

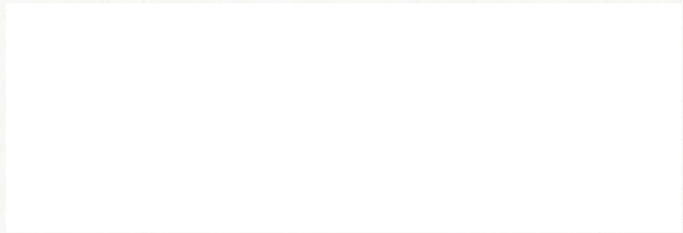
COALITION AND CONFLICT :  
THE UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENTS OF WEST BENGAL,  
1967 AND 1969-70

by

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This thesis is my own original work.



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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a study of two multi-party coalition governments which were in power in West Bengal, India, during 1967 and 1969-70, respectively. They were unique in that as many as fourteen parties joined the coalitions, and this very fact automatically makes them an object of fascination and interest. Added to the plurality of parties was a heterogeneity of aims, interests and ideologies.

A number of central questions preoccupied me in relation to the topic. How, for instance, could it be possible for such a large number of political parties to reach, and maintain sufficient agreement to enable the governments to maintain stability and viability, given that effective coalition government necessarily rests upon a certain amount of bargaining and compromise? In any event, the experience of the two United Front Governments in West Bengal proved that compromise politics was so minimal as to be of little consequence. Tensions and conflicts among the partners became so acute that both governments became untenable. Each collapsed after short periods in office.

As conflict was endemic to the partners forming the United Front Governments, my main interest turned towards the types of conflict, and the reasons for their existence. This brought into focus a number of socio-economic and political problems within West Bengal. My analysis of the conflicts which arose out of these problems, led to the conclusion that dissension among the coalition partners was, in some cases, a result of power struggles, and in others, an intermeshing of ideology and power. Most of these situations were complex, and reinforced by the cultural and political environment which prevails in West Bengal. These conclusions coloured my

assessments of a number of specific issues and events; I could not, therefore, accept the prevalent interpretations that one particular party, the CPM, was responsible for the failure, and break-up of both United Front Governments. Instead, the untenable nature of the coalition was multi-dimensional. My approach has been one of synthesis, analysis and description of the various factors in the situation, and to produce what I hoped would be a balanced case-study of the two coalition governments.

There were, however, a number of research difficulties. First and foremost was the very contemporary nature of the topic. For the most part, I was conducting my research during, and even before the drama ended with the collapse of the second United Front Government. This, together with the fact that the coalitions were comprised, in the main, of Communist and Marxist parties, made the topic politically sensitive, especially for a foreigner. (In this respect, the wearing of saris and the fortunate possession of a typical Bengali surname, may have helped me gain some interviews which I would have otherwise been denied!)

There were, of course, other more specific problems, for instance, the lack of authoritative documentary materials and data about the then current political issues, problems and conflicts. This necessarily meant that newspapers had to be utilized to a greater extent than I would have preferred. This was compounded by the reluctance of political leaders to discuss certain aspects of the situation such as factionalism, and control by leaders of political parties, over their rank-and-file cadres. Moreover, my interviewing commenced shortly after the fall of the second United Front Government, when political leaders were involved in much activity, and consequently often inaccessible.



Jyoti Basu and Hare Krishna Konar, were cases in point.

The contemporary nature of the topic precluded not only authoritative evidence and facts about a number of things, but also involved an absence of 'mellowness' from which the scholar can view things. As against this, however, there were some distinct advantages associated with 'being on the scene', as it were. One could observe the moods and passions of those who were so politically involved - from the Calcuttans engaging in heated conversations about the rights and wrongs of the government, on the notoriously over-crowded buses, to conversations with some suspicious, but sincere 'Naxalite' students. One could see, first hand, some of the violence which beset the period, and witness the huge demonstrations. The nuances of the period were invaluable, because the moods of crowds, groups and individual people are such essential ingredients of politics. It also meant, therefore, that those people whom I interviewed, or merely had conversations with, were vitally involved in the current political process : they were thus very volatile and not effete.

In any lengthy study one is always and necessarily grateful to so many people. My first thanks should go to my husband's family, with whom I lived during my nine months' stay in Calcutta. They extended to me every kindness, and partly 'socialized' me into the family and social systems of Bengal. This was a priceless and valuable experience. Moreover, it made some of the observations by Myron Weiner and Marcus Franda, which are referred to in this thesis, so much more than mere words in a book. Nevertheless, as well as thanks, I should also extend apologies for the few occasions when my sometimes fierce Western individualism did not gell too sweetly with traditional family and social attitudes!

To those people who granted me interviews or supplied facilities for study, I am also sincerely grateful. In most cases, I found them kind and helpful, regardless of their political affiliations. I am especially thankful to the librarian of the West Bengal Secretariat Library, Shri A. K. Chakravorty, who, not only rendered me assistance, but made me feel welcome in his efficiently run and 'cosy' library. At the same time, it was a most welcome respite from the Calcutta heat and crowds. I should also like to thank the several officers of the Food Corporation of India, who were most obliging, and provided me with more information than I could utilize.

To my supervisors, Drs. Thelma Hunter and Arthur Stockwin, I offer many thanks for their helpful suggestions and encouragement during some of the more 'traumatic' stages of thesis-writing. Without them, I would not have completed this work. To Dr. Len Hume, I am also grateful for suggestions relating to the Introduction of this thesis, and for the pleasure of his meticulous intellectualism. To Professor Fin Crisp, I am thankful for his general encouragement and confidence in me, despite his constant admonitions about excessive intakes of coffee and cigarettes! To my other colleagues in the Department of Political Science, School of General Studies, Australian National University, I extend my thanks for their general cheer and interest in the progress of this work.

Finally, to my husband, Ajit, I am also grateful for his calm acceptance of the inevitable 'disorders' which accompany a work such as this.

Canberra, 1974.

ABBREVIATIONS

AICC	All-India Congress Committee
AITUC	All-India Trade Union Congress
BC	Bangla Congress
BKD	Bharatiya Kranti Dal
BPI	Bolshevik Party of India
CAR	Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI(M-L)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
FB	Forward Bloc of India
FB(M)	Forward Bloc (Marxist)
FCI	Food Corporation of India
GL	All-India Gorkha League
HMS	Hind Mazdoor Sabha
ILO	Indian Labour Organization
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
LSS	Lok Sevak Sangh
PCC	Pradesh Congress Committee
PDF	Progressive Democratic Front
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
PULF	People's United Left Front
PUSF	People's United Socialist Front
RCPI	Revolutionary Communist Party of India
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party of India
SLC	Standing Labour Committee
SSP	Samyukta Socialist Party

SUC Socialist Unity Centre

UDPF United Democratic People's Front

ULEC United Left Election Committee

ULF United Left Front

USIO United Socialist Organization of India

UTUC United Trade Union Congress

WCEPS Working Committee Economic Planning  
Sub-committee of the Congress

WP Workers' Party of India

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CORRECTIONS

- p. 302            Due to a typing error, there is no p. 302. p. 303 follows on from p. 301.
- p. 351            Gopal Halder's 'Revolutionary Terrorism' in Atulchandra Gupta (Ed.), Studies in the Bengal Renaissance, has been incorrectly placed within the category 'Secondary Materials VIII. Periodical Articles. It should appear under VII. Books and Monographs.

## INTRODUCTION

At an election meeting in Arambagh constituency, West Bengal, before the Fourth General Election was held in 1967, the Congress Chief Minister, P. C. Sen, told prospective voters :

A pair of bullocks [the Congress symbol] can draw a plough [Bangla Congress symbol] alright, but how would it look harnessed to seven different animals? [the Progressive United Left Front].

Now, had Mr. Sen known that these seven different animals would be tenuously tethered to seven more animals to form the United Front Government of 1967, the rather incongruous analogy would have been completed. At that stage, however, he was unaware that a marriage of political convenience would be formed by fourteen heterogeneous parties to keep the Congress Party out of office.

This thesis presents a case study of this United Front Government, and of the same group of parties which formed the second United Front Government of 1969-70. Essentially, we will be concerned with the formation, maintenance, dynamics and disintegration of these two coalitions. Within this framework, the major problem and purpose of the study is to isolate and analyse the conflicts and conflict situations on the grounds that conflict was predominant and dysfunctional to the maintenance of both coalitions.

The scope of the thesis is therefore necessarily comprehensive. Before the 1967 General Election was held, the opposition parties were disunited and divided into two electoral alliances. When the election results indicated that the Congress Party could be kept out of office by the formation of a single united front, the parties hastily formed a coalition. This was in contrast to the situation pertaining to the 1969 Mid-term Election when the

parties were united, and subsequently came to power as the second United Front Government.

On neither occasion could the parties maintain themselves in stable office. In this respect, there was a complex set of factors. The first United Front held power during a year of economic and social crises. In addition, there were differences between the partners relating to policies and ideologies. Factionalism also plagued the parties. Given these facts, the slender majority which the coalition possessed rendered it unstable, and it fell from office after ten months.

The second United Front Government, on the other hand, enjoyed an overwhelming majority, but inherent strains and tensions within the coalition ultimately brought about its collapse after barely a year in office. During this time, a virulent power struggle developed, with the result that the individual interests of the parties could not be subordinated to the goal of maintaining the coalition. In a word, both coalitions were extremely pluralistic and opportunistic alliances, and heterogeneous in terms of their interests, goals and ideologies. They were also confronted with various social, economic and political problems relating to what Myron Weiner has so aptly called the 'Politics of Scarcity'.<sup>1</sup>

It is my conviction that a meaningful enquiry into these factors necessitates a certain grasp of the social, political and cultural environments in which they operated. The breadth of the topic to be analysed has led to the further conclusion that it would be inappropriate and undesirable to confine the study within

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1. Myron Weiner, The Politics of Scarcity : Public Pressure and Political Response in India (Chicago, 1962).



a particular theoretical framework, on the grounds that existing theories are too limited in scope and not genuinely explanatory. Accordingly, the remainder of this Introduction will be devoted to giving some reasons and illustrations of why this is so. Several theoretical approaches which a priori appear to have relevance to the topic have been selected for brief examination.

As we are dealing with coalitions and conflict, it might well be expected that coalition theory would serve as a logical frame of reference. Whilst it is not denied that some concepts and hypotheses in certain coalition theories might prove useful, it is nevertheless argued that this body of theory presents particular difficulties. Most coalition theories, for example, are heavily oriented towards the formation of coalitions,<sup>2</sup> and as such could have been used for a study which focussed principally upon the formation of the two United Front Governments. As we are also concerned, however, with the maintenance, dynamics and disintegration of the two coalitions, it is therefore felt that coalition theories are too restrictive. Groennings has pointed out that 'scholars have offered hardly any generalizations about coalition maintenance or behaviour within coalitions,'<sup>3</sup> although some scholars have tried to rectify this defect.<sup>4</sup>

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2. See, for instance, William H. Riker, The Theory of Political Coalitions (New Haven, 1967). Riker, however, also makes grand claims for his theory when he says that it 'is sufficiently applicable to political behaviour to offer political scientists - for the first time since Aristotle tried to generalize about politics... a model sufficiently descriptive and sufficiently unambiguous to occasion some hope for a genuine science of politics.' *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

3. Sven Groennings, 'Notes Towards Theories of Coalition Behaviour in Multiparty Systems : Formation and Maintenance' in Sven Groennings, E. W. Kelley and Michael Leiserson (editors) The Study of Coalition Behaviour : Theoretical Perspectives and Cases from Four Continents (New York, 1970), p. 459.

4. John E. Schwarz, 'Maintaining Coalitions : An Analysis of the E. E. C. with Supporting Evidence from the Austrian Grand Coalition and the CDU/CSU', in Groennings, Kelley and Leiserson, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-249.

Apart from this, the rationalistic assumptions made by many coalition theorists,<sup>5</sup> who very often utilize the concepts and methods of game theory, create particular difficulties when dealing with factors such as factionalism, ideology, personalities of actors, and so on. Some of these assumptions include the notions that all outcomes can be ranked in order of preference; that all actors prefer to win rather than lose; that human action is purposive and rational, and, finally, that actors somehow have access to the amount of information necessary to the pursuit of effective coalition strategies.<sup>6</sup> The assumptions do not hold good for the fourteen parties which formed the United Front Governments. To give a brief example here : given a faction-ridden party like the Communist Party of India (Marxist)(hereinafter referred to as the CPM), preferences over outcomes may substantially differ. One faction may prefer to adopt a revolutionary strategy, while another would want to

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5. Riker, who pioneered the study of coalition theory, has admitted that there are difficulties associated with the concept of rationality in political behaviour. Accordingly, he made an attempt to overcome this by re-defining rationality in terms of 'the man who would rather win than lose, regardless of the particular stakes'. See Riker, op. cit., pp. 16-24 and particularly pp. 22-23. Adrian and Press, however, argue that 'other decision costs may outweigh the desire to win'. See Charles R. Adrian and Charles Press, 'Decision Costs in Coalition Formation', American Political Science Review, LXII, No. 2 (1968), p. 562. Other writers such as Luce and Raiffa have defined rational behaviour in terms of maximizing something which is readily quantifiable. See R. D. Luce and H. Raiffa, Games and Decisions (New York, 1957), p. 5. It is doubtful, however, whether large and significant areas of political behaviour can, indeed, be quantified. Mazur has tried to solve some of these difficulties by resting his theory upon the concept of 'non-rationality', which he defines as 'the intangible, emotional determinants of choice which do not lend themselves in any practicable way to quantitative treatment by a maximizing postulate'. See Allan Mazur, 'A Nonrational Approach to Theories of Conflict and Coalitions', The Journal of Conflict Resolution, XII, No. 2 (1968), pp. 196-205.

6. Leiserson has drawn attention to a number of these defects. See his article 'Game Theory and the Study of Coalition Behaviour' in Groennings, Kelley and Leiserson (editors), op. cit., pp. 271-272. His efforts to dispose of these objections, however, have not been entirely satisfactory or convincing.

subordinate that to an outcome which is centered around maintaining stability in a parliamentary system. Coalition theory appears to assume that discipline can be effectively used to control factionalism if and when it threatens the maintenance of the coalition. Moreover, the assumption that preferences can be arranged on the basis of rational calculation is dubious, since ad hoc dilemmas, problems and opposing interests can arise.

Another methodological problem is that coalition theories lend themselves more readily to a limited study of small groups, or coalitions with a limited number of actors, than to large and amorphous entities like the two United Front Governments of West Bengal. Furthermore, the lack of homogeneity in ideology, goals and actions of these coalitions point up certain definitional problems. As pointed out by Stephen Brams, one could not accept the definition agreed to by Groennings, Kelley and Leiserson that a coalition is 'two or more actors in a coalition situation who have communicated and agreed to coordinate their actions'.<sup>7</sup> The point is that actors may agree to coordinate some of their actions, but not others. As far as the United Front Governments of West Bengal are concerned, it is precisely the lack of agreement to coordinate their actions which is conspicuous. This was one reason for the unstable and unstructured nature of the coalitions.

Brams, however, does not solve the problem when substituting his own definition, namely, 'those actors or sets of actors with complementary interests who join together to form a group that exacts some payment (not necessarily monetary) from its members.'<sup>8</sup> It seems that Brams may have overlooked the point that not all actors in a coalition will necessarily have complementary interests. Even if they do, there may well be other

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7. Stephen J. Brams, Review of Groennings, Kelley and Leiserson (editors), op. cit., The American Political Science Review, LXVI, No. 1 (1972), pp. 236-237.

8. *ibid.*, p. 237.

interests which are not complementary, and the ensuing result could be an overt clash of interests.

Again, this will be illustrated by an example relating to the topic of this thesis. When the first United Front coalition was formed, the actors shared two main complementary aims : one, to keep the Congress Party out of office, and, two, to maintain themselves in power. Apart from these limited objectives, their interests were, on the whole, mutually antagonistic. For instance, the actions of some parties in the coalition to expand their organizations ran counter to the interests of other parties who felt compelled to prevent encroachment upon their traditional areas of support. This manifestation of inter-party dissension was obviously dysfunctional to the complementary aim of maintaining a viable coalition government.

There is a further difficulty which arises from coalition theory, which appears to be predicated upon such concepts as bargaining, compromise, adherence to the rules of the game and so on. If the political and social culture of a society condones, or encourages - either directly or indirectly - diffuse political behaviour such as virulent factionalism and the extreme multiplicity of parties, then the ethnocentrism of the above concepts inhibits the usefulness of the theory as an appropriate conceptual tool. This is not to argue that the concepts of bargaining, compromise and adherence to the rules of the game have no relevance in West Bengal, nor that factionalism in a virulent form is exclusive to the political and social culture of that State, but merely to put forward the proposition that social and political fragmentation makes it more difficult to apply these concepts . The foregoing discussion leads to the conclusion that coalition theory is too limited to serve as an appropriate theoretical framework for this thesis.

It has been emphasized already that conflict was the most salient feature about the two United Front Governments, and

attention has been drawn to some of the reasons for this. On the face of it, therefore, it may appear that conflict theory would be applicable to the present study. Accordingly, it is proposed to outline and examine briefly some of the well-known works related to this body of theory in an attempt to demonstrate that this is not the case.<sup>9</sup>

To some extent, the emphasis on conflict and formulation of conflict theories has been a reaction to approaches taken by a number of structural-functionalists. The latter have shown a tendency to emphasize concepts relating to consensus, equilibrium and the inter-relationship of structures and functions within society. Ralf Dahrendorf, for example, has argued for the need to develop a model of society which would offer a diametrically opposed set of postulates to those of the structural-functionalist models he is concerned to criticise.<sup>10</sup> These diametrically opposed postulates are summarized by Dahrendorf as follows : 1) Every society is at every point subject to processes of change; social change is ubiquitous; 2) Every society experiences at every moment social conflict : social conflict is ubiquitous; 3) Every element in a society contributes to its change; 4) Every society rests on constraint

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9. Specifically mathematical models of conflict, as pioneered by the economist Kenneth Boulding and developed, for instance, in the Journal of Conflict Resolution, largely for use in the study of international relations, have been omitted from this discussion.

10. The structural-functionalist model as outlined by Dahrendorf, consists of the following : 1) Every society is a relatively persisting configuration of elements. 2) Every society is a well-integrated configuration of elements. 3) Every element in a society contributes to its functioning. 4) Every society rests on the consensus of its members. See Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Toward a Theory of Social Conflict', Journal of Conflict Resolution, II, No. 2 (1958), p. 174. It should be pointed out, however, that Gabriel Almond, for instance, would deny that his structural-functionalist theory implies ubiquitous consensus, harmony or equilibrium. See Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Comparative Politics : A Developmental Approach (Boston and Toronto, 1966), esp. p. 12.

of some of its members by others.<sup>11</sup> For Dahrendorf, coercion and not consensus is the major element which holds societies together.

The same theme was taken up by Dahrendorf in another work, namely, Out of Utopia : Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis.<sup>12</sup> Arguing that the functionalists, because of their emphasis on consensus and equilibrium, were talking not about real societies but about utopias, Dahrendorf is inclined to see all structural-functionalists as conservative advocates of a static and unrealistic theory.<sup>13</sup>

Lewis Coser's work is an attempt to put forward an integrative theory in a dynamic way. Thus, he is concerned to point to the positive functions of conflict in the integration of social systems. However, he makes a distinction between conflicts which 'do not contradict the basic assumptions upon which the relationship is founded [for these] tend to be positively functional for the social structure' and 'Internal conflicts in which the contending parties no longer share the basic values upon which the legitimacy of the social

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11. Dahrendorf in Journal of Conflict Resolution, op. cit., p. 174. Dahrendorf did, however, argue that the postulates of both the structural-functionalist and conflict models were not mutually exclusive, and that 'Stability and change, integration and conflict, function and dysfunction, consensus and restraint are...two equally valid aspects of every imaginable society.' *ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

12. This essay was published in Ralf Dahrendorf, Essays in the Theory of Society (California, 1968), pp. 107-128.

13. We cannot, however, accept the view that all structural-functionalists see society in terms of a complete functional unity; that all social and cultural forms perform positive functions, nor that all functions and/or social customs and beliefs are indispensable to the operation of the 'system'. Robert Merton has sought to refine structural-functionalism and to strip it of static and deterministic features. See Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, Revised and enlarged ed. (New York, 1967).

system rests [which] threaten to disrupt the structure.'<sup>14</sup> Coser's approach has the merit of attempting to accommodate both change and equilibrium. For Coser, so long as we have consensus about basic values and the rules of the game, conflict can exist and even perform positive functions. Basically, however, Coser's theory is more akin to a consensus than to a conflict theory. It is, in fact, the pluralistic thesis re-stated. The implication of his ideas are tantamount to arguing that society can only afford to tolerate conflict if it does not threaten the 'system'. This gives rise to a conservative bias in Coser's work.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Lewis A. Coser, 'The Functions of Social Conflict', in Lewis A. Coser and Bernard Rosenberg, Sociological Theory : a Book of Readings, third ed. (New York, 1969), p. 218.

15. Hugh Stretton's remark that 'Coser's values are not obscure, but he does not parade them.' raises the point relating to the relevance of ideological and normative perspectives in the selection of particular theories through which to study political and social structures. (For Stretton's remark about Coser, see Hugh Stretton, The Political Sciences (London, 1969), p. 330. The entire book is devoted to the argument that value-judgements and normative perspectives are intrinsic to the social sciences). John Horton, for example, argues that 'order' theories (into which category consensus theory and structural-functionalism may be placed) are predicated upon values of the social good involving notions of balance, stability, authority, order, quantitative growth, or, in other words, a 'moving equilibrium'. But, conflict theorists, Horton says, value concepts such as Freedom (as autonomy), change, action and qualitative growth. He summarizes it in the following manner : the 'conflict theorist invariably questions the legitimacy of existing practices and values; the order theorist accepts them as the standard of health.' See John Horton, 'Order and Conflict Theories of Social Problems as Competing Ideologies', The American Journal of Sociology, 71 (1965-66), pp. 701-713. Whilst it is tempting to accept this argument in an 'intuitive sense', this clearly would not do. The fact of the matter is that we can neither reject nor accept Horton's thesis in any scientific or quantitative sense, simply because we cannot subject it to overall empirical testing. This, in itself, throws a very real doubt upon the usefulness and validity of the terms 'social sciences'. All we can say, therefore, is that there is no intrinsic reason why social scientists cannot pursue their research in a neutral and objective manner. As P. H. Partridge puts it, 'How can it be argued that values are logically, necessarily, indispensably, a part of an explanatory theory?' See P. H. Partridge, 'Mr. Stretton on the Social Sciences', paper read to the Australasian Political Studies Association, 12th Annual Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, August, 1970. As far as conflict theory is concerned,

I would agree with Robin Williams that much of the argument is about strawmen, for no real society consists purely of conflict or of consensus. See Robin M. Williams, Jr., 'Some Further Comments on Chronic Controversies', rejoinder to Horton's article op. cit., The American Journal of Sociology, 71 (1965-66), pp. 717-721. Coser does, however, make qualifications of a general nature when he says that one should not see conflict and integration theories as 'rival explanatory systems', for they are 'partial theories sensitizing the students to one or other set of data relevant to a full theoretical explanation.' See Lewis A. Coser, Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict (New York, 1967), pp. 9-10.

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It is at this point that problems arise in relation to this thesis for Coser's approach necessitates that we make value-judgements about which conflicts are positively functional for the political and social systems, and which are negatively dysfunctional. This is not, however, the purpose of this study, nor am I prepared to make such value-judgements. An empirical example may serve to illustrate the difficulty connected with this point.

In 1967 in Northern West Bengal, a peasant revolt, led by a faction of the CPM, took place at Naxalbari. In analysing the conflict, are we to see it as essentially a problem of dissatisfaction over the land tenure system and conditions relating to the employment of tribal people on the tea-estates, and as basically an economic and social problem within the system? If so, are we then to make a judgement, on Coser's terms, that the conflict was functional because it did not cross the boundaries of system-maintenance? If, on the other hand, we placed major emphasis upon the challenge to the system by the leaders of the revolt (as distinct from their followers), are we then to conclude that the conflict was dysfunctional? Alternatively, are we conclude that despite this, the conflict was functional in the long-term, because it and subsequent agitation in other parts of West Bengal resulted in partial land reform measures? To form a conclusion as to the functionality or dysfunctionality of the revolt is to make a normative and ideological assessment, in view of the fact that people lack agreement on goals, and the means



to obtain them. Our only proper observation would be that this conflict was dysfunctional to consensus within the coalition, and this has nothing to do with basic values (unless we argue that such consensus is, in itself, a basic value), system-maintenance or boundaries to the overall primary system. Coser's approach must therefore be rejected.

Dahrendorf's assertion that conflict is ubiquitous, if taken out of the context of his total theory, seems appropriate to a study of the United Front Governments. However, the use of the theory is limited in that Dahrendorf (like Coser) is concerned with the formulation of a grand theory, which attempts to explain the totality of socio-political phenomena. We are involved, however, in a far more limited and modest enquiry which does not extend to an examination of the socio-political levels of the total society. For these reasons, Dahrendorf's theory cannot be utilised.<sup>16</sup>

The foregoing discussion and brief examination of some theoretical approaches has led to a rejection of the approaches on a number of grounds. Firstly, it is not the purpose of this study to test a theory or model. It appears, however, that pressures have been, and continue to be exerted in the social science disciplines to use and/or formulate theory as a necessary and desirable part of academic enquiry. This poses an inherent danger of over-simplification and artificiality, but this is not to argue that the pursuit of theory and model-building is a waste of time. It is merely to argue that some topics for research lend themselves more

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16. The discussion of conflict theory has been limited to the approaches taken by Dahrendorf and Coser. John Rex, however, has attempted to construct an alternative model which relates, in the main, 'to the study of total social systems and with special emphasis upon their overtly political aspects.' Rex does, however, point out that the model can be used for 'research into problems of particular institutions and social segments.' Nevertheless, it appears that he has in mind conflicts between those in authority and those subjected to it. See John Rex, Key Problems of Sociological Theory (London, 1961), p. 131. As our study is not oriented in this direction, but rather towards conflict between those exercising authority, and between those subjected to it, it is felt that further discussion of Rex's model is unnecessary.

readily to descriptive and analytical treatment, and are antecedent to more theoretical examination.

Nevertheless, various concepts within particular theories and models do have a certain utility. As we are dealing with factionalism, for example, some models about this aspect of political behaviour have conceptual relevance. Similarly, because the topic focusses upon two unstructured and unstable coalitions, Samuel Huntington's argument that political development is to be defined and measured by the level of institutionalization of political organizations and procedures<sup>17</sup> will be considered later on in the thesis. Notwithstanding this, a model about factionalism is not suitable as an overall conceptual framework because this thesis is not confined to a study of factionalism. Moreover, Huntington's theoretical approach cannot be used in a general way because the criteria which he adopts to measure levels of institutionalization, namely, adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence (apart from being distinctly familiar aspects of Western regimes) would have effectively involved an historical study of the political parties forming the United Front Governments, in the light of these criteria. Quite clearly, such an approach, due to space limitations, would have precluded a comprehensive study of the problems and actual experience of the United Front Governments in power.

It seems desirable, therefore, to adopt an open-ended case-study approach on the grounds that this is best suited to the comprehensiveness of the topic, and the problem to isolate the conflicts and conflict situations. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to settle some definitional problems relating to coalitions and conflict. A coalition is defined as any group of people who join together in pursuit of a single or multiple set of goals. This

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17. Samuel P. Huntington, 'Political Development and Political Decay', World Politics, XVII, No. 3 (1965), pp. 393-394.

definition is broad but preferred to those of the coalition theorists discussed in the foregoing, on the grounds that concepts like complementary interests, bargaining, compromise etc. are absent. In short, it is an open-ended definition.

The concept of conflict is a more difficult one. Clinton Fink has drawn attention to a wide variety of definitions relating to the term 'conflict'.<sup>18</sup> The main point at issue is whether conflict should be confined to overt struggle, or whether it should be used in a wider sense to cover a variety of situations ranging from competition to overt struggle. He draws attention to Mack and Snyder's argument that conflict involves mutually exclusive or incompatible values between at least two parties. On their definition, competition would not be regarded as conceptually analogous to conflict. They make a distinction between competition, which they define as 'the art of studying for some object that is sought by others at the same time, a contention of two or more persons or groups for the same goal', and conflict, which they define as 'opposition or antagonistic struggle, the aim of which is the annihilation, or subjugation of the other person or group'.<sup>19</sup>

Dahrendorf, on the other hand, argues that it is neither necessary or desirable to make a conceptual distinction between competition and conflict. As quoted by Fink, Dahrendorf says :  
'Like competition, conflict involves a striving for scarce resources... As far as the "established rules" of competition are concerned, they emphasize but one type of conflict, namely, regulated conflict.'<sup>20</sup>

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18. Clinton F. Fink, 'Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory of Social Conflict', Journal of Conflict Resolution, XII, No. 4 (1968), p. 432.

19. *ibid.*, pp. 436-7.

20. *ibid.*, p. 436.

Thus, as Fink points out, the problem concerns the question as to whether we should restrict the term 'conflict' to unregulated struggles, or broaden it to include regulated struggles. It is not merely a terminological problem, he says, but 'is theoretically significant in that the latter implies a larger empirical domain and additional substantive content for the theory.'<sup>21</sup>

Both views are valid in their own right. Whilst it is true that a conceptual distinction can be made between conflict and competition, it is equally valid to regard competition (or other types of regulated conflict) as forms of conflict. For the purpose of this thesis, the broader definition is preferred because it is considered more appropriate. In dealing with the United Front Governments, we will examine instances of regulated conflict, for instance, competition between the parties during the elections of 1967 and 1969, as well as unregulated conflict, notably, the forms and extent of inter-party dissension and violence. It is towards the setting for such conflict that we must now turn our attention.

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21. *ibid.*, p. 438.

Chapter OneWEST BENGAL : SOME ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL,  
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND.

Verdant and fertile,<sup>1</sup> West Bengal in north-eastern India consists of 33,839 square miles (or a mere 2.78 percent of the total land area of India) incorporated into sixteen districts,<sup>2</sup> and shares common borders with Orissa, Bihar, Nepal, Sikkim, Assam and the recently independent People's Republic of Bangladesh which, prior to its formation into East Pakistan in 1947, was part of the united province of Bengal. With the exception of the northern districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Malda, which are classified as sub-Himalayan, a good deal of this truncated state is deltaic or partly deltaic<sup>3</sup> with alluvial soil. It is one of the smallest of the states, yet has a population larger than all but four of those Indian states.

I. Diversity of Population.

Besides being an aspect of the general background, ethnic and linguistic diversity warrants a certain amount of factual description in an attempt to analyze any actual or potential political implications which might arise.

The population of West Bengal was 34,926,279 in 1961 (about 8 percent of the population of India), with a corresponding

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1. 60 percent of the land in the state is cultivated. See National Council of Applied Economic Research, Techno-Economic Survey of West Bengal (New Delhi, 1962), p. 35. Since the publication of this book, however, it is most likely that this percentage has increased.

2. The sixteen states are : Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Midnapore, Howrah, Hoogley, 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Nadia, Murshidabad, West Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar and Purulia.

3. Further information and categories can be found in O.H.K. Spate and A.T.A. Learmonth, India and Pakistan : A General and Regional Geography, 3rd rev. ed. (London, 1967), Ch. 19, pp. 571-576.

density of 1021 persons to the square mile, which makes the state the second most densely populated in India. Since 1961, the population was estimated to have reached  $44\frac{1}{2}$  million people in 1968,<sup>4</sup> making for a corresponding increase in density of 1210 persons to the square mile. The percentage rate of population growth for the years 1951-61 was 32.79 percent, which is higher than in most states of India.

The majority of the population are Hindus, but there is nevertheless a high proportion of Muslims who, in 1961 numbered almost 7 million or 20 percent of the total population. Most of them are concentrated in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad. Appendix I lists the number of Muslims per 1,000 of the total, rural and urban populations as at 1961. The ratio of Muslims to Hindus has been increasing over the past decade for the birth-rate of the former exceeds that of the latter.<sup>5</sup> Despite the large percentage of Muslims, however, communal parties are not important in West Bengal. Christians form the next largest religious minority, followed by Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains.<sup>6</sup>

Of the Hindus, there is a significant number of Scheduled Castes (52) with a population of nearly 7 million as at 1961. At the same year, the Scheduled Castes formed about 24.4 percent of the total workers in the rural areas, while their numbers as a percentage of the total population in the rural areas was about 23.62 percent.

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4. Figure supplied by the High Commission for India, Canberra, said to have been based on the 1971 Census which, at the time of writing, was unavailable.

5. Census of India (1961) : West Bengal and Sikkim, Part 1-A General Report, Book (ii) - Population and Society, p. 223.

6. Christians account for 204,530 people; Buddhists 112,253; Sikhs 34,184 and Jains 25,940. See Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India : A Reference Annual 1970 (New Delhi, 1971), Table II, p. 13.

The Scheduled Tribes, on the other hand, are not necessarily Hindus but are of different religions. Scheduled Tribes number over 2 million people, or 7 percent of the total population of the state. They comprise about 8.2 percent of the total workers in the rural areas, and together with the Scheduled Castes form 11.26 percent of the cultivators, and 16.5 percent of the agricultural labourers in West Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the Scheduled Castes live in the 24-Parganas, Burdwan, Midnapore and Bankura. In Cooch Behar, they rank first in terms of percentage to total population of the district (46.90 percent), while in Jalpaiguri live the largest Scheduled Tribe population with 26.10 percent of the total population of the district. Appendix II lists the district-wise distribution of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as at 1961. In Jalpaiguri, they are mostly employed as labourers on the tea plantations and figured prominently in the Naxalbari uprising of 1967, about which more will be said in Chapter Five.

Another important group are the refugees who, since Partition, have perennially crossed over the border from East Pakistan to West Bengal. By 1967, it was estimated that their numbers in West Bengal approached nearly 4 million, of which 20 percent were said to have entered the state since the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims occurred in East Pakistan in 1963-64.<sup>8</sup> Between the 1st January, 1964 and 31st December, 1969,

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7. D. S. Mehra and I. J. Kundra, 'A Study of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Working Force in India - Part I', All-India Congress Committee, Economic Review, 18, November 1 (1966), pp. 31-36.

8. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1967-68 (Alipore, 1968), p. 14.

a total of 517,322 refugees had entered the state.<sup>9</sup> In the Calcutta industrial area in 1967-68, refugees numbered about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million. Of those who had entered the city by 1958, a major proportion were said to have come predominantly from the middle-classes,<sup>10</sup> but further information on the class origins of this group after 1958 is not at hand.

Apart from the refugees, there are large numbers of non-Bengali migrants who have come from Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in search of employment as labourers and factory workers. As S. N. Sen's well-known study indicates, these groups are among the most educationally backward sections of the population.<sup>11</sup> Other minorities from the states of Punjab, Gujarat and Rajasthan form an important segment of the commercial and business life of the state and enjoy a comparatively high income.<sup>12</sup> Marwaris, for example, are said to be gaining increasing control over business, industry and commerce.<sup>13</sup> This has resulted in a considerable amount of antagonism on the part of Bengalis towards Marwaris. The Punjabis are mainly employed in the transport industry or

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9. According to Indian official sources, the reasons given for this migration included interference with religious rites and education, forcible stealing of crops by members of the majority community, economic boycott by the majority community, molestation of women and inability to have grievances against the majority community redressed by the local courts. See Government of India, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation (Department of Rehabilitation), Report 1969-70 (New Delhi), pp. 3-4 and 120. Measures designed to rehabilitate these displaced persons are dealt with on pp. 54-58.

10. S. N. Sen, The City of Calcutta : A Socio-Economic Survey 1954-55 to 1957-58 (Calcutta, 1960), p. 224.

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*, p. 17.

13. Ali Ashraf, The City Government of Calcutta : A Study of Inertia (Bombay, 1966), p. 5.



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## II. Linguistic Divisions.

Linguistically, West Bengal as a whole is fairly homogeneous for, based upon the 1961 figures, Bengali was the mother-tongue of 84 percent of the total population in the state. Differences, however, sharply demarcate Calcutta from the rest of West Bengal : in this city only a little more than half of the population were Bengali-speaking. Because it may be useful to refer to the linguistic compositions of the various districts, Appendix III gives the numbers per 10,000 people (both urban and rural) whose mother tongues are Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and Oriya - the latter three languages being predominantly the mother tongues of the major migrant groups in West Bengal, but particularly of Calcutta.

## III. Literacy.

The rate of literacy, defined as 'the ability both to read with understanding and to write a short statement on everyday life in any language'<sup>15</sup> is 34.46 percent of the total population, on an average of 3446 per every 10,000 persons. Of the overall rate, literacy in the rural areas is only 25.84 percent against 59.55 percent in the urban areas. Taking Calcutta separately, literacy is less among the Hindi-speaking population where it is 46 percent, followed by 48 percent among the Urdu-speaking people and 64 percent among the South Indians and Oriyas.<sup>16</sup> This compares with a literacy rate among Bengali-speaking people of 80 percent.<sup>17</sup>

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14. The territorial locations and employment fields for these groups is given in Meera Guha, 'The Definition of an Indian Urban Neighbourhood Man in India, 46, No. 1 (January-March, 1966), pp. 59-65.

15. Census of India (1961), op. cit., p. 103.

16. These figures are based on the study made by S.N. Sen, op. cit., p. 32.

17. *ibid.*, p. 31.

The question arises to what extent, if any, does linguistic and ethnic diversity have a bearing upon conflict within the state? If we take conflict as ranging along a continuum from regulated to unregulated struggles, there is no easy answer available. As far as one form of conflict is concerned, namely, violence, Weiner has pointed out with respect to Calcutta that :

'Demonstrators, ... come from many social classes, but the demonstrations most likely to be violent are those in which the middle classes form the core.' 18

It has been shown that migrants, particularly from the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa, together with the Scheduled Castes, are generally less educated than Bengalis, and have a low socio-economic status. The middle-class is predominantly made up of Bengalis (mainly Hindus), and Weiner argues that this class is predisposed towards violence because of the inability or perceived unwillingness of Government to satisfy or ameliorate their discontents and economic frustrations. Weiner goes on to say that violence is not common among either the rural population or refugees, and, moreover, that :

'Working class strikes in Calcutta only rarely involve violence and almost never involve the entire city.' 19

This general situation analyzed by Weiner has largely changed. Unregulated conflict, that is, violence, now extends beyond the middle-class, and is increasingly embraced by both industrial and rural groups as a means of bringing about social and economic change, and as a manifestation of anomie. In terms of numbers, the most important linguistic groups are Oriyas and Biharis, who are also working-class in terms of occupation and

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18. Myron Weiner, 'Violence and Politics in Calcutta', Journal of Asian Studies, XX, No. 3 (May, 1963), p. 277.

19. *ibid.*

status. Industrial conflict, ranging along a continuum from violent agitations to peaceful strikes, occurred during the tenures of both United Front Governments, but was particularly unregulated during 1967. It is not known, however, to what extent the different linguistic groups were involved.

The Scheduled Tribes, on the other hand, form the core of the landless labourers. The Naxalbari uprising involved a number of tribal groups. Moreover, during the 'land grab' movement of 1969, conflict was most intense in those districts with a high percentage of Scheduled Tribes from which the CPM is said to derive considerable support.

It is recognised, of course, that the absence of quantitative research data about the linguistic and ethnic composition of those actually involved in unregulated conflict during the periods of the two United Front Governments, makes it difficult to formulate any categorical conclusions. We can do no more than to observe two definite trends. On the one hand, it is a fact that violence has become more widespread geographically over the past few years, and, secondly, that the broad groups involved in violent agitations, i. e. industrial workers, peasants and landless labourers, do contain a number of diverse ethnic, linguistic and social groups. Be this as it may, leadership of such agitations still remains within the hands of the middle class. Clearly, however, further research using different methodological techniques needs to be undertaken before any further observations and conclusions can be drawn.

#### IV. Caste and Some Other Aspects of Social Stratification.

Definitions of caste vary among scholars, and, as E. R. Leach points out, some people view it as a cultural phenomenon, while others consider it as a structural concept.<sup>20</sup> As this obviously

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20. For an interesting and stimulating discussion on these points, see E. R. Leach (Ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan (Cambridge, 1971), particularly the Introduction by Leach.

implies a very specialized discussion which cannot, therefore, be pursued here, recourse is taken to the generally accepted view of caste as a cultural concept. On this view, caste is generally considered to be hierarchically-arranged hereditary groups, separated from each other by endogamy, commensality and occupational exclusiveness.<sup>21</sup>

'Jati', which is the correct term for caste(s) are subdivisions of the four 'varnas', i. e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, but, of course, also extends to those outside the pale of Hindu society - the Untouchables or Harijans as they are often called.<sup>22</sup>

It is not possible to give contemporary quantitative data about the occupational structure on a caste by caste basis because the 1961 Census does not contain this information (with the exception of Scheduled Castes and Tribes) for reasons of social policy.

A special characteristic of the caste system in West Bengal has been the practice of kulinism which entailed a division of the various castes in the three upper varnas into further sub-groups. Although the kulin system has now virtually disappeared, as Marcus Franda notes 'the basic features - the emphasis on learning, wealth and family background as a basis of social stratification - have survived.'<sup>23</sup>

Kulinism may have perhaps generated an ideology which resulted in the transference of certain values intrinsic to it to the .....

21. Whilst this definition has secured general acceptance from scholars, some would stress not the characteristics of caste as such, but the fundamental principle. Louis Dumont, for example, emphasises the notion of hierarchy, defined as the superiority of the pure over the impure, and the notion that ranking is religious in nature. See his book Homo Hierarchicus : The Caste System and its Implications (London, 1970).

22. For some essential differences between jati and varna, see M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (California, 1969), pp. 3-5.

23. Marcus F. Franda, 'West Bengal' in Myron Weiner (Ed.), State Politics in India (Princeton, 1968), p. 262.

Bengali status group<sup>24</sup> - the bhadralok. The bhadralok, drawn from the three major varnas, the Brahmins, Knyasths and Vaidyas as they are known in Bengal, came into prominence in the 19th century largely as a product of the urban environment in Calcutta, although their roots also extended deeply into rural Bengal. The Bengali bhadralok were the 'gentlemen' who, in the words of J. H. Broomfield, 'were distinguished by many respects of their behaviour - their deportment, their speech, their dress, their style of housing, their eating habits, their occupations, and their associations - and quite as fundamentally by their cultural values and their sense of propriety.'<sup>25</sup> The bhadralok were also characterised by their belief in the inferiority of manual occupations.

Westernised education became the criterion for bhadralok social status. Western influences led to a re-examination of the role of caste and European liberal institutions in Bengal society. As Broomfield notes, an accommodation was reached for 'the bhadralok valued their caste status and their liberal institutions equally, and they had little desire to dispense with either.'<sup>26</sup>

What might be termed 'bhadralok values' still permeate sections of Bengal society today where the educated lay great stress upon educational and cultural attainments, together with a concomitant distaste for manual work. Franda considers that aversion to manual labour is the reason for the large percentage of non-Bengalis in the labouring class.<sup>27</sup> Others, however, consider that these attitudes

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24. They are often referred to as 'a middle class', but Weber's term 'status group' is preferable because the bhadralok were not a particular economic or occupational class.

25. J. M. Broomfield, Elite Conflict in a Plural Society : Twentieth-Century Bengal (California, 1968), pp. 5-6.

26. *ibid.*, p. 18.

27. Franda, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

towards manual work on the part of the Bengalis may be in the process of change due to pressing economic needs.<sup>28</sup>

Caste distinctions have relevance and importance in West Bengal, but mainly in relation to the social system. Politically, caste is of less importance than in the other states of India. In urban politics, it plays a minor role and, in the words of one scholar, 'many of the urban intellectuals including Brahmins have largely broken away from the ties of caste, and some of the younger members of leftist groups have found within their political party new group loyalties and an exclusive set of values.'<sup>29</sup> The numerous political parties in West Bengal vie with caste for the primary allegiance of individuals. Weiner also considers that 'Among the Bengal middle class the rigors of both caste and joint family have in large part broken down', and in their place have grown a large number of social groups.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in urban areas particularly, education rather than caste has become a mark of status.<sup>31</sup>

All this is not to argue that caste plays no role at all in politics : Franda has pointed out that some castes, for example, the Mahatos of Purulia, the Ugra-Kshatriyas in parts of Burdwan, and the Suburna-Baniks in Calcutta organise and vote on the basis

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28. See, for example, Gouranga Chattopadhyay and Anil K. Sengupta, 'Growth of a Disciplined Labour Force : A Case Study of Social Impediments', Economic and Political Weekly, Special Number (July, 1969), pp. 1209-10.

29. C. Von Furer-Haimendorf, 'Caste and Politics in South Asia' in C. H. Philips (ed.), Politics and Society in India (London, 1963), p. 65.

30. Myron Weiner, Party Politics in India : The Development of a Multi-Party System (Princeton, 1957), p. 160.

31. See Weiner's interview with Congress Party Treasurer, Bijoy Singh Mahar in Myron Weiner, Party Building in a New Nation : The Indian National Congress (Chicago, 1967), p. 351.

of caste loyalties, while some other castes often express local caste and factional politics as part of wider political issues.<sup>32</sup>

Ralph Nicholas, in a study of three villages in West Bengal, has pointed out that while caste had political importance in one of the villages, it was of less importance in the other two which were relatively more equalitarian, and where the dominant group, the cultivators, were also the majority group. Nicholas says :

'Although the cultivators do not stand above the Brahmins in caste hierarchy, they constitute so large a proportion of the population and control so much of the land of the area that they thoroughly dominate social and political life in eastern Midnapore.'<sup>33</sup>

It would appear that the possession of wealth, and the patronage which goes with it, is of over-riding importance and this would apply in most parts of the state. Occupationally, caste is also breaking down particularly in the urban areas.<sup>34</sup>

As far as political leadership is concerned, however, caste has relevance in that most political leaders are drawn predominantly from the higher varnas. This applies particularly to the Marxist and Communist parties whose leaders are mostly Brahmins.<sup>35</sup> According to Weiner, Brahmins appear to be 'most closely associated with ideologically oriented parties, the Congress at one pole, the Communists and Marxists at the other with the Socialists in between but closer to the "left".'<sup>36</sup>

#### V. Urbanization With Particular Reference to Calcutta.

As mentioned previously, violence exists on a significant

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32. Franda, op. cit., p. 271.

33. R. W. Nicholas, 'Village Factions and Political Parties in Rural West Bengal', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, II, No. 1 (November, 1963), p. 18. See also p. 19.

34. Chattopadhyay and Sengupta, op. cit., p. 1210.

35. Myron Weiner, Political Change in South Asia (Calcutta, 1963), p. 185. He says : 'In short, 16 per cent of the Congress leaders, 30 per cent of the Socialists, 36 per cent of the Communists and 37 per cent of the Marxist Left are from Brahmin castes.'

36. *ibid.*

scale in Calcutta. The socio-economic problems which confront the majority of the city's inhabitants relate to overcrowding of living quarters, poverty, unemployment, disease, paucity of municipal and recreational facilities, and transport problems. These factors, together with certain demographic characteristics, give rise to an easily inflammable environment, resulting in anomic demonstrations, other forms of agitation, violence and so on. It is relevant, therefore, to elaborate more fully upon some of these problems.

Although the majority of people in West Bengal live in the rural areas, urbanization in terms of the proportion of urban population to total population is high. According to the 1961 Census, the percentage of urban population was then 24.45 percent. Appendix IV lists the rural and urban populations of the sixteen districts of the state. Urbanization is mostly concentrated in and around Calcutta, the 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hoogley and to some extent in Burdwan and Nadia. These contiguous districts, which cover 65 percent of the urban areas, accommodated 52.3 percent of the districts' total population and 84.4 percent of the urban population of the state in 1961.<sup>37</sup>

The main factors contributing to the level of urbanization in West Bengal are firstly, the movement of the population from rural to urban areas, and secondly, migration across regional boundaries in expectation of higher income and employment opportunities. This is reflected in the average annual earnings of industrial manual workers compared to those for male agricultural workers, where, in this state during 1962-63, the former were around Rs. 1,325 compared to Rs. 675 for the latter.<sup>38</sup>

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37. Chittapriya Mukhopadhyay, 'Trends of Urbanization in West Bengal', The Modern Review, CXXIX-V, No. 11 (November, 1969), pp. 847-865.

38. Nirmala Banerjee, 'What Course for Urbanization in India?', Economic and Political Weekly, IV, Nos. 28, 29 & 30 (July, 1969), p. 1175. For more recent information on rural wages and poverty, see 'Agricultural Wages in West Bengal : Arithmetic of Rural Poverty', The Call (official organ of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India), XXV, No. 5 (January, 1974), pp. 6-9.



The major urban area is, of course, Calcutta and its neighbouring Howrah. Because much of the political activity and conflict centres in and around Calcutta, it is desirable to deal with various problems confronting this city. Greater Calcutta, extending over an area of 450 square miles, has been described by a visiting World Bank team in 1960 as a 'national economic problem', and by the World Health Organization as 'an international health hazard'. It has been estimated that Greater Calcutta contains a population of 7.5 million as at 1968, which represents an increase from 4.63 million in 1951, and that the present population is expected to reach as many of 12 million by 1988.<sup>39</sup> Calcutta proper contains over 3 million people.

Calcutta proper is predominantly a commercial, trading, administrative and industrial centre. In 1967, there were 9,000 joint stock companies and 34 scheduled commercial banks.<sup>40</sup> As far as industry is concerned, with the exception of the jute, cotton, ship-building and some engineering concerns, most of Calcutta's industry is small-scale.

Most of the exports of jute products and tea are channelled through Calcutta Port which handles up to 45 percent of the country's export trade and a considerable proportion of its imports. But, the importance of Calcutta Port has been declining over the past few years due to the increasingly high level of port charges and the difficulty confronting ships with larger tonnage due to the heavy perennial silting of the Hoogley river. As a result, there has been

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39. V.V. Esvaran, 'Calcutta : International Hazard', Civic Affairs, 16, No. 9 (April, 1969).

40. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1967-68, op. cit., pp. 30 & 32.

a considerable diversion of cargo from Calcutta Port to other outlets in India. The construction of the Farakka Barrage Project which will provide alternative docking facilities for large ships, may help to arrest this trend.

Transport, in general, is a major problem in Calcutta and its metropolitan area. Howrah Bridge, which links both Howrah and Calcutta, is hopelessly inadequate : it has been estimated that whereas about 12,000 vehicles crossed the bridge daily in 1947, the number has now risen to 34,000.<sup>41</sup> In addition, transport is made more difficult by the inadequate services of the Calcutta Transport Corporation which runs the state-owned buses, and the Calcutta Tramways. This lack of an adequate transport infrastructure poses grave economic problems, and has given rise to a number of demonstrations by Calcutta residents.

Greater Calcutta includes two Corporations - Calcutta and Chandernagor - 33 municipalities including Howrah, and 37 non-municipal urban units separated by intermittent rural tracts. But, the lack of civic services in the Greater Calcutta area beggars description. The roads are very bad and full of potholes, the supply of water for sanitation and domestic purposes is abysmally inadequate, thick blackish mounds of evil-smelling garbage, often containing carcasses of dead animals, pile up for days without collection, and these together with the open drains which proliferate in the bustee (slum) areas are in themselves the sources of disease and epidemics.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the conditions under which the vast majority of the population of Calcutta live pose many medical, social, economic and political problems in an area with one of the highest population densities in the world. More than 75

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41. Sankar Ghosh, 'Calcutta's Many Civic Problems', Civic Affairs, 15, No. 8 (March, 1968).

percent of medium and large-scale households and about 70 percent of small-scale households in Calcutta proper have less than 40 square feet per person in which to live, and people thus exist in very overcrowded conditions.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, only 5 percent of Calcutta's families live in separate flats and 2 percent in complete houses.<sup>43</sup>

More than 1 million people live in the bustee slums where there is, on average, only 1 tap for every 33 persons; no drainage whatsoever for 28 percent of the total number of bustee dwellers; 32 percent have kutchra (mud) surface drains; 20 percent have pucca (cement) drains; 18 percent have proper underground drains, and there is an average of one latrine for every 25 persons.<sup>44</sup> Less fortunate than even the bustee inhabitants are the 300,000 pavement dwellers in Calcutta,<sup>45</sup> a great many of whom occupy the same location every day.

Calcutta proper is a predominantly male city. In the words of S. N. Sen :

'About a quarter of the population of the City live a single life without their families, and they form more than half of the households. The vast majority of these people are male, married and migrants. They are educationally backward, containing a high proportion of illiterate persons. More than 85 p. c. of these are concentrated in three groups of occupations - unskilled manual work, skilled labour and trading.'<sup>46</sup>

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42. S.N. Sen, op. cit., p. 265.

43. Richard L. Park, 'The Urban Challenge to Local and State Government : West Bengal with Special Attention to Calcutta', in Roy Turner (ed.) India's Urban Future (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1962), p. 385.

44. Sankar Ghosh, Civic Affairs, op. cit. Another detailed picture of living and housing conditions in a mainly bustee area is given in Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Report on Family Living Survey Among Industrial Workers 1958-59 : Calcutta (Simla, 1964).

45. For a moving account by a journalist of Calcutta's vagrant children, the Kangalis, see Sudhir Thapliyal, 'Children of the Streets', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 5 April, 1970.

46. S.N. Sen, op. cit., p. 259.

This tendency for migrants from neighbouring states in India to live predominantly single lives and to perform mainly manual jobs is borne out by a survey conducted by the Government of India among industrial workers in Calcutta.<sup>47</sup> Here, the percentage of Oriya-speaking single-member households was 90.58 percent; Hindi-speaking 61.21 percent and Urdu-speaking 51.11 percent compared to 25.53 percent for Bengalis.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from the Calcutta and Howrah areas, another major urban settlement consists of the Asansol-Durgapur industrial belt which is situated 120 miles from Calcutta in an area of 640 square miles in Burdwan and along the Burdwan-Bankura border, in the region known as the Damodar Valley Operational Area. Here, the percentage of urban population to total population was 46.56 percent in 1966, and manufacturing employment as a percentage of total non-agricultural employment was 46.64 percent in the same year. During the period of the two United Front Governments of 1967 and 1969-70, this region was the scene of considerable industrial and labour trouble during 1969.

In Durgapur, the growth of industries has been the single most important factor in attracting people to this area, the population of which has grown fourfold since 1961 to about 150,000 people. Asansol, in comparison to Durgapur, is older and unplanned, but employs about 150,000 workers in its 200 or so collieries, while the steel, engineering, chemical and ceramic industries provide employment for another 100,000 people. Together with the Calcutta-Howrah industrial area, 93 percent of the total registered factory

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47. Government of India, Report on Family Living Survey Among Industrial Workers 1958-59 : Calcutta, op. cit.

48. The figures for six and seven-member households, by way of contrast, were 1.47 percent; 5.98 percent; 8.51 percent and 19.52 percent, respectively. See *ibid.*, p. 13.

employment is accounted for in these areas.<sup>49</sup> The new major urban centres include Haldia and Kalyani, where, in the former, a secondary port has been constructed, together with the setting up of an oil refinery and fertilizer plant. To gain a clear view of urbanization in West Bengal, Appendix IV lists the rural and urban populations of the sixteen districts.

#### VI. Economic Structure.

A brief survey of the economic structure of West Bengal is useful on a number of grounds. Apart from providing a context in which the United Front Governments held office, it points to a number of specific problems which had a bearing on various conflicts in both the industrial and agricultural sectors during 1967 and 1969-70.

Even a cursory look at the economy of the state must take into account the massive damage caused by Partition in 1947. Summarizing the position, most of the fertile agricultural land went to East Pakistan, which made the agricultural base in West Bengal even more precarious. This also posed the problem of a greater food shortage than hitherto because the main food-producing regions also went to East Pakistan, as well as the most important fisheries.<sup>50</sup> Although all of the 111 jute mills existing at the time which produced 80 percent of the world's jute goods remained in West Bengal,<sup>51</sup> the source of raw jute hitherto grown in East Bengal went to East Pakistan. Partition, moreover, resulted in a dislocation of transport and communications; market connections were disrupted, and the influx of refugees previously

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49. Sushil Dhara, 'State Holds Unique Position on India's Economic Map', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), no date, but estimated to be late 1969 or early 1970.

50. Techno-Economic Survey of West Bengal 1962, op. cit., p. 13.

51. Further details are contained in Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Report of The Central Wage Board for Jute Industry 1963, p. 12.

mentioned, bore heavily on the economy.

Looking at the three sectors of the economy, it can be seen that although a little over half of the population are engaged in agriculture, this sector (which will be dealt with separately) produces only one-third of the state's income.<sup>52</sup> West Bengal is more industrialized than other states in India with the exception of Maharashtra. But, the percentage of the value of the state's ex-factory value of output on an all-India basis fell from its highest figure since 1959 of 23.1 percent in 1963 to 21.4 percent in 1965.<sup>53</sup> Looking at the state income derived from the various sectors of the economy, the primary sector provided 39 percent; the secondary sector, excluding construction 19 percent, and the tertiary sector 42 percent.<sup>54</sup> Table I below which sets out the number of workers employed in different sectors of the economy gives some idea of the economic and occupational structure of West Bengal, while Appendix V enumerates the state income and its percentage distribution by sectors at current prices.

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52. Techno-Economic Survey of West Bengal 1962, op. cit., p. 35.

53. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1967-68, op. cit., p. 21.

54. Techno-Economic Survey of West Bengal 1962, p. 12.

Table I\*

Number of Workers by Broad Industrial Categories in  
West Bengal, 1951 and 1961 Census.

Sectors of state income	Industrial categories of census	Number of workers	
		1951	1961
1. Agriculture	1. Agriculture	4,606,894	6,230,487
2. animal husbandry	2. mining, quarry- ing, livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plan- tations, orchards and allied activi- ties	537,732	577,881
3. tea			
4. forestry			
5. fishery			
6. mining			
7. factory estab- lishments	3. manufacturing and household industry	1,350,082	1,806,471
8. small enterprises			
9. banks and insur- ance	4. trade and commerce	868,759	872,204
10. big trade			
11. small trade			
12. railways	5. transport, stor- age and commun- ications	372,474	392,225
13. other transport			
14. construction activity	6. construction, other services including house property	1,332,023	1,700,927
15. professions and liberal arts			
16. domestic services			
17. public services			
18. house property			
total		9,067,964	11,580,195

\* Source : Government of West Bengal, State Statistical Bureau,  
Estimates of State Income and its Regional Differentials - West Bengal,  
(Calcutta, 1965), p. 22.

The number of registered working factories rose from 5,643 in 1965 to 5,735 in 1966, but the number of persons employed in them fell from 800,800 in 1965 to 800,700 in 1966.<sup>55</sup> There was a corresponding decline in productive levels in 1966 in the jute, cotton and steel industries. This was largely due to the economic recession of the period, which will be dealt with more fully in a subsequent chapter dealing with industrial unrest and the labour policy of the United Front Governments.

The most important industrial product in West Bengal is jute manufactures,<sup>56</sup> and, as one Government Report says 'the entire economy of West Bengal is inextricably bound up with the economy of the jute industry.'<sup>57</sup> India's share of the world production of jute in 1958-59 was 33 percent, and most of this is concentrated in West Bengal, which, out of an all-India total loomage of 72,916 maintained 69,674 looms.<sup>58</sup> Jute manufactures have been the mainstay of India's export trade and provided a significant proportion of her foreign exchange.<sup>59</sup> There were 82 mills in West Bengal as at 1964, and the industry is the largest single employer of labour in the state. In recent years, however, jute has suffered a setback on the international market, causing a decline in exports of jute products from 1,000,000 tons in 1965 to 750,000 tons in 1966,<sup>60</sup>

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55. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1967-68, op. cit., p. 20.

56. *ibid.*, p. 1.

57. Government of India, Report of the Central Wage Board for Jute Industry 1963, p. 12.

58. *ibid.*, p. 7.

59. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India, Indian Agriculture : A Survey, 1965, p. 44.

60. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1967-68, op. cit., p. 1.



with a corresponding increase in unemployment.

The cotton and engineering industries form the next most important industrial concerns in the state. There were 106 registered cotton mills which in 1964 employed 49,089 people.<sup>61</sup> Most of the mills are small in size, and are located mainly in the 24-Parganas and Howrah.<sup>62</sup> The engineering industry in terms of the number of people employed, is the second largest industry in the state. Appendix VI, which supplements Table I, lists the number of persons employed in registered factories on an industry-wise basis as at 1964. Engineering claims 23.4 percent of the number of factories in the state. Much of the industry is located in the public sector, for instance, the steel plant at Durgapur, which along with the Alloy Steel Plant is run by Hindustan Steel Ltd. with a share capital of Rs. 552 crores, and loans advanced to it by the Government of India amounting to Rs. 532 crores.<sup>63</sup> The Durgapur Steel Plant manufactures mainly small and medium sections and railway equipment, while the Alloy Steel Plant has been producing stainless steel since 1968. Other important engineering concerns are located in different areas of the Durgapur-Asansol industrial belt. Chittaranjan, for example, is a major centre for the manufacture of locomotive engines. Apart from these major industries, most of West Bengal's industrial establishments are either medium or small-scale.

Looking at the economic growth rate of the state,

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61. Government of West Bengal, State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Handbook (Calcutta), p. 85.

62. Government of West Bengal, Labour Department, Report on an Enquiry into Employment, Earnings and Welfare Amenities in Cotton Textile Industry in West Bengal (Alipore, 1961).

63. Indian Engineering Association, Handbook of Statistics 1968-69, (Calcutta, 1969), p. 18.

measured by the increase in real 'output' over time, West Bengal's income in real terms rose annually by 3.8 percent between 1951-52 to 1955-56 and by 5.4 percent during the period 1955-56 to 1960-61. On the other hand, the state's annual per capita income in real terms in the years 1951-52 to 1955-56 rose at a cumulative rate of only 0.6 percent.<sup>64</sup>

Turning now to the agricultural sector of the economy, it has already been shown that agriculture is the occupation of more than half of the population in the state.<sup>65</sup> As at 1961, there were 6,230,500 workers in the agricultural sector of which 4,458,800 were cultivators and 1,771,000 were agricultural labourers. Because of its relevance to the land tenure system, occupational structure and agrarian struggle which became particularly acute during the tenure of the second United Front Government,<sup>66</sup> Appendix VII lists the number of persons working as cultivators in the districts of West Bengal as at 1961. For the moment, we may note that the largest concentration of cultivators is located in the districts of Midnapore (782,000), 24-Parganas (579,000) and Purulia (463,000). Together, these districts account for 40 percent of the total cultivators of the state. It is significant that agrarian struggle became most acute in 1969-70 in the districts of Midnapore and 24-Parganas.

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64. Estimates of State Income and its Regional Differentials in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 5. According to this source, the low per capita growth rate was caused predominantly by the increase in the population caused by the migration of displaced persons from the former East Pakistan, and migrants from other neighbouring Indian states referred to previously.

65. The agricultural population refers to those who cultivate field crops only. As pointed out in one Census publication, the term 'agricultural population' is a misnomer because it 'excludes persons dependent on stock-raising, the rearing of small animals and insects and plantation work, all normally considered agricultural pursuits.' See Joseph E. Schwartzberg, 'Occupational Structure and Level of Economic Development in India : A Regional Analysis', Census of India 1961 (Monograph No. 4), (New Delhi), p. 42.

66. For a short summary of this agrarian struggle, see Sally Ray, 'United Front Government and the Politics of Agrarian Struggle in West Bengal, 1967 and 1969-70', Australian Outlook, 25, No. 2 (August, 1971), pp. 213-227.

There is considerable population pressure on the land where the ratio of population to land resource is much higher than the national average. This has had the effect of depressing the agricultural economy. To this must be added a backward technology. An indication of this is reflected in the small proportion of total farm credit requirements supplied by the co-operatives which is as low as 10 percent in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Rajasthan, compared to 40 percent in Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the view of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India :

'This may be indicative of the entrepreneur's lack of interest in undertaking major development schemes because of the Government's indecisiveness regarding future patterns of land tenure. More immediately it reflects the shortfalls in supplies of pumps, implements, tractors and the like which these types of credit were expected to finance.' 67

In any event, as mentioned previously agriculture supplies only one-third of the state's income, indicating that productivity is low. It may be that low productivity is associated with the land tenure system.

