

MANIFESTO

of the

Indian People's Front

with
POSTSCRIPT



**RALLY WITH THE FORCES OF REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY FOR A
UNITED, DEMOCRATIC, PROSPEROUS INDIA**

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*(Adopted at the Second National Conference, Calcutta,
4—6 November, 1984)*

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MANIFESTO

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At present our country is passing through a political turmoil. The Congress (I) government is promulgating one black law after another and is relying more and more on the bureaucracy and armed forces. Brazen corruption of the top brass, high-handed repression by the state machinery and total deprivation for common people have become the three pillars on which rests our parliamentary democracy. State repression has been stepped up since the latter part of the 60s and was carried to ignominious proportions during the period of Emergency in 1975-76 when all democratic rights were brutally throttled and the parameters of repression extended to cover the widest range of population. Subsequently the Emergency was withdrawn, but ever since Mrs. Gandhi's return to power in 1980 the process has been resumed all over again. What then are the main lessons to be drawn ?

1. The Emergency as well as all the subsequent black laws that snatch all democratic rights of our people including the very right to life have all been enforced constitutionally. This totally exposes the hypocrisy of our so-called democratic constitution. The civil liberties and fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution are hedged around with provisions that ensure that these can only be effectively enjoyed by the possessing classes. Each paragraph of the constitution carries its own antithesis, the freedom proposed in the Articles is nullified by the footnotes.

2. With the parliamentary institutions becoming ineffective and the judiciary turning powerless, all the usual channels of protest are getting blocked. This has made the parliamentary opposition simply irrelevant. It has proved incapable of launching any powerful people's movement and instead confines itself to

shouting and walk-outs in parliaments, organising symbolic bandhs, and meeting occasionally in conclaves in fruitless efforts to evolve a common strategy for the general election.

3. Whereas in appearance people are ruled by those elected by the people themselves, through a parliament, for all practical purposes real power is concentrated in the hands of the bureaucratic and repressive machinery of the state, which is a legacy of the Raj. Victory in elections is determined by money and muscle-power and by rousing the basest passions among our people through an unbridled propaganda of communalism, casteism, provincialism and all sorts of obscurantism. Governments are formed and toppled by purchasing elected representatives and exercising the power of the Governor who is an appointed and not elected authority. Universal suffrage and representative institutions, otherwise symbolic of progress in human history, have been degraded in our country to serve retrogressive social ends. Conditions are thus created for the emergence of a dictator surrounded by sycophants and commanding an army of the dregs of society, a dictator projected as the saviour of the country-Mrs Gandhi was in fact projected as reincarnation of Goddess Durga. And dynastic succession is sought to be passed off as a legitimate principle. Under the garb of modern bourgeois democracy, this is actually nothing but a feudal autocracy.

4. Indian bureaucracy is a mean and brutal form of centralisation, co existing with its opposite, feudalism. Being weak and dependent upon imperialism, and always threatened by popular challenges from below, the Indian bourgeoisie tries to achieve centralisation of political power more by using the bureaucracy and armed forces than through development of economic and social power.

In the guise of populist slogans, we find, therefore, growing deprivation of the people. In the name of socialism we find a mixed economy based on an alliance between the private and public sectors, between big monopoly houses and big bureaucrats of public institutions. National planning, green revolution, industrialisation, launching of rockets and satellites are

supplemented with survivals of feudalism over the vast countryside where old and new landlords, kulaks, anti-people officials and unscrupulous merchants hold sway. In the name of self-reliance we find abject dependence on multinationals, IMF, World Bank and the so-called "socialist aid". In the place of scientific temper we find resurgence of barbarous caste war, religious fundamentalism and all sorts of parochial ideas. Instead of strengthening of national unity we find the rise of regionalism and separatism.

In such a social set-up, invariably the state bureaucracy comes to play the prominent role. And the more the crisis deepens, the more the ruling classes resort to extra-parliamentary methods.

5. India being a vast country with uneven development, the question of share of power between the Centre and the States has its natural importance. Right after 1947, Congress rulers employed repressive measures against the struggles of the people, particularly those led by Communist, Socialist and other democratic forces. In 1959, the first non-Congress government in Kerala was toppled. However, as there were powerful local bosses at the helm of the Congress in the states, initially the party could maintain a sort of consensus on the question of Centre-State relations.

