

Contradictions, Negotiations and Reform

The Story of Left Policy Transition in West Bengal

1. Introduction

The thirty year story of Left rule (the Left Front coalition spearheaded by the Communist Party of India-Marxist: CPIM) in the Indian state of West Bengal has often been a tumultuous one, sparking intense debates in the political echelons of the country. The Left Front demonstrated a rare instance of political stability, especially when placed in the wider context of caste, religion, and ethnicity based politics and frequent regime changes elsewhere in India; it decisively won seven consecutive democratic elections from 1977 to 2006, finally losing in 2011. The Left Front's development record is also substantial. It brought in significant land reforms, was the first among Indian state governments to take up the mantle of democratic decentralization via the *panchayati-raj* institution (a system of local governance), and gained unprecedented popularity as a government for the poor.

In this context the electoral defeat of the Left Front in 2011, after a much touted industrialisation drive and associated land acquisition, evoked sharp reactions. In the 2006 state elections, the government had earned a historic majority¹, but this was followed almost immediately by a 'series of poll debacles... [which] left the...Left Front...completely shell-shocked. It did not quite anticipate the tide of popular mood to cause almost a lateral shift in its electoral base in the urban, and most dramatically in the rural, areas of the state' (Bhattacharya, 2010). Scholars such as Bardhan, Mitra *et al* (2012), associate this electoral decline with voters' concerns about the governance failure of Left leaders, while others articulate arrogance, accompanied by a noticeable downturn in the quality of the leadership (particularly that of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Chief Minister from 2000-2011), as being responsible for the decline (RayChaudhury, 2011). A third strand of criticism by disenchanted Left members, ex-members and other supporters focuses on ideological-political contradictions of the parliamentary Left with respect to its approach to neoliberal globalisation and the trajectory of economic development, particularly with reference to

industrialisation, land acquisition and informalisation of labour (Bose, 2013). Chatterjee and Basu (2009) assert that the debacle of the Left can be traced to land acquisition linked to industrialisation which alienated its hitherto stable rural support base. Another strand of criticism emphasised the ideological contradictions of the Left as reflected in its economic development policy. Ashok Mitra and Prasenjit Bose (2003), for example, have argued that the slogan of development is no substitute for ideology and the Left developmental model essentially reflected an ideological and political crisis. The process of economic liberalisation that India embraced in the 1990s, which led to a gradual effort by the Left Front to adopt a pro-market development strategy, a shift in both its political discourse and policy orientation, presents another important perspective. The Left parties, led by the CPIM, championed the nationwide opposition to neoliberal reforms. They could not, however, mount an effective nationwide resistance as they only had a significant presence in three states- Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal - and only the last displayed any form of political stability.

The above criticisms, although diverse in orientation, all originated from the Left Front's engagement with a development approach that it had previously been publicly opposed to, and the question of whether this indicated a deviation from Left political-ideological lines. However, these accounts mostly focus on the period of decline (circa 2006-2011), and do little to illuminate the conditions that precipitated such a turn of events. This literature is also dominated by a focus on the role of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as the chief minister (post-2000) in facilitating this shift (for e.g., see Basu, 2007). Bhattacharya repeatedly emphasised the need to expand the industrial sector as a natural progression of society. Although categorical in denying the existence of any economic model, he carefully mentioned the reforms and development in the Chinese and Vietnamese economies, and even Brazil, to highlight the need for industrialisation (Bhattacharya, 2007). His aggressive push for large scale industrialisation is seen as the decisive factor behind the turn of electoral fortunes of the Lefts in West Bengal.

Although instructive, these reasonings - both economic consideration and leadership orientated - in themselves are not sufficient to explain the conditions that brought about the transition. In reality, the Left Front, and particularly the CPIM, had found itself caught between a rock and a hard place in relation to its pro-poor policy orientation and emerging market forces ever since the early 1990s. It had to remain subservient to federal compulsions in terms of policy orientation, whilst still maintaining a largely contrasting political-ideological line, and at the same time justifying to its core support base its eagerness to ensure economic growth and development via a rather market-friendly stance. The explanations that the party had put forward at the time underplayed the extent and magnitude of changes, presenting them as unavoidable adjustments precipitated by the changes in the national economic landscape, rather than a fundamental doctrinal/ideological transition. However, the economic compulsion argument is only partially acceptable at best, as throughout the 1980s, despite a declining industrial sector, the CPIM was able to maintain its electoral base thanks to its pro-poor image (with a marginal increase in vote share and 14 more seats won by the entire Left Front between 1982 and 1987; see Table 1). Thus, arguments of economic compulsion alone cannot be an adequate explanation of the transition, nor can they explain the urge for rapid industrialisation.

<insert Table 1>

The central tenet of this paper is to present a set of ideas charting the process of transition in West Bengal. It attempts to answer the following question: what were the *local political conditions* that persuaded the CPIM/Left Front to take upon itself the task of engineering such a transition? It argues against (1) the often repeated (economy-centric) discourse about the transition arising simply out of compulsions generated by the post-1991 changes in the national economic framework, and (2) the common understanding that the transition actually took shape owing to the

active industrialisation strategy pursued during Bhattacharya's tenure. Rather, as we will show, it was a process, the dynamics of which went far beyond economic compulsions.

It should also be noted that the shift in West Bengal towards a pro-industry development agenda, although a part of the all-India decision of the CPIM, was unique in its pace and orientation as the West Bengal and Kerala state CPIM election manifestos for the 2006 state assembly elections show. The former was 'in a hurry to slip into the fast lane' and the latter reluctant 'to stray too far from the slow, beaten track' (Mazumdar, 2006). The Bengal manifesto, given the state's fiscal limitations, focused on attracting private investment and generating employment through developing industrial parks and townships, special economic zones (SEZs), and taking full advantage of the central government's 'Look East' policy. The Left Front also categorically stated it would close down loss-making public sector units (PSUs) if they could not be revived or restructured, and planned reforms in one of the largest - the state electricity board. In contrast, while the Kerala manifesto also focused on setting up more industrial parks, SEZs and facilities for investors, the focus lay in greater state initiative. It also clearly stated that neither the state electricity board nor other PSUs would be disinvested and every effort would be made to revive loss-making ones. While the pro-industry development agenda was an all-India decision of the party, the particular series of events that occurred in West Bengal was not witnessed elsewhere.

This last point is an important one to acknowledge. The events charted in this paper recounts the story of a political maneuvering that is unique in its own right within the larger narrative of reformism in India, and while it can be located within broader debates about economic transitions elsewhere, the paper consciously refrains from attaching any specific theoretical claims to it. However, the discussion presented here does throw a new light on the history and current status of the CPIM within Indian parliamentary politics, along with raising some wider questions about policy reform. These points have been elaborated in the conclusion.

