

RED STAR OVER WEST BENGAL

RED STAR OVER WEST
BENGAL

Ram Swarup

Mid-June, 1967
Pdf: 2015.

Published by Ram Swarup, 3B/6, Poorvi Marg, New Delhi-5, Printed at
Naya Hindustan Press, Chandni Chowk, Delhi-6.

RED STAR OVER WEST BENGAL

1. The post-election scene in India is markedly changed. With the disappearance of the Congress monopoly of political power, a crazy quilt of political coalitions has appeared in many States. With a minister in some state or other, every political party, big or small, has now a place in the sun. The country has hitherto been familiar with factional politics; it is our turn now to witness turn-coat politics of constant floor-crossing and overnight change of party labels. Some observers are led to believe that the country has turned neither left nor right, but local and regional, that the political horizon has become narrower and our consciousness smaller.

2. Non-Congress Governments have been formed in eight of our seventeen States. Except in the two States of Kerala and West Bengal, these Governments are broadly non-communist, formed by parties brought together on the basis of a common rejection of the Congress. Whatever be their complexion, these Governments are, in the ultimate analysis, patriotic and law abiding and, except perhaps for depressed Bihar, would uphold the Constitution.

3. Amongst the two Communist-dominated States, Kerala is economically undeveloped. It has no industrial proletariat worth the name. Kerala also does not border on any Communist country and has, therefore, no "safe rear". Communist strategy has therefore to be qualified here according to these conditions.

4. In contrast, West Bengal is not only tremendously important, but intensely vulnerable. It is a border strategic State touching Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and East Pakistan and

opens on a major sea route. Till 1911, it was India's capital state and, till recently, her most advanced part, industrially speaking. Calcutta is still our biggest city and our largest port. Bengal has been in the vanguard of the national movement and the cradle of the Indian renaissance. But the glory of the past has turned into the misery of today. The state is truncated. Already overpopulated, and bursting at the seams, it had to receive a further 5 million refugees. The social structure is nowhere more tenuous than here. There is great social disorganisation leading to inevitable social injustice. War, Partition and Government plans have created new classes, the new rich and the new poor. Traditional forms and relations have broken, but new ones have not taken shape. There are extremes of poverty and riches. Though the home of our traditional industries, like, jute, coal, tea and engineering, industrial technology is by and large primitive. Industrial management is of low calibre and the entrepreneurship is prone to speculation and trading and lacks true pioneering industrialising spirit. Wage levels are low and the influx of cheap labour from neighbouring states like Bihar, U.P. and Orissa depresses them further. Unemployment has reached menacing proportions amongst the educated youth. The standard of public services has always been miserable and, except for some public utilities run by the private sector, its civil amenities, like water, drainage, sanitation, hospitals, etc. are in a complete mess. Nowhere is stagnation and decadence more apparent, chances of a stable growth and shared prosperity less real.

5. To the problems of primitive capitalism have been added the problems of a multiplying State bureaucracy. Low productivity caused by a backward industrial technology has been augmented by controls, restrictions and delays imposed by a Government professing socialism. Government employees have been multiplying faster than public services.

The Bengalee youth is also self-alienated. He finds

that his God-given genius is not in keeping with the man-made environment. He loves poetry and music and carefree ways of life; but his new environment demands dull, routine, regular office work. He is a “feeler” and a “thinker”, but the two are not badly wanted by a “doing”, matter-of-fact industrial culture. He is personal in his relations but Industry and Bureaucracy are unfeeling and impersonal.

6. A Bengalee finds that not only his economic habitat but he cannot choose even his political environment in spite of his vote. About four months ago, he was called to the poll. Harassed by rising prices, irked by shortages of the basic necessities of life, worried by rations and controls, he divided his vote between the congress and the congress dissidents (both securing 165 seats in a house of 280 members); otherwise, the pattern of his vote was not much different from the one in the past. But the results were significantly different. The combined strength of the two wings of the Communist Party was only 59 members, a bare 21%. Thus though a Bengalee did not vote for the Communist, but by a curious arithmetic of fragmented, multiple parties, he found he had passed under the control of Communists.