With the deepening of the economic crisis, rising allocation of resources to the defence sector for the purpose of raising a strong army and paramilitary force (to get public sanction, the rulers day and night cry themselves hoarse about threats from Pakistan, China and other unspecified foreign forces) and further centralisation of the economy from above, the central leadership of the Congress began to get rid of the powerful local bosses (Kamraj Plan). The process was carried to an extreme with Indira Gandhi's rise in the Congress hierarchy. Chief Ministers of states were reduced to mere puppets drawing their entire strength from the supreme leader who came to be exalted as a demi-god.

Three processes went on simultaneously : (1) stepping up repression on common people through enhanced power to the

police and bureaucracy, (2) toppling non-Congress (I) governments under this or that pretext, and (3) strengthening the authority of the supreme leader at the expense of the erstwhile powerful local bosses. In short, this has been the story of the rise of the present autocratic regime.

6. However in a vast country like ours where interests of various imperialist power are involved and there exist serious differences and divisions among various categories of ruling classes, this process cannot be a smooth one. The removal of the powerful local bosses from the Congress may have been easy, but since the states have their objective demands soon there emerged regional forces with powerful leaders. From Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in south to Kashmir in the north, and from Punjab in the north-west to Assam and Sikkim in the north-east, these parties became an all India phenomenon; and in many states they went on to capture power by defeating the Congress. National parties gaining power in states like Karnataka, West Bengal and Tripura also decided to throw in their lot with the regional forces, demanding more power to the states.

In spite of assembling supper-sycophants around Mrs. Gandhi, dissidence within the Congress continued to grow. Persons like Menaka Gandhi and Jagannath Mishra who owed allegiance to the Sanjay brigade have also started creating trouble and this trend is very much on the rise.

In such a situation, the mean and brutal form of centralisation as has been in force in India logically demands that all power be concentrated in the hands of an individual dictator, who will enjoy the full backing of the armed forces and will run the country through the bureaucracy. This process has already been initiated most glaringly in Punjab and it is, therefore, no accident that the slogan of a Presidential form of government is up in the air.

7. In the context of these ominous signals, the slogans of parliamentary battles and more power to the states and the politics of using the limited power of state governments to give

some token relief to the people and important concessions to domestic and foreign capitalists—as are hallmarks of the parliamentary opposition of both the left and right varieties—are simply betrayal of the people's democratic struggles. Instead of raising the people's fighting and democratic consciousness, such slogans go to stifle their revolutionary energy in the long run. This fact is most evident in West Bengal and Tripura where the CPI(M) with all its rhetoric is constantly losing its mass base and none other than the Congress (I) is getting strengthened in the process.

8. The Indian people are brave and sacrificing. Everywhere they are rising in protest against repression. Led by communist revolutionaries and other democratic forces, peasants in many parts of the country are up in arms. Workers, whether in textiles, collieries, dockyards or other fields are fighting bitter struggles, increasingly class solidarity at an all India level. Other sections of labouring people, students, intelligentsia, oppressed nationalities, women, all are rising in struggles. Civil liberty movement has also got a new fillip.

Still what is lacking is the unification of all revolutionary and democratic forces at an all India level, what is lacking is an all India political centre, a vibrant, live centre having deep roots among the people, a centre that enjoys the confidence of the masses, is strong and full of creative energy.

It was precisely to fulfil this gap the Indian People's Front was built in Delhi two years ago by some 250 revolutionary and militant organisations spread all over the country.

As its basic goal, IPF strives to develop a people's government on the basis of democratisation of the entire state system. Through dismantling the old state system and relying on the might of the people, IPF envisages the convocation of a national constituent assembly which will prepare a genuinely democratic people's constitution vesting full authority and strength in the people to develop a new democratic society in India. On its own, IPF prefers the road of peaceful struggles, but what road the masses will ultimately be forced to take depends on the

autocratic government. And one thing is certain : IPF will always be at the head of people's struggle.

In its programme, IPF accords primary importance to the question of political liberty. IPF demands repeal of all black laws and abolition of all institutions which curb the freedom of speech, conscience, assembly and the press and the right to form associations and launch strikes.

IPF stands for autonomy down from state level to lower levels and for real and full freedom to the oppressed nationalities. And on this basis it also stands for safeguarding and developing national unity.