The paper has the following structure: the next section explores the nature of the transition in detail. The following section discusses some of the wider structural issues that underpinned the transition. The penultimate section presents our findings, focusing on a dual narrative of instrumental and political-ideological arguments, followed by a conclusion.

2. Contextualizing the Transition

Soon after coming to power in West Bengal in 1977, the Left Front issued a Statement on Industrial Policy (GoWB, 1978), which contained a number of key features in accordance with the ideological orientation of a Left party. Firstly, the policy repeatedly expressed a militant attitude towards multinationals and big corporations. These were accused of ‘utilizing the profits realised from West Bengal's industries either for supporting the lavish style of living of the owners and top executives or for setting up industries elsewhere, or for remitting funds abroad’, and hence there was ‘no question of allowing new multinationals to come in’ (ibid.:103-105). Secondly, a revival of the once-flourishing industrial units of the state was not judged a priority. If the stress of the policy is on revival, it was argued, then ‘the monopoly houses and the multinational companies will be helped in further increasing their grip over the economy...This would be wholly against the principles upheld by the Left Front’ (ibid). Thirdly, there was a strong emphasis on the government’s duty to attempt to influence central government policy. The Left Front lobbied hard for a ‘major modification in the allocation of powers between the Centre and the States in such matters as industrial licensing, the regulation of industries and arrangements concerning institutional finance’ (ibid.:107).

Following such an approach – commonly referred to as the *Left alternative* (which also included land reforms, *panchayats*, and a larger objective of self-reliance) – the future of industrial development in West Bengal post-1978 seemed bleak. While agrarian reforms and significant

decentralization measures did improve rural income levels and increased the demand for non-agricultural goods (Chakravarty and Bose, 2009), the impact on the overall economy of the state was limited. Between 1980 and 1990, per-capita SDP growth in West Bengal was extremely sluggish (see Table 2) and it registered one of the lowest growth rates among the fourteen non-special category states in this period (see Table3).

<insert Table 2>

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Irrespective of such stagnating conditions, the era of concerted economic reform that India embraced in 1991 (in response to an acute balance of payments crisis) was a complete antithesis to Left ideology, evoking strong reactions, especially from the CPIM. Not only did it criticise the new economic policies (NEP), but it also accused the preceding regime of having brought the balance of payments crisis upon the country through its pro-market policies of the 1980s.

Interestingly, although the CPIM as an individual party continued to denounce the NEP in public at every opportunity, in its guise as a member of the Left Front, it seemed to accept that some positives indeed came out of it. As Pederson (2001) writes:

The Left Front government had indirectly acknowledged in its Economic Review for the year 1992-93 that the freeing of the industrial sector from the compulsion to seek central government licenses had resulted in an increase in investment proposals in the state.

The watershed moment of this story came in September 1994, when the Left Front published a renewed *Policy Statement on Industrial Development* which deviated significantly from the rhetoric of the 1978 Statement. It read:

The State Government welcomes foreign technology and investments, as may be appropriate, or mutually advantageous...[I]t recognises the importance and key role of the Private Sector in providing accelerated growth (GoWB, 1994:7-8).

Consider the following points with respect to the features of the 1978 Statement discussed earlier:

1. The skeptical and almost militant attitude towards multinationals was completely reversed, and the state was promoted as an attractive destination for private capital, both domestic and foreign:

Apart from the presence of large Indian Industrial Houses functioning in the State, a number of Multi-national Corporations (MNCs) have long been successfully operating in the State.... A welcome development is that a good number of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), MNCs directly or through foreign Governments and Indian Industrial Houses have, in the recent past, shown special interest in coming to West Bengal (ibid).

The Statement also declared that all sectors – private, joint and public - would be treated as effective instruments for mobilising necessary resources and expertise in important areas of economic activity such as power generation, communications, roads, etc.

2. Contrary to its earlier claims that the revival of sick industries would strengthen the grip of the monopolists, the government now promised that all such units in the private sector would be ‘reopened and rehabilitated appropriately at the earliest’ (sic) (ibid.:14).
3. Finally, a number of policy instruments were introduced to expedite the process of industrial developmentⁱⁱ which indicated early signs of the change in government attitude. Other instruments included (a) a proposal to strengthen the WBIDC (West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation); (b) expedited decisions and clearances for large

and/or contentious projects that needed permissions from multiple departments; and (c) setting up various committees to ensure rapid decisions regarding land, employment and other related matters.

The 1994 Statement is the cornerstone upon which the subsequent industrialisation drive in West Bengal was based. Along with it, the Left Front also initiated a number of politically risky shifts, such as allowing the private sector to enter the infrastructure, health, and even education sectors. The most important institutional change was the reorganisation of the WBIDC and appointment of Somenath Chatterjeeⁱⁱⁱ - a senior and widely respected CPIM leader - as its Chairman, who (along with the state's Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu) intensified the promotion of West Bengal as an attractive investment destination through a number of foreign tours and visits. In spite of the party having long dismissed mainstream media as 'bourgeois', post-1994 the government attempted to signal its commitment to the reform agenda by drastically increasing the volume of interviews and press statements given. In most of his interviews, Chatterjee argued explicitly that addressing the credibility problem would require the government to undertake 'large' and 'stronger' reforms:

Unfortunately there is still the feeling among a section of the industry: Why should we go to a communist-led state? This should prompt us to be more aggressive in projecting West Bengal. We must attract private capital. I don't see any alternative (quoted in Sinha, 2004).

3. Understanding the Transition

In retrospect, the 1994 Statement marks the first moment of transition in the political economic history of West Bengal during its thirty year Left rule. For the first time, an attempt was made to *de-link government from politics*, albeit rhetorically. The 1978 Statement was an effort to link the struggle for production with the on-going class struggle of the Left parties. The 1994 Statement

was, on the contrary, by and large apolitical. The focus was on income and employment generation via industrial revival and growth rather than ‘revolution’ or ‘class struggle’. Surprisingly though, it was not until over five years later, that the CPIM ideologues took upon themselves the task of providing a theoretical justification of this^{iv}.

It is here that the puzzle lies. What prompted such a de-linkage? The major coalition partners, especially the CPIM, had entrenched themselves politically, organisationally and socially throughout the state and were riding high on electoral performance (see Tables 4a&b). Rural West Bengal, by the late 1980s, also demonstrated modest levels of economic affluence and social/communal harmony. Why would the government abandon its previously successful political line, and instead fall in with the central government recommended policy measures - which continued to be opposed in the public sphere by all the Left parties, even after 1994. Contemporary Left literature pays only lip service to this puzzle, which becomes even more intriguing in light of the policy choices of the Left faction in Kerala, as discussed earlier.

