

The Left and the 15th Lok Sabha Elections

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The electoral debacle faced by the left parties in the 15th Lok Sabha elections is due to the fact that the state governments led by the left followed the very same neoliberal policies that the parties opposed and were able to halt at the central level.

In the recently concluded 2009 general elections to the lower house of the Parliament (Lok Sabha), what this author terms the “Social Democratic Left” (SDL henceforth) in India, composed of the Communist Party of India-Marxist – CPI(M), the Communist Party of India (CPI) and a bunch of smaller left wing parties, has witnessed the severest electoral drubbing in a long time. This year, the CPI(M) won a total of only 16 parliamentary seats; compared to its performance in the last general elections in 2004 this is a whopping decline of 27 seats. The CPI, on the other hand, won four seats in 2009, suffering a net decline of six parliamentary seats from its position in 2004. Does this mean that the Indian population has rejected even the mildly progressive and social democratic policies that the SDL tried to argue for at the central level? Is this a mandate for the ruling Congress Party and by extension a mandate for neoliberalism, its pet project since the early 1990s? I think not.

A careful analysis of the results shows that this is a mandate against the SDL but not against social democratic policies; further, just like in 2004 when the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) “shining India” slogan was decisively rejected by the populace, this is a mandate against neoliberalism and for welfare-oriented policies. To the extent that the Congress was pushed by the SDL to partially implement such pro-people policies, it can possibly be interpreted as an indirect endorsement of Congress’ late-in-the day populism. After making a few comments on the national mandate, in this article, I focus my attention on West Bengal, the bastion of the SDL in India and try to understand why the parties led by the CPI(M) got such an electoral drubbing while paradoxically creating grounds for a Congress victory.

To understand the logic behind these assertions we must begin by distinguishing between the mandate and the electoral outcomes: the change in the number of seats won and lost (the electoral outcome) is only a partial, and often imperfect, reflection of the change in the actual level of support political parties enjoy among the people (the mandate); often the particular logic of electoral arithmetic draws a wedge between the mandate of the people and the electoral outcome in terms of seats won or lost. For instance, it is possible for a party to increase its share of votes polled without this leading to any addition to the number of seats won; conversely, it is possible for a party to decrease its share of votes polled without losing in terms of seats. An example of the former is Bahujan Samaj Party’s performance at the national level in 2009; it has emerged as the third largest national party, increasing its share of votes polled from 5.33% in 2004 to 6.17% in 2009, but this has not translated into any appreciable increase in terms of seats. Hence, to understand the structure of the “popular will”, it is necessary to go beyond an analysis of the relative position of political parties in terms of seats won and lost; one needs to study the changes in the shares of votes polled.

Focusing on the share of votes polled is also enough, among other things, to dispel certain misinterpretations of the mandate of the 2009 general elections that seem to have gained wide currency. The first misinterpretation that is gaining ground is the alleged existence of a “wave” in favour of the Congress Party which swept it to power, overcoming the “ubiquitous” current of anti-incumbency observed in Indian politics. Nothing could be farther from the truth as is obvious from a cursory glance at Table 1. Despite having won 206 parliamentary seats, the Congress merely won

Table 1: Share of Votes Polled in India by Major Parties (%)

Party	2004	2009
BJP	22.16	18.80
BSP	5.33	6.17
CPI	1.41	1.43
CPI(M)	5.66	5.33
INC	26.53	28.55
NCP	1.80	2.04

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28.55% of the votes polled in 2009, increasing it by a little less than 2 percentage points from 2004. An overall share of 29% of the total votes polled at the national

Table 2: Share of Votes Polled Going to Congress (%)

	2004	2009	Decrease
Andhra Pradesh	41.56	38.95	2.61
Arunachal Pradesh	9.96	51.11	-41.15
Assam	35.07	34.89	0.18
Bihar	4.49	10.26	-5.77
Goa	29.76	22.6	7.16
Gujarat	43.86	43.38	0.48
Haryana	42.13	41.77	0.36
Himachal Pradesh	51.89	45.61	6.28
Jammu and Kashmir	27.83	24.67	3.16
Karnataka	36.82	37.65	-0.83
Kerala	32.13	40.13	-8
Madhya Pradesh	34.07	40.14	-6.07
Maharashtra	23.77	19.61	4.16
Manipur	14.88	42.96	-28.08
Meghalaya	45.55	44.84	0.71
Nagaland	25.78	29.36	-3.58
Orissa	40.43	32.75	7.68
Punjab	34.17	45.23	-11.06
Rajasthan	41.42	47.19	-5.77
Sikkim	27.43	29.59	-2.16
Tamil Nadu	14.4	15.03	-0.63
Tripura	14.28	30.75	-16.47
Uttar Pradesh	12.04	18.25	-6.21
West Bengal	35.32	44.62	-9.3
Chhattisgarh	40.16	37.31	2.85
Jharkhand	21.44	15.02	6.42
Uttarakhand	38.31	43.13	-4.82