Although paddy occupies 71 percent of the gross cropped area (80 percent when added to other food items), West Bengal is deficit in the production of food. The yields of most crops - food and cash - are below a number of other states in India, with rice occupying an area of 4648.7 hectares and yielding 1038 kilograms per hectare, as against yields of 1490 kilograms per hectare for an area of 1068 hectares in Mysore, and 1188 kilograms per hectare for an area of 271 hectares in the Punjab.<sup>68</sup>

Against these figures, it is not surprising to find that the productive level of West Bengal's foodgrains in 1959-60 was

67. Indian Agriculture : A Survey, op. cit., p. 29. For criticisms relating to consumer co-operatives, see 'Poor Performance of Consumer Co-ops', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 10 February, 1969.

68. Government of India, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Community Development & Cooperation, Estimates of Area and Production of Principal Crops in India 1965-66 and 1966-67 (Summary Tables), p. 29.

only 4.3 percent higher than in the 1949-50 period, against an all-India increase of 38.3 percent for the same period. One observer has noted that 'The index of the availability of foodgrains per capita per annum in West Bengal during the period showed a decline from 100 in 1951-52 to 1959-60.'<sup>69</sup>

The ratio of area devoted to different crops tends to fluctuate in different periods. In the decade during the 1950's, the proportion of land cultivated for foodgrains, declined, the most probable reason being the extension of area devoted to cash crops like jute, oil-seeds, and so on.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, in the 1967 to 1969 period, the acreage under paddy increased at the expense of jute, due less to expectations of better yields through improved seeds and fertilizers, but rather to the high prices which prevailed for paddy in this period, and the corresponding low prices for jute.<sup>71</sup> In 1967 a severe famine struck India in which West Bengal was greatly affected. This, no doubt, would largely account for the high prices which prevailed during that year.

## VII. Occupational Structure.

To gain a clearer idea of the economic structure of the state, it is useful to devote some attention to the broad occupational groups. The 1961 Census divides the population into two broad categories, namely, workers and non-workers, workers being sub-divided into nine sub-categories.<sup>72</sup> In the rural sector, four

69. Amiya K. Gupta, 'Farm Sector's Performance in West Bengal', A.I.C.C. Economic Review, 16, Nos. 338-349 (June, 1964), p. 21.

70. *ibid.*, p. 17.

71. K. D. Mukherjee, 'Non-agricultural Factors Governing Agricultural Production', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 March, 1969.

72. Census of India (1961) Book Two, *op. cit.* cites the following nine categories : I. Cultivators; II. Agricultural Labourers; III. Workers in Mining, Quarrying, Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Plantations, Orchards and allied activities; IV. Workers at Household Industry; V. Workers in Manufacturing other than Household Industries; VI. Workers in Construction; VII. Workers in Trade and Commerce; VIII. Workers in Transport, Storage and Communications and IX. Workers in other Services. See p. 299.

groups have been enumerated, viz. (i) cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned and their dependents; (ii) cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependents; (iii) cultivating labourers and their dependents, and (iv) non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers and their dependents.<sup>73</sup> These headings are synonymous with owner-cultivators, tenant-cultivators, agricultural labourers and landlords.

Although figures are not available for the four groups separately, Appendix VII previously mentioned, gives the number of persons working as cultivators and agricultural labourers on a district basis. It should be mentioned, however, that these Census figures may not give an absolutely accurate picture of the number of persons listed in the two separate categories. As pointed out in another Census publication, there is a tendency towards 'category climbing', for example, if an agricultural labourer also owned and worked a plot of land, however small, he might list himself as an owner-cultivator even if his earnings were predominantly derived from working for others.<sup>74</sup> Referring to the 1951 Census data, the same study concluded that landlords are probably under-enumerated, possibly because of their reluctance to declare themselves as landlords (and hence non-cultivators) in the face of the then impending legislation on land reform.<sup>75</sup> In any case, as mentioned previously, cultivators are mainly concentrated in Midnapore, 24-Parganas and Purulia.

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73. *ibid.*, p. 380.

74. Schwartzberg in Census of India (1961), Monograph No. 4, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

75. *ibid.*, pp. 17 & 48. For additional information regarding the reliability or otherwise of Census figures for all four categories in the agricultural sector, see pp. 49-59. The land tenure system and land reform measures enacted in 1953 in West Bengal will be dealt with in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Turning now to the next most important occupational group, the industrial proletariat,<sup>76</sup> no attempt will be made to include all workers but only those on a major industry-wise basis. Firstly, if we take the manufacturing group, excluding those engaged in Household Industry, which, in any case, is relatively unimportant in West Bengal, we find that the former group has little significance outside the districts of Calcutta, Howrah, 24-Parganas, Hoogley and Burdwan.

Within these contiguous areas, however, they are of considerable significance, both in terms of the numbers employed, and in their impact upon the general economic structure and political life of the state.<sup>77</sup> Appendix VIII lists the classifications of workers in manufacturing by major groups of industry for the years 1951 and 1961. Of these groups, those employed as workers in the jute industry are the most numerous (225,031),<sup>78</sup> followed by workers employed in the Basic Metal Industry. The latter group, together with those engaged in machinery and electrical equipment, number 247,308 people. These two categories cover the engineering industry which was subject to a large-scale economic recession in 1966-68, retrenchment and industrial unrest.

Workers in large-scale industrial enterprises are, on average, mainly concentrated in the jute, cotton, petroleum and coal products, and beverage industries. The average scale of

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76. The term 'industrial proletariat' is, to some extent, a misnomer because we are dealing with figures on an industry-wise basis. The Census data does not sub-divide each industry into occupational groupings. Therefore, the term 'proletariat' in the immediate context, includes clerical, administrative and managerial staff, and thus the number of workers on the productive or assembly lines, would be over-enumerated.

77. The political significance of the working class will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Four.

78. This figure, and all those in Appendix VIII include employers as well as employees. For the ratio of both groups, see Appendix IX.

engineering, which could be classified as medium, follows next. It ranges from the large-scale engineering concerns in places like Durgapur, to the numerous small 'sweat-boxes' often consisting of a single room, which abound in Howrah. As far as industrial conflict is concerned, it is perhaps not surprising to find that it occurs mainly in the large-scale industries, due to the relatively high degree of unionization of the workers.

To those engaged in manufacturing, one could add workers employed in transport and communications, electricity, gas, water supply and sanitation services, public services and mining. According to the 1961 Census, the railways employed 144,795 persons, and the Postal, Telegraphic, Wireless and Signal Communications 29,931. Electricity, gas, water supply and sanitary services together employed 72,196; public services 302,564 and the mining industry 80,738.<sup>79</sup> These groups of workers, along with those of the manufacturing industries, are generally organized into various unions.

The workers in industry should be differentiated from the owners of industry. Here, the figures contained in Appendix VIII should be read in conjunction with those listed in Appendix IX, which gives the employer/employee ratios. Most of the workers employed in the transport and service industries listed above are not subject to an employer/employee ratio as these categories are mostly government-owned. The same does not, of course, apply to transport equipment mentioned in Appendix IX. Other broad occupational groups include those engaged in trade and commerce; service occupations such as medical, legal and other professional

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79. Census of India (1961), Book Two, op. cit., pp. 413 & 429.

groups, and finally, the managerial section of the population. Although some of these groups are important as far as this study is concerned, for instance, teachers who conduct militant strikes, more detailed information on the broad categories is contained in Appendix X.

#### VIII. Political Background : The Politics of Frustration.

An understanding of the politics of West Bengal today would be inadequate without some reference to the historical political tradition which has prevailed and shaped the political culture during this century.

Until the advent of Gandhi, Bengali Hindus played a prominent part in the nationalist movement which found institutional expression in the formation of the Indian National Congress Party in 1885. Gradually, however, nationalist sentiment in Bengal became disenchanted with the moderate policies espoused by the leadership of the Congress, who advocated piecemeal constitutional reform. Added to this was dissatisfaction with the party because, being an all-India organization, it did not focus much attention upon local problems.<sup>80</sup>

The Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon gave a spurt to the extremist movement, whose participants in the state had been nurtured upon a fervent nationalism tinged with a renascent Hinduism embodied in the works of Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and others.<sup>81</sup> Most of the Bengalis who were drawn into the nationalist and terrorist

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80. N.S. Bose, The Indian Awakening and Bengal (Calcutta, 1969), p. 241.

81. For further details relating to the influence of these people, see N.S. Bose, *ibid.*, pp. 243-247 and W.T. De Bary (Ed.), Sources of Indian Tradition (New York, 1964), pp. 705-738.



folds were bhadralok Hindus. The large Muslim community in undivided Bengal, whose socio-economic position had steadily deteriorated since the Indian Mutiny in 1857, entertained little sympathy for the renaissance, reformation and political awakening of Bengal, and therefore avoided involvement in the nationalist movement at this stage.

Extremism fostered the growth of terrorist organizations<sup>82</sup> the most notable being the Jugantar and Anushilan Samiti, which were founded in Bengal. Alongside terrorist acts, the Bengali Hindus initiated the Swadeshi movement involving the wholesale boycott of British goods. Agitation against Partition bore fruit in 1911 when the division of the state was rescinded. Nevertheless, the activities of the extremists and terrorists continued, although in 1916 rapprochement was reached between them and the Moderates. Finally, the death of Tilak in 1920, who although a Maharashtrian, had exercised considerable influence upon the Bengali extremists, and the accession of Gandhi to the leadership of the nationalist movement in the same year, marked the end of an era from which time the influence of the Bengali terrorists in the nationalist struggle declined.

This did not, however, eliminate the Bengali extremists, not all of whom were terrorists, from the nationalist movement. Indeed, the period from 1920 onwards marked what could be called 'the institutionalization of opposition politics' in Bengal, particularly among the urban and middle classes, which has continued to this day. Such opposition was oriented in the period 1920 to 1947 against Gandhi's leadership, methods and ideology. Revolutionary

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82. For an interesting account of the terrorist movement, see Gopal Halder, 'Revolutionary Terrorism' in Atulchandra Gupta (Ed.), Studies in the Bengal Renaissance (Jadavpur, 1958), pp. 224-257.

extremism was naturally antipathetic to the non-violence espoused by Gandhi. Moreover, with the measures enacted by the British Government to combat revolutionary activity, particularly in Bengal in the form of the Rowlatt Act of 1919, caused Bengalis to feel that Gandhi's methods of non-violence and non-cooperation were 'too negative, or too much charged with moralistic considerations.'<sup>83</sup>

In addition, there was disdain for Gandhi's traditional outlook and over-riding concern for the rural areas of India. His advocacy of symbols for the rural masses such as self-sufficiency for the villages, together with the charka (spinning-wheel), removal of untouchability and so on, had little attraction for the urban-educated elite in Bengal who were more interested in promoting an extension of educational opportunities and more government jobs for themselves.

Initially, however, most of the extremists and revolutionaries joined the Congress, not to defer to its leadership, but to operate a parallel nationalist movement from within the party. After the decline of the terrorist movement from the early 1920's, Marxism began to attract many of the alienated intellectuals of Bengal. Many of them subsequently left the Congress Party to join various Marxist and Communist parties which were formed during the 1920's and 1930's, about which more will be said in Chapter Two.

This brief survey would be incomplete without mentioning

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83. N.S. Bose, op. cit., p. 85.

84. A comprehensive political history of West Bengal from the 1920's onwards needs to be written. Although there is quite a lot of material about notable personalities, for example, Subhas Chandra Bose, there is, as yet, no satisfactory integrated political history of the state.

the position of the Congress Party in West Bengal during the twenty years following Independence in 1947.<sup>85</sup> For twenty years the party held power in the state, which at least resulted in political stability. The position of political dominance which the party was able to build for itself was not, however, acquired without considerable effort on the part of certain Congressmen to overcome the serious handicaps confronting the party at the time of Independence. At that time, the Congress was disorganised and severely limited by its lack of governmental experience. Moreover, its ranks had been depleted by the withdrawal of Subhas Bose and the other leftist groups which he tried to unite. Furthermore, there was the initial debilitating effect upon the party caused by Partition : the reorganization of the state left the Congress under the control of a group of East Bengalis and a struggle developed between them and another group dominated by West Bengalis, who were known as the Hoogley group. Hence, as Weiner has noted, the Congress Party was partitioned as well.<sup>86</sup>

Weiner further informs us that there were three major groups within the state unit of the Congress Party : the Gandhians, the Jugantar group and the Hoogley group. None of them, however, controlled either the Legislative Assembly or the Pradesh Congress Committee, and hence the Congress High Command decided to lend its support to the Gandhian group under the leadership of Prafulla Ghosh. The support given by the All-India Congress

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85. There is generally a dearth of literature on political developments in West Bengal since Independence. Myron Weiner, from whose works most of the following information on the Congress Party is derived, has done much to help fill the gap.

86. Myron Weiner, Party Building in a New Nation : the Indian National Congress (Chicago, 1967), esp. pp. 325-327.

Committee (henceforth referred to as the A.I.C.C.) did not eliminate dissension for the Jugantar and Hoogley groups combined to overthrow the P.C. Ghosh Ministry. Their attempts were successful and P.C. Ghosh resigned to be replaced in 1948 by Dr. B.C. Roy, who was supported by the Jugantar group.

This struggle for supremacy continued until the Hoogley group, led by Atulya Ghosh, asserted and consolidated its position over the other two groups, thereby winning control of the Pradesh Congress Committee. Finally, in 1950 the Gandhian group left the Congress to form the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party (Peasants', People's and Workers's Party), whilst the Jugantar group was virtually thrust into the political wilderness.<sup>87</sup>

The struggle between these factions was a prelude to the dominance of B.C. Roy who, together with Atulya Ghosh in his capacity as President of the West Bengal Congress Committee, managed to keep the Congress organization together. For the period during which Roy held office as Chief Minister, namely, 1948 to 1962, his authority remained unchallenged. Politics for Roy was conceived 'not as a compromise of contending groups, but as an administrator's assessment of what must be done to achieve some objective.'<sup>88</sup>

Dr. B.C. Roy, during his tenure in office, was left relatively free of the day-to-day affairs of the Congress organization, and these were managed by Atulya Ghosh. Ghosh was left with a

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87. See Myron Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit. Weiner gives the reasons for the differences between these three groups which included the dissatisfaction of the Hoogley and Jugantar factions with the portfolios assigned to them by the Gandhians. A decisive factor, says Weiner, was that the Hoogley group drew its support from West Bengal, whereas the other two groups came mainly from areas which were incorporated into East Pakistan as a result of Partition. See pp. 89-90.

88. Myron Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, op. cit., pp. 252-53.

free hand to control the machine, and the methods which he used to maintain this control have earned him a great deal of dislike both within the Congress Party itself, as well as from the middle-classes of Bengal. Apart from this, however, it was due to the strategy pursued by Ghosh that the Congress was able to rebuild the party organization in West Bengal.

Prior to the ascendancy of Dr. B.C. Roy and Atulya Ghosh, the party was confined mainly to the urban areas. Ghosh, however, realised the supreme importance of the rural voters to the success of any party within the state, and accordingly devised ways and means to extend the Congress organization into the rural areas. This paid dividends, and the Congress progressively increased its share of the popular vote in the 1952, 1957 and 1962 General Elections. On the other hand, the position of the party in terms of seats deteriorated in Calcutta, where in 1957 opposition alliances diminished the number of seats for the Congress. Hence, the prospects for the Congress in Calcutta were tenuous, but counterbalanced by its hold over the countryside.

Ghosh's efforts were not confined to securing the allegiance of the rural voters. He formulated a plan to ensure control by the Congress over municipal government in Calcutta, which could serve a two-fold purpose, namely, to increase the support and influence of the Congress itself, whilst simultaneously excluding the leftist parties from these strategic positions. This was effected through two main devices : the suffrage provisions in The Calcutta Municipal Act of 1951, and the nominations for offices within the Calcutta Corporation to trusted party workers and supporters. In the Act, the suffrage was limited to rate-payers, comprising a mere 10 percent of the city's population, and an extension to full adult franchise was not effected until 1965. Through

the control of nominations to the Calcutta Corporation, the Congress was able to extend and facilitate its hold over municipal government and elections. This naturally placed an important means of patronage in its hands.

There was a further means by which Ghosh managed to control and maintain cohesion within the Congress Party, namely, his position on the Election Committee of the Pradesh Congress Committee (henceforth referred to as PCC). This committee had to sanction all nominations of candidates for the Legislative Assembly, Parliament and Municipal bodies, but this, in effect, meant the approval of Atulya Ghosh. In this way, Ghosh was successfully able to contain the disruptive effects of factionalism for a number of years. This endemic factionalism within the Congress would have undoubtedly manifested itself with greater virulence had Ghosh lacked control of the party machine.

Summarizing the political background to the period of United Front Government in 1967 and 1969-70, we have seen that there is a strong tradition of political extremism which permeates and influences the political culture of West Bengal. This extremism, which has hitherto taken a number of different forms, has often led to violence becoming an ingredient of political conflict. West Bengal's educated urban elite are significantly attracted to this extremist tradition, but in the present era they are supported by sizable sections of the industrial proletariat and rural groups.

The leftist parties are the main beneficiaries, whilst the Congress Party, never a very popular force within the state as far as the urban population is concerned, has only been able to build up its political position and support through the instrument of patronage in both the urban and rural areas. To assess the bases of support for the various parties will be one of the purposes

of the following chapter.

In general, it can be seen that West Bengal is characterized by a number of features which are, potentially or actually, conducive to political, economic and social tensions, many of which have the ingredients for virulent conflict. The population is very diverse, and the large number of refugees and migrants have given rise to social and economic strains. In addition, there are pockets of extreme poverty. Tensions have been exacerbated because economic growth has not been able to keep pace with population growth.

Moreover, there is a large number of agricultural labourers and rural poor which provide for a potentially revolutionary situation if dissatisfactions among these groups can be harnessed by any of the numerous political parties within the state. As far as the urban areas are concerned, the relatively high rate of industrialization has resulted in a militant labour force which is largely unionized. The urban middle-class intellectuals, particularly in Calcutta, are leaders and supporters of the many Marxist and leftist political parties in the state. This is reinforced by the tradition of extremism and violence which characterizes political activity in this region of India.

THE COALITION PARTNERS : THEIR AIMS,  
IDEOLOGIES, PROGRAMMES AND BASES  
OF SUPPORT.

I. The Party Spectrum.

There are a large number of parties in West Bengal. At least twenty-six organizations exist within the state which call themselves political parties,<sup>1</sup> but many of these groups are of little political consequence. In fact, it is even doubtful whether some of these parties can properly be called political parties, for some are more akin to pressure and/or factional groups.

This point merits some further brief conceptual elaboration. The proliferation of political parties in West Bengal stems largely from intra-party factionalism which has existed, and continues to exist within all major political parties in India. The reasons for factionalism are interesting, although unfortunately, not a great deal of research has been carried out in this respect. Paul Brass concludes that 'factions and factional conflict in India are part of the indigenous social and political order.'<sup>2</sup> In other words, factionalism is basically a political reflection of a segmented social system.

Brass's conclusion may be accepted as a general principle. As far as West Bengal is concerned, however, it is suggested that factions in this state are not based mainly upon traditional

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1. The list of parties supplied by the Government of West Bengal, Home Department, Constitution and Elections Branch, are as follows : Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Samyukta Socialist Party, Praja Socialist Party, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Socialist Unity Centre, Lok Sevak Sangh, Gorkha League, Workers' Party of India, Forward Bloc (Marxist), Swatantra Party, Jan Sangh, Progressive Muslim League, Republican Party of India, Indian National Democratic Front, Proutist Bloc (India), Lok Dal, Bangla Jatiya Dal, Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Revolutionary Communist Party of India, Paschim Bangla Krishak Samaj, Bharatiya Biplabi Communist Party and Minorities League.

2. Paul R. Brass, Factional Politics in an Indian State (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1965), p. 234.



segmented social groupings, such as caste, but that political segmentation, in itself, has acquired a cultural and social value, which predisposes towards the formation of a number of political factions. In other words, the political culture accepts and even encourages political fragmentation and segmentation. This view has relevance for a second one, namely, that the plurality of ideologically-oriented groups, be they parties or factions, is reinforced by the tradition of political extremism mentioned in Chapter One.

Aside from this, however, there are a number of conceptual difficulties associated with defining factions, and differentiating them from political parties. Space limitations, and the focus of this chapter, prevent a comprehensive discussion of this interesting point. Nevertheless, J.A.A. Stockwin points out that most definitions of factionalism stem from Harold Lasswell's four elements:<sup>3</sup>

1. That factions are parts of larger units;
2. That they work for the advancement of particular persons or policies;
3. That they arise in the course of struggle for power and thus differ from each other, not on fundamental principles, but on details of the application of these principles;
4. That factions are impermanent, whereas parties are 'rather permanent', and that therefore past a certain point a 'solidification' of factional divisions turns the factions concerned into parties in their own right. Lasswell's first point would cover many, but not all factions in West Bengal. Some groups split off from larger groups because of some factional dispute(s), and call themselves

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3. J.A.A. Stockwin, 'A Comparison of Political Factionalism in Japan and India', The Australian Journal of Politics and History, XVI, No. 3 (December, 1970), p. 362.

political parties, even though they possess little organizational coherence, and lack a clearly defined programme and doctrine to delineate them from the larger parent group. Lasswell's third point, moreover, is not entirely accepted.<sup>4</sup> Whilst some factions (for instance, the Ajoy Mukherjee group before it left the Congress Party to form the Bangla Congress) would fall into this category, others would not. The group which left the Communist Party of India to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist), is a case in point.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, this writer agrees with Stockwin that Rosenthal's division of factions into :

1. Factions based on a personal following;
2. Political machines for the collection and distribution of rewards;
3. 'Primordial' groups based on blood, caste, religion, language, etc.;
4. 'Ideational groups' sharing a common set of principles,<sup>6</sup> is a more meaningful analysis,<sup>7</sup> and relevant to the situation in West Bengal. Other aspects of factionalism will be mentioned later on.

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4. Stockwin is concerned also to question the fourth element.

5. Differences over ideology, strategy and tactics between the two groups were (and still are) too significant to justify a conclusion that fundamental principles were not involved. Moreover, at the purely conceptual level, there is an extreme difficulty in making a distinction between 'principles' and 'details'. One man's detail may well be another man's principle.

6. Stockwin, *op. cit.*, summarizing the typology contained in Donald B. Rosenthal, 'Factions and Alliances in Indian City Politics', Midwest Journal of Political Science, 10 (1966), p. 324.

7. Stockwin, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

On the other hand, some political parties are, in effect, more like pressure groups in that their prime raison d'etre is to exert pressure for certain policies. The Gorkha League and Progressive Muslim League are examples. Such parties alone can never hope to capture power : at best, they may aspire for an insignificant share.

To return to our original enquiry, however, the following parties joined forces to prevent the Congress Party from taking office after the 1967 election was held :

The Bangla Congress (BC)  
 The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM)  
 The Communist Party of India (CPI)  
 The Forward Bloc of India (FB)  
 The Forward Bloc (Marxist) (FB(M))  
 The Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI)  
 The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (RSP)  
 The Bolshevik Party of India (BP)  
 All-India Gorkha League (GL)  
 Praja Socialist Party (PSP)  
 The Workers' Party of India (WP)  
 The Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS)  
 The Socialist Unity Centre (SUC)  
 The Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP)

A number of these parties are confined almost exclusively to West Bengal, and are distinctively Bengali in origin and subsequent development. This applies particularly to the Bangla Congress, the Forward Bloc, the Forward Bloc (Marxist), the Bolshevik Party, the Gorkha League, the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, the Lok Sevak Sangh, the Socialist Unity Centre and the Workers' Party. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), on the other hand, does have some influence in other states, but, on the whole, its

support and appeal is, like that of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, confined mainly to West Bengal and Kerala. Although the Praja Socialist Party and Samyukta Socialist Party are national parties, their appeal has been very limited in West Bengal. The Communist Party of India is, of course, a national party, and its position in West Bengal has been greatly influenced by the split within the party in 1964.

Another observation to be made is that the majority of the coalition partners were either Communist, or, to use Weiner's label, 'Marxist-Leftist' parties. If Weiner's categorization is retained, then the Marxist-Leftist parties comprise the Forward Bloc, the Forward Bloc (Marxist), the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Bolshevik Party, the Workers' Party, and the Socialist Unity Centre. Weiner's reason for making the distinction between the Communist and Marxist-Leftist parties is that the latter are 'organizationally separate from the Communist and Socialist parties.'<sup>8</sup> However, in terms of ideology, the Marxist-Leftist parties claim to be Communist,<sup>9</sup> as we shall see when analyzing the ideological attitudes of the parties.

The Communist Party of India (henceforth referred to as the CPI) has a long history, but one which need not detain us here.<sup>10</sup> Originally, the party operated through a number of groups within the Indian National Congress during the 1920's, which were

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8. Myron Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit., p. 117.

9. In interviews which I had with various leaders of the parties, I was told in each case that the Marxist-Leftist parties considered themselves to be Communist parties.

10. A detailed history of the CPI is contained in Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, Communism in India (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1960). See also Mohan Ram, Indian Communism (New Delhi, 1969).

largely under the influence of M.N. Roy. In 1925 the party was formally launched, and its first conference took place. At different periods of its development, but particularly after the decline in Roy's influence around the mid-1920's, the party was substantially influenced by its close relationship with, and direction by, the British Communist Party and the Comintern. However, the party has always been ridden by factionalism.<sup>11</sup> In 1964 the split within the party was precipitated by the Sino-Indian border disputes of 1962,<sup>12</sup> although the fundamental seeds of the schism predated both the Sino-Indian border dispute, and the Sino-Soviet conflict. The underlying causes of the split<sup>13</sup> can be traced to the inability of the CPI, throughout its history, to formulate a clearly integrated national policy and strategy suited to Indian conditions. Long before the actual split occurred, there were divisions within the party between what Mohan Ram has referred to as 'the right reformist line of P.C. Joshi', the 'left adventurist line of B.T. Ranadive', .....

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11. Unfortunately, Marcus Franda's monograph Radical Politics in West Bengal (Massachusetts, 1971) did not become available to me until after this thesis was written. Franda deals extensively with factionalism within the Communist movement of West Bengal, particularly as it affects the CPI and CPM. His study is primarily concerned with the growth of Communism in the state, and consequently, with its history and divisions. It is not possible, at this stage, to incorporate Franda's information and insights into the main text of this thesis. References, however, will subsequently be made, where possible in footnotes, to additional information which he has supplied, or to points on which his interpretation differs from mine.

12. See John B. Wood, 'Observations on the Indian Communist Party Split', Pacific Affairs, XXXVIII, No. 1 (1965), pp. 47-63.

13. Franda gives a very comprehensive and useful account of the causes and events relevant to the split, particularly in relation to the state branch of the CPI in West Bengal. In addition, he deals extensively with the CPM, and its contemporary factional alignments. See Radical Politics in West Bengal, Ch. 4.

'the Maoist line of C. Rajeswara Rao', and 'the "centrist" line of peaceful constitutionalism of Ajoy Ghosh'.<sup>14</sup> Differences in ideology, strategy and tactics existed between the four strands of opinion as epitomised by these Communist leaders. Such differences related to the characterization of the state, and the consequent stage of revolution in India, the nature of class strategy to be pursued in pursuit of the revolution, and so on. In the event, as John B. Wood observes, the schism represented a division between those who wanted to build a Marxist party with a militant programme anchored upon a revolutionary base, and those who opted for the introduction of socialism through parliamentary democracy.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the differences within the party at the time of the split related to such questions as 'the nature of India's independence, the class character of the Congress government; the party's attitude to economic development and planning under the government; and, lastly, since the 1951 programme had set the task of building a national democratic front including the national bourgeoisie, the party's attitude to the Congress and other parties and its tactics vis-a-vis the government.'<sup>16</sup> These points will be spelt out in greater detail when analyzing the ideological differences between the Communist parties. Although the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth referred to as CPM) came into existence as a result of the 1964 split, this did not put an end to factional disputes within the party. There were people within the CPM who thought the newly-founded party was not revolutionary enough, and the party divided in 1968, about which more will be said in Chapter Five.

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14. Ram, op. cit., p. 2.

15. Wood, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

16. Ram, op. cit., p. 59.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party (henceforth referred to as the RSP) was founded in 1938 at Ramgarh. Initially, the party had operated as an organised group within the Congress Socialist Party, but later on differences arose between the RSP and the pro-Gandhian leadership of the Congress. The party gave its support to Subhas Chandra Bose in his opposition to the Pant Resolution which stipulated that the President of the Congress should appoint his Working Committee in consultation with Gandhi. Apart from this, however, the essential element of the conflict over issues between Bose and the pro-Gandhian groups was whether the nationalist movement should launch a mass struggle against the British in anticipation of the war, or whether it should be postponed because of the threat of war.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, differences also occurred between the RSP and the Congress Socialist Party, which Professor Sourindra Nath Bhattacharyya (who, as at 1970 was a member of the West Bengal State Committee of the RSP) attributes to ideological and organizational differences which became particularly acute in 1940. According to him, these disagreements revolved fundamentally around Comintern policy and the subordination of national communist movements to that policy. In his words :

'The RSP recognised the task of strengthening the revolutionary movement of one's own country and refused to be subservient to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy which did not always have socialist revolution as its guiding factor because of actual international political developments.' 18

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17. Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit., p. 121.

18. Interview with Sourindra Nath Bhattacharyya, Calcutta, 27 May, 1970.

The Revolutionary Communist Party of India (henceforth referred to as the RCPI) was founded by Saumyendra Nath Tagore in 1934, after he had broken with the CPI. Advancing some tactical reasons for the split, the General-Secretary of the party, Sudhin Kumar, said :

'Originally we belonged to the Communist Party of India from which we seceded owing to the general, ultra-left and sectarian policies of the then CPI leadership. The actual split came over the victory of fascism in Germany. We thought the characterization of Social Democrats as 'Social Fascists' wrong, and the sectarian attitude towards the biggest organized working-class organization in Germany caused the most serious split among the only force which could stop Hitler - the German working class.' 19

The Bolshevik Party of India (henceforth referred to as the BPI) originated from the Bengal Labour Party founded by N. Dutt Mazumdar in 1933. In 1936 the Labour Party and Communist Party combined, but differences developed between them after the outbreak of war, when the Labour Party, which had by then established a group called the Bolshevik Party, declared that the war was an imperialist one, and that support should be given to the Quit India campaign. The Labour Party was banned during the war and for a few years it and its leader went underground, but in 1946 Mazumdar joined the Congress which led to the demise of the Labour Party.<sup>20</sup> The Bolshevik Party, however, continued, and its present General-Secretary, Mr. Nepali Bhattacharjee, asserts that the party is 'absolutely a Marxist party, whose main faith is in the proletariat to lead the revolution.'<sup>21</sup>

The Workers' Party of India (henceforth referred to as

19. Interview with Sudhin Kumar, Calcutta, 8 May, 1970.

20. Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

21. Interview with Nepali Bhattacharjee, Calcutta, 4 April, 1970.



the WP) was founded in 1960, although it had its origins in a political organization called the Democratic Vanguard, which was established in 1943. The Democratic Vanguard, like other Marxist groups, castigated the Communists for not wholeheartedly engaging in 'anti-fascist' movements during the second World War. Characterizing itself as a Marxist-Leninist party, the WP declares that socialist revolution through the development of revolutionary mass struggles led by the working class in alliance with the poor peasantry is the objective of the liberation struggle in India today.<sup>22</sup>

The Forward Bloc (henceforth referred to as the FB), founded by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1939 to unite all the leftist groups in the Congress was, until recently, the largest of the leftist parties excluding the CPI and CPM. Bose and Gandhi were particularly antagonistic opponents,<sup>23</sup> and after Gandhi forced Bose to resign from the Congress Party in 1939 over the Pant Resolution, Bose became 'convinced that the leadership of the Congress wouldn't conduct an effective struggle against the British and so he proposed to intensify the struggle for Independence, saying that when this was achieved, the task of the Forward Bloc would be to prepare the country for socialist revolution.'<sup>24</sup>

Bose was not an ideologist, but wanted to formulate a synthesis between socialism and fascism. According to one of his contemporaries :

'Netaji [Bose] discarded Marxian philosophy because firstly, its concept of materialism is a negation of the eternal urge of spiritual quest; secondly, its monistic outlook denies relativity of human and social values; and thirdly, it is against the ideas of evolution which upholds the theory of unending human progress.'<sup>25</sup>

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22. 'India's Path - Socialist Revolution', Manifesto of the Workers' Party of India adopted by the Second All-India Conference of the Party held in Calcutta on 23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th January, 1965, pp. 108 & 112.

23. These conflicts have been dealt with in Michael Brecher, Nehru : a Political Biography (London, 1959) .

24. Interview with Nirmal Bose, Calcutta, May, 1970.

25. Samar Guha, MP., 'Quintessence of Netaji's Philosophy', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 23 January, 1970.

During the 1940's the party split into two : the non-Marxist Subhaist Forward Bloc and the Marxist Forward Bloc. On the trade union front, the former entered the Socialist-dominated Hind Mazdoor Sabha, while the latter remained in the All-India Trade Union Congress, which was dominated by the Communists. Later on, the Subhaists merged with the Praja Socialist Party and the Marxist Forward Bloc split again in 1954.<sup>26</sup> At present, there are two parties known as the Forward Bloc and the Forward Bloc (Marxist) (henceforth referred to as the FB(M)). The former claims to be Marxist, and in the words of Nirmal Bose, the party's General Secretary in 1970 :

'In 1952 the Forward Bloc declared itself a Marxist party, and since then it has maintained that character. The Forward Bloc is a revolutionary party with a nationalist outlook, and it accepts socialism as its goal. It has accepted Marxism because it doesn't believe that socialism can be achieved through parliamentary means. Socialism can be achieved only through a revolution which can be possible by intensifying the class struggle, and only Marxism can give this programme of class struggle and revolution for socialism.<sup>27</sup> The Forward Bloc (Marxist) is a splinter group. We expelled some leaders of the FB(M) on disciplinary grounds and they formed the Forward Bloc (Marxist...'<sup>27</sup>

Of the Marxist-Leftist parties, we are left with the Socialist Unity Centre (henceforth referred to as the SUC), a group which split from the RSP prior to the 1952 elections. Little is known, however, about the origins of this party<sup>28</sup> except that it was founded before the 1952 elections by a factional group which .....

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26. Weiner, op. cit., p. 127.

27. Interview with Nirmal Bose, op. cit.

28. Unfortunately, I was not granted an interview with any spokesman for this party during my field work in Calcutta. Subsequently, however, through the help of an academic friend in Calcutta, I did enter into some correspondence with one of the leaders of the SUC, Subodh Banerjee, who held the Labour Portfolio in the first United Front Government. This will be referred to in Chapter Four.

split from the RSP.<sup>29</sup>

Both the Gorkha League and the Lok Sevak Sangh are sub-regional rather than ideological parties. The Gorkha League (henceforth referred to as the GL) was formed in 1943 for the purpose of demanding autonomy of Darjeeling in post-Independence India. Since then, the party has argued that the interests of the population of Darjeeling, who are, for the most part, Nepalese, and other peoples of the surrounding Himalayan hills, can best be served by a separate hill people's party.<sup>30</sup> The party's strategy so far, has been to cooperate with whichever party is in power. In this respect, the party is more akin to a pressure group than to a party, although they usually manage to have at least one candidate returned to the State Assembly.

The Lok Sevak Sangh (henceforth referred to as the LSS) was formed in 1949 by a group of Gandhians who left the Congress Party in 1949, with the complaint that the Congress had violated Gandhian principles. The party draws most of its support from the aggrieved peoples of Purulia - a district which was formerly part of the state of Bihar before being incorporated into West Bengal in 1956.<sup>31</sup>

The Praja Socialist Party was founded in 1952 being a merger of several pre-existing parties, of which the best-known was the Congress Socialist Party. The Socialists joined forces with the pro-Gandhian Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (Peasants',

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29. Marcus F. Franda, 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal: the Growth of the United Front', Pacific Affairs, 42, No. 3 (Fall, 1969), pp. 281-286.

30. Marcus F. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, VIII, No. 3 (November, 1970), p. 191.

31. *ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

Workers' and People's Party) and the Subhaist Forward Bloc of West Bengal. The Samyukta Socialist Party (henceforth referred to as the SSP) is the result of a split within the PSP, and was formed in 1964 by a number of leaders of that party. As with so many parties in India, the formation of the SSP was symptomatic of factionalism which could not be contained.

The emergence of the Bangla Congress (henceforth referred to as the BC) was also due to factionalism - this time within the Congress Party. The formation of the party was preceded by the defection in January, 1966 of Ajoy Mukherjee, a long-standing pro-Gandhian member of the Congress Party. According to some press reports, Mukherjee had been pressing for reform within the Congress for some time, and was opposed to alleged 'bossism' and corruption within the party.<sup>32</sup> But, former Chief Minister, P.C. Sen, argued that Mukherjee's defection was caused by personal reasons which stemmed initially from disappointment at having to relinquish a portfolio under the Kamaraj Plan, followed by attempts on the part of a section of the Congress to curtail the powers of the Chairman of the District Zilla Parishad Board - a post which Mukherjee held. Ajoy Mukherjee subsequently dismissed the General-Secretary of the Pradesh Congress Committee 'illegally' - an action which brought about the dismissal of Mukherjee by an overwhelming majority within the party.<sup>33</sup>

Franda also draws attention to these and other reasons for the formation of the BC. He argues that the defection of a number of Congress dissidents in 1966 to form the BC was related,

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32. Link, 11 December, 1966, pp. 13-14.

33. Interview with P.C. Sen, Calcutta, May, 1970.

in part, to a 'sub-regional revolt on the part of the major rice-producing areas of the State', which may have been caused primarily by opposition to the then Chief Minister, P. C. Sen's policy of cordoning, procurement and rationing during the food scarcity of 1964-66.<sup>34</sup> As most of the initial support for Ajoy Mukherjee and the BC came from the rice-producing district of Midnapore, it would appear that Franda is correct.

## II. Bases of Support.

Turning now to the bases of support for the parties, it must be noted that very little research has been done on this, apart from that by Franda.<sup>35</sup> One general observation can be made, however, namely, that the larger parties do not represent any particular social classes.<sup>36</sup> Both the Congress and the CPM, for example, draw their support from the middle, working and peasant classes. In conditions of social pluralism, the social bases of parties are subject to fluctuations. Furthermore, as far as the political leadership is concerned, Weiner has pointed to the diversity of social backgrounds of these leaders.<sup>37</sup>

Franda, however, has pointed out that support for the

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34. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 193. Franda gives a fuller account of the factional struggle between Atulya Ghosh and Ajoy Mukherjee in addition to other details relating to Mukherjee's defection and formation of the BC, in Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., pp. 142-144. In this work, Franda argues more positively that 'the failure of the [Congress] food policy also produced the unexpected boon for the Leftists of a split in the Congress itself.' See p. 147.

35. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit.

36. Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, op. cit., pp. 176-196.

37. Weiner, *ibid.*, pp. 179ff. Franda, in Radical Politics in West Bengal, argues that the leadership and many followers of the Bengali Communist and Marxist Left parties have been drawn from the elite group known as the bhadralok. Weiner's study is quantitative, and looks at differences in occupation, education, caste, and so on, whereas Franda focusses upon a broader social and cultural category. See pp. 7 & 13-14 in particular.

political parties in West Bengal is on a sub-regional basis : in many cases confined to pockets of support within a particular district or districts. He describes it as 'a two-or-three party system in each of West Bengal's districts, with the opposition to Congress changing from district to district.'<sup>38</sup> Apart from the Congress Party which contests a significant number of seats in all the sixteen districts of the state, the CPM from 1967 has been the principal contender to the Congress. The organizational base of the CPM until 1971, was concentrated in the districts which comprise the industrial belt of West Bengal, namely, Calcutta, Howrah and the 24-Parganas. The CPM has thus drawn its support mainly from middle-class intellectuals and the industrial proletariat, together with some landless labourers, while the CPI has only a small organizational base among scattered urban supporters, and in the rural district of Midnapore. As far as party activists are concerned, Weiner has concluded that the Marxist and Communist parties draw their activists from the cities, where social stratification is most rapidly occurring.<sup>39</sup>

The RSP has hitherto drawn its strength from the districts of Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri and West Dinajpur, while the Forward Bloc has relied for its support on the districts of Birbhum, Cooch-Bihar and Hoogly.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned previously, the GL is confined to the district of Darjeeling, and the LSS to Purulia. What little support exists for the RCPI and WP comes almost exclusively from either Calcutta or Howrah, while the

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38. Franda, 'Intra-Regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 188.

39. Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, op. cit., p. 197.

40. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 190.

SUC, like the CPM, obtains its support from the Calcutta industrial belt. In both the 1967 and 1969 elections to the West Bengal State Assembly, the strength of the BC, as noted earlier, has come predominantly from the rural areas of Midnapore. In the case of the SSP, support is drawn from both rural and industrial areas.

An examination of political support for the parties on the part of certain minority groups within the state is, in any detailed sense, beyond the scope of this thesis. Weiner, however, points out that on the whole, Muslim migrants from the neighbouring states, together with Scheduled Castes and Tribes, have tended to support the Congress to a greater extent than Bengali caste Hindus.<sup>41</sup> Weiner's conclusions are based upon a study of the 1952 and 1957 elections, and may not be so applicable to the period covered by this study. This point, however, will be taken up again in the next chapter.

### III. Ideologies.

Finally, it is necessary to analyze the ideologies of the parties.<sup>42</sup> La Polambara and Weiner have made an attempt to classify parties in terms of the following typology : 1) hegemonic-ideological; 2) hegemonic-pragmatic; 3) turnover-ideological; and 4) turnover-pragmatic.<sup>43</sup> There are, however, certain difficulties in the way of adopting this scheme. For instance, although it is a reasonable proposition to categorize Communist and Marxist-Leftist parties as 'ideological', this tends to obscure the fact that even ideological parties may have to balance their ideologies against

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41. Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, op. cit., p. 242.

42. Attention to the parties' programmes is also necessary, but this will be dealt with separately in Chapter Three.  
(Eds.),

43. Joseph La Polambara and Myron Weiner, Political Parties and Political Development (Princeton, 1966), p. 36.

the more pragmatic realities of electoral competition and conflict.

Thus, it is felt that a more useful approach for our purposes consists of adopting Franda's five-fold classification purely on the basis of the parties' programmes. He divides the parties in West Bengal into the following groups : 1) Aggregative parties which claim commitment to Democratic-Socialism; 2) Communist; 3) Marxist-Leninist; 4) 'Rightist' parties committed to the preservation of traditional values and both anti-Communist and anti-Marxist, and 5) local and communal parties.<sup>44</sup> A considerable amount of overlap can, of course, exist between these categories : local parties like the G L may also be aggregative of other interests if the need arises.

Moreover, there is a further problem relating to the FB. Although it calls itself Marxist, and Franda has included it as a Marxist-Leftist party, this label obscures the fact that it is very much a nationalist party. J. Mohan has argued that the 'Left' consists of two strands : the left nationalists, on the one hand, and the Marxian left, on the other. Into the former category he places the FB, SSP and PSP.<sup>45</sup> But, while Mohan's point regarding the FB is correct, Franda's classification is, in general, preferred, because parties such as the PSP and SSP are more 'aggregative' than they are 'left'. Leaving aside these caveats, Franda's division is listed below :

Aggregative parties : BC, PSP, SSP.  
Communist : CPM, CPI .  
Marxist-Leftist : FB, FB(M), SUC, RSP, RCPI, WPI, BPI.  
Local-Communal : GL, LSS.

44. Franda, 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal', op. cit., pp. 281-286.

45. J. Mohan, 'Missed Opportunities', Seminar, No. 127 (March, 1970), p. 13.



One question of obvious interest is : what are the ideological differences which separate the parties in each of the above categories? The answer is not always clear. For one thing, the profession of ideological differences may, in the case of some individuals, be a mere coating for patron-client relationships. For another, there are not always marked differences between some of the parties. For instance, all the parties of the 'aggregative' type espouse democratic-socialism, which, although vague, does not differ significantly on fundamental points. Leading personalities within the BC have admitted on several occasions that there are no ideological differences between that party and the Congress.<sup>46</sup> Ajoy Mukherjee, himself, stated in reply to a question about the differences between the BC and the Congress Party :

'As to our objectives, there is very little difference, that is, both parties believe in democracy and socialism. But, as to working out the line of objectives, there is a gulf of difference... This also is a reason why I came out of the Congress.' 47

The aims and ideals of the party as set out in Section 3a of their Constitution, read as follows :

'The aim of the Bangla Congress is to the upliftment of the people of West Bengal and consequently of India in the line of Gandhiji, and attempt to create a socialist form of state on the foundations of democracy by legal and peaceful means. In such a state, there will be equal opportunity for everybody to enhance their upliftment, and equal opportunity in political, economic, social and religious fields. And the aim of such state will be to establish world peace and universal brotherhood.' 48

As can readily be seen, this is no more than an affirmation of vague principles.

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46. See, for instance, 'No Ideological Conflict With Congress : Kabir', Statesman (New Delhi ed.), 15 September, 1966.

47. Interview with Ajoy Mukherjee, Calcutta, May, 1970.

48. Bangla Congress, Constitution, tr. from the Bengali edition, by Ajit Kumar Ray, Canberra.

As a generalization, there are few fundamental ideological differences which demarcate either the PSP or SSP from the Congress or BC. Of the two parties, however, the SSP has always been inclined to take a more militant and aggressive stand against the Congress than the PSP, and towards this end has been prepared to enter into electoral alliances with any party - right or left - if such alliance could help to defeat a Congress candidate. In addition, the SSP has been less openly anti-Communist than the PSP.<sup>49</sup> Both the SSP and PSP espouse the principles of democratic socialism. The relative blurring of ideological distinctions between these parties, however, is not to argue that they have no ideology, or that ideology is unimportant.

The situation becomes more complicated when dealing with the Communist and Marxist-Leftist parties.<sup>50</sup> For these parties, ideological differences are significant both in providing a frame of reference, and in determining or influencing the lines of action taken by party leaders and cadre. Nevertheless, compromises in ideology do take place when the parties deem this to be essential to their other interests. The most acute ideological polemics exist between the CPM and CPI, with the former arguing that the main danger to the communist movement in India emanates from the 'right-wing revisionist theories of the CPI'. In analyzing the distribution of state power, the CPM insists that the 'big bourgeoisie' is the leading force, and holds the monopoly of power, while collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development.<sup>51</sup> The party castigates the CPI for its

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49. Madhu Limaye, 'Irrelevance', Seminar, No. 127, op. cit. particularly pp. 19-28.

50. Much of the material relating to the ideological differences between the CPM, CPI and RSP is taken from the following article : Sally Ray, 'Doctrinal Differences Among Four Indian Communist Parties', Studies in Comparative Communism, V, Nos. 2 & 3 (Summer/Autumn, 1972).

51. CPM, Programme, adopted at the 7th Congress, Calcutta, October 31 to November 7, 1964, p. 25.

reluctance to state clearly which stratum or section of the bourgeoisie holds the commanding positions of state power, and, secondly, their failure to admit collaboration between a section of the bourgeoisie and imperialists.

Differences between the two parties also extend to the realm of strategy and tactics. The CPM bases its strategy upon the notion of a People's Democratic Revolution. This is predicated upon the formation of a united front of all those forces which are opposed to feudalism, imperialism and monopoly capitalism, although the 'core and basis of the people's democratic front is the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry',<sup>52</sup> while the national bourgeoisie are regarded as 'wavering' allies. Most importantly, however, the CPM insists that the hegemony of the People's Democratic Front shall be exercised by the proletariat. The immediate objective of the People's Democratic Front is the attainment of People's Democracy, which will replace the present bourgeois-landlord state.<sup>53</sup> This establishment of People's Democracy will be the interim period before the transformation to a socialist state. The party argues that although the objective conditions for socialist revolution are ripening, the subjective factors concerning the low level of the people's political consciousness precludes socialist revolution as the immediate task.

The CPI's conception of a National Democratic Front is one which involves an alliance between the working class, broad masses of the cultivating peasants, including rich peasants and the agricultural labourers, the rising class or urban and rural intelligentsia, and the national bourgeoisie.<sup>54</sup> In this front,  
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52. *ibid.*, p. 46.

53. *ibid.*, p. 37.

54. CPI, Programme, adopted by the Eighth Congress of the CPI, Karyanandnagar, Patna, 7-17th February, 1968, pp. 39-40.

leadership will not, therefore, rest exclusively with the proletariat, but will belong to 'firm anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, anti-monopoly forces.' In other words, there is no hegemony for the proletariat.

On tactics, the CPM argues that 'the task of tactical leadership is to master all forms of struggle and organisation of the proletariat, and to ensure that they are used properly to achieve, with the given relation of forces, the maximum results necessary to prepare for strategic success.'<sup>55</sup> Insisting upon their orthodox Marxist-Leninist stand, they argue that class struggle and class-consciousness are essential to the carrying out of the revolution. And, class consciousness, they say, can only be acquired through mass struggle in mass movements such as the trade unions and peasants' organizations.<sup>56</sup>

Hence the party adopts as immediate tasks the development of mass movements : 'Build up mass struggles... Build up mass organisations, the agricultural labour and kisan organisations in the rural areas; trade unions and middle class organisations in the urban areas.'<sup>57</sup> This tactical point has been spelt out because during 1967 and 1969-70 West Bengal witnessed the implementation of these tactics.

The other important tactic utilized by the CPM (as well as by the CPI and other Marxist-Leftist parties) is the utilization of bourgeois-democratic institutions for revolutionary struggle. For them, it is essential to combine both parliamentary and extra-

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55. B. T. Ranadive, 'Left Tactics Will Delink Party from Mass Struggle', People's Democracy (official organ of the CPM), 13 August, 1967.

56. See Tasks on the Trade Union Front, Resolution of the Central Committee, CPM, 1968 and Tasks on the Kisan Front, Resolution of the Central Committee, CPM, 1968.

57. Election Review and Party's Tasks, adopted by the Central Committee of the CPM at its session in Calcutta, April 10 to 16, 1967, p. 29.

parliamentary forms of struggle. Taking recourse to Lenin's Left-wing Communism : the Infantile Disorder, the CPM argues that it follows the dicta laid down in this pamphlet. The party justifies its participation by stating that, although the results which can be achieved through parliaments are minimal, and at best can only bring about a meagre amelioration of the people's condition, they are nevertheless valuable as instruments through which the party can approach the masses on a wider scale; advance the ideology of their party; advance the mass movements, and strengthen the organizational and political bases for the coming revolution.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, they argue that participation in bourgeois parliaments can expose the ruling classes and demonstrate the futility of the parliamentary regime for qualitatively improving the condition of the people, and in this respect, the consciousness of the people, they say, is thereby raised to a higher level. But, 'parliamentary activity', they add, 'must always be subordinated to the needs of developing the revolutionary struggle, the revolution.'<sup>59</sup> As a spokesman for the party said in an interview :

'We don't therefore consider being in government as being equal to being in power in this country. Being in power should be that we are in effective control at the Centre... By functioning in these governments, showing up their limitations, interference of the Centre with these governments, we teach the people the whole uselessness of the parliamentary system and the need to replace it by a people's democracy. So we compromise with our ideology because of our aim of educating the people for a change in the system. We do this, while at the same time using it as an instrument in the hands of the people.'<sup>60</sup>

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58. B. T. Ranadive, 'Ultras' Thesis : Inverted Advocacy of Congress Rule', People's Democracy, 16 July, 1967, pp. 5, 9 & 11.

59. *ibid.*, p. 9.

60. Interview with Ram Das, CPM, Calcutta, 14 May, 1970.

The CPI does not quarrel with this line of tactical reasoning,<sup>61</sup> but is more firmly wedded to the notion of attaining socialism through peaceful means via the parliamentary path than is the CPM. It does not deny that violence may be necessary,<sup>62</sup> but its general pronouncements do indicate that the party considers Indian revolution, in the context of Indian conditions, will be carried out peacefully. But, this does not mean that in contradistinction, the CPM rejects the notion of peaceful transition to socialism; on the contrary, it accepts that it can be peaceful, and the differences on this point between the CPI and CPM become merely matters of degree.

In some respects, the ideological stand of the RSP is more 'radical' than that of either the CPI or CPM. This applies particularly to their assessment of the present stage of revolution which they, unlike the other parties, describe as the Proletarian-Socialist phase. As to their analysis of the state, this party, in a similar vein to the CPI, defines India as a fully-fledged capitalist state, in which ruling power resides with the Indian capitalists and big bourgeoisie.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the CPM, they do not stress the anti-imperialist aspects of the struggle; for them the situation is fairly clear-cut in that the bourgeoisie as the ruling class, exercises the power of the state.<sup>64</sup> The party rejects 'the idea of class differentiation within the bourgeoisie, between the pro-imperialist and pro-feudalist monopolist bourgeoisie, on the one side, and the anti-imperialist, non-monopolist bourgeoisie, (the 'national' bourgeoisie or the 'progressive' democratic bourgeoisie)

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61. See Mohit Sen, 'The New Left and Communism - Who is a Revolutionary?', Mainstream, 19 April, 1969, pp. 25-31.

62. *ibid.*, p. 26.

63. Tridib Chaudhuri, Why RSP? Historic Need for a Party of Socialist Revolution in India Today (Calcutta, 1970), p. 35.

64. Tridib Chaudhuri, Syndicate Vs. Indicate : What Would the Leftists Do Now? (Delhi, RSP), p. 5.

on the other.<sup>65</sup> In this respect, the party differs from the CPI's analysis which differentiates the bourgeoisie into various progressive and reactionary sections, and more importantly, in the alleged failure of the CPI to define correctly the immediate historic or strategic objectives and political tasks of the revolution.

The RSP rejects equally the concepts of National Democratic Revolution and People's Democratic Revolution, both of which are aimed at fulfilling and completing the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The party argues that these two slogans are based upon the neo-revisionist ideology of Krushchev and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> In the party's view, 'the working class must forge alliances with the masses of the toiling peasantry in the country-side and with other sections of the toiling people like urban petty bourgeoisie, working intelligentsia, the middle and small peasantry, etc...'<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the party has said :

'The RSP is firmly of the opinion that with the capitalist class saddled in political power in India, the historic objective for which the vanguard party of the working class has to work and towards which it has to coordinate all its activities, cannot be anything other than a Proletarian Socialist revolution of the Leninist conception. To envisage the coming social revolution in India in the political context of bourgeois power over the state as a 'Democratic' revolution in any sense (other than that of Proletarian Democracy...) only leaves the door open for all sorts of revisionist and reformist formulations and for class-collaborationist policies with regard to the bourgeoisie.'<sup>68</sup>

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65. *ibid.*, p. 11.

66. RSP, On the Road to Socialist Revolution, Special National Conference (Delhi, 1968), p. 8.

67. *ibid.*, p. 1.

68. RSP, Forward to Toilers' Democracy and Socialist Revolution : Report on the National Political Situation, Eighth all-India Conference, Patna, 25-31 December, 1964, pp. 5-6.

The lack of research material<sup>69</sup> precludes a full treatment of doctrinal and tactical differences between other Marxist-Leftist parties in West Bengal. Most of them are registered but unrecognized officially as political parties. For the most part, they each secure a very minor percentage of votes cast in general and state elections. Nevertheless, the parties which formed the United Front Governments are well-known to the local West Bengal political scene, and so a few brief comments are in order.

The position of the WP appears to be similar in a number of respects to that of the RSP. In their analysis of the bourgeoisie, they say :

'It is not likely, therefore, that in India the toiling people will have any section of the bourgeoisie as their ally in the struggle for liberation. Neither the relation of classes in the context of the existing social order, nor the political alignment of forces indicate such a possibility. Programmes of National Democracy or People's Democracy, or any other programme based on an alliance with the bourgeoisie or any section of the bourgeoisie, are not applicable in India. All that the toiling people can hope for in this respect is a paralyzation of isolated groups of the bourgeoisie by organization of over-whelming mass force in the struggle for liberation. The main struggle will have to be waged against the bourgeoisie.' 70

The Forward Bloc also accepts the concept of socialist revolution as the party's goal. In the words of Nirmal Bose, 'The Forward Bloc says that India has passed the colonial stage of struggle, and has already passed the democratic revolutionary

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69. Parties like the WP, BPI, SUC and so on, do not publish much material in English, and there has been little research carried out about their doctrinal differences. Lack of time on field work prevented an extensive investigation, on my part, into these differences, and interviews necessarily had to be focussed mainly upon more immediate issues.

70. WP, India's Path - Socialist Revolution, Manifesto of the WPI, 1965, p. 64. See also India at the Cross-roads, Political Resolution adopted by the Third All-India Conference of the WPI, Calcutta, January, 1970, pp. 4-5.



stage. The phase of socialist revolution has started because the industrialists have become the masters.'<sup>71</sup>

The BPI also 'believes in socialist revolution and that not a single Marxist Party can take the leadership to prepare for revolution or lead the revolution. So the Bolshevik Party demands that the Marxist forces be united to lead the revolution.'<sup>72</sup> It is difficult to be definitive about the remaining Marxist parties : the RCPI, SUC and FB(M).<sup>73</sup> Apart from the finer points relating to doctrinal controversies, all the Communist and Marxist-Leftist parties believe in building up mass struggle in various labour and peasant organizations. The extent to which they are successful naturally relates to their organizational ability and bases of support.

#### IV. Summary - Conflict Situation.

Drawing together a number of points made in the foregoing, one can see that a number of areas for conflict existed among and within the parties. Firstly, reference has been made throughout to factionalism within the political parties, and in West Bengal it is largely responsible for the multiplicity of parties. A few additional conceptual remarks are therefore in order. Needless to say, factionalism is a manifestation of conflict, and its effects are obviously mutiple. There have been many approaches taken to the whole phenomenon of factionalism. Paul Brass, in his major work on the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh,

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71. Interview with Nirmal Bose, op. cit.

72. Interview with Nepali Bhattacharjee, op. cit.

73. Despite attempts to make contact with the FB(M), this proved abortive. As mentioned previously, the SUC refused an interview. Sudhin Kumar of the RCPI, was too pressed for time to answer questions relating to ideology beyond saying that 'Objectively, India is overripe for a revolution. But the subjective factor is extremely uneven and vacillating.' Interview, op. cit.

has pointed out that factionalism can be both integrative and disintegrative.<sup>74</sup> One of the integrative functions which factions can perform is to widen the base of political participation and social mobilization. Factions can also act as vehicles for the expression of group demands, and to this extent can increase the sensitivity of parties to group grievances. On the whole, however, Brass considers that factionalism is mainly disintegrative.

Samuel P. Huntington, in dealing with the concept of institutionalization in relation to political development and political decay, considers that factionalism is symptomatic of an early stage of political development, and that 'The process of party development usually evolves through four phases : factionalism, polarization, expansion and institutionalization.'<sup>75</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether Huntington's four-stage unilinear process can be accepted : factionalism within political parties can be as endemic and characteristic in 'politically developed' societies, as in those which are alleged to be 'less developed'. It is not the existence of factionalism which matters, but rather the extent to which it becomes disruptive, disintegrative and dysfunctional to the achievement of goals set down by the political parties.

Nevertheless, the concept of political parties as highly disciplined and cohesive groups has not taken much root in West Bengal, and to this extent they are not highly institutionalized. Weiner, like Brass, sees factions within political parties as an outgrowth of the social system, and makes the pertinent observations that 'A person who joins a political party in India apparently feels

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74. Brass, op. cit., pp. 232-245.

75. Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, 1968), p. 412. See also pp. 413-415.

the need to be a member of a tightly knit face-to-face group', and, furthermore, that 'The faction assumes many of the functions of the traditional family, caste system, and village organization.'<sup>76</sup>

Whilst this is also true of West Bengal, there is, as mentioned previously, another reason which predisposes towards the formation of factions, namely, the political culture within the state. As far as the ideologically-oriented parties are concerned, there appears to be a propensity on the part of Bengalis to 'split ideological hairs'. This is not to argue, however, that factions within ideological parties are caused only, or even primarily by ideological differences; obviously, personalities, power struggles and the influence of social groups also play a very important part. Nevertheless, the fact that so many Marxist-Leftist parties exist within the state is partly to be explained by the general inclination of many Bengalis to form ideological groups, whether they be factions within parties, or parties espousing different ideologies.<sup>77</sup> This is reinforced by the factors which Weiner has mentioned.

In any case, factionalism within West Bengal has proved to be disruptive, disintegrative and dysfunctional to the achievement of many of the parties' goals. On this point, Franda has noted : 'Severe factionalism within Bengali parties has made it difficult

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76. Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit., pp. 237 & 238.

77. Franda has given a very interesting interpretation which can be related to this point. In arguing that the leadership of the Communist movement has its social origins in the Bengali bhadralok, he concludes that there is a 'remarkable similarity of bhadralok and Marxist conceptions and goals.' The social and economic dominance of the bhadralok has declined, he says, and so Communist attacks on various groups who have long threatened the dominance of Bengal's elite, together with images of rejuvenation, have an appeal for the bhadralok. See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., pp. 244-245. This interpretation does not necessarily conflict with mine. If Franda's analysis is correct, then the actions and integrated beliefs of the elite leadership of the Communist movement in West Bengal could well be termed an ideology. Nevertheless, in the absence of further research on my part, I would be cautious about over-emphasizing social and economic reasons for the appeal of Communism to the bhadralok, on the grounds that Communist ideology per se, for purely intellectual reasons, may well be as important.

for party leaders to pursue coalition strategies, whether such strategies have been conceived in terms of intra-or-inter-party coalitions.<sup>78</sup> Hence the multiplicity of parties and factions increases the difficulties, and inhibits the potential for bargaining and compromise. This is exacerbated by the fact that the parties have sub-regional bases of support which they wish to defend at the minimum, and extend at the maximum.

Furthermore, ideological conflict between the parties of the left is often more virulent and intense than ideological conflict between the left parties and those of the centre. This can be seen when looking at the ideological conflicts which exist between the CPM and CPI, and between the CPM and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (henceforth referred to as the CPI(M-L)). Although the latter party was not a member of the coalition, ideological conflict with tactical implications between it and the CPM did influence some of the actions of the CPM as a partner in the United Front Government.

Of more immediate significance than ideological conflicts are those arising specifically from the strategy and tactics pursued by the parties.<sup>79</sup> The building of mass organizations under the influence of the parties necessarily means a sharpening of political differences. This intensification of mass struggle, and consequent

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78. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 197.

79. J. V. Stalin has succinctly made clear the distinction drawn by Communists between strategy and tactics, as follows: 'Strategy deals with the main forces of the revolution and their reserves. It changes with the passing of the revolution from one stage to another, but remains basically unchanged throughout a given stage. [But] tactics deal with the forms of struggle and the forms of organisation of the proletariat, with their changes and combinations. During a given stage of the revolution tactics may change several times, depending on the flow or ebb, the rise or decline, of the revolution. Moreover tactical leadership is a part of strategic leadership, subordinated to the tasks and the requirements of the latter.' See J. Stalin, Works, 6 (Great Britain, 1954), pp. 159, 161 & 167.

political differences proved inimical to the viability and maintenance of coalition government, and, as Franda notes, to the formation of coalition strategy. To form a viable coalition strategy and government obviously presupposes a certain amount of subordination of political differences. The extent to which the parties were able to do this was extremely meagre.

The conclusion emerges, therefore, that the grounds for conflict of various kinds existed before the first United Front Government was formed. At the same time, it would be a mistake to conclude that there were no areas for compromise and bargaining. A certain amount existed during the 1967 Fourth General Election and Mid-Term Election campaigns, with which the following chapter deals.

Chapter ThreeTHE FOURTH GENERAL ELECTION AND MID-TERM  
ELECTION IN WEST BENGAL.I. Electoral Strategies and Issues.

In dealing with the Fourth General Election and Mid-term Election for the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, it is necessary to survey briefly the attempts made by the leftist parties to form electoral alliances in opposition to the Congress during previous elections to the State Assembly. These attempts were only partially successful. In the first General Election of 1952, there were two electoral alliances, the United Socialist Organization of India (USIO) and the People's United Socialist Front (PUSF). The former consisted of the CPI, Socialist Republicans and FB, while the latter contained the Socialist Party, RCPI and Subhaist FB. The USIO obtained 43 seats in the Legislative Assembly, and the PUSF only 2.<sup>1</sup> With this relative success, the second General Election in 1957 was preceded by the formation of three different United Fronts consisting of the United Left Election Committee, the United Left Front and the United Democratic People's Front.<sup>2</sup> The United Left Election Committee (ULEC) was the largest of the Fronts; was led by the CPI, and also contained the PSP, RSP, FB and FB(M). The ULEC was able to gain 80 of the 252 Assembly seats, compared to 2 seats for the United Left Front (ULF), which consisted of the SUC, BPI and Democratic Vanguard, while the United Democratic People's Front (UDPF) comprised the RCPI (then led by Saumyendra-

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1. Franda, 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal : the Growth of the United Front', op. cit., p. 288.