Soon after the 1994 Statement, a rather ambiguous justification was provided by the 15th CPIM Party Congress, trying to dilute the scale of change, and reiterating the promise of the Left Front to play a leading role in the nationwide resistance to liberalisation. It admitted that it was necessary to take up the mantle of industrialisation given the opportunities presented by the NEP, but:

...doing so does not mean giving up or compromising on our basic strategic goals...care should be taken to see that our government...[does] not...justify the liberalisation policies...[Our]...policies should be in defence of the public sector...the government must clearly set out alternative policies possible...and this should be the basis for our Party’s propaganda and mobilization (CPIM, 1995:100-101).

However, such a proposition was fraught with inherent contradictions, concentrated mainly in three areas. Firstly, the 1994 Statement itself mentioned nothing about setting alternative policies.

While the Congress statement is essentially a political one and cannot be expected to cover administrative details, neither the government nor the CPIM delivered any subsequent plan regarding alternative policies. Secondly, promoting state intervention as a political priority would discourage private capital from coming to West Bengal which, even the Congress admitted, was a necessity. Finally, it is not clear why the Left Front felt it could canvas for private capital while at the same time leading a nationwide anti-liberalisation movement without running a major risk of creating doubt among potential investors, as well as their own supporters. This statement is possibly the only formal explanation of the policy transition that the CPIM provided during the 1990s, but rather than focusing on the de-linkage question, it attempted to recreate the political sanctity of a pro-labour alternative economic model, downgrading the shift in policy as necessary ‘adjustments’ rather than a fundamental transition.

The puzzle however, remains unanswered. For analytical clarity, let us rephrase it as two distinct questions: why were the policy changes, irrespective of whether one labels them as adjustments or transition, necessary? And more importantly, why was an attempt made to de-link government from politics, contrary to the Left parties’ ideological discourse and history? The answers to both these questions constitute the *political conditions* that brought about the transition. Let us examine them in turn.

<insert Tables 4a&b>

3.1 Fiscal and Federal Compulsions

Looking beyond the political overtones of the period, certain facts about the fiscal condition of West Bengal stand out. By early 1990 its fiscal standing was among the country’s worst. Table 5 provides a comparative analysis of the cumulative fiscal indicators of ten states with maximum revenue deficits over this period. The government had to borrow substantially, its total outstanding liability was the third highest in the country and in terms of debt-income ratio West Bengal was

one of the most debt-stressed states. The government itself admitted that: ‘the state has been caught in an internal debt trap in relation to the Centre’ (GoWB, 1991:94). In effect, the government barely had any cash to allocate to developmental expenditure. Total capital expenditure in West Bengal between 1980 and 1990 was a paltry 28% of its total revenue expenditure, less than all the other revenue-deficit states, bar one. Therefore, the government had little choice but to court private investments in order to inject a much needed momentum into the state’s economy. While the CPIM chose to continue with its rhetoric of a ‘self-reliant alternative’ in public, the pro-market reforms introduced by the central government had, in effect, provided the Left Front with an opportunity to induce some economic development (via job creation in the private sector and development projects undertaken in public-private partnerships) in spite of its fiscal bankruptcy.

Beyond the fiscal crisis, there was a larger arc of federal compulsions and political salesmanship that also played a critical role in the process. These arguments stem from the dual conceptual categories of inter-jurisdictional competition (Sáez, 2002) and provincial Darwinism (Jenkins, 1999). The most overt influence of the NEP was on India’s industrial policy; abolishing the licensing system triggered intense competition among different state governments to attract private investment, resulting in ‘a proliferation of tax-incentive schemes and promises of speedy administrative procedures, expedited land acquisition for new industrial projects, and efforts to maintain a ‘conducive’ industrial-relations climate’ (ibid.:134). The long-term outcome of this is what Sáez calls an institutional shift towards inter-jurisdictional competition among the states, and Jenkins- the partial displacement of centre-state conflict by inter-state competition. What is crucial though, from an analytical perspective, is the identification of the political skills employed by the central government (key cabinet ministers in relevant departments and high level bureaucrats) to bring about this shift.

The key issue here, as Jenkins (1999) argues, is that the central government passed on many of the difficult tasks arising from structural adjustments to the state governments; by making them the main point of contact for entrepreneurs, state governments were thus held largely responsible for their own economic performance and so began to compete for private investment rather than lobbying at the centre as before. Coupled with this was the effect of *provincial Darwinism*, as the central government ‘pitt[ed] states against one another, starving states of resources, and providing new opportunities for patronage and profiteering at the state level’ (ibid.:179).

For the Left Front, this implied a lone fight against central government directives. Its opposition was further undermined by some non-Congress state governments implementing the reforms^v. Despite their initial anti-NEP stance, eventually the Left Front leaders realised its unsustainability and joined in the race for investment, thus weakening the anti-reform stance of the Left MPs in parliament. As Jenkins writes, ‘to the extent that discrepancies between national rhetoric and state-level reality undermine this [nationalist anti-reform rhetoric], it is a blow to opposition efforts to reverse the direction of government policy’ (ibid.:144). With the new industrial policy of 1994, West Bengal was seen to have finally joined the reform brigade.

<insert Table 5>

While it cannot be denied that these fiscal-federal compulsions certainly contributed to the transition in West Bengal, structural pressures emanating from broader economic transformation remain a limited explanation due to the non-incorporation of the role played by *political agency* in bringing about the transition. The structural pressure argument provides the exogenous explanations, but as often argued by Sinha (2005), Sarkar (2006), and Bhattacharya (2011), it needs to be supplemented by certain endogenous arguments to build a comprehensive narrative of transition in West Bengal. As these authors point out, despite stagnant macroeconomic conditions and especially a rather bleak industrial scenario, the Left Front was able to win repeated elections,

largely owing to the extent of its social penetration (particularly that of the CPIM) that infiltrated and controlled each and every state institution and dominated large sections of the society (via, for e.g., local clubs; see Roy (2002) for a detailed discussion) and exercised its influence. Any discussion on West Bengal therefore remains incomplete without due attention paid to the particular political context and key political actors of the time.

4. Behind the Transition

4.1 Support Base

The idea of a ‘vanguard’ party is one that the CPIM naturally had an inclination towards. However, in parliamentary democracy, political parties generally tend to (or at least are expected to) reflect and mediate social demands, acting as channels of communication between the state and society, playing a pivotal role in mobilisation, governance, formulation and implementation of policy^{vi}. Though theoretically inclined towards the ‘vanguard’ identity, once in government, the CPIM had to seek to pursue the interests of their support base and re-electable macro-economic outcomes. Therefore, in order to understand the transition of the CPIM, it is necessary to investigate the nature of its support base.