IPF stands for transfer of land to the peasants and it resolutely supports every revolutionary measure of the peasantry to take possession of the entire land. It will render all possible help to develop revolutionary peasant associations. Besides demanding thoroughgoing land reforms, IPF also supports the struggles of the middle peasantry and capitalist farmers for remunerative prices of their produce and cheaper inputs, against the trio of bureaucracy, landlords and merchants.

IPF stands for urgent measures for curbing capitalist exploitation of workers.

IPF stands for an independent and genuinely non-aligned foreign policy which demands active opposition to imperialists in general and super powers in particular as well as development of closer and friendly relations with countries of the Third World, particularly with our neighbouring countries.

IPF pledges to support with all its might each and every struggle of all sections of the oppressed in any corner of India.

IPF regards religion as a private affair of individuals. Religious societies should have no connection with the governmental authority. No discrimination should be made among citizens on account of religion.

Countrymen, we place before you our manifesto. Now it is up to you to make your choice. On one side you have all the sinister forces of exploitation, oppression and violence ranged

against the people. And here you have an organisation fighting for equal rights of all citizens in the affairs of the state. There we have a union of the exploiters, the wealthy and the police. And here we have a union of the working people, all the vital active forces of the society and all fair-minded intellectuals. Between the two there is the Opposition, corrupt and impotent.

Make your choice. Here is our programme which has long since been put forward by the whole people. We are not trying to impose on you any innovation of ours. We are merely taking initiative to bring about the minimum conditions without which it is impossible to live in India.

We now submit all our decisions and steps to the judgement of our revolutionary people. And we rely solely on the free initiative of the working masses. We are for uniting all revolutionary parties and organisations and we call into our ranks representatives from every group of the population who are willing to fight for freedom, for our programme which guarantees the elementary rights and meets the elementary needs.

POSTSCRIPT

(Adopted at the Third National Conference, Delhi, 20 - 23 March, 1988)

It's A Changing World

As the Twentieth Century draws to a close, a new type of unrest has gripped the world around us. For once, the popular penchant for peace and development seems to be overshadowing the hitherto overriding concern of the rulers for military superiority and domination. The relentless pace of industrial and technological changes keeps the world in a constant flux,

and even the most advanced of nations, capitalist and socialist alike, find themselves hard put to cope with this hectic pace. All seemingly settled equations are getting mercilessly unsettled. The once unquestioned supremacy of the United States is seriously threatened by the rapid strides made by Western Europe and Japan ; the socialist countries are effecting profound internal changes to reestablish their historic relevance ; and the developing countries of the Third World which have all along been made to bear the burden of others' development, are also unmistakably waking up to this new challenge.

Simultaneously, there is a marked and growing determination on the part of the world community not to put up any longer with the last vestiges of colonial subjugation and racist domination, and cases of neo-colonial plunder and hegemonic aggression draw ever louder protests from all over the globe. Of course, the dark designs of war still hover on the horizon and regional and local conflicts do often escalate global tension, but all in all, the entire world appears obsessed with a passionate urge for development and modernisation.

Where Do We Stand in This World ?

Where does India find herself in this rapidly changing world ? A nation of 800 million people, a country with abundant natural resources, a land of ancient civilisation and rich cultural heritage, India is rightly expected to play a leading role in this world-wide long march. The nation, too, is throbbing with an inner urge to put end to its legacy of backwardness. But are we anywhere near fulfilling this expectation ?

On the economic front, our agriculture still depends on the dispensation of nature, green revolution has lost its momentum and even our highest record of agricultural productivity falls far short of the global average. Industrialisation still rests on a narrow internal base, an all-pervasive industrial sickness makes a mockery of modernisation, and despite having a massive contingent of scientific and technological personnel it is the screw-driver technology which con-

tinues to flourish at the cost of indigenous innovations. The poverty-line refuses to come down from its long-standing 50% level, the ranks of jobless keep swelling with each passing day, and large parts of the country are repeatedly haunted by the spectre of famine and starvation.

