of Kerala or West Bengal as the Yenan of India unlikely and inclined the Party towards making Left governments an example for emulation rather than a starting point for a revolutionary wave.

After World War Two Communists emerged as a major force in European local government, but these governments lacked significant powers. Communist parties at first sought to employ local governments as surrogate mass organisations to participate in party campaigns such as the peace movement. But as the parties realised that their exclusion from national office was likely to persist they gave more attention to local government. Their priorities tended to be component administration, seen as a way of lifting the party’s credibility, and to the limited extent possible redistributive taxation and higher social expenditure. Communists showed little interest in forcing a confrontation between their local governments and central governments, perhaps because their own tradition assigned to local government a subordinate role. The most acrimonious conflicts in Europe between central and local governments were in Britain between left-wing Labour councils and Conservative governments in the 1980s. In contemporary Europe the major Federation with a significant post-Communist party is Germany. Here the PDS has pursued participation in government with the SPD.

In India the CPM-dominated United Front governments of West Bengal in the late 1960s had presided over substantial political mobilisation in particular a land reform program accompanied by forcible seizures of lands by activists aligned with United Front parties. These mobilisations had been difficult to control and in many cases landholdings below the limit imposed by the reform legislation were seized. The resultant conflict and violence contributed to the fall of the United Front. At least partially the

53 A. Rosenberg, A History of Bolshevism
54 Franda, Radical Politics, pp. 167-68.
55 Franda, Radical Politics, pp. 205-208.
United Front had seen its role in government as to provide a shield for popular movements rather than just to legislate.\(^{58}\)

In 1977 the CPM returned to government in West Bengal as the dominant party in the Left Front. It has stressed its commitment to working within the democratic system, rather like pre-1914 social democrats it has argued that it is the minority of landlords and the big bourgeoisie that trample on democracy.\(^{59}\) Reforms have been implemented top-down rather than popular mobilisation encouraged, some such as Rowan Mallick criticise this approach as reducing their effectiveness, others such as Atul Kohli argue that effective reformist government under capitalism requires management of popular mobilisation.\(^{60}\) In government after 1977 the Party refused to purge police associated with violence against left party supporters during the previous Congress government, whereas under the United Front it had tried to mobilise Party sympathisers within the force against police leadership.\(^{61}\) Even the CPM’s choice of leadership has expressed this approach, Jyoti Basu, chief minister from 1977 was a party centrist with long parliamentary experience from a wealthy upper-caste family, the model of the Bengali *bhadralok*, and this despite the fact that most of the party’s intellectuals had remained with the CPI. He has always insisted that there is no contradiction in a Communist party working within a bourgeois democratic system.\(^{62}\)

According to the CPM in West Bengal ‘the Party has consistently told the people the limitations under which the state government works and can do what is feasible’\(^{63}\) High levels of public satisfaction with the record of Left Front governments suggest great achievements or considerable success in lowering expectations.

7. Economic policy:

In recent years media analysis of the Indian left has focused on its attitude to economic liberalisation. The left’s position of parliamentary power after the 2004 national election has potentially given it the ability to delay or reform the program of economic liberalisation favoured by central governments since the early 1990s. But some have pointed to the record of the West Bengal government as contradicting Communist criticism of economic liberalisation at the centre.\(^{64}\) In one view the West Bengal party is characterised by pragmatic pursuit of power, in which Marxist rhetoric is little more than tool employed by party bureaucrats in their rivalry with politicians.\(^{65}\) But Chief Minister Bhattacharjee keen to insist that party is united and


\(^{59}\) CPM, Program, 5.22-23.


\(^{64}\) ‘FDI in retail trade: PM optimistic’ (13 December 2005)

that the West Bengal government has the same priorities as the Left elsewhere.\textsuperscript{66} CPI leader Atul Kumar praised the West Bengal government for advancing economic development ‘without subscribing to the diktats of the pundits of liberalisation’.\textsuperscript{67}

From an Australian perspective the debate is reminiscent of that within the left in the 1980s; did the implementation of market liberal reforms by a Labor government constitute betrayal of the party traditions, or rather an attempt to implement enduring values by different means? Can changes in public policy be understood as the imposition of ideals, such as neo-liberalism, or as result of the development of new forms of governmentality that share similar objectives with the socialist phase?

\textit{(a) Development and the constituency of economic reform:}

The post-independence Indian political class was committed to the drive for industrial and technological modernity through state-directed economic development planning.\textsuperscript{68} These objective remains but the means have radically shifted towards the encouragement of an export-focused entrepreneurial economy. In retrospect both Indian ‘neo-liberalisms’ and Indian ‘socialism’ were a complex collection of strategies and approaches.\textsuperscript{69} Since independence Indian parties have had to win government within an increasingly competitive democracy, and from the early 1970s Indira Gandhi’s promise to abolish poverty led to poverty-alleviation being defined as an objective of national policy, no longer was it assumed that poverty would be solved by economic growth. The Left however outdid Congress in devotion to the model of state-sponsored development, it promised to put into practice what Congress could only promise. In West Bengal government after 1977 the left’s focus was development with redistribution rather than class mobilisation.\textsuperscript{70}

The Left’s admiration of the Soviet model, and even the sympathy of Congress, criticised global capitalism less on the grounds of inequality than of its perceived inability to increase living standards in the undeveloped world. Economic planning was seen as a strategy to increase living standards, as an efficient way of funnelling forced savings into the construction of industrial base that would be protected in the short term against completion from developed industrial countries.\textsuperscript{71} This model came under two waves of attack; first for its failure to reduce poverty and then its failure to accelerate economic growth.

One option for the critics of the Indian development model was to downplay the economic growth objective. There had always been critics of the industrialisation focus from those who appealed to the tradition of Gandhi, and awareness of the human costs of Communist force-draft industrialisation supported this.\textsuperscript{72} The fact of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{68} Brass, \textit{Politics of India}, pp. 262-63.
\textsuperscript{70} Kohli, \textit{State and Poverty}, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{72} Brass, \textit{Politics of India}, p. 240.
\end{footnotesize}
massive poverty and deprivation seemed cried out for immediate solutions. Indeed with the notable exception of David Harvey the contemporary left critics of economic liberalisation by activists in the developed world has tended to stress distributional consequences with particular focus on reductions in public expenditure, rather than the requirements of economic growth. This approach was apparent in the idealisation of the Kerala model, with its combination of modest economic growth rates with high levels of human development. The debate anticipated more recent arguments about the link between happiness and economic growth or even in Australia the debate about indigenous self-determination, where recent critics have argued that it neglected the importance of economic development for human welfare.

At a national level in particular the Indian Left has stressed the distributional consequences of current economic policy. A central theme of recent successful electoral campaigns has been that only a minority has benefited from economic growth. Questions of the level of economic growth were little mentioned by the left recently and sometimes the argument would be resurrected with reference to Kerala that GDP and human development were not necessarily correlated. A similar shift in approach became apparent in the European Communist countries after 1956 where governments increasingly sought legitimacy on the basis of their ability to provide full employment and social welfare. But this legitimation strategy exhausted itself and by the late 1980s even the social policy record of Communist regimes now looked tawdry compared to those of a prosperous Western Europe. The willingness of Communist parties to abdicate power reflected awareness among much of their leadership that planning had failed to deliver economic growth.

In India the left’s opponents made a similar argument in the recent Kerala election campaign. The United Democratic Front Chief Minister declared: “it is time Kerala took a practical approach to development. We believe in creating wealth first and then distributing it while the LDF is merely trying to distribute poverty and unemployment.” This rhetoric echoed the criticism of European social democracy that became widespread during the 1990s. The Left was a major force in Kerala politics and took pride in the model, but there was always a hint of ambivalence, for it

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73 Brian Easton makes this point.
77 A. Bagchi, D. Banerjee & A. Chakrobarty, ‘A Critique of the Approach to the Eleventh Five Year Plan’, People’s Democracy (PD) (this journal was accessed from the CPI(M) website, the articles I found had printed without their date but they are all from 2005-06).
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was more committed to the objective of economic growth than some of the model's
defenders. In 1994 former Communist Chief Minister E M S Namboodiripad had
stressed the need to accelerate economic growth without losing sight of social goals.82

In the Indian context the disjunction between economic and social development has
been apparent in the problem of educated unemployment. Sri Lanka is an example of
the consequences of an educated and politicised population in a stagnant economy.83
Even the left has declared a concern with the problem of 'jobless growth', but has
blamed capitalism and economic reform in India.84 The failure of employment growth
to keep up with population has meant that employment has become increasingly
casual, marginal and insecure.85

However it is in West Bengal that the Left has come to champion growth and
development. Initially this focused on agriculture. The land reform program
implemented after 1977 reduced the influence of landlords and encouraged the
emergence of a more productive middle-peasant stratum. This was a happy
combination of equity and productivity-enhancing reform.86 Yet West Bengal has not
achieved the human development progress of Kerala.87

The West Bengal debate about the Left Front's industrialisation program at times
echoes in intensity and tone that over whether or not the practice of Australian Labor
governments over the last twenty years represented a fundamental break with Labor
tradition. The Left Front government had always pursued foreign investment and
sought the support of local business. A long-serving government is likely to form
links with local business groups, and Australian state governments have demonstrated
this.88 In the late 1990s some commentators saw the Left Front government drifting
and potentially facing defeat but its increasingly aggressive implementation of an
industrialisation agenda first announced in 1994 has seen the government reverse its
political fortunes.89 Now the government has tied the industrialisation project to an

82 R. W. Franke & B. H. Chasin, 'is the Kerala Model Sustainable? Lessons from the Past, prospects for
the Future', in Parayil, Kerala: the Development Experience. This was consistent with the theme of his
eyear willingness to promote capitalism in agriculture (Franda, Radical Politics, p. 106).
83 R. Jeffrey, Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala became a 'model', Macmillan, London,
1992, p. 228.
84 Centre for Development Studies, Human Development Report 2005 Kerala, State Planning Board,
Government of Kerala, Thrivananthapurum, 2005, 2.2.5. Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18th
Congress of the CPM (April 2005), 1.21, 2.5. 'AITUC Calls for Struggle Against Attacks on Workers',
Interests of the People', PD
85 Development and Planning Department, West Bengal Human Development 2004, Government of
West Bengal, Kolkata, p. 89.
27-39, 74-76.
Quo', EPW, 26 May 2001
89 R. Choudhury, 'Pointers in West Bengal' (12 June 2000)
S. Das, 'Buddhadeb will tilt the balance' (3 May 2001)
http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/05/03/stories/0503134c.htm (12 October 2006). I. Dutta, 'In West
overall evaluation of the Indian political economy it gives priority to the need to create jobs, a focus on the supply side again similar to third way approaches.  