The Left Front had emerged on the basis of a stable, homogenous support base of poor and marginal sections of society, and gained dominance through land and radical labour movements. Historically, its social support base was largely based on the alliance between industrial proletariat, urban middle class, the poor and the rural peasantry (specifically small-middle peasants and landless labourers) (Chaudhuri, 1987). Catering to the party’s core support base, the government, once in power, initiated a series of land reforms that somewhat arrested the process of de-peasantisation by offering small plots to the rural proletariat, secured the interests of the sharecroppers, improved agricultural productivity by some margins (Sen and Sengupta, 1995;

Ozler and Datt, 1996), and installed a system of local governance (the *panchayats*) that did empower the rural population to a certain extent (Kohli, 1987; Bhattacharya, 2004). The CPIM general secretary, Prakash Karat, comments:

Right from the outset, the twin policies of implementation of land reforms and...the panchayat system were the basis for the advance of the CPI(M)...Successive terms of the Left Front...expanded and consolidated in these two areas. It is this unique record of the CPI(M) in advancing the interests of the rural poor which gave it a sound and stable mass base (Karat, 2002).

However, this image of rural prosperity conjured by the Left Front based on agricultural productivity and land reforms, often celebrated during the early decades of its tenure by authors such as Kohli (1987), Nossiter (1988), Lieten (1996) and others, has often been a source of contention, with the dominant discourse of “virtuous cycle of higher production...[with] a decrease in poverty and polarization” (Lieten, 1996:111) being challenged by concerns about “how the Midas touch of growth and reforms might have left structures of poverty and marginalization untouched” (Roy, 2002:28; Rogaly, Harriss-White *et al*, 1995). The dissenters have long argued that not only is the agrarian structure in West Bengal both inequitable and inefficient (Boyce, 1987), but it has also persistently excluded the rural poor from the largesse of the state (Mallick, 1993). Authors such as Kohli, Nossiter, and Lieten feel that such prosperity among certain sections of rural poor is indicative of a shift to a more equitable agrarian structure, but more recent authors argue that this beneficiary class constitutes a new agrarian elite enjoying economic and political hegemony (Webster, 1992; Echeverri-Gent, 1992; Mallick, 1993; Bhattacharya, 1993, Ruud, 1994; Beck, 1994; Rogaly, 1994; Roy, 2002). This difference in conceptualisation stems from, as Roy points out, the former group’s concern with the disappearance of the large landowners and an assumption of unity of interest among all other peasants vis-à-vis the observation of the latter

group that the entire middle peasantry section cannot be lumped together with the large mass of agricultural wage labourers (Bhattacharyya, 1993). Roy, Bhattacharya and other critics of the Left Front also point out that the state's middle peasants are in fact a dominant class in their own right - West Bengal's *kulaks* (Roy, 2002) - but unlike the kulaks in Marxist narratives, an evanescent presence in the modernist progression from agriculture to industry, they have not withered away (ibid.). On the contrary, the Left Front has played a crucial role in reproducing and perpetuating this class, especially by channeling development resources through the *panchayats*, which they dominated (Westergaard, 1986; Herring, 1989; Webster, 1990; Bhattacharyya, 1993; Mallick, 1993).

It needs to be mentioned here that there is a rich literature following from the above characterisation of the Left Front, developed further in the works of Ruud (1994), Williams (2001), Roy (2002, 2004), Bhattacharya (2001, 2009, 2010) and many more, providing an in-depth discussion of the evolution of the CPIM into an all-pervading social entity, intertwined with the everyday lives of the citizenry via patronage and clientelist structures^{vii}. Though much of this literature is beyond the ambit of the period and focus of this paper, the larger point here is as follows: hand in hand with continued electoral success and a gradual metamorphosis of the CPIM into almost a *para*-legal institution making inroads into all facets of everyday lives, there was naturally a steady growth in its support base in the rural areas, not only among small scale peasants and industrial workers, but across all classes. In a landmark party plenum in 1979 (commonly known as the Salkia Plenum), the CPIM reformulated its stance as a revolutionary mass party, which significantly contributed towards its subsequent rapid expansion. As Bhattacharyya (1994) points out, such a downward devolution of power gave rise to a rural middle class, who came to control this power through the *panchayats*, a practice justified within the CPIM in terms of the political-organisational perspective of democratic centralism. The composition of this class cut across all forms of traditional class, caste, religion and other social

boundaries in Bengali society. Drawing upon an identity solely inherited from political allegiance, its membership initially centred on full-time party workers and local leaders, but then extended to a much wider circle of ‘proletariats’ as identified by the party. This included government employees, school teachers, and government contractors, as well as middle and rich peasantry. In fact, the CPIM party programme provides a clear guidance on the class composition of such a consolidation of forces:

...the core and basis...is the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry...The agricultural labourers and poor peasants...will be basic allies of the working class. The middle peasantry too...[will be] reliable allies. The rich peasantry is an influential section of the peasantry...at certain junctures, they can also be brought in...The large number of white-collar employees, teachers, professionals, engineers, doctors and new strata of intelligentsia constitute a significant and influential section...every attempt should be made to win them...(Updated Party Programme, 2000:46).

However, two parallel phenomenon made it rather difficult for the CPIM to translate the pressures from this expanding rural support base into any policy mechanism. Firstly, this expansion of party membership was not mirrored in the urban constituencies, owing largely to a declining industrial proletariat caused by industrial stagnation and disenchantment with party domination (see Tables 6a&b). This phenomenon is reflected both in critical perceptions that often point out the increasing anti-incumbency in urban and industrial areas, and the electoral records of the period (Chakrabarty, 1998).

<insert Tables 6a&b>

Secondly, this spatial shift was not accompanied by an associated shift in the traditional cultural and ideological dynamics in which the traditional middle/upper classes and castes continued to maintain its hegemony. Politics in West Bengal has long been dominated by the *bhadralok* across political parties (the rise of Trinamool Congress recently has raised questions about the hegemony of the *bhadralok*, however, given the historical period this paper is trying to reevaluate, the *bhadralok* was certainly at the helm of the political class). The *bhadralok*, literally meaning ‘a

gentleman', is a term originally used to denote a new social class that arose during colonial times, and was largely confined to members of the middle/upper-middle classes and castes of Bengal. According to Sinha (op. cit), the social position of the *bhadralok* - in urban/governmental professions - and its middle class status with a historic legacy of cultural renaissance, nationalist fervour and Marxism induced ideas, significantly radicalised the ideational discourse in the state. The near complete domination of the *bhadralok* meant business as a class and liberal capitalist model of development was held suspect in the wider political discourse. The composition of Members of Parliament (MPs) from West Bengal hints at the extent of this domination (Figure 1), as the majority of MPs belong to the four upper castes: *Brahmin*, *Kayastha*, *Kshatriya*, and *Vyasya* (a high SC/ST proportion is largely due to constitutionally 'reserved' positions)^{viii}. A similar trend can be observed if one examines the MLAs, state cabinet ministers, and even key post holders within the political parties.