2. Subimal Pal, 'The Leftist Alliance in West Bengal', Indian Political Science Review, 1-2, Nos. 3 & 4 (1966-68), p. 176.

nath Tagore), Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and a few dissident Congressmen, failed to obtain one seat.<sup>3</sup>

In the third General Election of 1962, the parties drew closer together. The major electoral front, led by the CPI, took over the name of the United Left Front, and consisted of the CPI, FB, FB(M), RSP, BPI and RCPI, while the SUC and PSP declined to join the electoral alliance. The failure of the SUC to gain one seat in the 1962 election caused it to join in an electoral alliance with the United Left Front (ULF) in the fourth General Election.<sup>4</sup>

By 1967, West Bengal was divided into 280 constituencies, of which fifty-five were reserved for the Scheduled Castes, and sixteen for the Scheduled Tribes,<sup>5</sup> compared to a total of 252 seats in 1962. Of the 280 seats, 23 fell within the Calcutta area. The number of Lok Sabha constituencies, on the other hand, was fixed at 40, representing an increase of 4 over the 1952 figure.

The electoral strategy employed by the non-Congress political parties which were later to form the United Front Government, differed in the 1967 and 1969 Mid-term Elections. Attempts to form a single united opposition front to the Congress in 1967 were unsuccessful, and accordingly two fronts emerged : the ULF, led by the CPM and containing the RSP, SUC, SSP, WP, FB(M) and the RCPI, on the one hand, and the People's United Left Front (PULF), led by the CPI and BC, and containing the FB and BPI, on the other. The PSP, Swatantra Party and Jan Sangh refused to join either of the fronts, as did initially the LSS and GL.

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3. See Pal, *ibid.*, p. 176 and Franda, 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal : the Growth of the United Front', *op. cit.*, p. 288.

4. Franda, *ibid.*, pp. 288-289 and Pal, *ibid.*, p. 177.

5. There was a delimitation of constituencies between the years 1962-1967. See Government of India, Report on the Fourth General Election in India, 1, esp. Table 2, p. 5.

This inability of the parties to join a common united front in 1967 was due to a number of reasons, including factionalism.<sup>6</sup> Although various attempts were made by the parties to reach agreement on the distribution of seats, this proved to be abortive. A major problem was to determine the basis for the distribution of seats, and in this respect the CPM said it wanted the organizational strength of the parties to be the major criterion, whereas the CPI favoured the status quo through agreement to allow sitting members of all parties to contest the elections. Three factions were said to exist within the CPM.<sup>7</sup> One section, led by the party's organizational 'boss', Promode Das Gupta, formulated the party's strategy upon two major considerations, firstly, the notion that a polarization of political forces around the Congress and CPM was taking place within the state, and that the CPM should therefore endeavour to emerge from the election as the main rival to the Congress by eliminating as far as possible, the other parties.

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6. The information on factions, particularly within the CPI and CPM, elicited by Franda is especially valuable since a number of newer researchers who have carried out interviews and investigations in India on this topic are agreed that, whilst the parties are clearly faction-ridden and some evidence of this is clearly apparent, party leaders are not only reticent but positively evasive on the subject. My own experience ran consistently along these lines, and Franda's information is therefore most useful. See his Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., passim.

7. One report about the factions in the CPM referred to the 'ultra-left hard core' led by Hare Krishna Konar and Ganesh Ghosh of West Bengal (together with Jagjit Singh Lyallpuri of Punjab and Hanumantha Rao of Andhra Pradesh); the 'centrists' headed by General-Secretary P. Sundarayya, B. T. Ranadive, Promode Das Gupta, Ranamurti and Surjit; and the 'pragmatists' led by Jyoti Basu and E. M. S. Namboodiripad. The report stated, moreover, that the struggle between the three groups was most acute in West Bengal. See 'Ultras, Centrists, Pragmatists', Link, 25 September, 1966, p. 10ff, and 'Rift in Left Opposition', ibid., 20 November, 1966, p. 23. In discussing the subject as it relates both to the CPI and CPM, Franda delineates three factions thus: 'One of them is now centered in the organizational apparatus of the CPM, another forms the basis for the regular CPI, and the third is clustered around the electoral machinery of both parties.' See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 14.



Secondly, there was the belief on the part of the CPM that the Congress Party would, in any case, win the election of 1967. Consequently, a good deal of the electoral strategy which Promode Das Gupta tried to effect<sup>8</sup> was oriented towards the overall objective of eliminating, as far as possible, the party's main rival, the CPI.<sup>9</sup> This was indicated by the fact that the CPM did not claim the seats of sitting members of leftist parties other than those of the CPI.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the party's overall policy, there was a division within its ranks on the course devised by Das Gupta. Another group, which supported the 'centrist' leader, Jyoti Basu, was more willing to make adjustments with other parties in order to avoid, or minimize the number of triangular contests which have always favoured the Congress Party.<sup>11</sup> Several meetings were held by the parties in an attempt to reach an agreement on the lists prepared by the BC and CPM as leaders, respectively, of the PULF and ULF. At one meeting held on October 16,

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8. To a considerable extent, Das Gupta had the difficult task of trying to maintain a balance between the centrist and 'ultra-left' factions within the party. Although known as a leader of the left faction, which formed the core of the CPM in 1964, Das Gupta has been thrust more towards the centre since those of the left faction became increasingly critical of the party's participation in parliamentary politics. Franda illustrates this when discussing Das Gupta's position in relation to the Naxalbari revolt. See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., pp. 166-168.

9. This point is emphasized by Franda in *ibid.*, p. 146. He argues that the decision to 'negotiate only with selected Left parties...' which did not include the CPI and, in fact, called for its defeat, was opposed by the Centrist faction within the party. Franda claims that they agreed to implement the strategy, even though 'halfheartedly' in many cases. See also pp. 150-151.

10. Pal, op. cit., p. 181.

11. In the event, according to the Statesman, there were 107 triangular, 67 4-cornered and 43 5-cornered contests in the 1967 General Election. See '22 Women Among State Congress Candidates', the Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 2 February, 1967 and 'West Bengal Goes to the Polls Today', *ibid.*, 19 February, 1967.

agreement could only be reached regarding 180 of the 280 seats, and both the BC and CPM presented separate lists. Jyoti Basu and Ajoy Mukherjee were said to have been in substantial agreement that the general principle of permitting sitting members of the Opposition to seek re-election should be conceded by the CPM,<sup>12</sup> and that the latter party, which, in effect meant the Gupta faction, would not veto certain candidates supported by the CPI.<sup>13</sup> Official CPM policy, however, insisted on the right to veto both its own members, and those of the CPI.<sup>14</sup> The lack of agreement within the party was exacerbated by the existence of a left faction (which later formed the core of the CPI(M-L) opposed to a parliamentary strategy in favour of a more revolutionary one.

In any case, the attitude of the CPM evoked not only ill-feeling within the BC and CPI, but also on the part of some other parties.<sup>15</sup> It was argued by the parties opposing the CPM's choice of candidates that there was no justification for a unilateral approach towards the nomination and selection of candidates by the CPM, and that such action was disruptive and a barrier to the formation of left-wing unity in an effort to dislodge the Congress Party from power. This was followed by the practice

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12. Basu's conciliatory stance is consistent with his past attitudes, role and position within the party. As Franda notes, Basu was leader of the legislative wing and therefore had considerable knowledge of parliamentary politics, although this caused him to be distrusted by the left faction. See Franda, Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 107ff.

13. See 'Promode's Polarization', Link, 23 October, 1966, p. 15.

14. 'Bengal non-Congress Alliance in Difficulty', Indian Express, 25 October, 1966.

15. Some press reports claimed that other non-Congress parties, for instance, the SSP and RSP, were divided into factions on the question of opposing the CPI and BC. See 'Divided Opposition', Link, 5 February, 1967, p. 14.

of unilateral publication of lists of candidates by the parties, including the CPI, which had protested most strongly against this practice started by the CPM. The CPM, for its part, blamed the CPI for 'disrupting the unity of the opposition parties'.<sup>16</sup> Later, it was reported that the initial agreement on seats had been reduced from 180 to 119.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the list submitted by the PULF was based upon the major criterion of where the strength of the Congress lay, and hence was mainly concentrated in Congress bases, particularly in the rural areas of Midnapore, Bankura and the 24-Parganas.<sup>18</sup> When all attempts to form satisfactory compromises failed, the PULF was formed in November, 1966.

The strategy adopted by the non-Congress parties in the Mid-term election of 1969 differed significantly from that in 1967. Although the first United Front Government had held office for a mere ten months, it won a great deal of sympathy, especially in the urban areas, after it was dismissed by the then Governor, Dharma Vira, in a manner considered arbitrary and unconstitutional by many people. In any event, twelve of the fourteen parties which had formed the first United Front Government, decided to create a single United Front to confront the Congress Party in the Mid-term election. The most significant aspect of the formation of a single United Front was the reduction in the number of triangular contests, thereby creating a greater number of straight contests between the United Front and the Congress than hitherto.<sup>19</sup> Thus the process of polarization,

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16. 'Marxists Blame CPI(R) Again', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 April, 1967.

17. 'Three-Cornered Fight', Link, 1 January, 1967, pp. 16-17.

18. *ibid.*

19. Despite this, however, the number of candidates contesting the election in 1969 was slightly more than 1,000, representing an average of 3.5 candidates per constituency. See 'About 1,000 Stand for 280 Seats in W. B.', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 12 January, 1969.

though incomplete, was far greater than in the 1967 election.

Whilst this strategy did not significantly alter the proportion of the popular vote for the Congress Party (see Table II), its major effect was to give the United Front an overwhelming majority of seats in the new Assembly. An idea of the discrepancy between votes cast for a party and seats obtained by it, can be seen by looking at the figures for the Congress Party in the 1952, 1957 and 1962 elections when it secured 38.93 percent, 46.14 percent and 47.29 percent of the votes respectively, yet obtained 62.87 percent, 60.32 percent and 61.90 percent of the seats.<sup>20</sup> The full significance of this sort of disparity as far as the Mid-term election was concerned, will emerge more clearly when looking in greater detail at the election results for both 1967 and 1969.

Meanwhile, the most fundamental reason for the formation of a single United Front to contest the Mid-term election is fairly obvious. Firstly, the first United Front Government perceived that the Congress Party could be kept from office by the drawing together of opposition forces, and therefore placed the unity of opposing parties to the forefront, as far as electoral considerations were concerned. Secondly, having tasted power for nine months, the partners who had formed the first United Front Government quite naturally wished to regain that power.

Nevertheless, despite the greater degree of unity and compromise between the United Front partners over electoral

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20. G. Lakshmana Rao and R. Seethalakshmi, 'Mid-term Elections in West Bengal', Social Action, 18, No. 4 (July-August, 1968, p. 311.

strategy and campaigning,<sup>21</sup> this did not imply a fundamental narrowing of differences between the parties. In both 1967 and 1969, the parties forming the United Fronts and subsequent coalition governments, were heterogeneous in terms of interests, ideologies and bases of support. This fact was responsible for the in-built strains and divisions within the two Fronts, and ultimately led, as we shall later see, to inter-party dissension which simply could not be contained.

In any case, an essential part of any election campaign necessarily refers to issues.<sup>22</sup> The 1967 election took place in an atmosphere charged with extreme tension. There was an acute shortage of essential foodstuffs, particularly rice, fish and pulses, exacerbated by the high prices of general essential commodities. The food crisis, in a famine year, was thus the major issue. Economic distress was widespread, and erupted in a considerable number of demonstrations and agitations, not only on the part of workers in industrial undertakings, but also

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21. The greater degree of unity among the United Front parties can be detected by a reading of press reports devoted both to the overall campaign and particular constituency studies. See, for example, the following: 'Congress and Front Poised for Stiff Contests', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 24 January, 1969; 'Reports on Constituencies: Arambagh, Baranagar and Dhakuria', *ibid.*, 28 January, 1969; 'Reports on Constituencies: Barasat, Kamarhati and Phansidewa', *ibid.*, 30 January, 1969; 'Undercurrent of Fear Among Rivals in N. Bengal', *ibid.*, 30 January, 1969; 'All-out Congress Bid to Win Back Midnapore', *ibid.*, 19 January, 1969; 'Pressure Groups Hold Sway in Key District of 24-Parganas', *ibid.*, 21 January, 1969; 'Congress and L.S.S. Main Rivals in Purulia', *ibid.*, 31 January, 1969; 'Reports on Constituencies: Shyampur, Joynagar, Titagarh', *ibid.*, 29 January, 1969. See also 'Campaign Begins in West Bengal', Link, 4 August, 1968, pp. 12-13; 'Poll Quadrangle in Darjeeling: Plains, Hills, UF, Congress', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28 January, 1969; 'Poll Tempo Hits New High in Birbhum' and 'Congress, UF Locked in Grim Battle for Midnapore Seats', *ibid.*, 29 January, 1969.

22. On the campaign and issues, see Bangendu Ganguly, '1967 General Elections in West Bengal' in S. P. Varma and Iqbal Narain (editors), Fourth General Election in India, Vol. 1 (Bombay etc., 1968), pp. 390-411.

by sections of the middle classes in the lower income brackets, for instance, teachers, bank employees and so on. There were a series of strikes, bandhs and other forms of protest, which were encouraged and intensified by the September agitation, led by the opposition parties in an attempt to discredit the Congress Party. All opposition parties stressed corruption on the part of the Congress Government, and alleged that there was a general indifference to the deteriorating conditions of the people.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the Congress Party, for its part, emphasized the disunity of the left-wing parties. This was epitomised by the Congress Chief Minister, P. C. Sen, who argued that the Congress's pair of bullocks (the party's symbol) could draw a plough (the BC's symbol), but that it would be difficult to harness a plough to seven different animals (referring to the PULF).

Press opinion differed concerning dissatisfaction among important groups within West Bengal, particularly the Muslims and refugees, over various issues.<sup>24</sup> Some views stressed the antagonism felt by various Muslims towards the Congress which, it was claimed, had discriminated against them as an aftermath of the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1965. It was claimed further that Muslim support had been alienated after the withdrawal of Humayan Kabir - a prominent Muslim - from the Congress Party. Views on the actual effect of the Muslim vote, however, were not unanimous by any means, and some

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23. See 'West Bengal', Overseas Hindustan Times, 16 February, 1967.

24. For an analysis of Muslims in Murshidabad, see 'Murshidabad Presents a Riddle to Hopefuls', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 10 February, 1967 and 'Divided Opposition', Link, 5 February, 1967, p. 13.

people did not see them as a potentially significant force, except in a few constituencies.

As far as the refugees were concerned, it was alternatively argued that they had, by now, been well-integrated, or that they were the most important group which could sway the balance of power.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, it was also stated in one report that Atulya Ghosh had hinted that refugee loans would be written off, in a move to ensure the continued support of this group. Another point of view was the argument that, in any case, candidates from East Bengal would have more appeal for refugees, regardless of the party for which they stood.<sup>26</sup> However, to investigate and pursue these arguments further would necessarily involve a full study and analysis of the two groups - a task which is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis.

In comparison, the Mid-term election differed with respect to the issues raised. The main one on the part of the United Front parties, centered almost exclusively upon the alleged 'illegality' and unconstitutionality of the dismissal of its Government in November, 1967. Moreover, attention was focussed upon the alleged injustices which occurred during the brief period of minority government headed by Dr. P.C. Ghosh.<sup>27</sup> In addition, President's Rule which was imposed from February,

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25. Link, for example, took the view that the Muslims were disenchanted with the Congress, but that the refugees were not an important force politically. See 'Divided Opposition', Link, 5 February, 1967. On the other hand, Eric da Costa, Director of the Institute of Public Opinion, in a series of articles on the Fourth General Election, thought that the refugee vote would prove vital in Calcutta. See '1967 General Election - IV', Times of India, 2 November, 1966.

26. Overseas Hindustan Times, February 16, 1967.

27. 'Poll Issues Revolve Around 9 Months of U.F. Rule', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 20 January, 1969.

1968 until the Mid-term election, had caused dissatisfaction in itself, and what might be called 'the politics of President's Rule,' which, in effect, meant rule from the Centre by the Congress Party. This was a situation quite unacceptable not only to the political parties, but also on the part of a sizeable and influential section of the population. This discontent manifested itself in demonstrations and in comment from the press.

The Congress Party in the Mid-term election emphasized the divisions within the United Front partners, and claimed that no one had benefitted from the period of United Front rule.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the party was unable to offer either an attractive set of promises, nor a different image from that which it possessed in the 1967 election campaign. A major complicating factor for the party was caused by its own internal divisions and factions.<sup>29</sup>

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28. *ibid.* See also 'Congress Campaign Guidelines Mark End U.F. Failures', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17 January, 1969 and 'New Developments to Decide Fate of Congress', *ibid.*, 18 January, 1969.

29. See 'Divided Congress Faces Elections', Overseas Hindustan Times, 14 December, 1968. No mention has been made in the text about the strategy employed by the Congress Party in the 1967 election. The selection of Congress candidates is an interesting aspect, and Kapur's article gives a comprehensive account. See Narinder S. Kapur, 'Rules of Procedure Adopted for the Selection of Candidates to the Parliamentary and State Legislatures by the Congress Party', The Indian Journal of Political Science, XXVIII, No. 3 (July-September, 1967); Ramashray Roy, 'Selection of Congress Candidates - I: the Formal Criteria', Economic and Political Weekly, 31 December, 1966, pp. 833-840 and 'Congress: West Bengal Selections', Link, 16 October, 1966. See also 'Opposition Disunity Again for Congress', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20 January, 1967, which deals with the nature of the party's campaign, and 'Atulya Ghosh is Worried', Link, 22 January, 1967, together with 'Atulya Ghosh in Trouble', *ibid.*, 19 February, 1967.



Moreover, few organizational changes had taken place within the party since 1967, and so it was essentially the same group of people contending for power. This did nothing to heighten its prestige.

## II. Election Results.

To return now to the actual elections, the Fourth General Election was held on February 22, 1967 under a single-member, simple majority system. Leaving aside the criticisms which have been made about this electoral system,<sup>30</sup> which excessively inflates the proportion of seats obtained in relation to the percentage of the total vote, and on the patterns of distribution of strengths within the state,<sup>31</sup> Table II below sets out the results of the election.

From this Table, it can be seen that the Congress Party emerged as the largest single party, followed by the CPM, BC and CPI. The ability of the BC to obtain a sizeable number of seats was both surprising and interesting.<sup>32</sup> Most of the

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30. Much has been written on this subject, both by academics and journalists. Two short criticisms of the system, which advocate the adoption of proportional representation as a remedial measure, are given by Mohan Kumaramangalam, 'Our Electoral System', Link, 15 August, 1967, and Dr. A. J. Faridi, 'Proportional Representation With a Party List', National Herald, 6 February, 1967. In addition, see Rao and Seethalakshmi, op. cit.

31. See Rao and Seethalakshmi, op. cit. The authors argue that the pattern of distribution of a party's strength is the most crucial factor, and that, as a consequence, it is possible for a party which secures 26.01 percent of the votes to obtain power. Rao and Seethalakshmi, however, reject the notion that Proportional Representation would be an acceptable solution to this discrepancy, on the grounds that it is unsuited to India with its multitude of national, regional and local parties.

32. Franda has drawn attention to the impact of the BC also in terms of votes. The party secured 1,325,013 votes as against 5,198,743 for the Congress Party; 933,407 for the CPI, and 2,255,229 for the CPM, or, as Franda puts it '...almost 42 per cent of the additional votes cast in the 1967 elections'. He points out, furthermore, that it was the Congress which mostly lost votes and seats to the BC. See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 125.

Table II<sup>33</sup>

Results of the 1967 General Election to the West Bengal  
Legislative Assembly.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats Won</u>	<u>Percentage of Votes Gained</u>
INC	127	42.13
CPM	43	18.11
CPI	16	6.53
SSP	7	2.13
PSP	7	1.88
BC	34	10.44
FB	13	3.87
FB(M)	1	0.21
RSP	6	2.14
SUC	4	0.72
LSS	5	0.68
GL	2	0.45
WPI	2	0.34
RCPI	-	0.31
Swatantra	1	0.81
Jana Sangh	1	1.33
Independents	11	8.92

33. Figures for seats were supplied by the Constitution and Elections Branch, Home Department, Government of West Bengal. Percentages of votes have been taken from Franda's article 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal : The Growth of the United Front', op. cit., p. 282.

party's support came from Midnapore, the home district of Ajoy Mukherjee, the party's leader.

In order to analyze further the parties' strengths and weaknesses, Table III sets out the district-wise distribution of seats won by each political party and its percentage of seats in the 1967 election.

As can be seen from this Table, the strength of the Congress Party was spread among the various districts, with the greatest concentration of seats in the 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Murshidabad and Burdwan. The CPM, on the other hand, surpassed the strength of the Congress in the 24-Parganas, and was significantly strong in Burdwan, and to a lesser extent in Calcutta and Hoogley. This points to the party's strongholds in the industrial areas and among the industrial proletariat. The CPI, however, was strongest in Midnapore,<sup>34</sup> and to a lesser extent in Calcutta and 24-Parganas. It is not necessary to comment further on the positions of the other less significant parties, which, in most cases, obtained only a negligible number of seats, and, as mentioned in Chapter Two are confined to 'pockets of support'. This can be seen clearly from Table III.

It was argued in an interesting article by Ashok Mitra<sup>35</sup> that the Congress was able to gain 47 seats to which it was 'not entitled', in that its share of the total vote was less than that of the two opposition fronts put together. The figures given by Mitra are listed below, and refer to the number of

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34. See 'Midnapore Study', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 February, 1967.

35. Ashok Mitra, 'Congress Lost Only Because of Two Districts', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 23 March, 1967.

Table III<sup>36</sup>

District-wise position of seats won by each political party and its percentage of seats within each district in the 1967 election

Party	Cooch Behar		Jalpaiguri		Darjeeling		W. Dinajpur		Malda		Murshidabad		Nadia		24-Paraganas		Calcutta		Howrah		Hooghly		Midnapore		Bankura		Burdwan		Birbhum							
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%						
INC	5	62.5%	6	60%	3	60%	6	54.55%	6	60%	13	72.22%	4	28.57%	12	24%	11	47.83%	9	56.25%	7	38.88%	12	34.28%	4	36.36%	9	69.23%	14	56%						
CPM	1	12.5%	0	10%	0	10%	0	10%	1	5.56%	1	5.56%	2	14.29%	18	36%	5	21.74%	3	18.75%	4	22.22%	1	2.86%	0	0	0	0	7	28%						
CPI	0		0		0		0		0		0		1	7.14%	3	6%	4	17.39%	0	0	0	0	8	22.86%	0	0	0	0	0	0						
SSP	0		2	18.18%	0		0		0		0		1	7.14%	1	2%	0	0	0	0	1	5.56%	1	2.86%	0	0	0	1	4%	0	0					
PSP	0		1	9.09%	0		3	27.27%	0		0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5.71%	0	0	0	1	4%	0	0	0				
BC	0		1	9.09%	0		0		0		1	5.56%	5	35.71%	9	18%	0	0	1	6.25%	1	5.56%	10	28.57%	1	9.09%	4	30.77%	1	4%	0	0				
FB	2	25%	0		0		0		0		0		0		2	4%	0	0	3	18.75%	3	16.66%	0	0	1	9.09%	0	0	2	16.67%	0	0				
RSP	0		1	9.09%	0		2	18.18%	0		2	11.11%	0		0	0	1	4.35%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
SUC	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		3	6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8.33%	0	0			
LSS	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
GL	0		0		2	40%	0		0		0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
WPI	0		0		0		0		1	10%	0		0		0	0	1	4.35%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
FB(M)	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5.55%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Swa-tantra	0		0		0		0		1	10%	0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Jana Sangh	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		1	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
RCPI	NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC		NC	
Ind.	0		0		0		0		1	10%	1	5.5%	1	7.14%	1	2%	1	4.35%	1	5.55%	0	0	1	5.55%	1	5.55%	0	0	1	4%	3	25%	0	0	0	

36 Figures supplied by the Constitution & Elections Branch, Home Department, Government of West Bengal, in correspondence.

NC denotes 'Not contested'.

additional seats which would have gone to the opposition had it not been divided :

Calcutta	3
Howrah	5
Midnapore	8
Hoogley	3
Burdwan	7
Birbhum	2
Purulia	1
West Dinajpur	3
Cooch Behar	2
24-Parganas	6
Darjeeling	1
Jalpaiguri	1
Murshidabad	1
Bankura	2
Malda	2
	47

In a subsequent article, Mitra calculated the figure to be 50 for the number of seats which the Congress would have lost (thus reducing its share of the seats to 77), had the opposition parties been united.<sup>37</sup> Mitra estimated further that if, in addition, the votes had swung another 1 percent away from the Congress Party, its percentage of the seats would have fallen by an additional 13, thus reducing its share of seats in the Assembly to 64. Of these 13 seats, Mitra claimed that the CPM would have acquired 10. A further calculation on the basis of a 2.5 percent swing from the Congress would have reduced its share of seats to 56. Something along these lines occurred in the Mid-term election of 1969, as we shall see.

Other interesting highlights of the election were the defeats in Bankura of Atulya Ghosh by J. M. Biswas, a young

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37. Ashok Mitra, 'Bengal', Seminar, No. 95 (July, 1967), pp. 50-53.

trade union leader and member of the CPI, and of the Congress former Chief Minister, P. C. Sen by Ajoy Mukherjee in Arambagh constituency.<sup>38</sup>

Turning now to the Mid-term election, some interesting contrasts may be observed. As mentioned previously, most of the parties formed a single united front in opposition to the Congress Party. This had a very significant effect upon the election results, as can be seen from Table IV below.

Table IV<sup>39</sup>

Results of the 1969 Mid-term election to the West Bengal  
Legislative Assembly.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Assembly Seats Won</u>	<u>Percentage of Votes Gained</u>
INC	55	40.42
CPM	80	19.55
CPI	30	6.78
SSP	9	1.82
PSP	5	1.25
BC	33	8.00
FB	21	5.40
RSP	12	2.75
SUC	7	1.48
LSS	4	0.73
GL	4	0.52'
WPI	2	0.39
FB(M)	1	0.19
Swatantra	-	0.07
Jana Sangh	-	0.83
Progressive Muslim League*	3	1.50
Indian National Democratic Front*	1	0.82
RCPI	2	0.37
Independents	11	7.00

\* The PML and INDF were both founded in 1968.

38. For more details about defeats of prominent Congressmen, see the following : 'Congress Goes Down in West Bengal', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 24 February, 1967; 'Verdict in West Bengal', Eastern Economist, 10 March, 1967, pp. 397-398, and the front page of Amrita Bazar Patrika, 22 February, 1967. On Arambagh constituency, see 'Arambagh Poll Tempo Reaches New Pitch', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1 February, 1967, and 'Two Worlds of Arambagh Voters', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 6 February, 1967.

39. See note 33 on p. 92.

Three major things are immediately apparent. Firstly, the enormous increase in seats for parties forming the United Front; secondly, the correspondingly dramatic decline in seats for the Congress Party, and thirdly, that although the Congress lost heavily in terms of seats, its share of the popular vote declined only slightly. Nevertheless, it can be seen that most of the leftist parties did increase their share of the vote, at the cost not only of the Congress, but of the right-wing and 'aggregative' parties. Fundamentally, the election results were a triumph for the electoral strategy of the United Front parties, which, in turn, was based upon electoral unity. The effect, therefore, was an increasing polarization between the Congress Party and the United Front.

At the district level, Table V sets out the number of seats and the percentage of votes won by the political parties. It can be seen that the Congress lost heavily in Murshidabad, 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Howrah, Hoogley, Midnapore and Bankura. On the other hand, the CPM gained significantly in 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Hoogley and Burdwan, while the CPI increased its strength in 24-Parganas and Midnapore - in both cases, mainly in the urban areas of these districts.

### III. Formation of the United Front Governments.

Having dealt with the elections of 1967 and 1969, attention must now be directed towards the formation of the respective coalition governments. After the 1967 election results were finalised, the parties forming the ULF and PULF perceived that if they joined forces they could prevent the Congress Party from holding office, and together, could form a government, albeit with a slender majority, and relying on the support of the GL, PSP, LSS and an Independent.

**District-wise position of seats won by each political party and its percentage of seats within each district in the 1969 mid-term election.**

Party	Cooch Behar		Jal- Dar- W. Dinaj- paiguri feeling pur		Murshid- abad		Nadia ganas		24-Par- cutta		Howrah Hooghly pore		Purulia Bankura Burdwan Birbhum		Midna-		
	6	7	1	3	5	5	5	5	4	5	1	2	6	3	0	2	0
	75%	63.64%	20%	17.17%	50%	27.78%	35.71%	8%	21.74%	8%	6.25%	11.11%	17.14%	27.27%	8%	8%	0
INC	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	24	8	8	9	3	NC	4	17	3	25%
CPM	0	0	0	18.18%	0	0	14.29%	48%	34.79%	50%	50%	8.57%	30.77%	68%	1	1	NC
CPI	NC	1	NC	0	2	1	7	14%	17.39%	4	1	10	1	1	1	4%	NC
SSP	NC	1	NC	0	NC	1	5.56%	7.14%	7.14%	2%	1	1	NC	1	2	8%	NC
PSP	NC	0	NC	1	NC	NC	NC	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
				9.09%								11.43%					
BC	NC	0	NC	1	0	2	3	5	NC	1	0	11	1	6	2	1	8.33%
				9.09%					10%		6.25%		31.43%	9.09%	46.16%	8%	
FB	2	NC	NC	1	NC	NC	NC	2	2	2	5	3	NC	1	1	NC	4
	25%			9.09%				4%	9.69%	31.25%	16.66%		9.09%	7.69%	33.33%		
RSP	NC	2	NC	2	NC	4	NC	2	2	2	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
	18.18%			18.18%				4%	8.69%								
SUC	NC	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
								8%						9.09%			16.67%
LSS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
														36.36%			
GL	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			80%														
WPI	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
				10%					4.35%								
FB(M)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
											5.55%						
Swatantra	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Jana Sangh	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
PML	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
								2%									
INDF	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
				9.09%													
RCPI	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	4%
										7.14%	6.25%	5.55%					16.67%
Ind.	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	0	1	NC							
					20%	16.66%	7.14%		4.35%								

40 Figures supplied by the Constitution & Elections Branch, Home Department, Government of West Bengal, in correspondence.



Needless to say, the formation of a coalition government containing fourteen parties is, at once, an unusual and difficult task. Given the significant impact of the BC on the 1967 elections, it is not surprising that the party's leader, Ajoy Mukherjee, was chosen to head the new government, known as the United Front Government. The decision to elect Mukherjee was unanimously agreed to by representatives of the parties.

One of the most striking differences between the formation of the United Front Government of 1967 compared to that following the Mid-term election in 1969, was the relatively lesser degree of conflict in 1967 over the number of portfolios allotted to the various coalition partners, and the allocation of those portfolios. In 1969, there was a considerable degree of dissension over certain key sensitive portfolios, and it took a lot of hard bargaining before agreement could be reached. But, in 1967, the sixteen-member cabinet<sup>41</sup> was formed within a few days, though not entirely without conflict.

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41. The cabinet consisted of the following Ministers and portfolios : 1) Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee (Ind.((BC)), Chief Minister, Minister-in-Charge of the General Administration, Political, Police, Defence, Civil Defence, Special Branch, Anti-Corruption, Enforcement and Constitution and Elections Branches of the Home Department; and Departments of Cooperation; Cottage and Small-Scale Industries; Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services; Fisheries; and the Relief Branch of the Department of Relief and Social Welfare. 2) Mr. Jyoti Basu (CPM), Deputy Chief Minister, Minister-in-Charge of the Finance Department and the Transport Branch of the Home Department. 3) Mr. Somnath Lahiri (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Departments of Local Self-Government; Information and Public Relations, and also of Parliamentary Affairs. 4) Mr. Hemanta Kumar Basu (FB), Minister-in-Charge of the Departments of Public Works and Housing. 5) Dr. Prafulla Ghosh (Ind.), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Food and Supplies; and the Agriculture Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Community Development. 6) Mr. Jehangir Kabir (Ind.((BC)), Minister-in-Charge of the Departments of Development and Planning and Forests. 7) Mr. Harekrishna Konar (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Land and Land Revenue. 8) Mr. Biswanath Mukherjee (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Irrigation and Waterways. 9) Mr. Sushil Kumar Dhara (Ind.((BC)),

## 41. (continued)

Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Commerce and Industries, and the Community Development Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Community Development. 10) Mr. Amar Prasad Chakravarty (FB), Minister-in-Charge of the Legislative and Judicial Departments; Department of Excise; and the Press and Passport Branches of the Home Department. 11) Mr. Nani Bhattacharya (Ind. ((RSP)), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Health. 12) Mr. Niranjana Sen Gupta (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department; and the Jails Branch of the Home Department. 13) Mr. Bibhuti Bhushan Das Gupta (Ind. ((LSS)), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Panchayats; and the Social Welfare Branch of the Department of Relief and Social Welfare. 14) Mr. Deo Prakash Rai (Ind. ((GL)), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Tribal Welfare. 15) Mr. Jyoti Bhushan Bhattacharya (Ind. ((WP)), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Education, and 16) Mr. Subodh Banerjee (Ind. ((SUC)), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Labour. Source : Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 11 March, 1967, p. 938.

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The new distribution of power created by the Mid-term election was a main factor behind the conflict and controversy over the formation of the second United Front Ministry. Initially, the major bone of contention related to claims made by both the CPM and the BC that their nominees should be given the Chief Ministership. The contest over the leadership issue polarized the partners of the new coalition. The CPM argued that, as the largest single party within the United Front, it had an undeniably justifiable claim to the post. The BC, on the other hand, contended that Ajoy Mukherjee, who had prestige in his own right, and was the Chief Minister in the United Front Government of 1967, had made the major contribution to, and was the focal point in building up the image of the United Front to the public, and should therefore be given the Chief Ministership. In addition, the party argued that had the Central Government not intervened in 1967 to assist the fall of the United Front Government,<sup>42</sup> Mukherjee would have

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42. This point will be dealt with in Chapter Seven.

remained the Chief Minister, and that this 'continuity' should not be broken.<sup>43</sup> Two other major points of controversy concerned the size and basis of representation of the coalition partners in the new Ministry, and, secondly, the distribution of portfolios. Until the leadership crisis was settled, however, these other issues could not be dealt with.

It was generally argued in the press that the rigid stand of the CPM on the leadership issue may have been a tactical manoeuvre to induce other partners in the coalition to agree to the party being given important and strategic portfolios, such as the Home portfolio. In view of the later decision of the CPM to allow Mukherjee to assume the Chief Ministership, in return for the CPM's control over the Home Department, this would appear to have been a plausible interpretation of the party's intentions. But, even this concession did not solve the issue. The BC, CPI and FB claimed that the Chief Minister should also hold the Home portfolio on the grounds that the Chief Minister's role in the cabinet was essentially a supervisory one, and could best be performed if the Home portfolio was in the same hands.<sup>44</sup>

After the emergence of a deadlock on this issue, the BC then proposed that the Home portfolio should be split, and that the section dealing with General Administration should, at least, be retained by the Chief Minister. The CPM, however, continued to insist on having control over the two key areas within the Home Department, namely, General Administration and Police.

From the point of view of power politics, there were two obvious reasons to explain the crisis which developed over the

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43. See 'No Consensus Yet on Issue of Leadership', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 16 February, 1969.

44. See 'Issue Hinges on Allotment of Home Portfolio', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 17 February, 1969.

issue of the Home portfolio. For one thing, the General Administration section was responsible for appointments within the State Civil Service, so that whichever party controlled this key area could be in a favourable position to appoint its own nominees who would be sympathetic to that particular party, even though it was the Chief Minister's role to give the final say in such appointments. As for the Police branch of the Home Department, a party in charge of this area could control the police in such a way as to serve the political ends of that particular party. With the multiplicity of parties in West Bengal, inter-party rivalry and violence has always been a particularly characteristic feature of the state. It is obvious, therefore, that partisanship could be applied to police intervention in party clashes, and this factor made the control of the police branch very crucial.

To this must be added another, but related factor. The natural aim of any political party is organizational expansion. As the Mid-term election had greatly enhanced the number of seats for the major non-Congress parties in the United Front, the way became clearer for some parties to think in terms of extending their organizational bases. Obviously, this could only be done at the expense of other parties, but in the process a party's control over the police when inter-party clashes and violence occurred could be instrumental towards that party's expansion.

To have questioned the CPM's motives in wanting to possess the Home portfolio with its two most important branches, as did the CPI, BC and FB, was understandable, but nevertheless ignored some aspects of political reality. In pressing its 'entitlement' to the portfolio on account of its numerical superiority, the CPM was acting as any other party, in the same circumstances,

would have acted. Added to this were two other relevant factors, firstly, the extreme antipathy which the CPM had towards the CPI, and, secondly, the distrust felt by the CPM towards Ajoy Mukherjee who, in October, 1967, had attempted to oust the CPM from the United Front, with the aim of forming another government supported by the Congress Party. It was therefore another political reality that the CPM wished to be assured of a counter-balancing position of power.

In any event, after a week of acute dissension, the issue was superficially resolved when the parties agreed to the Chief Ministership being given to Ajoy Mukherjee, with the CPM's nominee, Jyoti Basu, being given the Deputy Leadership. In addition, the Home portfolio was split and Basu was given control over both General Administration and Police, while Ajoy Mukherjee retained Finance, Planning and Development and Home (Political).<sup>45</sup>

As mentioned previously, conflict was not confined merely to these two portfolios, for other crucial portfolios were also the subject of dissension among the coalition partners. The Labour portfolio was both important and sensitive. As we shall see later in Chapter Four, this portfolio was held by Subodh Banerjee of the SUC in the United Front Government of 1967. Banerjee's handling of the post and the labour unrest of that year had evoked a great deal of criticism from some of the parties in the coalition. For this reason, as well as the importance of the portfolio per se, there was opposition on the part of some parties to the portfolio being given once more to Banerjee of the SUC. The SUC, however, argued that if the portfolio was not

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45. 'Ajoy Mukherjee Elected Leader', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 21 February, 1969. For a brief description of the functions of these branches in the Home Department, see 'Functions of Home Department Branches', *ibid.*, 22 February, 1969.

re-allocated to Banerjee, this would imply failure of the Labour policy of the previous United Front Government. The CPM, for its part, argued that as its main strength lay in the industrial areas, it should have charge of the portfolio. In the event, it was given to the CPM's nominee, Mr. Krishnapada Ghosh.

It is also significant to note that two other important portfolios went to the CPM, namely, Education and Land and Land Revenue. The latter had been held by the party in the first United Front Government and had proved crucial during the Naxalbari revolt in the first half of 1967. Another cause of dissension concerned the allocation of the Food portfolio. It was decided to offer it to Sudhin Kumar, a leader of the RCPI, and Convenor of the United Front. The SUC, however, complained at not having received the portfolio, arguing that a minor party like the RCPI should not be given such an important responsibility.

Another complication which arose during the course of the formation of the second United Front Ministry was the insistence of the SSP on being given two portfolios, instead of the one which the other coalition partners considered it was entitled to. The party decided that it would not participate in the Ministry unless its request were met. Meanwhile, difficulty also arose in connection with the PSP. The National Executive of the party had given instructions that the state branches were not to join in any United Front Government which contained the CPM. However, after the Mid-term election results were known, four elected members of the party from the district of Midnapore decided to rebel against the party's directive, and to join in as partners in the United Front. This looked as if it would cause a split within the state branch of the party when disciplinary action was taken against the rebel legislators by suspending them. Finally, when the conflict over Ministry-making and the allocation

of portfolios was solved (even though only formally), the new government contained thirty ministers.<sup>46</sup>

46. The Ministers and their portfolios were as follows :

- 1) Mr. Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee (BC), Chief Minister, Minister-in-Charge of the Finance Department, the Political and Defence Branches of the Home Department, the Social Education Branch of the Education Department and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services.
- 2) Mr. Jyoti Basu (CPM), Deputy Chief Minister, Minister-in-Charge of the Constitution and Elections, Special, General Administration, Police and Press Branches of the Home Department.
- 3) Mr. Janab Abdur Razzak Khan (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Relief Branch of the Relief and Social Welfare Department.
- 4) Mr. Bhabatosh Saren (BC), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Forests.
- 5) Mr. Bhakti Bhusan Mondal (FB), Minister-in-Charge of the Judicial and Legislative Departments.
- 6) Mr. Bibhuti Das Gupta (LSS), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Panchayats.
- 7) Mr. Biswanath Mukherjee (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Irrigation and Waterways Department and the Tanks, Small Irrigation, Wells and Tubewells, and Pump Irrigation Branch of the Agriculture and Community Development Department.
- 8) Mr. Charu Mihir Sarkar (BC), Minister-in-Charge of the Community Development Branch of the Agriculture and Community Development Department.
- 9) Mr. Deo Prakash Rai (GL), Minister-in-Charge of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Welfare Department.
- 10) Mr. Janab Golam Yazdani (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Passport and Civil Defence Branches of the Home Department.
- 11) Mr. Harekrishna Konar (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of Land and Land Revenue Department.
- 12) Mr. Jatin Chakravarty (RSP), Minister-in-Charge of the Parliamentary Affairs Branch of the Home Department.
- 13) Mr. Jyoti Bhusan Bhattacharjee (WP), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Information and Public Relations.
- 14) Dr. Kanailal Bhattacharji (FB), Minister-in-Charge of the Agriculture and Community Development Department excluding the Community Development Branch, the Agro-Industries Branch and the Tanks, Small Irrigation, Tubewells and Pump Irrigation Branch.
- 15) Mr. Krishna Chandra Halder (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Excise Department.
- 16) Mr. Krishnapada Ghosh (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Labour Department.
- 17) Janab Abdullah Rasul (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Transport Branch of the Home Department.
- 18) Mr. Nani Bhattacharjee (RSP), Minister-in-Charge of the Health Department.
- 19) Mr. Niranjan Sen Gupta (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department and the Jails Branch of the Home Department.
- 20) Mr. Provash Chandra Roy (CPM), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Fisheries.
- 21) Mrs. Renu Chakrabartee (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Co-operation and the Social Welfare Branch of the Relief and Social Welfare Department.
- 22) Mr. Sambhu Ghosh (FB), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Cottage and Small Scale Industries.
- 23) Mr. Satya Priya Roy (CPM),

.../continued on p. 106

46. (continued)

Minister-in-Charge of the Education Department (excluding the Social Education Branch and the Sports Branch). 24) Mr. Somnath Lahiri (CPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Local Self-Government Department, the Development and Planning Department and the Housing Department. 25) Mr. Subodh Banerjee (SUC), Minister-in-Charge of the Public Works Department excluding the Roads and Special Roads Branches. 26. Mr. Sudhin Kumar (RCPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Food and Supplies. 27) Mr. Sushil Kumar Dhara (BC), Minister-in-Charge of the Commerce and Industries Department and the Agro-Industries Branch of the Agriculture and Community Development Department. Ministers of State : Mr. Barada Muktmāni (BPI), Minister-in-Charge of the Tourism Branch of the Home Department; Mrs. Prativa Mukherjee (SUC), Minister-in-Charge of the Roads and Special Roads Branches of the Public Works Department. 30) Mr. Ram Chatterjee (FB(M)), Minister-in-Charge of the Sports Branch of the Education Department. Source : Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 1 March, 1969, pp. 572 & 575.

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#### IV. Programmes of the United Front Governments.

So far, nothing has been said about the programmes of either of the United Front Governments. Before the 1967 election was held, both fronts operated with separate programmes. The ULF had drawn up a 12-point programme which regarded the provision of food as the foremost priority, and mentioned such things as land reform, housing, education, relief and development plans.<sup>47</sup> The PULF formulated a 39-point programme which stressed the importance of the same issues but, unlike the ULF, concentrated on the importance of defence.<sup>48</sup>

In 1967, a common minimum programme was not drawn up until after the election was held, when the parties decided

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47. For further details, see '12-point Programme of ULF Presented', Statesman (New Delhi ed.), 13 January, 1967, and 'ULF 'Alternative Government' Programme', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 January, 1967.

48. For further details, see 'PULF Programme for Alternative Government', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 January, 1967 and 'West Bengal : Congress Prospects Improve', Eastern Economist, 3 February, 1967, p. 202. See also 'Left Front's Pledge to Resist Attack', Indian Express, 19 January, 1967.



to join forces to prevent the Congress from obtaining power. The programme was referred to as the 18-point programme (see Appendix XI) and, in view of its hurried formulation by numerous heterogeneous parties, it is not surprising to find that the programme was characterized by vagueness and generality. Mention was made of the government's intention to meet the primary needs of the people in respect of food, clothing, housing, education, health services and employment; to fight corruption; promote the production and supply of food, and so on.<sup>49</sup>

With the assumption of power by the second United Front Government, however, a more comprehensive 32-point programme was worked out prior to the Mid-term election, facilitated by the experience gained during the government's ten months in office during 1967. In the 32-point programme, the same sorts of problems were referred to, but in more detail, as can be seen from Appendix XII. Despite this, however, the framing and implementation of policy is obviously more complex than the drawing up of mere programmes, which, in any case, are formulated mainly for electoral purposes. The full implications of this point will emerge in the next few chapters.

#### V. Summary.

Drawing together some of the points made throughout this chapter, we can see that a certain minimum amount of agreement was reached between the United Front partners in both 1967 and 1969. Although the parties in 1967 differed widely in their aims and outlooks, it was easier for them initially to reach agreement once the Fourth General Election had been held. Their common desire to keep the Congress Party from power was a

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49. See 'UF Ministry Sworn In', West Bengal, 25 January and 4 March, 1967, p. 907.

negative goal which facilitated a significant amount of agreement about such things as the formation of a government and the formulation of a vague programme. Excluding the election campaign, conflict was kept to a reasonable minimum until the assumption of office. Later, however, the facade of unity was broken, although to nothing like the same extent as occurred during the tenure of the second United Front Government.

On the other hand, events preceding and immediately following the Mid-term election in 1969 were different. Knowing that a single united front of most non-Congress forces would enable the United Front to come to power again, the parties could reasonably compromise on electoral strategy. Nevertheless, in the new and important configuration of political power, they found it increasingly difficult to reach agreement over the formation of a government : that so much was at stake was clearly discernible by the parties. This explains the degree of brinkmanship on the part of the major parties, namely, the CPM and BC over the leadership issue and allocation of key portfolios.

The whole context of politics and power had changed with the assumption of office by the second United Front Government. The logic of power realities meant that the strongest party or parties would endeavour to enhance their strength further, whilst the weaker parties could only retaliate by trying to preserve their strength. Conflict over the formation of the ministry was symptomatic of this situation, and the full implications were to emerge in a most virulent form during the tenure of the second United Front Government.

Chapter Four

INDUSTRIAL UNREST AND UNITED FRONT LABOUR  
POLICY.

I. The Problem.

When the first United Front Government took office in 1967, one of the most urgent and pressing problems concerned industrial labour and unrest. Worker dissatisfactions in the form of strikes, violence and gheraos became progressively acute during 1967, and a number of press commentators and other observers labelled the period as one of industrial anarchy. In addition to action taken by a large number of workers, employers carried out large-scale retrenchment and lock-outs. However, it was the 'gherao-movement' in particular which was a marked feature during the ten months of United Front rule in 1967.

The term gherao was defined by the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, Mr. D.N. Sinha, in September, 1967 as :

'a physical blockade of a target, either by encirclement or forcible occupation. The 'target' may be a place or a person or persons usually the managerial staff or supervisory staff of an industrial establishment. The blockade may be complete or partial and is invariably accompanied by wrongful restraint, and/or wrongful confinement, and occasionally accompanied by assault, criminal trespass, mischief to person and property, unlawful assembly and various other criminal offences.' 1

Gheraos, as Nitish De points out, are neither new phenomena nor confined to West Bengal,<sup>2</sup> although the proportions reached by the 'movement' in this state during 1967 were unique. Figures concerning the number of gheraos are conflicting : official

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1. Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Calcutta, Text of the Judgement of the Calcutta High Court delivered by the Hon'ble Chief Justice in the Group of "GHERAO" cases, namely, Jay Engineering Works Ltd. & Ors. Versus The State of West Bengal & Ors., p. 10.

2. Nitish R. De and Suresh Srivastava, 'Gheraos in West Bengal - I : A Study in Industrial Conflict', Economic and Political Weekly, 18 November, 1967, p. 2015.

sources claim that 811 cases occurred between March and December, 1967, with the highest number occurring in Asansol region and the lowest number in Jalpaiguri,<sup>3</sup> but according to De and Srivastava there were 1,018 cases of gherao in 583 industrial establishments, 85 percent of these having occurred in the four most industrialized areas of the state, namely, Calcutta, 24-Parganas, Burdwan and Howrah.<sup>4</sup>

The dislocation to industry caused by strikes, gheraos and demonstrations were levelled by the press, the Congress Party and a number of other observers, including employers and their organizations, at the door of the United Front Government. One accusation was that the Labour Minister, Subodh Banerjee, one of the leaders of the SUC, had deliberately encouraged the gherao movement when he described them as a legitimate form of the labour movement. This was upheld by the United Front Cabinet when it issued instructions to the police not to intervene in cases of gherao, without first seeking the advice of the Labour Minister, himself.<sup>5</sup> Another charge was that the Communists, particularly the CPM, were responsible for gheraos and industrial unrest in general. C. R. Irani, for example, whose views typify this type of argument, has written :

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3. Government of West Bengal, Statistics, Research and Publications Branch of the Labour Directorate, Labour in West Bengal 1967, p. 5.

4. De and Srivastava, op. cit., p. 2015.

5. West Bengal Government, Decision of Cabinet held on 8th June, 1967, Home Political Department, as quoted in Text of the Judgement of the Calcutta High Court, op. cit., p. 7.

'Like the Kisan Sabha in the villages the Communist-dominated trade unions were not slow to take advantage of the formation of the new Government. In March, 1967 they launched on an unprecedented campaign of terror and intimidation. This campaign was inspired by the Labour Minister and its course greatly assisted by the actions of the Government as a whole.' 6

The problem to be examined in this chapter, therefore, is to analyze the validity of these claims. To do this merely in the light of decisions by the United Front Government would provide us with no more than a highly superficial analysis, isolated from the social, economic and political environment(s). An examination of both the labour policy pursued by the first United Front Government and the industrial unrest during 1967 must extend beyond this narrow focus, and be placed within an overall context. Accordingly, we must examine various factors including the framework of labour legislation in the state, workers' grievances relating in general to their conditions of employment and remuneration, the particular economic climate in which industrial unrest assumed such unprecedented proportions, in addition to the policy of the United Front Government and the motives and roles of the partners forming the coalition. We may then compare and contrast the position relating to the second United Front Government, as part of our general analysis.

## II. The Climate of Unrest.

### (i) The Statutory Framework.

Labour legislation, under the Constitution of India, falls within the concurrent list, that is to say, the State Government may enact legislation concerning labour where no central act exists, on the proviso that state enactments do not conflict with .....

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6. C. R. Irani, Bengal : The Communist Challenge. (Bombay, 1968), p. 61.

those of the Central Government. Be that as it may, the most important pieces of labour legislation since Independence have been passed by the Central Government, and the problem of implementing them has been left to the State Governments. Implementation, however, is not the only intractable difficulty which faces State Governments; the acts, themselves, together with the procedures laid down in them for the resolution of disputes, have been the subject of much criticism by unions and employees. It is desirable, therefore, to give a brief outline of the scope of labour legislation by pointing to some of the most important acts,<sup>7</sup> and, secondly, to examine a few of the procedures for flaws which are said to be inimical to the aims and interests of workers, particularly those in West Bengal.

According to Van Dusen Kennedy, Indian labour policy has been influenced by what he calls 'tendermindedness' - an attitude which includes, among other things, a distaste for the realities of power.<sup>8</sup> According to him :

'A characteristic distaste for the realities of power has marked Indian labour policy. The government has refrained from using compulsion to bring order into the labour movement or fair practice into labour relations. It looks upon the strike as an outmoded, unsocialistic method of decision-making and has promoted an elaborate set of alternative, mostly voluntary arrangements.'<sup>9</sup>

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7. For a useful reference to labour legislation, see P. C. Banerjee, A Handbook of Industrial Employment (Kalyani, 1966).

8. Van Dusen Kennedy lists the traits of 'tendermindedness' as follows : '...mystical confidence that in Hinduism and Indian traditions and culture there is a special essence of resource - the favourite word is unity - which will carry India through many troubles.' Secondly, there is an idealization of the peasant and village democracy; thirdly, strong emotional identification on the part of the leadership toward a set of values; fourthly, '...an almost eighteenth century faith in the rationality and goodness of man...'; and, lastly, the '...inability or reluctance to face up to the realities of power.' See Van Dusen Kennedy, Unions, Employers and Government : Essays on Indian Labour Questions (Bombay, 1966), Ch. 1 and specifically pp. 13-17.

9. *ibid.*, p. 17.

A similar view is likewise shared by Nitish De, who has written quite extensively on industrial relations.<sup>10</sup> Whilst these views may represent a somewhat over-simplified and over-generalized analysis (for it is also likely that other motives, such as the desire to minimize economic mal-effects of industrial strike action, is as fundamental in framing labour legislation), it is nevertheless true that the main emphasis in central labour policy has been towards a voluntary approach and hence against compulsion. As a result, encouragement has been given to the settlement of disputes through mutual negotiation, conciliation and arbitration.<sup>11</sup>

The keystone of Indian labour policy exists in several Codes, particularly the Code of Discipline, which became operative in June, 1958, after gaining the approval of representatives of employers, trade unions and the Central Government at the 16th Indian Labour Conference in May, 1958. In the Code, a number of general principles and obligations were laid down for employers and employees. A special feature of the Code was the voluntary nature of its adoption and enforcement. An emphasis was placed upon the settlement of disputes through the existing machinery of mutual negotiation, conciliation and voluntary arbitration - principles which were also subsequently stressed in The Truce Resolution of 1962, adopted by the representatives of employers and employees after the Chinese invasion of India in 1962. In any event, obligations were laid down in the Code of Discipline

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10. See, for example, Nitish De, 'An Approach to the Problem of Industrial Relations' in C. K. Johri (Ed.), Issues in Indian Labour Policy : Papers and Conclusions of the Fourth National Seminar on Industrial Relations in a Developing Economy (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 68-69.

11. For the views of a Central Government (Congress) Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation, see J. L. Hathi, 'Factors Retarding Better Industrial Relations', Supplement to Capital, 10 July, 1969, pp. 9, 11 & 13.

for management not to increase work-loads without mutual agreement between employers and employees; to recognize unions which meet with the criteria set down in the Code, and to refrain from activities designed to discourage union activity. Finally, managements were exhorted to be prompt in settling grievances and implementing awards and settlements. Unions, for their part, were obliged not to engage in physical coercion and violence.

However, as both Van Dusen Kennedy and P. Chakraborty, among others, have pointed out, the Code has proved ineffective in its aims.<sup>12</sup> Chakraborty draws attention to the fact that the Study Group on Industrial Relations (Northern Region), appointed by the National Commission on Labour, had reached the same conclusions concerning the grievance procedure of the Code, and quotes from their report :

'Generally, the employers have shown little interest in setting up a formalised procedure relying more on the existence of ad hoc arrangements. The employees in small units rarely find the organizational strength to demand the setting up of such procedures.'<sup>13</sup>

Van Dusen Kennedy, for his part, observes that :

'Putting all the evidence together there can be no question that non-observance of the Code of Discipline and the Code of Conduct is widespread and serious. It follows that enforceable legal protections are needed.'<sup>14</sup>

It may be added that C.K. Johri is among a number of other people who have also argued that the Code of Discipline is ineffective.<sup>15</sup>

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12. For example, according to official sources 32 complaints alleging violation of the Code of Discipline were received by the West Bengal Government during 1967, and 39 cases were pending at the beginning of the year, making a total of 71 cases of which only 10 were disposed of during the period. See Government of West Bengal, Department of Labour, West Bengal Labour Gazette, March, 1968, p. 247.

13. (Mrs.) P. Chakraborty (Deputy Labour Commissioner, Government of West Bengal), Strikes and Morale in Industry in India and Her Principal States (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 81-82.

14. Van Dusen Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

15. C.K. Johri, 'Labour Policy in Perspective' in Johri, op. cit., p. 21.



Similarly, the Code of Conduct, formulated with the object of curtailing rivalry between the unions, but likewise voluntary in nature, has been quite ineffective, as will be seen particularly when dealing with the subject of inter-union rivalry.

Procedures for the conciliation or settlement of disputes were laid down in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947,<sup>16</sup> and provided for the setting up of Works Committees to remove friction between employers and employees, Boards of Conciliation and Courts of Enquiry to deal with negotiations. In the Act, a great deal of emphasis was put upon conciliation. In addition, the Act provided for the creation of Labour Courts, Industrial Tribunals and National Tribunals which were to deal with the adjudication of disputes. In the case of settlement through conciliation, the Labour Commissioner in each state appoints conciliation officers to handle these cases. Where conciliation proves unsuccessful, the Labour Commissioner has authority to recommend that the matter be referred for adjudication.

Concerning the adjudicative machinery, the Labour Courts deal with day-to-day matters such as dismissals, the legality or otherwise of strikes and lock-outs, while the Industrial Tribunals concern themselves with wages, bonuses, allowances, retrenchment and the like, and their decisions become binding upon the parties concerned.<sup>17</sup> One of the major shortcomings of the Industrial Disputes Act is that it does not extend to casual employees, who, in certain industries, particularly jute and textiles, comprise a significant section of the working force.

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16. Government of India, Industrial Disputes Act (Act No. XIV of 1947) (Allahabad, 1969).

17. For a view which argues that the Industrial Relations Act contains many restrictive provisions upon employers and encroaches upon their traditional prerogatives, see R. C. Goyal, An Introduction to Industrial Employment, Discipline and Disputes in India (Delhi, 1970), Ch. 5.

The system of casual employment, referred to as 'badli' constitutes a major grievance on the part of unions and badli workers.

In any event, Weiner has argued that the prerogative of state governments to determine which disputes will be referred compulsorily to arbitration results in considerable discretion for ministers, particularly labour ministers, and makes them both legislators and the objects of trade union pressure.<sup>18</sup> The Report of the Working Group on Labour Administration, appointed by the National Commission of Labour, has elaborated upon this point and draws attention to the criticism levelled at the discretionary powers which vest in the State Labour Departments. One complaint, the Report says, is that :

'...the Department uses its discretionary powers to protect trade unions of particular brand. In the case of other unions, Governments have on many occasions reserved for themselves the right of judging the merits of each demand and referring only some of them to industrial tribunals and withholding others. The implication is that in case of unions which do not find favour with Government, it is only the minor demands which go in for adjudication, if at all.'<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, the Report also draws attention to arguments refuting these allegations.<sup>20</sup> Insofar as the Central Government is concerned, the National Tribunals deal with disputes referred to them by the Central Government, and are empowered to act if

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18. Weiner, The Politics of Scarcity, op. cit., p. 75.

19. Government of India, National Commission on Labour, Report of the Working Group on Labour Administration (Eastern Region) (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 35-36.

20. *ibid.* The Report also says 'It has been argued with equal force that the alleged misuse of discretion is not a reality. If certain demands get left out, it is because there may be existing agreements/settlements/awards governing them. It may also be that as a matter of prestige such demands are put forward again by rival unions even before the awards/agreements etc. run their course. Since questions of prestige of this type cannot be a guide for governmental action, selective references may take place and with justification. The argument about "favoured" unions is also not reported to be valid...In fact, many trade unions have been

## 20. (continued)

getting a raw deal at the hands of Government in the sense that because of the instrument of agitation which is always in the hands of unions alleging step motherly treatment, Governments have, at times, found themselves shy of granting references to tribunals where they are due in case of the "favoured" unions...'.  


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the latter considers that the dispute is of national importance, or is likely to affect industries in other states.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there is a system of tripartite machinery consisting of representatives of the Government, employers and employees, among which the Indian Labour Conferences, the Standing Labour Committee, Industrial Committees, the Committee on Conventions and the Labour Ministers' Conferences, are the most important.

This brief sketch of the industrial relations machinery needs to be supplemented by pointing to some further difficulties arising from Indian labour legislation and policies. Firstly, the Minimum Wages Act,<sup>22</sup> which was passed by the Central Government in 1948, required it and the State Governments to fix the minimum rates of wages within certain industries. The State Governments were empowered to appoint committees and

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21. Indian Investment Centre, An Outline of Labour Legislation and Practices in India (New Delhi, 1966), p. 15.

22. Indian labour policy is also covered in other laws including The Payment of Wages Act, 1936, which lays down certain regulation incumbent upon employers for the payment of wages; The Factories Act of 1948, setting out the conditions in factories under which employees are recruited and required to work; the Workmens' Compensation Act, 1923, providing for payment of compensation to certain classes of workmen, and the Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959, which makes it obligatory for all factories employing more than 25 persons to notify all vacancies (other than certain specified exceptions), to the employment exchanges, although recruitment from these exchanges is not obligatory. The Acts, themselves, contain innumerable loopholes, but it is not possible due to space limitations, to pursue this point further. See Chakraborty, op. cit. and Johri, op. cit. for further details.

sub-committees to advise on the assessment and revision of minimum wages.<sup>23</sup> The principles to govern the fixation of minimum wages were devised by the Fair Wages Committee, set up by the Central Government in 1948. The Committee reported that there were three levels connected with the determination of wages : a lower limit, involving a minimum wage, an upper limit, based on what a particular industry could afford to pay, and the intermediate levels which obviously constituted the majority of cases, where wages would be determined by criteria such as productivity of labour, prevailing rates in similar occupations and neighbouring localities, the level and distribution of the national income, and the importance of the industry in the national economy.<sup>24</sup> According to the United Front Minister for Labour, Subodh Banerjee, however, the Minimum Wages Act had not been properly enforced because most of the committees formed to deal with the problem of wages were 'filled with representatives of management.'<sup>25</sup>

For several years after the enactment of the Industrial Disputes Act, the usual procedure for dealing with disputes over wages when mutual agreement was lacking, was through adjudication by industrial tribunals. These, however, resulted in an increase in litigation which, in West Bengal, could take up to twelve years. The Seventh Industrial Tribunal, for instance, which was to enquire into wage fixations in small and medium engineering units in the state, took five years to complete its work.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this

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23. Government of India, The Minimum Wages Act 1948 (II of 1948) as modified up to 1st October, 1969 (Delhi, 1969).

24. See Sivadas Banerjee, 'Wage Board Awards Leave Everybody Dissatisfied', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 28 September, 1967.

25. Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 1 April, 1967, p. 997.

26. See 'Wage Fixation in Small and Medium Engineering Units in West Bengal', Trade Union Record (official organ of the All-India Trade Union Congress), 20 March, 1967, p. 2.

situation, recourse has, in general, been taken to wage boards which were set up in a limited number of industries.<sup>27</sup>

Like the tribunals, however, the wage boards were faced not only with the difficulty of assessing the criteria enumerated by the Fair Wages Committee, but also with the limitations imposed through their lack of statutory force. The consequence has been that decisions reached by these wage boards were frequently ignored in West Bengal, and their effectiveness really depended upon the extent to which the parties to the dispute were willing to implement their decisions.

A further difficulty has been the alleged lack of representativeness,<sup>28</sup> and the failure of the boards to pay sufficient attention to the problems of particular regions. The attitude of employers towards wage boards has also been limited, for they claim that the decisions of the boards do not reflect the problems of the particular industry, for instance, whether or not the establishment has the capacity to pay the wages set down by the boards. Moreover, they argue that the boards do not relate the fixation of wages to the productivity of the workers - one of the criteria set down by the Fair Wages Committee - on which there is little agreement or common meeting ground between the employers and employees.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the major alternative to

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27. Indian Investment Centre, op. cit., p. 19. The industries concerned numbered fifteen as at 1966, and consisted of cotton textiles, sugar, cement, jute, tea, coffee and rubber plantations, iron and steel, coal-mining, iron-ore mining, lime-stone and dolomite mining, working journalists, engineering ports and docks, heavy chemicals and fertilisers.