At the last West Bengal elections the government campaigned on its development record and the personal appeal of Bhattacharjee (of which signs were already apparent at the 2001 elections), who like recent Labor state premiers in Australia marketed himself as a ‘can-do’ practical and non-ideological leader, aided the Left Front to make significant gains among young and urban voters. This personality based appeal was not entirely novel in Communist history. In Europe local government electoral success for the smaller Communist parties was often due to charismatic local leaders and the parties had some success in transferring this to the national level in these areas.

However it could be argued that eventually such ideological adaptability will be counter-productive that it will demobilise the left’s rural support and ultimately enable the populist right to steal the left’s ground. Congress supporters made this argument in response to the left's strong performance at the 2006 state elections. Electoral trends to be discussed below raise faint hints of this possibility but for the time-being the Left Front has been able to walk on two legs and attempts by the state opposition to develop a populist campaign against development projects seem to have alienated middle-class support for little electoral gain elsewhere.

An emphasis on economic development and market liberalisation has been a major contributor to the electoral success of some Communist successor parties. The first round of free elections in Eastern Europe became a referendum on the Communist system. Successor parties strove to distance themselves from this heritage but they were rejected overwhelmingly. Voters were committed to the road of market reforms and they were reconciled to the fact that this would result in economic costs in the short term. Indian public opinion may remain more hostile to economic reform; the current PM has described liberalisation as a battle for the minds of the people. In east central Europe voters wanted to rejoin Europe and to make up what they regarded as wasted decades. This aspiration took more precise form in an aspiration to meet the requirements for accession to the European Union. Over time this aspiration spread more broadly in Eastern Europe into the southern states. It potentially advantaged...
social-democratic parties who could claim to represent a west European model of politics unlike their religious-nationalist rivals.

Many observers were surprised by the electoral revival of Communist successor parties in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, particularly in Hungary and Poland, and attributed this to a backlash against economic reforms. But those electorally successful parties did not reject the idea of a transition to capitalism rather they promised to administer this transition with more competence and with a greater attention to equity issues. Although the successor parties made progress among low-income voters (who had mostly supported the right in the first round of elections) their core constituency remained managers and professionals formally associated with the Communist regime. Even on a generous interpretation the successor party governments in Eastern Europe did not implement a distinctively social democratic welfare state.

The appeal of these parties was not solely to the losers of transition. The Czech Republic provided a counter example, here the Communists retained the Communist label and sought to appeal to the losers of transition, but even they were aware that the promise of a return to the pre-1989 order would be unpopular; they were thus unable to propose a coherent alternate. The result was that although their vote increased they were unable to prevent the emergence of a social democratic rival on the left. In Russia the presidential system meant that the Communists appeal to the losers of transition was unsuccessful in forcing a change of policy, even although there were many more losers than in Eastern Europe. The Indian Left has tended at the state level towards the Polish/Hungarian model but at the national level its rhetoric has echoed the Czech road, even if its Lok Sabha support has largely reflected a positive evaluation of the performance of left state governments. In India however perhaps the combination of economic growth and increasing regional and personal inequality (despite declining poverty) makes it easier to assemble a winning Coalition of the losers than Europe, or at least under a parliamentary system to exercise influence on policy.

In Bulgaria and Rumania the successor parties for a time tried to define themselves as reform Communist and were successful in the first round of free elections. But with the collapse of the Soviet market the model of socialism in one country was even less viable than it had been previously. In the 1970s Ernest Mandel had argued that given the globalisation of capitalism Eurocommunist parties had no prospect of effecting a transition to socialism in one country, their options would either be capitulation to international markets or else the pursuit of an autarkic road that would reduce working-class living standards. The experience of the Bulgarian and Rumanian

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99 Grzymala-Busse, Redeeming the Communist Past, pp. 123-27, 144.
102 Mandel, Stalinism to Eurocommunism, p. 35.
Indian Communism (Hyderabad conference, December 2006)

economies, which entered a severe crisis despite their failure to effectively pursue 
market-liberal reform, demonstrated that autarky was not feasible.

(b) Investment and growth:

Despite accelerated growth in India investment levels remain below those of China.\(^{103}\) The need for additional investment funds has underpinned the left’s more sympathetic attitude to foreign investment. At a state government level the neo-liberal policy of fiscal austerity enforced by the centre has encouraged left governments to pursue private investment.\(^{104}\) There are Australian precedents for this in the privatisation initiatives of cash-strapped state governments from the late 1980s. But there are also past precedents in Communist history for such a shift.

From very early on the Bolsheviks had recognised the need to obtain funds for investment. Initially this perception was an aspect of the belief in an imminent European revolution. But Lenin also sought foreign investment particularly from the US, the initial focus was on concessions for natural resources but by 1922 the possibility of leasing factories to foreign investors was under consideration. The NEP reform of labour law in a less union-friendly direction was seen as facilitating such concessions.\(^{105}\) Little came of concessions and Stalin focused on the domestic mobilisation of resources for investment, here as David Day argues was a neglected point of divergence with Trotsky who argued for a much greater reengagement with world market.\(^{106}\)

After 1945 Soviet policy-makers had emphasised the construction of a socialist world market.\(^{107}\) However after Stalin’s death this project lost support. European Communist government pursued foreign investments as a way to escape the need for further economic sacrifices by an increasingly restive population. Poland was a particular example of this. Eurocommunists adopted a similar approach, Santiago Carrillo recalled Lenin’s policy of concessions and stressed that there was only one world market: ‘Thus the economy, with its implacable laws, lies at the root of every political decision’.\(^{108}\) But this approach to foreign investment diverged from the open-door idea of economic liberalisers. 1970s European Communists focused on the quantity of investment rather than its efficiency. The theory of ‘state monopoly capitalism’ hegemonic in the orthodox and dissident Communist movements predicted that the directive role of the state would continue to grow into the future.\(^{109}\) Few Marxists, if any, predicted the global turn to economic liberalism. Communist thinking, even in its most reformist guise of the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism, sought to combine markets in the present with planning of investment for

\(^{104}\) Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18\(^{th}\) Congress of the CPI(M) (April 2005), 2.101-103.
\(^{108}\) M Myant, Poland: a crisis for socialism. N. Swain, Hungary; the Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism. Carrillo, Eurocommunism, pp. 106-08.
\(^{109}\) B. Jessop, The Capitalist State: Theories and Methods
the future. It clung to the vision of an ‘economic surplus’ subject to reallocation, whose quantum could be increased by foreign investment.\textsuperscript{110}

From the 1960s European socialist countries began to participate and seek funds from international financial agencies and more recently the Indian left has followed this example. Yet the reliance on foreign funds potentially undermines state autonomy, in 2004 the West Bengal government took up a World Bank aid package, which they had rejected in 1999 on the grounds that it required the Bank to undertake a review of the sustainability of government finances.\textsuperscript{111}

Thus the aggressive pursuit of FDI is not entirely a break with the Communist tradition, but it is a break with Stalinism. But in some aspects Indian Communist practice has recently recalled some aspects of the Stalinist model of industrialisation. The Left’s turn towards the countryside from the late 1960s represented a break with the Leninist focus on the industrial proletariat, but in legitimation of its new industrial development focus the CPM now argues that economic development necessarily requires a reduction in agricultural employment.\textsuperscript{112} The West Bengal government has rebutted populist attacks from the opposition, and doubts within the CPM, about the annexation of West Bengal land for industrial projects.\textsuperscript{113} Yet at the same time the national Left has complained about the displacement of farmers by Special Economic Zones, the CPM Lok Sabha manifesto tried to square this with a call for a ‘uniform national rehabilitation’ policy for those displaced.\textsuperscript{114} In the Lok Sabha the smaller left parties have felt the CPM has been too willing to compromise on Special Economic Zones.\textsuperscript{115}

According to the CPM ‘capitalism continues to develop productive forces with the application of new scientific and technological advances, [but] it remains a crisis-ridden system apart from being a system of oppression, exploitation and oppression’. To the CPM the distinctiveness of capitalism is seen as a matter of material technology rather than organisational innovation. The People’s Democracy that the CPM endorses as a long-term transitional stage will seek Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to secure advanced technologies, increase productivity and boost employment.\textsuperscript{116} Orthodox Communism tended to define investment as physical