The cultural hegemony of the *bhadralok* finds expression in the fact that the expanding rural middle class was an issue of concern within the CPIM itself. Anil Biswas, the West Bengal party secretary (and Left Front chairman), commented that post Salkia Plenum there was a significant dilution of party membership as not enough emphasis had been attached to improving the standard of members (2003). In fact the party Central Committee in a 1996 report highlighted the circumstances that led to such errors and deviations, particularly the predominance of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeois within a quasi-feudal ambience, economic liberalisation and the spread of its innately unequal and perverted consumerism, emergence of sectarian and fundamentalist forces and induction into the party of very many people who are devoid of the proper outlook on the basic party stance. According to Biswas (ibid.), countering these tendencies would require a long-term and vastly difficult struggle which was either often compromised by, or

tended to accommodate the existing circumstances favourable to the bourgeois system and the bourgeois moralities.

<Insert figure 1>

When viewed in this light, a critical insight may be gained into the policy transformation of the Left Front. Sinha (op.cit) argues that the reason the Left Front could win elections despite the gradual economic decline and pursue a policy of confrontation with the central government at the cost of investment, was due to the unique political dynamics of the state, which rewarded sub-national tendencies and offered little space to industrial interests in its politics. In spite of the pressures of a growing middle class, the party could afford not to make overt efforts towards improving the industrial climate of the state, owing to (a) its declared ideological position and a generic suspicion towards the business class, and (b) the political dynamics of the license-*raj* era where the blames of an industrial decline could be shifted to the central government as a discriminatory attitude on the latter's part (what Sinha calls a partisan confrontation strategy).

However, the situation could not remain so following the NEP, as it changed the structural dynamics of political mobilisation, constricting the space for oppositional politics by dismantling the license-*raj* system. An already handicapped industrial situation, with declining employment opportunities for an expanding professional class, now intensified its pressure on the government. Given that tactically the CPIM had shifted its attention status from a party of industrial proletariat to that of farmers and share-croppers, limitations of land reform led growth (agrarian growth reached peak in 1980 and showed decline in 1990s) also exerted pressures on the government. According to Bhattacharyya (1994), rapid commercialisation of the rural economy with decline in agricultural income, withdrawal of most support structures that were available in the forms of input and output subsidies, and de-peasantisation led to demands for opportunities outside agriculture especially by the younger generations. New demands were placed for education, skill, network and

food supply, in all of which the infrastructure was thoroughly inadequate. It was only after the limitations of agrarian expansion and the socio-economic transformation in the Left's support base became prominent during the 1990s, that the need for increased industrial investment was translated into policy.

This found resonance across the state, as the criticism of the Left Front, emanating especially from the urban and emergent rural middle classes during the late 1980s/early 1990s usually centred around the lack of development^{ix}. This outlook is aptly summed up by Mukherjee (2007), pointing out that the Bengali *bhadralok*, which prides itself on education, culture and intelligentsia, increasingly found a stifling mediocrity buttressed by political power calling the shots in all fields. It was this increasing pressure from the educated middle class constituency (within the leadership as well as the support base) for 'development' on one hand, and a declining agricultural scenario on the other, that acted as an important impetus for policy transformation. In the absence of any serious alternative development programme, the Left Front undertook policy transformation in favour of market-led development similar to that followed by other states and in direct competition with them.

In summary, the NEP had provided the state with an opportunity to pursue industrialisation without central intervention, but one of the major reasons behind the translation of that opportunity into policy was the pressure of its socio-economic support base. The electoral verdict of the 2001 assembly elections, projected as the referendum for industrialisation, goes somewhat to endorse our analytical understanding. Analysing the results, Das (2001:2116) shows that in urban constituencies the middle class demonstrated its new found support as the Left was victorious in 30 out of 64 seats, compared to 1998 and 1999 parliamentary elections where it was ahead respectively in only 13 and 18 assembly segments within the same urban conglomerations. In the industrial regions, the Front won 42 of 81 seats, again bettering its 1999 performance, albeit only

by 5 seats. A plausible reading of these numbers is that the structural pressures for investment were indeed augmented by the transformations in the support base of the government.

4.2 Ideological Debates and Factional Pressures

The above transformations find equal resonance in the ideological doctrines of the Left. On the ideological front, certain ambiguities emerged within the CPIM during the late 1980s/early 1990s. These took two specific forms. Firstly, the party's role in promoting a Left alternative versus its long term governmental duties and secondly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and associated ideological implications, along with the Chinese economic take-off.

The ideological discourse of the CPIM provides the fundamental guidelines for all its political and policy decisions. This discourse was built upon an understanding that on the way to a people's democratic revolution (the party's declared objective), the party might have to occupy power *for a transitional period* with the aim of distributing immediate relief to the people. However, although the party had been contesting elections since the 1950s and was the majority partner in the two short-lived United Front governments in West Bengal in 1967 and 1969, no consensus was ever reached (or even attempted) on what its duties would be if it came to hold power over a longer period.

When the Left Front came into office in 1977, there was an overt feeling within the CPIM, as well as its coalition partners, that this would not be long-lived. Coming out of a five year long National Emergency, many Left leaders harboured a deep suspicion of the Congress government at the centre and believed that it was only a matter of time before the centre overruled state governments. Therefore, it was assumed that the Left Front, an alliance brought into existence specifically to contest this election, would be short-lived but nevertheless would take the opportunity to further its political goals using the governmental institutions. In the words of Jyoti Basu: 'neither did we ever

believe that we would form a government, nor did we imagine that once formed, our government could stay in power for so long...[also] we were not certain about what such a regional government would achieve within the capitalist and bourgeoisie parliamentary system of our country' (introduction to Sen, 2008).

Therefore, compared to the more politically attuned tasks of land reforms and *panchayati-raj*, industrial revival was not judged a priority in 1977. The 1978 Statement was demonstrative of the deep suspicion that the Left leaders harboured towards big businesses and industrial houses, both politically and culturally.

This attitude paid rich dividends in the first five to seven years of the Left Front's rule, but while the political gains largely compensated for the economic worries of the state, the situation gradually started to change from the mid-1980s onwards. With the gradual stagnation of land reforms and the party well entrenched in most of the *panchayats*, political activism surrounding these two major institutions had reached a low level equilibrium, and in the absence of fresh ideas the party was gradually entering into political torpor. At the same time, the prospect of being in power long term, or at least longer than initially expected, had begun to dawn on the CPIM. This created a rather challenging situation for the party inasmuch as: it had the chance to enjoy a longer stint in office, but had no guidance from its ideological discourse on what its long-term duties should be; it was not clear how to combat the pitfalls of parliamentary participation (such as succumbing to reformist tendencies) which would certainly infect the party if it stayed in power for any length of time; and, if the party remained associated with a bourgeoisie parliamentary system for too long, this might hinder the prospects of the people's democratic revolution.