7. A United Front Government, an odd amalgam of 14 parties came into power ousting the Congress Government. In this coalition, Left Communists, strictly a minority, became a dominant influence. This Government has not solved any of the endemic chronic problems of the State and has not even attempted to do any preparatory work. It is an intensely political Government and prefers to maintain a pre-election atmosphere of scare, noises and charges rather than to embark upon constructive nation-building tasks. It has been singularly busy in strengthening its political base particularly amongst those sections where the Communist party had already formed a base. The whole series of policy pronouncements and measures are primarily agreed to this political purpose. In option for the primacy of political

ends over economic results, the Communist Party is only living up to its ideology.

8. Having firmly entrenched itself in the Government, the Communist Party is gradually unfolding its programme. In the present phase of revolution, the primary aim of the party is to smash the existing social order and its supporting organs. This has to be achieved by intensifying class war and class hatred, demoralising the “class enemy”, by throwing him into confusion, by sowing the seeds of revolution amongst the hungry masses and by stoking the flames of rebellion. The intention is to bring about an all-round chaos, anarchy and disintegration. But in this welter of confusion, the party would remain the only cohesive organised force, in command of the traffic, directing it on the road to Revolution.

9. The journey to a “People’s Democracy” is much shorter than what people think. It always starts with a United Front of disparate and loose elements which the rich, resourceful, iron-disciplined Communist Party can easily direct and lead. Once they worm themselves in, it becomes very difficult to dislodge them. In this phase, they are very liberal with the treasury which is emptied for buying the loyalties of the “have-not” and of the lower bureaucracy. “Democratic rights” are freely granted for wrecking articulation and discipline within the society and the administration. But when the next “higher phase” begins, the demand for those very rights becomes “reactionary.” A demand for increased wages is rejected as “vulgar economism” and any talk of free votes is denounced as “revisionism.”

10. As the midwife of Society, the Party does not believe in the “spontaneity” of revolution. The masses have to be led by the nose. The strategy of revolution has to be carefully mapped out and the tactics have to be developed and varied to the need and the occasion. The Communist Party has a detailed blueprint for revolution. Like a superbly managed

modern industrial corporation, the party continuously carries out a feasibility study, a project report, a market survey, a sales forecast, a product research and an input-out analysis of man and his society.

11. During its brief regime of three months, the left Communist Party has taken certain concrete steps for translating its immediate programmes into action. A brief narration of the organised activity in which the party is presently engaged would show the direction of its policy and the shape of the things to come. What emerges clearly from the following is the fact of radical preparations for an eventual showdown, the forging of new weapons of mass sanctions, violent upheavals and terror.

(a) Industrial workers in West Bengal are not yet fully unionised. The first aim of the Party is to achieve complete unionisation, by presenting militant charters of demand to the big and small factories, through the agency of Communist dominated Trade Unions. The strategy consists in eventually drawing the particular factory workers into the fold of these Communist Trade Unions by launching agitational activities. A very well organised and concerted effort is going on amongst the factories, plantations and collieries in the State.

(b) Existing unions led by rival political workers belonging to INTUC or Hind Mazdoor Sabha are being captured by the Party. Open assaults are made on their trade union workers with impunity, as the police are afraid to give any protection to the victims.

(c) The communists aim at snapping the human and democratic link between the employer and the employees through the widespread use to the totalitarian method of Gheraos.

(d) Banks, Insurance Companies and Mercantile Companies in the City are being unionised very rapidly. Their managements are being coerced into submission through these employee unions.

(e) The countryside is gradually being converted into an arena of class conflicts and struggles. Sections of the peasantry are being set up against each other. At some places, land hungry peasants are being incited to seize lands, loot crops, terrorize the owners and clash with the police. At other places, share croppers and small peasants are being banded together against the bigger peasants.

