

RIGHTIST INDIAN CP LEADER TARGET OF "UNITY" BLOC

After his recent release from one of Nehru's jails, Jyoti Basu was asked at a conference of West Bengal Communist party legislators December 26 to resume his position as Leader of the Communist Group in the Assembly and also Leader of the Opposition. The decision, reported by the Calcutta daily Statesman [December 27] to have been unanimous, ended the temporary arrangement under which Somnath Lahiri functioned as Leader while the regular party leaders served time in prison because of their opposition to the Indian government during the Sino-Indian border dispute.

Instead of at once taking a clear stand in the internal struggle

which has been deepening in the Communist party of India, Basu sought to avoid commitment by raising the banner of "party unity." He "disappointed all major groups in the party in West Bengal," reports the Statesman, "when he refused to commit himself at private meetings with leading members of the different factions."

Basu, however, may have done this as a tactical move. On being let out of prison, he got in touch, it is reported, with Centrist leader E.M.S.Namboodiripad "and proposed that the latter should gather a third force which might help the building of party unity."

This could be interpreted as part of a factional plan that aims at securing the position of strategic balance between the Left Wing and Right Wing. If successful, the plan could lead to the displacement of Rightist leader S.A.Dange, who at present holds a majority in the leadership but only a minority in the rank and file.

Namboodiripad "immediately flew to Delhi and sounded all the Left-wing leaders for an informal conference to try for an unified stand against the Rightists in the party now in control of the party leadership."

The results of this move were so encouraging that Namboodiripad sent an emissary by air December 23 to Calcutta to take Basu and Harekrishna Konar, a Left Wing leader, to Delhi for the conference. They left the next day. One of the purposes of the conference "was to iron out whatever differences were there between the Leftists and the so-called Centrists in the party."

The conference participants appear to have decided to ask the Central Executive Committee of the party to postpone a scheduled January 6 meeting to January 12. It was hoped that by then another Left Wing leader of West Bengal, Promode Dasgupta, would be released from prison. Apparently the bloc of Leftist and Centrist leaders is counting noses in the 31-member body in hope of racking up a majority there against Dange.

Among the issues on which the Left Wing seeks support from the Center is restoration of the West Bengal party leadership as it existed in September 1962 and withdrawal of all disciplinary measures against those members who opposed the Dange leadership. Some fifty leading Communists were either suspended or expelled.

The Left Wing has recently felt some wind in its sails. A considerable electoral success was chalked up at Burdwan, which is its stronghold. This was done without any support either from the national leadership or the official leadership in the state.

When the National Council sent Z.A.Ahmed to address party election rallies there, the local organization kept him "confined under guard at the party commune." When he finally agreed not to try to "sell" the line of the national leadership and to confine himself to merely introducing party candidate Benoy Chowdhury, Left Wing leader P. Rammurthi let Ahmed speak as sixth on the list.