Simultaneously, the quality of human life too suffers from acute stagnation, while the cultural ethos of the nation exhibits a dangerous decline. A great majority of our people still do not have access to even potable water, not to speak of 'luxuries' like healthcare and housing. Education still remains the preserve of a privileged minority, and left with little opportunities to put their knowledge to any productive use at home the cream of the educated are often found migrating abroad while the country limps along with a heavy burden of illiteracy. The social and cultural atmosphere is vitiated with the communal venom and religious bigotry, and the appeal of reason and intellect lies suppressed under the blinding influence of superstitious beliefs and obscurantist passions. Atrocities on dalits go on unabated, women find themselves at the receiving end of a male-dominated, oppressive social order, and the national and religious minorities have to struggle hard to safeguard their identities. An all-pervasive despair has come to grip the nation's youth, alienation hangs heavy on the mental horizon of the individual, while the family and other social ties are smarting under dehumanising conditions of existence and an acute value-crisis.

Where We Went Wrong ?

It is on the soil of this hard ground reality that we have to wage and win the struggle for progress and prosperity in India. Our effort must address itself squarely to all the existing maladies, it must identify and overcome all the glaring weaknesses and lacunae of our past development efforts, and building on the elements of our inherent strength it must culminate in a total national reawakening and reconstruction. Only then can we make sure that this time we will not miss the bus, but march ahead with all our strength in this global race for peace and progress.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of our development effort so far has been our inability to mobilise—our vast resources and this is true not only of our natural wealth but more so of our human resources. Our people have been treated more as an impediment to progress than as its key weapon. Our democracy has been only representative and not participatory in character, and even our representative institutions have often been reduced to a farce with money and muscle power and caste-and-community considerations governing the political process. Instead of devolution of power down to the grass roots and energetic popular participation and supervision at all levels, development in India has been sought to be achieved through a proliferation of bureaucratic agencies and controls. And naturally, we have failed to replace the lethargy, inertia and fatalistic passivity that struck deep roots among our people under the detrimental influence of a protracted colonial rule by unleashing a counter-wave of popular enthusiasm, initiative and a dynamic action-oriented approach to life.

The negation of the broad majority of people in the development process has obviously had the following two implications—total reliance on the propertied sections, assigning to them the key role as agencies of change and transformation; and a crippling dependence on the developed countries and MNCs for capital and technology. The first has ruled out any radical rupture with the past, and our vital economic lifelines have all been left at the disposal of a relatively small group of big capitalists and big landlords, giving these parasites a free hand to exploit at will the vast masses of direct producers—peasants, agricultural labourers, workers and employers. And the second has prevented us from charting our independent course of development, from evolving a model best suited to our conditions—a model which will revolutionise agriculture basing on the might of the rural poor, and will erect, on this basis, a strong industrial edifice to ensure rapid, all round development. On the contrary, we have borrowed a development model rooted in Western realities which has far from working wonders, played havoc with our human and natural environment. And consequently, while the country

reels under a staggering burden of debt and the masses progressively sink into the mire of poverty and squalor, the big business and big landlords make hay, usurping all the fruits of labour, thanks to the protective umbrella provided by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.

Another major stumbling block on the road to development has been the constant diversion of scarce resources into unproductive channels. The mammoth bureaucracy is a big drain. More so is the huge contingent of military, para-military and police forces. Our wrong and shortsighted foreign policy, especially our erroneous way of dealing with our neighbours, has pushed us into a number of meaningless wars and armed interventions abroad, causing incalculable damage to the cause of development. And even in the absence of actual war conditions, there is no dearth of war propaganda and excuses for war preparations. In fact, over the years the interests of influential sections of the trinity of military top brass, high echelons of bureaucracy and ruling politicians have coalesced with the interests of sections of domestic big business and foreign arms merchants to form a veritable anti-people nexus with a vested interest in tension, conflicts and arms race.

The net result of such a distorted and lopsided process of development has been a duplication of the global North-South or developed-underdeveloped divide within the frontiers of India. In other words, we have two Indias—an elitist India all set to step into the 21st century and a commoners' India lagging way behind, pockets of plenty and advance amid an ocean of poverty and backwardness. And this straightforward rich-poor divide apart, the working of the development process has resulted in so much of unevenness on so many scores that almost every Indian today thinks in terms of two Indias—'our' India and 'their' India. Theories of "India vs Bharat" or "internal colonialism" may be based on somewhat simplistic generalisation, but the great imbalance between industry and agriculture, between urban India and the countryside, between the Centre and the States, between advanced and backward regions, between the majority religious and linguistic community

and minorities, between a group of big and developed nationalities and their small and neglected counterparts is there for everybody to see.