Under pressure from such conflicting ideological positions, by mid-1980 debates had started to emerge within the CPIM over its long-term governmental duties. At the forefront were the dual issues of industrial development and attitude towards private capital. These were formally voiced

at the 12th Party Congress (1985), where the issue of economic development (as an independent subject rather than intertwined with the political agenda) was discussed at great length for the first time.^x

It appears that the above discussed contradictions in ideas had initially surfaced from a sense of an ideological void within the party which came to light in the face of the trade-off between political longevity and revolutionary character. While the debates pertaining to it were largely confined to the higher echelons of the party during the time of the 12th Congress, they became significantly more widespread after the shock of the Soviet disintegration, the CPIM having pledged its allegiance to the CPSU as late as 1988-89. The opening lines of the 14th Party Congress confirm this:

The international situation in the period after the 13th party congress has been a...difficult one...The reverses suffered by socialism in the Soviet Union and earlier in Eastern Europe have altered the world balance of forces in favour of imperialism...Though significant changes began taking place in the socialist countries and in many Communist Parties by the time of the 13th Congress of the party, we failed to grasp their deep implications then. Hence the subsequent developments...were quite unexpected (CPIM, 1992).

This was a serious setback. While the debates surrounding the party's role in government were already in full swing, their gradual pace would not have induced any drastic change whereas the Soviet disintegration dealt a blow to the larger theoretical framework it operated within. The 14th Party Congress therefore had to make a formal attempt to re-evaluate the existing ideological discourse. The Congress adopted a resolution on 'Certain Ideological Issues', which admitted, 'the complexity of the situation and issues being questioned, encompass the history of nearly a century of human civilisation. This demands a wide, extensive and in-depth study' (ibid.:91-92).

This resolution was one of the most significant in the history of the CPIM, as for the first time it admitted a fallacy in its understanding of the nature and potential of capitalism. It stated:

In retrospect, it can be said that the general crisis of capitalism was simplistically understood. The historical inevitability of capitalism's collapse was advanced as a possibility round the corner. This was a serious error...while the socialist revolutions reduced the physical size and levels of operations of the world capitalist market...these basically affected neither the levels of productive forces already attained by capitalism nor its future potential (ibid.:94-96).

This introduced a fundamental change in the party's ideological discourse. While a detailed critique is beyond the purview of this paper, it is important to note the political line that the party assumed henceforth. The debates leading up to the 14th Congress and the resolution on Certain Ideological Issues provided the CPIM with an ideological middle ground. Having admitted that a socialist revolution was not imminent and that some means of co-existing with capitalism needed to be found, it was now possible to weave the logic of capitalist production into the operational principles of the party. The government could be given license to promote a more industry-friendly attitude and concentrate on basic development duties without appearing to lose its ideological character, and at the same time the party could continue protests against the economic reforms. The economic growth taking place in China further strengthened this argument in the transitional phase.

Finally, the 1991 economic reforms led to a serious setback to one of the cornerstones of the CPIM's political line - its partisan confrontation strategy based on accusations of a discriminatory attitude on the part of the central government, particularly regarding its licensing policy (Sinha, op. cit). The NEP made the earlier accusations entirely redundant and took the steam out of the party's anti-centre rhetoric. The government was left with no option but to acknowledge that, 'while

continuing to advocate a change in some important aspects of this New Economic Policy, we must take [its] fullest advantage' (GoWB, 1994:6).

These changes indicate that, by early 1990, the CPIM had begun to accept a Chinese-style economic model and withdraw some of its earlier radical stances against private capital. The 14th Congress provided the necessary ideological legitimacy for such a change in attitude. Although the party continued its opposition to the economic reforms via protests and demonstrations, as far as its governmental duties were concerned, it was slowly coming to terms with the changing situation.

4.3. The Role of Jyoti Basu

The above discussion shows that long before the 1994 statement was even conceived, the higher echelons of the party and the government were embroiled in debates over an industrialisation-based development agenda. While a policy transition eventually took place in 1994, the ambivalent ambience present might have continued much longer had it not been for the Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu. His role in the process deserves special attention.

Basu was seriously criticised for his government's policy indecisiveness^{xi}. He was usually seen to be entirely subservient to the party, turning a blind eye towards the state's stagnating economy and never interfering with party diktats, even if they disrupted government services (such as calling strikes frequently). However, while his inability to rise above party priorities was seen as a serious drawback, his individual initiatives to attract investments were appreciated. Saugata Ray, a senior Congress MLA of the time, said of him: 'Mr. Basu is constrained by his party. While he has been trying to attract investments, the party is pulling him back'. Ray went on to praise Basu for a shift in outlook and attitude: 'while at one point he was against modernisation of factories, today he is welcoming foreign technology and joint collaboration'^{xii}.

Basu played a rather pragmatic role in bringing about a discursive shift in both the party and the government's attitude towards industrialisation, while keeping it separate from ideological conundrums. His Chief Political Assistant (1987-96) and one of his closest aides admits:

It was unthinkable in those years for a government officer to even hold a private meeting with a businessman. But Mr. Basu used to attend Chamber of Commerce meetings, meet industrialists outside government offices and even accept private invitations from them. Gradually, he started to get rid of the sensitivity about the industrial class. It was perhaps his biggest contribution to initiate a change in the culture of viewing businesses and businessmen as untouchables^{xiii}.

Basu's Chief Secretary (1991-96) recalls: 'he never felt that he has deviated from the Left ideology...essentially it was never a question of ideology to him, but rather an administrative and pragmatic decision'^{xiv}. Basu was successful in keeping the criticism from certain factions that an industrialisation agenda is a deviation from the idea of a Left alternative isolated within the party and the cabinet. The greatest example of such political acumen was the formulation of the Policy Statement in 1994. While the CPIM was engaged in vehement opposition to the NEP at a national level, Basu had started to meet investors and campaign for West Bengal. The request for a formal policy was made to him during these meetings. He wrote: 'when we were visiting the various Chambers of Commerce and inviting people to invest in the state, they requested us to present a policy statement explaining our approach towards industrial development' (introduction to Sen, 2008)

Undoubtedly, this was a rather challenging task. In spite of the resource crunch, ideological debates, and the gradual changes in mindset, the party was yet to take a decision on its attitude towards large scale industrialisation, and would hardly be amenable to the idea of the government formally courting private capital without party approval. Therefore, anticipating opposition, Basu

prepared the Statement with the involvement of only a very small group of bureaucrats (which included both Basu's chief political assistant and chief secretary)- in what was perhaps the first and only instance of its kind during the entire Left Front period - the party being kept entirely in the dark. The initial draft was prepared by Basu's chief secretary, who admits that '...it was not discussed in the party, or even in the Left Front cabinet.'^{xv}

Basu's pragmatism continued: without prior notification to the party or cabinet, the Statement was tabled directly in the Legislative Assembly (as the last item of the day) on 23rd September 1994, just one day before the House closed. The records of the next day show that the Statement was adopted with minimal discussion, and possibly, with very few members even realizing its significance. In fact, a joint motion was brought against the NEP by two CPIM MLAs, Rabin Deb and Lakshman Seth, which was, to a large extent, quite contradictory in tone to the Statement. In response, Subrata Mukherjee (a Congress MLA) commented: 'placing this motion just a day after the new industrial policy has been introduced highlights the bankruptcy of the Left Front...This policy is Mr. Basu's policy, not the Left Front's'^{xvi}.