level can hardly be interpreted as a “massive wave”; besides, this overall increase also hides substantial decreases in vote share (and seats) in several important states like Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh as shown in Table 2.

The second misinterpretation that is doing the rounds pertains to the perception that this general election saw the definite demise of regional parties and all federalist tendencies of the Indian populace; the people voted overwhelmingly for national parties, the argument goes, because they want stability. Whether people desire stability or not is a question that cannot be entered into at the moment, but the fact that the populace did not reject regional parties in favour of national parties can be seen by looking, in Table 1, at the share of votes going to the Congress and the BJP taken together: according to provisional figures released by the Election Commission of India, the combined vote share of the Congress and BJP in fact declined from 48.69% in 2004 to 47.35% in 2009. Thus,

the share of votes going to the two main national parties has declined and not increased; so much for the ascendancy – what historian Ramachandra Guha called the “course correction” – of the tendency for centralisation in the Indian polity.¹

SDI Performance: National Level

How did the SDI perform in terms of the share of votes polled? At the national level, the CPI(M) lost only marginally in terms of the share of votes polled that it was able to garner for itself, which declined from 5.66% in 2004 to 5.33% this year; the CPI, on the other hand, gained marginally at the national level, increasing its share of votes from 1.41 to 1.43%. Thus, going by these national figures, there is no evidence of any nationwide trend against the “social democrats”; there is no evidence of any trend against their opposition, however feeble, to the neoliberal policies of the UPA-led central government.

Those who want to interpret the current debacle of the “social democrats” as a national mandate for “economic reforms” and against progressive economic and social policies need to rethink their arguments; the evidence does not support such an argument. In fact, as I will argue below, if there can at all be discerned any “wave” in favour of the Congress in the mandate it is largely a “wave” against neoliberal economic policies and not the other way

round as many pro-establishment analysts are making it out to be.

But the national level figures hide many interesting state-level variations; hence we must also look at state-level data to get a complete picture. There is another reason why we need to supplement national level with state-level analysis: since the SDI is prominent only in the three states of Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal, the national figures are not very relevant to assessing the electoral prospects of the SDI. Thus, we must look at state-level data for Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal to understand the sharp change in the electoral performance of the SDI in India and draw conclusions about its continued relevance, or otherwise, in the Indian polity.

State Level Performance

How did the SDI perform in the different states? Three tendencies can be observed in the data summarised in Table 3.² First, the SDI managed to increase its vote share in a few states: Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Apart from Manipur, of course, the total vote share of the SDI in these states remains insignificant; hence, the increase in the vote share did not even remotely translate into changes in seats. Second, the SDI lost its share of votes polled in a large number of states: Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir,

Table 3: Share of Votes Polled in Various States Going to the Left Front

	2004			2009			Vote Share in 2009 as a Ratio of 2004
	CPI(M)	CPI	Total (LF)	CPI(M)	CPI	Total (LF)	
Andhra Pradesh	1.04	1.34	2.38	1.27	1.58	2.85	1.2
Assam	0.66	1.66	2.32	0.7	0.92	1.62	0.7
Bihar	0.77	1.17	1.94	0.51	1.42	1.93	0.99
Goa		2.17	2.17		2.34	2.34	1.08
Gujarat	0.11		0.11	0.19	0.09	0.28	2.55
Jammu and Kashmir	0.82		0.82	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.78
Kerala	31.52	7.89	39.41	30.48	7.44	37.92	0.96
Madhya Pradesh	0.05	0.24	0.29	0.03	0.38	0.41	1.41
Maharashtra	0.72	0.05	0.77	0.53	0.11	0.64	0.83
Manipur		10.11	10.11		14.93	14.93	1.48
Punjab	1.81	2.55	4.36	0.14	0.33	0.47	0.11
Rajasthan	0.51	0.37	0.88	1.26	0.26	1.52	1.73
Tamil Nadu	2.87	2.97	5.84	2.2	2.85	5.05	0.86
Tripura	68.8		68.8	61.69		61.69	0.9
Uttar Pradesh	0.02	0.13	0.15	0.02	0.16	0.18	1.2
West Bengal	38.57	4.01	50.72	33.1	3.6	43.3	0.85
Chhattisgarh	0.23	0.43	0.66	0.14	0.92	1.06	1.61
Jharkhand	0.4	3.8	4.2	0.54	1.16	1.7	0.4
Uttarakhand	0.16		0.16	0.18	0.23	0.41	2.56
Andaman and Nicobar	2.71		2.71	4.23		4.23	1.56

Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, West Bengal and Jharkhand. The percentage decline in Punjab and Jharkhand were very large, though that did not affect the reckoning in terms of seats because the SDI did not have seats to start with, i.e., in 2004. On the other hand, the sharp decline in the vote share in Tripura did not translate, fortunately for the SDI, into any decline in seats. Third, the states where the loss of vote share wreaked havoc for the SDI's reckoning in terms of seats were Kerala and West Bengal: in Kerala, the share of votes going to the SDI declined from 39.41% in 2004 to 37.92% in 2009; in West Bengal, the share of votes garnered by the SDI declined from 50.72% in 2004 to 43.3% in 2009.

Let me summarise the evidence presented so far: the SDI's marginal decrease in vote share at the national level was made possible by the offsetting of the decrease in vote share in several states by the increase in others. The fact that this marginal decrease led to such a debacle in terms of seats is driven largely by the fact that the bulk of the decrease in vote share was concentrated in the electorally important states of Kerala and West Bengal whereas the increase in vote share was spread out across states where the SDI is electorally marginal. Thus the state-level distribution of the increase and decrease of vote shares for the SDI turn out to have profound implications in terms of electoral outcomes at the national level.

This, of course, brings us to this important question: why was the bulk of the decrease in vote share for the SDI concentrated in Kerala and West Bengal? The clue to an answer is provided by the fact that both states, Kerala and West Bengal, currently have "social democratic" governments, led by the largest "social democratic" left party in the country, CPI(M). In both states, the governments have, over the past few years, increasingly accepted, adopted and pushed neoliberal economic policies, often in the name of development and industrialisation. A little scrutiny revealed, in every case without fail, that the state government was pushing a particular type of industrialisation: neoliberal, capitalist-led industrialisation.

This led to the emergence of a seemingly paradoxical situation: the SDI opposed,

however feebly, the continued adoption of neoliberal policies at the level of the central government, while the same set of policies were aggressively pursued in the states where they were in power. The debacle of the SDI in the two most electorally important states of Kerala and West Bengal can, therefore, be understood as a strong rejection of this doublespeak and hypocrisy of the SDI. The rejection of the SDI at the level of these two states, moreover, dovetails into the overall mandate in favour of progressive and social democratic policies, and against the neoliberal turn, at the national level. Of course there were other local factors, both in West Bengal and in Kerala that overlaid this broad rejection of the neoliberal turn and turned the mandate decisively against the SDI in both these states. Before we look at some of these factors, especially for West Bengal where the debacle of the SDI was the most stunning, a comment about the so-called national "wave" in favour of the Congress is in order.

Left Helps the Congress

The so-called nationwide "wave" in favour of Congress, if there was one, resulted to a large extent from the slew of populist policies that it adopted, paradoxically pushed towards this by the SDI, over the last few years in office. These include the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the step-up in public investment in agriculture, the debt relief programme for farmers, the Right to Information Act

2005, the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act 2006, the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Bill 2008, the setting up of the Sachar Committee to inquire into the continued marginalisation of Muslims in the country. The Congress encashed the benefits of this populist swing electorally claiming it to be its own policies whereas, in truth, the SDI was largely instrumental in pushing for these policies at the central level. Other such social democratic policies pushed for by the SDI include: opposition to financial sector reforms (pensions, insurance), opposition to outright privatisation of the public sector, privatisation of healthcare and education. These defensive actions by the SDI have partially limited the unbridled power of capital to exploit labour and have provided some relief to the mass of the working people in India. It is, therefore, no surprise that corporate India is exultant at the SDI's drubbing at the hustings in 2009. The stock market in Mumbai went into a tizzy immediately after the results were out and trading had to be stopped for a while to deal with the unprecedented euphoria!³ As many media reports show, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and other business groups have already started preparing their "wish list" of "reforms", by which they mean another round of neoliberal policy assault on the common people – quite unsurprisingly, land reforms do not figure in this wish list of reforms.