28. The All-India Trade Union Congress, among other critics (not necessarily communist) argue that in most cases employers seek to use these wage boards to their own advantage, and to 'utilize these as some sort of rivals to trade unions and to disrupt the latter.' See Problems of Industrial Relations in India, Memorandum of the AITUC to the National Commission on Labour (New Delhi), p. 24.

29. It has been estimated that labour productivity in West Bengal is lower than in many other states. See 'Labour and the Left', Eastern Economist, 7 April, 1967.

the wage boards - the system of adjudication through tribunals - has, as mentioned previously, proved defective because of the tendency to resort to long drawn-out litigation. This, in particular, is a process which has left the workers in West Bengal highly dissatisfied and uncompensated for the long delays which the procedure involves. This view was also held by the Labour Advisor of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Madan Ghosh, who said in an interview :

'Re the tribunals - they are defective in the delays which are caused...the system of adjudication and conciliation is defective because everything is legalized, except the important factor of recognition of unions. If a small union can challenge a decision reached with a large union, this leads to drawn-out delay. Conciliation means people take a rigid attitude. Then they go to the tribunals...' 30

Mr. Ghosh then went on to say that the system had not been changed, despite recommendations from the National Commission on Labour, because of the existence of vested interests in both the trade unions and on the part of employers.

(ii) Problems of Trade Unionism.

In general, industrial disputes and unrest in West Bengal cannot be seen in isolation from three other very important factors, firstly, the nature of trade unionism; secondly, the attitudes of management towards employees, and thirdly, the state of the economy in the state during the period under review, for these factors are relevant to an examination of industrial unrest and the labour policies of the United Front Governments.

Trade unions were legalized in India under the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926, which, among other things, set out the rights and liabilities of trade unions, together with the

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30. Interview with Madan Ghosh, Calcutta, April, 1970.

procedures and criteria necessary for registration.<sup>31</sup> From the very beginning, the labour movement was politically oriented and thus never merely an economic movement. For this reason, the political parties have always endeavoured to control the labour movement, which, in turn, has led to a number of splits within the trade union movement.<sup>32</sup> At the time of writing, it is divided between five major federations, the All-India Trade Union Congress (henceforth referred to as the AITUC), now controlled by the CPI, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (henceforth referred to as the INTUC), controlled by the Congress Party, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (henceforth referred to as the CITU), formed in 1970 and controlled by the CPM, the PSP-led Hind Mazdoor Sabha (henceforth referred to as the HMS), and the RSP-led United Trade Union Congress (henceforth referred to as the UTUC). Prior to the formation of the CITU, the unions controlled by the CPM were affiliated with the AITUC.

Of greater significance, however, for the fragmentation of the labour movement is firstly, the fact that under the Indian Trade Unions Act as few as seven members of an enterprise can form a trade union, and, secondly, that unions are not industry-wise organizations, but based upon individual places of work, and affiliated to one or other of the major federations. In West Bengal, this has led to an extreme multiplicity of trade unions on the one hand,<sup>33</sup> and intense inter-union rivalry on the other.

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31. Government of India, The Indian Trade Unions Act (Act No. XVI of 1926) as amended up-to-date (Allahabad, 1969).

32. For a useful historical account of this, see V. B. Karnik, Indian Trade Unions : A Survey, second rev. ed. (Bombay, 1966).

33. The total number of trade unions in West Bengal is not known, but figures relating to claims for registration of trade unions in 1967 give some idea of the rate of proliferation : 1109 applications were received during the year, and 127 applications were pending at the beginning of the year, making a total of 1236 applications, out of which 897 trade unions were registered during that year. See Government of West Bengal, Department of Labour, West Bengal Labour Gazette, March, 1968, p. 249.

The latter is facilitated by the absence of any legal provisions for compulsory recognition by employers of trade unions - not even those enjoying the largest percentage of members among the workers of a particular enterprise. The absence of legal provisions for compulsory recognition gives considerable administrative discretion to the party or parties forming the government. Here, again, the Report of the National Commission on Labour has drawn attention to abuses of discretion against the registration of trade unions, on the one hand, and, according to some employers, administrative discretion used 'liberally and sympathetically' in favour of the unions, on the other hand.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the absence of provisions for statutory recognition has necessarily minimized collective bargaining in West Bengal, as, indeed, throughout India as a whole.<sup>35</sup> For this reason, the National Commission on Labour considers it 'desirable to make recognition compulsory under a Central law in all undertakings employing 100 or more workers or where the capital invested is above a stipulated size.'<sup>36</sup>

The other major reason for the multiplicity of trade unions in West Bengal relates to the multiplicity of political

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34. National Commission on Labour, Report of the Working Group on Labour Administration (Eastern Region), op. cit., p. 37.

35. For an interesting and evaluative article on the suitability or otherwise of collective bargaining in India, see K.M. Tripathi (Deputy Director, Department of Labour and Employment, New Delhi), 'Collective Bargaining - Theory and Practice', Indian Labour Journal, IX, No. 8 (August, 1968), pp. 923-932.

36. National Commission on Labour, Conclusions and Recommendations of the National Commission on Labour : A Digest with Minutes of Dissent (Delhi, August, 1969), p. 36.



parties.<sup>37</sup> Each political party attempts to form unions in enterprises where it thinks it may have some support. For this reason, inter-union rivalry often becomes an extension of inter-party rivalry, and, as we shall see, both of these features became very acute during the tenures of the first and second United Front Governments. It is also a reason for the extreme importance of the issue concerning union recognition, on which a few more remarks are pertinent.

Union recognition involves certain very significant factors such as the level of recognition, i. e. whether it should be on an industry-wise or plant basis; procedures for certifying which is the majority union, and so on. The CPM has favoured the method of secret ballot in preference to the present system of membership verification<sup>38</sup> carried out by the Labour Commissioner's Office - a system which is alleged to favour the Congress unions. The INTUC, for its part, favours the latter method of membership verification.<sup>39</sup> The Central Government has always tried to justify the present arrangements

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37. Other, but less important causes relating to the multiplicity of unions include : a) 'factors like communal sentiments, caste consciousness, provincial feelings, parochial interest etc., which contribute to the disruption of workmen and to the growth of parallel trade unions'; b) 'the formation of employer-sponsored trade unions either to check the power of the existing union growing in strength or to evade the recognition of the majority union'; c) 'When the existing union becomes inactive, certain section of workers, being dissatisfied with its indifference, forms a new union with the help of one of these political parties'; d) 'when workers are not satisfied with the activities of the existing union, they lose confidence in it and form another union.' See Chakraborty, op. cit., p. 38.

38. See, for example, AITUC, Problems of Industrial Relations in India : Memorandum of the A.I. T.U. C. to National Commission on Labour (New Delhi, 1969), p. 25ff., and 'Memorandum to West Bengal Government', Trade Union Record, 20 April, 1967, p. 5.

39. INTUC, 18th Report, 1968-69 (New Delhi), p. 11.

on the grounds that an elective system would intensify inter-union rivalry, and cause some unions to make radical and extreme promises to the workers in a bid to secure votes.<sup>40</sup>

This view is still currently endorsed by the National Commission on Labour, which concluded in 1969 that under an elective system 'the plant will be surcharged with election atmosphere, rather than production atmosphere...'; that it would tend to politicize the trade union movement completely'; and that small unions, if they held a balance of power, would 'be able to dictate and decide the issue for a price', and would encourage meddling by employers.<sup>41</sup> As Van Dusen Kennedy points out, however, it is ironical that a government which allows people to vote in democratic elections, does not extend to them the same right in electing their union representatives. He says, moreover, that there is no evidence that the introduction of the secret ballot would favour the Communists.<sup>42</sup>

(iii) Employer-employee Relations.

Apart from the foregoing, another major factor affecting the industrial climate in the state relates to the attitudes of employers towards their employees and their involvement in unions. Chakraborty has conducted fairly extensive investigations into this, and has concluded that employer-employee relationships are characterized by traditional attitudes of authoritarianism

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40. For arguments relating to the pros and cons of secret ballot versus verified membership, see Om. P. Bhatia, 'The Problem of Trade Union Recognition in India', Indian Labour Journal, X, No. 4 (April, 1964).

41. Conclusions and Recommendations of National Commission on Labour, op. cit., pp. 37ff.

42. Van Dusen Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

and autocracy on the part of employers.<sup>43</sup> Employers, she says, are motivated by a sense of prestige in resisting the demands of employees, particularly over personnel disputes, as well as by a fear complex that concessions granted by employers will only lead to more and more demands being made by employees. Furthermore :

'Many employers have still retained their primitive approach towards employer-employee relations... The "welfare concept" of labour-management relations has not yet taken the place of "commodity concept" of employment... The employers' resistance is displayed in several ways. Some employers decline to sit together with the union even before the Government Conciliation officers. They send quite often ineffective representatives to attend tripartite conferences (employer-union-Government) in the sense that these representatives are not authorised to take final decision toward the resolution of the dispute. Opposition also takes the form of widespread violation of agreements, tribunal awards and of disregard of central wage boards' recommendations. Absence of any agreement on grievance procedure at plant level, by and large, is another case in point.' 44

It is therefore not surprising that a low morale prevails among industrial employees in West Bengal. The foregoing factors understandably predispose towards a climate of industrial unrest, and, in a situation of economic recession, as occurred in West Bengal during 1966-69 (as well as throughout India in general), the problems became even more acutely accentuated.

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43. Chakraborty's conclusions are also borne out by my own observations during field work, when I came into contact with, and elicited in a non-formal and non-quantitative way, the attitudes of <sup>some</sup> employees and their employers.

44. Chakraborty, op. cit., pp. 176-7. See also pp. 421-424.

(iv) The State of the Economy.

Mention has already been made in Chapter One about the general state of the economy of West Bengal. In this context, however, certain factors which were of immediate concern to the situation of acute industrial unrest and the first United Front Governments's labour policy, become highly pertinent. For some time prior to the assumption of office by the United Front Government, a number of major groups and well-known individuals had voiced complaints against the Central Government for its alleged discrimination in the allocation of contracts, resources and finances, which was said to have affected the growth of industries in the state. The question of discrimination, however, must be seen against the Central Government's policy of dispersing industries and industrial development among the various states within the country, for until the end of the 1930's West Bengal had dominated the entire industrial scene.

In any event, industrial output in the state fell from 22.2 percent in 1959 of the value of the country's entire industrial production to 21 percent in 1963. Moreover, whereas in 1961 the state received 62 licences for new undertakings, in 1964 it received only 10; for the production of new articles 26 licences were received in 1964, against 55 in 1961, and licences for the expansion of existing production units showed a decline from 66 in 1961 to 52 in 1964.<sup>45</sup> All this had a significant effect upon the employment situation in West Bengal.

Central Government allocation of scarce resources is another factor which made for unemployment in the state. During the period 1963-4, for example, only 11.5 percent of

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45. 'West Bengal's Industrial Outlook', Eastern Economist, 26 May, 1967.

its annual requirements of copper was received from the Central Government, 7 percent of zinc, 17.5 percent of tin, and 2.3 percent of lead, compared to the more favourable allocations given to Maharashtra and Gujarat.<sup>46</sup> A similar situation exists regarding the housing of financial institutions, most of which have been located in Maharashtra, and hence West Bengal is at a disadvantage in obtaining assistance from these institutions.<sup>47</sup>

The relative decline in the rate of growth of total income in West Bengal is also a measure of its economic decline. For example, although West Bengal registered the average rate of growth for all states, namely, 50 percent, it was below the 70 percent for Punjab and 53 percent for Gujarat, for the period 1964-65 over 1960-61.<sup>48</sup>

These factors and other complex causes which cannot be dealt with here, have led to a decline in employment levels since 1963, which, as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry points out, turned into an absolute decline after 1965. According to these figures, total employment in the factory sector alone fell by more than 40,000 in 1966 from the level of 1965, which, as they say, was particularly acute considering that increases in factory employment between 1951 and 1959 was only 20,000. In other words, double this increase was entirely obliterated in the course of one year.<sup>49</sup>

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46. *ibid.*

47. An example will illustrate the point : in 1964-5 the Industrial Development Bank provided 58 percent of its assistance to Maharashtra, as against only 10 percent to West Bengal. See 'Why West Bengal Lags Behind', Eastern Economist, 26 August, 1967.

48. Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, West Bengal : An Analytical Study (New Delhi, 1971), pp. 38-39.

49. *ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

The set-back in industrial production became particularly noticeable from the end of 1965. Much of the recession was in the engineering industries, particularly in the field of wagon-building and commercial vehicle construction, caused to a considerable extent by the lack of government orders, especially from the railways.<sup>50</sup> This recession in large-scale engineering concerns had further implications for the smaller, ancillary units, because they were dependent upon the larger enterprises.

In the light of the above, retrenchment in industry<sup>51</sup> increased from 1966, but became progressively more acute after the 1967 election was held. According to a reported estimate given by the United Front Labour Minister, 23,000 workers lost their jobs in 95 establishments within the first three months of 1967.<sup>52</sup> The fact that retrenchment and layoffs<sup>53</sup> accelerated rapidly after the installation of the United Front Government in

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50. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce says : 'This State which accounted for more than 60 per cent of the country's wagon building capacity registered a decline of over 39 per cent in 1966 in the production of wagons in terms of four wheelers as compared to the position in 1965. The corresponding figure for the rest of the country was only 21.4 per cent. In the next year, i. e. 1967, while production in West Bengal fell by a further 32 per cent, the fall in the remaining States was less than 22 per cent. As a result of this decline the share of West Bengal in the total production of railway wagons came down from more than 75 per cent in 1963 to about 54 per cent in 1967. The output of wagons in 1967 in West Bengal was only 41 per cent of the peak level reached in 1964, while for the remaining States the level of production in 1967 was 62 per cent of their peak performance.' See Bengal Chamber of Commerce, *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

51. For the legal position regarding retrenchment, see N. K. Joshi (Labour Commissioner, Rajasthan), 'The Law on Retrenchment' Indian Labour Journal, IX, No. 11 (November, 1968), pp. 1445-1462.

52. 'Labour and the Left', Eastern Economist, 7 April, 1967.

53. For the circumstances under which layoffs are legally permitted, see N. K. Joshi, 'The Law on Lay-off in India', Indian Labour Journal, IX, No. 6 (June, 1968), pp. 680-690.

March, 1967, led to the allegation of an 'employers' offensive'. It was widely believed that employers' associations had come to a tacit agreement with the Congress Party to hold over large-scale retrenchment until after the election, so as to avoid embarrassing, and possibly prejudicing, that party's electoral prospects.<sup>54</sup> These allegations, however, were denied in interviews which this writer had with spokesmen for several major firms.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the Labour Advisor of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce thought differently when he said :

'The employers did not want to retrench before the election because of the nature of election tempo in West Bengal. Had the employers retrenched before the election and staged lock-outs, this would have led to greater violence during the election.'<sup>56</sup>

In any case, closures and lock-outs, causing accelerated unemployment levels, continued throughout 1967. The greatest number of retrenchments and closures occurred in the engineering industry, while layoffs were highest in the cotton industry, followed by those in engineering concerns.<sup>57</sup>

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54. See, for example, Link, 2 April, 1967, p. 17; editorial 'Labour and the Law', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 25 March, 1967, and Flibbertigibbet in Economic and Political Weekly, 1 April, 1967, p. 633.

55. Interviews with Mr. D.P. Mukherjee, Chairman, Andrew Yule & Co., Calcutta, April, 1970; Mr. Dutta Mukherjee, Personnel Officer, Guest, Keen Williams Ltd., Howrah, May, 1970; Mr. Maitra, Labour Officer, Dunlop (India) Ltd., Asansol, May, 1970 and Mr. Roychowdhury, Deputy Labour Advisor, Indian Engineering Association, Calcutta, May, 1970.

56. Interview with Mr. Madan Ghosh, op. cit.

57. Official figures released by the West Bengal Labour Directorate covering the year 1967, are as follows : Retrenchment = 6,054; layoffs = 61,155; closures = 7,383; total = 74,592. See Government of West Bengal, Statistics, Research and Publications Branch of the Labour Directorate, Labour in West Bengal 1967, pp. 8-9.

### III. The Experience of the First United Front Government.

#### (i) The Policy Outlined.

It is within the foregoing context that we must examine the labour policy of the United Front Government. The policy announced by the Labour Minister, Subodh Banerjee, shortly after taking office, was bold : a drastic re-organization of all committees and boards of the Labour Department, the expedition of pending conciliation cases and adjudication proceedings by tribunals, the implementation of controls to abolish the system of casual labour.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the representation on these committees and boards was to be broadened by allowing an increase in the number of trade union members. Moreover, Banerjee asked the courts for suggestions on ways to speed up the litigation process. Regarding retrenchment, the Labour Minister made a statement that the issue had been taken up with the Central Government in an effort to eliminate some of the causes, namely, the shortage of raw materials and lack of orders from the railways. Banerjee also sought suggestions from employers and employees on how the postponement of retrenchment could be carried out pending negotiations with the Central Government.<sup>59</sup> Other measures included the decision to set up a Conciliation Board which would hear the pending cases on labour disputes.

Apart from these aspects of the labour policy of the United Front Government, the emphasis, according to Subodh

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58. Criticisms of this policy are contained in 'West Bengal Labour Policy', Capital, 16 March, 1967, p. 497.

59. Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 11 March, 1967, p. 1.



Banerjee, was quite different from that of the previous Congress Government. As he put it :

'The Labour policy was formulated by our own party, the Socialist Unity Centre of India. It was accepted by the United Front in its 18-point programme. The most salient feature of it, which was a departure from the policy of the previous government, was (a) to encourage the growth and development of legitimate trade union movements; (b) to prevent police interference in such movements; police here more often than not make such interference on a plea of maintaining law and order; (c) to emphasize collective bargaining as a means of settling industrial disputes rather than on compulsory adjudication, compulsory arbitration and litigation; (d) to ensure as much relief as possible under the existing system of palliatives to improve the working and the living conditions of the workers, like progressive amendment of laws.' 60

Despite the emphasis put upon 'legitimate' trade union movements and the prevention of police 'interference', Banerjee also appealed to workers and management to exercise restraint. To these two groups, he said :

'I, therefore, appeal to the workers to exercise restraint and not to respond to any adventurist move and allow themselves to be exploited by agent provocateurs. The Labour Department is there to look to legitimate interests of the workers. I request the workers to contact the Department before taking unilateral actions. I also appeal to the management not to take unilateral actions which may precipitate trouble and to co-operate with the Government in maintaining industrial peace.' 61

Notwithstanding this, the United Front Government was later charged with having brought about a state of industrial anarchy, resulting in violence, with the result that: industry

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60. Correspondence with Mr. Subodh Banerjee, August, 1971.

61. Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 18 March, 1967, p. 956.

was greatly disorganized, and that a flight of capital from the state had taken place as a consequence. Why was this so? Our analysis must necessarily turn towards the gherao movement, and to the policy of the United Front Government towards it.

(ii) The Problem of Gheraos.

As mentioned previously, official sources state that there were 811 gheraos between March and December, 1967, with a peak period in September when 194 cases occurred within the state,<sup>62</sup> of which the highest number took place within the engineering industry. According to De and Srivastava, the majority of gheraos in the Calcutta area were concerned with grievances relating to higher wages, followed by charge-sheet suspension/dismissal/discharge in the 24-Parganas, then bonus-profit sharing/production grievances in Burdwan, and finally, with the non-implementation of awards of courts, tribunals and wage boards in Howrah.<sup>63</sup> The authors have concluded that 56 percent of gheraos were thus of a defensive nature.<sup>64</sup>

The left-wing unions and parties, for their part, argued that gheraos were spontaneous in nature. The AITUC described the movement as follows :

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62. Government of West Bengal, Labour in West Bengal 1967, op. cit., p. 5.

63. De and Srivastava, op. cit., p. 2019. Official figures given for complaints regarding non-implementation of awards and agreements for 1967 are : awards - 168 cases received during 1967 and 233 cases pending at the beginning of the year, making a total of 401, of which only 95 cases were disposed of by the end of the year; agreements - 134 cases received during 1967 and 113 cases pending at the beginning of the year, making a total of 247 cases, of which 94 cases were disposed of at the end of the year. See West Bengal Labour Gazette, March, 1968, p. 247.

64. De and Srivastava, op. cit., p. 2020.

'The gherao movement is a spontaneous reaction of the workers to the cruel offensive of the employers. The refusal of the employers even to attend the conciliation proceedings, to implement the award of the court and the decision of the Wage Boards, to abide by the provisions of the Labour laws, to pay the earned wages and other dues to the workers and their policy of victimisation and retrenchment have compelled the workers to resort to Gherao in a big way. The failure of the legal machinery to expeditiously settle the grievances have also contributed to a great extent to the emergence of Gherao movement.' 65

In any event, shortly after the upsurge of gheraos, a tripartite conference was held on April 13 between the government, employers and employees. It was agreed to hold a one-week industrial truce, which was subsequently extended, pending the formation of a committee to examine cases of retrenchment, layoffs, closure of factories and non-implementation of awards and wage board recommendations.<sup>66</sup> Despite the truce, however, the incidence of gheraos continued. Moreover, the formation of the above committee was impeded by the failure of the tripartite meeting of management, labour and government held on May 4, to agree on the formation and functions of the proposed committee. The five major trade union organizations suggested comprehensive powers for the committee, which would empower it to examine the difficulties leading to retrenchments, layoffs, dismissals and closures; to scrutinize the finances of establishments over the past five years, including their accounts, their place in the economy,

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65. All-India Trade Union Congress, West Bengal Committee, 15th Session September 22-24, 1967, General Secretary's Report, Manoranjan Roy, p. 17.

66. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 20 April, 1967.

their future prospects, overhead expenses, including salaries and perquisites to top management personnel, and to call for any necessary papers, data and information.<sup>67</sup>

Although disagreement between management and labour relating to the powers of the committee could be expected over these suggestions by the trade unions, agreement was also lacking on the proposed composition of the committee, which was the main item for discussion at the tripartite conference of May 4. The trade union representatives suggested that the committee should consist of three spokesmen from each of the two parties, two members from the government, and an independent chairman, who would not be a member of the judiciary. The representatives of the Chambers of Commerce, however, did not agree on the proposal to have two members of the government included on the committee. Accordingly, their proposal was for three members from the management, three from the unions and one independent chairman, supported unanimously by the two parties, but failing such agreement, the government should appoint a retired High Court judge as Chairman.<sup>68</sup>

The representatives of the AITUC and UTUC suggested that the management agree to a moratorium for six months on layoffs, retrenchment and closures, while the workers, for their part, would desist from staging gheraos. This suggestion, however, was rejected by the representatives of the Chambers of Commerce on the grounds that it was not possible for many industries to hold in abeyance their decisions to retrench and dismiss. The failure to agree on any proposal put forward at

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67. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 17 April, 1967.

68. *ibid.*, 6 May, 1967.

the tripartite meeting resulted in the decision of the Chief Minister, Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee, to meet the representatives of labour and management separately : the former on May 15 and the latter on May 16.<sup>69</sup> These meetings, however, did not solve the various problems, and the gheraos continued.

One aspect of the movement was that it affected establishments controlled by both the Central and State Governments, in addition to those in the private sector. The most conspicuous example here was the Durgapur steel plant. Labour relations in Durgapur had been strained for some time. In the present context, however, the management put the blame on labour indiscipline and low production levels, but this was denied by the workers. The situation was complicated further by inefficiency in the operations of the plant, as well as by inter-union rivalry between the INTUC, which had gained recognition, and the AITUC which, although unrecognized, claimed to have the allegiance of a larger number of workers in the plant.

This raises an important aspect of the labour movement in general, and gherao movement in particular, namely, inter-union rivalry. De and Srivastava claim that gheraos did not arise because of any preconcerted plan on the part of the trade unions.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the unions became involved, and of the four major federations, the AITUC provided leadership in the majority of cases where unions were involved, followed by the INTUC<sup>71</sup> and UTUC despite the opposition of the central executive of the INTUC to gheraos. In some cases, however,

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69. *ibid.*

70. De and Srivastava, *op. cit.*, p. 2022.

71. *ibid.* - III, Economic and Political Weekly, 2 December, 1967, p. 2099.

gheraos were staged without consulting the union leadership.<sup>72</sup>

In any event, the effects of the gherao movement upon the unions were threefold : an increase in their activities which were oriented towards gaining the allegiance of workers; an increase in the number of registered unions, and an intensification of inter-union rivalry. In some instances, this rivalry was the cause of gheraos.

It is not clear, however, whether the political parties, themselves, were responsible for encouraging and/or promoting inter-union rivalry during this period in an effort to increase the former's political influence. As mentioned previously, Irani considers that the whole object of the gherao movement was to strengthen the Communist movement, and this view was shared by a number of other commentators. However, Irani's account of the entire period of United Front rule in 1967 is so over-simplified as to make his conclusions suspect.

Nevertheless, the problem can be stated in a slightly different way, namely, to question whether the militancy and increased trade union activity was, in any way, a by-product of inter-party struggles for influence? The party which is most prolific in publicizing its tactics is the CPM, and one can find considerable evidence to suggest that this party consciously embarked upon a plan to increase its influence among the working-class. The following extracts from resolutions of the Central Committee bear testimony to this :

'In this struggle [for trade union unity] the winning over of the majority of unions controlled by reformists and revisionists no doubt occupies an important place as they represent sections of comparatively advanced workers - in comparison with the unorganized...', and,

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72. Correspondence with Subodh Banerjee, op. cit.

'The efforts for united struggle from below includes constant appeals to all sections of workers not directly under our influence, for unity and joint action...'; moreover,

'Similarly our work in joint unions must be immensely strengthened so that we secure decisive influence in them', and, finally,

'Our immediate task is to effect the maximum mobilisation of the working class...' 73

These, and other similar statements which appear frequently in CPM literature, suggest that the party's tactics are geared towards the promotion of inter-union rivalry with the aim of extending the party's organizational base.<sup>74</sup> Mr. Ram Das, a member of the Central Committee of the CPM, told this writer that the relative failure of the party to impart 'consciousness' into the proletariat was 'one of the criticisms we have made about the party's functioning in the last fifteen years, and one of the serious weaknesses which we are trying to overcome.'<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, neither the literature mentioned above, nor the extracts from the CPM documents cited by Irani,<sup>76</sup> are evidence that the party actually instigated the gherao movement in

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73. Communist Party of India (Marxist), Tasks on the Trade Union Front, Resolution of the Central Committee, May, 1967, pp. 13, 33, 38 and 63 respectively.

74. Franda argues that 'By 1967 the CPM was clearly on the defensive in the all-India trade union front despite its control of large numbers of trade unions in the state...', and that because of this 'the CPM has pursued what the Central Committee has called 'the real bolshevik method of mobilizing the masses.' This has consisted of militant and aggressive tactics towards employers and other trade unions but 'supplemented by offers of united front from the top which at times is a pre-condition of united front from below.' See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 192.

75. Interview with Mr. Ram Das, op. cit.

76. Irani, passim.

West Bengal during 1967. The same applies to other Communist and Marxist parties within the United Front : although they outwardly avowed their desire to extend their organizations, there is, in my view, nothing explicit which entitles us to conclude definitively that gheraos, as such, were consciously promoted to extend the influence of the parties.<sup>77</sup>

One tentative conclusion is that, for the most part the unions acted independently throughout the period. To some extent, this is borne out in the case of the CPM, whose official leadership in one instance at least, appeared embarrassed by the chaos and indiscipline caused as a result of gheraos organized by an extremist section of the party at the West Bengal State Electricity Board. In the event, a new union was formed within the enterprise, which was sponsored by the official leadership of the party.

Apart from this, certain further hypotheses can be made, namely, that with the coming to power of the United Front Government, sections of the working class expected that Government to be more tolerant of, and sympathetic to their economic aims and grievances. Thus, given the distinct deterioration of the economy and concomitant retrenchment, lock-outs and closures mentioned earlier, with obviously adverse effects upon the workers, gheraos were resorted to as a means of bringing force to bear upon managements to agree to some of their demands. This air of

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77. Franda, however, argues 'That both the CPM and the CPI used the tactic of gherao to gain support among trade union workers is shown by the fact that 397 of the 1018 cases of gherao in March-August 1967 were instigated by CPM or CPI trade unions. The success of the CPM in expanding its trade union base was strikingly demonstrated by its increased support among labour unions in the Calcutta industrial belt in the 1969 election campaigns.' See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., pp. 194-5. My own view, however, is that the parties utilized gheraos, rather than instigated them.

78. De and Srivastava - III, op. cit., p. 2100.



militancy was no doubt welcomed by the various Communist and Marxist parties, given their aims of fostering 'mass revolutionary struggles', but this is not the same thing as saying that the gherao movement was part of a conscious attempt on the part of such parties either to promote revolution, or to increase their support. It is more likely that the parties would have sought to further their organizational expansion through the more usual manifestations of inter-union rivalry than through the gherao movement as such.

Nevertheless, gheraos, as a by-product of other causes, were probably used by the Communist parties on some occasions to further their aims, and this is borne out to some extent by their tactics of utilizing every rift and struggle in pursuit of their overall objectives. The main point to be made, however, is that there is no evidence, as yet, to indicate that the large-scale involvement of trade unions in the gherao movement was due to the control over, and direction of the trade unions by the political parties; nor was the movement a manifestation, by and large, of inter-party struggle. As a matter of fact, there is some evidence to suggest that a number of leftist parties looked askance at the gherao movement, and regarded it as part of an economic struggle of the proletariat. Nepali Bhattacharjee, for instance, told me :

'The BPI wanted to improve employment. If, side by side, you have gheraos etc., the employment potentiality will decrease. So, there is a contradiction if you want more employment, plus gheraos.' 79

The RSP, through one of its state leaders, not only considered that 'to the RSP gherao is no part of the labour policy of any Government, nor ... under Subodh Banerjee in 1967', but also that 'the RSP is particularly concerned about the manner in which the workers' movement as a whole, continues to remain confined within the limits of an economic movement.'<sup>80</sup>

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79. Interview with Nepali Bhattacharjee, op. cit.

80. Interview with Sourindra Nath Bhattacharyya, op. cit.

A similar opinion was expressed by Jyoti Bhattacharjee of the W.P (who was the Minister for Information and Public Relations in the second United Front Government). He said :

'There is a definite trend of economism which we sharply criticize... There are two things to be said re West Bengal : the present struggles are characterized on the one hand, by much larger participation, which is the main achievement of the United Front. On the negative side, the leadership so far has not been able to give serious thought to integration and correlation of these movements towards a common goal. This is economism... My criticism is that in 1967 we didn't really have a labour policy... We didn't provide leadership to the labour movement...' 81

Sudhin Kumar of the RCPI, put the matter more strongly :

'Banerjee had no labour policy. He talked a lot but there was no action. He talked about legitimate democratic movements. What is this? It made the people think that gherao was revolutionary, but this is not so. It is a method of the majority, and in a way is a sectarian policy, creating mischief and anti-social elements get mixed up. Ghosh [the CPM Minister for Labour in the second United Front Government] realized this and never idealized gherao. Banerjee idealized it.' 82

Both spokesmen for the CPI and CPM thought that, in general, the working-class and trade union movements were characterized by economism during the period. Ram Das of the CPM, put it this way :

'Where the party has been able to politicize the working class and agricultural groups, to that extent they have been indulging in political acts. But, unless the party imparts this consciousness, the movement remains essentially a trade union and economic struggle.' 83

Finally, it might be added that not even the Labour Minister, himself, was unqualified in his support of gheraos.

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81. Interview with Jyoti Bhattacharjee, Calcutta, May, 1970.

82. Interview with Sudhin Kumar, op. cit.

83. Interview with Ram Das, op. cit.

Not only did he consider the labour movement as being 'primarily involved in economic struggle', but, in relation to gheraos, said :

'If the cause for which gherao is made is justified then that gherao is legitimate or justified. But if the cause is unjustified, the gherao is unjustified. This approach is true for strike and other forms of movements also... At that time [1967] I said that up to a certain limit gherao is legitimate and not beyond that limit. By it I meant that there should not be unnecessary or excessive intimidation or coercion. The limit was left to the leadership. If the leadership was wise it did not exceed the limit. If the leadership was wrong or immature, the limit was exceeded. In a few cases the limit was deliberately exceeded for personal or political reasons.' 84

In any case, the problem of gheraos attracted the attention of the tripartite Standing Labour Committee (henceforth referred to as the SLC). The SLC, an advisory body, operates on the principle of equality of representation between government and non-government groups on the one hand, and between employers and workers within the non-government group, on the other. Organizations which have an all-India basis, with a minimum membership of 100,000 spread over a number of states and a majority of industries, are eligible to send representatives to the SLC. 85

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84. Correspondence with Subodh Banerjee, op. cit.

85. Criticism has been made about the composition and lack of parity within the SLC and the Indian Labour Organization (ILO) between government and non-government groups. Furthermore, attention has been drawn to the overlapping functions of both these bodies. Further details of these criticisms are contained in 'Industrial Relations Machinery Needs Reorganization', Eastern Economist, 24 March, 1967, pp. 381ff.

At a meeting of the SLC, the representatives of the employers urged that a formal denunciation of gheraos be made by the committee, stressing that they were often accompanied by violence, and that the police should therefore be authorized to take action when they occurred. This view was based on the notion that gheraos were fundamentally a problem of law and order. As such, it was contrary to the view of those people who argued that gheraos were symptomatic of genuine grievances and causes, and that government action was necessary to ensure that employers met their obligations. The Union Labour Minister, Jaisukhal Hathi, initially refused to accept the demand that gheraos be formally denounced. Instead, he summed up the meeting by declaring that the consensus of opinion was against coercive methods. The trade union leaders, on the other hand, argued that gheraos were caused by the failure of employers to settle labour disputes, and this view was supported by the West Bengal Labour Minister, who reiterated his instructions that the police would not be allowed to interfere in 'legitimate' labour disputes. It would seem that Subodh Banerjee regarded gheraos over retrenchment, closure, dismissals and the non-implementation of awards, as legitimate.

Mr. S. A. Dange, one of the leaders of the AITUC, also insisted that gherao was a 'legitimate weapon', and asked that coercive tactics undertaken by employers should also be included in the resolution. When this was not agreed to, he and some of his supporters, walked out of the meeting.<sup>86</sup> The attitude of Mr. Kali Mukherjee of the INTUC was that gheraos would disappear

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86. See 'Employer-Government Conspiracy in SLC Exposed - AITUC Walkout from Tripartite Meeting', Trade Union Record, 10 May, 1967, pp. 1-2 and 'West Bengal State TUC Calls for State-wide Action Against Employers' Offensive', *ibid.*, 5 July, 1967, pp. 1 & 6.

if labour disputes were settled expeditiously, but added that his federation was against gheraos.

The attitudes of other state Labour Ministers were varied : most agreed that the causes of labour's discontents must be removed, but they were not unanimous in thinking that gherao was an acceptable technique to relieve these grievances. Ultimately, the committee did pass a resolution disapproving of gheraos, to which the West Bengal Labour Minister was a party.<sup>87</sup>

A major complicating factor relating to gheraos was that they were often accompanied by violence. This factor was no doubt in the minds of the members of the National Commission on Labour when it concluded that 'Gheraos' cannot be treated as a form of labour protest since it involves physical coercion rather than economic pressure...'<sup>88</sup> On this point, the arguments of the AITUC were similar to those of S.A Dange, mentioned earlier. According to the federation :

'...a well-conducted gherao is a legitimate weapon in the armoury of collective disputes. As does happen, a particular gherao may be unjustified; or it may result in some excesses. But so may be the case in a particular strike or any other action of the workers... Secondly, the N. L. C. [National Commission on Labour] has failed to see that lock-out is also physical coercion in the sense in which the term has been used in the context of gherao...'<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that violence also accompanied intense inter-party clashes among the rank-and-file

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87. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 10 & 11 May, 1967.

88. INTUC, Conclusions and Recommendations of National Commission on Labour - A Digest with Minutes of Dissent, August, 1969, p. 35.

89. Satish Loomba (Secretary, AITUC), Comments on Labour Commission Report, AITUC (New Delhi, 1969), p. 26.

which became particularly virulent during the tenure of the second United Front Government. Accordingly, it is suggested that as a major difficulty confronting the United Front Governments of 1967 and 1969-70 was the inability of the coalition partners to control their rank-and-file, so also it was not possible for union leadership to exert discipline over their members during the gherao movement. Whilst it is impossible to prove or disprove the hypothesis, the point will be taken up later on.

To return, however, to the next phase of the government's policy towards gherao and industrial unrest, a circular dated 12 June was issued which countermanded, to some extent, the instructions contained in the circular of 27 March, stating that matters should be referred to the Labour Minister, whose approval was necessary before the police could intervene in disputes. The new directive, which followed an interim injunction by the High Court in Calcutta against the enforcement of the March circular, stated that if employers were desirous of making complaints, then it was incumbent upon them to place the facts before the police who would then decide whether to act under the existing law.<sup>90</sup> This was a tacit recognition that police action would be resorted to under less stringent conditions than had hitherto been the case. In the judgement of the Chief Justice, Mr. D.N. Sinha, however, 'the beautifully vague wordings of the second circular dated 12th June, 1967 was an attempt to maintain the mischief of the earlier circular dated 27th March, 1967, without making it appear that the interim injunction of the 8th June, 1967 was being violated.'<sup>91</sup>

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90. Text of the Judgement of the Calcutta High Court, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

91. *ibid.*, p. 31.

Justice Sinha argued that officers-in-charge of police stations were neither competent enough, nor likely to have sufficient knowledge to know what constituted a 'legitimate labour movement' or an unlawful act under it.<sup>92</sup>

(iii) Measures to Control Unrest.

Meanwhile, the government turned its attention to some more positive measures to cope with the situation of labour unrest. One was the enlargement and strengthening of the conciliation machinery of the Labour Directorate to enable it to cope with the large volume of pending cases. Moreover, it was decided that in future all tripartite settlements should have the endorsement of all unions, recognized or unrecognized, in an industrial concern. This meant that all those unions would be parties to any decisions made by tripartite bodies.<sup>93</sup> Some of the measures proposed included the introduction of a bill to regulate casual labour - the Casual Labour Bill. In this instance, no central act existed, and hence the approval of the President was to be sought.

A number of other anomalies existed which the Labour Minister endeavoured to rectify, including loopholes in Central Labour Acts, such as the Workmen's Compensation Act. The latter provided that compensation must be paid to a worker who was disabled as a result of an accident, if such accident caused a reduction of his earning capacity. The payment of compensation, however, was often evaded when employers provided alternative employment at the same rates of pay, on the grounds that there had been no reduction in the worker's earning capacity.

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92. *ibid.*

93. Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 7 June, 1967.

Another anomaly concerned the provision for overtime allowances. Under the Central Government Act, namely, the Factories Act, it was stipulated that workers were entitled to overtime allowances if they worked more than nine hours per day, or more than 48 hours per week. In practice, however, if an employee worked nine hours a day for five days, and fell ill on the sixth, he was refused overtime allowances on the grounds that his duty did not exceed 48 hours a week. The Labour Minister proposed to change this in favour of the worker.<sup>94</sup>

These proposals for amendments to labour legislation caused antagonism on the part of employer organizations, because it was felt that the government's decisions were taken unilaterally, without reference to employers. In a joint memorandum to the government, the six Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta claimed that labour laws, although on the concurrent list, should not be at variance with the laws of other states, because a lack of uniformity in labour laws would place employers in West Bengal at a competitive disadvantage with employers in other states. Moreover, it was felt that there should not be extensive amendments to the labour laws pending the discussion of labour-management relations by the National Commission on Labour.<sup>95</sup>

In the meantime, gheraos continued amidst constant pressure by the business community upon the government to take sterner measures than had hitherto been agreed to by the Labour Minister. Increasingly, the Central Government became concerned about the problem. This manifested itself most of all in the public statements issued by the Home Minister, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, who

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94. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 4 June, 1967.

95. 'Labour Must Govern', Eastern Economist, 23 June, 1967.



discussed the issue with the West Bengal Chief Minister and requested him to stop the gheraos. Chavan took the view that, far from being isolated incidents, gheraos had become virulent, and were subverting the rule of law because coercion was frequently resorted to.<sup>96</sup> In a subsequent directive to union government offices within the country, the Home Ministry stated that disciplinary action should be taken against employees who took part in gheraos, and outlined the action to be taken in cases where the police failed to intervene.

This attitude by the Home Ministry most likely provided an impetus to employers in West Bengal to refer cases of threatened gherao to the courts for legal action. On 6 June, a rule was issued by Justice B.C. Mitra of the Calcutta High Court on the West Bengal Government and police, asking them to show cause why the government's circulars directing the police not to intervene in gheraos, should not be declared unlawful, and why the police should not be instructed to discharge their duties under the law.<sup>97</sup> This was subsequently followed by Mr. Justice Mitra's decision to refer all gherao matters under Article 226 of the Constitution, which were then pending in the Calcutta High Court, to a larger bench, as they involved interpretations of the Constitution. This decision followed a series of interim injunctions referred to earlier, handed down by Justice Mitra, and restraining employees from carrying out gheraos in various firms.

The decision of the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on 29 September, 1967, in delivering judgement in the Jay Engineering Works Ltd. & Ors. Versus the State of West Bengal & Ors., was highly significant, and had the effect of slowing down the gherao movement. Chief Justice Sinha struck down the circulars

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96. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 20 May, 1967.

97. The Maharashtra Citizens' Council, Bombay, Gheraos and the Rule of Law, 2nd ed., 1967, p. 13.

issued by the United Front Government on 27 March and 12 June, and ordered the police to act in conformity with the decision of the special bench of the Court. This meant, of course, that they were to take action in gheraos involving wrongful restraint. In his Judgement, Chief Justice Sinha maintained that workers indulging in acts of wrongful restraint were 'guilty under Section 339 or 340 of the Indian Penal Code', and that such offences rendered them liable to arrest without warrant and punishable with imprisonment and fine.<sup>98</sup> The Chief Justice denied that the Labour Minister had the power or authority under the law to give directions to the police before taking action, because such action was 'provided for in the Criminal Procedure Code and Police Acts [and] By executive fiat such procedure cannot be altered or supplemented or varied.'<sup>99</sup> The police were said to have a duty to investigate a complaint alleging an offence, and to prevent the commission of crime, such as forcible confinement and restraint that accompanied most of the gheraos. If the police failed to carry out their duties in this connection, they would be answerable to the courts and punishable under the law.<sup>100</sup> Following the Judgement of the Calcutta High Court, the incidence of gheraos died down, although they did not altogether disappear.

(iv) The Consequences for United Front Rivalries.

Attention must now be drawn to a major aspect of the problem which industrial unrest and gheraos presented for the United Front Government, namely, tensions and conflict among the various constituents of the coalition. One aspect of the disagreement between the partners appeared to center around the

98. Text of the Judgement of the Calcutta High Court, op. cit., p. 40.

99. *ibid.*, p. 41.

100. *ibid.*, p. 42. See also Statesman (Delhi ed.), 30 September, 1967.

interpretations of the problems created by industrial unrest and the policy adopted towards it by the Labour Minister. As in the case of the Naxalbari uprising (to be dealt with in the next chapter), two major divisions emerged : on the one hand, the view on the part of some parties that gheraos were 'legitimate', and, on the other, that gheraos were primarily a law and order problem. These two views were not mutually exclusive, but the tendency did seem to reduce itself to an almost exclusive stress on one or other of these views. The 'aggregative' parties within the coalition took the latter view, while the Communist and Marxist-leftist parties held the former view, and called for remedial measures of an economic and administrative kind.

This polarization of attitudes has interesting implications relating to the interaction between power, policy and ideology. Several questions may be posed in this respect : were the parties' views about labour unrest and gheraos a result of their differing perceptions about the desired policy to be pursued towards employers and employees; were their attitudes influenced primarily by ideological considerations and commitments, and, finally, did their views derive more fundamentally from expectations of power and prestige which were expected to follow from adoption of one or other of the attitudes and intended 'solutions' to the labour problem?

One possible answer is that those parties insisting that the problem was one of law and order, were influenced by their opposition to the CPM, for it will be recalled that the then CPM-dominated AITUC led most of the gheraos. This opposition would have, in part, stemmed from ideological perspectives, but more fundamentally from the struggle for power between the CPM, on the one hand, and the parties opposing the CPM, on the other. As against this view, one could argue that considerations of power and influence were not dominant motives, or, if they were, then

calculations about / <sup>them</sup> were misguided, for parties committed to a law and order solution would hardly have been popular with the industrial working class. Why, then, did those parties advocating a law and order solution do so, when this would have militated against their popularity among the working-class? Let us first consider some manifestations of dissent between the parties.

A certain amount of conflict appears to have arisen between the Labour Minister and the BC Minister for Commerce and Industry, Sushil Dhara, after the latter had written to the Chief Minister, stating that gheraos should be stopped in public sector undertakings.<sup>101</sup> Dhara issued a press statement saying that although he could not claim that the Labour Minister had encouraged gheraos in public sector undertakings, he had not, at least, discouraged them. According to the press, the conflict between these ministers subsequently reached the point where the Chief Minister was said to be considering a re-allocation of portfolios by relieving Banerjee of the Labour portfolio, and giving it to Dhara instead. This was resisted by the Communist members of the coalition, who charged that the BC was attempting to appropriate too many important portfolios for itself,<sup>102</sup> a charge which, as mentioned in Chapter Three, was later made against the CPM in 1969, when the second United Front Government was formed.

Dissent was also voiced by the Minister for Relief and Co-operation, Mr. N.N. Kundu, who argued that gheraos impeded industrial production as a result of which many industries would have to close down.<sup>103</sup> Dissatisfaction over the labour policy pursued by the government was not confined to non-Communist

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101. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 31 May, 1967.

102. *ibid.*, 28 September, 1967.

103. Maharashtra Citizens' Council, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

parties, but as pointed out earlier, there was criticism from members of other Communist and Marxist parties. Added to this was opposition on the part of the RSP Minister for Health, Nani Bhattacharjee, who, according to press reports, threatened to resign from the United Front Cabinet in August, 1967. Bhattacharjee is alleged to have said that the United Front had failed to work as a composite body, and hence was creating confusion among the people. Under these circumstances, he felt that his party should dissociate itself from the government.<sup>104</sup>

Piecing together the various threads leads to the conclusion that the attitudes of the coalition partners were not motivated by any one single factor. Certainly, there were fears that the CPM, through its dominant position in the AITUC, might make opportunistic use of the gherao movement to further its organizational aims. Equally strong, however, was the fear that industrial chaos would do two other things : firstly, create a bad image for the United Front Government which would only be to the advantage of the Congress party, and, secondly, result in a grave economic crisis by causing industrialists to withdraw their capital investments from the state, or, through lack of new investment and development, retard even further the already deteriorating economic situation

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104. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 8 August, 1967. In addition to the dissension mentioned above, there were other conflicts. For instance, the Ministers were divided over the composition and terms of reference of the Pay Commission which the Government had decided to set up to examine the structure of emoluments of all state government employees, and to recommend changes for certain classes of employees such as the police, teachers, and so on. A FB Minister opposed the appointment of a Mr. K. G. Bose, on the grounds that he was associated with 'a particular left-wing party'. A difference arose on this point between those opposed to the inclusion of Bose, and Jyoti Basu, the Deputy Chief Minister, who argued that Bose's appointment was justified by virtue of his status as an established trade union leader. See Statesman (Delhi ed.), 6 & 7 August, 1967. A further rift developed in October over a decision to appoint a cabinet sub-committee to deal with certain aspects of the labour situation in the state. This decision was taken, however, without reference to the Labour Minister, Subodh Banerjee, who was left unaware of the composition and scope of the committee. Moreover, Banerjee was conspicuously absent from the names of the proposed committee members, which caused some people to argue that there was a lack of confidence in the Labour Minister. See Statesman (Delhi ed.) 8 August, 1967.

in West Bengal. Hence, pragmatic reasons were as important a motive as those relating to the struggle for power or ideology.

Returning briefly, however, to the sequence of events, other political issues were moving towards a highly critical position with the manifestation of factionalism within some of the coalition parties, and the defection of Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, the Minister for Food, from the United Front Government. From this point, it was not long before the first United Front Government fell from office.

#### IV. The Experience of the Second United Front Government.

##### (i) Gheraos Abate.

When the second United Front Government came to power, Mr. Krishnapada Ghosh, a member of the CPM, was given the Labour portfolio after considerable haggling. Ghosh's personality and handling of the portfolio were quite different when compared with Subodh Banerjee. As Mr. Ajit Sen of Sen Raleigh & Co., put it :

'Banerjee was more a theoretician; he never came down to brass tacks on labour. Ghosh was a down-to-earth man, and following a definite policy, for example, the first year we should settle the economic demands of labour through long-term agreements. So jute was settled, and cotton, tea etc. after strikes. Once economic issues are over, labour and management can work out, for example, problems of productivity etc. But, Banerjee had a theoretical approach.' 105

Thus, pragmatism was in many ways the key-note of Ghosh's style in handling the portfolio. Before examining this in greater detail, however, let us first look at the relevant sections of the 32-point programme formulated by the United Front as it related to labour. Under Clauses 14-15, the programme says :

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105. Interview with Ajit Sen, Calcutta, May, 1970.

'14. The U.F. Government will help the workers in their struggle for (a) living wages; (b) unemployment benefits; (c) adequate bonus, necessary modification of the Bonus Act; and (d) preventing retrenchment, rationalisation and automation.

The U.F. Government will amend the existing labour laws, wherever necessary, to protect the interests of the working people. It will legislate for (a) punishment of employers declaring closure with malafide intentions; (b) abolition of contract and casual labour; (c) recognition of trade unions - compulsory recognition of union where there is one union; in case where there are more than one union, recognition to the most representative one determined by secret ballot every two years subject to the right of representation by other unrecognised unions; (d) payment of wages for lock-out period - 50% to be paid during pendency of lock-out; (e) payment of subsistence allowances pending final settlement of disputes relating to retrenchment, suspension or dismissal on charges of mis-conduct etc. (f) clauses of I.D. Act relating to compensation eligible to workers on various accounts would be amended to increase the quantum and for speedy payment; (g) compulsory attendance of employers and employees in conciliation proceedings; and (h) suitable punishment for default in depositing employers' contribution towards Provident Fund. It will take steps to amend Employment Standing Orders for ensuring rights of workmen for improving conciliation machinery and procedures etc. It will take steps for reorganization of the E.S.I. Scheme. It will recognise the trade union rights of all categories of government employees and it will take particular steps for thorough revision of Government Service Conduct Rules in the interest of the employees.

15. The U.F. Government will take effective steps to ensure minimum wages to agricultural labourers throughout the State, more employment for them and recognition of agricultural labourers employed in State farms as regular workers.' 106

It can be seen from the programme, therefore, that a number of issues such as closures, contract and casual labour,

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106. Programme of the United Front, United Front, West Bengal, 20 July, 1968, pp. 20-21. See Appendix XII.

recognition of unions and conciliation procedures were recurring general problems for the second United Front Government. It is not proposed, however, to go into these matters any further, but rather to point up the differences with respect to industrial relations and the policy of the government during the tenure of the second United Front.

The essential differences were three in number : firstly, although gheraos continued during the period 1969-70, they were less in number and intensity, and, the United Front Government, through its Labour Minister, did not encourage them. Secondly, strikes which took place in three major industries of West Bengal, namely, jute,<sup>107</sup> tea,<sup>108</sup> cotton and engineering, were more characteristic of the period. These strikes were of long duration, and the net effect was a series of wage-increases for employees in these industries. Thirdly, inter-union rivalry became more intense during the period of the second United Front Government than was the case during 1967. This rivalry resulted in many instances of violence, and was an adjunct to the virulent inter-party dissension which was so marked a feature during 1969-70. In the end, inter-party dissension and clashes led to a virtual paralysis of the administration, and brought about the collapse of the second United Front Government.

Meanwhile, although the Calcutta High Court in its judgement of September, 1967, had declared gheraos to be

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107. For information about conditions in the jute industry, see 'What the Jute Mill Owners Want People to Believe', West Bengal, 9 August, 1969, pp. 1054-1056, and 'Appalling Condition of Jute Workers', People's Democracy, 3 August, 1969.

108. For conditions relating to tea plantations and the industry, see 'Land Owners are Abusing Process of Law', West Bengal, 26 July, 1969, pp. 1009-1010, and 'Tea and Sympathy', Frontier, 30 August, 1969, pp. 3-4.



illegal, 517 cases occurred during 1969, compared with 811 cases from March to September, 1967.<sup>109</sup> According to the Indian Engineering Association, the police were generally inactive in rescuing those who were gheraoed, unless court orders were produced, and even when this was done, police action was not prompt.<sup>110</sup>

It will be recalled from Chapter Three that the Home portfolio was taken over after the Mid-term election in 1969 by Jyoti Basu of the CPM, who was also Deputy Chief Minister. One of the major accusations by other partners in the coalition against the CPM during the period of the second United Front Government, was that Basu utilised the Home portfolio to further the aims of the CPM, and towards this end, was partial in ordering police intervention during acts of violence and inter-party clashes - a point which will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Seven. As far as gheraos were concerned, however, it is not possible to prove or disprove that police inaction, as such, was caused by deliberate instructions from Basu, either on his own initiative, or at the behest of the CPM.<sup>111</sup> It is likely, however, that orders were in fact given to the police that they were not to act in gherao cases unless court orders were served - a formality which the police would be likely to observe.

Added to this was the strongly-held feeling on the part of the left-wing parties that gheraos were, despite what the High Court may have said, part of a legitimate trade union movement.

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109. Government of West Bengal, Labour in West Bengal 1967 and Labour in West Bengal 1969, op. cit., pp. 5 respectively.

110. Indian Engineering Association, Calcutta, Annual Report 1969, p. 93.

111. It should be pointed out that a great deal of criticism from both Communist and non-Communist parties and individuals has been levelled over the years against the police force in West Bengal. For Jyoti Basu's attitudes towards the role of the police, see his statements in 'Police Will be Instrument of Justice and Not of Oppression', Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 9 August, 1969, pp. 1047-1049 & 1060.

As against this, however, we must consider several things : firstly, the fact that the second United Front Government, through its experience of 1967, must have observed that gheraos did nothing to ameliorate the workers' grievances; that they disrupted the economy, and created a bad image for the government among other sections of the community. Moreover, according to Madan Ghosh of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce :

'In 1969 the objective of the United Front was to give something positive to the workers. They did not say gheraos were illegal, but they said that strikes were a better weapon. Also, the worst of the recession had passed.' 112

Even with respect to strikes, the government sounded a cautious note when Jyoti Basu said in a speech :

'We know that whereas the workers have the right to withdraw labour - that is the greatest weapon - but that is not used everyday. We know that it is the ultimate weapon, the most powerful weapon, and it should be used only when there is no other alternative.' 113

Basu's comments should be seen within the context of an initial and genuine attempt on the part of the government, particularly through talks which he held with representatives of industry, to bring about a better industrial and economic climate. Again, the remarks of Madan Ghosh are pertinent :

'The second United Front Government had the best opportunity to revive the economy because of the receding recession, the plan outlay, the wide support of the people. The Chambers of Commerce also felt the second UF Government would be different from the first UF Government in this respect. But, it did not happen this way.' 114

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112. Interview with Madan Ghosh, op. cit.

113. Government of West Bengal, 'Cooperate With Us in Implementing Our 32-point Programme', West Bengal, 24 May, 1969, p. 828.

114. Interview with Madan Ghosh, op. cit.

That this move for accommodation was extremely short-lived was due to inter-party dissension, and a shift in the strategy of the CPM to the rural areas during 1969-70 in pursuit of organizational expansion, as a defensive measure to counteract the perceived influence in the future of the CPI(M-L). Before examining these factors, let us look more closely at the prevalent forms of industrial unrest during the tenure of the second United Front Government.

(ii) Strikes Increase.

Work stoppages, including strikes, rose dramatically and numbered 903, involving 684,993 men, with a loss of 9,971,389 man-days in 1969, as compared to 438 work stoppages, involving 165,102 men and a loss of 5,015,852 man-days in 1967.<sup>115</sup> In August, 1969, 200,000 workers in 64 jute mills staged an indefinite strike;<sup>116</sup> the same number of workers also lodged an indefinite strike in 188 tea gardens as from August 18,<sup>117</sup> and from September 1, 45,000 cotton textile workers struck in 30 mills.<sup>118</sup> In addition, major strikes took place in a number of engineering concerns. The largest number of strikes in the above-mentioned industries occurred over the issue of wages and

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115. Government of West Bengal, Labour in West Bengal 1969, op. cit., p. 2.

116. See the following in connection with the jute workers' strike : 'Jute Workers to Launch Indefinite Strike for 10-point Charter', New Age (official organ of the CPI), 13 July, 1969; 'Jute Workers Prepare for Mighty Action on August 4', *ibid.*, 3 August, 1969; 'Jute Workers' Strike - a Landmark', *ibid.*, 17 August, 1969, and 'Case for Revision of Jute Workers' Wages', Indian Worker (official organ of the INTUC), 4 August, 1969; 'Interim Wage Rise for Jute Workers', *ibid.*, 18 August, 1969; 'Jute Workers Prepare for their Historic Strike', People's Democracy, 3 August, 1969 and 'Jute Workers Win Magnificent Victory', *ibid.*, 17 August, 1969.

117. See 'Tea Garden Workers on Indefinite Strike' and 'Tea Workers Magnificent Victory', People's Democracy, 24 August and 7 September, 1969, respectively.

118. Figures relating to the number of workers on strike in the four major industries have been taken from Indian Engineering Association, Calcutta, Annual Report 1969, p. 94. For the textile

118 (continued)

workers' strike, see 'Textile Strike Drags On, Employers Adament', New Age, 21 September, 1969.

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allowances, and involved the highest total time loss. It is worth mentioning that conditions in the jute, tea and cotton industries within the state have been very poor compared to those in the engineering industry, and workers in the former have been among the most poorly paid. As far as the jute industry is concerned, a major problem relates to the fact that it is an export industry, and was faced with considerable competition both from Pakistan and synthetics.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, as the Labour Advisor of the Indian Jute Association, Mr. Maitra, said :

'The workers in the jute industry have lower wages than in the engineering industries. But when the demand for higher wages is compared with the particular capacity of an industry to pay, the problem arises.'<sup>120</sup>

Apart from the abovementioned factors, it is significant to note that the major strikes in the months of August and September were industry-wise, and it was no doubt due to united action of this kind that expeditious tripartite agreements were reached.<sup>121</sup>

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119. The industry's share of the international market declined from 83 percent in 1957 to 55 percent during the first nine months of 1968. According to Sushil Dhara, the industry's problems are intensified by the shortage of quality raw jute and a continuation of export duty. See Government of West Bengal, 'West Bengal Holds Unique Position on India's Industrial Map', West Bengal, 21 June, 1969, pp. 908 & 915.

120. Interview with Mr. Maitra, Indian Jute Association, Calcutta, May, 1970.

121. Jute Workers received a monthly interim wage rise of thirty rupees; textile workers twenty rupees per month; engineering workers between twenty-seven and forty-seven rupees per month, plus a minimum bonus of 4 percent plus 15 days' wages, while tea plantation workers received an interim rise of 20 paise daily, and the creation of nearly 10,000 new vacancies in the agreement. For more details, see the following : 'Memorandum of Settlement on Jute Strike Signed', West Bengal, 16 August, 1969, p. 80; 'Settlement of Cotton Textile Dispute', *ibid.*, 11 October, 1969, p. 236; 'Tea Garden Workers Succeed in their Struggle', *ibid.*, 6 September, 1969, pp. 138-139, and 'Tripartite Agreement to End Tea Workers' Strike', *ibid.*, 13 September, 1969, pp. 160-162.

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121. (continued)

Figures relating to wage increases have been taken from Government of West Bengal, News Bureau, United Front in West Bengal - the First Year, February 23, 1970, p. 28.

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(iii) Inter-union Rivalry.

As mentioned previously, inter-union rivalry was a source of considerable conflict in 1969. A major factor behind this rivalry was the fact that the United Front Government, in accordance with its programme, proposed to introduce a bill providing for the compulsory recognition of unions enjoying the support of the majority of workers employed in various undertakings. This had the not unexpected effect of causing unions to endeavour to dislodge other unions, and, at the same time, to increase their membership. The struggle was particularly acute in the coal-fields of Asansol, where violence took place between supporters of the SSP-dominated unions, which had hitherto enjoyed the support of the management, and the CPM-controlled unions.

The question arises as to whether this inter-union rivalry was confined merely to struggle and conflict over union dominance within a particular plant, with the object of becoming the sole recognised agent for the workers over economic issues, or whether it was primarily a manifestation of inter-party struggle, and hence mainly political in origin. It appears to this writer that the conflict was caused by both factors, that is to say, from the normal trade union desire to be the sole representative of the workers, on the one hand, and, as part of the inter-party struggle, on the other. Most observers agree that political parties in West Bengal ultimately exert control over trade unions, but it is not so easy to find agreement on the extent to which political parties actually direct the activities of

the trade unions. Some opinions on the matter may therefore be of interest.

According to Mr. Roy Chowdhury of the Indian Engineering Association :

'The trade unions take action if instructed, for example, for political or trade union reasons. Initially, though, the circumstances must be there and then the parties can utilize this to their own cause. But, just for a political cause? It has happened to a certain extent, but this is not a normal feature.' 122

Similarly, Ajit Sen thought that :

'The trade unions never go against the parties, but they are not utilized fully for the benefit of the parties.' 123

On the other hand, Mr. Maitra of the Indian Jute Association, thought that 'inter-union rivalry to a great extent, is part of the inter-party struggle',<sup>124</sup> while D. P. Mukherjee of Andrew Yule & Company said that 'troubles are created not for the benefit of the workers, but for the parties.'<sup>125</sup>

#### V. Summary and Conclusions.

Returning now to the points raised in the earlier part of this chapter relating to the accusations that, firstly, the United Front Government of 1967 was responsible for promoting a bad state of industrial unrest during its tenure, and, secondly, that the motive behind the encouragement of this unrest was the expansion of the communist movement, and, in particular, the organizational expansion of the CPM, we may formulate some conclusions.

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122. Interview with Mr. Roy Chowdhury, op. cit.

123. Interview with Ajit Sen, op. cit.

124. Interview with Mr. Maitra, op. cit.

125. Interview with D. P. Mukherjee, op. cit.

Certainly, it is true that industrial unrest, particularly in the form of the gherao movement, was the most characteristic feature of 1967, when the first United Front Government was in power. It has also been shown, however, that the industrial relations machinery within the state is highly defective and inefficient in many respects, and this fact is responsible for a great deal of frustration on the part of the working-class. Wage boards, for example, act like wage fixation schemes due to the long delays taken to reach their recommendations. The whole system is beset by loopholes which enable the managements and owners of enterprises to evade their obligations and responsibilities. Added to this, is the climate of 'scarcity', which, in effect, means that many of the workers barely live above subsistence level. To make these inherent difficulties more acute, there was a severe industrial recession preceding and during the tenure of the first United Front Government, resulting in a great deal of unemployment.

It is within this dismal context that the United Front Government - a predominantly left-wing coalition - took office early in 1967. It is not surprising, therefore, that the assumption of power by this avowedly pro-labour group of parties had the effect of inflating hopes and expectations in the minds of a considerable number of workers, who hoped their grievances would now be ameliorated. The coming to power of the United Front Government, therefore, had a significant psychological effect upon many workers. Thus, the feeling was engendered that they could take the law into their own hands to force the managements of enterprises into meeting their demands, and that the government would not go against the workers in this respect. This feeling was reinforced when the Labour Minister, Subodh Banerjee, made a number of public statements affirming

that gheraos were a legitimate form of working-class agitation, and that therefore the police would not be allowed to intervene. Banerjee probably did not realise at the time that the movement would be as extensive and intensive as it in fact, became.

Conflict in industrial relations reached a high point when violence occurred. It is contended, however, that there was no deliberate attempt generally on the part of the parties forming the United Front Government, to promote gheraos. For the most part, they were, as the Communists said, spontaneous movements by the working-class, aimed essentially towards the redress of grievances. Thus, they were essentially economic in character, and not political. At the same time, however, there may have been a tendency for the parties, or some of them, to utilize gheraos with the object of fostering discontent and antagonism towards the political and economic systems. Finally, in most cases gheraos were initiated by the workers, and later taken up by the trade unions, and not the other way around.