The Need For a Political Alternative

Few would perhaps say they are really happy with this state of affairs and many would want the entire system to be thoroughly overhauled. Yet the old order goes on in our country, primarily because the manifold popular strivings for an alternative path of development and an alternative social order are yet to crystallise into a nationwide mass political movement, stable and powerful enough to inflict the final, decisive defeat on the custodians of the present order.

In fact, there are some forces engaged in voluntary social action, who do not believe in the need to integrate the endeavour for an alternative path of development with the quest for a national political alternative. They gloss over the role of the state machinery in defending the existing social order; and while they do raise their voice against state repression on popular agitations, they grossly underrate and even deny the utmost importance of establishing people's power and control at all levels and carrying out a thoroughgoing democratisation of the entire state structure.

Emphasising the need for such a political alternative does not certainly deny the possibility of some reforms, under the existing set-up, to bring about an improvement in the quality of our social, economic or cultural life. It only means that given a state armed to teeth to crush any popular assertion, a constitution meticulously amended to legalise all sorts of encroachment on the fundamental democratic rights of the masses, a parliament showing increasing indifference, nay contempt, to the popular aspiration for justice and a bureaucracy ever ready with its noose of red tape to strangle all popular initiatives, the scope of such constructive reforms is getting progressively narrowed down. Without the larger perspective of a political alternative, developmental efforts at the grassroots can therefore only end up in a blind alley.

And then there are those on the other extreme who are

all for establishing people's power but shy away from the rigours of a bitter political battle. They call for overthrowing the present state power but do not relate it to the practical world of political parties and governments. Consequently the dedicated efforts they put in to mobilise the masses at the local levels do not carry adequate significance on the national political plane, and the gains of their work are often reaped by their political adversaries. In the name of fighting for the basic and long-term goal, they thus allow the ruling party and its traditional opposition a hegemony over the immediate world of practical politics.

The point is to pursue the long-drawn quest for an alternative system through the immediate political agenda. And given the uninterrupted domination of the Congress party on the Indian political scene for as long as a century and the fact that as the leading spokesman of our freedom movement and later on as the ruling party in independent India, the Congress has been the principal architect and custodian of the present system, the movement for a political alternative must primarily concentrate on putting an end to the Congress rule which has in fact, degenerated into the dictatorial rule of a definite dynasty. And it is here that the movement for alternative has to contend with the whole range of opposition parties and their models of political alternative.

Most of our opposition parties are offshoots of the original Congress party and their linkage with the parental culture of the Congress which has degraded politics to a lucrative profession for all the dregs of our society and reduced organisations into private ventures run on dynastic lines, is quite pronounced. When voted to power, whether at the Centre or in the States, they have hardly given any better account of themselves than the Congress. And about the record of the regional parties, the less said the better. In fact, the political alternatives they peddle have little to do with the ongoing popular agitations and quests for an alternative on diverse fronts of social existence, except paying lip-service to them so as to convert the popular resentment into votes and seats in the Assemblies and Parliament. Divorced from the soil of

mass movements these opposition combinations can only give us *different sets of rulers ruling along the same lines.*

And even the history of Left-led State governments has been primarily a history of vacillations and compromises—they have gone back on most of their professed policies and principles they themselves once upheld through their movements, resigning themselves to *accepting the dominant path as the only possible path.*

The IPF And Its Relevance

And herein lies the room and need for a brave new experiment. An organisation which will combine constructive endeavours below with political initiatives above, which will unite the scattered efforts for an alternative social, political, economic and cultural environment in a common framework, which will integrate the diverse expressions of experiments with an alternative path into a single political stream. The political stream of revolutionary democracy which draws its life-force from the ceaseless strivings of all downtrodden men and women who refuse to remain relegated to the margins of social survival and dare to march ahead to the centrestage of history, to become the master of their own destiny ; from the urge of freedom and creative fulfilment of all those enlightened people with rational outlook who join forces with the exploited and the oppressed ; from the determination of all patriotic Indians who are fighting wholeheartedly for national, reawakening and reconstruction. Which draws ideological inspiration from the whole range of progressive schools of thought and action which strengthen the forces of fundamental change as against the *status quo*, liberation as against bondage, rationality as against superstition, equality as against domination.

This was the essential concept underlying the emergence of the INDIAN PEOPLE'S FRONT as a political movement of the Indian people for their much-awaited second freedom which will fulfil the vision of a united, democratic and prosperous India.

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