(f) Educational establishments throughout the State are being effectively controlled by student bodies and teachers' unions.

(g) All modes of transport such as shipping, docks, railways, road transport and tramways are being effectively controlled through Communist unions which can paralyse, sabotage and disrupt the arteries of communication at the behest of the party.

(h) The strong officers in the administration and the police are singled out for attack in the communist press and from the communist platform and are being silenced into submission by transfers, demotions and character-assassination.

(i) The Party has started keeping dossiers on businessmen, politicians and social workers who can be exposed whenever needed by the party.

(j) Every attempt is being made to discredit the previous Congress Government and all sorts of commissions, enquiries and investigations are being threatened and launched for the purpose. The Party is organising its workers, activists and agitators into party cells in every mohalla and street, which in future would form the nucleus of the mohalla committees and the terror squads.

(k) Local people are being systematically drawn into mob activities and fracas with the forces of law and order. This serves the dual purpose of increasing the popularity of the Party amongst the masses and of demoralising the administration.

(l) People's Committees, called Gana Committees, are being formed in the rural country-side for the ostensible purpose of dehoarding food. In reality, these Committees are acting as levers of power for the party and as organs of a parallel Government.

(m) All checks on political affiliations before appointment to Government jobs have been removed. Active workers of the Party are being inducted into every Government department.

(n) Government employees are deliberately being made disloyal and indisciplined under the guise of democratic and trade union rights. It is no longer possible for the Government to command effectively its own machinery for administrative purposes.

(o) Police is being infiltrated by the induction of party workers into lower level constabulary and by brow-beating senior officials.

(p) The Party is bringing out a spate of magazines, journals and dailies in Bengali and other languages. These are being widely disseminated by the party workers through street corner news-boards, pavement hawking and through the party offices.

(q) Party workers on the cultural front are organising street dramas, village theatres and cultural functions, thus effectively putting across the Party's slogans to the wider public.

(r) Every opportunity is being taken to appoint leftist advocates as Judges, public prosecutors and other judicial officials. Efforts are made to penetrate the judiciary through the existing communist lobby in the law profession of the state.

(s) Coffers of the Party are being filled up by collecting ransom money from businessmen, by government patronage and, of course, from secret foreign sources.

12. This is a mighty multi-pronged effort ranging over the whole gamut of organised social activity and is gathering momentum with every day that passes. While some outward results are already visible, the public is hardly aware of the sinister implications and ramifications of these developments. Not only that the Communists are past masters in deception, camouflage and double-talk, there are certain other reasons also for this dull muted response. While the people are somewhat agitated over the Gherao which is only an outwardly pronounced form and by no means the most sinister, Government policies have not as yet impinged on their vital interests. People are, therefore, prone to take the present set-up as some kind of surface turmoil, likely to disappear with a good monsoon and not a basic frontal attack on democracy, freedom and property. There is also a sub-conscious hope that the Congress Party will come back to power at the appropriate moment by toppling the multi-party amalgam. A lot of comfort is derived from the thought that the Central Government can always intervene at the right moment.

13. These are nothing more than fond illusions and hopes. The good people of West Bengal are in for a holocaust and a blood-bath. The length of their ordeal would depend much on their own efforts to counteract this creeping paralysis of their inner life. But two things are certain: (1) that things are marching inexorably to an upheaval and (2) that, in the ultimate analysis, the people of West Bengal will have to wage their own battle, though they need immediate and urgent support from the rest of India.

14. The Communist Party does not harbour any illusion that the United Front Ministry would last for any length of time. For the Party, the UF regime is at best a transitional arrangement and is meant to be a stepping stone to the next and higher phase of revolution. Those who seek to derive comfort from the tenuous position of the present

arrangements and are looking for relief in the break-down of the present ministry are likely to be disillusioned when the sequel follows.