One assumes that the timing and secrecy of the Statement was a deliberate act. As Basu's Chief Secretary noted: 'Had the Statement been flagged up in the Left Front meetings prior to it actually being written, then the whole thing would have been delayed, or perhaps never achieved'^{xvii}.

Once the Statement was adopted, it created serious confusion within all the Left parties. The 15th CPIM Party Congress, held a year later, noted: 'This statement...was placed without any discussion in the state committee or central committee and...created confusion and apprehensions in Party circles' (CPIM, 1995:98-99).

Basu appeared to try to pacify his colleagues by promising that the policy would be discussed in detail in the cabinet and, given his authority and stature as one of the most respected Left leaders

in India, it was highly unlikely that any member, even from another party, let alone the CPIM, would disagree with or question his decisions, at least in public or on the floor of the assembly^{xviii}. While some questions were raised behind closed doors within party circles and cabinet meetings, those hardly went beyond Basu's reassurance of a 'future cabinet discussion', as nobody would have wanted to be seen questioning Basu any further. Therefore, no formal opposition ever took shape against the Statement. The promised discussions never happened, and gradually the initial apprehensions and controversies dissipated. Hafiz Alam Sairani (former West Bengal State Secretary, Forward Block), a minister in Basu's cabinet, confirms this:

We did not even know about the Statement. Once it was passed in the Assembly, we raised our opposition in a cabinet meeting. But Mr. Basu said that the statement has not yet been implemented, and there will be further discussions. No one questioned him. But no discussions followed. And none of the other Left parties pushed for it.^{xix}

The only formal discussions that took place were in the CPIM politburo and in a Central Committee meeting a month later. Justifying his decision in these meetings, Basu stated that given the Left movement's current position in West Bengal (having achieved a certain degree of progress, but struggling with a serious economic crisis, the added compulsions of a wider federal shift towards a liberalized regime, and above all with no imminent socialist revolution) there was no option for the state government but to make certain adjustments in relation to the capitalist system, even if politically it might seem a reformist deviation.

After these discussions, the 15th Party Congress upheld the promise that the party in West Bengal would continue to play a prominent role in the nationwide resistance to liberalisation, but at the same time approved the policy statement on industrial development as its official position. The ideological stamp of the Party Congress was the final hurdle in the transition process. It was a process which, in retrospect, stands as a classic example of Jenkins's conceptualization of

political salesmanship, *reform by stealth* (Jenkins, 1999), orchestrated by one of the leading Left leaders of India and the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

5. Conclusion

Recalling the two questions whose answers constitute the *political conditions* of the transition phase: why were the policy changes necessary? And why was there an attempt to de-link government from politics? The answers can be summarized as follows.

The conditions that precipitated the changes stemmed first and foremost from the financial and political impasse the Left Front was in by the mid-1980s. This was the result of a misplaced notion about the transitory nature of the government and being guided entirely by a political agenda instead of working on a long-term developmental plan. However, once the CPIM realised that there was a possibility of the government remaining in power for longer, involving private capital in some form was deemed the only possible way forward. The debates over joint ventures during and after the 12th Party Congress indicate the gradual acceptance of such an eventuality. However, these early changes were still only theoretical, while the actual resource crunch on the government was steadily assuming alarming proportions, coupled with a gradually stagnating agricultural scenario, and an intense pressure from an expanding support base. The party was thus confronted with the additional challenge of formulating an ideological middle ground where the government could be seen to be pursuing a private capital induced mode of economic development, but without losing its revolutionary character and at the same time, trying to avoid the inevitable criticisms. This marked the beginning of an ambivalent attitude in the policy-making sphere as, instead of rising to the challenges, the government adopted a one step forward, two steps back approach towards private capital and industrial development. As Mukherjee (2007:2) writes:

Since the Left's imaginary, ideology and strategy was centred on revolution, once it moved away from militancy...it simply did not know what to do. It was a collective failure of imagination and creative and critical thinking on the part of the CPM. They completely ran out of ideas...[and] just clung on to Marxism as a set of rituals and mantras.

The 1990s brought with them a way out via two largely unrelated events - the Soviet disintegration and the announcement of the NEP - which together gave the CPIM a way to formulate a middle ground. It now had the opportunity to be seen in public as opposing the NEP and not having relented to the imperialist forces, thereby retaining its political character. At the same time, it could start weaving the logic of capitalist production into the government's policies, having admitted to a theoretical misjudgment of the imminency of a socialist revolution and the undermining of the resilience of the forces of capitalism. In other words, it was now possible for the government to keep its ideological opposition alive at the all-India level, and justify its actions in the state by citing the unavoidable compulsions placed on it by recent developments on the national and international horizons. The 1994 Policy Statement on Industrial Development could, therefore, be seen as an eventual outcome of the political choices of the time, rather than a standalone policy exercise. However, the outcome could have been delayed much longer had it not been for Jyoti Basu. His clandestine manner in introducing the policy while ideological debates were still raging at large within the party managed to minimize wider awareness of the potential significance of the changes. As a result, while the policy was approved in the 15th Party Congress, the party continued to perpetrate the standard excuse of blaming federal pressures as having left the state government with no choice. It never examined the nature of these pressures or openly admitted the extent of internal ideological modifications.

This is also exactly what prompted the de-linkage attempts. Admitting a theoretical misjudgment was bad enough, but to admit that the government was no longer an instrument of class struggle,

and was trying to adjust to market forces instead, would be politically suicidal. It would then be accused of, at best having completely given way to reformist pressures, and the entire Left movement in the country would be undermined. Therefore the party had to argue, at least publicly, that the changes in West Bengal were confined to a realm of *regional governance compulsions*, while politically remaining disassociated with a pro-market development agenda.

Industrial development in West Bengal under a relatively more industry-friendly environment from the second half of the 1990s onwards has been written about extensively. In particular, the mainstream literature that emerged after the rapid electoral decline of the CPIM/Left Front post-2008, along with media reports and an increasing feeling within a section of the CPIM itself, often attributes the 2011 defeat of the Front to the ‘political cost’ of pursuing a strategy of industrial development in a state historically dominated by small and medium peasantry. While such a theory is only partially true at best, industrial development in West Bengal is usually perceived to be a rather recent phenomenon, gathering pace only after 2000 under the leadership of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, thereby accusing him of having brought this ‘cost’ at the party’s door. The reappraisal presented in this paper argues to the contrary, raising questions about such a portrayal, as the pre-conditions that prompted the Left Front to start on the path of an industrialisation-based development agenda have rarely been scrutinised. This narrative presented here demonstrates that the seeds of a policy change were sown prior to 2000 – and as early as the mid/late 1980s – and involved a complex set of circumstances, combining a wider set of fiscal and federal compulsions with internal debates and negotiations, factional pressures, political salesmanship, and a reorientation of some of the previously upheld tenets of Marxian principles. While Buddhadeb Bhattacharya certainly expedited the process, he was not its architect, having ‘inherited’ an agenda with its core dynamics already in motion.