\textsuperscript{110} N. Swain, \textit{Hungary: the Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism}
\textsuperscript{111} ‘West Bengal to accept World bank aid’ (12 June 2004)
\textsuperscript{112} B. Konar, ‘Left Front Govt and Bengal’s Industrialisation’, \textit{PD}.
\textsuperscript{113} M. Dam, ‘Will Singur cause realignment?’ (4 October 2006)
\textsuperscript{114} N. Banerjee, ‘Govt gives ground on Singur’ (5 October 2006)
\textsuperscript{115} CPM, 2004 Lok Sabha Election Manifesto, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{116} ‘Left Front stands divided over SEZs’ (27 September 2006)
\textsuperscript{116} CPM, Program, 6.5-6.6. S. Cakrobarty, ‘Left Front Govt’s Industrial Policy: Principled and Pro-People’, \textit{PD}
accumulation of large-scale fixed capital in which past labour was piled up.\textsuperscript{117} The CPM's reform Communism has broadened the definition of physical capital from factories to hi-tech but it still emphasises the physicality of capital. Hence Bhattacharjee's statement 'we prefer IBM over Wal-Mart all the time' and his argument that the priority of FDI must be to secure technological gains.\textsuperscript{118} The left's opposition to FDI in retail can be seen as evidence of the attitude that the role of FDI is to create employment new hi-tech areas.\textsuperscript{119} Yet rather like the 'new economy' rhetoric of the 1990s and 'third way' predictions of a 'knowledge-based service economy' this model ignores the fact that IT will never be the major source of employment in its own right. The rapid industrial growth in West Bengal has been in the informal sector, in particular services. This supports the third way emphasis on the importance of the services sector and entrepreneurs generally and the need to avoid encumbering these with excessive regulations. Third way thinkers have called for a recognition of the need for a low-wage services sector to serve as a bridge into the workforce.\textsuperscript{120}

In part the left's shifting attitude towards investment reflects an awareness of the importance of private saving. The old central planning model tended to assume that voluntary private saving was insignificant and that the state had to mobilise resources directly. In Kerala the left's advocacy of decentralisation and in particular the 'People's Plan' was attempt to secure investment targets by the mobilisation of small savings and voluntary labour. It was also an attempt to sustain the Kerala model and bridge the gap between high levels of social provision and the more slowly growing economy which had focused the government to increasingly rely on unsustainable debt finance.\textsuperscript{121}

The left has shifted ground on foreign investment, but in some respects its basic economic model has changed less than one might think. The question is whether the Party's development of a formal policy on FDI at the 2005 18$^{th}$ Congress might open a way forward beyond the combination of pragmatism and opportunism that has characterised its policy approach so far and perhaps in long-run open up prospects for national governance.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{118} B. Prasant, 'Left Front Govt will proceed along an alternative path of development', \textit{PD}.
\textsuperscript{119} 'Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee opposes FDI in retail trade' (1 September 2006) \url{http://www.thehindu.com/2006/09/01/stories/2006090106551200.htm} (20 October 2006). B. Bhattacharjee, 'We are trying to find an alternative path for our development' (26 June 2006) \url{http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20060606????}.
\textsuperscript{119} 'FDI in retail trade' (13 December 2005) \url{http://www.thehindu.com/2005/12/13/stories/2005121306991200.htm} (20 December 2005).
\textsuperscript{121} R. Krishnakumar, 'A left agenda for Kerala', \textit{Frontline} 23, 01 \url{http://www.flonnet.com/fl2301/stories/200601270023092300.htm} (12 October 2006). S. Mohanakumar, 'From People's Plan to Plan sans People' \textit{EPW}, 20.4.02
\textsuperscript{122} 'CPM: Change of Guard, Change of Focus', \textit{EPW}, 23 April 2005.
(c) Industrial relations:

The debate about investment levels and efficiency points towards questions of property rights. In the regulated Indian economy capitalists' property rights were limited, but trade unionism also posed a challenge to property rights.

The classical Communist model of trade unions defined their role as subordinate to the Party. Industrial militancy, it was argued, required political leadership to become a revolutionary force. Once Communist parties were in power unions were assigned a 'transmission belt' role to mobilise workers for production, contribute to their politicisation and to represent their interests to a limited extent. One early indicator of the looming crisis of classic West European Communism from the 1970s was the decline of the Party presence at workplaces and the increasing independence of union militants from Party influence. Communist parties increasingly related to the working-class through the unions rather than directly through party cell organisations.

In India trade unionism is weak and largely restricted to the formal sector. Party-aligned union federations have largely functioned as a campaigning tool and vote bank.123

In government the Left has moved far from its earlier position of employing the state as a shield for working-class activity, in particular the gheraos, where workers physically intimidated owners and managers by direct action. In both West Bengal and Kerala the left in government sought to constrain militancy and claimed a record of labour peace.124 Jyoti Basu argued that the government encouraged industrialists to discuss production with workers and that workers should not give up their right to strike but that this should be a last resort. Bhattacharjee has sharpened the rhetoric and called West Bengal unions to accept need for quality production and productivity.125 This approach by a Communist government is not entirely novel. In the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna in the late 1950s Communist democratic centralism helped manage union opposition to the promotion of small and medium enterprises as a regional economic strategy.126

Here the Indian position has some similarities to that in Eastern Europe post-1989. The Hungarian and Polish successor parties pursued alliances with their national trade union movements, the inheritors of the previous official transmission-belt unions. Although the Polish and Hungarian union movements were weak in absolute terms in the context of an undeveloped civil society they had substantial weight. But the party-union alliance was not a class mobilisation; rather the parties amalgamated an

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electoral coalition of diverse groups, which included unionists, many new entrepreneurs, cultural minorities (in particular secular voters) and the old Communist service class. Here a parallel could be drawn with the ALP, which similarly appealed to voters as groups. Once the Left came to government the unions, particularly in Hungary, did not exercise great influence on government policy. 127

In India the party-union balance has perhaps not been quite as tilted in the direction of the party as in Poland and Hungary. Sections of West Bengal capital continue to complain ‘Government and party don’t speak the same language’ and demand tougher controls on unions and illegal strikes. The government ignored recommendations from by an American consultancy firm for a liberalisation of labour law. 128 Bhattacharjee has spoken out against any suggestion that existing labour laws be diluted in Special Economic Zones. 129 As in Australia in 1983-96 the party-union nexus constrains labour market liberalisation. The CPM is aware that the CPM-aligned union federation, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, has to compete with other federations aligned with the opposition parties. The Centre has rejected the ‘lies of the corporate media’ that they always oppose strike action but has argued that they strikes must be carefully planned to have maximum impact. 130 So it is under pressure. There is disillusionment among many workers with accommodation of unions with management and inability to respond to industry closures. 131 However perhaps workers are now unnecessary to the Left’s coalition?

(d) Public enterprise and services:

The question of the role of union in contemporary Indian Communist governance overlaps with the debate about the public sector. This debate initially focused on government business enterprises but more recently has extended to core government services such as education and health.

By the 1980s both India and Western Europe had large government business sectors. That in Europe principally originated after World War Two whilst that in India had been built up in the post-independence years as an agency of development. For Communists under capitalism the status of the public sector has been ambiguous. The non-Communist left tended to see public enterprises as an island of socialism in a capitalist economy, or among more revisionist socialists as exemplars of the mixed economy. The classical revolutionary left has instead argued that public enterprise are

130 B. Prasant, ‘33rd state council meeting of Bengal CITU’, PD
subordinate to the logic of a capitalist economy, as capitalism and socialism are two distinct social orders whose elements cannot be intermixed.\textsuperscript{132}

Communist parties have oscillated between these two positions. Particularly in Western Europe public sector industrial and mining enterprises were often strongholds of Communist support. The economic restructuring of the 1980s, in some cases facilitated by social democratic governments, as in France, threatened these Communist bulwarks. Communist parties defended the public industrial sector. In Portugal as long as the Communists cherished the hope of a resumption of the 1974-75 revolutionary waves they saw public enterprises as socialist.\textsuperscript{133} In India also the Left at the level of rhetoric has become more defensive of the public industrial sector, as its continued existence has ceased to be a matter of national elite consensus. The CPM now argues that although not socialist in itself the public sector has supported national sovereignty and provided secure employment.\textsuperscript{134}