The situation was different during the inter-union rivalry which existed during the period of the second United Front Government. Although conflict had, in the main, shifted to the rural areas in 1969-70, it was nevertheless intense within the industrial front. Here, the reasons were both political and economic. The rivalry was political in the sense that the trade unions, being dominated by the parties, could act as vehicles for the organizational expansion of any party which succeeded in ousting the influence of other unions. Much was at stake, and it was thus a naked struggle for power, exacerbated by the proposal of the United Front Government to pass the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill, which would have made recognition of unions by employers, compulsory, after the unions had



demonstrated by secret ballot, that they had the majority of support within an enterprise.

The CPM took the most militant part in this conflict, but not an exclusive part. That the party was able to take a leading part was due to its superior organizational resources and clear-cut policy which laid down tactics designed to increase its support. Despite this, one qualification in the form of a hypothesis, needs to be made, namely, that not even the CPM-dominated trade union leaders could always control their rank-and-file during inter-union clashes involving violence. This point will be taken up again in Chapter Seven. But, to the author, who was resident in West Bengal during most of the tenure of the second United Front Government, it did seem that this control was lacking. Questions to spokesmen for political parties on this point, however, mostly resulted in evasive replies. Madan Ghosh was more outspoken when he said :

'Yes, definitely they are unable to control their rank-and-file. But, it is very complex. The leaders can't come out with positive statements because the whole thing is on a party alignment. The leaders couldn't control the rank-and-file, but they also couldn't make positive statements about this.' 126

It is suggested,<sup>127</sup> therefore, that a certain amount of inter-union rivalry and violence during the tenures of both United Front Governments, was initiated by the workers, themselves. On the whole, however, inter-union rivalry was directed by the

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126. Interview with Madan Ghosh, op. cit.

127. Needless to say, this hypothesis would be extremely difficult to prove or disprove. I do not believe that quantitative research techniques involving questionnaire methods could definitively settle the point.

parties, particularly the CPM, for political reasons.

Nevertheless, the other side of the conflict was, of course, the natural desire of the unions to attain majority support within enterprises, in pursuit of ultimate recognition. Moreover, the existence of vested interests within union organizations must not be overlooked. All this adds up to the fact that there was not a single factor situation behind the conflict of 1969-70, and the same can be said about the gherao movement of 1967. Both situations were complex, unlike the over-simplified analyses given to us by Irani and, in general, the press.

Chapter FivePEASANT UNREST AND THE PROBLEM OF  
LAND REFORM.I. The Problem.

Increased industrial unrest during the tenures of the United Front Governments was matched by disturbances in the rural areas, but whereas the most acute phase of industrial conflict occurred in 1967, peasant disturbances became particularly conspicuous during the period when the second United Front Government was in power. In 1967 a peasant revolt occurred in the northern part of West Bengal, and was referred to as the Naxalbari revolt. During 1969, the grievances of peasants, share-croppers and rural labourers spread beyond Naxalbari, and were manifested in what has been called the 'land grab movement', when significant numbers of peasants took forcible possession of the land.

An examination of this period is important for several reasons. Firstly, it points up another fundamental strain underlying the coalition, caused by the different attitudes towards methods of effecting land reform, and, as such was inimical to cohesion within the United Front Government. For example, attitudes on the part of the parties towards the Naxalbari revolt differed. Moreover, the disturbances posed difficulties for the CPM, as the revolt was led by an extremist section of the party, and thus created an embarrassment and problem of inter-party discipline. The more moderate leadership was faced with a major dilemma : how to preserve a 'revolutionary image', while at the same time, as a partner in the coalition, to agree to the forcible quelling of the revolt.

Secondly, when we look ahead to the land-grab movement of 1969-70, led predominantly by the CPM, we are confronted

with a tantalising question, namely, why, after the experience of the first United Front Government and problems created by relatively unrestrained groups such as industrial workers staging gheraos, and peasants in revolt, did the CPM promote such a degree of rural unrest as to threaten the whole viability and cohesion of the second United Front Government? Why did that party not first consolidate its position and image by creating a climate of relative stability and the promotion of piecemeal reform? Moreover, as pointed out in Chapter Four, the second United Front Government when it assumed office, did create the impression that it wanted a better climate of cooperation between it, business interests and industrial workers. Needless to say, acute disturbances in the rural areas would have effects upon urban areas and groups.

The questions to be raised, therefore, are : did the party miscalculate its tactical line by concluding that its leadership of a violent peasant movement would thereby consolidate its position through expansion of its organizational base? Did the party think that organizational expansion would eventually lead to its unchallengeable supremacy, so that a short-term loss in the form of antagonism by the other coalition partners to an aggressive tactical line followed by the CPM, might prove a long-term gain?

It is difficult to accept the conclusion that the party, of its own volition, could have made such a crude miscalculation. Had it thought along these lines, a more sensible and viable approach would have been steadily and patiently, but less dramatically, to expand organizationally into the rural areas. After all, with its dominant position in the United Front, and its policy towards land reform, it was in a good position to improve gradually and consistently, its position. I would argue, therefore, that another factor must be taken into account when

analyzing this complex situation, namely, the existence of the CPI(M-L), or Naxalites as they are generally called. By the first half of 1969, the Naxalites had extended their operations to various parts of West Bengal, and were perceived as a major force to contend with, because of their policy of violence and murder of land owners in the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, it is argued that the CPM offensive in leading the land grab movement of 1969-70 was, in large part, a defensive measure designed to counteract the increasing influence of the Naxalites.<sup>2</sup> The latter's actions had placed

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1. Although the general term 'Naxalites' is often employed here, it must be noted that there were, and still are, a number of different groups using this name, which are bitterly opposed to each other over questions of tactics, for example, the followers of Charu Mazumdar, on the one hand (since this draft was written, Mazumdar has been arrested), and those of the Andhra leader, Nagi Reddy, on the other. Although the Naxalites in West Bengal are split up into a number of factions, reference here is made to the Mazumdar group which espoused a policy of terrorism and annihilation of 'jotedars', claiming that this activity was a higher form of class struggle. For further details, see Mohan Ram, Maoism in India (Delhi, 1971)

2. Franda's interpretations and emphases differ in some respects from mine. He argues that 'Of particular concern to CPM leaders is the danger that the other parties in the United Front might coalesce against the CPM, either in alliance with the Congress or under the tutelage of the CPI.' See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 182. Franda then says that the CPM adopted a more flexible policy 'designed to meet the threat of other parties' making inroads into the rural areas by using the patronage of political office. By allowing local units to determine the forms of organization to be used as well as the class interests to be courted, the party made it possible for each local unit to ensure maximum support.' *ibid.*, p. 184. I would not dispute these statements, and consider that the need to consolidate the party's position, and prevent an anti-CPM alliance from forming were major problems in 1969-70 as well as in the 1967 period. My point, however, is that the militant policy pursued by the CPM was actually inimical to both these aims. For this reason, I have put greater emphasis upon the significance of the CPI(M-L) in the situation relating to the land grab movement than Franda appears to have done.

the CPM on the horns of a dilemma : whether the party's image was to be one of a fairly moderate Communist party treading the parliamentary path, or whether its stance was to be more militant involving overt and violent class struggle. The CPM decided to counteract the influence of the Naxalites by leading a peasant struggle for land. Thereafter, the movement snowballed to the extent that all the parties were, at different times, and in different places, conducting both offensive and defensive operations. The result was that the CPM decided on an all-out bid to win over the allegiance of as many poor peasants and rural labourers as possible.<sup>3</sup> In addition, part of the intensity and scope of the movement was, as in the case of the gherao movement and inter-union rivalry, caused by the independent actions of the rank-and-file of the parties and militant peasants.

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3. Franda argues that the 'land redistribution program' 'could be understood as a political device for transferring land from landed Congress supporters (who had the backing of previous state governments) to a new group of rural landholders who were able to gain the backing of the United Front parties.' See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 190. Whilst Franda's point may well relate to one aim behind the policy, it leaves a number of questions relating to the dynamics of the land grab movement unanswered. Although I would agree with one of his specific points, namely, that the policy was designed to erode the previous pattern of Congress support in the rural areas, I do not hold with the other statement in the above quotation. If, for instance, the parties were concerned merely to transfer land from one group of landholders to another, then their 'image', and hence support from the landless labourers and poor peasants, would have ultimately suffered, unless one were to argue that the transference of land from one group of landholders to another, would secure support because of the patronage system. As I have analyzed the situation, there was a complex interaction between a power struggle, designed to erode Congress support, even if that meant supporting some landholders in return for their support, and a policy intended to redistribute land to the landless and poor peasants, both for ideological reasons, and pragmatic expectations of increased support from these social groups. Aside from this, there is a further problem which Franda's assessment does not explain. Why, for instance, as stated in the previous footnote, did the CPM adopt such a degree of militancy which was obviously so dysfunctional to the maintenance of the United Front Government? Certain suggestions relating to this point are advanced in the conclusions to this chapter.

## II. Historical and Statutory Framework.

Before we proceed, however, to look more closely at the situations of extreme conflict caused by the Naxalbari revolt and land grab movement, in addition to the points mentioned above, it is necessary to pay some attention to the system of land tenure<sup>4</sup> as it existed in 1967 and 1969. As shown in Chapter One, there are large numbers of landless labourers and cultivators in West Bengal. Many of the latter are share-croppers, who are known as bargadars. Rural discontent stems largely from dissatisfaction with the land tenure system, which historically acquired notoriety after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in 1793. This Act created a landlord class possessing absolute proprietary rights - later referred to as the zamindari system. The effects of this system, and the subinfeudation which became progressively more acute, cannot be dealt with here, except to say that a series of moderate reforms were enacted before Independence. However, it was not until the appointment of the Flood Commission in 1938 that any large-scale and comprehensive plan was formulated for the actual abolition of the zamindari system.<sup>5</sup>

Land reform lies within the jurisdiction of the state governments. The Central Government, despite various attempts between 1947 and 1950, was unable to develop a clear-

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4. Brief information about land tenure systems in West Bengal can be found in Radha Kumar Mookerjee, Indian Land-System : Ancient, Medieval and Modern (with special reference to Bengal), (Alipore, 1958).

5. Franda deals with the principal recommendations of the Flood Commission. See Marcus F. Franda, West Bengal and the Federalizing Process in India (Princeton, 1968), pp. 146-147.

cut strategy which could act as a guideline for state governments in formulating policies for their respective states.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the state governments were left to work out their individual policies in this respect.

According to the report of the National Commission on Labour adopted in 1969, 'There are two aspects of land reform : one relates to the changes in the system of land holding through tenancy reform and abolition of intermediaries, and the other to the system of land cultivation as affected by ceiling on land holdings, cooperative farming, and distribution of lands through official agencies or through other movements.'<sup>7</sup> In the present context, we shall deal with both aspects of land reform.

The Congress Government in West Bengal introduced a bill in 1953 which was an attempt at implementing major legislation on land reform. The objectives of the bill sounded impressive in that, among other things, they purported :

- (a) to eliminate the interests of all zamindars and other intermediaries by acquisition on the payment of compensation;
- (b) to permit the intermediaries to retain possession of their khas (private) lands up to certain limits and to treat them as tenants holding directly under the state.<sup>8</sup>

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6. *ibid.* Franda summarizes the recommendations of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, and the Working Committee Economic Planning Subcommittee of the Congress. The CAR Report could not command general approval, while the subsequent WCEPS Report was more moderate, and simply recommended the abolition of 'the zamindari and malguzari systems by paying compensation, if necessary, ' '. It advocated the formulation of state laws which would give permanent tenure to the tillers, but other controversial questions remained vague. p. 145. For the views and assessments of the Central Government's Planning Commission, see A. N. Rajmani 'Land Reforms and Land Policy in the Fourth Five Year Plan', Economic Affairs, XII, No. 10 (October, 1967), pp. 453-457.

7. Government of India, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Report of the National Commission on Labour (Delhi, 1969), p. 405.

8. H. D. Malaviya, Land Reforms in India (New Delhi : All-India Congress Committee, 1954), p. 133.



The following year, the bill was translated into the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, and, although it formally abolished the zamindari system, and effected a re-distribution of some land, it did not succeed in eliminating the intermediaries, nor did it significantly alter the relationships between various rural groups.<sup>9</sup> This was largely due to the legislation which proved ineffective in plugging the numerous loopholes enabling wholesale evasions of the act to take place.<sup>10</sup>

Under the act, intermediaries were able to retain homestead lands, land appertaining to buildings and structures, non-agricultural land in khas possession, provided that the total of such land did not exceed twenty acres; agricultural land in khas possession to the limit of twenty-five acres, and tank fisheries,<sup>11</sup> orchards, and tea-gardens - without limitation.<sup>12</sup> The act also exempted from its ceiling provisions religious or charitable institutions, which could retain any amount of agricultural or non-agricultural land, with the exception of forest lands. All intermediaries, however, were required to hold land directly as tenants under the state.

If a major objective of land reform is to break the concentration of land in a few hands; to provide security to tenants

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9. Franda, West Bengal and the Federalizing Process, op. cit., p. 167.

10. For a general overview, see Wolf Ladejinsky, 'Agrarian Reform in Asia, the "Green Revolution" and its Reform Effects', Paper read to the 28th International Congress of Orientalists, Canberra, 6-12 January, 1971.

11. In connection with the illegal transferring of agricultural land into fisheries so as to evade the ceiling limits, see 'More Than Half of Sundaban Fisheries are Agricultural Lands', West Bengal, 2 August, 1969, p. 1039.

12. Government of West Bengal, The West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953, as modified up to 1 October, 1966. (Alipore, 1967), pp. 9-10.

and share-croppers, and to distribute land to the landless<sup>13</sup> and small peasants, then it is an undeniable fact that the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act failed to secure these objectives. The verdict of the National Commission on Labour is relevant to West Bengal, namely :

'A reason for inadequate availability of land through the operation of land reforms is the clever evasion of the ceilings legislation... Besides, the basis of 'individual' holdings... has encouraged nominal transfer to near relatives. Exemptions under the law are liberal and liberally interpreted too... Of late, eviction of small cultivators, who are also in several areas share-croppers, has been on the increase as a result of resumption of land for direct cultivation by land-owners. Such evictions should be stopped.'<sup>14</sup>

The ceiling law has been circumvented by the use of many devices. Religious and charitable trusts have been created by individuals so as to bring their lands within the scope of ceiling exemptions. Another ruse has been recourse to Mitakshara law,<sup>15</sup> under which land could be divided among the sons during the life-time of the head of the family, and this enabled owners to partition their land, with the express purpose of evading the ceiling.<sup>16</sup> In addition, there has been the notorious device of benami transactions, whereby owners transferred land in excess

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13. The conditions of rural landless labour in general have been summarized in an article by Hansraj Gulati, 'Rural Agricultural Labour', Janata (official organ of the PSP), 22 February, 1970, pp. 6-7 & 12. See also Peter Alvares, 'Land Hunger', *ibid.*, 26 July, 1970, pp. 8-10 & 16.

14. Report of the National Commission on Labour, *op. cit.*, pp. 406-7.

15. In India, there are two schools of family law based on the legal texts : Mitakshara and Dayabhaga. Mitakshara law entitles the sons and grandsons to insist, if they wish, upon division of the property before the death of the paterfamilias, who is more like a trustee of the property. See A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (London, 1954), p. 156.

16. See Girish Mishra, 'West Bengal Land Reforms (i) Land Ceilings', The Call (official organ of the RSP), (Delhi, February, 1970), p. 15.

of the ceiling to friends and relatives. In this latter connection, an amendment in the form of Section 5A of the Estates Acquisition Act, was subsequently passed, with retrospective effect, in an attempt to deal with these mala fide transfers. The amendment stated that the state government could inquire into transfers made between the 5th May, 1953 and the date of vesting if there were prima facie reasons for believing the transfers were not bona fide, and if bad faith were proven, then the government had the power to cancel such transfers.<sup>17</sup>

As pointed out in a study undertaken by S. K. Basu and S. K. Bhattacharya, at the instance of the Research Programme Committee of the Planning Commission, however, this amendment did not cover transfers which took place prior to the 5th May, 1953 in anticipation of the act. Such transfers have been estimated to be numerous. In the words of the authors :

'As the ceiling was fixed for each individual and not the family, there was practically no limit to the amount of land that could be held by a family in this way.'<sup>18</sup>

The authors observed further that a 'crescendo' of benami transactions took place during 1953 and 1954, shortly before the first date of vesting in April, 1955.<sup>19</sup>

The other major aspect of land reform in West Bengal concerns the predominant system of barga cultivation (share-cropping), which is especially characteristic of this state.<sup>20</sup>

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17. The West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, op. cit., p. 6.

18. S.K. Basu and S.K. Bhattacharya, Land Reforms in West Bengal (Calcutta, 1963), p. 52. See also the authors' table 5:1 on p. 55.

19. *ibid.* See especially table 5:2 on p. 58 and text on p. 59.

20. The system does vary to some extent in different districts of West Bengal.

In this connection, two major problems confront the bargadars : firstly, arbitrary eviction, and secondly, the terms and conditions relating to the share of the produce and costs. It was in an attempt to deal specifically with, and regulate, the second of these problems, that the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1956 was passed. The act did not, however, do away with the barga system, but provided that the share of the crop should be on a 50:50 basis where the bargadar supplied the implements, and in the proportions of 60:40, with the former proportion for the owner when he supplied the implements.<sup>21</sup> As Basu and Bhattacharya point out, however, the dominant practice is for the cost of seeds to be shared by both owners and bargadars, with the owners receiving 50 percent of the produce anyway, and for them not to bear any of the ploughing costs.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the bargadar obtains 50 percent of the gross output, but bears a considerable portion of the costs.

The loophole through which evictions of bargadars take place, lies within the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, itself : specifically, in the provisions of the act which enable landowners 'personally' to cultivate land. The term 'personal cultivation', however, simply meant 'cultivation by a person of his own land on his own account by his own labour or any member of his family or by servants or labourers on wages payable in cash or in kind or both.'<sup>23</sup> But, as Franda has noted further 'a landholder could continue to farm his land by hiring bargadars or cultivating labourers and, insofar as this was done,

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21. Basu and Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 33.

22. *ibid.*, pp. 34 & 36.

23. Franda, West Bengal and the Federalizing Process, op. cit., p. 171.

the existing landlord-tenant relationships remained the same throughout the state.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, this loophole was responsible for mass evictions of tenants and 'voluntary' surrenders of land by tenants. This has been the position, despite the existence of Clause 17 of the Land Reforms Act which states that the services of bargadars can only be terminated in execution of an order by a prescribed authority in cases where the bargadar improperly cultivates the land. The problem of evictions is exacerbated further by the lack of registration of barga-plots.

In addition to the above difficulties, others can be enumerated briefly. One administrative problem concerns the inadequacy of rural records which could enable the government to determine more accurately the amount of land held bona fide or mala fide under the ceiling provisions. This was made more difficult by the fact that a number of landowners held land in different districts of the state, but records were prepared with the village as a unit.

A constitutional problem concerned Article 226 of the Constitution, which enables landowners to take recourse to the High Courts as soon as they received notices requiring them to produce papers relating to suspected benami holdings. In this way, they can avoid having the cases heard in the first instance by the revenue or appellate courts.<sup>25</sup>

Last, but not least, there has been the relevant political problem in that, until the 1967 election, the Congress Party drew most of its strength from the rural landowners. In addition,

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24. *ibid.*, p. 172.

25. For some figures and examples relating to this, see 'Land Owners are Abusing Processes of Law', West Bengal, 26 July, 1969, pp. 1009-1012 & 1022.

the Congress acquired a good deal of political support through its involvement in various local bodies and activities, which provided avenues for influence and the acquisition of strength and power.<sup>26</sup> Because a considerable number of Congressmen were owners of land, they had a vested interest in preserving the general pattern of land relationships.

From the foregoing, therefore, it can be seen that the majority of peasants in West Bengal suffered severe disabilities and entertained legitimate grievances at the time the first United Front Government came to power in 1967. Yet, the 18-point programme adopted by the first United Front Government said very little about land reform, and merely spoke of its intention to 'undertake progressive land reforms' and to pay 'particular attention... to the acute problems faced by poor peasants, share-croppers, agricultural labour and all sections of distressed tillers.'<sup>27</sup> The explanation for such a brief reference to the complex issue of land reform no doubt lies in the fact that the 18-point programme was hurriedly drawn up after the 1967 election was held, when the parties decided to form a coalition.

### III. The Experience of the First United Front Government.

#### (i) Naxalbari.

The United Front Government had only been in office for a short time when the Naxalbari revolt occurred. The area affected by the disturbances consisted of Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa, which are situated in the sub-division of Siliguri

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26. Weiner, Political Change in South Asia, op. cit., pp. 194-6.

27. See Clause 3 of the United Front's 18-point Programme, Appendix XI.

in the district of Darjeeling. The area contained a predominantly tribal population composed of Santhals, Oroans, Mundas, Rajbanis and others, who were largely migratory cultivators.

In general, there were three types of land within the Naxalbari area : the tea-estates, private and vested land.<sup>28</sup> Over the years, large tracts of surplus land were acquired illegally by the jotedars and plantation owners, and little was done to settle the disputes over land in favour of the poorer sections of the rural population. Land was leased out by the larger jotedars to smaller ones through a system known as Theka or contract, in which oral transactions were made regarding fixed rents for the land leased over specified periods. The khas land consisted mainly of newly reclaimed areas after they were cleared in the jungle by tribesmen, who, after growing one crop, then moved off to some other place, whereupon the land was taken possession of by regular agriculturists in terms inconsistent with the provisions of the Estates Acquisition Act of 1953. Similarly, illegal occupation occurred on lands vested in the government.

All this did nothing to alleviate the hunger of the share-croppers and landless labourers, who, for the most part, were recruited from the adivasis (tribal people). Their requests for redistribution of land had been abortive.<sup>29</sup> Other grievances against jotedars and landowners related to the increasing number

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28. Although official figures are not to hand, it was estimated by one source that there were approximately 65,000 acres of surplus land owned by the tea-estates, and about 19,000 acres of khas and vested lands. See 'The Naxalbari Story', Link, 15 August, 1967.

29. In 1959 there was a considerable peasant movement to effect reform, but it did not achieve anything worthwhile. See 'Naxalbari - What Next', Link, 25 June, 1967.

of evictions against the poorer peasants and share-croppers; the operation of casual labour without a proper fixation of wages; benami transfers of vested land, and unjust redistribution of vested land. These grievances appeared to create divisions between the middle and small peasants and share-croppers, and altogether, a situation of extreme rural discontent existed in this part of West Bengal.

The political complexion of the three affected areas at the time was varied. In Naxalbari, the CPM and the BC contended for supremacy, whilst in Phansidewa and Kharibari the major rivals were the CPM and the Congress.<sup>30</sup> The Krishak Samiti (Peasants' Organization) of Siliguri sub-division was predominantly under the influence of its President, Jangal Santhal, who, together with Charu Mazumdar (later to become the leader and theoretician of the CPI(M-L)) and Kanu Sanyal, were the three top-ranking rebel leaders.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the PSP and SSP were active in the area. Within the broad divisions of political influence, however, there were smaller units, namely, villages, which were under the influence of one or other of the political parties.

It is perhaps arbitrary to pinpoint the commencement of the Naxalbari revolt.<sup>32</sup> In March, 1967, a Kisan Convention,

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30. During the Fourth General Election, Phansidewa returned a Congressman, Tensing Wangdi, to a reserved seat in the assembly with 16,000 votes - 6,000 more than his CPM rival Jangal Santhal and 15,000 more votes than the BC candidate, Iswar Tirki.

31. Franda argues conclusively that although the Krishak Samiti was formally under the control of the Darjeeling Committee of the CPM, the Samiti had nevertheless gained a considerable amount of autonomy from the party. He states, furthermore, that the Samiti had 'also maintained close contacts with a group of dissident CPM leaders who had established a parallel District Committee in Darjeeling.' See Franda, Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 157.

32. According to Franda, leaders of the state branch of the CPM had come to an agreement with the Krishak Samiti during the course of 1965-66, to foment a peasant agitation in Naxalbari, on the assumption that the Congress Party would be returned to power in the 1967 election, and that the disturbance would provide a 'handy tool to harrass the new government.' *ibid.*



sponsored by the Krishak Samiti was held which passed a resolution sanctioning the forcible occupation of land.<sup>33</sup> Discussion at the Convention took place about the categories of people entitled to receive land, but this was summed up by Kanu Sanyal, the foremost leader of the uprising, when he affirmed that the committee would only allocate land to those who supported their cause and the means employed to further it. Preparations were then made for a so-called 'agrarian revolution' which was to take place through the forcible seizure of land.

The second phase of the uprising took place with large demonstrations by the Adivasis, armed with their traditional weapons of bows and arrows. These were followed by the forcible seizure of land and paddy, combined with incidents of arson and violence. During this period, however, the peasants were divided among themselves, which did not augur well for the success of the movement, and reflected its political naivete. The divisions manifested themselves in certain characteristics of the revolt, firstly, that only land belonging to those opposed to the uprising was seized, and, secondly, that the land of some jotedars was left intact.

The United Front Government took steps to quell the disturbances by sending two of its ministers ; the Irrigation Minister, Biswanath Mukherjee of the CPI, and the CPM Minister for Land Revenue, Hare Krishna Konar, to the area to assess the situation and to speak with the local leaders, including Kanu Sanyal. Sanyal agreed to persuade the extremists to surrender to the police on the understanding that the United Front Government would take steps to redress the grievances of the peasants. Konar

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33. Franda claims that the state unit of the CPM was not represented at this Convention. See *ibid.*, p. 158. See pp. 158-59 for a more detailed account of the Convention.

also suggested to the Commissioner for Police that there should be a ban on demonstrations with bows and arrows, and that persons wanted by the police should surrender voluntarily, and be given bail.<sup>34</sup> Konar then returned to Calcutta with the suggestion that the government act promptly in the matter.

However, the revolt took a serious turn shortly afterwards when a police inspector, Wangdi, was killed by an arrow on May 24. The following day, during a peasant demonstration, the police opened fire and killed six women and two children. These events precluded or greatly minimized all chances of a quick settlement through negotiation. Instead, they were responsible for an intensification of the offensive by the peasants.

At this point, the Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee, made a personal visit to the area, and it was then decided to send a team of state ministers to Naxalbari. Mukherjee gave orders that the police were to avoid bloodshed, but would take steps to maintain law and order, and to this effect a system of police patrolling was introduced.<sup>35</sup> Immediate steps were taken to appoint four high-powered land committees with power to settle land disputes promptly. An ultimatum was given to the rebels to cease their activities by June 22, or else face stern action by the police.

By this time, the revolt had assumed other features which added to the overall confusion. This was the third phase of the agitation, namely, a counter-resistance by the jotedars, which was said to derive encouragement from the local BC and SSP. In Siliguri, the local BC led a hostile demonstration against

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34. Biswanath Mukherjee, 'Two Faces of Naxalbari', Link, 20 August, 1967, p. 27.

35. Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 14 June, 1967.

the Cabinet Mission, while the SSP organized resistance, involving violence, by the jotedars.<sup>36</sup> The Darjeeling District Committee of the BC saw the problem as one of law and order, arguing that the disturbances had no real connection with the kisan movement. The local SSP branch held the same view, stating that acts of dacoity, murder and the like, were not the proper activities of a genuine peasant revolt.<sup>37</sup> Both parties were outspoken in their criticism of the initial policy of the United Front Government, which was geared towards a political solution. Instead, they demanded immediate and stern action by the police.<sup>38</sup> The parties were therefore denying that the uprising was fundamentally agrarian in nature, and laid the blame squarely at the door of the CPM.<sup>39</sup> The Communist and Marxist parties, however, took the view that the revolt was a movement for agrarian reforms.<sup>40</sup>

The CPM, for its part, was faced with a difficult problem : as a major partner in the coalition, they had to evaluate the conflict from this position, but as left Communists affirming an ideology predicated firmly upon class struggle, and opposed to a peaceful transition to socialism, they were ideologically called upon to support the actions of the Naxalbari extremists. In any case, the main initiative in bringing about some kind of political solution to the Naxalbari problem lay with

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36. Link, 15 August, 1967, p. 86.

37. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 15 June, 1967.

38. Biswanath Mukherjee, op. cit.

39. See 'U.F. Parties Differ on Naxalbari', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 1 July and issue 12 July, 1967.

40. For the CPM's position, see 'Naxalbari - Not a Law and Order Problem', People's Democracy, 4 June, 1967, pp. 3 & 11.

the CPM because the hard-core leadership of the revolt owed at least formal allegiance to the party.

The party's organization 'boss', Promode Das Gupta, and General-Secretary P. Sundarayya, visited the area with Hare Krishna Konar and addressed peasant meetings in the towns, but they met with little response. It was suggested that this would not have been the case had the leadership of the party, which included several cabinet ministers, toured the disaffected areas instead of confining their activities mainly to the towns.<sup>41</sup> Eventually, however, the CPM took steps to disassociate the party from the Naxalbari extremists, firstly, by publicly attacking the extremist faction; secondly, by condoning police action to quell the uprising,<sup>42</sup> and, thirdly, by taking disciplinary action against the extremists and expelling them from the party.<sup>43</sup> In an article written by M. Basavapunniah and published in People's Democracy, the extremists were criticized as left-sectarian adventurists and anarchists 'because the political objectives these extremist leaders set for the Naxalbari kisan struggle have absolutely no relation to the realities of class alignments obtaining either in West Bengal or the country as a whole...'<sup>44</sup>

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41. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 4 June, 1967.

42. The CPM Minister for Lands and Land Revenue, Hare Krishna Konar, was a signatory to a document outlining the policy. See 'C.P.M. at Crossroads', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 26 July, 1967.

43. See, for example, 'Marxist Camp Rift Widens', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 July, 1967.

44. See 'Our Party's Stand On Naxalbari', People's Democracy, 9 July, 1967. See also 'Ultras' Thesis : Inverted Advocacy of Congress Role', *ibid.*, 16 July, 1967. Given the long-standing factional situation and autonomy of the extremist group mentioned by Franda, it is not surprising that the CPM ultimately expelled the extremists when their existence proved irreversibly embarrassing to the party because of its role within the United Front Government.

Prior to this, the United Front Government had pursued a rather vacillating policy. But, now stern action to impose law and order was sanctioned, and the police were given orders to resist any so-called criminal activity, and authorized to fire, if necessary. A number of public meetings were held to explain the purposes and functions of the land committees which were set up by the government. The latter hoped that these measures would isolate the peasants and their grievances from the hard-core leadership of the revolt. The extremists were called upon to surrender by July 5, but when they did not respond to this deadline, the government ordered an intensification of police action, whilst simultaneously effecting some land reforms. This decision to use more force soon brought the disturbances to an end. Although the uprising was crushed, however, the extremists who had led it, were not. In 1968, during the interval between the first and second United Front Governments, they formed a new party, the CPI(M-L), which was to pose a major challenge for the CPM, through the extremely rapid extension of the party's influence to other parts of West Bengal, particularly the Debra-Gopiballabhpur area in Midnapore.

Thus, what the Naxalbari revolt revealed was the potentially explosive situation which existed in the rural areas due to the hunger for land and other grievances of small peasants and landless labourers, together with uncontrollable factionalism within the CPM. If the former discontents could be harnessed and consolidated behind the leadership of a political group, that group could rapidly extend its influence and support. This was a factor behind the formation of the CPI(M-L). Although the Naxalbari revolt was led by the extremists of the CPM for political and ideological reasons, namely, dissatisfaction with the more moderate leadership of the CPM, it is unlikely that

the uprising could have taken place had it not been for the short-sightedness and triumph of vested interests in the state branch of the Congress Party, which, for twenty years prior to 1967, had done very little to bring about effective land reform.<sup>45</sup> In any event, the Naxalbari revolt was both a political and economic movement.

A similar combination of factors underlay the 'land grab movement' of 1969-70, but here we must take the following factors into account : firstly, that by the time the second United Front Government took office, the influence of the CPI(M-L) had, as mentioned before, extended to other districts in the state, particularly Midnapore and the 24-Parganas. The party had built up an effective organization, and was successfully recruiting cadres, particularly from university students in Calcutta. The strategy and tactics employed by the party<sup>46</sup> were based upon a violent campaign involving the murder of rural landowners and money-lenders, arguing that these people had long exploited the rural poor. The party hoped that a militant campaign of eliminating such people in the name of liberating the people, would appeal to the village poor.

This aggressive policy posed a challenge for the CPM, for not only did a number of the party's own urban supporters join the CPI(M-L),<sup>47</sup> but it realized there was a

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45. Franda also draws attention to this point. See West Bengal and the Federalizing Process, op. cit., Ch. VII. Ladejinsky also lays a great deal of blame at the door of 'State politicians and legislatures.' See Ladejinsky, op. cit., p. 11.

46. For further details of the strategy and tactics pursued by the CPI(M-L), see Sally Ray, 'Communism in India : Ideological and Tactical Differences Among Four Parties', op. cit.

47. If the report given by Link relating to Naxalbari sympathizers is correct, then the CPM was faced with the possibility of a severe split. This journal reported that while the extremists claimed the support of 8,000 of the 20,000 members of the CPM, reports from district committees stated that at least 4,000 party members sided with the extremists. Either way, it was a serious challenge to the party. See 'Attack on UF Government', Link, 30 July, 1967.

severe threat to its own support - potential and actual - if the Naxalites proved to be successful in recruiting what Franda has called 'a segment of the rural population that is potentially the most revolutionary in India.'<sup>48</sup> Secondly, to understand the 'land grab' movement, the policy of the United Front Government towards land reform must be taken into account because it provided an impetus to the participation of the peasants in the movement.

(ii) Land Reform Measures.

During the tenure of the first United Front Government, very little was done to frame new legislation aimed at land reform, although it will be recalled that the Government was only in power for nine months. It was not until November, 1967, that a new land policy was presented and accepted by the government. The stated purpose of this policy was to give protection and security to bargadars, while protecting the rights and interests of small bona fide owners at the same time.<sup>49</sup> One major provision of the policy was to debar the jurisdiction of the civil courts from judgements in land disputes. Other provisions of the new policy consisted of the following :

1. The imposition of a ceiling of 25 acres per family, rather than on an individual basis;
2. The abolition of exemptions which, under the Act, related to orchards, fisheries, dairies, etc.
3. Additional power for the government to verify the authenticity

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48. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 193.

49. As pointed out earlier, Franda has argued that the policy can be understood as a 'political device for transferring land from landed Congress supporters... to a new group of rural influential landholders...' For comments on this, see footnote 2.

or otherwise of deeds, many of which were alleged to have been back-dated, and to declare them as mala fide if the evidence warranted this.<sup>50</sup>

4. Permanent and heritable rights of cultivators for bargadars, with no rights to sale and mortgage. Illegal and forced evictions which were, in theory, already cognizable and bailable, were to be made more difficult by strengthening the penal clauses.<sup>51</sup>

Pending comprehensive legislation, the government resorted to interim measures, which were to be enacted as ordinances before the harvesting season began. These ordinances would provide for a temporary ban on evictions of bargadars or tenants, temporary restriction on sales and purchases of land to prevent mala fide transfers, provision to bar jurisdiction of the civil courts pertaining to Chapters II and V of the Estates' Acquisition Act, and rights for bargadars to store and thresh grain on notice to the owner or prescribed authority, as well as the right to deposit the owner's share of the produce with the prescribed authority.<sup>52</sup>

It was only a matter of days after the presentation of this policy to the cabinet, when the first United Front Government fell from office, and so the proposed policy did not reach legislative enactment. Despite this, the government claimed

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50. The additional powers were spelt out in an article 'W. B. Proposals for Amending Land Acts', People's Democracy, 29 October, 1967.

51. Other clauses included : 6. Appeals to the next highest revenue authority, but only one appeal would be allowed - the final verdict to rest with the appellate authority. 7. The setting up of special land tribunals composed of officials and non-officials with statutory authority, and representing peasants' interests which would deal with complaints and appeals. 8. The provision in the Estates' Acquisition Act relating to personal labour was to be changed to mean 'cultivation by one's own labour, or by the labour of one's own family, assisted by servants and labourers.' This, it was thought, would give greater protection and security to bargadars by making arbitrary eviction more difficult. The policy of the United Front Government was summarized in 'State Civil Courts No More to Deal with Land Suits', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 November, 1967. A full and detailed statement of the government's policy is contained in 'A Blue Print for New



51. (continued)

Land Policy in West Bengal. Maximum Protection and Security to Bargadars', West Bengal, 28 October, 1967, pp. 491ff. See also 'West Bengal's Proposals for Amending Land Acts', People's Democracy, *ibid.*, pp. 3 & 4.

52. West Bengal, *ibid.*, p. 501.

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to have made an important gain in unleashing the peasant movement for recovery of land. According to its estimates, more than 50,000 acres of land were taken possession of,<sup>53</sup> and about 232,000 acres of surplus lands were distributed to about 238,000 tillers.<sup>54</sup> Applauding this, the Land and Land Revenue Minister, Hare Krishna Konar of the CPM, had always been at pains to stress that no land reform measure could be successful without the active participation of the peasants, themselves.<sup>55</sup> In any event, the government also issued instructions for the allotment of homestead plots, not exceeding 5 cottahs, to families without homestead plots of their own. To safeguard the rights of the families to whom these plots were given, provision was made for them to be recorded.<sup>56</sup> These instructions were later incorporated in an act passed in 1969.

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53. 'Toiling Masses in Villages Helping to Implement Government Policies', West Bengal, 9 August, 1969, p. 1058.

54. 'Comprehensive Amendment to Land Legislation to be Made', *ibid.*, 29 March, 1969, p. 668.

55. 'West Bengal Land Minister Calls for Popular Initiative to Implement Progressive Measures', People's Democracy, 21 May, 1967, pp. 5 & 8.

56. 'First Six Weeks of United Front Government', West Bengal, 6 May, 1967, p. 59.

#### IV. The Programme of the Second United Front Government.

When the Mid-term election was held in February, 1969, the United Front captured 214 seats out of 280. On the face of it, this indicated a stable term in office, which would enable the government to carry out its policy of land reform. In the meantime, there were a number of reasons for the formulation of a more detailed statement relating to land reform in the United Front's 32-point programme, which was drawn up prior to the Mid-term election.

Partly, the new and more detailed statement was formulated because, as indicated earlier, the government had decided upon a policy just prior to its collapse at the end of 1967. In addition, there was an easing of the severity of a number of major problems which had confronted the first United Front Government, notably, the chronic food shortage and industrial unrest. Moreover, during 1968, the United Front had time to work out some collective agreements with its various partners. During the same period, the CPM devoted attention to the tactics it would employ in the rural areas to meet the Naxalite threat to its influence. Before dealing more fully with this point, the section of the 32-point programme relating to land reform merits reproduction in full, as a yardstick by which to measure the second United Front Government's policy towards land reform, as well as its role in the land movement :

'5. The U. F. Government will undertake a thorough programme of land reforms so as to ensure : (a) suitable amendments to the present Estates Acquisition and Land Reforms' Act in the interests of the peasantry; (b) exemption of Land Revenue for peasants holding not more than 3 acres of land; (c) detection, recovery and distribution of all "Benami" land held in excess of ceiling; (d) acquisition of unutilised land in plantation; bringing of tank-fisheries, land comprised in orchards, dairy, poultry etc. , now excluded from the operation of land ceiling, under E. A. Act; (e) distribution of surplus and 'Khas' land among

landless and poor peasants on a permanent basis; (f) speedy payment of compensation to small intermediaries; (g) hereditary right of sharecroppers to cultivate 'Barga' land; (h) suspension for three years of eviction of sharecroppers from land pending comprehensive legislation; (i) free distribution of land up to 5 cottahs for dwelling houses in rural areas to those who have no homestead; tenancy rights of homestead land up to 5 cottahs to those who are in occupation without such right and who have no other homestead; removal of jurisdiction of civil courts in matters concerning ceiling, malafide transfers, vested land, etc. and setting up of special land tribunals to deal with these matters; (k) a new survey of land for the purpose of settlement and cancellation of all malafide records made in the past; (l) moratorium on four year old existing debts of peasants holding land up to 3 acres to the Government and settlement of other debts and (m) return of land to the original sellers sold due to distress.

The scheme for reforms for the hill areas of Darjeeling district however to be suitably modified due to special features of the area.

It will help the peasants in their struggle for detection, recovery, acquisition and distribution of 'Benami' land and the realisation of other legitimate democratic demands.' 57

It will be noticed that this amounted to a two-pronged programme : one involving legislative measures, and the other vaguely oriented towards a mass movement on the part of the peasants and agricultural labourers to 'struggle for detection and recovery, acquisition and distribution of 'Benami' land. . . ' It was this mass movement in the rural areas which took precedence over the enactment of legislation in 1969-70, and, moreover, in contrast to 1967, assumed greater proportions than the mass movement on the industrial front. In addition, it was the land

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57. Programme of the United Front, Appendix XII.

movement, itself, and all that this involved, rather than the legislative proposals to amend the land tenure system that caused dissension among the coalition partners of the second United Front Government.

#### V. The 'Land Grab' Movement.

The agrarian upheaval was not evenly distributed in intensity throughout the state. Certain districts, namely, the 24-Parganas, Burdwan and Midnapore witnessed the forcible seizure of land to a greater extent than in other parts of West Bengal. Of these districts, the struggle was most virulent in the 24-Parganas.<sup>58</sup> The United Front had reached agreement that vested, benami and ryoti lands submerged as fisheries, should be detected, recovered and occupied.<sup>59</sup>

Most conflicts concerned the seizure of benami land, and clashes were concentrated upon conflicting claims to possession of the harvested crop, cultivated by the landless peasants on land owned by jotedars. The slogan of the landless was that the right to possession lay with those who had tilled and harvested the crop. On this aspect of the struggle, the United Front unanimously approved of the government decision to protect the right of the tiller to the crop, irrespective of the type of land occupied illegally.<sup>60</sup> Resistance by the jotedars to the forcible seizure of their benami (and other) lands led to violence, which was exacerbated by the actions of the jotedars

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58. Not only was it the 24-Parganas in which the CPM was strongest, but it was also the district in which the land problem was most acute. See 'Worst Land Problem in 24-Parganas : Effective Reforms Needed', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 October, 1967.

59. 'Tillers' Rights to Harvest Must be Defended : Konar', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 28 October, 1969.

60. See 'Government Guidelines for Right of Harvest' Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30 October, 1969.

in taking recourse to the legal processes of the law by referring disputes for judicial decision.

Most of the seizures of land were carried out by the various peasant associations, organized by individual political parties. This led to clashes, with rival claims being put forward by the different parties, concerning the rights to occupation and possession.<sup>61</sup> It was alleged further that the parties did not always act neutrally in supporting those individuals with the most legitimate claims to occupation and possession, but in many instances, distribution was made on the basis of political affiliations. Part of the problem lay in the small amount of land available for distribution, and, as one person noted 'the inevitable result was in-fighting among the different parties.'<sup>62</sup>

This led, in a number of cases, to clashes between one landless peasant and another.<sup>63</sup> In the absence of reliable data, however, it is impossible to know conclusively at this stage, the extent to which the distribution of land was based upon the claimant's political affiliations. In any event, as admitted by the government, the land seized was not always from those possessing more than the ceiling limit.<sup>64</sup> A number of cases occurred where middle and small peasants, possessing no more than the legal limit of 25 acres, had their land, or part of it, forcibly taken over, and in other cases, genuine fisheries

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61. See 'Distribution of Vested Land', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 24 June, 1969.

62. S. Sengupta, 'Confusion over Land Reforms - West Bengal Experience', Economic and Political Weekly, 27 June, 1970, p. 1004.

63. This was admitted by the United Front Government. See 'Tillers Have the Right to Harvest', West Bengal, 22 November, 1969 p. 309.

64. See 'Movement to Recover Benami Land : U. F. Admits Some Excesses', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 18 July, 1969 and 'Six U. F. Partners Deplore Stealing of Property', *ibid.*, 26 July, 1969.

were seized and even looted.<sup>65</sup> The government, on a number of occasions, appealed to the constituents of the United Front to avoid these clashes, and stated that if the conflicts could not be settled locally, they should be referred to the leaders of the respective parties at the state level.<sup>66</sup> Another complicating factor was the alleged tendency of some of the jotedars, who were faced with the forcible seizure of their benami lands, to seek the support of various parties within the United Front.<sup>67</sup>

The peak of the movement was reached during the harvesting season in November, 1969. Apprehending considerable violence, the United Front Government unanimously adopted a set of directives which were issued to district authorities, including the calling of meetings by district magistrates, of all political parties, including the Congress, to discuss the situation. In addition, the guideline laid down by the government for harvesting was that those who had grown the crop would harvest it; that jotedars should be dispossessed of weapons when violence was apprehended, and where trouble was anticipated

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65. 'Mighty Peasant Movement for Recovery of Benami Land', West Bengal, 2 August, 1969, p. 1030.

66. 'Tillers Have the Right to Harvest', West Bengal, 22 November, 1969, p. 310.

67. 'Jotedars Seek U. F. Partners' Refuge', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 August, 1967. Although this article refers to the period in 1967, a number of press reports in 1969 indicated similar action by jotedars in the 1969-70 land movement. Moreover, Franda's study also indicates that landowners sought to secure the backing of one or other of the parties, and that this brought tensions within the Front to breaking point. See Franda, Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., p. 189. Franda's analysis accords with one of the conclusions made in Chapter Nine of this thesis, namely, the importance of local factors in the situation.

from the peasants, themselves, the district authorities could promulgate Order Section 114 Cr.P.C. Moreover, the administration was asked to remain impartial.<sup>68</sup> In cases where the peasants grew crops on land owned by persons possessing at or less than the ceiling, the government directed that although the cultivators should harvest the crop, the owners would be entitled to claim a share of such crop as from a bargadar.<sup>69</sup>

Harvesting clashes have been a perennial feature in West Bengal. But, the essential differences between previous years and 1969-70 lay in the fact that they occurred in the latter period on a larger scale, and were consciously and directly organized, encouraging the rural poor to challenge collectively the existing structure of land ownership in the state. At this point, it is relevant to devote attention to the strategic and tactical positions taken by the dominant partner in the United Front Government, the CPM. In his speech, as President of the All-India Kisan Sabha, A. K. Gopalan, said :

'Very important for us in consolidating our influence and strengthening our organization is the task of concentrating on organising the poorer sections of the peasantry and agricultural workers... Depending on the situation in each State and area, it should be our primary task to organise the agricultural labourers either separately or inside the Kisan Sabha and lead their battles.' 70

As mentioned in Chapter Three, traditional support for the CPM lay mainly in the urban and labour organizations concentrated in the industrial belt of Calcutta and the 24-Parganas. Furthermore, Franda has noted that :

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68. 'Administration Must Serve Rural Masses', West Bengal, 15 November, 1969, pp. 289 & 302.

69. 'Possession Will Decide Right to Harvest', *ibid.*, 8 November, 1969, p. 268.

70. CPM, Twentieth Session of the All-India Kisan Sabha held at Barsul, Burdwan, West Bengal, from October 30 to November 2, 1969, p. 7.

'effective organisation of landless labourers has generally hurt small landholders more than anyone else and has therefore alienated this most significant segment of the rural population : on the other hand, party attempts to gain support from small landholders has usually made it impolitic for the Communists to organise the landless at the same time, thereby depriving the movement of support from a segment of the rural population that is potentially the most revolutionary in India.' 71

Franda also observes that whereas the 'Right Communist faction' (now the CPI) has given preference to wooing small landholders first and the landless later, the 'Left Communist faction' (now the CPM), has endeavoured to organize the landless. 72

As far as the CPM is concerned, it did not regard its efforts in organizing the rural poor as successful, and it is contended here that the party devoted more attention to this organizational and tactical task after the 1967 General Election than it had done before. The party's affirmation of its tasks in 1967 stated, among other things, the necessity to develop kisan work to 'larger and larger areas in a contiguous belt.' 73 In 1968, under the fire of self-criticism, their position was clearly stated when they said :

'But our party failed to undertake as its main task the work of organising the agricultural labourers and poor peasants on the basis of their specific demands; of uniting them with the rest of the peasantry and of consciously training active cadres from the ranks of agricultural labourers and rural poor in order to make them the militant vanguard of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution.' 74

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71. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 193.

72. *ibid.*, p. 174.

73. Our Tasks on Party Organization, adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) at its Calicut Session, October 28 to November 2, 1967, p. 51.

74. Tasks on the Kisan Front, Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), 1967, pp. 6-7.



Although the CPM applauded the increasing development of mass struggles, it nevertheless concluded that 'the degree of political consciousness and the state of unity and mass organisations of the people are at a deplorably low level', and, further, that 'the economic protests are not developed into a conscious movement which will transform the electoral defeat inflicted on the Congress Party in the fourth general elections into a political defeat for the ruling classes, as a whole.'<sup>75</sup> Of great significance, therefore, was the party's conclusion that :

'The weakness arising out of the spontaneous character of the mass movement can be overcome only if the Party grows still stronger in those places where it is relatively strong and expands in those places where it is weak or even non-existent.' 76

These extracts have been liberally quoted in order to illustrate the party's emphasis after 1967 on organizational expansion, and the need for greater efforts to organize the poorer peasants and landless labourers. As a result, the party claimed that the membership of the state branch of the All-India Kisan Sabha, rose from 9,64,430 in 1969 to 16,24,007 in 1970.<sup>77</sup> The conclusion which emerges from this is that one of the major reasons for the agrarian unrest which manifested itself in the 1969-70 period of United Front rule was largely, but not exclusively, the result of the CPM's decisions on tactics and organizational matters as indicated above, and that these

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75. CPM, Political Resolution adopted by the Eighth Congress, Cochin, December 23-29, 1968, pp. 47-48.

76. Political-Organisational Report of the Central Committee to the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), 1969, p. 192.

77. 'Agrarian Crisis and Struggles of Peasants and Agricultural Labourers in India', Documents of the 21st Session, All-India Kisan Sabha, Rurkakalan, Punjab, September 23-26, 1971, p. 62.

decisions were precipitated by the increasing influence of the Naxalites in the rural areas.

Claiming that the CPM had become vulnerable to 'right and left deviation', the party said :

'Unless a radical turn and re-orientation is made in building the trade union and Kisan movements... no amount of self-criticism regarding the defective class composition of our party will improve matters and no pious resolutions and arbitrary steps can remedy this situation.' 78

Despite this, mere decisions by the party would, in themselves, have been inadequate or insufficient actually to carry out a militant rural strategy of the kind that existed in West Bengal during the tenure of the second United Front Government. The party could offer direction and leadership to a movement, but this would have been to little avail had the small peasants and landless labourers not supported the movement to grab the land. All the Communist and Marxist parties encouraged the 'land grab' movement, and the support given by large numbers of rural poor make Donald Zagoria's general conclusions applicable to West Bengal, namely, that it is not caste or linguistic factors which explain the appeal of Communist parties to India's rural poor, but rather a combination of landlessness and high rural population density.<sup>79</sup> As we have seen, both of the latter characteristics apply in West Bengal. Thus, given the receptivity of the rural poor in certain districts within the state, it is not surprising that the CPM, with its superior

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78. 'Why the Ultra-'Left' Deviation?', Communist Party of India (Marxist), adopted by the Central Committee at its meeting held from October 5 to 9, 1968, Calcutta, p. 13.

79. Donald Zagoria, 'The Ecology of Peasant Communism in India', American Political Science Review, LXV, No. 1 (March, 1971), p. 147.

resources for organization should have taken the lead in the land movement of 1969-70.

None of the other parties within the United Front could have opted for such a bold tactical line. The smaller parties could not entertain ambitions towards organizational expansion on a large scale, for, as Franda points out, they must defend their 'sub-regional interests.'<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, it would be an over-simplification to argue that during the agrarian movement these smaller parties confined themselves to defensive positions : in the inter-party clashes which developed, these parties were also on the offensive, either to fill political vacuums where they occurred, or to try and expand their own bases of support where these were being challenged directly. It is significant to note in this respect that drives towards forcible occupation of land were accompanied by new membership enrolment drives on the part of the parties.<sup>81</sup>

To some extent, there were certain limitations on the part of some parties towards the formulation of policies directed towards organizing the rural poor. The BC, composed mainly of disenchanted ex-supporters of the Congress Party, is a case in point, given its avowed aim 'for the upliftment of the people of West Bengal, and ... in the line of Gandhiji... ' together with its attempts 'to form a socialist state on the foundations of democracy by legal and peaceful means.'<sup>82</sup> This, in itself, constituted an ideological limitation, to which must be added the fact that support for the BC came largely from land-owners.

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80. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 196 and passim.

81. See 'Bengal Preparing for People's Democracy', Freedom First, No. 204 (Calcutta, May, 1969), p. 2.

82. Bangla Congress, Constitution, op. cit., Clause 3(a).

In any event, it can be seen that an extreme conflict situation arose in West Bengal in 1969-70 between the CPM and CPI(M-L), on the one hand, and among the partners of the coalition, on the other. Conflict between the CPM and CPI(M-L) was exacerbated by the fact that other parties within the coalition were not as adverse to the CPI(M-L) as was the CPM, for the simple reason that the CPM was, to them, a major threat and contender for power, whereas the CPI(M-L) was not. For these smaller parties, the bitter animosity and acts of violence which took place between the CPM and CPI(M-L) were politically convenient, and even welcomed.

On the other hand, the drive by the CPM to lead the 'land grab' movement, and thereby expand its organizational base, imposed severe strains upon the coalition - strains which could not be healed. The parties perceived a very real threat to their bases of support, and, in some cases, to their very existence. This threat outweighed all other considerations, even that of the future of the United Front Government, itself. The CPM, for its part, must also have perceived that its militant rural strategy posed a threat to the existence of the government. The party could not have miscalculated so erroneously as to think it could emerge within a short time, to form an alternative to the Congress, without the help of some, at least, of the other parties. The past record of voting figures and fate of disunited oppositions to the Congress, would have dispelled any such pretensions.

This writer considers, therefore, that a more plausible hypothesis is to view the actions of the CPM in the light of ideological, strategic and tactical challenges thrown out to the party by the Naxalites. No doubt, the party would have set about a policy of consolidation and gradual organizational expansion, in any case, but when the Naxalites shifted their activities to

sensitive areas within the state,<sup>83</sup> and were drawing considerable attention and support, the CPM was forced to act as quickly as possible, and in a manner thought best to counteract the influence and activities of the CPI(M-L). In this way, it is most likely that the CPM was caught precipitately by the logic of events, rather than by a deliberate campaign aimed at an immediate destruction of the other parties in the coalition, at the cost of the coalition, itself.<sup>84</sup>

In any case, conflict caused by the organizational expansion of the CPM into the rural areas was not an exclusive cause of dissension between the parties in the United Front Government of 1969-70. This was preceded by other forms of conflict relating to the rural areas during the famine crisis of 1967. In order to gain further insights into the difficulties facing this multiple coalition, attention will now be devoted to the crisis caused by the food shortage during the 1967 famine, and the problems which this created for the first United Front Government.

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83. See Sankar Ghosh, 'The Naxalite Struggle in West Bengal', South Asian Review, 4, No. 2 (January, 1971), p. 101.

84. The reader may note that in this respect, Franda's interpretations and analyses differ from mine. See his Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., Ch. 7.

Chapter Six

THE POLITICS OF FOOD AND FAMINE.

I. Socio-economic, Political and Administrative Background.

The first United Front Government took office in the middle of a severe famine crisis, caused in the immediate instance, by the failure of the monsoon. This, in itself, made the food portfolio one of the most important, sensitive and difficult portfolios of all. It was given to Dr. P. C. Ghosh, an ex-Gandhiite and ex-Congressman, who had contested the 1967 General Election as an Independent. Ghosh's handling of the portfolio evoked bitter criticism from the Communist and Marxist parties, mainly on the grounds that he (Ghosh) refused initially to resort to coercive measures to ensure the forcible procurement of grain, relying instead on voluntary procurement.

Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to three main factors : firstly, the inherent difficulties confronting the United Front Government in formulating and administering an effective food policy during a period of famine; secondly, the severe strains which this policy created among the coalition partners. These strains were caused by genuine differences over policy and its implementation, as well as by the desire on the part of the parties to exert as much influence as possible through the machinery created to deal with the food problem. The third factor concerns the problem of Centre-State relations, which were strained to a considerable extent by the food shortage.

Before these problems can be examined, however, it is necessary to deal briefly with the general background to the food crisis and food production in the state.<sup>1</sup> The shortage of

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1. Franda has given an interesting account of the background surrounding the food policy of the Congress Governments prior to 1967. See Radical Politics in West Bengal, op. cit., pp. 135-141.

food, especially in a deficit state such as West Bengal, is a familiar problem, and to understand the reasons for this, reference must be made to some of the social, political, administrative and economic factors which affect the production of food, for the level of food production is not merely dependent upon the inputs which are injected into the agricultural sector. Moreover, because the Central Government plays a large part in determining the nature and scope of the agricultural sector through the five year plans, some attention will also be paid to this aspect, insofar as it bears upon food production in West Bengal.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the ratio of land to population is lower in this state than in other parts of India. This is partly due to the reduction in size of the state after Partition, which led to an increase in pressure on the land. In addition, priority has been given to the industrial sector of the economy. Apart from the general economic recession in 1967, the level of agricultural production had been falling for three successive years prior to 1967. This resulted in decreased incomes for the agricultural section of the population, which not only had an inhibiting effect upon farm production, but also meant that there was a lesser demand for consumer goods<sup>2</sup> - a factor which added to the overall recession.

Although the area under cultivation has been increased to an almost optimum point,<sup>3</sup> accompanied by changes in the nature of crops grown, there has not been a proportionate overall

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2. S.K. Goyal, 'The Way to Self-Reliance', Link, 15 August, 1967, p. 39.

3. It is estimated that 87 percent of the land is already under cultivation. See Samr Bose, 'Increasing Population and the Falling of Cereal Consumption - a Case Study of West Bengal', AICC Economic Review, 17, Nos. 13-24 (1966), p. 34.

increase in crop yields. With the exception of a few crops, the ratio of acreage increase to crop yield has either remained stagnant or declined.<sup>4</sup> Paddy is the major crop grown in West Bengal, but the yield per acre is less than in other states, ranking seventh on the list,<sup>5</sup> and the demand greatly exceeds the supply.<sup>6</sup> As a result, consumption of rice, which is the staple food, has fallen on a per capita basis. Taking into account the period covered by the first two five year plans, it has been estimated that the production of foodgrains in West Bengal during 1959-60 was only 4.3 percent higher than in 1949-50, compared to an all-India increase during the same period of 38.3 percent.<sup>7</sup>

The targets set down for food production during the period covered by the third plan were very high, and aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in foodgrains.<sup>8</sup> Declining productivity, however, proved these expectations to be highly optimistic. Much has been written about the causes of low and declining productivity in the agricultural sector. A great deal of emphasis has been placed upon inputs : high-yielding crop seeds, fertilizers, mechanization, rural credit schemes and the like. There have been a number of shortcomings, however, in the availability and deployment of inputs into the farm sector. The supply of

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4. Gupta, 'Farm Sector's Performance in West Bengal', op. cit., p. 17.

5. See Samr Bose, op. cit., p. 20.

6. *ibid.*

7. Gupta, op. cit., p. 21.

8. See 'Agriculture in the First Three Plans', Eastern Economist, 30 June, 1967, p. 1281.



fertilizers and improved seeds has been insufficient to meet the demand because of the delay in setting up fertilizer factories, and the under-utilization of their capacity. Moreover, the production of high-quality agricultural implements has been impeded by the lack of research facilities, testing, training, manufacture, distribution and extension in agricultural programmes.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there has been a lack of coordination between the Agriculture and Irrigation Departments at almost all levels.<sup>10</sup>

The existence of co-operative credit did little to help the cultivators purchase the necessary implements for increased agricultural production. Under the present scheme, credit from these institutions is usually given against a mortgage on land. As a result, cultivators are forced to rely on the traditional money-lenders and traders, whose rates of interest have been exorbitantly high. All this means that inputs into the agricultural sector have not percolated down to the lower levels of the agricultural community, but have been mainly utilized by the more affluent sections of the peasantry and landowning classes.<sup>11</sup>

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9. The Committee on Plan Projects (COPP) issued a report in June, 1966, listing these shortcomings. See 'Agriculture in the First Three Plans', Eastern Economist, op. cit., p. 1283.

10. For further details, see *ibid.*, p. 1282.

11. It could be argued, of course, that overall agricultural production and efficiency could more easily be promoted if advantages such as rural credit and various innovations are channelled to larger, rather than small-scale inefficient producers. This complex economic argument cannot be pursued in detail here, especially as a meaningful discussion would have to include a number of inter-related social and political factors as well. For example, if small-scale producers were displaced by larger, more productive entrepreneurs, the already large number of landless labourers would be augmented even further. This would create problems relating to alternative employment, and in its absence, the provision of food for such people. Moreover, there would be the problem of further anomic discontents. It is not clear, therefore, that the economic benefits which may obtain from increased agricultural production and efficiency on the part of larger producers, would outweigh the economic and social costs to other adversely affected groups.

The growth in population of the state is an additional factor which adversely affects the agricultural sector of the economy. The growth rate for the state for the period 1952-63 was 32.79 percent, compared to the all-India rate of 21.50 percent for the same period.<sup>12</sup> As indicated in Chapter One, this is due to several factors, namely, the influx of refugees, the mobility of population from other parts of India to Calcutta and the metropolitan districts, and the decline in the death rate. Social factors must also be taken into account when analyzing the difficulties confronting the agricultural population. The productivity of land has been adversely affected by the social framework which has existed for centuries in India : the dominance of a landowning, leisured class performing few productive and entrepreneurial functions, who valued land as a source of status and prestige. This, combined with a rigid system of social stratification, resulted in the existence of a large peasant class, with little incentive to till the land beyond subsistence levels. P.C. Joshi maintains that West Bengal belongs to an area of stagnation, where the social framework sustains the dominance of upper castes in the economic and social structure.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the system of land tenure is widely accepted as an inhibiting factor against agricultural development and production.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Samr Bose, op. cit., p. 33.

13. P.C. Joshi, 'Social Factors in Agricultural Transformation', Link, 26 January, 1967, p. 73ff.

14. This was the view held by the Committee on the Implementation of Land Reforms, constituted by the National Development Council. See 'Land Reforms and Food Production', Economic and Political Weekly, 22 October, 1966, p. 403. Similar views have been put forward by other observers who are too numerous to mention.

Moreover, unremunerative wages paid to agricultural labourers, who have little prospect of increasing them by additional inputs of effort or technology, and a system of high rents imposed on agricultural tenants, have contributed to the general lack of incentive on the part of small peasants and bargadars. These factors may also have adversely affected production. Moreover, a large part of the land which was actually distributed by the former Congress Government in West Bengal resulted in a vast amount of litigation which bore heavily on the peasant. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the prevalent system of benami transfers has enabled landowners to acquire considerable tracts of land, despite formal ceilings set down in the act. To this must be added the number of 'voluntary' transfers, whereby landowners exert pressure on their tenants to transfer land. This has amounted to ejection of the peasants, an illegal process according to the law, which is nevertheless carried out.<sup>15</sup> It can therefore be seen that these disabilities are likely to inhibit any incentive to produce much more than is required for subsistence farming.

The problem was recognized by the Central Government and attention was drawn to the necessity for land reform by the Food and Agriculture Minister, Jagjivan Ram, who considered it to be a top priority for bringing about an increase in food production, and promised the support of the Central Government in this respect.<sup>16</sup> Since Independence, this attitude and view has been stressed by various members and committee recommen-

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15. See editorial 'Agrarian Reform', National Herald, 4 October, 1968.

16. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 16 July, 1967.

dations of the Central Government.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Five, however, this has partly been frustrated by the failure of some of the state governments to frame comprehensive legislative proposals to deal with land reform.

The prevailing system of prices has been another factor adversely affecting productivity. In a symposium called Indian Planning, organized by the National Book Club in New Delhi in December, 1966, it was generally conceded that prices for agricultural products were unremunerative.<sup>18</sup> The Foodgrains Policy Committee, which was constituted by the Central Government in March, 1966, to assess the all-India food shortage, reported in September of that year that the prices for foodgrains should be at a level 'which gives farmers adequate incentive to increase production.'<sup>19</sup> The Committee emphasized that there was a need to formulate a price policy to ensure both price stability and increased production. For this purpose, an Agricultural Prices Commission was set up. Any policy which dealt with the price situation was bound up with the drive for procurement, about which more will be said later. For the moment, we are mainly concerned to note that the actual prices which the cultivator received from the traders and host of other

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17. It must be said, however, that there is no inherent certainty that land reform would automatically raise the level of production on the part of small peasant beneficiaries. It is possible that many proponents of land reform as a means of raising productivity, have social justice as a primary aim, rather than purely economic benefits. In any case, the economic aspects of the subject are highly controversial, and to pursue them in further depth is beyond the scope of this thesis.