15. The Communist Party is itching for the eventual ultimate class war and restraining itself only for tactical reasons. When it chooses the moment for the break-down of the ministerial coalition, it will be all set and ready to pin the blame on parties like the Bangla Congress, the PSP and the Forward Bloc which would immediately revert to their old “reactionary” status in the party jargon. The Party would pose to be the sole champion and fighter for the interests of the people. In case of a Presidential takeover, the Party would be ready to pose as a martyr in the people’s cause. The dialectical nature of its slogans and the flexibility of its tactics enables it to take a suitable stance under any eventuality.

16. The next phase of the revolution now starts. Since there is no possibility of the Congress Party either forming a government or being allowed to govern, the Parliamentary system breaks down and the President takes over. Under the Constitution, a Presidential proclamation must be followed within six months by fresh elections. This is the day for which the Party has been readying itself all along with its militant mass movements. It is reasonably certain that under the prevailing political conditions in the State, the Left Communist Party may emerge single-handedly victorious in a midterm election, as it would be riding on the rising waves of seething discontent and rebellion which have been deliberately fomented by the Party during its short-lived regime for its political purposes. The shape of things to come has already been indicated by the massive victories scored by the Party in recently held municipal elections all over the State.

17. The People’s Government (as contrasted to the United Front regime of the present day) consisting solely of the Party

nominees now comes into being and this is going to be very different from the present regime. It is no longer necessary to camouflage the Party's activities or its intentions. Having built a solid mass base of operations, agitations and organisations and having created organs of class war for agitation and parallel organs for governance, the Party can now confidently proceed to alter the "class" character of the State and the Society, in flagrant breach of the Constitution and in open defiance of the Central Government. At this stage, it would not hesitate to assassinate its political opponents or to carry out widespread raids on business houses or to bring relentless pressure upon those who do not side with the party. The Party would see to it that they are squeezed out of the State, on the East Pakistan or Burma pattern.

18. It is at this stage that the Party's armed bands would appear in the countryside and violent insurrection could become a reality. Open Camps and Schools for guerilla warfare would be established all over the State and secret liaison would be established with China for the smuggling of arms across the borders. The "safe rear" would now come into play, which would not only provide sanctuary to the wanted men but would act as the base of operations for armed forays, armed assistance, movement of spies and organisation of an Intelligence and Propaganda network. Efforts would be made to cut off our tenuous links with Assam, Tripura, Manipur and NEFA and to isolate these parts from the rest of the country. The possibility of a concerted effort with other trouble spots in Eastern India and with our enemies across the borders is not a mere pipe dream.

19. Lest it be hoped that this armed rebellion could possibly be crushed by Army intervention at the behest of the Central Government, it would be instructive to recall the limited effectiveness, almost bordering on futility, of punitive action in civil wars engineered by the Communists. The Central forces would be treated as an army of occupation and

would be harassed by guerilla tactics. Communications would be disrupted, railway tracks would be uprooted, the offices and establishments of the Central Government would be taken over, industrial establishments would be looted and a State-wide general strike would ensure bringing the life of the community to a complete standstill. If the Army has been unable to pacify the small undeveloped pockets like Mizo Hills or Nagaland how could it hope to smother large-scale disturbances in a densely populated State, without shooting and killings on a huge scale?

20. All the while, events in West Bengal would not be happening independently or in isolation. Subversion there will go hand in hand with subversion in other parts of India and at the Centre. For the target of communism is not the North-East but the entire sub-continent of India. West Bengal is only a beach-head, a springboard, a base of action for further consolidation and aggression.

The Centre itself would be under the constant pressure from within the Parliament of those very people who are active in West Bengal. In the present power-equilibrium, it is not impossible that there may even emerge some kind of UF Government at the Centre with or without the Congress in which the communists are not unrepresented. Besides, the forces, pressures, slogans and illusions which are working in West Bengal are also working in the rest of India and in the society at large. So unless some new factors emerge, some new effort takes place, results are bound to be the same with a certain time-lag.