In government however the left has to confront the drain that unprofitable public enterprises place on the state budget. In some aspects the Indian left position resembles that which the left of the ALP tried to adopt in Australia during the 1983-96 Labor government; opposition (although diminishing over time) to privatisation combined with support for restructuring. The CPM declares that the public sector should be strengthened through ‘modernisation, democratisation, freeing from bureaucratic controls and corruption, fixing strict accountability, ensuring workers participation in management and making it competitive so that it can occupy commanding position in the economy’.\textsuperscript{135} In government however the Left has faced harder choices. Since 2002 the West Bengal government has initiated policy of closing down non-viable units and pursuing joint ventures with the private sector, an example of what one observer described as ‘political rhetoric of Leftism and economic policies underlined by a market-orientated pragmatism’.\textsuperscript{136} Like Labor supporters of privatisation the CPM has argued that funds saved from public enterprise reform can be used for social expenditure.\textsuperscript{137} This focus on fiscal management was the opposite of the UF experience.\textsuperscript{138} Across India governments have found that their reliance on debt finance has approached its limits but this has constrained their ability to invest in infrastructure.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{132} Mandel, \textit{Stalinism to Eurocommunism}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{137} S. Cakrobarty, ‘Left Front Govt’s Industrial Policy: Principled and Pro-People’, \textit{PD}. The shortage of funds impacts everywhere, for example limiting the effectiveness of decentralisation as panchayats are under funded; Planning Department, \textit{West Bengal Human Development Report 2004}, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{138} Franda, \textit{Radical Politics}, pp. 199-201.
Like the 1980s Australian Labor supporters of industrial restructuring the West Bengal government has argued workers affected are entitled to receive appropriate retirement and retraining packages. West Bengal Chief Minister Bhattacharjee has argued that governments must play an active role to compensate for the fact that a market economy marginalizes the poor. 140 In Australia committed neo-liberals regarded such packages with suspicion but their establishment was part of the grudging consensus Labor constructed for economic reform. 141 Overall however the left’s focus on public enterprises seems driven by budgetary concerns. There seems little emphasis on questions of overall efficiency of resource allocation that in Australia inspired the early 1990s shift from corporatisation (which had increased static efficiency by downsizing) towards complete privatisation and exposure to competitive forces. 142

The possible plight of workers affected by privatisation and restructuring reminds us that to most Indian workers in the informal sector the employment security of public sector employees is an impossible dream. As the socialist vision recedes the real needs of Indian social policy become more apparent. In Eastern Europe the transition towards capitalism encouraged an increase in social expenditure, driven by political competitiveness, and the need to compensate for the shift of welfare functions from employers. Rumania was the major exception, despite its continued reform Communist government, due to the low level of electoral competition. 143 At the level of rhetoric the left has championed the need for a safety net for the unorganised but some have argued that West Bengal has not set a good example of this. 144

We might see the ideological shifts in Indian Communism as towards an ‘old revisionist’ social democratic position that emphasised government services, particularly education, and income redistribution via taxation over direct government regulation and public ownership. When the left has tried to go beyond a critique economic liberalisation for its negative distributional consequences alone it has emphasised the importance of investing in R&D and human capital more generally together with land reform. 145 Kerala the left’s flagship was notable for high levels of educational expenditure.

But more recently the Indian left has had to consider ‘new revisionist’ or ‘third way’ questions that criticised the effectiveness and efficiency of government human

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140 B. Bhattacharjee, ‘We are trying to find an alternative path for our development’ (26 June 2006) http://www.hinduonnet.com/thething/hindu/print.pl?
file=20060607.


services. Analysts of the Kerala experience have stressed importance of boosting quality as well as quantity. Third way proponents support investment in human capital as well but stress the importance of improving efficiency and quality. Education has been a central focus of these debates exemplified by proposals for teacher incentive pay and increasing parental choice. By the early 1990s some sympathetic critics questioned Kerala’s prioritisation of education expenditure, and suggested that it had encouraged unfulfillable demands, and been spread too thinly at the expense of other worthwhile expenditure areas.

Questions of value for money in public services are particularly crucial due to the difficult fiscal position of Indian state governments which places a severe constraint on the ability of Left governments to pursue different policies. Public employee wages were a key component of Indian state expenditure. In 2004 West Bengal wages, pensions and interest amounted to 101.25% of revenue receipts, this was an unsustainable level although down from the 152.7% it had been in 1999-2000. Complaints of absenteeism, low work effort and overstaffing in the core public sector as well as public enterprises are long standing. Yet non-manual public sector employees have been a key component of the left parties’ support base, teachers are well-represented on panchayats and as CPM supporters, although their panchayat membership had declined notably by the early 1990s and that of the landless and sharecroppers had increased. Despite this before the 2001 election Bhattacharjee admitted that the quality of primary teaching was poor and that the government had performed badly in this area. Pupil-teacher ratios and levels of educational expenditure have declined in West Bengal in the 1990s. There are high levels of student and teacher absenteeism and complaints that teachers, many of whom are higher-caste Hindu males, are indifferent towards poorer and lower-caste students and parental involvement. Private tuition has become increasingly popular. Poor teaching standards are a major motive for parents withdrawing children from schools across India. The government’s difficult financial position has meant that it has welcomed private investment in health despite the potentially regressive

147 M. Duncan, Imagining Australia. M. Keating, Who Rules?
implications.\textsuperscript{156} Up to now however voters seem to have accepted the CPM’s promises to improve performance in health and education, although for the Left Front’s new middle-class supporters the quality of public services may be less of an issue as they access the private sector.\textsuperscript{157}

8. Political competitors:

The crash of the revolutionary myth as manifest in the Soviet Union reduced a key brand advantage of Communist parties in the political marketplace. Post-Communist parties have faced renewed competition from both left and right. In India the electoral system, unlike the proportional representation, that prevails in most of Europe has placed a premium on electoral pacts, but outside of the Left’s strongholds these pacts have threatened its independence.

\textit{(a) From the right:}

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution initiated a battle between social democrats and Communists for the European labour movement. The first serious proposal to heal this division came from Communists in the 1930s, with defence of the Soviet Union replacing revolution as the immediate Communist priority, leading Communists supported the merger of Communist and Socialist parties in Spain, and Stalin even considered that the unified party would not have to be a member of the Comintern. But Communists were clear that any unified party must be committed to unconditional defence of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{158} The collapse of European Communism could be seen as evidence that the battle on the European left between Communists and social democrats initiated in 1917 had finally been won by the later. Eurocommunists had distinguished themselves from social democrats by their defence of the October revolution. After 1989-91 many questioned this defence, Santiago Carrillo the most prominent theorist of Eurocommunism eventually rejoined the Spanish socialist party.\textsuperscript{159}

The Polish and Hungarian and eventually the Bulgarian, Communist successor parties successfully pursued and held the social democratic position on the political spectrum. However those parties that refused to ‘social-democratise’ still had to resolve their own attitude towards established social democratic parties. The argument for a position of ‘system opposition’ to social democracy gained little support outside the


Marxist Platform faction of the PDS which carried on the tradition of German Communist ultra-leftism forged in the Berlin battles of 1918. But the question of how closely to work with Social Democrats has deeply divided the left socialist parties. 160

Congress was the functional equivalent of social democracy and the CPM had argued in the late 1960s that cooperation with Congress would encourage illusions about social democracy. In India the non-Marxist left was squeezed out between Congress and the Communists, and the small Marxist parties were reduced to satellites of the Communists. Aggressive on the ground organising by the CPM was important and contributed to the decline of Forward Bloc, However the Left always had to resist the pull of Congress, particularly from the 1950s with its pro-Soviet tilt in foreign policy and its commitment to state sponsored industrial development. Attitudes towards Congress divided the Indian left. 161 In 1955 several Forward Bloc leaders defected to Congress on grounds that once Congress had accepted socialism the Bloc had no role. 162

With Congress’ repudiation of its ‘socialist’ past the Left has struggled to resist a politics of conservative nostalgia that evokes the memory of a ‘good’ Congress secular, socialist and non-aligned. But if the Indian state has always been the agent of landlords and the big bourgeoisie how is the current age of economic liberalism any more worthy of condemnation? The Maoist parties come close to this position, while the CPI tends to take the rhetoric of post-war planning at face value. The Party describes the commitment of planners to reduce individual and economic inequalities with little attention to the gap between reality and achievement, in particular the failure of planning to end poverty, achieve high growth levels or even control regional inequalities. 163 The CPM has to argue that Congress’ 40 year record shows it is not an alternative. 164 The CPM argued that the Indian bourgeoisie had initially relied on state intervention but once it had accumulated sufficient resources to stand independently of the state it shed its nationalism towards an alignment with finance capital and international capital. 165 As Philip Brass noted shortly before the liberalisation wave commenced the left has to blame deficiencies in society rather than the planning process. 166 But these social deficiencies are defined with a spurious precision, the bourgeoisie and the peasantry are subdivided into a multitude of categories but these are distinguished not on objective economic criteria but political attitudes. This flexibility originates with Stalinist Popular Front Marxism, which championed alliances between proletariat, lower middle classes, peasantry and intelligentsia.

164 Lok Sabha manifesto
165 CPM, Program, 3.1-11.
166 Brass, Politics of India, p. 327.
against most reactionary sections of the big bourgeoisie, with 'reactionary' defined by attitude towards the Soviet Union.167

With the demise of the Soviet Union as a rallying point and test of differentiation the Indian left has tended to define progressive by 'anti-imperialism' (that is hostility towards American policy) and opposition to the BJP. For left socialist parties in Europe 'anti-imperialism' has been a powerful tool especially against the Greens, in Germany the PDS won votes by its opposition to the NATO intervention in Kosovo and Afghanistan.168

(b) From the left:

In Europe the left socialist parties have not faced significant electoral competition from the revolutionary left, except in a few isolated and distinctive outposts of alternative culture such as Berlin, where the PDS lost heavily at recent elections due to discontent with its performance in government with the SPD.169 There is some evidence however in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, that PDS participation in government may led to abstention by many voters and assist the extreme right to claim the banner of 'system opposition'.170

India however unlike Europe has a significant armed revolutionary left in the form of the Maoists. Like the left-wing critics of Eurocommunism in the 1970s the Maoists believe that India is a pre-revolutionary position and consider official Communists to be a force that blocks a revolutionary advance. They can trace their ancestry to those in the left of the CPM who opposed the Party's entry into state government in 1967. They mostly reject electoral participation although their sectarian devotion to the word of Mao means that they legitimate this abstention of the grounds that India is not a real bourgeois democracy rather than by reference to the more coherent Trotskyist critique of the individualising and demobilising effect of parliamentarianism.171 In some areas the Maoists have established dual power with an alternative administration and judicial system.172

The exclusion of the Maoists from the CPM in the 1960s removed a major force that pulled the party to the left.173 Since then the parliamentary left has rejected the road

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171 Mandel, *Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, p. 45.
of armed struggle accusing the Maoists of terrorism and anarchism, and of being wrong to reject action through parliaments and unions. It has claimed to favour an educative and developmental approach rather than a punitive one, but left state governments have employed physical force against Maoists. 174

However the CPM has admitted that support for the Maoists does reflect the desperate plight of many Indians; such as the landless and the marginalised in West Bengal and elsewhere tribal forest dwellers. 175 But the electoral strategy of the left has increasingly focused on securing a middle-ground constituency.