18. 'What is Wrong With Our Planning', Link, 11 December, 1966, p. 17.

19. C. H. Shah, 'Essentials of a National Food Policy : A Critique of the Foodgrains Policy Committee's Report', Economic and Political Weekly, 8 October, 1966, p. 323.

intermediaries, was, for the most part, extremely low, and therefore a disincentive towards agricultural production.

## II. The Controversy Over Food Zones and the Reaction in West Bengal.

In addition to the above, considerable controversy has taken place about the system of food zones, which have been a constituent part of the Central Government's food policy for a number of years. Opinion was sharply divided on whether the zones, as they existed, should be abolished, altered or retained. To understand this, let us briefly survey the system.

The country was divided into a number of single and multi-state zones. As at 1965, there were sixteen rice zones, each state comprising one zone, where the surplus states were to hand over their surpluses to the Central Government for distribution to the deficit states. Furthermore, there were four multi-state, four single-state and residual areas of wheat zones. The arguments put forward for the utility of this zonal system were along the following lines : that they enabled a better distribution of foodgrains, both imported and indigenous, among the deficit states, and, in so doing, reduced the inter-state price differentials; secondly, that they prevented a wasteful amount of foodgrains across the country which would otherwise have created a great deal of pressure on the transport system.

The argument against the system of state zones has been that it requires an amount of cooperation between the Centre and the states which is simply not forthcoming. Moreover, it has been denied that the system minimized inter-state price differentials. It has also been argued that the system fosters separation and national disintegration, and that zones are not reliable instruments for yielding surplus stocks to the Central Government, because each particular state tends to underestimate its surpluses, while deficit states over-estimate their

deficits.<sup>20</sup> Suggestions have been made for a re-organization of zonal arrangements, rather than either a retention in their present form, or abolition.<sup>21</sup>

In 1965, the Central Government set up the Food Corporation of India, which was to act as the largest wholesale trader in foodgrains for the country. Its functions were to undertake the purchase, storage, movement, transport, distribution and sale of foodgrains and foodstuffs.<sup>22</sup> Its role was enhanced because of the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, as a result of which it played a major part in the battle against famine in India during 1966-68.

Another important organization was the National Food Body, whose major role was to determine the food surpluses and deficits of the different states and areas, and, on the basis of this information, to provide the guidelines for the operation of the procurement devices.

The Central Government's policy was largely influenced by the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, which reported in September, 1966. Its major recommendations consisted of the following :

1. A system of compulsory procurement with minimum graded levy for both surplus and deficit states, plus a system of supplementary procurement.
2. The continuation of the food zones.

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20. K. L. Maheshwari, 'Food Zones in India - Need for Reorganisation', AICC Economic Review, 16, Nos. 350-361 (15 April, 1965), p. 16.

21. *ibid.*, p. 18.

22. Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India 1968 : A Reference Annual, 1968, p. 227.

3. A system of public distribution of food to those vulnerable sections of the population who would be hit hardest by the famine. The greatest difficulty in this respect was to make some arrangement which would not weigh too heavily on the producers, on the one hand, and the consumers, on the other. The problem consisted of an attempt to reconcile the policy of remunerative prices for the producers, and low prices for the consumers.<sup>23</sup>

4. Restriction on inter-state movements of foodgrains.

However, what the Foodgrains Committee did not decide was firstly, the prices to be offered for procurement, and secondly, the methods of procurement, which were left to the individual states.<sup>24</sup> In the light of the famine, the Committee's recommendations were discussed at a meeting of the state Chief Ministers in November, 1966, who accepted the most important ones. It was decided to formulate a national food budget, after an assessment had been made of the surpluses and deficits of the various states. To prepare and implement this, the National Food Council, under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, was set up and included the Food, Finance and Planning Ministers, plus the states' Chief Ministers. The powers of this body were to be exercised by a Standing Committee.<sup>25</sup>

It was decided to introduce a system of statutory rationing in fifteen major towns, including the four metropolitan cities, of which Calcutta was one. In addition, approximately ninety-three million people were to come under the system of 'informal' rationing, which meant that their food rations would

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23. More detailed arguments relating to this point can be found in Shah, 'Essentials of a National Food Policy...', op. cit.

24. 'Food Policy : After U.S. Freeze', Link, 4 December, 1966, p. 21.

25. 'Food Policy Window-Dressing', Economic and Political Weekly, 19 November, 1966, p. 564.

be catered for through the fair price shops. This system of rationing was to be maintained by procurement in both the deficit and surplus states, and this indicates that a great deal depended upon the device of procurement. In this respect, so far as West Bengal is concerned, it was the whole issue of procurement and its implementation which created both difficulty and tensions within the United Front Government during 1967.

Brief consideration will now be given to the food situation in West Bengal prior to the formation of the first United Front Government, in order to place the difficulties confronting the coalition into perspective. Throughout 1966, a series of bundhs had taken place, organized by some of the left-wing political parties. These bundhs were, among other things, demonstrations against the food policy and its implementation by the Congress Government in West Bengal.<sup>26</sup> In October, 1966, the Congress Government made some changes to its food policy, including a decision to hand over all procurement to the Food Corporation of India.<sup>27</sup> One possible reason for this change was the difficulty experienced by the administration in dealing with the bigger producers. In addition, the Congress Government decided to impose a levy of 50 percent on the production of the rice mills, against the 100 percent levy of the previous year, and waived the proposal to nationalize the rice mills.<sup>28</sup> It was also said that the Congress proposed to abolish price control on foodgrains, while still adhering to fixed procurement prices.<sup>29</sup>

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26. 'Bengal Bund', Link, 17 April, 1966, pp. 19-23. See also Eastern Economist, 12 August, 1966, pp. 277-279.

27. 'West Bengal - Concession to Food Racketeers', Link, 30 October, 1966, pp. 13-14.

28. One explanation given for the decision to oppose nationalization was that the Central Government's Food Minister felt the level of assistance given by the United States and other Western countries would decrease if nationalization took place. See 'Food Policy Muddle', Link, 2 April, 1967, p. 11.

29. 'West Bengal - Concession to Food Racketeers', Link, op. cit., p. 14.



One possible cause for these changes in the food policy was a political one, namely, the approach of the Fourth General Election. The Congress Party in West Bengal relied to a considerable extent upon the support of the larger economic and business interests, and it is possible that the relaxation in the procurement levels and abolition of price controls was a concession designed to maintain the support of these interests. In any event, it would seem that this change in the food policy was bound to create greater opportunities for the speculators. As has been argued by a number of people, a government in a situation of acute food shortage needs to have command over the supply of foodgrains in order to gain a position of strength in the market, so as to counteract effectively the activities of the speculators.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the prices fixed by the Congress Government bore little relation to the prevailing market prices, which was probably one reason for the inability of that government to reach the procurement targets. Criticism was made on the grounds that those selling on the free market were able to make large profits, compared to those selling at the procurement prices offered by the government, who, according to one source, comprised fifty percent of the poorer sections of the peasantry. In addition to the foregoing aspects of the Congress Government's food policy, there was a system of inter and intra-district cordons, which were criticized on the grounds that they were cumbersome and ineffective, besides being ineffectual in the prevention of smuggling.<sup>31</sup>

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30. See, for instance, Abdul Majid, 'Necessary Elements of a Food Policy', Economic and Political Weekly, 26 November, 1966, p. 624.

31. See editorial 'West Bengal Compromise', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 31 March, 1967.

### III. The Policy of the United Front Government.

Enough has been said to indicate that the Food Portfolio was perhaps the most difficult of all in the prevailing circumstances. It was given to Dr. P.C. Ghosh, who had formerly been Chief Minister of West Bengal, prior to the tenure of Dr. B.C. Roy. The food policy was outlined to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly at the end of March, 1967, and contained some significant deviations from the policy pursued by the former Congress Government. It was, however, by no means radical in nature or scope, and hence, from the start, there was little in the policy which met with the ideas of the left-wing partners in the coalition. The main features were the abolition of inter and intra-district cordons, and the levy system, higher rates of procurement of rice and paddy, and maintenance of the current prices of rationed goods, despite the higher procurement rates. A decision was made to retain the current system of statutory rationing in Calcutta and other areas. The Food Corporation was to act as the agent to procure rice and paddy on behalf of the West Bengal Government; it would then be given to the mills, which would return it after milling, to the Food Corporation of India (henceforth referred to as the FCI). It was decided to supply wheat and rice in the non-statutory areas at the same prices as in the statutory rationed areas.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the higher procurement prices offered by the government for paddy, it was felt that they might not, therefore, ensure the success of procurement targets, because the prices operating on the free market were slightly above those offered

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32. For further details of the policy, see Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 1 April, 1967, p. 991.

by the government. It may have been an unrealistic move to abolish simultaneously the levy, because, with the closer correlation between procurement and market prices now being offered by the government, dissatisfaction with the levy would most probably have been lessened, and the justification of former complaints against its imposition would have carried less weight. Withdrawal of the levy, however, meant that everything hinged on the success or otherwise of the procurement policy.

The food policy of the West Bengal Government was intricately bound up with that of the Central Government. As mentioned earlier, the Union Government decided that a national food policy would be formulated, on the basis of which a national food budget would be estimated. It would seem, however, that these decisions did not pay sufficient attention to political realities, for it had always proved difficult to force state governments to pool their food resources, and adopt uniformity in procurement, prices and distribution.<sup>33</sup> It is possible, of course, that the Central Government was taking other political realities into account, namely, a desire to impress the Western nations that it had, in fact, produced a food policy which was ostensibly coherent. The Central Government may have thought that this would induce the Western nations to increase their supplies of exports of foodgrains to India.

In any event, suggestions were made for a greater degree of inter-state trading on an ad hoc basis, with the role of the Central Government limited to one of coordination.<sup>34</sup> Objections to this suggestion were made mainly on the grounds

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33. See editorial 'Dear Food Minister', Eastern Economist, 7 April, 1967, p. 691.

34. *ibid.*, 692.

that this would lead to an exorbitant price spiral, which may necessitate stern police measures in an anti-hoarding drive. In any case, the West Bengal United Front Government was left to work out in greater detail the basic lines of the policy formulated by its Food Minister, P. C. Ghosh, and accepted by the United Front Cabinet.<sup>35</sup> A decision was made to set up advisory committees in the districts to implement the food policy, together with relief measures. The District magistrates were appointed convenors of these committees, and their composition was to consist of sub-divisional officers, local MLA's and members of the Legislative Council, representatives of the political parties, and officials of the FCI. Invitations were also extended to local Congressmen to join the committees, whose main overall function was the mobilization of public support for the government's food policy and the distribution of relief.<sup>36</sup>

This aspect of the food policy appears to indicate a lack of realism on the part of the West Bengal Food Minister, and one cannot help wondering why Ghosh failed to foresee the political difficulties inherent in this plan. Was he being naive in imagining that these committees, with their varied composition, could ever become instruments for the implementation of a viable food policy? It is difficult to envisage a harmonious relationship between the assorted party workers, politicians and administrative officers. More attention, however, will be given to this aspect when we examine in greater detail the

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35. Although the food policy was agreed to by the United Front Cabinet, it was generally referred to as 'the policy of Dr. B. C. Ghosh'.

36. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 18 April, 1967.

difficulties confronting the implementation of the food policy.

Although the initial premise of the procurement drive was on the basis of persuasion rather than coercion, it was soon found necessary to make it compulsory for owners of land in excess of ten acres in irrigated areas, and twelve acres in non-irrigated areas, to sell their paddy to the government. In relative terms, this meant that such owners, considered to be 'big' growers, would be subject to government direction. The government also ordered large owners to declare their stocks by April 15. Restrictions on the movement of paddy and rice were also found necessary, and hence no truck carrying an excess of 25 maunds of rice or paddy was able to move without a requisite permit from the government.<sup>37</sup>

The target set for the procurement drive, which began in mid-April, was 200,000 tonnes. It was not long before it became apparent that the procurement drive fell short of the government's expectations. One reason was the opposition of the rice-owners to the government's directive to deliver up their stocks. A number of them argued that they had already handed over 50 percent of their stocks at the old price of Rs. 75 per quintal, thinking that they would subsequently make up the loss incurred at this price by selling at a higher price than the current government offer of Rs. 95 per quintal on the open market. As the government had prohibited this, however the millers remonstrated with the Food Minister that they would incur a substantial loss.<sup>38</sup> Ghosh was reported to have told the millers that he would review the situation to see if the procurement price could be raised.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 27 April, 1967.

38. *ibid.*, 3 May, 1967.

39. *ibid.* (Calcutta ed.), 5 May, 1967.

The procurement target of 200,000 tons of rice was needed to sustain the statutory rationing system and to introduce modified rationing in the areas affected by drought. Because the government wished to avoid an increase in the price of rice supplied through the ration shops, although it had raised the procurement prices in an attempt to appease both consumers and producers, it felt that the Central Government should agree to a food subsidy of nearly Rs. 40.5 millions. The figures indicate the difficulty of the situation : the demand for rice within the statutory rationing areas from May, 1967 to January, 1968, was estimated to be 180,000 tons, of which the Central Government had promised to supply 15,000 tons per month, which meant that the state government proposed to meet the gap through procurement.<sup>40</sup> Unless the procurement targets could be reached, therefore, or the Central Government would increase its share of the supply, the state's food needs could not be met.

The United Front Government, however, informed the Central Government that the former's resources were inadequate to meet the situation. The Revenue Minister, Mr. Kundu, told Mrs. Gandhi that the state would need a special grant in money and foodgrains to feed the drought-afflicted areas, and that the Central Government would have to supplement the relief work undertaken by the state.<sup>41</sup> The request for a food subsidy of nearly Rs. 40.5 millions was, however, rejected by the Central Government.<sup>42</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Food Minister, P. C. Ghosh, was reluctant to resort to methods of coercion in an

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40. Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 5 May, 1967.

41. *ibid.*

42. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 6 May, 1967.

attempt to secure the procurement targets. By May, it became obvious that the targets set down by the government fell far short of expectations, and it was therefore decided to introduce a greater element of force by carrying out a programme of dehoarding operations. This was accordingly begun in the middle of May, but the amount actually collected fell short of the goals in many cases. By the time compulsion was introduced through the medium of de-hoarding operations, much of the surplus stocks had already been absorbed by the private traders, or were concealed or dispersed by the farmers. Ghosh was blamed for his initial rejection of compulsion and coercion, but responsibility was also levelled at the cabinet as a whole. At the policy level, the failure of the government to evolve a satisfactory food policy was said to rest upon the following : firstly, the government's delayed decision on the method of procurement, which only helped the private traders to acquire stocks; secondly, the selling spree which followed the government's initial decision to abolish the paddy levy; thirdly, the government's order enabling the movement of ten maunds of paddy or seven maunds of rice per vehicle, which meant that the traders could legally move large amounts by hiring many different vehicles; fourthly, the interference, on occasions, by United Front workers, which inhibited the movement of foodgrains even to bona fide traders, and fifthly, the government's policy of persuasion.<sup>43</sup> The Central Government also came in for its share of blame insofar as it failed to deliver its promised supplies, or to increase them.

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43. 'Paddy Procurement Prospects Improve in Midnapore', Statesman (Calcutta ed.) , 9 June, 1967.

#### IV. Problems of Implementation.

Apart from considerations of policy, however, we must look more closely at some of the difficulties with which the government in West Bengal was faced in the implementation of its food policy. These problems revolved primarily around administrative procedures and political factors connected with inter-party rivalry.

To begin with, the joint committees which were set up at the district level did not appear to function with a strong commitment towards united effort in carrying out the policy.<sup>44</sup> The representatives of the parties were sharply divided on the fundamental question of persuasion or compulsion in connection with food procurement and distribution.<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to know whether this divergence in views was more the product of ideological considerations, or of purely political factors and motives. It had been a fact that during the later months of the Congress Government's food policy, before that party was defeated in the 1967 election, there had been a widespread clamour on the part of all sections of the population against the institution of a levy in order to meet procurement targets. The protest against the levy was also taken up by the leftist political parties, possibly in a bid for electoral support. P. C. Ghosh was mindful of the criticism against the Congress Party for its commitment to compulsion, and this was perhaps one reason for his initial decision to adopt a policy of persuasion instead, although he appeared also to have had the view that compulsion necessarily bred corruption.

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44. 'Letter from West Bengal', Economic and Political Weekly, Special Number, August, 1967, p. 1457.

45. 'Favourable Climate for Food Production', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 3 May, 1967.



Apart from the difference in views among the United Front parties, the Congress was also in no mood to help with the implementation of the dehoarding and procurement drive, despite its network of influence in the rural areas. Quite likely, the party was also subject to the influence which the combined rice-miller-jotedar interests could exert, both upon the Congress, itself, and the administration. It was even acknowledged by spokesmen of the rice-millers' associations in Birbhum and Burdwan that their figures might not be entirely accurate.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, it was conceded that even where checks of the rice-millers' books were made by officials of the Food Department, this was not reliable as many of these officials would probably be subject to an 'agreement on irregularities.'<sup>47</sup>

Administrative difficulties were said to exist in the initial organizational weakness of the FCI. After the de-hoarding operations began, however, it was claimed that these weaknesses had been overcome to some extent. A system of operation squads was set up to tour the districts, checking the stocks of the big growers from lists prepared by the local Bloc Development officers. To some extent, a certain demoralization may have existed among such officers, who were of the opinion that if the de-hoarding operations had been carried out earlier, there would have been a much greater chance of success in reaching the targets set down for procurement.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, it was also argued that the prices offered by the private traders was far more attractive than

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46. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 4 May, 1967.

47. *ibid.*

48. *ibid.* (Calcutta ed.), 9 June, 1967.

those of the government's food procurement agent, the FCI.<sup>49</sup> A further difficulty consisted of the non-implementation of price control by the United Front Government. As a result, the private traders were able, as mentioned previously, to offer higher prices for foodgrains than the government. This, in itself, led to the buying up of large stocks by the private traders, who were then able to smuggle it to various parts of the state. This might have been mitigated if the government had enforced greater restrictions on the unauthorized movement of grain.<sup>50</sup>

Yet another factor which added to the difficulties of procurement was the government's expectation that the producers, themselves, would deliver the requisitioned stocks to the government godowns within a period of forty-eight hours or so. The producers, however, were reluctant to do this at their own expense, and hence insisted that the FCI agents arrange for removal. This placed a burden on the FCI agents, who were not willing to bear the cost of this expense.<sup>51</sup> A further problem was created in that the co-operative societies, which had requisitioned stocks delivered to their centres in the previous year, while the government had met the costs of transportation, were not in the present period allowed these costs. This caused them to withdraw from the operations, and hence the FCI officials were forced to appoint private agents for this purpose.<sup>52</sup>

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49. *ibid.* (Delhi ed.), 11 June, 1967.

50. 'Problems of Procurement', Link, 6 August, 1967.

51. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 10 June, 1967.

52. *ibid.*, 11 June, 1967.

Difficulty was also experienced in the distribution of relief through the food and relief committees set up by the United Front Government. Formerly, under the Congress Party, this role was assigned to the various panchayat bodies. But, under the new system, inter-party rivalry held up the implementation of this task. This was manifested acutely in one district in West Bengal, namely, Cooch-Bihar, where the FB members resigned from the committees. Because this party had a strong base in North Bengal, its resignation was interpreted as spelling failure to the programme supposed to be carried out by the committees.<sup>53</sup> It was also argued that in many cases the rich peasants, jotedars and hoarders were made local agents of the committees.<sup>54</sup> A further shortcoming was alleged to exist in the failure of party cadres to supervise efficiently the work of the administrative officials.<sup>55</sup>

The failure of the food policy led to a re-orientation of thinking in September, 1967, and some new decisions were made in an attempt to formulate a somewhat different policy. The most conspicuous aspects of the new policy concerned the virtual abolition of the wholesale trade in rice and paddy, as well as stringent restrictions on the retail trade. A procurement target of a million tons of rice was set, to be acquired through a levy on the surplus producers. In addition, there was to be little scope for retail trade, which meant that the government was now claiming a virtual monopoly of the private trade in rice and paddy. It was estimated that the new policy would affect about 15 percent of the farmers who would have to deliver

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53. See editorial 'Independence Day', Now, 11 August, 1967.

54. *ibid.*

55. *ibid.* and Dilip Mukherjee, 'Local Self-interest Displaces Ideologies on Food', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 11 August, 1967.

paddy under the levy order, for the remaining 85 per cent, owning less than a few acres, would be exempt from the levy.<sup>56</sup> It would seem, therefore, that the government had come to the position of the former Congress government, in realizing that a levy on producers was the only viable means of requisitioning foodgrains.

#### V. The Role of the Central Government.

It is now appropriate to evaluate the role of the Central Government insofar as the food crisis confronting the United Front Government was concerned. The Union Food Minister told the Lok Sabha that the food crisis 'could only be met by the Centre and State Governments working together with a sense of urgency, common sharing and national purpose',<sup>57</sup> and it is essential to determine to what extent this rhetoric matched the situation. Jagjivan Ram emphasized that it would be necessary for the states to make an all-out effort to intensify procurement, and that the political parties should cooperate in an endeavour to meet the crisis. Part of the difficulty, however, appears to have been the lack of a coherent policy towards procurement, although such a policy could only have worked in the event of cooperation from the state governments. An additional problem was the inability of the Union Government to increase the amount of imports into the country. This was partly due to the shortage of food within the importing countries, such as the United States, as well as the small reserves of foreign exchange within India, itself.<sup>58</sup>

At various times, pressure was put upon the Central Government to make it agree to the formation of bilateral

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56. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 25 September, 1967.

57. The Hindu Weekly Review, 3 April, 1967.

58. 'Food Situation : A Review', Eastern Economist, 7 April, 1967.

arrangements between the states for the supply of foodgrains. This had been done in Kerala when the Chief Minister, Mr. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, endeavoured to make a similar arrangement with the neighbouring states. Similarly, an attempt was made in West Bengal to reach an agreement with Orissa for the supply of extra grain to the state. The attitude of the Central Government, however, was that the apportioning of supplies on an all-India basis according to need and availability, would be impossible if these inter-state arrangements were made.<sup>59</sup>

During the month of June, the United Front Government sent a request to the Central Government for an additional supply of foodgrains for the drought-afflicted districts of Bankura and Purulia, but the Union Food Minister replied that any allocation of additional foodgrains would have to be determined on the future availability and needs of the other deficit states, and therefore it would not be possible for the Central Government to give a firm undertaking on the request.<sup>60</sup> Later on, the Central Government did announce its willingness to send extra wheat for these two districts, but the closure of the Suez Canal interfered with this intention.

In general, the Central Government failed to maintain regular supplies of foodgrains to the state in accordance with its promised commitments. But, even if it had sent the promised quotas on time, this would have, in any case, only represented a proportion of the state's needs. Hence, the responsibility for meeting the gap appears to have rested more squarely on the state government of West Bengal. Its

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59. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 14 May, 1967.

60. *ibid.* (Calcutta ed.), 7 June, 1967.

failure to meet this responsibility was a direct consequence of the initial policy formulated by the state's Food Minister, P. C. Ghosh, shortly after the installation of the United Front Government.

There does not appear to be a great deal of justification in the charges made by the CPI, namely, that the Central Government had pursued a deliberate policy of discrimination against the state because of the composition of the United Front Government. Two charges made by a CPI spokesman, alleging that the Central Government was culpable in the present crisis because of its failure to evolve a national food policy, and in its objection to bilateral arrangements between the states,<sup>61</sup> do not seem grounded on an appreciation or acknowledgement of the difficulties confronting these proposals.

The Central Government, for its part, maintained that some of the Congress-run states had suffered as much through the shortage of food supplies as had those of the non-Congress states, and that over half the monthly allocations of imported grain were earmarked for the four non-Congress states most short of food : Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.<sup>62</sup> A fact which was repeatedly pointed out by various critics of the Central Government over the food shortage was that the Centre had supplied the state of West Bengal with considerably larger amounts of food in the preceding year (1966), although the harvest was more satisfactory during that period. Taking into account, however, the intensified

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61. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 17 July, 1967. Part of the reason may, of course, have been political, namely, to continue the leverage of the Central Government, which would have been less if bilateral arrangements had been entered into.

62. *ibid.*

seriousness of the situation in 1967, it is not surprising that the Centre was not able to maintain the same level of foodgrains to the state. This is not to argue, however, that the Central Government did all it could to alleviate the distress suffered by the population in West Bengal; it is merely to suggest that the evidence does not support the view that the Central Government, through its failure to maintain the 1966 level of supply, and through lapses in the monthly allocation of supplies to West Bengal, was therefore following a policy of discrimination. The Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee, also denied that there had been discrimination.<sup>63</sup> The inability of the Central Government to maintain adequate supplies to West Bengal (as, indeed, to other deficit states), was heightened by the existence of only two surplus states within the Union : Andhra Pradesh and Punjab.

Despite the criticism that the Central Government had failed to evolve a national food policy, the efforts of the Chief Ministers in this respect, were hardly more fruitful. A conference of the Chief Ministers was held in Delhi in September to discuss procurement targets and methods. The agricultural prices commission had recommended that a direct levy be made on producers, but the Union Food Minister, Jagjivan Ram, preferred a levy on the millers and traders, which was also generally in accordance with the views of parties other than the Congress, who opposed the notion of a producer levy.<sup>64</sup> The main issue before the conference concerned the scale on which supplies were to be made available through the ration and fair price shops, because this had implications for

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63. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 10 August, 1967.

64. *ibid.*, 26 September, 1967.

the control over prices, which, in turn, had a bearing on the government's ability to undertake larger investments to revive the economy. However, the degree of public distribution was highly dependent upon the availability of food, and hence the basic question once more reverts to the success or otherwise of procurement drives.

The second basic issue for the conference was the level of procurement prices, which involved a fundamental problem for policy. The view taken by the Agricultural Prices Commission was that a compulsory levy would have the effect of appropriating part of the producers' income, in the nature of a tax, representing the difference between the procurement price and the open market for the stocks requisitioned by the state. This, however, would involve a reduction of incentives for the producers.<sup>65</sup>

In the event, however, the conference was sharply divided over the proposals of the Agricultural Prices Commission, and nearly all the Chief Ministers argued that the cost of inputs into the farming sector had increased, and that they (the farmers) should not be forced to sell grain at unremunerative prices.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, it was decided to retain the old method whereby the Union Food Ministry fixed the price for each state after official and ministerial consultation.

The Central Government was also criticized by some of the Chief Ministers for leaving the method of procurement to the states, and some argued that unless the grain was procured through a producer levy, it would not be possible to

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65. *ibid.* and editorial, Economic and Political Weekly, 30 September, 1967.

66. 'To Market, to Market', Economic and Political Weekly, 21 October, 1967.



meet the targets. As no agreement was reached at the conference on the system of procurement, it was left to the individual states to formulate their own methods. Disagreement was also voiced on the targets for procurement set down by the Agricultural Prices Commission. The conference did provide an opportunity for the Union Food Minister to inform the states that their grain allocations from the Centre would be cut in the ensuing year, and henceforth a much greater responsibility would devolve upon each individual state to meet its own food requirements. In order to do this, it would seem that there was no alternative than the politically undesirable task of enforcing a grain levy upon the producers.

Basically, there are three other alternative methods of procurement : monopoly purchase from producers, a levy on trade, and purchases on the open market. The general political tendency is for the left-wing parties to favour either monopoly procurement or a levy on producers, whilst the right-wing parties favour purchase on the open market.<sup>67</sup> There is, however, no certainty that output can be vastly increased by manipulating either procurement prices or modes of procurement, when the surplus needed to increase stocks of food is dispersed among millions of cultivators.<sup>68</sup>

The problem of procurement prices suggested by the Agricultural Prices Commission caused the Ministry of Finance to suggest a strict cut in the Centre's commitments to supply food to the deficit areas. The Ministry pointed out that by increasing the procurement price by an average of 25 percent,

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67. 'Search for a Food Policy', Link, 1 October, 1967, p. 12.

68. See editorial 'The Elusive Surplus', Economic and Political Weekly, 30 September, 1967.

the prices on the open market would be increased towards an inflationary level, and that the issue price from the central stores would go up by 40 to 50 percent on the assumption that there will be no subsidies the following year. Both of these consequences would increase the cost of living for the consumer, and hence the Finance Ministry suggested that those deficit states insisting upon higher prices than the Agricultural Prices Commission had recommended, should be told in advance that they would have to bear the burden of any subsidy granted to the consumer. Secondly, the Ministry recommended that the surplus states, which were advocating high prices, should not be included in the central procurement scheme, and that the targets for these states should be lowered correspondingly.<sup>69</sup>

As it turned out, however, the Union Food Ministry subsequently agreed to increase the procurement prices by between 20 and 30 percent rather than those recommended by the Agricultural Prices Commission. This was part of a package deal between the Food and Finance Ministries. The latter was able to persuade the former to agree to the withdrawal of the subsidy on imported grain (which was necessitated by devaluation), and the containment of the incentive bonus paid to surplus states which met procurement targets 'within the limit of procurement prices fixed for deficit states so as to maintain a price parity in the whole country.'<sup>70</sup>

#### VI. Conclusions and Summary.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the difficulties inherent in formulating and implementing a satisfactory food

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69. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 8 October, 1967.

70. *ibid.*, 11 October, 1967.

policy in a period of acute famine, provided plenty of scope for clashes over policy and other tensions among the coalition partners. As the Eastern Economist put it : Ghosh was 'unable to enlist the enthusiastic cooperation of his ministerial colleagues in the implementation of the food policy.'<sup>71</sup> This lack of unity was expressed more forcibly in interviews with some of the parties' spokesmen. In stating that the WP was critical of the policy, Mr. Bhattacharjee said :

'The first step taken was very wrong, e. g. removal of all levy collections which was a joint idea of Mukherjee [Ajoy] and Ghosh, as a pledge to the jotedars. They said they'd put an end to rationing and control but they couldn't get this agreed to by others in the U. F. They couldn't give up rationing, but removed price control, cordon and levy. It was P. C. Ghosh's policy. He'd go about and appeal to the mill-owners to voluntarily hand over their stocks. This failed. And it took six months before the policy was reversed, and control, cordoning and levy were re-imposed. The food policy was bungled from beginning to end. Just when we did arrive at some solution in November, 1967, the U. F. Government was dismissed.'<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, for Professor Sourindra Nath Bhattacharyya of the RSP :

'There were so many factors. Ghosh was adverse to exacting levy from the big peasants and jotedars. He misled both the public and the cabinet regarding the food position. He refused to put pressure on the Centre for more foodstuffs for West Bengal.'<sup>73</sup>

The CPI was also critical :

'Ghosh used to give twists and turns. One example : during 1967 he had a procurement programme. This was agreed to by the U. F. , but Ghosh issued instructions in a circular contradicting the basic policy.'<sup>74</sup>

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71. 'Hartal and Hunger', Eastern Economist, 8 September, 1967, pp. 433-434.

72. Interview, op. cit.

73. Interview, op. cit.

74. Interview, Calcutta, May, 1970.

Dissent over the food policy and its implementation involved a complex interaction between ideology and power. As mentioned earlier, the major conflict was over the policy of persuasion versus compulsion in the procurement of food stocks. This conflict was not confined to the United Front cabinet, but existed at the local levels as well. A number of joint committees had been formed in the districts to assist and mobilize the procurement drive, but they were divided on the methods of procurement.<sup>75</sup>

Disunity at both the top and local levels had both ideological and pragmatic aspects. Ideologically, Ghosh was opposed to compulsion; moreover, on pragmatic grounds he believed that compulsion bred corruption. Apart from these factors, it is not known whether some of the leftist parties were correct in maintaining that Ghosh's refusal to institute a compulsory levy for some months was due to pressure from the larger producers and the BC.

The opposition of the leftist parties to persuasion accorded with their ideological commitment to state control. In their case, however, there were also pragmatic reasons for favouring compulsory levies, namely, the belief that procurement targets could not otherwise be met.

In addition, power struggles played a significant role. The people's committees which were set up in the districts to assist the procurement drive, were infiltrated by the bigger producers.<sup>76</sup> (It has been noted in the previous chapter that a similar situation occurred during the 'land grab' movement of

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75. 'Favourable Climate for Food Procurement but No Unity Among U. F. Units in Burdwan', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 3 May, 1967, p. 7.

76. Dilip Mukherjee, 'Local Self-Interest Displaces Ideologies on Food', *ibid.* (Delhi ed.), 8 August, 1967.

1969, when the jotedars sought refuge in the various political parties in an attempt to protect their own interests). Moreover, the CPM had been most vociferous and active in its attempts to organize these people's committees,<sup>77</sup> and it seems reasonable to argue that their motives were not merely to use the committees to facilitate procurement, but also to expand the party's influence.

In any case, the whole procurement drive was a failure. By May, the CPM was openly critical of Dr. Ghosh for his appeals to the producers to sell voluntarily their surpluses to the government. The politburo made a public statement saying that the government should immediately and compulsorily procure all marketable surpluses.<sup>78</sup> By August, the party had come out in open criticism of the Department of Food, claiming that it had 'failed to carry out the main directives given in the eighteen-point policy statement of the U. F. Government.'<sup>79</sup> According to the party, the food situation, in terms of availability and price, had become worse than under the previous Congress regime. The position was summarized as follows :

'The jotdars, hoarders, black-marketeers and profiteers have not been curbed by the U. F. Government, rather they have profited economically far more than during the past years. They are politically working for discrediting the U. F. Government by sabotaging, in league with the corrupt officials, all the major decisions of the U. F. Government with regard to food procurement, price-stabilization, land distribution, prevention of eviction, etc.'<sup>80</sup>

The tensions and animosities generated by the food policy of the first United Front Government had two significant

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77. See 'West Bengal State Committee on People's Committees', People's Democracy, 23 April, 1967.

78. *ibid.*, 28 May, 1967, p. 6.

79. CP(M) to Launch Campaign for Food Policy', *ibid.*, 13 August, 1967.

80. *ibid.*

effects as far as the first United Front Government was concerned.<sup>81</sup> Firstly, the fact was emphasized that agreement and consensus within this multiple party coalition, was extremely limited. In fact, intense conflict pervaded both United Front Governments with respect to all its major policies. Stemming from this was the fact that animosity between the CPM and Ghosh became embittered to the point where Ghosh resigned his portfolio, arguing that he could no longer work with the communists, but particularly the CPM. The major effect of this was a severe split within the BC, when Ghosh mustered together a number of supporters with the intention of bringing about the collapse of the United Front Government, as it was then constituted. In this way, Ghosh hoped to form an alternative coalition which would exclude the CPM. Hence, dissension over the food policy was crucial, with far-reaching results.

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81. The food situation during the tenure of the second United Front Government was not comparable because, by this time, famine conditions did not prevail. Accordingly, therefore, there was less conflict in this area of policy and administration.

Part III - THE FALLChapter SevenFALL AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE TWO  
UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENTS - I.I. Introductory Comments.

The United Front Governments did not collapse suddenly, but disintegrated over a period of time. This was particularly so in the case of the second United Front Government. Moreover, just as it is difficult to assign a particular point in time to the commencement of this disintegrative process, so also it is impossible to attribute the disintegration to one exclusive reason. Although, on both occasions the CPM was held responsible by spokesmen for some of the parties, as well as by the press, this explanation is altogether too facile and over-simplified. Whilst the actions of the CPM, particularly in the second United Front Government, may well have been a contributing factor, the very nature of the coalition governments, themselves, were inimical to continuing viability, and thus was a more major reason for the disintegration of both governments.

Despite this fact, the circumstances under which both governments fell were characterized by differences as well as similarities. On each occasion, the coalitions were gravely troubled by inter-party dissension and hostility towards the CPM. But, whereas the collapse of the first United Front Government was precipitated by intra-party factionalism within the BC, the second United Front Government progressively declined over a long period of time. During this period, it seemed as if attempts to avert the final collapse of the coalition were made by parties and their personnel, either to retain power under any circumstances, or to make every possible attempt to hold the coalition together for its own sake. Because the reasons for the fall of both governments were characterized by differences and similarities,

as well as by intensity and scope, it is proposed to analyze these processes in two chapters. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter will be confined to a descriptive analysis of the fall of the first United Front Government.

## II. Intra-party Factionalism and the Problem of Defections.

It has already been stated that one immediate cause behind the collapse of the first United Front Government was intra-party factionalism within the BC. The divisions within this party, which constituted a major problem for cohesion and stability within the coalition, found expression in the Bengal unit of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (henceforth referred to as the BKD). The BKD group in West Bengal consisted mainly of BC members, led by an ex-Congressman and well-known Muslim leader, Professor Humayan Kabir, who was also one of the chief ideologues of the BKD.

As early as May, 1967, a number of regional groups and parties had met in Patna to form an all-India BKD as an alternative to the Congress Party.<sup>1</sup> Most of the participants at the convention consisted of former Congressmen, who, for one reason or another, had defected from the Congress Party, either shortly before or after the Fourth General Election was held.<sup>2</sup> These delegates included the West Bengal Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee, the United Front Minister for Food, P. C. Ghosh, as well as other politicians from the state. For Ajoy Mukherjee, however, the formation of the BKD presented a number of problems, including differences among the potential constituent units of the

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1. See editorial 'A New Party', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 16 May, 1967, and 'Congress Defectors Form Bharatiya Kranti Dal', *ibid.*

2. An account of this convention is contained in 'Rebel Congressmen's Party', Link, 21 May, 1967, pp. 10-14.



BKD over the proposed programme for the new party.<sup>3</sup>

In any event, steps were taken in West Bengal for the formation of the state branch of the BKD, popularly referred to as 'the Dal'. But, already there was a division within the BC on this issue, for Kabir was enthusiastic about an all-India party, to be run on central lines, whereas Mukherjee wished to maintain the autonomous status of the BC. The latter accordingly argued that the structure of the BKD should consist of a loose federation of state units. At one stage, the organizational problem was allegedly solved when the committee of the BKD, set up by Kabir, was dissolved and merged into the BC committee, on the assurance that the BC would ultimately become a branch of the Dal. In the meantime, the BC was expected to take an active interest in the all-India BKD.<sup>4</sup>

The organizational aspects, however, are less interesting than the political ones. Kabir had been very outspoken in his opposition to the Communists, and particularly the CPM.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned previously, this attitude was shared by P. C. Ghosh, who had attended the Patna Convention. Despite the fact that the BKD was originally seen as an opposing force to the Congress Party, Kabir soon indicated willingness to come to an arrangement with the Congress to bring about a re-alignment of political forces

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3. See Link, *ibid.*, p. 12. A spokesman for the BC is reported to have told Link that whereas the BC believed in democratic centralism, the Jan Congress (another constituent unit of the BKD) did not. Moreover, the leadership of the BC emphasized that their party was a state party, and so they were not interested in an all-India organization.

4. 'Kranti Dal - A Rightist Success', Link, 8 October, 1967.

5. See, for example, 'Kranti Dal : Kabir Disruption', Link, 24 September, 1967, p. 17 and 'Kranti Dal - Rightist Success', *ibid.*

to exclude the Communists - a view he later frequently reiterated.<sup>6</sup> He, and the right-wing of the BC were opposed to what they considered to be an increasing threat to law and order, manifestations of violence during gheraos, student indiscipline, and the like.

It was not only the BKD, however, which threatened the existence of the United Front Government. The Congress Party was also alleged to be deeply involved in attempts to topple the government. Certain organizational changes had been promoted by a section of the party, which included the formation of an ad hoc committee to replace, or rather displace, Atulya Ghosh's hold over, and power within the West Bengal Congress Committee. This proposed organizational change, incidentally, was a demand made by Ajoy Mukherjee when he left the Congress Party in 1966.

The group opposing the power and authority of Atulya Ghosh included the former Congress Chief Minister, P.C. Sen. In connection with the United Front Government, the Sen faction thought that some arrangement could be made with Ajoy Mukherjee, either to win him back into the Congress fold, or to persuade him to form a coalition government with Congress support, which would exclude the Communists, and particularly the CPM.

In any case, Gulzarilal Nanda, a former Union Home Minister, proceeded to West Bengal ostensibly to investigate ways of effecting a re-organization of the West Bengal unit of the Congress Party.<sup>7</sup> Nanda and Atulya Ghosh were old-time

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6. See, for example, 'Kranti Dal Gesture to Congress - Coalitions Possible says Kabir', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 30 September, 1967, and 'Now Practically No Government in W. Bengal - Prof. Kabir', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 October, 1967.

7. Nanda's visit was widely covered in the press, particularly the Calcutta press. Details of the Nanda plan and reaction to it can be seen in the following issues of the press : Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 24, 25, 27 & 28; editorial, Statesman (Calcutta ed.) 26 September; Delip Mukherjee, 'Nanda's Initiative May Boomerang on Him', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 29 September; press reports in ibid. (Delhi ed.), 30 September, and Hindustan Times, 1 October, and Statesman (Delhi ed.) October 8 and 12 - all in 1967.

antagonists, and perhaps this facilitated Nanda's conclusion that the West Bengal Congress Committee should be replaced with an ad hoc committee. A more important reason, however, may well have been acceptance of the demands made by Ajoy Mukherjee, in return for his agreement to oust the CPM from the coalition government. Apart from this, however, the then Congress President, Kamaraj, as well as Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Y. B. Chavan, approved of the plan, although it was later shelved because of Atulya Ghosh's influence as a member of the powerful Congress 'Syndicate' at the Centre.<sup>8</sup>

Before the Nanda plan was placed in cold storage, Kabir was said to have reached an understanding with Ajoy Mukherjee at the end of September, 1967, on the formation of the BKD, and that the Dal might cooperate in future with the Congress Party in forming a coalition government. By this time, speculation was widespread that Ajoy Mukherjee had reached an agreement with the Congress to resign on 2 October, with the intention of forming a non-Communist government, and that the army had been alerted to deal with any possible disturbances arising from this. Mukherjee later admitted that he had entered into discussions with the Congress Party, with the aim of bringing about a Congress-backed, non-Communist minority government.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the other parties in the coalition understandably demanded a reply from Mukherjee, who, when 2 October arrived, did not follow up his decision to resign,<sup>10</sup> probably because not

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8. Subhash Kashyap, The Politics of Defection (Delhi, 1969), p. 349.

9. See 'C. M. Explains Stand at U. F. Meet', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 October, 1967.

10. For a fuller account, see 'C. M. 's Resignation Rumours Did Not Come True', *ibid.*, 3 October, 1967.

all members of the BC would support him. The reason given by Ajoy Mukherjee for his contemplated resignation was his concern about the role and activities of the CPM and the deteriorating law and order situation within the state.<sup>11</sup>

Following the October crisis, some attempts were made to reduce the number of strains within the United Front by insisting upon adherence to a previously devised code of conduct for ministers. The most significant point in this respect was the proposal that ministers should refrain from speaking out publicly against decisions reached in the cabinet.<sup>12</sup> This new, albeit tenuous consensus temporarily muted the crisis of immanent collapse of the United Front Government. The CPM, moreover, changed its tune and said that they would support a coalition government in which they were excluded, provided that it was not a Congress-supported government.<sup>13</sup>

Discord, however, continued to plague the BC. Humayan Kabir's brother, Jehangir Kabir, defected from the party shortly afterwards, on the grounds that Ajoy Mukherjee's clandestine negotiations with the Congress Party prior to 2 October necessitated the forfeiture of his allegiance. Jehangir

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11. 'C.M. Explains Stand at U.F. Meet', Amrita Bazar Patrika, op. cit.

12. 'Ministers Won't Attack Cabinet Decisions - U.F. Consensus', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 September, 1967.

13. The changed tone of the CPM became very evident in its official organ People's Democracy. In a front page article of the issue dated 15 October, devoted to an account of Ajoy Mukherjee's address to a mass rally, critical comments about Mukherjee were absent. Moreover, in the party's account of the attempts to topple the U.F. Government, no mention was made about the Chief Minister, beyond a brief comment that the Congress Party had tried to win him over. See 'West Bengal People on the Alert' (re Mukherjee's address to the mass rally), and 'Added Vigilance Needed Against New Plots' (re attempt to topple the U.F. Government), People's Democracy, 15 October, 1967. The same reserved tone can be detected in subsequent issues of the paper.

Kabir and a group of supporters then constituted themselves as a separate constituent of the United Front,<sup>14</sup> and continued to support the United Front Government.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, a conference of the BC was held in the middle of October to discuss the proposed merger of the party with the BKD. This, in itself, was also a divisive factor because eight district organizations insisted that a merger could only take place if the BKD pledged itself towards the goal of 'socialism'. Another eight districts insisted on certain organizational conditions being fulfilled. When the merger was agreed to, it was on the condition that five demands were met, the most important being the recognition of the BC as a state unit of the Dal.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, there were other developments which threatened and ultimately led to the collapse of the first United Front Government. This was the formation of an independent group within the assembly called the Progressive Democratic Front (henceforth referred to as the PDF), led by P. C. Ghosh. The PDF was organized after an announcement was made by the government that an amendment to the Land Reforms Act would be made, which would give relief to the poorer sections of the peasantry, particularly the share-croppers.<sup>17</sup> It was

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14. Kashyap, op. cit., p. 355 and "B.K.D. to Quit Bangla Congress', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 October, 1967.

15. See 'Jehangir Kabir's Opposition', *ibid.*, 20 October, 1967.

16. 'Uncertainty Phase', Link, 22 October, 1967.

17. For full details of the proposed amendment, see 'A Blueprint for New Land Policy in West Bengal. Maximum Possible Protection and Security to Bargadars', Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 28 October, 1967, pp. 491ff.

alleged, but not substantiated, that Ghosh and Humayan Kabir were under the domination of the jotedars, who were opposed to land reform.<sup>18</sup> Although the authenticity of this allegation cannot be verified, the formation of the PDF did take place towards the commencement of the harvesting season, when the government had made plans for an extensive procurement programme.

It has already been pointed out that a great deal of bitterness existed between P. C. Ghosh and the CPM over the food policy.<sup>19</sup> Ghosh had even threatened to resign as far back as July.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, a number of defections had already taken place : before the October crisis three BC MLA's defected to the Congress, and were joined by two others - an Independent and a member of the Jan Sangh.

Whether the Congress Party and the BKD used Ghosh as an instrument to bring down the government is not known, but it is quite probable that this was so,<sup>21</sup> given the concerted efforts of both parties prior to, and after 2 October, to oust the CPM from the United Front. According to Kashyap, the Congress Party had engineered Ghosh's resignation.<sup>22</sup> This does

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18. 'Another West Bengal Conspiracy', Link, 12 November, 1967, p. 13.

19. See 'Campaign Against W. Bengal Govt.', Patriot, 5 August, 1967. This report stated that 'The West Bengal unit of the Left C.P. has decided to launch a campaign against the policies pursued by the Home and Food Departments of the State Government.'

20. 'Cabinet Crisis Averted in West Bengal', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 27 July, 1967.

21. See 'Fresh Bid for New Ministry', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 October, 1967.

22. Kashyap, op. cit., p. 355.

not, however, exclude the possibility that Ghosh also decided on his own initiative, to lead a number of defectors from the government. His own comments below certainly suggest this. One view was that Ghosh's resignation was a sequel to his differences with the cabinet, and, furthermore, that he was intensely annoyed by a proposal to appoint a cabinet sub-committee on food. Disagreeing with the proposal, Ghosh is reported to have said that if such a sub-committee were set up for his department, then sub-committees should likewise be formed for all departments.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact remains that when Ghosh did resign on 3 November, 1967, without any prior intimation to Ajoy Mukherjee or other ministers within the cabinet, nine of the seventeen defectors were members of the BC, and belonged to the Humayan Kabir faction.<sup>24</sup> Speculation that the BKD group and Ghosh would attempt to topple the United Front Government had been made as far back as August, and came into prominence immediately after Mukherjee failed to resign a month before the government fell.<sup>25</sup> In any event, Ghosh's reasons for resignation were reported as follows :

'...after the last General Elections various political parties and some Independent members elected to the Legislative Assembly decided to form a Coalition Government with Congress in the Opposition. Mr.

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23. See 'P.C. Ghosh Resigns : Fresh Crisis in U.F. Ministry', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 November, 1967.

24. "Biswanath Mukherjee Meets Kabir", Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 November, 1967.

25. See 'Critical Days Ahead for United Front', Patriot, 22 August, 1967; Ajoy Mukherjee Decided Not to Quit Office', Times of India, 5 October, 1967, and 'New Communist Offer', Patriot, 4 October, 1967.

Mukherjee, an ex-pupil of mine<sup>26</sup> was chosen as the Chief Minister. I joined the Cabinet as Food and Agriculture Minister. For a multi-party Cabinet flexibility and adjustability are essential. But within two months of its functioning, I realised that various parties constituting the Cabinet sadly lacked these qualities... By July, I realised the Cabinet was a conglomeration of representatives of various warring groups, which could hardly be expected to deliver goods to the masses. So I wrote out a resignation letter and went to the Chief Minister with it. At his request, I agreed to continue but I made it clear to him that my non-violence was on trial. Within the last three months the situation has further deteriorated and our State was in a condition of economic bankruptcy.' 27

Of course, Ghosh was quite right when he referred to the cabinet as a 'conglomeration of representatives of various warring groups', and it was this factor which was the prime reason for the lack of viability in both United Front Governments - a point which has been stressed throughout this thesis, and one which will be elaborated upon in the concluding chapter.

Returning now to the actual fall of the government, Kashyap has given the pre-defection party affiliations of the

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26. If Ghosh was reported accurately, one cannot help wondering whether he was piqued right from the start at having been given a subordinate post to that of Ajoy Mukherjee. As some press reports indicated (for example, see "B.K.D. May Pull Out of Bengal U.F.", Statesman (Delhi ed.), 19 October, 1967) Ghosh was senior to Mukherjee, and had, moreover, once been a Chief Minister in Bengal. Given a social system which accords an inordinate degree of status and prestige to those senior in age, to guru-relationships, and to holders of power and authority, it is not improbable that Ghosh found it difficult to accept the concepts of 'one among equals', or, in relation to Ajoy Mukherjee 'first among equals'. This may have been an additional reason for Ghosh's failure to attend cabinet meetings, except when they related to his own portfolio. He was, after all, an old man. Nevertheless, the point should not be taken too far.

27. 'Dr. Ghosh Wants Govt. to Resign', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 November, 1967.



defectors as follows :

Independents		3
BC (BKD group)	28	9
PSP		4
Swatantra		1
RSP-supported Independent		1
Total		<u>18</u> 29

The defections of Ghosh and his supporters therefore appeared to reduce the majority of the United Front Government into a minority, against the combined opposition strength of 149 in a House of 280. From this stage onwards, the role of the state Governor, Mr. Dharma Vira, was of crucial significance, not only for the future of the government, but in raising fundamental questions about the role and powers of state governors in general. A constitutional crisis of considerable magnitude followed these events.

### III. The Constitutional Issue.

The Governor requested Ajoy Mukherjee to test his government's strength in the assembly in an endeavour to ascertain its support. Mukherjee replied that he was not prepared to do this before the 18th December, no doubt having in mind that a period of time was necessary to rally support. Claims and counter-claims by the PDF and United Front respectively about their alleged strength in the assembly were put forward. The Governor, however, would not agree to a delay in assessing the government's majority or otherwise. Ajoy Mukherjee then requested that the matter be taken to the Supreme Court, under Article 143 of the Constitution, for judgement on the legality or

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28. For one view of the role of the BKD group in toppling the United Front Government, see 'Bharatiya Kranti Dal : Right Turn', Link, 14 April, 1968, p. 18.

29. Kashyap, op. cit., p. 356.

or otherwise of the Governor's actions.<sup>30</sup> This request, however, was rejected on the advice of the Union Government's Home and Law Ministries.

In the event, Governor Vira deemed that 'it was constitutionally improper under all circumstances that a Ministry should continue to hold office when it has lost the confidence of

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30. Kashyap has listed seven points on which Ajoy Mukherjee wanted the President to refer to the Supreme Court for advice :

1. Has the Governor the authority to dismiss the Council of Ministers without taking the verdict of the Assembly under Articles 163, 164 and other relevant Articles of the Constitution?
2. If the Governor on the basis of information available to him entertains the doubt that the Council of Ministers does enjoy the confidence of the majority, can he in his individual discretion dismiss the Council of Ministers?
3. As the Governor is bound to act aided and advised by the Council of Ministers in the matter of summoning the Houses of legislature, is it open to him to disregard the advice of the Chief Minister and can he advise or insist upon the Chief Minister to summon the Houses on any other date?
4. If the Chief Minister fails or disagrees to comply with the Governor's advice, can the Governor dismiss the Council of Ministers on the ground that non-compliance with his advice amounts to violation of the Constitution or that there has not been proper working of the Constitution?
5. If the Chief Minister fails to comply or disagrees with the advice of the Governor in the matter of summoning the Assembly, can the Governor on that ground make a report to the President under Article 356 of the Constitution?
6. As the Governor is bound to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers, is it open to him to disregard the advice of the Council of Ministers and act on his own counsel if he is entertaining doubts about the Council of Ministers enjoying the confidence of the majority of the House before the question of majority is tested in a sitting of the Assembly?
7. Is it open to the Governor to disregard the advice of the Council of Ministers to dissolve the Assembly on the ground that in his personal opinion the Council of Ministers does not have the support of the majority of the Assembly?

Kashyap, op. cit., pp. 360-361.

the majority of members of the Assembly',<sup>31</sup> and dismissed the United Front Government on 21 November. In justifying his decision, Dharma Vira said he had done so under Article 164 of the Constitution, which states that the Chief Minister and other Ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor.<sup>32</sup> P. C. Ghosh was then invited to form a ministry.

A great deal of controversy followed the actions of the Governor. It was urged by many people that he had misused his discretionary powers when dissolving the United Front Government, because he had no right to take such action unless there had been an adverse vote in the Assembly. The issue brought into prominence the question of whether the Governor was a mere constitutional head, who had to act on the advice of his Council of Ministers, who were collectively responsible to the Assembly, or whether he was entitled to use his discretion in dismissing a government without a formal vote in the Assembly. Some people held the view that the Constitution was vague and ambiguous in this respect, and hence liable to different interpretations.<sup>33</sup> A study group on Centre-State relations concluded that Governors have the right to dismiss their Council of Ministers under Article 164, and that even though it can be argued that he can dismiss other Ministers only on the advice of the Chief Minister, he was under no such constraint when the Chief Minister, himself, was involved.<sup>34</sup>

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31. 'Assault on Democracy', Link, 26 November, 1967, p. 11.

32. *ibid.*

33. This was the view of Jayaprakash Narayan. See Statesman (Delhi ed.), 10 December, 1967.

34. These points have been elaborated upon fully in Government of India, Administrative Reforms Commission, 'Role of the Governor' in Report on Centre-State Relationships June 1969 (Delhi, 1969), pp. 20-31.

A different view was given by Krishna Menon, who intimated that the Governor in West Bengal had acted in a partisan way. He pointed to the fact that this Governor did not know with any certainty, that Ajoy Mukherjee and his government had actually lost the majority of the Assembly at the time he dismissed the Ministry. He argued, further, that the Governor, for political reasons which included a preference for a particular party (the Congress), tried to have the Assembly called in a hurry, and when this was not agreed to by Ajoy Mukherjee, he dissolved the legislature, fearing that otherwise the defectors would 'melt away'.<sup>35</sup> Even the Statesman, which had been critical of the United Front Government, took Governor Vira to task when it wrote :

'It would have been bad enough if, guided only by his own assessment and without waiting for the State Assembly to test it, he had replaced the Ministry with President's rule. But he did worse by inducting a defector into office, leader of a small bunch of splinters of the United Front, who may at best survive with the support of parties much bigger than his own and at worst may plunge the State still deeper into the uncertainty from which the Governor claims to have rescued it. He cannot claim this to be a more democratic decision than the United Front's deplorable refusal to call the Assembly to an early session...'<sup>36</sup>

However, apart from the failure of the Governor to agree to the delay proposed by Ajoy Mukherjee for calling the Assembly, and to the latter's refusal in this respect, the problematical question was posed for the constitutional theorists ; by whose advice, if any, should the Governor be bound when dealing with a party which appears, on the face of it, to have

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35. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 31 December, 1967.

36. As quoted in Kashyap, op. cit., p. 364.

lost its majority through defection. The problem is rendered more difficult by the fact that the Governor, by virtue of his appointment by the President of India, is primarily a representative of the Centre. On the other hand, he is expected to work in close collaboration with the state governments.<sup>37</sup>

One authority on the Constitution, S. Mohan Kumaramangalam, writing about another constitutional crisis which had occurred in Madhya Pradesh in July, 1967, when a number of defectors had crossed the floor thereby leaving the ruling Congress government without a majority, wrote :

'As soon as the Council of Ministers loses its majority it can no longer continue in existence as that would be in violation of Article 164(2) of the Constitution.'<sup>38</sup>

Kumaramangalam argued that Governors possessed no discretionary power, and were bound to take the advice of their Chief Ministers.<sup>39</sup> As already indicated, however, the situation in West Bengal revolved around two interesting and unique points : firstly, the Governor had failed to determine accurately which side had the majority, and, secondly, the Chief Minister had refused to agree to the calling of the Assembly within the time stipulated by the Governor.

The difference in viewpoints over the constitutionality or otherwise of the Governor's actions<sup>40</sup> points to the inescapable

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37. See editorial 'Governors and Politics', Overseas Hindustan Times, 18 November, 1967.

38. 'Centre Cannot Tamper With State Autonomy', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 31 July, 1967.

39. *ibid.*

40. To pursue this point further is beyond the scope of this thesis. A number of academic articles have examined the question in considerable detail. See, for instance, Ravindra Nath Mishra, 'Governor and Dissolution of the Legislative Assembly', and Amal Roy, 'Constitutionality of the Governor's Action in West Bengal', and Pabitra Kumar Ghosh, 'Position of Governor in Relation to his Council of Ministers - with special reference to Constitutional Impasse in West Bengal' in The Indian Journal of

40. (continued)

Political Science, XXVIII, No. 4 (October-December, 1967); B. C. Rout, 'The Gubernatorial Office in India - a Devalued One' and J. P. Suda, 'The Role of State Governor' in *ibid.*, XXIX, No. 1 (January-March, 1968).

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conclusion that there is, indeed, an ambiguity in the Constitution, itself. Apart from this, however, the fact remains that the Governor - whatever his motives or assessments - did act in a precipitate way, which actually did more damage to the cause of the Congress Party and Central Government, than would otherwise have been the case. It led, moreover, to an intensification of the constitutional crisis and ultimate deadlock which went far beyond interpretations of the Governor's discretionary power. This happened when the Speaker of the West Bengal Assembly, Mr. Bijoy Banerjee, exercised his discretion over the installation of the PDF Ministry, led by P. C. Ghosh.

The Assembly was due to meet on November 29 to enable Ghosh to seek a vote of confidence in the House. A large crowd assembled in front of the legislature. The Speaker told the House that it was difficult for him to recognize Dr. P. C. Ghosh and his Council of Ministers as the constitutional and valid government, because the change of government had been made 'behind the back of the Assembly.'<sup>41</sup> Banerjee ruled that the calling of the Assembly by the Governor was unconstitutional under the circumstances, and then adjourned the House sine die.<sup>42</sup> According to press reports, the police made lathi charges against the crowd as soon as the Assembly was adjourned.

The Speaker's action significantly deepened the already complex constitutional crisis, and opinion ranged widely

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41. 'New Turn in Bengal Drama', Link, 3 December, 1967.

42. Kashyap, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

over this new turn of events. Two well-known jurists concluded that the Speaker had acted in an unconstitutional manner by placing himself above the Constitution. Mr. Mehr Chand Mahajan, the former Chief Justice, said the Speaker was there merely to guide the deliberations of the Assembly. The only solution, as he saw it, lay in the discretionary powers of the Governor, which could be used to break the deadlock.<sup>43</sup> Another jurist, Mr. Anthony, argued that the Speaker's action constituted an usurpation of power, and that the Governor, under Article 174, had the power to summon the legislature when he saw fit. He said, moreover, that the Governor could call the legislature to consider a vote of no-confidence against the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker, and that if the former did not submit to this procedure, then the Governor had a duty under Article 159 to preserve and defend the Constitution, by using his discretionary powers under Article 163 to dismiss the Speaker for deliberately preventing a vote of no-confidence being carried against himself.<sup>44</sup> Other legal experts argued that the emergency provisions of the Constitution (Article 356) could be used to solve the deadlock, by suspending the legislature while retaining the Executive intact, and solving the issues arising out of the no-confidence motion against the Speaker by having Parliament deal with it.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, some of those who supported the actions of the Speaker, used the argument that it was the function of such an officer to guard the privileges of the House against encroachment by the Executive. Krishna Menon supported

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43. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 10 December, 1967.

44. *ibid.*

45. *ibid.*, 12 December, 1967.

this view, and said that as Banerjee considered the Houses to be improperly called, he was justified in refusing to preside over it. In pursuance of the argument, an advocate of the Calcutta High Court, Swadesh Bhusan Bhunia, wrote :

'It is important to note that the Speaker is the mouth or representative of the House in relation to the Crown. In the context of India, the Speaker in a State is the mouth or representative of the Legislative Assembly in its relation to the Governor. If the Speaker finds that the Governor in violation of the provisions of Article 164(2) has encroached upon the province of the Legislative Assembly and has unmade a Ministry, made by it, the Speaker as the representative of the Collective personality of the Assembly in all its powers, proceedings and dignity, has a right and a duty to protect the province and refuse to recognise the Ministry made in derogation of a power, which is the executive preserve of the Assembly.'

Moreover, Bhunia has written further :

'The Speaker and the Governor are two independent constitutional entities, each is supreme in his own field. The Speaker cannot rely upon the satisfaction of the Governor. He must come to his own satisfaction and that satisfaction must arise out of the proceedings in the House. The satisfaction of the Governor is extraneous so far as the Speaker is concerned. A motion expressing want of confidence in the Council of Ministers must be moved under Rule 199 of the aforesaid Rules and if the Speaker is of opinion that the motion is in order and if not less than fortyeight members rise in their places in support of the motion, the Speaker shall declare that the leave is granted under Sub Rule (2) of Rule 199 and that under Sub Rule (3) of Rule 199 the Speaker shall allot a day or days for discussion of the motion. If after discussion, the motion of want of confidence is passed by majority of the House, the Government falls. Even then the defeated Ministry can advise the Governor to dissolve the House and hold a fresh election. The Speaker cannot recognise any other procedure. This sound constitutional principle was thrown overboard and this is why West Bengal was going to witness the novel procedure of passing a "Vote of Confidence". One will search in vain May's "Parliamentary Practice" and the Rules of Procedure to find out a provision for the motion of confidence moved on behalf of the Government. The Speaker forestalled the novel procedure by his ruling that the session itself is illegal.' 46



46. Swadesh Bhusan Bhunia, 'West Bengal Speaker's Ruling', The Economic Studies, VIII, No. VII (January, 1968), pp. 374 & 377 respectively.

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The dire complexity of the situation is evident when one considers that a number of weeks elapsed during which time abortive efforts were made to solve the deadlock. Ultimately, however, the Central Government found a 'solution' in the imposition of President's Rule, which was imposed in February, 1968.

#### IV. Civil Disobedience.

The dismissal of the United Front Government drew forth a great deal of protest on the part of the United Front parties and the general population. In December, 1967, Ajoy Mukherjee announced the intention of the United Front to stage a civil disobedience movement in protest against the actions of the Governor, as well as to exert pressure towards the removal of the Ghosh Ministry. A large number of arrests of supporters of the Front had taken place since November 21. Accordingly, Mukherjee wrote to the Prime Minister demanding the release of those arrested; the withdrawal of all restrictive measures then in force; the dismissal of the Governor and Ghosh Ministry, and the restoration of himself as Chief Minister.<sup>47</sup> The Prime Minister denied the unconstitutionality of the Governor's actions, both in dismissing the United Front Government, and in installing the Ghosh Ministry, and asked Ajoy Mukherjee to drop his plans for agitation, which, she said, would only increase the economic problems of the state and lead to further violence.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, the United Front Committee drew up plans for a civil disobedience movement, and a decision was made

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47. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 15 December, 1967.