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The SDI's ability to counter the Congress claim that the populist thrust was a result of a progressive shift in the party, in reality fiercely opposed by entrenched interests within the Congress, was severely limited by the SDI's de facto record in the states where it was in power: Kerala and West Bengal. Thus, paradoxically, while the SDI was largely responsible for creating the populist shift in the Congress Party and thereby creating a "wave" in its favour, it could not transform this effort into any substantial electoral advantage for itself; and this was largely because of its doublespeak and hypocrisy, saying one thing at the central level and doing exactly the opposite at the state level.

Probably nothing brings out this double-speak and hypocrisy of the SDI better than the NREGA. The NREGA, which provides a guarantee of a minimum of 100 days of work to the rural poor, came into effect on 2 February 2006 in 200 of India's poorest districts. This provision was originally brought by grassroots-level mass movements in Rajasthan and other states in India, and was later adopted and forcefully pushed by the SDI at the central level. While the NREGA has been constantly attacked in the mainstream press as a waste of resources and a useless policy initiative, in reality it has managed to create substantial benefits for the rural proletariat and poor peasants; even though there is still a lot of room for improvement, the NREGA has managed to improve the lives of the rural poor by putting a floor on agricultural wages and assuring some days of employment, both of which resulted in increased rural incomes.⁴

West Bengal: A Closer Look

How did the NREGA fare in West Bengal and Kerala compared to other states? In 2006-07, the person-days of NREGA employment generated per rural household was six in West Bengal and three in Kerala, with both states figuring in the list of the three worst performers. Compared to this, the all-India average was 17 person-days, and Chhattisgarh generated 34, Madhya Pradesh 56, Assam 70 and Rajasthan 77 person-days. A similar picture emerges for the next year too: in 2007-08, West Bengal generated eight person-days and Kerala

six person-days, much below the all-India average of 16 person-days. The dismal performance of the state government led the Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS), a non-party, registered trade union of agricultural workers, to file a public interest litigation in the Calcutta High Court on non-implementation of the 100 days work guarantee scheme in West Bengal.⁵

Coming back to the factors specific to West Bengal that led to this stunning electoral defeat of the SDI, we must complement the story of the state government's surrender to neoliberalism with its misguided arrogance. The utter failure in the implementation of the NREGA went hand-in-hand with other overt neoliberal policy moves: privatisation of healthcare and education, the full-scale assault on the public distribution system, and an aggressive state-sponsored attack on farmers to "acquire" their agricultural land for a neoliberal industrialisation drive. Singur and Nandigram stand as symbols, at the same time, of both this attack by the state on behalf of corporate capital and also of the fierce resistance to this brutality by the poor peasants and landless labourers. The arrogance of the SDI-led state government was in gruesome display during the "recapture" of Nandigram in March 2007, a violent attack on the people opposing forcible land acquisition, and also in the manner it dealt with the case of Rizwanur Rahman. Coming as it does in the background of the dismal conditions of the Muslims in the state, the total insensitivity displayed in the Rizwanur Rahman case increased the ire of the common Muslim population against the SDI-led state government; it is interesting that some of the districts where the SDI performed dismally, like North and South 24 Paraganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, Birbhum, have a relatively high proportion of Muslims. Taken together, all these factors created a massive wave of anger and resentment against the state government and resulted in the unprecedented electoral debacle of the SDI in West Bengal.

Refuting a Spurious Argument

At this point, we need to closely scrutinise an alternative argument that is doing the "social democratic" rounds. This argument, which purports to provide an explanation

of the electoral defeat of the SDI in West Bengal, runs something like this: the Left Front made a great tactical mistake in severing ties with the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) at the centre on the issue of the 123 treaty (nuclear deal)