9. The constituency of the left:

(a) Towards the catchall party?

One persistent theme in the analysis of contemporary social democracy is the emergence of the catch-all party, which pursues a broad base of support across all social classes rather than seeking to mobilise a particular class. ‘Third-way’ proponents with their definition of socialism in terms of governing values rather than class interests or specific policies exemplify this approach. At times as I have argued above Communist parties could exercise a similar tactical flexibility but they always fell back to a core defined as much by geography as class: ‘proletarian ghettos’ of particular workers in heavy industry together with some peasant regions. This geographical ‘cageing’ was not distinct to Communism, as Michael Mann argues left support in Europe before 1945 was largely geographically confined. Outside of the left’s geographical strongholds conservative, even fascist parties, were strong contenders for working class support. 176 Even in the 1950s left party support in France and Italy by region was largely unrelated to the working-class population. Australia was something of an exception, from the 1890s Labor support was initially geographically concentrated but from about 1910 it established a firm hold on the manual working class across regions. 177

Analyses of European Communism have pointed to the crucial role of place-based identities. In some interpretations Communism is seen as the latest version of radical traditions that go back to the patterns of eighteenth century revolutionary mobilisation. But others have suggested that Communist strength was more contingent that it reflected 20th century mobilisations and struggles at the regional level. 178 In Portugal the party’s strength is very geographically confined, and has been


177 G. Robinson, 2003 ASSLI paper.


Consider Gareth Stedman Jones’ argument on discourse, ideology and class mobilisation.
strong in certain rural areas; former latifundist zones where state farms were established in the revolutionary period of 1974-75.\textsuperscript{179}

In France provides an example the Communists rural bailiwicks proved more durable in the Party’s decline than its former heartland of the Paris ‘red belt’.

Map 1: French Communist Vote, 1936:

![Map of France showing Communist vote in 1936](image)

(Boswell, \textit{Rural Communism in France}, p. 31).

The highly regional nature of European left support (both Communists and Socialists) compared to labourism is apparent from the following two charts, the first compares which compare the combined left vote in France in 1956 by the number of workers by region and the second the Labor vote in the Australian state of New South Wales in 1930 by workers. We can ask the question what would West Bengal and Kerala look like for a comparable dependent variable. Would Kerala be more like NSW than West Bengal?
Chart 1: France 1956 Socialist & Communist Vote and Manual Workers:

The regional focus of the Indian left is well-known (Map 3). West Bengal and Kerala have remained the strongholds of the left which has actually lost ground elsewhere (apart from the tiny state of Tripura). The organisation of the CPM, and in particular membership turnover is much weaker outside its strongholds although turnover is high in Kerala. The Left remains a prisoner of path dependence; it is strong where the Congress hold on the nationalist movement was weakest. In the late 1960s Field and Franda found little correlation between Communist support and the social characteristics of electorates and concluded that when a party ‘is really institutionalised in a constituency, it benefits from an allegiance which may be derived from social cleavages but which assumes a largely autonomous quality’. In 2006 West Bengal Left Front polled only 48.5% in those assembly seats with a majority of workers and their families. The largest post-Communist parties in Europe are similarly based in the alternative subculture of some larger towns and remnants of periphery support. In Germany the PDS base is overwhelmingly in the lander of the

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180 CPM, Report on Implementation of Organisational Tasks (September 2006), pp. 8-9. Is Kerala more social democratic than the parliamentary Communism of West Bengal? Might CPM have achieved more by being out of government on occasions, Kerala suggests this?

181 Brass, Politics of India, p. 75.
former East Germany, which is a periphery as a whole to the western *lander*. A significant group in the PDS has sought to restrict its focus to the east. The Party’s small western membership is more radical than its mass eastern membership. I suspect that CPM members in Andhra Pradesh might be unhappy with policies that the West Bengal party would accept.  

Map 3: 2004 Indian Lok Sabha Election:

Parliamentary Elections 2004
All India Snapshot

(b) historical patterns of left party support:

The Indian Communist parties at first claimed to uniquely represent the working class but had to deal with the problem that the manual working class for the foreseeable future would be a small portion of the Indian population. Here it confronted problems
that the European and Australian left had faced from the 19th century. More recently the left has had to respond to the decline of the manual working-class.

(i) The peasant debate:

In the late 19th and early 20th century European Marxists had debated their approach to the peasant population. Revisionists argued that peasants were workers and that there was little evidence that the peasant farmers would be replaced by capitalist agriculture. Orthodox Marxists had argued that larger farms were more efficient and that the apparent persistence of small farms was largely misleading as an increasing number were ‘dwarf holdings’ whose occupants relied on off-farm labour on capitalist farms to survive. In Australia the left was revisionist from the start. The rapid extermination of the indigenous population and the undemocratic character of the state during the early 19th century saw large areas of land pass into the effective control of pastoralists usually on leases that were close to freehold. The result was that land ownership became a major point of contestation as a populist alliance called for measures to disperse the land among smallholders and then to provide support for these new farmers. As in India large landholders showed skill in evading land reform legislation but eventually substantial portions of land were turned over to smallholdings. Many of these were too small to support families and thus smallholders supplanted their income by off-farm labour. Labor initially won the support of many smallholders, both as battling small producers and often as part-time agricultural labourers. From an early stage the party made concessions to smallholders for example opposing the rigid imposition of minimum wages and maximum working hours.183

However the fate of Labor’s agricultural support perhaps vindicated those orthodox Marxists who had argued against the agrarian strategy. In government Labor could not keep together a populist alliance, inevitably it opted for workers over farmers, and its farmer support probably declined. This was despite Labor leading the way in the development of market regulation and support to assist small farmers. In Europe the pattern was oddly similar after 1918 social democratic parties adopted the revisionist appeal to producers rather than just workers and in the post-war political climate of upheaval they were able to attract substantial farmer support in some cases. But as social democratic parties formed government they had to make a choice between competing constituencies of farmers and workers. Farmers moved to the right and as the orthodox Marxists, such as Kautsky, had early argued the right was able to outbid the left for farmer support. Oddly in some areas Communist parties had more successful (relative to their overall level of support) in appealing to marginal farmers precisely because they were untainted by the burdens of government. The sole left party in a European majority country that originated as a farmers party was the Canadian Co-operative Commonwealth Federation but over time it was gradually reformed as a party with a mainly working class electoral base.184

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(ii) Wooing the Indian peasantry:

Up until the early 1970s the core support for Indian Communist parties, even in their regional strongholds, was among industrial workers. After then however the CPM moved into the countryside with success. The left claimed to apply class analysis to the rural population, identifying a class of hegemonic rural capitalists as the enemy. But rather like Lenin himself this theoretical clarity was blurred by a potentially arbitrary class typology that permitted the lines of friend and foe to be redrawn according to political convenience.

Against the CPI the CPM had claimed to appeal to the landless rather than small farmers. But despite this even under the UF the Party had been willing to court middle and rich peasants as it sought to secure dominance over the Left. In government after 1977 the CPM reforms in West Bengal assisted the middle strata rather than the landless. The beneficiaries of land reform became conservative and feared further redistribution. Karl Kautsky had suggested in 1899 that the left always be aware that reforms were not an end in themselves but should be judged by their ability to contribute to the mobilisation of oppressed classes. West Bengal might provide an example of counter-productive reforms. Left Front governments were reluctant to encourage the mobilisation of agricultural labourers or to increase their wages for fear of alienating farmers. The relative neglect of the landless is more serious in the current context where rates of landlessness are increasing as an increasing number of small cultivators have become unviable, and agricultural labourers have exceptionally high rates of poverty.

In Australia 19th century land reform and subsequent Labor support for small farmers was probably counterproductive from the viewpoint of left party support. Indeed it was the large pastoral estates which provided a more favourable ground for unionisation of agricultural workers with the result that ‘outback’ electorates became Labor strongholds whereas in small farming regions despite the presence of large agricultural workforce their unionisation rate was extremely low and Labor’s electoral support ebbed.