48. *ibid.*

for political parties to participate in the protest on 18 and 23 December, and women, students, youth and teachers on 19, 20, 21 and 22 December respectively.<sup>49</sup> Appeals, however, were made by the leaders of the United Front to make the civil disobedience movement non-violent in their efforts to 'remove the Congress as we did the British.'<sup>50</sup>

The movement commenced as scheduled, and during the demonstrations in the Chowringhee area (the heart of Calcutta's commercial centre), Ajoy Mukherjee, and former United Front ministers and MLA's were arrested. In the districts, where demonstrations were also held simultaneously in large towns, five hundred people were reported to have been arrested on the first day of the agitation.<sup>51</sup> Lathi charges by the police were carried out against the crowds which took part in the demonstrations. On the following day, which was primarily a women's movement, a total of two hundred and nine women were arrested, while in the districts four hundred and twenty-two people, including one hundred and ninety-four women, were also said to have suffered arrest.<sup>52</sup>

The students' phase of the demonstrations proved more violent, when a jeep, two cars and a tram were set on fire, and tear-gas was used in conjunction with severe lathi charges. A number of people were injured, including a press reporter and photographers, and the approximate number of arrests amounted to two hundred.<sup>53</sup> A similar picture of violence was characteristic of the youth day demonstrations, during which

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49. Statesman (Delhi ed.), 12 December, 1967.

50. *ibid.*, 17 December, 1967.

51. *ibid.*, 19 December, 1967.

52. *ibid.*, 20 December, 1967.

53. *ibid.*, 21 December, 1967.

time a bomb was set off. The police again used tear-gas on the crowds, who retaliated by throwing bricks and crackers at the police.<sup>54</sup> The next day there was a continuation of the violence in Calcutta and Howrah.<sup>55</sup>

The United Front then announced that the next stage of its agitation would be held in the third week of January, when it was proposed to widen the base of the movement by drawing upon larger sections of the population. In the December agitation, it appears that most of those actively engaged were members of the middle classes, whereas the peasants and working-class were less involved.

#### V. Summary and Conclusions.

It would be tedious to pursue the agitation further, and it has already been noted that in any case President's Rule was imposed in February, 1968, during a climate of mass protest and demonstrations. Nevertheless, aside from the constitutional crises and reactions on the part of the United Front parties and their supporters, it is necessary to place the disintegration and fall of the government into a broad perspective, by drawing together a number of points made throughout this thesis.

In the first instance, the United Front Government possessed only a slender majority when it took office. Given the fact that there were so many internal strains among the coalition partners, this majority was even more tenuous than its actual number would imply. Throughout the tenure of the government, cabinet ministers publicly criticized their colleagues, and there was very little sense of collective responsibility.<sup>56</sup>

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54. *ibid.*, 22 December, 1967.

55. *ibid.*, 24 December, 1967.

56. See, for example, 'Urgent U. F. Meet to Resolve Differences', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 September, 1967 and 'Workers' Lot 'Worse' Under U. F. ', *ibid.*, 5 September, 1967.

Moreover, as Kashyap has remarked : 'any real success or a meaningful impact of the new government could flow only from its proper handling of the food and employment problems.'<sup>57</sup> As indicated in Chapters Four and Six, however, these two major problems were the cause of much conflict and strains within the coalition. On the one hand, the period was one of recession; gheraos were widespread, and unemployment increased considerably. On the other hand, there was considerable criticism and antagonism towards the food policy and its implementation.<sup>58</sup> The argument employed by the anti-CPM group of parties was that the CPM had wilfully contributed to the magnitude of these problems, purely for motives of party gain. This interpretation, however, is an over-simplification, for the fact of the matter was that the problems were deep-seated, and exacerbated by a critical year of famine and economic recession. These circumstances, therefore, heightened the importance of the types of policies adopted to deal with these problems, and it was in this policy area that conflict was most virulent and heated.

In relation to the food policy, the CPM and, in general, other Communist parties, wanted a tough line to be taken with the larger producers, and against hoarders, and pressed for compulsory requisitioning and de-hoarding operations. P. C. Ghosh, whether through motives of protecting jotedar interests or not, was reluctant to use force until it could no longer be avoided. This conflict over policy<sup>59</sup> produced one of many inter-

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57. Kashyap, op. cit., p. 334.

58. See, for example, 'Food Policy Draft Rift in Cabinet', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 October, 1967.

59. See, for example, 'C.P.I. (M) Sabotaging State's Food Policy, Says Opposition', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 13 July, 1967.

party conflicts would could not be contained.

Similarly, as argued in Chapter Four, the policy towards industrial unrest produced a division among the coalition partners who became polarized into two camps : those who saw the problem created by gheraos and strikes as one of law and order, and the other group of parties who were sympathetic to the grievances and actions of the working class. Hence, inter-party dissension over major policies<sup>60</sup> was a crucial element in the instability which was inherent in the United Front Government, and ultimate disintegration of that government.

Intra-party factionalism was another factor which proved dysfunctional to the viability of the government. Although intra-party factionalism is endemic to most, if not all political parties in West Bengal, its existence and manifestation within the BC was an extremely disintegrative element as far as the United Front was concerned. These strains within the party did bring about the collapse of the government. In contrast, other parties within the Front were able to contain factionalism more effectively. This may have been due, in part, to two reasons. Firstly, there was the generally more 'sympathetic' attitude on the part of the left-wing parties towards the CPM, and, secondly, unlike the situation during the tenure of the second United Front Government, the CPM did not threaten the existence of other parties to such an extent as it did during the 1969-70 period, nor did it significantly encroach upon their bases of support.

Hence, although the disintegration of the United Front Government was caused primarily by conflict and strains over

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60. See 'Rift in W. Bengal Cabinet : Centre's Arms Ban Resented', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 12 July, 1967; editorial 'Unlearnt Lessons', ibid., 13 July, 1967; 'Sharp Differences in U.F. Over Law and Order Situation', ibid. (Calcutta ed.), 19 July, 1967; 'Growing Differences in Bengal Cabinet', ibid. (Delhi ed.), 6 August, 1967; 'C.M.'s Sharp Reaction to C.P.I.(M) Criticisms', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 August, 1967; 'RSP Minister Wants to Quit W. Bengal Cabinet', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 8 August, 1967; 'RSP May Quit UF', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 August, 1967; editorial 'Patching It Up', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 12 August, 1967; 'Joint Responsibility

60. (continued)

in Coalition Cabinets', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 October, 1967 and 'Retrospect and Prospect', Thought, 23 December, 1967.

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policies pursued by that government, by factionalism and antipathy towards the CPM, there is another factor which should be mentioned, namely, the role of personalities, and in particular, that of Ajoy Mukherjee, himself. Although Mukherjee enjoyed considerable personal prestige among BC supporters (obviously less so among the BKD group), his whole attitude towards the continued existence of the United Front Government was vacillating and indecisive, even when treachery was resorted to, by him, as a tactic to deal with the Communists.

Of course, a more charitable interpretation might be to argue that, given his stated fears about a speculated Sino-Pakistani invasion into India, which would necessitate a cautious attitude towards the CPM, the need for secrecy was paramount. This notwithstanding, one might have expected him to have taken some of his cabinet colleagues into his confidence, either before or after reaching his decision to resign, especially in view of the fact that the upper echelons of the Congress Party had been consulted.

However, not even the 'arrangements' which were made with the Congress Party were carried out, which suggests that Mukherjee was caught between two stools, and unable to decide which course to take. As a result, his prestige suffered a decline after his 'non-resignation' of 2 October.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, it is surprising that the 'deals' were made in the first place, for

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61. For criticisms of Mukherjee, see editorial 'In Place of Polemics', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 18 October, 1967, and editorial 'Not the Whole Story', Indian Express, 18 October, 1967. For Humayan Kabir's criticisms of Ajoy Mukherjee, see 'BKD May Pull Out of Bengal U. F.', Statesman (Delhi ed.), 19 October, 1967.

Mukherjee must have known that his involvement in a plan to rid the United Front Government of the CPM by devious means would only have brought discredit to himself on the part of many people and parties who were not necessarily very sympathetic to the CPM.

Had Mukherjee pursued his resignation threat on 2 October, he would have merely gained kudos from the Congress Party and minority right-wing groups and socialist parties like the PSP. In view of this, there was a marked inconsistency in his attitude after the fall of the United Front Government, when he protested so rigorously against the actions of the Governor in dismissing the government, and with much zeal pressed forward with a civil disobedience movement. In part, Mukherjee may also be seen as an indirect tool, used both by the Congress and BKD, in an attempt to isolate the CPM from the government. Interestingly enough, this contrasts to some extent with the situation relating to the disintegration of the second United Front Government, when Mukherjee, albeit under pressure from the BC, took considerable initiative, and devised his own strategy and tactics for isolation of the CPM.

In any event, the first United Front Government fell from power without having achieved any significant results from its rule.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this can be explained, in part, by the brevity of its tenure, as well as by the uniquely critical year of 1967, in addition to the conflict among the coalition partners. Ignoring the last point, for the moment, it is probable that no

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62. In August, the Indian Express took the view that despite sincerity on the part of ministers of the United Front Government, 'the new rulers have not shown much ability to implement the 18-point programme...'. See 'Critical Days Ahead for United Front', Indian Express, 22 August, 1967.

government, given such brief tenure and a difficult year, could have achieved any more, or less, than the United Front Government. In any case, the confidence of the electorate was not shaken by its experience of rule by the first United Front Government. No doubt, this feeling was influenced by the clumsy and inopportune attempts of the Congress Party to topple the government, and the subsequent handling of the constitutional crisis by Governor Vira, together with the installation of the much disliked PDF Government. It remained for the second United Front Government to demonstrate dramatically the deep-seated and fundamental lack of viability confronting the divergent parties, with acutely conflicting aims and interests. For this reason, we must now turn to the slower, more acute and more fundamental disintegration of the second United Front Government.



Chapter EightFALL AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE TWO  
UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENTS - II.I. Introductory Comments.

The collapse of the second United Front Government took place within a situation of conflict which was far more extreme than during the first period in 1967. In the former case, there was almost a complete polarization of United Front parties against the CPM. Vociferous allegations were made that the CPM had used certain portfolios to further the party's interests. Behind these allegations were fears on the part of a number of parties that the CPM was increasing its influence in a number of localities to such an extent as to threaten the existence of other parties within the Front. Attention has already been drawn in Chapter Five to the role and leadership of the CPM in the 'land grab' movement of 1969. The other parties felt that the CPM was making inroads into the rural areas, and, in the process, threatened to displace them through its organizational expansion and militant campaign to politicize the peasants by emphasizing their land hunger.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this and other factors, inter-party dissension became so acute that the whole government and administration was practically brought to a standstill. This came as a great disappointment to many people and groups who had placed hopes on the ability of the second United Front to benefit from its previous mistakes. It was felt that the government's enhanced majority after the Mid-term Election would result in

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1. For an interesting article on this, see 'Peasant Unrest and Battle for Political Power', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 19 October, 1969.

greater political stability, thereby enabling it to implement a number of important policies. These hopes were prompted by the fact that the second United Front Government took office when the worst of the recession had passed, and signs of economic recovery were apparent.

These hopes, however, were belied by the power struggle which developed, partly as a result of conscious decisions on the part of the CPM, but also as much by the logic of the circumstances in which the CPM was placed. The major argument of this chapter is that the second United Front Government disintegrated and ultimately collapsed for three closely inter-related reasons. Firstly, as mentioned throughout this thesis, conflict was endemic within the United Front as a result of differences in ideologies, aims and strategies. Secondly, in the power struggle to which these differences gave rise, a number of parties defended, and, in some cases, attempted to expand their organizational bases, thereby adding to virulent inter-party dissension. Thirdly, the conflict inherent in the general situation was specifically exacerbated by the attempts of Ajoy Mukherjee and the BC to isolate the CPM completely through building up a popular movement (in contrast to 1967) against the CPM. As implied by the third factor, it will be argued that the second United Front Government did not disintegrate purely as a result of self-aggrandizement on the part of the CPM. This was more properly one aspect and manifestation of the more fundamental reason for the non-viability of the government, namely, the composition and very nature of the coalition, itself. The plough harnessed to so many different animals was unable to dig a straight furrow.

First of all, the events need to be treated chronologically. The United Front Government had not long been in power when

serious inter-party clashes occurred in both the rural and industrial sectors. As mentioned in previous chapters, most of this conflict involved the rank-and-file supporters of various organizations. Violence, including frequent murders, often accompanied clashes, particularly inter-party ones.<sup>2</sup> Although the latter were not confined purely to the CPM, on the one hand, and other parties on the other, the CPM seems to have been more often involved than any other single party.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Inter-party Conflict.

Concern over these clashes was felt by the United Front as a whole. As early as May, 1969, the problem of inter-party rivalry and dissension received a considerable amount of attention from the United Front leaders. A group referred to as 'the Big Five', consisting of the CPM, CPI, FB, RSP and BC, held a number of meetings in an attempt to analyze the causes of conflict, and to find ways and means of dealing with it.<sup>4</sup> However, even the formation of the 'Big Five', itself, was a source of conflict. One of the United Front partners, the SUC, was critical when it said :

'Very recently, "big five" parties, in spite of our repeated opposition and request not to follow such an unprinciples method of resolving the problem by bypassing the U. F. and reducing U. F. general body to merely an instrument of giving official stamp on whatever they decided amongst themselves, they

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2. See 'Concern Over 'Political' Murders in State', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 24 May, 1969.

3. There are no official records to hand which pinpoint the number of clashes in which the CPM was involved. A reading of press reports, however, provides a general picture, for almost every day there were reports of inter-party clashes.

4. See 'Firm UF Bid to Curb Party Clash-Gherao', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 27 May, 1969.

developed a combination at the back of the U. F. We did never accept this method and it is well known that we criticized this move at the U. F. meetings as it was unprincipled.' 5

In any event, according to Mr. Ashoke Ghosh of the FB, there was a tendency for clashes to occur in areas where the parties were not very firmly entrenched.<sup>6</sup> At a meeting of the 'Big Five' on 31 May, three main causes were given by the parties for inter-party confrontation : the first was said to be an influx of anti-social elements into the ranks of the parties since the Mid-term Election. The second cause was attributed to '...the bureaucracy and the police who were allegedly deliberately trying to accentuate inter-party tension either by overacting in certain situations in favour of one constituent or another, or remaining passive observers in other circumstances.' The third cause, which the Front was reported to have seen as the most fundamental, was the failure of the concept of United Front unity to percolate down to the lower levels of the parties.<sup>7</sup> It was decided that each of the parties comprising the 'Big Five' should enter into bilateral discussions with other parties involved in conflict, and then prepare reports on the causes for further

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5. Socialist Unity Centre of India, Maintain and Strengthen The Solidarity of the United Front - S. U. C. 's Proposals to end the Present Impasse, 1970, p. 5.

6. 'UF 'Big Five' to Discuss Preventive Steps on May 31', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 30 May, 1969.

7. See 'Broad Agreement on Steps to End Party Clashes', Statesman (Calcutta ed.) 1 June, 1969. Concerning 'anti-social' elements, it is interesting to note that this characteristic of the parties was constantly stressed by observers, both before the first United Front Government came to power, as well as after. The allegation is so widespread that some credence must be given to it. As far as the second United Front Government is concerned, all political leaders referred to the existence of these anti-social elements. See, for example, 'Political Steps to End Inter-Party Rivalry Needed', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 21 May, 1969; 'Dhara Deplores Party Clashes', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 October, 1969, and editorial 'Not the Way', ibid., 2 November, 1969.

discussion and formulation of preventive measures.

Meanwhile, a suggestion had been made earlier for the formation of United Front Committees designed to function at lower levels, with the intention of promoting greater unity among the Front's constituents. This idea had been mooted in 1967, and was re-advocated by Mr. Makhan Pal, General Secretary of the RSP, in March, 1969, shortly after the United Front took office.<sup>8</sup> The CPM was agreeable to the formation of such committees at the district level, provided their membership was confined to constituents of the Front who had actually contested the Mid-term Election from the particular district. It was, on the other hand, opposed to the formation of committees lower down, on the grounds that consultations at these levels should be confined to the local leaders of mass front organizations.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, the effect of this would be to exclude those United Front constituents which did not have mass organizations. Moreover, as the CPM had the largest following in most of these mass organizations, the reaction of other parties in the United Front was one of suspicion about the CPM's motives.

A number of meetings were held by the 'Big Five'<sup>10</sup> who seemed able to agree substantially on the causes of the conflict. Very little by way of preventive measures were undertaken, however, beyond an agreement to plan joint tours by United Front leaders to areas where clashes were particularly prevalent, and the distribution of a document on the prevention of clashes

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8. See 'Code of Conduct for U. F. Ministers to be Discussed', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 19 March, 1969, and 'No Decision Yet on U.F. Bodies at Lower Levels', *ibid.*, 10 May, 1969.

9. 'Big Five Document to Stop Party Clashes Finalised', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 12 July, 1969.

10. 'Big Five Proposals to Stop Inter-Party Clashes', *ibid.*, 13 July, 1969, and 'Big Five Talks on Prevention of Clashes', *ibid.*, 23 July, 1969, plus editorial 'Frontal Attacks', *ibid.*, 9 September, 1969.

to the followers of the various parties.

By September, the CPI was openly accusing the CPM of partisan use of the police to shield CPM rank-and-file members in clashes between both parties.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the BC, FB and SUC also openly agreed with the allegations made by the CPI.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Somnath Lahiri, one of the CPI leaders, said towards the end of September that '...the rivalry and mad competition among UF parties to get their trade unions recognised', and constant attempts by some of them to capture the unions of others, were the root causes of inter-party conflicts.<sup>13</sup> Lahiri proposed that elections in unions with memberships drawn from different parties should be suspended for two months; that the existing status of unions should not be challenged; that the government should not intervene in elections or recognition of trade unions, and, finally, that a ban should be placed on parties taking out processions with bows and arrows<sup>14</sup> (such processions with traditional weapons, were often taken out by the tribal people, from which the CPM derives considerable support).

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11. 'CPI May Attend UF Meeting if Baranagar Incident is Discussed', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 4 September, 1969.

12. 'UF To Discuss CPI Statement on Monday', *ibid.*, 5 September, 1969.

13. The CPM described the causes of inter-union rivalry in the following terms : 'Clashes have taken place because of the multiplicity of organizations, for example, the SSP unions in the collieries. They, the SSP unions, have acted more or less as agents of managements and contractors. So even an issue like the abolition of contract labour in mines, or the proper payment of wages - even those are not taken up by the SSP unions. The same position applied to the CPI unions. Earlier, it was difficult for us to form unions because managements, higher arms of contractors, the SSP, the Right CPI leadership and the police were ranged against us. But, after 1967 when the police could not be used against us, the situation radically changed because we took up these demands like the abolition of contract labour, proper payment, and the workers began rallying under our leadership. This naturally led to a lot of clashes.' Interview with Ram Das of the CPM, *op. cit.*

14. See 'Lahiri X-rays Cause of Clashes', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 25 September, 1969.

Agreement could not be reached, however, for the CPM, through its spokesman and Home Minister, Jyoti Basu, argued that it was undesirable to postpone all union elections for two months. If, on the other hand, trouble appeared to be looming in any one particular union, then elections could be postponed in that union. Basu was also opposed to the proposal to ban processions with bows and arrows, stating that such ban was neither feasible nor desirable. Another spokesman for the CPM, Mr. Saroj Mukherjee, said that a ban of this kind would weaken the peasants' movement against the jotedars, and that the carrying of weapons was, in any case, a religious rite of the tribal people.<sup>15</sup>

In early October, the Executive Committee of the BC met under the chairmanship of its leader, Ajoy Mukherjee. The committee adopted a political resolution which stated that 'inter-party clashes, gheraos, repressive measures in educational institutions, forcible occupation of land, police inaction, a general deterioration in the law and order situation, activities of anti-social elements protected by different political parties, indignities suffered by women and the indifference of the administration have combined to create a deep sense of insecurity and uncertainty among the people.'<sup>16</sup> Although the resolution did not name the party or parties responsible for this state of affairs, it warned that if the situation did not change for the better, the 'Bangla Congress would be compelled to build up a resistance movement on Gandhian lines to end this intolerable situation.'

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15. 'U. F. to Continue Debate on Clashes', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 1 October, 1969.

16. 'Life Disrupted in W. Bengal', *ibid.*, 8 October, 1969 and 'Bangla Congress Bid to Resist Lawlessness', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 October, 1969.

### III. The Campaign to Isolate the CPM.

The BC resolution marked the beginning of a campaign to isolate the CPM, and, in the process, set in train the disintegration of the second United Front Government, notwithstanding Ajoy Mukherjee's statements to the contrary. As the Statesman observed :

'... it [the resolution] has obviously been shaped as a political weapon in the inter-party rivalries among the constituents of the United Front. In short, the Bangla Congress's motives are suspect.' 17

Similar opinions were shared by both supporters and critics of the United Front Government. The WP, for example, stated :

'The Bangla Congress resolution, in the opinion of some people, is directed against a particular party, the CPI(M), because it is aimed against the Home, Education and Labour departments of the Government. But it should be obvious that objectively it is an attack against the entire UF Government.' 18

A month later, an editorial in the generally pro-Congress Amrita Bazar Patrika, said :

'The isolation of the CPM from other constituents of the UF, which was the dominant feature of the breakdown in Kerala, is fast becoming a prominent characteristic of West Bengal politics.' 19

The CPM replied that the resolution was a 'slander' upon the United Front Government, and denied most of the allegations contained in it.<sup>20</sup> The party was particularly critical because the resolution was released to the press, without

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17. See editorial 'Violence', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 9 October, 1969.

18. Workers' Party of India, On the Crisis in the United Front (November, 1969), p. 15.

19. Editorial 'Breach Widens', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 November, 1969.

20. 'CPM Dubs Bangla Congress Move 'a slander'', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 October, 1969. See also CPM, Conspiracy to Wreck W. Bengal United Front (January, 1969).



prior discussion with other constituents of the United Front. In any event, the resolution marked the beginning of a process of polarization - albeit a non-ideological one - of the United Front into two irreconcilable camps.

The CPI, SSP and FB supported the allegations made in the BC resolution.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent talks between the Chief Minister and his deputy, Jyoti Basu,<sup>22</sup> and a series of United Front meetings, failed to ease the situation, and the conflict pervaded these discussions.<sup>23</sup> In an effort to reduce tension within the United Front, the SUC formulated a set of proposals, which included the following :

- '(a) We think that on questions of policy, principle and ideology decisions should always be unanimous...
- (b) But in many other fields for ensuring the normal and regular functioning of the UF, majority decision may be necessary where unanimity is not possible even after decisive attempts. These are, for example, matters relating to :
  - (i) Implementation of all decisions and resolutions of the U. F.
  - (ii) Adoption of directives, resolutions and measures relating to any violation of discipline, codes of conduct, norms etc.
- (5) It is observed that in most of the cases of inter-party clashes even diametrically opposite sets of facts are placed by the contending parties. But since we know that facts stand independent of human consciousness

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21. See 'Postponement of Joint U. F. Meetings in Districts', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 12 October, 1969; 'Forward Bloc Says : CPI(M) Posing Danger to U. F. Unity', *ibid.*, 13 October, 1969 and 'CPI Accuses CPM of Wrecking U. F. in West Bengal', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 November, 1969; 'SSP Leader Condemns CPM Role', *ibid.*

22. See 'Mukherjee and Basu Meet Today', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 15 October, 1969, and 'Mukherjee-Basu Talks Makes Little Headway', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 16 October, 1969.

23. 'CPM Put in Dock by Partners', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17 October, 1969, and 'No Improvement in Inter-Party Ties', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 26 October, 1969.

although the reading of facts may vary - it will be the task of the UF Committee to probe into such facts unbiasedly and also exhaustively in order to come to certain conclusions which will be at least nearer to truth, even if they may not be always exactly true.' 24

These proposals have been quoted at length, precisely to indicate their unreality, given the nature and composition of the United Front. One point needs emphasis in view of the ideological differences among the coalition partners, and the struggle for power. Suggestions that decisions on the former should be unanimous, and that 'unbiased probes' should be made regarding the latter, were naive to say the least, for they took no account of the realities of the near zero-sum power game. Nevertheless, the United Front did adopt a seven-point plan in a fruitless attempt to promote inter-party harmony.<sup>25</sup>

Although the BC Minister for Industries and Commerce, Sushil Dhara, denied the CPM's accusations that a conspiracy was being hatched to isolate the party and to relieve Jyoti Basu of the Home Portfolio, subsequent events indicated that the CPM was correct in its assessment of the situation. This became obvious when Ajoy Mukherjee and the BC launched a satyagraha campaign on the grounds that law and order had not improved within the state. It is not clear, therefore, why the Chief Minister and his party continued to deny that the purpose of the campaign was the isolation of the CPM.

In an interview with Ajoy Mukherjee, the latter avoided a direct answer to the specific question : whether the purpose of the satyagraha campaign was the isolation of the CPM. Instead, Mukherjee said :

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24. SUC, Maintain and Strengthen the Solidarity of the United Front, op. cit., pp. 8 & 9. Other proposals not quoted are contained on pp. 7-9.

25. See editorial 'Seven Points', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28 October, 1969 and editorial 'Not Unwarranted', *ibid.*, 3 November, 1969.

'The mass fasting was to raise the morale of the people due to violent activities. It succeeded in raising the morale, but not in bringing the CPM from its undesirable activities. That is why ultimately I had to resign, so that these activities could be stopped.' 26

In any event, the decision to launch the satyagraha campaign was taken at the Bankura session of the BC in October. It is worth noting that the month of November is the main harvesting period in West Bengal, and the timing of the campaign should be placed in this context. It is quite probable that the BC was apprehensive that the harvesting period would bring about an even greater resurgence of inter-party clashes and violence, as the struggle for possession of the harvested crops began.<sup>27</sup> An additional motive behind the launching of the campaign, therefore, may well have been the intention on the part of the BC to minimize violence by deflecting attention towards the campaign.

According to the CPM, however, the intention of the BC was to 'safeguard the interests of jotedars against peasants during the harvesting season.' The State Secretary of the party, Promode Das Gupta, further said :

'What else can be the objective of this satyagraha... If it is to stop inter-party clashes... it does not affect us. We do not ourselves go into the fields and fight. It is the peasants that do.' 28

Gupta added, moreover, that in Midnapore district, which was

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26. Interview with Ajoy Mukherjee, Calcutta, May, 1970.

27. On the subject of apprehended clashes during the harvesting period, see article 'West Bengal Rural Scene - III : U. F. Parties Heading for Clashes During Harvesting', Statesman (Calcutta ed.) 9 November, 1969, and 'West Bengal Rural Scene - V : Forward Bloc-CPI(M) Showdown Likely in Cooch Behar', *ibid.*, 11 November, 1969.

28. 'Satyagraha Move Criticized', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 6 November, 1969. See also 'Peasant Unrest a Battle for Political Power', *ibid.*, 19 October, 1969.

the stronghold of the BC and CPI, only 12,000 acres of benami land had been detected, whereas in the 24-Parganas and Burdwan - districts in which the CPM was dominant - 62,500 and 17,000 acres of benami land respectively, were detected.<sup>29</sup>

We simply do not know whether the allegations of the CPM were true. It was a fact that the BC drew most of its support from the rural areas of Midnapore, as indicated in Chapter Two. It is quite probable that the Bangla Congress both wished to prevent violence, as such, and, at the same time, to safeguard the interests of landowners, on the dual grounds that it wanted to protect many of its supporters, and in pursuance of its ideology which was against the forcible seizure of land.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, the Home Minister, Jyoti Basu, called for a conference on 12 November of Divisional Commissioners, District Magistrates and Stipendiary Magistrates for a briefing on the law and order situation. The purpose was to inform these officers that violence or lawlessness in any form, should be dealt with sternly, and that the police, who had hitherto been accused of inaction, would be protected in their attempts to curb 'the activities of anti-social elements.'<sup>31</sup> Although the CPM had earlier denied that there was a law and order problem within the state, Basu's actions amounted to a tacit admission that the problem did, indeed, exist. Moreover, it is most likely that Basu's move represented an attempt by the CPM to 'soften' its public image.

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29. Statesman, 6 November, op. cit.

30. See also editorial 'Fact is Fact', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 12 November, 1969.

31. 'Basu to Brief Senior Officials on Nov. 12', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 6 November, 1969. For a report of the conference, see 'District Officials Told To Remain Impartial', *ibid.*, 13 November, 1969.

Meanwhile, the satyagraha campaign was scheduled to begin on 1 December if 'no desired improvement' in the law and order situation took place by 27 November.<sup>32</sup> Sushil Dhara stated that the resistance movement 'would not be directed against the UF Government, the UF or any of its constituents', but that 'This Satyagraha in the form of a mass hunger strike is against the perpetration of violence in violation of the Front's policy and principle.'<sup>33</sup> Despite misgivings on the part of a number of United Front constituents about the proposed satyagraha,<sup>34</sup> Ajoy Mukherjee and the BC remained firm in their decision to pursue the campaign, which was launched as scheduled, on 1 December.<sup>35</sup> A few days later, some of the Front's constituents made an attempt to persuade Mukherjee to call off the fast, on the grounds that it posed a serious threat to the existence of the United Front Government.<sup>36</sup> As the CPM prophetically observed, a continuation of the situation would lead either to an imposition of President's Rule, or to replacement of the United Front Government with an

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32. 'Bangla Congress Mass Fast from Dec. 1', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 13 November, 1969.

33. *ibid.* See also 'Bangla Congress Plans Mass Hunger-Strike From Dec. 1', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 13 November, 1969.

34. 'UF Fails to Prevent BC Satyagraha Bid', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 27 November, 1969; 'UF Constituents Leave It To Bangla Congress', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 27 November, 1969; 'Brinkmanship Grips UF in W. Bengal', *ibid.*, 28 November, 1969, and 'Fresh Efforts to Dissuade Bangla Congress Fail', *ibid.*, 29 November, 1969.

35. For reports about the launching of the campaign, see issues of the Statesman and Amrita Bazar Patrika on 2 December, 1969.

36. See 'Bid to Persuade Bangla Congress to End Agitation', Statesman (Calcutta ed.) 5 December, 1969; editorial 'C.M.'s Warning' Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 December, 1969; 'Frantic Bid to Keep UF United', *ibid.*, and editorial 'Way Out', *ibid.*, 6 December, 1969.

alternative ministry.<sup>37</sup>

It was at this stage that the Chief Minister began to point markedly to the role of the CPM in the violence which existed within the state,<sup>38</sup> although it had been obvious for some time past that the CPM was being held responsible. Attention was then directed towards the handling of two portfolios held by CPM ministers, namely, Home and Education, the latter being in the hands of Satyapriya Roy.<sup>39</sup> Mukherjee said that both portfolios were being used by the CPM to further its own party interests. He charged, moreover, that the police and administrative officials were afraid to take action in inter-party disputes in which the CPM was involved, for fear of reprisals from the minister, Jyoti Basu.<sup>40</sup>

Concerning the Education Portfolio, the BC contended that tension between students, teachers and managements had led to an increase in the number of gheraos in educational institutions, and that their purpose was to obtain the forcible removal of certain teachers or officials, and to replace them with CPM nominees. It was alleged further that the supersession of managing committees in secondary schools by administrators was politically motivated by the CPM through its Minister for Education, Satyapriya Roy. Most administrators were said to be members of the CPM, who

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37. 'Basu Smells Rat in Bangla Cong. Move', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 December, 1969.

38. 'CM Spots One Party Behind Violence', *ibid.*, 9 December, 1969.

39. See 'I Have Power To Take Over Home Portfolio', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 15 December, 1969 and 'Satyapriya Roy Put To Dock by CM', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 December, 1969.

40. See 'Police Afraid of CPI(M), Says Mukherjee', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 23 December, 1969 and editorial 'Public Polemics', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 December, 1969.

in some cases, did not even possess adequate educational qualifications. The Education Minister, however, denied these charges, saying that 90 percent of the newly appointed administrators were government servants, college and secondary school teachers. This was no effective refutation of the charge since most public servants and teachers have political affiliations in West Bengal. From the information available, it would appear, therefore, that there was some substance in the allegations made by the BC. Nevertheless, politically motivated appointments were not exclusive to the CPM<sup>41</sup> : as pointed out in an article by Hiranmay Karlekar, both the FB and BC had supporters who were also appointed administrators.<sup>42</sup>

Criticism was also levelled against the CPM's Minister for Education for his failure to democratize the constitutions of governing bodies. Members of these bodies continued to be nominated by the Minister instead of appointment through an elective process. Prima facie, it seems, therefore, that the CPM had a vested interest in this respect, by continuing to nominate members of these governing bodies. Karlekar argues that the order of priorities adopted by the Minister for Education points to the conclusion that the Education Ministry wished first to strengthen its own control over educational institutions.<sup>43</sup> He had made certain organizational changes without putting through the more

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41. The areas which were said to have been infiltrated by the CPM were : Bodai, Amdanga, Birati, Belgharia, Kandrapara and North Dum Dum. See 'Another Round of Clashes During Harvesting Feared', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 20 October, 1969.

42. Hiranmay Karlekar, 'Politics Determine Order of Priorities', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 24 November, 1969.

43. Karlekar, op. cit.

important Primary Education Bill.<sup>44</sup>

Reference has already been made to charges that Jyoti Basu used the Home Portfolio in a partisan manner by rendering the police inactive in inter-party disputes involving the CPM. On this point, some comments by party spokesmen are of interest. According to the RSP, the party did not hold Basu directly responsible for the actions or inactions of the police. On this, Sourindra Nath Bhattacharyya, said :

'The RSP had occasion to complain of the police when any conflict with the CPM was concerned. The most glaring example was at Alipurduar when a CPM-led procession attacked and burnt down the RSP office with the help of the police. The RSP, however, did not apportion the blame for such functioning of the police to Mr. Jyoti Basu. It might be that the police thought it expedient to behave in that manner, or they behaved in that manner only to widen the cleavage between the UF partners.'<sup>45</sup>

The CPI, however, thought differently when its spokesman, Gita Mukherjee, told the writer :

'This is the main charge against the CPM - they would like the Home Portfolio to strengthen their own party. Basu said no party ever bought a specific complaint to him. This is not true. The CPI bought a case to Basu's notice : one of the CPI's leading workers was assaulted in his own (Basu's) constituency. This attack was led by a local committee leader of the CPM. This fact was given by the assaulted comrade when he was wavering between life and death in hospital, in front of the police and magistrate. According to our laws, if anyone in this condition makes such a dying declaration, accusing anybody of being the leader of the assault, they must be arrested, and the police

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44. The WP also accorded top priority to the proposed Primary Education Bill ' in order to break the ring of corruption and nepotism and favouritism in the District School Boards.' See Workers' Party of India, West Bengal State Committee, On the Crisis in the United Front : Views of the Workers' Party of India (November, 1969), p. 12.

45. Interview, op. cit. For press reports of the incident, see 'Police Firing in Alipurduar; Political Groups Clash : Two Killed', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 17 May, 1969; 'RSP Worker Beaten Up in Alipurduar', *ibid.*, 19 May, 1969; 'RSP Note Ready For U.F. : Party May Quit', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20 May, 1969, and 'RSP-CPM Keen to Soften Rift', *ibid.*, 22 May, 1969.



must proceed. But, this case was brought up before the UF, and the CPI desisted to attend the meeting of the UF because these people were not arrested. The whole of the West Bengal press publicized it, and it was formally brought up before the U. F. But, none of these people were arrested. Hundreds and hundreds of such examples can be found where, if the offender was relative to the CPM, the police didn't take any action against them. . . . The U. F. policy with regard to the police was that the police should not be used against any legitimate movement of the workers and peasants. . . . But the CPM policy re the Home Portfolio was a departure from this, because they were not using the police against the CPM.' 46

Supporting the view of the CPI, Nirmal Bose of the Forward Bloc quoted examples to the writer where CPM supporters who committed acts of violence, were given the protection of the Home Department.<sup>47</sup>

The CPM, on the other hand, denied the charges both in its public pronouncements, and in an interview with Ram Das, who said :

'When the first time this charge was made by the Bangla Congress, it was decided that functions of all departments will be discussed in the UF Committee, and Basu offered that the Home Department should be taken up first for decision. If any party had any serious charge against us, here was our offer to discuss it with the UF. But, week after week, they refused to produce any substantial material or even to begin that discussion. At the same time, in the press and to the public, they went on making these charges.' 48

Out of these conflicting statements, the view expressed by Sudhin Kumar of the RCPI may well be the most realistic appraisal of the situation. According to him :

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46. Interview, op. cit.

47. Interview, op. cit.

48. Interview, op. cit.

'Everybody uses their portfolio. On the whole, he, Basu, didn't use it, and it can't be used much... There is opposition to Basu because he is Basu and a CPM man. The CPI and Bangla Congress did not want the CPM to take Home; therefore, they are giving a bad name to Basu. It is politically motivated (my italics).' 49

The vital point which emerges from Kumar's candid statement is that the situation was, in reality, a complex one. Although it would appear that the Home Portfolio may have been utilized, where possible, to benefit the CPM, this was only one side of the coin. The other side relates to the political motivation to which Kumar referred, namely, the desire of some of the United Front parties to isolate the CPM.

This is borne out by the fact that when the Chief Minister made open accusations against the CPM, the BC, through its spokesman, Sushil Dhara, simultaneously hinted most strongly that the United Front Government could be run without the CPM. He stated, moreover, that this would not be a violation of the mandate given by the United Front to the people because 'the mandate had already been violated by the CPI(M).' 50

Returning, however, to the satyagraha campaign launched by the Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara announced one month after the campaign had been in progress that it would continue. One consequence of this decision was dissension within the BC, itself, when the party's Vice-President, Mr. Sukumar Roy, and the General Secretary of the Calcutta District Committee, Mr. Asit Chowdhury, were suspended, and ultimately expelled from the party, on the grounds of alleged anti-party activities. The two men had been critical

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49. Interview, op. cit.

50. See 'CPM Not Indispensable, Says Dhara', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 28 December, 1969.

of the decision to continue the satyagraha campaign. Roy was alleged to have stated that Sushil Dhara was 'hostile to the unity of the UF. Govt. and an associate of reactionaries and industrial and financial magnates.'<sup>51</sup> Shortly afterwards, however, the BC called off the mass fast, stating that this was the end of the first phase in the campaign, but that preparations for the second phase would continue.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. Abortive Attempts At Reconciliation.

Efforts were then made by representatives of two parties - the LSS and RSP - who became known as the 'peace makers', to bring about a reconciliation of the United Front partners.<sup>53</sup> The CPM then indicated its willingness to participate in a proposed meeting of the United Front scheduled for 14 January, provided the Chief Minister withdrew some of his earlier statements, notably that the United Front Government was 'uncivilized and barbarous.' Ajoy Mukherjee, however, refused to retract these statements, and he, the BC and the CPM became deadlocked over the issue. The ultimate result was that the meeting planned for 14 January was postponed.<sup>54</sup>

This was then followed by an exchange of lengthy letters between Jyoti Basu and Ajoy Mukherjee, concerning the Chief Minister's cancellation of a Home Department order withdrawing eight criminal cases in Malda, and the cancellation of a transfer order of a police officer. The letters were released to the press, and Basu claimed that the actions of the Chief Minister were beyond his legal powers and propriety as they

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51. 'Bangla Congress to Continue Movement; Sukumar Roy and Asit Chowdhury Suspended', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 30 December, 1969, and 'Roy Criticizes Dhara', ibid., 1 January, 1970.

52. 'Bangla Congress Switches Off Mass Fasting', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 31 December, 1969.

53. See 'LSS Peace-Maker Meets Mukherjee', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 1 January, 1970; 'UF Peace-Makers Meet CPI(M) & FB Leaders', ibid., 4 January, 1970, and 'Peace-Makers Hard Put to Save UF', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 January, 1970.

54. See 'Crucial UF Talks Postponed; Confusion Over Meeting Place' Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 14 January, 1970.

constituted an interference in the working of another minister's department.<sup>55</sup>

A further lengthy exchange of letters followed, in which an important constitutional issue was raised, namely, whether the Chief Minister was merely primus inter pares (this was Basu's contention), or whether, as Ajoy Mukherjee put it '...He is the Head of the Council of Minister.'<sup>56</sup> At this stage, it seemed that the United Front Government was in danger of immanent collapse. The SUC came out with a series of proposals about measures to be taken in cases where the administration is used by a minister to further his party's interests. Included in the proposals, were the following :

'(d) But in case any Minister or any Party feels that any Minister or his department has acted or is acting against the declared policy, principle, programme, pledge and decisions of the UF or using the administration for petty party interest, then other Ministers or other Parties, as the case may be, should have the right to refer the matter to the Cabinet. The cabinet should at once probe into it and take decisions which should be implemented by the Minister of that department within a specified period.

The Chief Minister on behalf of the Cabinet will see that the decision is implemented.

(e) If that Minister does not implement the decision within that specified period then the Chief Minister should refer the case to the UF Committee.

(f) The UF Committee will then at once take appropriate decision and according to this decision the Cabinet will again issue fresh directives to the Minister concerned.

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55. For a reproduction of the letters, see 'UF Tussle Shifts to Administration', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17 January, 1970 and 'Withdrawal of 8 Malda Cases Due to 'error' - Basu', Statesman 17 January, 1970. For a summary of the very involved wrangle, see editorial 'Four Letters', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 18 January, 1970.

56. Quoted from Mukherjee's letter to Basu which was reproduced in full in 'Letter to Basu : CM Vindicates Right to Intervene', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 23 January, 1970. Basu's reply to Mukherjee's letter was published under the caption 'Jyoti Basu Replies to Points Raised by Ajoy Mukherjee', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 25 January, 1970

- (g) And even then if the Minister does not act accordingly then the UF should by a resolution express public regret.' 57

The SUC was obviously concerned to involve the whole cabinet in matters of dispute over policy and use of the administration for party purposes. However, it is doubtful whether these proposals could have proved effective, because conflict of interests was too deep, and hence unlikely to be stopped by the mere adoption of resolutions or appeals by party leaders.

In the event, the collapse of the government was averted for one more agonizing month by a meeting of the United Front. On this occasion, three resolutions were passed. One directed towards the prevention of inter-party disputes, had the effect of temporarily averting the crisis. As an editorial in the Amrita Bazar Patrika pointed out, however, differences over the methods to restore inter-party unity and harmony, such as the establishment of thana committees, and the prohibition on the carrying of lethal weapons were left unresolved.<sup>58</sup> For instance, it was reported that the United Front was divided into two groups over the formation of these lower level committees. The BC, CPI, SSP, PSP, FB, BPI and GL wanted an immediate constitution of such committees, whilst the CPM, RSP, RCPI, FB(M), WP and LSS opposed the demand.<sup>59</sup>

It may be recalled that these same methods had been discussed over a period of months; continued to be discussed, but remained unresolved throughout. This points up the fact that while most of the United Front partners wanted inter-party accord at both the top and lower levels, no agreement could be reached on

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57. SUC, Maintain and Strengthen the Solidarity of the United Front, op. cit., p. 12.

58. See editorial 'Postponed', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28 January, 1970.

59. 'CPM Leaves Meeting in a Huff', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 31 January, 1970 and 'UF Divided on Outstanding Issues', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 31 January, 1970.

methods to achieve this. In any case, Sushil Dhara was then reported to have told a meeting of the BC secretariat that the United Front Government 'had outlived its purposes as a political instrument', and that 'a vital decision had been taken but this could not be disclosed to the Press.'<sup>60</sup>

#### V. The Final Crisis.

The crisis within the United Front was sharpened when its arena moved to the Legislative Assembly. On the first day of the debate on the Governor's Address in the Assembly, the BC, FB, CPI and SSP spoke out in the nature of an opposition group, and criticized the actions of the CPM. One BC member reiterated the allegation that the Education Ministry was used by its CPM minister to strengthen the party's organization by packing school management committees and college governing bodies with party members, and that teachers were being forced to resign so that vacancies could be filled by CPM members. The allegations were continued in the Assembly a few days later when the Chief Minister repeated that the government which he headed was 'uncivilized and barbarous'.<sup>61</sup> To make matters worse, moreover, the BC boycotted a meeting of the United Front, on the grounds that the CPM was responsible for the current crisis, and in protest against Basu's statement that the Chief Minister was merely a technical head of the cabinet, and thus primus inter pares.<sup>62</sup>

The crisis dragged on throughout February, with accusations and counter-accusations being the order of the day.

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60. 'Bangla Congress Says... United Front Has Outlived Its Purpose', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 29 January, 1970.

61. 'Assembly Debate - CM Again Calls State Government Barbarous', *ibid.*, 6 February, 1970.

62. 'UF Meeting Not Held - Bangla Congress Stays Away', *ibid.*, 5 February, 1970 and editorial 'Strategy or Sulks', *ibid.*, 6 February, 1970. See also editorial 'Boycott', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 February, 1970.

On 19 February, three BC ministers, allegedly on instructions from their party, resigned.<sup>63</sup> Among the ministers was Sushil Dhara, who had played so prominent a part in the move to isolate the CPM. More meetings were then held in an attempt to hold the United Front together, but hopes entertained by some of the constituents were short-lived. The BC once again boycotted a meeting of the United Front set down for March 4. This was followed by a directive to the Chief Minister by the BC, as a result of a joint meeting of its executive committee and legislative wing, to resign as Chief Minister by 16 March.<sup>64</sup>

In a further effort to prevent the government from falling, some constituents within the Front tried to persuade the CPM to relinquish the Home Portfolio, but the party refused to agree to this.<sup>65</sup> It was also reported that the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, tried to persuade Ajoy Mukherjee to defer his resignation beyond 16 March, but the latter refused, and accordingly resigned on this date.<sup>66</sup> As mentioned earlier, Mukherjee said in an interview that he had to resign in order to stop the 'undesirable' activities of the CPM.

At this point, it is desirable to make a few comments about Mukherjee's actions, and to note the reactions of some United Front parties towards his resignation. Most of the parties' spokesmen who were interviewed by me, were critical. Sudhin Kumar of the RCPI, said :

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63. 'Bangla Congress Asks 3 Ministers to Resign', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 13 February, 1970 and 'Three Bangla Congress Ministers Resign', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20 February, 1970.

64. 'CM Asked to Quit by March 16', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 March, 1970 and 'Ajoy Mukherjee to Resign by March 16', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 9 March, 1970.

65. 'CPM Refuses to Part with Home', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 13 March, 1970 'All Out Bid to Save UF', *ibid.*, 11 March, 1970 and subsequent issues of both the Patrika and Statesman.

66. 'Collapse of United Front : Mukherjee Submits Resignation', Statesman (Calcutta ed.), 17 March, 1970.

'Politically he (Mukherjee) was not able to pull further, so it was inevitable that he should resign. He forced the break-up of the United Front Government; he could have merely resigned from the Front.' 67

Mere resignation from the Front, however, not not have solved any major problems. It has been argued throughout that inter-party dissension was inherent in the situation, and would have continued, with or without the presence of Ajoy Mukherjee. It is my own view that the Front would have collapsed in any case, due to its own internal contradictions. That Ajoy Mukherjee precipitated the break-up of the second United Front Government did not, therefore, greatly matter. Nevertheless, Jyoti Bhattacharyya of the Workers' Party was critical of Mukherjee's act of resignation :

'He could have continued as Chief Minister, but this would be evading the issue. He never sat in the UF and discussed the issues. He never discussed problems in the cabinet. It is our contention that he took a political decision as soon as the Congress was split, that he had to break the UF and go back to his friends.' 68

Furthermore, the RSP condemned Mukherjee :

'The RSP thinks the action of Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee in resigning the post of Chief Minister was in direct violation of the mandate of the people, and the RSP gave expression to that opinion in unmistakable terms.' 69

Likewise, the FB expressed its disapproval when Nirmal Bose said :

'We don't think that Ajoy Mukherjee acted properly in submitting his resignation. There were reasons for him to become aggrieved, but we wanted the UF to continue, and we hoped that all the differences would be settled within the UF, and it would be possible to control the CPM. If our attempts to control the CPM would not succeed, then we would

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67. Interview, op. cit.

68. Interview, op. cit.

69. Interview, op. cit.



force them out. But, why should Mr. Mukherjee resign? We requested him not to resign, but in anger and frustration, he resigned.' 70

The CPI also appeared to entertain reservations about Mukherjee's actions, when Gita Mukherjee said :

'It was unfortunate. Before he resigned, the CPI requested him not to resign because we thought pressure could be brought upon the CPM. So, in this context, his action was not proper. In some statements we also made it clear that the provocative actions of the CPM probably led him to this act.' 71

Finally, of the parties interviewed, the PSP gave the most unqualified support to Ajoy Mukherjee. The Joint Secretary of the West Bengal branch of the party stated that :

'The PSP welcomed Mukherjee's resignation and gave unconditional support to him and thought he should have resigned earlier.' 72

#### VI. Summary and Conclusions.

For the sake of clarity, it has been necessary to narrate the process of disintegration at length, but attention should now be shifted towards an analytical summary of the major contentious issues between the United Front partners. In this respect, we may examine the allegations made by a number of United Front parties, particularly the BC and CPI, that the CPM was responsible for a deterioration in law and order, especially in the form of inter-party clashes, often resulting in violence. Secondly, there was the general accusation that the belligerent attitude of the CPM made it impossible for other parties to co-exist amicably in the coalition government. These charges, moreover, were made frequently by the press.

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70. Interview, op. cit.

71. Interview, op. cit.

72. Interview with Dr. D. Majumdar of the PSP, Calcutta, April, 1970.

In connection with the first point, there are a number of factors to be taken into account. The most important of these relates to the fact that the CPM was the largest single party within the United Front, and, as pointed out in Chapter Two, had a fairly extensive organization throughout the state. In view of this, it is not surprising that most inter-party clashes did involve the CPM. The party had set for itself a course of organizational expansion, and given this goal, its actions must necessarily have been to the detriment of other parties. This organizational expansion took place in both the rural and industrial sectors, and involved attempts to win support, and ultimately take over, the various kisan and trade union organizations. This was a militant programme, adopted partly from conscious decisions on the part of the party, but also, as far as the rural sector was concerned, because of the challenging influence of the CPI(M-L) - a point which has already been emphasized in Chapter Five.

At the same time, however, it would be an oversimplification to regard the CPM's goal of organizational expansion as the sole cause of the inter-party clashes and dissension which occurred during the tenure of the second United Front Government. The raison d'etre of all parties, after all, is an extension of their influence and control, but the methods they adopt to further this aim is of equally crucial significance. Certainly, it would appear that violence often accompanied the efforts of the CPM to further its support among the peasants and proletariat, but it should be borne in mind that violence was not exclusive to the CPM. More important, however, is the more perplexing problem of all, namely, whether methods involving violence and intimidation were caused as a result of conscious policy and directives from the top echelons of the CPM, itself, or whether such actions were brought about by a largely uncontrollable rank-and-file. This

vexatious point has relevance not only for the CPM, and, indeed, for other parties within the United Front, but also for the whole political climate and culture of West Bengal - a point which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Any assessment of the situation can only be based upon impressions because of the lack of evidence and reluctance of the CPM (as well as other parties) to discuss the issue. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that inter-party clashes and violence were conspicuous at lower levels. To mobilize the masses was part of a conscious decision, not only by the CPM, but on the part of other left-wing parties, as well. It is obvious, however, that this activity cannot always be controlled, and it would appear that the CPM, and other parties, were unable to impose limits to the violent effects of this policy, not even when these effects became dysfunctional to the existence of the United Front Government. Sudhin Kumar put the position in this way :

'Concessions are not very important, but bringing the masses into politics is the most important. If we can strengthen this, it is exactly what we want. But, they should be more disciplined and organized.' 73

The ex-Congress Chief Minister, P.C. Sen, also thought that the rank-and-file could not always be controlled, and made an additional point of interest when he said :

'To some extent it is true the rank-and-file couldn't be controlled by their leaders. But, then, even in a particular party or group, the leaders had differences of opinion as to the manner of utilizing the rank-and-file.' 74

However strong the desire on the part of the leaders of the various parties to prevent such clashes, they seemed to

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73. Interview, op. cit. Throughout this thesis, I have quoted liberally from the somewhat brief interview I had with this RCPI leader, because it seemed to me at the time, and now, that Kumar's replies to my questions were most direct and honest, being couched in terms of cold political realities, rather than attempts to answer in a moralistic fashion, which is so characteristic of India, as a whole.

74. Interview, op. cit.

have no effect in preventing inter-party clashes and dissension. There were, in theory, organizational remedies in the form of lower (thana) level committees composed of representatives of the various United Front parties. In practice, these did not take political realities into account. In particular, they would have subjected the CPM to pressure from parties in areas where the CPM was either already influential or in the process of increasing its support. Ram Das, of the party, put it this way :

'Re the committees :

- (a) those attached to ministries which will broadly discuss policy and review the implementation, and not interfere with the day-to-day work - this the CPM agreed to.
- (b) of having committees at all levels to advise only on certain matters like the police - this we rejected because this would have meant at the lower levels, interference with the day-to-day administration.
- (c) most of these parties are only in one or two districts - not uniformly in all districts, except the CPM. So, their claim would actually mean that even in those districts where they don't have a party base, they begin interfering in that.' 75

Hence, the logic of the situation was this : the CPM resisted these moves, and other parties, whose bases of support were being threatened, tried to promote these measures in an attempt to prevent CPM encroachment, and possibly even their ultimate extinction. In other cases, the offensive was taken by parties other than the CPM, in order to fill vacuums created by the loss of Congress power after the Mid-term Election, or, simply to expand their own organizations, in any case.

Clearly, the actions of the CPM were both offensive and defensive. Had any of the other parties within the coalition

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75. Interview, op. cit.

been as strong as the CPM, it is almost certain that they would have acted and reacted in a similar fashion to that of the CPM. This is borne out when looking at the inter-party clashes which did not involve the CPM, and it must not be forgotten that there were a considerable number of these clashes. This was admitted even by Dr. D. Majumdar of the PSP, when he said that 'most of the small parties thought to expand their party at the cost of each other.'<sup>76</sup>

Opposing interests and contradictions were not, of course, confined to the lower levels, but also manifested themselves at the higher levels, as has been shown in this and previous chapters. P. C. Sen summed up the situation succinctly and accurately, when he said :

'The parties wished to increase their spheres of influence. The question of raising funds : each party thought that being in government it had the opportunity to raise funds and therefore there was a clash of interest. Ministers belonging to a particular group wanted to convert officers and employees of that department to his point of view. Therefore, there were water-tight compartments, and no coordination. The function of the Chief Minister is to coordinate the activities of the different departments, and ministries. But, the Chief Minister had no control over the parties, and failed to bring about coordination. This also led to quarrels and bitterness. The UF Committee met and discussed often, but having conflicting interests, no decisions were taken, or if there were decisions, they couldn't implement them.'<sup>77</sup>

The foregoing factors caused some of the parties within the United Front to support the BC in its move to isolate the CPM. In this, the BC was supported by the CPI, SSP, PSP, FB and SUC. Ideology was of partial relevance, but the power struggle was more significant. In ideology, the BC and CPM were poles

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76. Interview, op. cit.

77. Interview, op. cit.

apart, and it is not surprising that the former was supported by the PSP and SSP. As for the CPI, FB and SUC, ideology played no part in what was purely a power struggle. In making this claim, reference is made mainly to the conflict of interests between the parties at the higher levels, and not, in general, to the lower level of the rank-and-file. In many respects, the most bitter animosity existed between the CPM and CPI, for these parties, in characteristic fashion of Communist parties elsewhere, were intense political rivals, each vying for the support of a left-oriented mass public.

Whether in terms of the power struggle or ideological differences, the misalliance of fourteen coalition partners contained within it what the Marxist might call 'the seeds of its own destruction', and in this manner the coalition was irreparably untenable.

Chapter NineCONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES.

The main purpose of this chapter is to point up the various factors which had a bearing upon the lack of viability of the two United Front Governments, and their failure to maintain themselves in stable office. These factors should also be placed within an overall perspective.

From the very beginning, both governments were weak as potentially viable and stable political instruments. In part, this was because the purpose of their alliance was both negative and limited. The parties had formed a coalition with the negative aim of preventing the Congress Party from forming a government. This was particularly the case with the first United Front Government. This aim meant that the coalitions were no more than opportunistic alliances, concerned to anchor themselves in power. They were, moreover, limited in the following respects, as stated throughout this thesis : by heterogeneity of outlook and interests on the part of the coalition partners; by a vague programme devoted to general objectives only, and, finally, by the lack of a necessary consensus over the means to implement these objectives.

The opportunism within the coalition was not the exclusive possession of any one single party, for each was determined, in one way or another, to utilize the alliance for the party's own benefit. For the smaller parties, the United Front was the only instrument through which they could hope to share power. On the other hand, parties like the BC and CPI initially rode the waves of anti-Congressism, to join the United Front, but later antipathy towards the CPM, which reached its climax during the tenure of the second United Front Government, caused them to think in terms of alternative coalitions, excluding the CPM.

The motives of the CPM were likewise self-interested. The United Front Government was to be the main instrument through which the party could hope to increase its organizational support. The whole experiment of United Front Government in West Bengal was therefore essentially a struggle for power par excellence. But, where this thesis differs in its interpretation and analysis of certain aspects of the situation from the general interpretations given in the press and by some of the political parties and other observers, is in maintaining that the CPM was not the only bete noire in the drama, and, secondly, that ideology also played a part.

Concerning the power struggle, opportunism was also manifested by the Chief Minister of both coalitions, Ajoy Mukherjee. Despite his lofty and moral exhortations to the public and parties within the coalition, Mukherjee was as adept at the political power game as any politician the CPM could produce. Although he bungled the move to isolate the CPM from the first United Front Government, he made up for this through his satyagraha campaign which precipitated the collapse of the second government.

On the other hand, the CPM and other Marxist parties were just as calculating in their initial acceptance and utilization of Mukherjee as a political instrument, for he was initially the least intolerable man to command acceptance, albeit in qualified terms, as Chief Minister of the coalition. This opportunism was epitomized in a statement made by Sudhin Kumar of the RCPI during an interview :

'The task of the RCPI was to break the Congress and Mukherjee was necessary here. After - Mukherjee was redundant. It is no longer possible to go with Mukherjee. It is no longer necessary to go with him; it is now dangerous to go with him.' 1

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1. Interview, op. cit.



Given this attitude, which was shared by most of the Marxist and Communist parties within the coalition, it is no wonder that Mukherjee's role as Chief Minister, was extremely limited insofar as the functioning of the United Front Cabinet was concerned. More will be said about this point later on.

Notwithstanding the power struggles, the implicit and explicit assumptions that power struggles and/or personality clashes are the almost sole motivating force behind political conflict, must be questioned. The corollary of this view that ideology has little or no relevance, except as a mask to cloak power and personality conflicts, is also in doubt.<sup>2</sup> It is argued here that ideology is important especially, but not exclusively, for Communist and Marxist parties, particularly in West Bengal. There is no intrinsic reason why opportunistic alliances and compromises over ideology automatically negate the importance and relevance of ideology in general terms.

Accordingly, it is argued that ideological heterogeneity was responsible, in varying degrees, for some of the conflict which proved so endemic to the United Front Governments of West Bengal. The situation was a complex one involving, in a number of cases, an intermeshing of ideology and the struggle for power. As mentioned in previous chapters, this manifested itself in conflict over industrial unrest in both 1967 and 1969-70; the food crisis of 1967, and in the 'land grab' movement of 1969-70. For the Communist and Marxist parties, conflict and various forms of industrial unrest, for example, are seen not purely as tactics and opportunities to increase organizational expansion and support.

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2. This line of thought seems influential and prevalent among a number of American social scientists, especially those whose interests include communist systems and/or communist parties in non-communist systems. The works of Daniel Bell, R. V. Daniels and others, in relation to the Soviet Union, are cases in point. It appears that the conclusions drawn by the above writers, together with those of the kremlinological school, have had a significant influence upon a number of political scientists in general.

They are also seen as manifestations of a historical process involving class struggle. Similarly, politicization and radicalization of the peasantry are not merely devices to facilitate a Communist party's organizational expansion, but are part of a continuing process towards ultimate revolution. There is a distinct danger of over-simplification associated with becoming lost in the woods of Communist tactics, so that the ideological trees become obscured, or even bulldozed down.

Similarly, ideology and ideological perspectives cannot be entirely dismissed as motivating forces in the activities of other non-Communist parties and individuals. The bitter opposition which existed between P. C. Ghosh and the CPM and other parties, was largely over policy, reinforced by ideological perspectives. P. C. Sen had said of Ghosh in a different context :

'Ghosh left the Congress firstly because of some ideological differences. He thought the Congress was moving away from Gandhian ideology. This was the main reason. Secondly, ... with Nehru the emphasis was on having more heavy industry. Ghosh laid more emphasis on cottage industries than on heavy industry...'<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, then, the outlooks of a Gandhiite, on the one hand, and the CPM, on the other, are totally dissimilar. Ghosh's dislike of forced requisitioning and cordoning and violence inevitably brought him into conflict with the CPM. Ideology, as well as the cut and thrust of the power game, was involved.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, ideological outlooks also influenced the polarization of attitudes between those parties which viewed some manifestations of violence, for

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3. Taking the Soviet Union as an analogy, it has been fashionable to argue that policies like NEP, forced collectivization and rapid industrialization, Stalin's promotion of inequalities during the 1930's, and so on, have been 'ideological deviations'. This view, however, entirely misses the point that such policies and 'ideological deviations' were related to means, and not to ultimate ends.

4. Interview, op. cit.

instance, the Naxalbari uprising, primarily as a law and order problem, and those who argued that it was first and foremost a socio-economic one. This is not meant to imply that one group of parties totally ignored the basic causes of the conflict and violence, but rather that the approaches and emphases of the two groups were different because of their dissimilar ideological perspectives.

Given this situation of ideological heterogeneity, the prospects for the United Front maintaining itself in viable and stable coalition would have been very shaky, even if the naked struggle for power had not eventuated. In itself, this flimsy foundation would have made consensus and agreement difficult to attain, but perhaps some minimal degree of compromise and bargaining over policies could have eventuated. Overall, however, the logic of the situation and its political reality was that the parties, each with what Franda calls 'sub-regional' interests,<sup>5</sup> were thrust into a melting pot, where they vied with each other in varying degrees, for political influence and support.

Furthermore, as suggested in Chapter Eight, it was not simply the case that the form of inter-party dissension and conflict which occurred, did so exclusively because of direction from the party's leaderships. Here, again, it appears that there was a complex inter-relationship between the policies of the parties, the excessively independent actions of the rank-and file, and the political culture as a whole. Now, it was obvious to the leaders of the United Front coalition that excessive inter-party dissension and violence were dysfunctional to the viability of

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5. Franda, 'Intra-regional Factionalism and Coalition-building in West Bengal', op. cit.

the government. Each party wished to maintain itself in power. But, the one thing which none of the parties could do was to prevent inter-party clashes at the lower levels. This failure, it seems, was in a sense intentional and unintentional; that is to say, whilst the parties wished to minimize inter-party conflict, in particular, violence, they could not do so for several reasons. Firstly, they could not control their own rank-and-file adequately enough. Secondly, when the rank-and-file of other opposing parties was unrestrained, then defensive and likewise unrestrained reaction seemed the only way to deal with the situation. Hence, the parties were caught in a dilemma, and were quite unable to resolve it.

This situation was compounded by two other factors, namely, factionalism, and the direct influence of the political culture, together with the more indirect influence of the social system. It has been pointed out already that factionalism is endemic to most, if not all, political parties in West Bengal. Specific to this study is that intra-party factionalism was a factor in the Naxalbari uprising, and had an influence upon the CPM's role in the 'land grab' movement. Moreover, it has also been shown that factionalism was a conspicuous feature of the BC. In particular, it played a crucial part in the collapse of the first United Front Government, and accompanied the disintegration of the second government.

Whilst it has not been the purpose of this thesis to explore and analyze the various models of factionalism which have been put forward by many authors, Norman Nicholson's approach to the phenomena of factionalism nevertheless seems quite appropriate to the general situation in West Bengal. Nicholson's definition of a factional system is as follows :

'a political system (or subsystem) characterized by the informal competition of a plurality of amorphous segments (factions) operating within a cultural context which places a high value on diffuse and unrestrained personal power and led by an elite whose orientations are self-centered and instrumental.' 6

Of particular importance in Nicholson's definition is the phrase 'operating within a cultural context which places a high value on diffuse and unrestrained personal power.' Leaving aside, for the moment, some of the connotations which Nicholson attaches to the words 'segments' and 'factions', we may note that in the broader sense the whole concept of multitudinous segments is deeply ingrained within the cultural environment and social systems of India. In West Bengal, this is reinforced by the development of a highly politicized political culture.