21. At this point of time, this process of political evolution seems to be inevitable and inexorable. There is hardly any point of adequate strength or of vigorous counteraction in West Bengal today. The Congress Party has little fighting spirit left in it. Its self-assurance is gone and its bewildered leadership is paralysed. After having objectively served their role as the sappers and miners for the Communist Party, the

Bangla Congress would have also lost its utility for inclusion in any future United Front. There is too much distrust and hatred amongst the non-communist Parties, not only against the Congress but also in respect of each other. These political parties stand paralysed and hypnotised by the Communist slogans which set the tone and pace of organised political activity within the State. Business continues to be a divided house against itself and utterly demoralised under the impact of the terror tactics of the Party. It more and more looks as if it is a sick society with a death wish.

22. There is no doubt that the situation is potentially very dangerous and there are objective reasons for such grave forebodings. The bushfires already started and Naxalbari is a dress rehearsal for the coming Revolution. However, the democratic cause is still not lost irretrievably. Serious upsets occur in every healthy organism, but the malady is corrected through the process of counterattack by the anti-bodies which isolate the attacking microbes and destroy them. In a social organism likewise, there are organs of self-defence and counteraction which can isolate and destroy the anti-social elements.

23. While non-Communist forces remain demoralised, divided and confused, a faint glimmer and awareness of the looming danger is not starting to appear. This awareness has to be strengthened and the nature of the Communist menace has to be projected across the minds of the people. After all, the Communist Party is a broken reed and a paper tiger, its promises have been proved false and spurious times without number and its claims have been historically debunked. Over the many decades, it has made itself a kind of moral leper. It is only through a barrage of propaganda and sustained organisational activity that the Party succeeds in projecting a popular image. Given a determined effort, the hollow pretensions of the Party can easily be seen through. The image of eight feet tall communists marching with seven league

boots or communism as the wave of the future is discredited, disproved myth and need not scare the patriotic forces.

24. It has to be remembered that the Communist Party seeks to capture power at all levels and in all forms. Ultimately their struggle is ideological, total in nature and scope and comprises political, economic, social, psychological and military action, all interwoven into an effective offensive strategy. The communists are not ordinary criminals who can be restrained by the forces of law and order. They act as active agents of a social revolution, of their own kind, and as such they have to be met primarily at the level of thoughts and ideas. An effective programme of action would therefore consist of certain short-term measures for meeting the immediate menace, and certain long-term measures of social justice and of ideological and organisational warfare.

25. Certain elements of the programme both immediate as well as prospective, could briefly be spelled out thus:

(a) The democratic constituents of the present United Front regime should be made to realise that in allowing the Communists to dominate the Government, they are subverting the very basis of freedom and democracy. These democratic parties must oppose the Communist measures from within the Government, even at the risk of breaking up the coalition. Their efforts at clinging to power at any cost would not only prove to be futile in the short run but also suicidal in the long run.

(b) The time has come when these parties should give up their blind hatred of the Congress and should form a united front of political parties which are opposed to Communism. If these democratic parties could join hands with the Communist Party on a Common Programme, there is far greater reason for them to join hands with the Congress and other non-Communist forces, on a Common Programme of action for resisting Communism.

(c) The Congress Party in the West Bengal Legislature and

outside has to streamline itself. At present it is adept only in electoral tactics and catching votes. The Party must immediately secure the help of competent men who are able to provide background information on public issues. The democratic case must be documented for democracy and against Communism. The misdeeds of the Communist government should be brought out and its nefarious designs exposed. The democratic parties should produce able and fighting debaters. The message has to go out on the streets, in the villages and in the towns.

(d) Though owned by non-Communists, the press is heavily infiltrated by reporters and journalists with pro-Communist sympathies. The mode and manner of press reporting should be looked into and Communist influence should be eliminated. There is nothing progressive or noble about a Communist seizure of power.

(e) The Press within the country should fully spotlight subversive and anti-national Communist activities in West Bengal.

(f) Non-Communist M.P.s belonging to the Congress and other democratic Parties like the Swatantra, Jan Sangh, P.S.P., D.M.K. etc. should visit West Bengal regularly for studying and reporting to their respective States and to the National Parliament.