In India however there were always too few manual workers to make the Australian road of predominately working-class left party feasible. The Left has placed the appeal to farmers at the centre of its electoral strategy. Cheap imports and the withdrawal of government supports are condemned, even although some of the poorer may be net purchasers of food (an argument made by some defenders of the old state planning model). Rhetorical appeals to agricultural labourers are common but their interests are not opposed to that of farmers, rather the entire agricultural sector is seen

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185 Field & Franda, Communist Parties of West Bengal, p. 23.
186 Brass, Politics of India, pp. 75, 306-09.
187 K. Kautsky, The Agrarian Question. Lenin’s Development of Capitalism in Russia was on one level the Russian equivalent of Kautsky work but it hinted at a more pragmatic approach.
as affected. Earlier the West Bengal Left Front had failed to impose effective agricultural taxes so as to conciliate the agricultural middle classes and supported increases in agricultural process. The left’s organisational base in rural area may enable it to incorporate agricultural labourers into this coalition, despite their objective conflicts of interests with farmers. Similar patterns can be seen for both the Australiana and American left which at times have supported higher food prices to the objective disadvantage of working-class consumers.  

The left’s electoral base in rural areas has reflected past struggles against landlordism. In 2001 and 2006 the West Bengal Left Front was able to mobilise its rural base by an appeal to memory and fear of a landlord return despite growing scepticism and a mixed record on services the CPM is still for many ‘like our relative’ as one voter said. The Party’s colonisation of rural civil society (unlike Kerala?) has assisted the maintenance of its base. At certain levels of economic development it is feasible for a party to act as an agent of intercession with the state and a distributor of access to government services, ‘machine politics’ in the classic American 19th century sense. The CPM has large membership but not a mass one and careful to maintain distinction between cadres socialised into the party’s norms and sympathisers. Thus the CPM has inserted itself into the administration of government programs such as microcredit, and this has been the case in Kerala as well to a lesser degree with decentralised revenue collection. Without an organisation of their sections of the landless have been mobilised by former landlords and the opposition parties in local violent struggles over power and position apparently devoid of substantive content. Once established local political traditions can be surprisingly persistent, in Eastern Europe many areas of relative Communist successor party strength are zones of former latifundist agriculture where the Stalinist program of collectivisation and state farming received much agricultural labourer support. The importance of grassroots


organisation has also been significant for the PDS, which with its large, disproportionately retired membership, has been able to maintain advisory bureaus for citizens.

The Left is aware that its support of farmers seems to contradict the classical Marxist position that the decline of petty-bourgeoisie production should be welcomed, but it has argued; 1) that feudal relations remain significant in agriculture and that the replacement of landlordism by peasant farming is an advance and 2) that disposed farmers will not be proletarianised but pauperised and be subject to manipulation by reactionary forces. 194

Political parties provide a range of collective goods that benefit all social groups such as honest administration, administrative competence and freedom from communal violence. As one observer noted after the polarisation and violence of the 1970s the Left Front for a long period befitted by simply being able to secure a ‘minimum of democratic civic governance and order.’ One major achievement of the Left Front has to preside over an exceptional low level of communal violence. In Eastern Europe the appeal of managerial competence has benefited some Communist successor parties after the disunity and instability of the post-1989 governments. 195

(iii) The new middle class?

From the 1960s the decline of the industrial working class shadowed the left in Western Europe. But the Indian Left largely escaped this trauma because the working class was never its core, in some critical views the left, at least in West Bengal, has been able to dispense with is the traditional working class However some of the Indian left’s shifting electoral appeals have echoed European trends. Initially one response by the European left to their electoral setbacks in the 1980s was to look the growing, mostly female, public sector human services workforce as a substitute proletariat, whose self-interest impelled a defence of old style social democracy against the neo-liberal onslaught. The revolutionary left had already argued in the 1970s against Eurocommunist class alliance strategies, with their message of moderation, that white-collar workers were now part of a proletariat that was actually much larger than it had been previously, despite the growing signs of deindustrialisation. This approach did not consider that the left’s quest for new constituency was not entirely a positive sum game, at the same time that the new strata moved leftwards, many private sector manual workers resentful of higher taxation that paid for female public employees and the limitations that slow services sector productivity growth placed on their own wage levels under corporatist wage bargaining shifted rightward. When the dust cleared it was apparent that although the
deserted by the left? Does the old working class protest vote in Europe now go to the radical right? From Communism to Le Pen.

left had made gains among the new white-collar strata it had made loses elsewhere and the perception of an overall working class identity had continued to decline.\footnote{Eley, Forging Democracy, 385-87. S. Banerjee, ‘Uneasy Convergence of Left and Right’?, EPW, 9.8.2003.}

In India perhaps the Left skipped over the 1980s turn to the public salariat. Instead in West Bengal in particular it has appealed to the urban middle-class with a message of sound economic policy, development, competence and anti-communalism. This was an appeal similar to the middle-ground appeals of contemporary social democracy, exemplified by state Labor governments in Australia, to which at most public employees are seen as an important group interest and vote bank, but not a substitute classical proletariat.\footnote{Fieldes in Kuhn, Class and struggle. Mandel, Stalinism to Eurocommunism, pp. 208-11. S. Banerjee, ‘Hobson’s Choice for Indian Communists’, EPW, 7 May 2005. M. Stekete, ‘Failure to launch’, Weekend Australian, 9-10 September 2006, Inquirer, p. 25.}

The elections of 2004 and 2006 have confirmed that the left’s base is regional but also divergences between West Bengal and Kerala. In West Bengal Communist support is not particularly clearly linked to income levels. The aspiration to seek broad cross-class support is a standard of third way arguments.\footnote{S. M. Lipset, ‘The Americanization of the European Left’, Journal of Democracy, vol. 12, no. 2 (2001), p. 79.} At the 2006 state election the Left Front made gains among the urban and rural wealthy electors, and young voters whilst losing ground among rural poor, but support among scheduled castes and tribes held up. Bhattacharjee’s popularity (he had a higher approval rating than Basu in retrospect) and the government record of development was a plus.\footnote{Y. Yadav & S. Kumar, ‘Why the left will win again’ http://www.lokniti.org/opinionpollsurveys.htm (15 November 2006). Swedish Communist support both from radicalised white-collar stratum and immigrants (D. Arter, ‘Communists in Scandinavian Local Government’, in B. Szajkowski, ed., Marxist Local Governments in Western Europe and Japan, Frances Pinter, London, 1986, pp. 108-09).} Prolonged service in government has clearly shifted power to the parliamentary party. It is inconceivable that Bhattacharjee would ever be subject to ritual humiliations that Basu endured in the 1950s and 1960s from the Party organisation.\footnote{Franda, Radical Politics, pp. 40-41, 107-08.}

Left socialist parties in Europe have a target constituency the current support for social democratic and Green parties but in India it is more difficult to discern a target constituency, particularly as at the Union level the Left has almost achieved a clean sweep in its regional heartlands. Outside of its state strongholds the support is very limited, residual pockets remain at the state assembly level for example in Andhra Pradesh, but party is almost entirely dependent on electoral pacts for a handful of Lok Sabha seats. Outside of the left’s strongholds Congress seems confident that it will continue to be the dominant partner in any alliance with the Left.

Some observers saw the election of Prakash Karat, whose political socialisation lay more in the democratic struggles of the 1970s rather than the old Communist tradition, as CPM general secretary as possibly foreshowing a shift of party focus towards the ‘third alternative’, the construction of a political alliance that could challenge both Congress and the BJP. But the possible partners for this alliance, mostly the regional parties, are uninspiring and they seem as wedded to the economic liberalisation agenda, with occasional opportunistic deviations, as is Congress. In contemporary India the left is pulled towards Congress by its definition of the Hinduvata BJP as the main enemy. Bhattacharjee has complained that the left is compelled to support Congress because we ‘are compelled to do to keep the communal parties and forces like the RSS out of power’. The CPM had rejected the CPI’s pursuit of an alliance with the Indira Congress and in particular the CPI’s argument that the Congress split was between monopolies and the rest of the bourgeoisie. The pursuit of an alliance with the regional parties is despite fact that the CPM considers them to represent the bourgeoisie-landlord class. The CPM’s dilemmas in some aspects resembles that of the Italian Communist Party, in the 1980s it recognised that its stand-alone strength had peaked and sought to develop a ‘democratic alternative’ in which it would act as a pole for parties opposed to the Christian Democrats, but it proved unable to hold or even attract allies, and for a time the Communists were under siege by the Socialists who could more plausibly represent themselves as a democratic and secular alternative.

The CPM had argued that the position of the secular non-Congress parties could be shifted by mass struggles, but the party’s definition of struggle seems to be little more than protests and rallies. The 1960s style of mobilisation is long past, yet this is the only force that could induce a shift. The CPM has even shown little interest in the CPI supported project of Communist reunification although this would strengthen the

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205 ‘CPM: Change of Guard, Change of Focus’, EPW, 23 April 2005.
206 Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18th Congress of the CPM (April 2005).
208 Franda, Radical Politics, pp. 235-36.
209 Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18th Congress of the CPM (April 2005), 2.16, 43-47, 2.78.
Yet it is clear that the CPM must be the basis of any future Left. The procedure of left party dissolution and then reformation as a new political formation undertaken by the Canadian Co-operative Federation in the late 1950s and Italian Communism in the early 1990s secured little new strength.\(^{213}\) Since the 2004 election the left has clung to the letter of the ‘Common Minimum Program’ (CMP) negotiated between it and the Congress-led national government. All it has been able to do is call for the CMP to be followed or implemented more effectively, but at the same time Left spokespeople such as CPM general secretary Prakash Karat in May 2006 have continued to insist that they have no intent to withdraw support from the Congress government. Yet it is clear that the Congress sees the role of the left on core economic policy as minimal.\(^{214}\) It is true that the CPM had given pragmatic support to sections of Congress before when its Lok Sabha members supported Indira Gandhi after the 1969 Congress split but this was seen as temporary.\(^{215}\) Now it seems to have little alternative.