Table 4: Decrease in LF's Vote Share from 2004 to 2009

Parliamentary Constituency	Vote Share in 2004	Vote Share in 2009	Decrease
Maldaha South	35.37	37.02	-1.65
Maldaha North	40.90	41.25	-0.35
Jalpaiguri	46.02	45.54	0.48
Murshidabad	44.84	43.82	1.02
Balurghat	45.55	44.38	1.17
Asansol	51.08	48.69	2.39
Baharampur	39.87	37.28	2.59
Raiganj	41.20	38.58	2.62
Bangaon	44.88	42.08	2.80
Jangipur	44.34	40.52	3.82
Sreerampur	44.08	40.00	4.08
Alipurduars	45.59	41.22	4.37
Medinipur	51.86	47.29	4.57
Jadavpur	50.28	44.65	5.63
Dum Dum	50.66	44.94	5.72
Ranaghat	47.06	41.25	5.81
Jhargram	62.88	56.89	5.99
Darjeeling	31.41	25.29	6.12
Kolkata South	41.85	35.39	6.46
Coochbehar	51.44	44.66	6.78
Barasat	46.08	38.97	7.11
Tamluk	47.67	40.49	7.18
Krishnanagar	42.51	35.03	7.48
Kanathi	50.33	42.48	7.85
Mathurapur	49.49	41.55	7.94
Kolkata North	48.15	40.05	8.10
Uluberia	49.33	41.12	8.21
Howrah	52.58	44.27	8.31
Basirhat	50.14	40.39	9.75
Hooghly	52.40	42.36	10.04
Bankura	58.43	47.66	10.77
Ghatal	64.30	53.50	10.80
Diamond Harbour	49.98	39.17	10.81
Birbhum	53.14	41.77	11.37
Bardhaman Purba	59.14	47.31	11.83
Barrackpur	54.97	42.84	12.13
Bolpur	62.36	49.91	12.45
Jaynagar	55.36	42.86	12.50
Purulia	56.78	44.13	12.65
Bardhaman-Durgapur	63.62	50.52	13.10
Bishnupur	65.41	51.33	14.08
Arambagh	76.73	54.18	22.55

with the US; this severing of ties with the Congress allowed the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Congress to forge an alliance in West Bengal; this alliance managed to consolidate the anti-Left votes and directly resulted in the electoral drubbing of the SDI in West Bengal.⁶

This argument, if true, would provide some solace to the SDI leadership in India.

By shifting the responsibility of the electoral debacle onto the logic of alliance arithmetic, the SDL would manage to skirt some difficult issues of policy and politics. But alas, the argument does not hold water when confronted with evidence. There is a simple way to determine the validity or otherwise of this, to my mind, spurious argument. For if it were true that the SDL debacle was fuelled mainly by the consolidation of anti-Left votes (because of the Congress-TMC alliance), it would mean the following: the SDL's share of votes polled would remain relatively unchanged between 2004 and 2009. This is a straightforward testable implication of the above argument. What does the evidence say on this?

In Table 4 (p 13), we have summarised data about the vote share of the Left Front (CPI(M), CPI, All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)) at the level of the parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal between the general elections in 2004 and 2009;⁷ a negative decrease is, quite obviously, an increase. As can be seen from Table 4, out of the 42 parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal, the SDL's vote share went down in 40, ranging from 0.48% in Jalpaiguri to a whopping 22.6% in Arambagh. The only two constituencies where the SDL managed to increase their vote share are: Malda North and Malda South; in all the other constituencies its vote share fell between 2004 and 2009. There were 29 constituencies where the share of votes garnered by the SDL fell by more than 5 percentage points, there were 13 constituencies where the vote share fell by more than 10 percentage points and there were nine constituencies where the vote share declined by more than 12 percentage points. Can we, in the face of this overwhelming evidence of a massive anti-SDL wave, still stick to the story of the supposed consolidation of anti-Left votes as the primary reason behind the SDL debacle?

Beyond Elections

There is no denying the fact that the SDL played an important role in halting the juggernaut of neoliberalism in India through its intervention in the formation of the Common Minimum Programme of the UPA; and this was largely possible, given the political situation five years ago, because of the sizeable parliamentary

presence of the SDL at the central level. If nothing, the reaction of corporate India to the electoral debacle of the SDL is proof of the partial efficacy of the SDL's past interventions. But there are, I would submit, at least two serious problems of a strategy that focuses on primarily on electoral politics, as the SDL does.

First, most of its interventions, even though salutary, are at best defensive actions and therefore extremely limited from any long-term left political perspective; the ruling classes set the agenda and move forward with a concrete programme of neoliberal reforms and the SDL reacts to that agenda, it tries to halt the speed of the reforms, tries to win a battle here or there, without in any real sense questioning the logic of the whole move. The logic of which can only be questioned when there is a positive agenda guiding political intervention. In the absence of such a positive political programme, it boiled down to the following: the ruling class ushers in the policy triumvirate of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, and the SDL merely reacts to these. In such a scenario, the best outcome can only be a return to the status quo, not a move forward towards a socialist future. Is it difficult for the SDL to see the inherent and long-term limitations of populism?