Finally, it is possible to draw certain wider conclusions about party transformation from the West Bengal story. In general, both exogenous and endogenous factors explain party strategy change (Panebianco, 1988; Strom, 1990; Kitschelt, 1994; Harmel and Janda, 1994; Katz and Mair, 1995; Levitsky, 2001). Neither is sufficient, but both are necessary elements of any explanation. As Samules (2004:1001) points out, exogenous environmental factors can ‘set the stage’ by describing whether political space exists for parties to attempt to move in the political spectrum, but one also needs to explore parties’ internal dynamics to obtain a complete explanation of party strategy change. The analysis presented in this paper sits perfectly well with such an observation, as it revolves around a set of specific exogenous (fiscal) and endogenous (support base pressure, factional struggles) factors, ideological contradictions, and political salesmanship. The West Bengal story, while being unique in its own right, thus also represents a microcosm for the study of a set of puzzles that has much to say about similar economic transitions among Left/pro labour parties elsewhere, particularly with regard to how large-scale macroeconomic policy decisions are *negotiated* at ground level, and how such acts of negotiation are intensely political both in its formation and agency. In this sense, further work on this research can blend itself into broader instances of political transformations in other parts of the world. For example, the gradual deradicalisation of Latin America’s largest leftist party - the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores [PT]) which came to power in Brazil in 2002 with a far more moderate stance than before - presents a similar scenario of transformation of a party^{xx} from ‘socialism to social democracy’ owing to a series of exogenous and endogenous factors (Samuels, 2004). Similar historical arcs also exist in China; East Asian countries such as Vietnam and North Korea; Russia and other Eastern European nations; and other Latin American countries like Cuba and Venezuela. Thematic parallels can be found in Thatcherism in England, or more recently, in the way the Labour Party seeped into the ideas of New Labour; the transformation of the Italian communist party, etc. There remains, of course, an issue of *degree* intrinsic to such ideas. Not everywhere are

the contradictions as intense, reactions evoked as sharp, or outcomes determined as similar.

This paper shows that even ideologies can be reshaped in the search for appropriate ways to negotiate transition efforts, stepping way beyond prudent economic management (while the latter is crucial indeed, as demonstrated in detail by Moore, 1997, it is not the whole story). Particularly for Left/pro-labour political parties, with their own history and development-orientation to conform to, the task of negotiation neither happens on the basis of economic incentives alone, nor remains a sole question of forming coalitions to counter collective action or distributive problems. Instead, it becomes the much more difficult undertaking of justifying a form of change that is nothing short of a radical transformation – not only in terms of policy – but also in the realm of ideas, political rationality, historical and ideological legitimacy. Transition initiatives, in such circumstances, transgress the idea of ‘reforms’ as matters of economic prudence or good governance, and become what may be described as negotiating an act of political audacity against the very rationale from which the political movement derives its legitimacy.

ⁱBetween the 2006 and 2011 elections, the CPIM’s vote share reduced from 176 to 40.

ⁱⁱFor example, an incentive scheme for new as well as expansion of existing units,; tax concessions announced in the 1993-94 state budget; streamlined and simplified sales tax laws and procedures, etc.

ⁱⁱⁱHe later went on to become the parliamentary Speaker, but was eventually evicted from the party in 2010.

^{iv}An updated party programme was published in 2000 in response to some of these debates.

^vFor example: the then Shiv Sena government of Maharashtra led by Manohar Joshi, and (though slightly later) the Telegu Desam government of Andhra Pradesh under Chandrababu Naidu.

^{vi}See Hasan, Z. (2002) and De-Souza, Ronald *et al* (2006).

^{vii} Harihar Bhattacharya (1998, 2002), for example, shows how the CPIM had taken over almost every aspect of the village life through a total domination of the *panchayats*, successfully manufacturing political consent and allegiance as a result, and Dwaipayan Bhattacharya (2001) discusses the role of (party supported) school teachers in providing a

form of moral legitimacy to the party's all-encompassing presence. Equally important is Roy's (2002) work illustrating a similar development in urban/semi-urban areas, where the CPIM was able to control innumerable local clubs, and garnered political allegiance through illegal colonized settlements. These works highlight how a continuous process of manufacturing consent and allegiance via a wide range of political tactics, negotiation, and even force, has been an important determining feature of the CPIM regime, a process that continued well into the 2000s.

^{viii} An 'elite stronghold' (wealthy, high caste, and often male politicians) over decision making structures is however not an uncommon phenomenon in Indian party politics. It is often commented that Indian parties are organisationally weak (Chhibber, 2013), symptoms of which are also said to include a lack of internal democracy and a tendency towards 'dynastic rule' (Hasan, 2010:251). See, for example, Manikandan and Wyatt (2014) for a detailed discussion of how such elite formation took place within the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Especially as far as underrepresentation of the SC/ST population is concerned, the authors point out that 'the small number of Dalits holding party posts, begs the question of what would happen to the representation of Dalits in the DMK in the absence of official quotas. It is very likely that even fewer Dalits would be offered nominations to contest assembly and parliamentary seats' (50).

^{ix} *Anadabazar Patrika*, the leading vernacular daily, was at the forefront of such criticisms.

^x It should be noted that from the mid-1980s, the Left Front started to gradually engage with private capital. Two of the earliest and most publicised ventures were an electronics complex involving Philips and the West Bengal Electronics Development Corporation, and a petrochemicals complex at Haldia. There were a number of other smaller proposals as well.

^{xi} The criticisms were not only political. For example, Besley and Burgess (2004), show a causal link between Basu's pro-worker policy reforms and the decline of the manufacturing industry and a rise in urban poverty.

^{xii} West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings; 1991, Volume V, 22nd August.

^{xiii} *Interview*, 18th June, 2009, Calcutta.

^{xiv} *Interview*, 29th June, 2009, Calcutta.

^{xv} *Ibid.*

^{xvi} West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings; 1994, Volume V, 24th September.

^{xvii} *Interviews*, 3rd July and 29th June, 2009. Calcutta.

^{xviii} While in a regimented party like the CPIM it is unusual for an individual to gain a heightened status, Basu was an exception. One of the most senior Left leaders of the country, he was a charismatic figure who had risen through the

ranks rather than 'starting at the top'. He was also one of the oldest members of the CPIM politburo from the time of the party's formation in 1964.

^{xix}*Interview*, 24th June, 2009, Calcutta.

^{xx} See Hunter (2010) for a detailed discussion of transformation of the PT

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