(g) Non-Communist teachers, educationists, writers and artists should be mobilised for effective counteraction on the educational and cultural fronts.

(h) The non-Communist intelligentsia has to prepare and equip itself on the issue of Communism through studies and discussions.

(i) Persons affected by the pressurising tactics of the Party should take effective counteraction rather than submit to the Party for gaining short-term comfort.

(j) Employers should take solid industry-wide coordinated action against the terror tactics of the Party.

Such action could include industry-wise lockouts, the establishment of an Industrial Security Force and effective legal actions in all forms and forums.

(k) The police should not tolerate any encroachment upon the legitimate discharge of its duties and must voice its grievances and seek redress by all constitutional means. At the same time they must receive the active support of the law-abiding and thinking citizens whose duty it is to protect and defend the police.

26. The biggest responsibility rests upon the shoulders of the Central Government, whose obligations are not only legal in the narrow sense of the term. The Central Government is responsible for the integrity and security of the country and for maintaining an atmosphere of freedom in the country. In its present weak state, there is a tendency for the Central Government to be on the defensive, to stay its hands in spite of Communist terroristic and subversive activities and to play politically safe by a policy of masterly inactivity. The dangers of inaction have to be clearly perceived in time, before the situation becomes too desperate for remedial action.

27. Concretely speaking, Central Governmental action involves surveillance of the Law and Order situation by the Home Ministry, the maintenance of strict discipline and order in the Central Government establishments, correct relations with the State Government and strengthening of the border security forces, frequent and regular visits by Central Government Ministers and officers who would, through meetings and discussions, strengthen and revive the administrative forces trying to uphold the Constitution under difficult conditions, and prevent demoralisation amongst the services. The Communist Party should not be allowed to play with and subvert such Central services as the Railways, Posts and Telegraphs, Ports, Docks and Airports etc. The Central Home Minister has already shown courage in denouncing the Gheraos. Pronouncements of policies have still to come on all other aspects of communist activities.

28. Business in West Bengal has to take certain long term measures. It must realise that the character of business today is institutional, and that the workers and consumers have a legitimate share in the prosperity of the industry. Ultimately Business is People. Industry has to improve its technology for increasing productivity and spreading economic gains. Business should also see that in schools and colleges and in the organs of public opinion, anti-business sentiments are challenged, answered and refuted. Business should also take part in the cultural life of the country. Its business is not merely to make profits, but also to see that its activities and profits serve India's national values, serve forces of truth, harmony, service and freedom. It has also to keep a chin-up attitude and fight it out rather than to surrender meekly to the forces of darkness and aggression.

29. At the policy making level, our rulers should realise that their wrong policies have rendered the Indian economy almost unworkable, which is one of the main causes of the widespread unrest and discontent. The accent of policy should be on production, and productivity rather than doctrinaire controls and restrictions.

30. This is a tall bill of particulars and it is a doubtful proposition whether it can be implemented in a significant measure. The democratic forces are weak and vulnerable in West Bengal and, if left to their fate, the odds are against their survival. The curious fact, however, remains that Communism is at once very strong and yet very weak. It cannot stand the scrutiny of truth, and yet it can prosper in an atmosphere of lies, fear and violence.

31. If the rest of India supports West Bengal, the balance of forces can be tilted in favour of survival and Communism can be defeated in the fields and factories and in the Legislative Chambers. But if we continue to remain aloof and let Bengal go under, it is going to be only a question of time

when the rest of the country will also follow suit. The old saying “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow” is perhaps true. The morrows may be than one but the sequential pattern will hold.

32. There seems to be little awareness on the national scene of what is unfolding in West Bengal. Our Parliament is busy with trivialities. One is reminded of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. The failure of not measuring up to the job will be not only one of West Bengal alone, but that of the whole country. It is therefore up to the National Leadership of each patriotic party and the Nation as a whole to act here and now. Eternal vigilance as the price of liberty was never more true than now.