Returning to Nicholson's narrower focus, this writer would argue that factions form and re-form, not only because of patron-client relationships, and expectations related to this relationship, nor only because the political culture places a 'high value on diffuse and unrestrained personal power', but also because the political culture in West Bengal is predisposed towards the formation of a plurality of groups with different perceptions, ideologies and sub-ideologies. The effect of this, as far as political parties are concerned, is for the occurrence of an almost bewildering array, degree and pace of factional alignments. Moreover, it is difficult to detect significant and widespread condemnation of these factional alignments, except insofar as they prove inimical to the aims of the parent group, or an opposing group. Perhaps the social acceptance of factionalism can partly be explained by Weiner's acute perceptions :

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6. Norman K. Nicholson, 'The Factional Model and the Study of Politics', Comparative Political Studies, 5, No. 3 (October, 1972), p. 292.

'A person who joins a political party in India apparently feels the need to be a member of a tightly knit face-to-face group. . . The faction assumes many of the functions of the traditional joint family, caste system and village organisation.' 7

Weiner was likewise correct in his remarks about the importance of faction leaders :

'The party member will talk to the faction head about personal problems in much the same way as he might, in the old days, have gone to his father or older brother.' 8

This deference to leaders, whether they be of factions or other non-political groups, does place a high value on personal power, although not necessarily on the 'unrestrained personal power' mentioned by Nicholson. For these underlying social and cultural reasons, the importance of individuals and personalities in the form of 'leaders' manifested itself in the experiment of United Front Government in West Bengal. Ajoy Mukherjee was reasonably successful in his campaigns to enlist sympathy and support for the first United Front Government after it was dismissed, and to isolate the CPM during the tenure of the second government, precisely because he was Ajoy Mukherjee. That is to say, Mukherjee was a leader of a significant political group, and, in this position had acquired status, prestige and charisma, which were reinforced by his earlier political career.

Status and prestige, however, are not confined purely to leaders of political groups, for again, as Weiner has pertinently observed :

'The political party also provides its members with status, or a position in the community', and, 'A militant satyagraha (civil disobedience demonstration) resulting in mass arrests of party members may do more for the prestige and status of the party than a large number of votes.' 9

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7. Weiner, Party Politics in India, op. cit., pp. 237 & 238.

8. *ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

9. *ibid.*, p. 239.

This value which the cultural and social systems place upon political involvement partially explain the plurality (some people may say surfeit) of 'movements' in West Bengal. Thus, in the light of the relative approbation accorded to factional alignments, political involvement and political movements, together with a radical political tradition, it is not difficult to see how the rank-and-file of the heterogeneous and mutually opposing political parties which formed the United Front Governments, could easily have passed beyond the control of the parties.

Moreover, clashes at the local level were always more influenced by local factors, and it is plausible to argue that the conflict situation was then perceived in terms of a zero-sum situation. Thus, a segmented social system is reflected in a segmented political system, which, in effect, meant that there were not merely twelve to fourteen parties operating within the United Front, but many more amorphous groups, each pulling in directions that best suited their local purposes.

All this points to the extremely weak and unstructured multi-party coalition 'situation' (it can hardly be called a 'system') which existed in West Bengal during 1967 and 1969-70. This structural uncertainty and weakness helps to explain why concepts artificially borrowed from British political institutions and conventions, like collective responsibility, bargaining, adherence to the rules of the game, and compromise politics, could find little credence or adherence, and why ministers, one after another, spoke out against other ministers and their parties. Consensus among leaders could only be achieved over broad programmes, but not to the various methods of implementation. The unstructured multi-party situation also helps to explain why institutional devices, such as the United Front Committee, which was constituted after the formation of the first United Front Government to discuss

matters and settle disputes among the constituents of the Front, were quite ineffective. Conflict therefore became the 'name of the game'.

The foregoing factors mentioned in this chapter must be taken into account when placing the United Front Governments into perspective. They are, moreover, reasons for asserting in the Introduction to this study, that the theoretical approaches considered there, are too limited in scope and not genuinely explanatory to enable a comprehensive analysis to be made of these coalition governments of West Bengal.



APPENDIX I \*NUMBER OF MUSLIMS PER 1,000 OF THE TOTAL, RURAL  
AND URBAN POPULATION, WEST BENGAL, 1961.

<u>State/District</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>227</u>	<u>115</u>
Darjeeling	31	29	37
Jalpaiguri	95	100	46
Cooch Behar	238	251	66
West Dinajpur	394	421	58
Malda	462	472	221
Murshidabad	559	592	204
Nadia	244	288	49
24-Parganas	234	283	129
Calcutta	128	...	128
Howrah	164	190	125
Hoogley	127	139	92
Burdwan	152	158	122
Birbhum	176	289	113
Bankura	44	46	24
Midnapore	76	77	62
Purulia	60	60	67

\* Figures are taken from Census of India (1961), Book Two, p. 223.

APPENDIX II\*

DISTRICT-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES

POPULATION OF WEST BENGAL, 1961.

State/ Division/ District	Total population	Scheduled Caste population	Percentage of Scheduled Caste population to Total population
1	2	3	4
WEST BENGAL	34,926,279	6,890,314	19.73
Presidency Division	18,760,996	3,713,139	19.79
Darjeeling	624,640	82,381	13.19
Jalpaiguri	1,359,292	418,655	30.80
Cooch Behar	1,019,806	478,313	46.90
West Dinajpur	1,323,797	286,453	21.64
Malda	1,221,923	163,433	13.38
Murshidabad	2,290,010	282,168	12.32
Nadia	1,713,324	350,162	20.44
24-Parganas	6,280,915	1,524,922	24.28
Calcutta	2,927,289	126,652	4.33
Burdwan Division	16,165,283	3,177,175	19.65
Howrah	2,038,477	299,791	14.71
Hooghly	2,231,418	445,208	18.95
Burdwan	3,082,846	753,883	24.45
Birbhum	1,446,158	421,344	29.14
Bankura	1,664,513	492,700	29.60
Midnapore	4,341,855	563,406	12.98
Purulia	1,360,016	200,843	14.77

\*Source: Census of India (1961), Vol. XVII, Part V-A(i) -  
Tables on Scheduled Castes.

## APPENDIX II\*

## DISTRICT-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCHEDULED TRIBES

## POPULATION OF WEST BENGAL, 1961.

State/ Division/ District	Total population	Scheduled Tribes population	Percentage of Scheduled Tribes population to Total population
1	2	3	4
WEST BENGAL	34,926,279	2,054,081	5.88
Presidency Division	18,760,996	904,878	4.82
Darjeeling	624,640	96,444	15.44
Jalpaiguri	1,359,292	354,741	26.10
Cooch Behar	1,019,806	8,809	0.86
West Dinajpur	1,323,797	170,149	12.85
Malda	1,221,923	99,522	8.14
Murshidabad	2,290,010	31,452	1.37
Nadia	1,713,324	21,923	1.28
24-Parganas	6,280,915	119,318	1.90
Calcutta	2,927,289	2,520	0.09
Burdwan Division	16,165,283	1,149,203	7.11
Howrah	2,038,477	6,111	0.30
Hooghly	2,231,418	90,106	4.04
Burdwan	3,082,846	180,143	5.84
Birbhum	1,446,158	106,860	7.39
Bankura	1,664,513	173,389	10.42
Midnapore	4,341,855	329,736	7.59
Purulia	1,360,016	262,858	19.33

\*Source: Census of India (1961), Part V-A(ii) -  
Tables on Scheduled Tribes.

## APPENDIX III\*

LINGUISTIC DIVISIONSTable 1

Numbers per 10,000 Total, Rural and Urban Population speaking Bengali in the State and Districts of West Bengal, 1961.

State/District	Total	Rural	Urban
1	2	3	4
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>8,420</u>	<u>8,860</u>	<u>7,052</u>
Darjeeling	1,844	1,514	2,939
Jalpaiguri	5,450	5,165	8,298
Cooch Behar	9,613	9,710	8,323
West Dinajpur	7,220	7,145	8,150
Malda	8,359	8,348	8,626
Murshidabad	9,672	9,703	9,336
Nadia	9,767	9,802	9,612
24-Parganas	9,127	9,865	7,544
Calcutta	6,384	..	6,384
Howrah	8,547	9,813	6,687
Hooghly	8,808	9,318	7,354
Burdwan	8,235	8,654	6,353
Birbhum	9,045	9,098	8,343
Bankura	9,060	9,014	9,636
Midnapore	9,005	9,197	6,710
Purulia	8,326	8,366	7,779

Table 2

Numbers per 10,000 Total, Rural and Urban population speaking Hindi in the State and Districts of West Bengal, 1961.

State/District	Total	Rural	Urban
1	2	3	4
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>542</u>	<u>194</u>	<u>1,619</u>
Darjeeling	766	509	1,618
Jalpaiguri	699	644	1,249
Cooch Behar	313	225	1,479
West Dinajpur	538	465	1,442
Malda	253	223	958
Murshidabad	149	125	407
Nadia	149	112	313
24-Parganas	504	60	1,456
Calcutta	1,934	..	1,934
Howrah	889	107	2,038
Hooghly	580	205	1,651
Burdwan	845	557	2,139
Birbhum	130	63	1,031
Bankura	37	20	242
Midnapore	104	29	1,008
Purulia	244	198	874

\* Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this Appendix have been taken from Census of India, 1961, West Bengal and Sikkim, Book Two: Population and Society, pp.170, 172, 175 and 178.

## APPENDIX III

Table 3

Numbers per 10,000 Total, Rural and Urban Population speaking Urdu in the State and Districts of West Bengal, 1961.

State/District	Total	Rural	Urban
1	2	3	4
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>239</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>655</u>
Darjeeling	40	9	143
Jalpaiguri	27	25	42
Cooch Behar	6	5	20
West Dinajpur	1,014	1,086	118
Malda	172	166	328
Murshidabad	61	48	204
Nadia	3	1	11
24-Parganas	204	4	632
Calcutta	898	..	898
Howrah	309	13	744
Hooghly	141	17	496
Burdwan	239	101	863
Birbhum	81	60	366
Bankura	6	5	9
Midnapore	148	129	381
Purulia	145	116	550

Note: A large number of these Urdu-speakers are Muslims.

Table 4\*

Distribution of 10,000 speakers of Oriya among the Districts, 1961.

State/District	Number of Speakers	State/District	Number of Speakers
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>10,000</u>	Calcutta	2,882
Darjeeling	400	Howrah	1,219
Jalpaiguri	555	Hooghly	857
Cooch Behar	17	Burdwan	823
West Dinajpur	75	Birbhum	27
Malda	95	Bankura	52
Murshidabad	19	Midnapore	988
Nadia	79	Purulia	71
24-Parganas	1,841		

\* The 1961 Census does not give a rural/urban break-up in the case of Oriya-speaking people.

## APPENDIX IV\*

RURAL AND URBAN POPULATION, 1961.

<u>District</u>	<u>Population (Number)</u>			<u>Percentage of Urban Population to Total</u>
	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Total</u>	
WEST BENGAL	26,385,437	8,540,842	34,926,279	24.45
Burdwan	2,521,768	561,078	3,082,846	18.20
Birbhum	1,345,389	100,769	1,446,158	6.97
Bankura	1,542,356	122,157	1,664,513	7.34
Midnapore	4,007,569	344,286	4,341,855	7.70
Howrah	1,213,385	825,092	2,038,477	40.48
Hooghly	1,652,135	579,283	2,231,418	25.96
Purulia	1,267,538	92,478	1,360,016	6.80
24-Parganas	4,282,958	1,997,957	6,280,915	31.81
Calcutta	-	2,927,289	2,927,289	100.00
Nadia	1,397,986	315,338	1,713,324	18.41
Murshidabad	2,094,546	195,464	2,290,010	8.54
West Dinajpur	1,224,828	98,969	1,323,797	7.48
Malda	1,171,138	50,785	1,221,923	4.16
Jalpaiguri	1,235,478	123,814	1,359,292	9.11
Darjeeling	480,003	144,637	624,640	23.16
Cooch Behar	948,360	71,446	1,019,806	7.01

\* Government of West Bengal, State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Handbook 1966, p.10 quoting as source Census of India (1961), Vol. XVI, Part IIA.

## APPENDIX V\*

## STATE INCOME OF WEST BENGAL AND ITS PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION

## BY SECTORS 1958-59 TO 1961-62

(at current prices)

	net income (Rs.crores)				percentage distribution			61-62P
	58-59	59-60	60-61	61-62	58-59	59-60	60-61	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1. Agriculture	288.25	311.12	382.09	416.32	29.62	31.37	34.81	36.03
2. Animal husbandry	0.00	0.00	0.74	1.66	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.14
3. Tea	24.86	28.67	30.84	28.44	2.55	2.89	2.81	2.46
4. Forestry	1.11	1.15	1.29	1.35	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.12
5. Fishery	19.43	21.30	21.78	25.74	2.00	2.15	1.98	2.23
6. Mining	19.57	20.86	23.50	24.74	2.01	2.10	2.14	2.14
7. Factory establishments	169.14	158.46	175.30	187.30P	17.38	15.97	15.97	16.21
8. Small enterprises	46.14	46.42	46.73	47.00	4.74	4.68	4.26	4.07
9. Banks and insurance	13.15	13.58	15.61	17.02	1.35	1.37	1.42	1.47
10. Railways	46.73	46.86	53.84	56.83	4.80	4.72	4.92	4.92
11. Other transport	24.59	22.77	20.85	20.61	2.53	2.30	1.90	1.78
12. Construction activity	10.04	10.09	11.13	11.27	1.03	1.02	1.01	0.98
13. Big trade	24.78	24.41	23.87	23.39	2.55	2.46	2.17	2.02
14. Small trade	73.81	72.45	71.06	69.74	7.58	7.30	6.47	6.04
15. Domestic services	15.23	15.29	15.36	15.42	1.57	1.54	1.40	1.33
16. Professions and liberal arts	80.07	76.94	72.06	69.01	8.23	7.76	6.57	5.97
17. Public services	56.18	60.15	66.79	72.97	5.77	6.06	6.09	6.31
18. House property	60.17	61.40	64.76	66.84	6.18	6.19	5.90	5.78
Total	973.25	991.92	1097.60	1155.65P	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

\*Source: Government of West Bengal, State Statistical Bureau, Estimates of State income and its Regional Differentials, West Bengal, 1965, p.23.

P = Provisional

## APPENDIX VI\*

PERSONS EMPLOYED IN REGISTERED FACTORIES  
ON AN INDUSTRY-WISE BASIS AS AT 1964

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Number as at 1964</u>
1. Rice mills	24,163
2. Flour mills	1,621
3. Sugar	418
4. Tea factories	26,732
5. Other food except beverage industries	9,107
6. Tobacco	3,872
7. Jute textile	250,851
8. Cotton mills	49,089
9. Other textiles	16,139
10. Paper	9,896
11. Other paper products	4,320
12. Printing, publishing and allied industries	18,958
13. Leather and leather products**	1,627
14. Rubber and rubber products	33,239
15. Chemical and chemical products	26,395
16. Basic metal industries	91,600
17. Electrical machinery, apparatus, appliances and supplies	30,078
18. Transport and transport equipment	76,670
19. Products of petroleum and coal	3,432
20. Electricity, steam and gas	6,604
21. Others***	169,069

\* Figures have been taken from Government of West Bengal, State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Handbook 1966, op. cit., pp.85-86.

\*\* Except foot-wear.

\*\*\* "Others" include process allied to agriculture, beverages, wood and cork except furniture, non-metallic mineral products, manufacture of metal products, manufacture of machineries, foot-wear, other wearing apparel, made-up textile goods, furniture and fixtures, water and sanitary services, recreation services, personal services and miscellaneous industries.



APPENDIX VII\*

NUMBER WORKING AS CULTIVATORS AND AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS  
IN THE DISTRICTS, WEST BENGAL, 1961.

<u>State/District</u>	<u>Cultivators</u>	<u>Agricultural Labourers</u>
West Bengal	4,458,779	1,771,708
Darjeeling	99,703	7,807
Jalpaiguri	227,314	15,424
Cooch Behar	240,306	23,020
West Dinajpur	267,636	91,402
Malda	199,654	57,728
Murshidabad	294,004	130,764
Nadia	199,736	77,616
24-Parganas	578,859	325,388
Calcutta	76	88
Howrah	89,828	60,002
Hooghly	206,138	134,188
Burdwan	295,752	184,416
Birbhum	197,122	138,172
Bankura	317,928	149,197
Midnapore	781,823	286,077
Purulia	462,900	90,419

\* Figures have been taken from Census of India (1961):  
West Bengal & Sikkim, Book Two: Population and Society,  
Statement X.17, p.381.

APPENDIX VIII\*

CLASSIFICATION OF WORKERS IN MANUFACTURING BY  
MAJOR GROUPS OF INDUSTRY, WEST BENGAL, 1961 AND 1951

Division/Major Group (1)	1961		Total (4)	1951
	Non-Household Industry (2)	Household Industry (3)		Total (5)
Division 2 and 3 - Manufacturing	1,319,160	441,578	1,760,738	1,738,478
Foodstuffs	107,622	53,844	161,466	168,014
Beverages	8,332	559	8,891	4,869
Tobacco products	58,433	50,139	108,572	66,745
Textile-Cotton	80,279	123,493	203,772	120,193
Textile-Jute	225,031	2,632	227,663	302,857
Textile-Wood	2,342	1,068	3,410	1,766
Textile-Silk	2,823	10,269	13,092	2,442
Textile-miscellaneous	75,699	26,410	102,109	83,294
Wood & Wooden products	68,358	77,905	146,263	111,208
Paper & Paper products	17,552	1,481	19,033	13,564
Printing & Publishing	35,479	806	36,285	27,484
Leather & Leather products	34,906	9,217	44,123	44,416
Rubber, Petroleum & Coal products	22,629	320	22,949	11,381
Chemicals & Chemical products	43,392	996	44,388	24,842
Non-metallic Mineral products other than Petroleum & Coal	93,641	31,765	125,406	96,602
Basic Metal & their products except Machinery & Transport equipment	197,462	24,558	222,020	122,761
Machinery (all kinds other than Transport) & Electrical equipment	49,846	300	50,146	60,148
Transport equipment	90,511	1,276	91,787	56,670
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industries	104,823	24,540	129,363	59,222

\* Source: Census of India (1961): Book Two, op. cit., pp.399-400.

## APPENDIX IX\*

CLASSIFICATION OF 1,000 WORKERS IN EACH MAJOR GROUP OF  
INDUSTRIES IN CATEGORY V BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS, WEST BENGAL, 1961.

Major Group (1)	Total (2)	Employer (3)	Employee (4)
Foodstuffs	1,000	33	612
Beverages	1,000	19	835
Tobacco products	1,000	29	595
Textile-Cotton	1,000	14	880
Textile-Jute	1,000	5	965
Textile-Wood	1,000	36	881
Textile-Silk	1,000	49	813
Textile-miscellaneous	1,000	46	561
Wood & Wooden products	1,000	31	547
Paper & Paper products	1,000	24	854
Printing & publishing	1,000	47	827
Leather & Leather products	1,000	35	637
Rubber, Petroleum & Coal products	1,000	17	939
Chemical & Chemical products	1,000	33	873
Non-metallic Mineral products other than Petroleum & Coal	1,000	25	763
Basic Metal & their products except Machinery & Transport equipment	1,000	24	874
Machinery (all kinds other than Transport) & Electrical equipment	1,000	28	884
Transport equipment	1,000	23	855
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industries	1,000	35	753

\* Source: Census of India (1961): Book Two, op. cit., p.402.

## APPENDIX X\*

## OCCUPATIONAL DIVISIONS

Table 1

Minor Groups in Division 6 Trade and Commerce with  
5,000 or more Workers, West Bengal, 1961.

Minor Group (1)	No. of Workers	
	Total (2)	Urban (3)
Wholesale trading in cereals and pulses	7,197	3,133
Wholesale trading in vegetables, fruits, spices, oil, fish, dairy products, eggs, poultry and other foodstuff (not covered elsewhere)	9,757	7,283
Wholesale trading in all kinds of fabrics and textile products such as garments, hessian, gunny bag, silk and woollen yarn, shortings, suitings, hosiery products	5,881	5,160
Wholesale trade in petrol, mobil oil and allied products	6,804	5,909
Wholesale trade in all goods not elsewhere classified	24,148	21,994
Retail trading in cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, sugar, spices, oil, fish, dairy products, eggs, poultry	250,912	137,724
Retail trading in beverages such as tea (leaf), coffee (seed & powders), aerated water	24,363	16,689
Retail trading in intoxicants such as wine, liquor	7,971	4,758
Retail trading in tobacco, bidi, cigarettes and other tobacco products	40,192	29,882
Retail trading in fuel such as coke, coal, firewood and kerosene	19,595	15,981
Retail trading in foodstuffs like sweetmeat, condiments, cakes, biscuits, etc.	45,286	25,982
Retail trading in animals	5,527	1,606
Retail trading in fibres, yarns, dhoti, saree, readymade garments of cottons, wool, silk and other textile and hosiery products	56,296	39,325
Retail trading in medicines and chemicals	11,167	8,786
Retail trading in footwear, headgear such as hat, umbrella	5,127	3,872
Retail trading in stationery goods & paper	28,254	18,599
Retail trading in metal, porcelain & glass utensils	8,537	5,996
Retail trading in hardware and sanitary equipment	9,747	8,149

\* Source: Census of India (1961): Book Two, op. cit., p.407.

Table 1 (contd)/...

Table 1 (contd)

Minor Group (1)	No. of Workers	
	Total (2)	Urban (3)
Retail trading in wool, bamboo, cane, bark and thatches	9,086	5,861
Retail trading in transport and storage equipment	6,741	6,171
Retail trading in electrical goods like electric fan, bulb, etc.	5,150	4,603
Retail trading in precious stones & jewellery	6,845	5,582
Book-selling	5,114	3,668
Retail trading in goods unspecified	126,175	73,137
Importing & exporting of goods & commodities	6,518	5,434
Providents & insurances	10,483	9,664
Banking & similar type of financial operation	15,226	13,590
All other activities connected with trade & commerce not covered in any other Minor Group, including hiring of durable goods such as electric fans, microphone, rickshaw, etc.	25,907	25,333

Table 2\*

Distribution of Professional, Technical and Related Workers  
by Occupational Groups, West Bengal, 1961.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Architects, Engineers and Surveyors	23,439	18,014
Chemists, Physicists, Geologists and Physical Scientists	18,837	3,538
Biologists, Veterinarians, Agronomists and Related Scientists	1,109	504
Physicians, Surgeons and Dentists	31,265	16,740
Nurses, Pharmacists and other Medical and Health Technicians	36,481	21,020
Teachers	138,974	59,847
Jurists	10,329	8,005
Social Scientists and Related Workers	10,506	8,716
Artists, Writers and Related Workers	15,247	11,322
Droughtsmen and Science and Engineering Technicians	10,809	9,974
Other Professional, Technical and related Workers	35,684	14,800
Total	332,680	172,480

\*Source: Census of India (1961): Book Two, op. cit., p.421.

Table 3

Distribution of Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers  
by Occupation Groups, West Bengal, 1961.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Administrators and Executive Officials, Government	31,521	22,737
Directors and Managers, Wholesale and Retail Trade	8,989	8,656
Directors, Managers and Working Proprietors, Financial Instructors	3,318	3,057
Directors, Managers and Working Proprietors, Other	80,640	71,191
Total	<u>124,468</u>	<u>105,641</u>

APPENDIX XI \*18-POINT PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT  
1967Preamble

The people of West Bengal have given their verdict against Congress misrule and have enjoined on their accredited representatives to set up an honest, clean and efficient administration under Ministers of ability and integrity enjoying public confidence. The United Front has been constituted to carry out this mandate and accepts this responsibility with all humility. The UF is fully conscious of the gravity of the situation caused through inefficient and corrupt handling of affairs by the Congress over a long period, non-utilisation and draining off of the resources of the State through wrong and often un-holy channels and failure to meet even the minimum basic needs of the masses. The UF is also aware of the handicaps under which the State Government has to function, the limitations imposed by the Constitution, stagnation of resources and ungenerous treatment of West Bengal by the Centre denying her legitimate share in development programmes and even in food supply from the Central Pool. Even so, UF is emboldened to shoulder the responsibility on the strength of the confidence reposed on it by the people and assures sincere and determined efforts to ameliorate the distressing condition in which the people have been thrown during Congress regime. With the help and active cooperation of the people the UF is confident of overcoming all obstacles in the path of people's advances.

Policies.

1. The Government of U. F. will strive to meet the primary needs of the people in respect to food, clothing, housing, education, health services and employment opportunities and will ensure efficiency, economy and impartiality in the administration.

2. The Government of U. F. will relentlessly fight corruption and nepotism in official and non-official spheres, profiteering, hoarding, black-marketing, amassing of ill-gotten wealth, adulteration of food and medicine and all anti-social acts fostered under Congress rule and will liberate the forces of freedom and progress.
3. The Government will not rely on restrictive or merely administrative steps for relieving the acute distress due to inadequate supply & high prices of essentials, but will take adequate measures for promoting production, specially of food. With this in view the Government will undertake progressive land reforms, provide to the cultivators due incentives through proper irrigation and draining facilities, supply of fertilisers, seeds improved and scientific methods, better live-stock and agricultural credit and ensure rational price support. Particular attention will be given to the acute problems faced by poor peasants, share-croppers, agricultural labour and all sections of distressed tillers.
4. The present food crisis that has been aggravated by the policies of the Congress Government will be tackled on an emergent basis. Distribution of essential commodities will be strictly regulated to ensure fair and equitable supply at reasonable prices and every effort will be made to set up suitable, effective and incorruptible machinery for the purpose. Wholesale trade in paddy and rice will be undertaken by State and the margin between procurement and distribution prices will be rationalised and wastage and corruption eliminated.
5. Special emphasis will be placed on fighting unemployment and on utilising the man-power resources, specially the youth, in economic development and social services, thereby creating new employment opportunities. In this context as also for strengthening



the economy of West Bengal efforts will be made to foster and promote various categories of industries, specially cottage, small and medium industries and commerce calculated to serve the people honestly and efficiently.

6. The Government will take determined steps to improve the number and quality of primary and secondary schools, reform educational administration, remove the chaotic condition in the field of education at all stages, build up an integrated system of education and promote literature, sports, physical education and cultural activities calculated to build up a better future generation. The cause of teachers and non-teaching staff and their just claims will also be duly attended to. The problems of students will also receive due consideration.

7. The displaced persons from East Pakistan demand particular attention and the U. F. will make best efforts to re-habilitate them so as to enable them to take their rightful place as full-fledged citizens of India with ample opportunities for housing, education and employment. Squatters' colonies will be regularised and agriculturists will be given special assistance.

8. The cause of labour and workers on whom production and economic development primarily depend will be given adequate support and working conditions in the field and in factories will be substantially improved. The feasibility of ensuring minimum or living wages for all categories of workers, industrial, agricultural, will also be duly attended to.

9. The U. F. recognises the rights of the minority communities to follow their faith, preserve their special culture and language and noble traditions and will provide them with due protection against distrust, disability and handicaps - social, economic and educational as guaranteed in the Constitution of India. The Government will not tolerate or foster the evils threatening national integrity such as provincialism, casteism and linguistic fanaticism.

10. The Government will pay special attention to and improve the conditions of scheduled castes and tribes and backward sections of the people.
11. The special problems of women will receive due consideration.
12. The problems of Calcutta, the nerve-centre of Eastern India as also of under-developed regions e. g. Purulia, the Sunderbans and parts of North Bengal, will receive special attention and the speedy and proper implementation of Farakka and Haldia projects will be pressed for.
13. The Government will take early steps to implement the resolutions adopted unanimously by the West Bengal State Assembly to make Bengali the official language of this State and Nepali the regional language of Darjeeling hill areas.
14. The U. F. Government will recognise the rights of workers, peasants, teachers and employees of all categories to form unions or associations with a view to voicing their just demands and grievances, and will not suppress democratic and legitimate struggles of the people. The U. F. will re-orient the executive and the police in a manner consistent with the democratic aspirations of the people. It will respect and defend fundamental civil rights and the Government of India will be urged to lift the state of emergency that empowers recourse to D.I. Act and Rules. The repeal of all anti-democratic and repressive laws including P.D. Act will also be pressed for.
15. The Government is aware of the severe limitations imposed on the State Government and its precarious dependence upon the Centre. The U. F. will strive to acquire more powers and rights for the State Government and in particular press the Centre for meeting the legitimate share of West Bengal to larger allocations from Central revenue.
16. The question of Berubari will be taken up with the Union Government.

17. The Government will do everything for the preservation and strengthening of the sovereignty of the country.

18. The Government will not rely merely on administrative machinery to implement the above policies but will seek active cooperation and association of the people in all matters and at various levels. The local self-governing institutions and Panchayats will be democratised and vitalised to truly represent the people and will be made more effective institutions free from corruption and nepotism.

Finally, the U.F. informs the people that the measures required to implement the above basic policies will be determined after careful consideration and announced in due course.

\* Source : Government of West Bengal, West Bengal, 25 February & 4 March, 1967, pp. 907-8.

APPENDIX XIIPROGRAMME OF THE UNITED FRONTPreamble

1. After 20 years of misrule the Congress Party was voted out of office at the last General Election in West Bengal. The people wanted an anti-Congress progressive government which would work in the interests of the vast masses of the people, and, accordingly, the anti-Congress parties combined to form the United Front Government of 1967.

2. The U. F. Government set to its tasks amidst great jubilation of the people and huge demonstrations of popular support and enthusiasm. In sharp contrast to the previous Congress regimes the U. F. Government, from the very beginning, adopted a pro-people and democratic attitude. All the prisoners kept in detention without trial by the Congress Government were at once released; Government employees who had been dismissed by the Congress Government for their alleged political opinion were mostly reinstated, and it was declared that no one would be debarred from Government service because of political views or activity and the Government employees would have full democratic and trade union rights; State Transport and Tram employees suspended or dismissed for participation in their legitimate movements, were reinstated; the infamous Security Act, so long used by the Congress party for repression and harassment of political opponents workers and peasants, and participants in mass-movements as well as the people in general, was removed from the statute-book. The Government declared that the police would not be used to suppress legitimate mass-movements. A new atmosphere of freedom of opinion, freedom of representation and demonstration,

was created. The government also agreed to institute judicial enquiry into several cases of police firing on serious complaints against the police. A fresh wind began to blow in West Bengal after a 20-year nightmare rule of brutal oppression and shameless exploitation of the people. Hard-working, unostentatious ministers of the U. F. Government were easily accessible and freely moved about among the people, often rushing in aid of people in trouble, and above all, displaying a truly democratic attitude towards the people.

3. There were immense obstacles in the path of the United Front Government. But even with those obstacles the U. F. Government achieved many successes within a short while. Guided by a genuine desire to render as much relief and assistance to people, the U. F. Government, on its own remitted land revenue in vast areas of the State where crop had failed due to drought or flood, stayed repayment of loans by peasants to the Government and generally stopped certificate proceedings against peasants. The U. F. Government went all out to serve the famine-stricken people of Bankura and Purulia. It increased the Dearness Allowance for Government employees and teachers and non-teaching staff in schools and colleges; rendered financial aid to municipalities and Calcutta Corporation for enhancement of dearness allowance to the employees; and drew up amendments to the Municipal Act to help the municipalities function better; it set up a Pay-Commission with a view to improve the pay-scales of Government employees, teachers etc. Existing labour-laws were reviewed, and new bills drafted for securing more benefits for workers, and more effective Government help to workers and employees in their just cause; these draft Bills were sent to the Union Government for their concurrence. Conciliation proceedings in industrial disputes were expedited, registration of trade unions was speeded up. The U. F. Government set up a large number of Government chemist shops

replacing private shops. About 238,000 acres of surplus vested land, char land and tea-garden surplus land were distributed among the poorer peasants, and more than 10,000 acres of benami land were recovered for distribution among the poorer peasants.

The U. F. Government took over the management of the Calcutta Tramways Company, and thus put an end to the greedy, wasteful and irresponsible British management of this public utility service, and fulfilled a long-standing national demand. The Government enquired into the scandalous corruption of the previous Congress Government regarding issuing of bus permits in Calcutta and published its report. The Government also took over the management of the National Medical College, and converted the Jalpaiguri Engineering College into a Government College; thus two institutions of public importance which were not being properly run, were brought under public management. The U. F. Government took up the cause of the displaced persons from East Pakistan and submitted an 11-point plan for approval of the Union Government; it distributed nearly 2500 letters of eligibility for squatters' colonies, arranged for electricity in over 6000 refugee households, installed over 400 tubewells in different camps and colonies, and restored the doles cut as a measure of political victimization by the Congress Government; it arranged for the admission in hospital of over 300 T. B. Patients.

The U. F. Government reduced the burden of taxation on bustees and increased the taxes on big landlords in Calcutta. It removed police control over dramatic performances.

The U. F. Government tried to tone up the administration of government owned industries, sought to revive some enterprises, to expand industrial establishments and set up Haldia Development Board to advise the State Government for the development of the areas.

Despite lack of funds and Government of India's callous attitude, the U. F. Government did its best to help agriculture. A high power commission was set up with official and non-official experts to make an estimate of the surface and sub-soil water resources for irrigation purposes and draw up a master plan for best utilisation of these water resources. Many deep tube wells sunk at great cost but lying idle were brought into operation, river lift irrigation schemes were increased, various small and medium irrigation and drainage works including that of the Kangsabati Project were accelerated. Tessta Dam Project was drawn up and taken up with the government of India for expanding irrigation to Jalpaiguri, Maldah and West Dinajpur. Schemes were drawn up for irrigation co-operatives to help poor, small and medium peasants. A plan was adopted for setting up an Agro-Industries Corporation to supply to the peasants on long term loan basis pump sets, shallow tube wells and other equipment for boosting agricultural production as well as industry.

The Government took some steps to increase housing facilities for the people of low and middle income groups, and tried to remove the grievances of the tenants of Government Housing Estates. It set up all-party committees for distribution of flats and took steps to remove nepotism and corruption in this respect.

The discrimination practised by the previous Government in favouring a particular Bar in the appointment of the Advocate General was discontinued. The Bill for separating the judiciary from the Executive was published.

In the sphere of medical education the North Bengal Medical College was opened at Siliguri; seats were reserved in every medical college for candidates who will undertake to serve the rural masses for at least a few years after obtaining degrees, admission to medical colleges were arranged only on merit and

not recommendations and manipulations. To help the working people, out-patients sections were opened in 3 Calcutta hospitals. Some new health centres were opened and some old ones equipped and properly manned. The U. F. Government reviewed the Panchayat and Zilla parishad administration which were infested with corruption and mal-administration, and prepared a Bill for new, democratic legislation in this matter. The Government promptly started a thorough investigation into expenditure of several crores of rupees by a number of Zilla Parishads for relief purposes, found out that huge amounts had been mis-spent or misappropriated, informed the public about it and sought to take steps against these Parishads but were frustrated due to injunction by the High Court. For the first time in the state, a conference of the Vice-Chancellors of the universities in the state and the President of the Board of Secondary Education was convened by the U. F. Government to consider the question of the medium of instruction, and the conference agreed to take active steps for the introduction of the regional language as the medium of instruction at all stages. Another conference was held with representatives of the teachers and the students organizations and the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University to ensure smooth holding of the University examinations; this proved a success with the co-operation of the teachers and students.

4. The method of securing popular co-operation was followed by all departments which set up a number of advisory committees to help and supervise administration. Of particular importance was the setting up of Food and Relief Committees, from district to "anchal" level in all areas, with representatives of political parties and local administration to help, supervise and participate in the procurement and supply of food, distribution of relief etc.

5. In every department of the Government, plans and arrangements were being made for bigger and more substantial



improvements. The Government as a whole was preparing itself to tackle the larger problems of food, finance, economic planning and administrative reform when it was removed from office.

6. The obstacles in the path of the U. F. Government were many. First of all, the Indian Constitution itself stood in the way of any radical measures effecting property-relations, or any measures of speedy reforms. The Constitution does not give any power to a State Government in most matters vitally affecting the people. The bureaucratic state-machinery inherited from the British imperialism, and further corrupted and choked by 20 years of Congress rule, stood in the way of speedy implementation of policies and decision of the U. F. Government. Moreover, when the Congress party went out of office, they left almost no foodgrains in Government stock; with severe drought and failure of crop there was an acute food-shortage, which was seriously aggravated by the deliberate withholding of supplies from the centre. The failure of Congress economic plans, and the suspension of planning by the centre, produced a serious economic situation. The wastage of public money over the years by the Congress Government had left the State with practically no resources for large welfare activities after meeting at least some of the long-standing demands for relief, aid and assistance.

7. There were also certain weaknesses and vacillations and differences within the U. F. , as well as some treacherous elements linked with vested interests and the Congress party. These, too, served as obstacles in the path of more effective functioning of the U. F. Government.

8. In spite of these obstacles and limitations, the nine months of the U. F. Government clearly showed that this government, born out of the struggles of the people, was working in the interests of the people and against the vested interests.

9. This Government, however, was not allowed to continue. The Congress party, although defeated at the polls, had not been completely routed. It enjoyed all the advantages, and the U. F. Government had all the disadvantages, of having a Congress party Government at the centre. The people's verdict at the polls did not automatically end the strangle-hold of vested interests over the economy, nor end their powers of political machination. The Congress party, the Congress Government at the centre, the vested interests in West Bengal and all over India, certain elements in the top-bureaucracy and the police, along with foreign imperialist agencies combined in a series of conspiracies to remove this popular Government elected by the people.

10. These conspiracies were of the most heinous kind. To begin with, riots of communal and provincial nature were engineered. When the U. F. Government, with firm determination, and with active co-operation of the people, stopped these riots within hours, the conspirators turned to the methods of bribery and corruption and unfortunately found ready response among some traitorous legislators. At the same time, the Congress Government at the centre did serious injustice to West Bengal in the matter of financial allocations, famine relief aid, and in meeting the food deficit. The Government of India refused to allot even the same quantity of rice and wheat as had been allotted to the Congress Government of West Bengal during the previous year despite the fact that famine conditions were prevailing in some districts and the deficit in 1967 was greater than in last year. Later, the Government of India was continuously and persistently dishonouring even its own inadequate commitments about supply of foodgrains, and thereby creating a situation where the rationing system of the state was threatened with disruption. Many of the employers, in their turn, resorted to lock-outs and closures on various pretexts in order to teach a lesson to the workers and bring pressure to bear on them for

accepting the entire burden of the recession created by the Congress Government. Many of the employers refused to co-operate with the U. F. Government in devising a machinery for speedy settlement of disputes. The big jotedars and profiteers also, with the support of the Congress, played a nefarious role in hindering procurement of foodgrains and encouraging blackmarket operations. In such a situation the toiling people's movement against the vested interests was depicted as a break-down of law and order, and a hue and cry was raised by those reactionaries who never show any respect for law and order when "law and order" is inconvenient for them.

11. The Congress party and the reactionaries vainly hoped that the crisis created by them would turn the people against the U. F. Government; but this hope was shattered by the huge demonstrations of popular support for the U. F. Government in spite of the immense hardships experienced by the people in respect of food and employment. The Congress party and the reactionaries, however, mainly relied on their machinery of bribery and corruption, and on their agents within the U. F. headed by Dr. P. C. Ghosh. These traitors within the U. F. soon came into the open, and using their defection as a pretext, the U. F. Government was arbitrarily dismissed by the Central Government action through the Governor and without a vote in the Assembly. The traitors were rewarded with ministry, and the so-called PDF Government was installed with the army in a state of alert and the armed police called out with reinforcement from the Central Reserve Police and elsewhere. The installation of the so-called PDF Government then of the Congress-PDF clique ushered in a period of blanket ban on civil liberties, and a period of police-terror; assemblies and demonstrations of people were forbidden, a large number of people were held without trial, and merciless beating-up of innocent people became a daily occurrence. A barbarous regime of criminal violence against the people was imposed. But the people could not be

cowed down. This was also a period of continuous mass-movements of protests and popular non-cooperation with the so-called Government; thousands upon thousands of people, young and old, men and women, students and youth, workers and peasants and teachers and employees, political workers and social workers courted imprisonment in a vast movement spread wide and deep throughout the State.

12. The so-called Government of the Congress and the PDF, built on bribery and corruption and treachery and violence against the people, could not and did not last. The historic ruling of the Speaker in the West Bengal Assembly, the huge mass-protests, and finally, defection from the ranks of the engineers of defection, put an end to this Government, and President's Rule was imposed on West Bengal.

13. The people of West Bengal are now called upon to give their verdict again through a mid-term election for the State Legislative Assembly. There is no doubt that the people will confirm their verdict against the Congress in even clearer terms this time than in 1967. The people will always recall their experiences of the Congress rule of 20 years - the rule of corruption, oppression and exploitation of the people. They will recall the many martyrs whose lives were taken by the Congress Government. In addition, the people will remember the role of the Congress in 1967 - how they reduced parliamentary democracy to a mockery by their game of purchase of defectors, and by their over-riding the powers of the elected legislature. The people will remember the short but sufficiently ugly rule of the Congress-PDF clique.

14. The people also see around them the results of 20 years of Congress rule in West Bengal and the continued Congress rule at the centre. Congress economic planning is breaking down; unemployment is rising by leaps and bounds, markets are

shrinking, purchasing-power of the people is falling, prices are rising, and there is widespread distress and unrest all over India. The unity of the country is threatened by the high-handed reactionary policies of the Congress Government at the centre, and linguistic, communal and provincialist passions are being roused everywhere.

15. The crisis is developing on an all-India scale, and is likely to be intensified in the coming days. The people's struggle will be long and arduous. It will be a mistake to imagine that the struggle will end as soon as the Congress is again defeated at the polls. The U.F. is fully convinced that no lasting and radical solution to the problems of the people can be found without changing the present social order, and that only a socialist society can guarantee liberty and justice to the people. The present crisis is rooted in the present irrational and unjust social and economic system.

16. In the context of this inevitable continued struggle of the people, and in the critical days ahead, it will be of immense advantage for the people if a really popular government, pledged to honour the democratic rights and liberties of the people, and a government which will be an instrument of struggle for the people be installed in office. Such a government will actively help the people by raising mass-consciousness, by developing people's organisations and struggle, and by sustaining the people through whatever reliefs and reforms and development works can be secured even under existing conditions. If, on the other hand, a Congress Government be installed in office, not only will the sufferings of the people increase by leaps and bounds, but ruthless and brutal oppression, will be added on to the sufferings.

17. It is clear that the U.F. Government will have to work under a series of limitations. As has already been seen, the

Indian Constitution itself is a bar to any radical measure of social reconstruction and progress. It is heavily loaded in favour of the capitalists and big landowners. Many of the existing laws are similarly loaded and their interpretation at the law-courts have more often than not gone against the interests of the people. Moreover, the Constitution imposes severe restrictions on the powers of a State Government, practically concentrating all powers at the centre. As long as the Congress continued in office at the centre, and is not ousted by the democratic forces, no significant improvement can be brought about in the life of our people. It is obvious that West Bengal will have to face serious difficulties from the Congress Government at the centre in respect of food, finance industry, labour and all other matters where the centre has a say.

18. The present economic depression, unscientific planning, the acute dearth of funds created by the Congress rulers, and the increased dependence on foreign aid, will be further limiting factors to be faced by West Bengal.

19. Fully conscious of these limitations and difficulties, the U. F. is also fully convinced that with united and active people's struggles to help the Government, the U. F. Government will be able to secure certain important reforms and relief for the benefit of the people and to help them advance along the path of their struggle.

20. The most important and immediately achievable improvement that the U. F. Government will bring about will be in the relations between the Government and the people. The people will feel that the government is theirs, and the government will rely on the people. The Government will not use the police against legitimate mass-movements; fully aware that its tasks cannot be accomplished without active support and co-operation of mass movements and mass-organisations, the

U. F. Government will develop popular movements on important issues affecting the country. It will not rely on the bureaucratic machinery alone for carrying out its tasks. Experience has shown that not only is the bureaucracy incompetent in most circumstances, but also that it contains elements that are corrupt and disloyal to the people.

21. The 18-point programme adopted by the U. F. in 1967 remains valid for the coming period too. But experience has shown that it is necessary to further concretise it to work out and explain to the people the schedule of priorities in order that the perspectives may be clear. It is evident for instance that food, agriculture along with irrigation, drainage and land reforms will have to be given to priority.

The U. F. places before the people the following programme :

Administration :

1. The Government of the United Front stands for a clean and honest administration. It will ensure efficiency, economy and impartiality in the administration. A State Administrative Reforms Committee will be set up to report on the steps to be taken for speedy implementation of government decisions and for dealing with people's grievances.

It will endeavour to change the rules governing the present services of I. C. S., I. A. S. and I. P. S. cadres with a view to maintain effective control of the State Government over them. It will also take steps to change the existing Police code so that it may not be used against the rights and interests of the people. The Jail Code will also be suitably amended.

Tribunal Against Corruption :

2. The U. F. Government will fight corruption and nepotism in official and non-official spheres.

It will set up a Tribunal to investigate into complaints of corruption, nepotism, jobbery and such other misconduct of ministers, high officials and of political leaders during the 20

years of Congress rule and during the PDF-Congress rule.

If any complaint be received against any minister, high official or leader for their conduct during the rule of the U. F. it will be enquired into.

Any complaint from the people in this connection shall be taken into cognizance and properly dealt with.

Food Production, Agriculture and Irrigation :

3. (a) The U. F. Government will take all possible steps to increase food production and make attempts to proceed towards self-sufficiency in food, and for this, it will provide necessary facilities to cultivators through supply of fertilisers, seeds, pesticides and improved live-stock etc. It will try to expand agricultural credit, and press the Centre for nationalisation of banks and general insurance. It will try to ensure reasonable prices and proper marketing facilities for agricultural products. It will take steps to start jute buffer stock under the State with remunerative price to jute-growers. It will reclaim all cultivable waste land and unnecessary encroachment on agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes will not be permitted. Effective measures will be taken against soil erosion.

Attempts will be made to modernise agriculture and to introduce multiple cropping.

(b) The U. F. Government will take all possible steps to bring more land under irrigation, and for this elaborate schemes of small, medium and lift irrigation will be undertaken, and derelict tanks and reservoirs will be reconditioned and put to use. It will seek to take effective measures for flood control and drainage.

(c) The U. F. Government will pay due attention to preservation of forests. It will look to the legitimate interests of people who live in forest areas and depend on forests for their livelihood.

(d) The U. F. Government will develop poultry-farming and animal husbandry.



It will take steps for reorganisation of Greater Calcutta Milk Supply Scheme, and sponsor such schemes in other parts of the state.

Food Policy :

4. (a) The U. F. Government will introduce state monopoly in whole-sale paddy and rice trade, and impose suitable control over the entire trade in foodgrains.

It will adopt a policy which will prevent hoarding by big owners and hoarders, secure adequate procurement and ensure equitable distribution. This policy will be based on : (a) procurement of surplus stock of all big-owners, levy being imposed on producers having 7 or more acres of irrigated and 10 or more of non-irrigated land; The hill area of Darjeeling district being an area of extremely low yield and high cost of cultivation, shall be exempted from the perview of levy. (c) ban on purchase by rice-mills from open market - they are to work with Government-Procured paddy; (d) control of husking and chira mills; (e) Keeping of a portion of procured paddy/rice (at least 30% in surplus areas, and 100% in deficit areas) in the localities where actual procurement work is done; (f) supply of modified ration to other areas step by step; and (g) distribution of essential commodities at reasonable prices.

It will take strong action against profiteers, hoarders and black-marketeers through preventive detention and through legislation for imprisonment, fine etc. It will also ask for powers to confiscate property in such cases.

It will exert effective pressure upon the Centre for meeting the food deficit of the State.

(b) The U. F. Government will take steps to control prices of essential commodities and it will set up a Statutory Price Commission for fixation of prices of industrial and agricultural products.

(c) The U. F. Government will take adequate measures for relief in rural areas including gratuitous and text relief works.

It will try to get the existing rules and regulations regarding famine relief and other relief modified so that the Centre bears its due share of responsibility.

Land Reforms :

5. The U. F. Government will undertake a thorough programme of Land reforms so as to ensure : (a) suitable amendments to the present Estates Acquisition and Land Reforms' Act in the interests of the peasantry; (b) exemption of Land Revenue for peasants holding not more than 3 acres of land; (c) detection, recovery and distribution of all "Benami" land held in excess of ceiling; (d) acquisition of unutilised land in plantation; bringing of tank-fisheries, land comprised in orchards, dairy, poultry etc. , now excluded from the operation of land ceiling, under E.A. Act; (e) distribution of surplus and 'Khas' land among landless and poor peasants on a permanent basis; (f) speedy payments of compensation to small intermediaries; (g) hereditary right of sharecroppers to cultivate 'Barga' land; (h) suspension for three years of eviction of sharecroppers from land pending comprehensive legislation; free distribution of land up to 5 cottas for dwelling houses in rural areas to those who have no homestead; tenancy rights of homestead land up to 5 cottas to those who are in occupation without such right and who have no other homestead; removal of jurisdiction of civil courts in matters concerning ceiling, malafide transfers, vested land etc. and setting up of special land tribunals to deal with these matters; (k) a new survey of land for the purpose of settlement and cancellation of all malafide records made in the past; (l) moratorium on four year old existing debts of peasants holding land up to 3 acres to the Government and settlement of other debts and (m) return of land to the original sellers sold due to distress.

The scheme of reforms for the hill areas of Darjeeling district however to be suitably modified due to special features of the area.

It will help the peasants in their struggle for detection recovery, acquisition and distribution of 'Benami' land and the realisation of other legitimate democratic demands.

Limitations on Urban Property :

6. The U. F. Government will take suitable steps against concentration of wealth and possession of unlimited land and housing property in urban areas.

Tenants' Right :

7. The U. F. Government will give tenancy rights to 'thika' tenants in Calcutta and Howrah.

West Bengal premises Tenancy Act will be suitably amended to give reasonable protection to tenants, and obviate other difficulties which have arisen in the operation of the Act.

Industries :

8. The U. F. Government will take all possible steps to foster and promote various categories of industries, specially cottage, small and medium industries and commerce, calculated to serve the people honestly and efficiently. Attempts will be made to set up more agro-industries in rural areas.

It will exert pressure on the Centre for securing licences, finance and raw materials etc. for industries in the State.

It will take effective steps to maintain peace in industry.

Co-operative :

9. The U. F. Government will encourage development of co-operative. Attempts will be made to set up more co-operative societies, of producers as well as consumers, for the purpose of increasing agricultural production, development of small industries, supply of credit, and control of prices of essential commodities.

Education :

10. The U. F. Government will take determined steps to remove chaos from the field of education, and build up a sound integrated and coherent system of education; and, with this end

in view it will : (a) Introduce mother tongue as the medium of Instruction up to the highest level. (b) introduce free and compulsory education up to class IV and to cover those areas which are still uncovered by primary schools, (c) make education free up to class VIII; (d) remove the existing disparities between the primary schools in rural and urban areas in matters of management, standards and service conditions of teachers; (e) enforce a new and comprehensive primary Education Act; (f) abolish the present District School Boards, and set up, in their place, new boards on a democratic basis; (g) reform the present Board of Secondary Education; (h) democratise management of universities; (i) increase salary and improve service conditions of all categories of teachers and non teaching staff and give them security of service; (j) ensure regular payment of dues to teachers and non-teaching staff; (k) extend facilities of training; (l) tackle the problem of admission of students by starting new institutions and introducing more shifts in the existing ones; (m) change the present examination system; (n) ban entry of police in educational institutions without previous permission of the head of the institution; (o) undertake measures of students and youth welfare; (p) develop co-operation between students, teachers and administration; (q) promote literature, fine arts, sports and physical education, and cultural activities; and (r) set up a stadium in Calcutta.

#### Health :

11. The U. F. Government will endeavour to extend facilities of health services and medical education, and more towards nationalisation of health services.

It will take steps to ensure better management of the hospitals; and remove the grievances of the public in this respect.

It will take effective steps to ensure supply of adequate drinking water through the State.

Housing :

12. The U. F. Government will try to provide more housing facilities in both urban and rural areas for the people of low and middle income groups at cheap rates, and housing co-operative societies will be encouraged.

Rehabilitation :

The displaced persons from East Pakistan demand particular attention and the U. F. Government will make efforts to rehabilitate them so as to enable all of them to take their rightful place as full-fledged citizens of India with opportunities for housing, education and employment.

The centre will be moved to recognise the persons who have been forced to have Indian enclaves within the territory of East Pakistan, and have come over to the mainland of India as refugees for the purposes of relief and rehabilitation.

The U. F. Government will put pressure on the Central Government for adequate provision of finance required for the full implementation of its rehabilitation schemes.

Labour :

The U. F. Government will help the workers in their struggle for (a) living wages; (b) unemployment benefits, (c) adequate bonus necessary modification of the Bonus Act; and (d) preventing retrenchment, rationalisation and automation.

The U. F. Government will amend the existing labour laws, wherever necessary, to protect the interests of the working people. It will legislate for (a) punishment of employers declaring closure with a malafide intention; (b) abolition of contract and casual labour; (c) recognition of trade unions - compulsory recognition of union where there is one union; In case where there are more than one union, recognition to the most representative one determined by secret ballot every two years subject to the right of representation by other unrecognised unions;

(d) payment of wages for lock-out period 50% to be paid during pendency of lock-out; (e) payment of p. c. wages to workers whose services have been terminated or who have been rendered or suspended or dismissed on charges of misconduct etc. (f) compulsory attendance of employers and employees in conciliation proceedings and (g) suitable punishment for default in depositing employers' contribution towards Provident Fund. It will take steps to amend Employment Standing Orders for ensuring rights of workmen for improving conciliation machinery and procedures etc. It will take steps for reorganisation of the E. S. I. Scheme. It will recognise the trade union rights of all categories of government employees and it will take particular steps for thorough revision of Government servants conduct Rules in the interest of the employees.

15. The U. F. Government will take effective steps to ensure minimum wages to agricultural labourer through-out the State, more employment for them and recognition of agricultural labourers employed in State farms as regular workers.

Unemployment Benefits and Old Age Pensions :

16. The U. F. Government will take all possible steps to create employment opportunities both in urban and rural areas. It will endeavour to introduce unemployment allowance.

It will extend the scope and increase the payment of old-age pensions.

The persons who have fought and suffered for the independence of the country will be looked into in their old age and infirmity. The U. F. Government will give them due honour.

Separation of Judiciary :

17. The U. F. Government will complete the work of separation of the judiciary from the executive and take steps for simplifying the procedure to avoid delay in disposing cases before the courts of law.

Local Self- Government :

18. The U. F. Government will introduce progressive change in the present system of local self government and democratic Municipalities and Panchayat bodies, and give them more power and finance with a view to ensure their proper functioning.

Minorities :

19. The U. F. Government will protect the rights and interests of the minority communities. It will safeguard their right to follow their faith, preserve their special culture and language and will provide them with due protection against distrust, disability and handicaps - social, economic and educational as guaranteed in the Constitution.

Schedules Castes and Tribes

20. The U. F. Government will pay special attention to and improve the conditions of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other backward sections of the people.

Unity of the People

21. It will combat communalism, provincialism, casteism, linguistic fanaticism, and such other evils that injure the unity of the people and affect the integrity of the nation.

Women

22. The special problems of women will receive due consideration from the U. F. Government. Attempts will be made to expand the facilities of education and training for women, more jobs specially suited for them will be created.

Special Attention to Certain Areas and Projects

23. The problems of Calcutta as also of under developed regions, e. g. Purulia, the Sundarbans, and parts of North Bengal will receive special attention, speedy and proper implementation of Farakka and Haldia Projects will be pressed for.

Bengali & Nepali as official Languages

24. The U. F. Government will take steps for immediate implementation of the resolution adopted unanimously by the

West Bengal State Legislature to make Bengali the official language of this State and Nepali the regional language of Darjeeling hill areas.

It will press the claim for conducting the work of courts up to the High Court in Bengali (and Nepali in Darjeeling hill areas).

#### Memorials to Martyrs and Removal of Relics of Imperialism.

25. (a) The U. F. Government will set up suitable memorials for the martyrs of national liberation movement, August Revolution, I. N. A. and also of food movement and other democratic mass movements.

It will ask for the proper preservation of the Cellular Jail in Andaman Island as memorial to fighters for freedom.

(b) The U. F. Government will remove all statues of former British rulers and other relics of foreign rule from Calcutta and other places.

#### Peace and Security for the People

26. The U. F. Government will protect the people against all anti-social and criminal activities and take stern action against anti-social elements.

#### Berubari

27. The question of Berubari will be taken up with the Union Government.

#### Sovereignty of the Country

28. The U. F. Government will do every thing for the preservation and strengthening of the sovereignty of the country.

#### Civil Liberties

29. The U. F. Government will respect and defend fundamental civil rights. It will not use Preventive Detention Act against workers and peasants struggle and other democratic movements. Police will not be used against any democratic movement. It will institute enquiries into police excesses after the dismissal



of U. F. Ministry, and withdraw all cases in connection with the movement against the dismissal of U. F. Government and other democratic movements. It will take steps for the release of all political prisoners. It will put pressure on the Centre to repeal undemocratic Maintenance of Essential Services Act, etc.

#### Popular Committees

30. The U. F. Government will take steps to form popular committees at different levels with representatives of political parties, trade unions, peasants' organisations, other mass organisations and prominent individuals for development of people's cooperation with the efforts of the Government and proper implementation of the Government decisions.

#### Abolition of Upper House

31. The U. F. Government will take initiative for the abolition of Upper House of the State Legislature.

#### Changes in the Constitution

32. The U. F. Government will work for changing those articles of the constitution which hinder the effective implementation of the minimum programme of the United Front. It will strive in particular for a change in the Constitution in the sphere of Centre-State relations in order to secure more autonomy and powers for the states.

(ii) Amendment of the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India.

The United Front shall advocate through redrafting of the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India so as to include and indicate status and use of other important languages used by different sections of the people such as Nepali.

(iii) The United Front shall advocate extension of provisions of autonomous councils in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to the village areas of Darjeeling District and further expansion of the powers of such district councils limiting the powers of the Governor.

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GLOSSARY

Bundh	Demonstration
Charka	Spinning-wheel
Crore	One crore = 10 millions
Godown	Warehouse
Guru	Teacher of spiritual matters
Jotedar	Landholder of affluent means; also used sometimes to refer to money-lenders.
Kisan	Peasant
Lathi	Long bamboo stick carried by Indian police
Maund	About 25 lbs.
Quintal	100 kilograms
Swadeshi	Goods made in one's own country
Thana	Small administrative unit

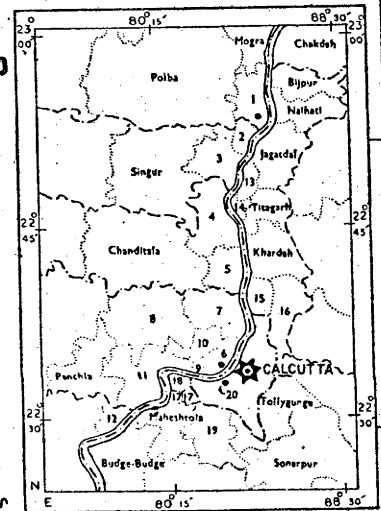
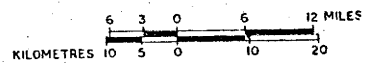
# WEST BENGAL

## ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

### 1961

	INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
	STATE BOUNDARY
	DISTRICT BOUNDARY
	SUBDIVISION BOUNDARY
	POLICE STATION BOUNDARY
	STATE CAPITAL
	DISTRICT HEADQUARTER

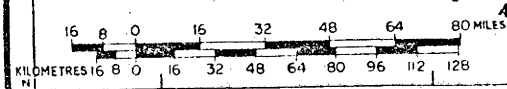
#### CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION



#### KEY TO POLICE STATIONS

- |                         |               |                              |              |
|-------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>HOOGHLY DISTRICT</b> |               | <b>24. PARGANAS DISTRICT</b> |              |
| 1                       | CHINSURAH     | 13                           | Neapara      |
| 2                       | CHANDERNAGORE | 14                           | BARRACKPORE  |
| 3                       | Bhadreswar    | 15                           | Baranagar    |
| 4                       | SEAKPORE      | 16                           | Dum Dum      |
| 5                       | Uttarpara     | 17                           | Metiabruz    |
|                         |               | 18                           | Garden Reach |
| <b>HOWRAH DISTRICT</b>  |               | 19                           | Behala       |
| 6                       | HOWRAH CITY   | 20                           | ALIPORE      |
| 7                       | Bally         |                              |              |
| 8                       | Domepur       |                              |              |
| 9                       | Sibpur        |                              |              |
| 10                      | Jagicha       |                              |              |
| 11                      | Sankrail      |                              |              |
| 12                      | Bewra         |                              |              |

Notes:  
(i) Police Stations in the Cities of Calcutta and Howrah have not been shown separately.  
(ii) In 24. Parganas adjustments have been made for Notification No. 3490 PI, dated 25.8.62.

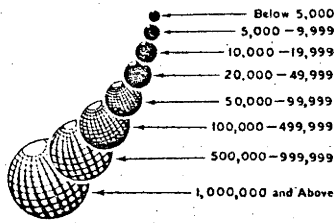


Source : Government of India, Census of India 1961, Vol. XVI, Part 1-A, between pp. 76-77.

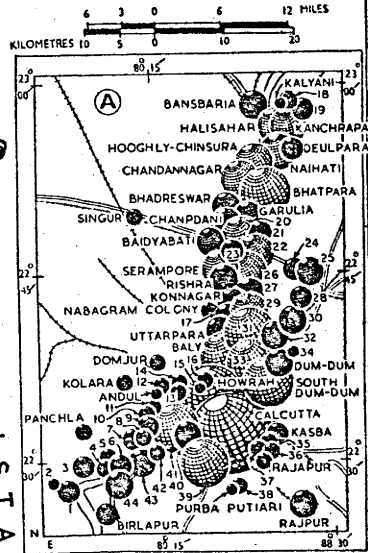
# WEST BENGAL

## TOWNS, 1961

TOWNS WITH POPULATION, 1961

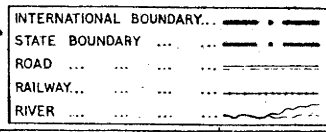


CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION

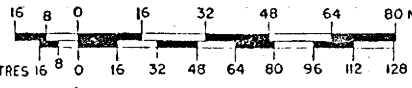


KEY TO INSET

- |                                     |                           |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 ULUBERIA                          | 23 BARRACKPUR CANTONMENT  |
| 2 BANITABALA                        | 24 NABAPALLY              |
| 3 CHENGAIL                          | 25 BARASAT                |
| 4 BAURIA                            | 26 TITAGAR                |
| 5 BURIKHALI                         | 27 KHANDAMA               |
| 6 FORT GLOSTER                      | 28 MADHYAMGRAM            |
| 7 SARENGA                           | 29 PANIHATI               |
| 8 MANIKPUR                          | 30 NEW BARRACKPUR COLONY  |
| 9 SANKRAIL                          | 31 KAMARHATI              |
| 10 BANPUR                           | 32 NORTH DUM-DUM          |
| 11 JHORHAT                          | 33 BARANAGAR              |
| 12 MAHIARI                          | 34 DUM-DUM AERODROME AREA |
| 13 UNSANI                           | 35 GARFA                  |
| 14 NIBRA                            | 36 SANTOSHPUR             |
| 15 JAGACHHA                         | 37 JADABPUR               |
| 16 SANTRAGACHHI                     | 38 BANSDRONI              |
| 17 KOTRANG                          | 39 SOUTH SUBURBAN COLONY  |
| 18 KATAGANJ & GOKULPUR GOVT. COLONY | 40 PANCHR                 |
| 19 GAYESPUR GOVT. COLONY            | 41 GARDEN REACH           |
| 20 NORTH BARRACKPUR                 | 42 BATANAGAR              |
| 21 ICHHAPUR DEFENCE ESTATE          | 43 NANGI                  |
| 22 BARRACKPUR                       | 44 BUDGE-BUDGE            |



B Birbhum  
C Cooch Behar  
E East Pakistan



Prepared at the Office of the Superintendent of Census Operations, West Bengal.

Source : Government of India, Census of India 1961, Vol. XVI, Part 1-A, between pp. 76-77.