10. New cleavages:

One major challenge that the left in the developed world has had to deal with is the emergence of new cleavages that challenge traditional economic lines of division. If we think historically about the left the values of defending the socially weak have always been interlinked with in complex ways with other discourses such as nationalism, secularism and progress, but it is true that during the long boom non-economic cleavages were undervalued.\(^{216}\) These are issues that have always been central for the Indian left. The ‘first world’ is becoming more like the ‘third’.

These new cleavages are often around identity and values, from ethnic and religious identity to the rise of post-materialism. They challenge existing parties of the left, threatening to raise contradictory and impossible demands. Yet such non-economic issues have always been central to the Indian Left, they have become even more central with the rise of a cultural nationalist right in the form of the BJP.

The European left socialist parties have sought to blend the class appeal of their Communist past with newer cleavages; they have sought to outflank the Greens to their left on foreign policy. Even their economic appeal has focused on issues around social expenditure in opposition to the austerity requirements of European economic integration rather than the more direct class themes of the 1970s battles around income policy or the 1980s around economic restructuring. Yet a turn to the social movements poses the problems of evoking impossible expectations. In 1975 the Italian Communist Party was swept into local government across wide areas of the country on a wave of popular protest. Previously the party’s local government power base had been restricted to the ‘red north’ of Emilia-Romagna, where the Party had a

\(^{212}\) CPI, Political Resolution Adopted at the 19th Party Congress, Part 17.
\(^{215}\) Franda, *Radical Politics*, pp. 210-203.
strong base in civil society, but the Party struggled to manage its relation with the more fragmented and heterogenous civil society of its post-1975 gains.\textsuperscript{217} French Communist local governments with their old-fashioned focus on the provision of basic government services struggled to respond to an electorate with rising expectations from the 1970s.\textsuperscript{218}

(a) Gender:

On one hand left parties were always champions of the rights of women, but they usually polled more poorly among female voters, higher levels of female religiosity and low turnouts by low-income women have been significant.\textsuperscript{219} In India the left parties have supported the reservation of a quota of Lok Sabha seats and the abolition of dowry.\textsuperscript{220} However the left parties have not led in the parliamentary representation of women or their representation in Left governments.\textsuperscript{221} More recently however the Left has increased the representation of women in West Bengal 29 out of 36 female MPs are from the Left Front and 26 from the CPM.\textsuperscript{222}

For a long period the left tended to see women’s oppression as close to a reflection of class oppression, which would disappear under socialism, where women had access to paid employment. This remains a central feature of the Party’s case.\textsuperscript{223} In West Bengal the land reforms of the Left Front did not adequately address the position of women.\textsuperscript{224} But more recently CPM leaders and Party resolutions have admitted that the Party had failed to promote women, had low female membership levels (only around 10%), and that it has tended to dismiss feminism as a bourgeois movement and ignored the oppression of women in the family. Now Communists are called on to set examples of gender equity in their personal lives. Gender issues the CPM has recently declared are not just the responsibility of women’s organisations but of the Party as a whole and this extends to trade unions. The party has also admitted that women’s organisations are too subordinate to the party.\textsuperscript{225}

The left has seen the questions of women’s rights through a traditional enlightenment lens. It has argued that women have to be defended against fundamentalism both in the broader community but also within minority groups. It adopts the liberal position

\textsuperscript{221} CPI, Manifesto, 14.
\textsuperscript{222} CPI, Political Resolution Adopted at the 19\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress, Part 12. Jeffrey, Politics, Women and Well-Being, pp. 214-15.
\textsuperscript{224} CPI, On Party’s Perspective on Women’s Issues and Tasks (December 2005), pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{225} Development and Planning Department, West Bengal Human Development 2004, Government of West Bengal, Kolkota, 2004, p. 39.
that individual rights trump group identity. The Maoists are even more vociferous on this and criticise the suggestion that self-determination for tribal groups could legitimate oppression of women amongst them. 226

Yet if the left takes a liberal position on the question of individual and group rights it is not committed to a veneration of consumerist individualism. The CPM has complained of the spread of ‘consumerist, egotists and decadent values through the transnational media’. These are apparent in the commodification of women, which is combined with traditional feudal attitudes, and is responsible for the growth of pornography, sexual trafficking and the dowry system. 227

(b) Caste and nationalities policy:

Caste has been a central problem for Indian social reformers in action but it has also posed a challenge to the Marxist position that relations of oppression ultimately being economically driven. If caste is a uniquely Indian problem Europe has seen an upsurge of minority national identities and these have posed a challenge for a left traditionally committed to the nation-state.

Despite the left’s argument that non-economic oppression is ultimately reducible to class oppression it has been a strong defender of affirmative action for scheduled castes and defends the classical liberal position that ‘protection of the interests of the minorities is the litmus test of democracy which is de facto majority role’. 228 In line with this classical rationalist view the party has little time for the suggestion that only subaltern groups can speak for themselves. 229

Yet the leadership of the left is socially distant from the scheduled castes, particularly in West Bengal very much that of the bhadralok elite. The left has been frustrated by the rise of caste-based parties in recent decades, which it sees as taking support that ‘naturally’ belongs to the Left, and as potentially subject to manipulation by reactionary forces. It is careful to argue that affirmative action ‘is no panacea for the problems of caste and class exploitation’. 230 But as with women there are hints of awareness that in the past the CPM had neglected caste questions. 231 Yet the left tends to see the role of caste and nationality divisions as sorting individuals into economically subordinate classes: ‘the tribal question is not just a question of protection of ethnic identity or defending the rights of a significant minority. It is also a class question’. The united interests of all oppressed groups are stressed. Hence the

229 N. Rajan, ‘Left-liberalism and caste politics’, EPW, 14 June 2003
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left's focus on the tribal question has emphasised economic development and carefully limited autonomy. The West Bengal government has resisted demands by groups such as Gorkhas for a separate state. The West Bengal government has even claimed that armed separatist groups in the northeast based in Bangladesh are aided by imperialism.

(c) Secularism:

Across the world the major and unexpected challenge to orthodox politics has been the rise of religious fundamentalisms. Islamic fundamentalism has been the most notable form but we have also seen in Europe the rise of a new nationalist right, that has posed its own version of the identity politics favoured by the new left. Forces previously on the right-wing margin have moved into the political centre such as the Italian National Alliance. In Eastern Europe, particularly Poland a fundamentalist and populist Catholicism has played a major political role. In India the BJP has risen from political obscurity to national government.

To a considerable extent the defence of secularism, interpreted as opposition to the BJP, has become the major rallying point of the Indian left since the 1990s. Recent CPM manifestos and platforms have put the defence of secularism and democracy as their very first priority ahead of economic goals. The CPM has criticised the CITU for not struggling against communalism and for just restricting itself to economic issues. Here the Indian left it finds a common theme with Communist successor parties in Europe, which have tended, particularly in the Polish case, to be strong defenders of secularism. In Australia the major electoral breakthrough by the Greens as left-wing rivals to the Labor party came around an issue of national identity: popular opposition to the punitive treatment of asylum-seekers by a conservative government and the acquiescence of the ALP in this.

The Indian left has been alarmed by the rise of fundamentalism, in particular the Hinduvata nationalism of the BJP, which it views with horror but for which it can offer little coherent explanation. The left's style is that of old-fashioned enlightenment liberalism. In style it recalls the air of cultured superiority that encouraged personal ties and friendships between many leaders of Congress and the old CPI. Opposition to the BJP has become a central theme of left strategy but this has pulled the Left towards Congress, just as Congress' earlier 'socialism' did. From the 1990s the CPM in particular, more so than Forward Bloc or the Revolutionary

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233 S. Chattopadhyay, 'Ghising's game', Frontline, 23, 01
234 Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18th Congress of the CPM (April 2005), 2.28.
Socialist Party, rejected any idea of equidistance between Congress and the BJP. Although Congress has become increasingly firmly committed to economic liberalisation it has been willing to respond to the left’s cultural concerns. Critics of the CPM argue that the party has in the pursuit of nominal secularism been willing to ally itself with anyone nominally opposed to the BJP whilst failing to address its own flaws in government, and those of Congress, that encourage growth of support for the BJP.

The left has also sought to link its secular concerns to anti-imperialism and claims that both the Hinduvata forces and the economic liberalisers are pro-imperialist. An appeal to the past Congress tradition of non-alignment, rather than the pro-American tilt of recent Indian foreign policy (particularly under the BJP) has been a major theme of the Left, and it has been able to rally some members of the old Indian foreign policy establishment around this. However Indian public opinion is notably pro-American. This may reflect majority anti-Muslim sentiment and some have accused the West Bengal government of compromising with Hindu communalism by its concern with Muslim illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

(d) Democracy:

One central theme of the last decades on the left has been that of democracy and participation. Some have identified a general shift among the population towards such ‘post materialist’ values. The left socialist parties that emerged before 1989, especially in Scandinavia were heavily influenced by environmental themes. Here was a criticism of capitalism fundamentally different from Marxism. The left’s engagement with these values has reflected both the influence of the movements of the 1960s but also more recently the neo-liberal defence of the market as the only form of democracy.

In the 1970s and the 1980s powerful criticism of statism and bureaucracy came from the Communist left and the British Labour, two forces that although politically opposed had been seen as strongly statist. The Communist theory of ‘state monopoly capitalism’ argued that the state apparatus was divided between a small elite aligned to monopoly capital and the mass of routine workers. The left was called upon to struggle not just for a parliamentary majority but also for a radical democratisation of the state apparatus. In Britain the new Labour left of the 1970s criticised the...
bureaucratic statism of traditional social democracy, whose flaws, it argued had alienated many public employees and consumers of government services. They called for a radical policy of public participation. More traditional social democrats were sceptical and suggested that the new left’s participatory structures empowered a minority of unrepresentative self-appointed community activists, many of whom were left labour members anyway. In the Italian Communist Party those on the right committed to the final social-democratisation of the Party were suspicious of calls for engagement with what they regarded as unrepresentative social movements. Those European Communist parties less constrained by Stalinist traditions, such as the Spanish, were notable for their encouragement of participation in local government, almost as an end in itself given the limited resources of these bodies.

'Third way' theories have inherited, without acknowledgment, this critique of bureaucratic statism without acknowledgement but cast it in a much more liberal form of returning power to citizens in the market and enforcing higher standards for more informed consumers, and a state that steers rather than rows. In India we can see this approach echoed in calls for the state apparatus to shift from ruling to governing. The argument is made that only contestability and competition can drive improvement in the quality of public services and match rising expectations.

At the level of rhetoric the Indian left has stressed democracy and participation, both through the defence of federalism (freedom of states from control of the Centre) and extension of local governance through the panchayat system. Recent CPM statements have even been more explicit than previously on the continuation of political pluralism under ‘people’s democracy’ although it is the CPI, which has been clearest on political pluralism under socialism. Yet the left remains focused on the state. As Javeed Alam argues the Communists have continued to operate within the statist assumptions of Congress, even as they criticised the direction in which Congress took the state. The left was reluctant to accept the autonomy of social movements.

It is possible to criticise the left’s commitment to democracy in practice, in particular in the case of West Bengal. One observer has suggested that CPM’s authoritarian

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approach disqualifies it from the title of social democratic, although a cursory experience of the Labor Party suggests that social democracy is often democratic in name only. 253

The CPM in West Bengal has been accused of a strategy of control and domination of social institutions, apparent in the control of universities by unqualified party loyalists. 254 At the panchayat level the CPM has excluded its Left Front coalition partners (even when they have been allocated local parliamentary seats). In 2003 11% of total panchayat seats were uncontested which some attribute to CPM intimidation. 255 This is part of a broader pattern of the marginalisation of other Left Front parties. 256 The CPM’s hint in response to any hint of disagreement within the Left Front is to boast that it alone counts politically, because it has the strength on the ground, a boast that has an element of threat. 257 Even in Kerala the CPM’s push for greater representation in the LDF has produced controversy. 258 Nevertheless the overall stability of the CPM-led alliances have been impressive, as Csaba Nikolenyi has argued that Indian party system has combined both fragmentation, a large number of parties, with cohesion, the coalescence of these parties into limited cohesive blocs. This is a product of the fact that parties occupy a large ideological range and there is space for multiple parties to form distinct poles. 259 Can this cohesion survive indefinitely in a less ideological system?

After 2001 in West Bengal there were suggestions that as the CPM no longer had an absolute majority in its own right the Left Front might become more of a genuine coalition but this did not seem to eventuate. 260 The CPM supports left unity but sees itself having leading role. 261 It seems to be able to play off the smaller left parties against each other, even at different levels of government, with little difficulty. 262 At the national level there have been murmurings about the CPM making decisions for the left as a whole, and one could speculate that one reason for the CPM’s rejection of the CPI suggestion that the left join the UP A government was that in government the CPM may have had less control over its left allies. 263

261 Political Resolution. Adopted at the 18th Congress of the CPI(M) (April 2005), 2.104-105.
262 ‘Differences in Left Front over Total Motors project come out in open’ (October 19) http://www.zeeinvest.com/new/print_articles.asp?aid=330459& (26 October 2006).
Democracy remains limited within the Left parties. Communist parties are committed to democratic centralism, a formal bar on factionalism has not prevented factional conflict, most notably in Kerala, but it has meant that the policy, as distinct from the personal, basis of factionalism has remained obscure.\(^{264}\)

Most European Communist successor parties have dropped the phrase ‘democratic centralism’ but the tradition of top-down control lives on. Paradoxically political success under democracy depended on this control. Undemocratic parties were able to modernise their name and appeal with little effective opposition from more traditionally minded party members. It was the weaker pre-1989 parties such as the Polish and Hungarians who were more realistic about their post-1989 prospects and more determined to adapt. High pre-1989 party membership, as in the Czech case, could discourage adaptation. The current Bulgarian Socialist Prime Minister has argued that the role of party members is to explain unpopular decisions to the population, an updated version of the old transmission belt. In Australia the top-down control exercised within the ALP through the factional system smoothed the party’s accommodation to economic liberalism. In West Bengal the CPM has tightened controls on internal dissent. Those European Communist parties that rejected democratic centralism in a fit of post-1989 enthusiasm and which allowed internal factions such as the Czech Communists found that the resistance of traditionalist members slowed the process of political adaptation. In Germany the small neo-Stalinist faction of the PDS was a source of constant bad publicity.\(^{265}\) The Communist myth can encourage a devotion to the party as an end in itself, and as Italy during the social-democratisation of the PCI; this loyalty can hold many who might disagree with a rightward shift in policy.\(^{266}\) The invention of Labor ‘true believers’ in Australia has played a similar role.

For Indian Communism tight central control, inherited from the old Communist tradition, facilitates political adaptability. The West Bengal CPM implemented a major turnover of MPs and ministers before the last elections. New leaders can be recruited; the current Bulgarian PM only joined the party in 1995, even although most Party members are ageing former Communists.\(^{267}\) Bhattacharjee has talked of the


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need to consult with the opposition and with experts unlike the bad example of the USSR where Communists assumed they knew everything, but his discourse does not include Party members. 268 We see in Indian Communism a steady shift from the Party to the Government as the leading force similar to that which some authors have identified in European Communist local government. 269 Here is a paradox the power of idealism and commitment inspired by a vision of a socialist future, or even an idealised vision of actually existing socialism has empowered CPM activists to build an impressive political apparatus but it has been employed for unheroic ends. Yet now the Party faces increasing difficulties in recruiting new Party workers who want reasonable salaries, in West Bengal there around 2,700 full-timers 270 Will the CPM eventually become like the ALP a shell? Bhattacharjee’s style of leadership is different from that of the classical inspirational or tribunist Communist parliamentary leadership. We see here similarities with Australian social democratic leadership, ordinary populism leaders who claim to be in touch with people and to listen rather than guide. 271

11. Conclusions: from Stalinism to Indo-Communism to what?

As we have seen the dilemmas which the Indian left has faced are similar in many respects to those which the left in the developed world has faced. Indeed the Indian Left has always had to grapple with a range of issues, such as ethnic/religious conflicts and economy divided between a formal and informal sector, a trade union movement restricted to a few sectors only, which are relatively new for the western Left. Even the Indian Left’s restriction to sub-national governance which once distinguished it from most western left parties, apart from Canadian social-democracy, is now less of a dividing line. The division between regional and national Indian governance is less significant in the age of globalisation. Even the Left’s turn towards a values based politics around defence of democracy and secularism mirrors broader trends. As Seymour Martin Lipset has argued the global politics of the Left has become Americanised and liberal as the socialist vision fades. 272 Even if we continued to defend a class-based approach the Indian experience demonstrates a major lesson, as Marcel van Linden has argued, of comparative labour history, that the classical working-class of 19th century Marxism has always been a historical anomaly and its passing in Europe merely brings Europe more into conformity with the rest of the world. 273

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268 B. Bhattacharjee, ‘We are trying to find an alternative path for our development’ (26 June 2006) http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20060606


Are there lessons the Indian and Western left can learn from each other? The Indian Left can learn from the debates in the western left about modernisation and economic change. Even if much third-way discourse does little more than pose questions rather than provide solutions they are important questions. At the level of defence of democracy and secularism however perhaps the western left can learn from the Indian Left, both proponents of the third way and the ‘anti-imperialist left’, have in their own ways comprised with communal anti-secular forces.

But we also have to consider the dangers. Is the egalitarian commitment of Indian Communism now as rhetorical as it was for Congress in the past? If Indian Communism bypasses classical social democracy for the third way does it mean that the best that the disadvantaged can hope are occasional populist concessions, on the lines that sections of Congress, such as in Karnataka offered in the 1970s?\textsuperscript{274} Can civil society alone, as distinct from party politics, provide the basis for the empowerment of the disadvantaged that even orthodox economic opinion now sees as central to their rights?\textsuperscript{275} The left’s criticism of civil society activism as diversion from the task of party-building is self-interested may have an element of truth.\textsuperscript{276} Indian voters have begun to choose to an unprecedented level but the question is whether the rhetorical opening up of political participation, exemplified by the rise of the lower-caste and regional parties, provides real choice.\textsuperscript{277}

\textsuperscript{274} Kohli, State and Poverty, pp. 157-59.
\textsuperscript{276} CPI, Political Resolution Adopted at the 19th Party Congress, Part 12.