This brings me to the second, and related, problem of the SDL strategy. The fact that the communist parties, now part of what I have called the SDL, have lost the political offensive in the context of the class struggle in India also finds reflection in their over-emphasis on electoral politics, to the virtual exclusion of all non-electoral struggles. Over the last two decades, there is not one significant nationwide non-electoral struggle that the SDL initiated or led; all its attention and energy has been fixed towards how to maintain its electoral position in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. More often than not, the SDL has been willing to enter into opportunistic and unprincipled alliances to attain short-term electoral goals, little realising that this opportunism leads to long-term political setbacks. At times it has even gone with the BJP to keep Congress out of power, quickly reversing the logic at the next moment and aligning with the Congress to defend secularism. Caught in these endless electoral antics

and working within a framework whose rules have been set by the ruling classes, the SDL has gradually distanced itself from its programmatic concerns of a peoples democratic revolution. To recover its potency and relevance, the SDL must re-fashion itself by forging links with the rising tide of revolutionary mass movements in India against the neoliberal offensive and overcome its obsession with electoral politics. It is perhaps time for the current SDL leadership to return, at the least, to the prescient analysis of P Sundaraya who had resigned from the general secretaryship and politburo of the CPI(M) in 1976, alarmed at what he called the "revisionist habits" within the party and what later Marxist-Leninists, borrowing a phrase from Lenin, have termed "parliamentary cretinism". Of course if post-poll statements of the SDL bigwigs, like Biman Bose, are anything to go by, they have decided to do exactly the opposite: justify the electoral debacle on external factors, avoid any serious rethinking and continue with elections as the primary focus of SDL politics.

NOTES

- 1 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/world/asia/17india.html?_r=2&scp=5&sq=india%20elections&st=cse
- 2 For all states other than West Bengal, the total vote share of the Left Front (LF) is the sum of the vote shares of the CPI(M) and the CPI; for West Bengal, the vote share of the LF is the sum of the vote share of the CPI(M), CPI, All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP).
- 3 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/19/business/global/19rupee.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=india%20stock%20market&st=cse
- 4 Economist Jean Dreze has been in the forefront of the struggle to make the NREGA a national issue; for details on the implementation of NREGA across states see <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2414/stories/20070727001804100.htm> and <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2604/stories/20090227260410100.htm>
- 5 For details see <http://sanhati.com/news/1168/>
- 6 This argument was recently made, among others, by Vijay Prashad in Counterpunch: <http://www.counterpunch.org/prashad05192009.html>
- 7 What complicated this computation was the fact that there was a parliamentary delimitation in 2008, precisely between the 2004 and 2009 general elections; hence, constituencies changed their names and the assembly segments contained in them; hence constituencies could not be compared between 2004 and 2009 without some adjustments. In the Appendix, I have outlined the method used to make constituencies reasonably comparable between 2004 and 2009; I have used that method to compute the entries in Table 4.

Appendix

All the data in this article come from the following three sources:

- (1) The data for the 2009 Lok Sabha election results came from the Election Commission of India's web site: <http://eci.nic.in/results/>

(2) The data for the 2004 Lok Sabha election results were extracted from the following:

(a) Election Commission of India 2004, *Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha*, Volume 1 (National and State Abstracts and Detailed Results), New Delhi. Available at: <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

(b) Election Commission of India 2004, *Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha*, Volume 3 (Details for Assembly Segments of Parliamentary Constituencies), New Delhi. Available at: <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

(3) The data about the 2008 delimitation came from: Election Commission of India 2004. "Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 2008", available at: <http://www.delhielections.com/2008/01/10/78654/delhi-elections-delimitation-of-lok-sabha-and-assembly-constituencies/index.html>

The main empirical challenge was to find a method to make the constituency level data on vote share reasonably comparable between 2004 and 2009. The 2008 parliamentary and

assembly constituency delimitation complicated the comparison because many of the constituencies changed, in terms of the assembly segments contained in a parliamentary constituency, between 2004 and 2009. Let me take an example.

Parliamentary constituency number 7 was called Malda during the 2004 general elections and was called Maldaha North in 2009. Malda, in 2004, contained the following assembly segments: Habibpur, Araidanga, Maldaha, English Bazar, Manikchak, Suzapur and Kaliachak; Maldaha North, in 2009, contained the following assembly segments: Habibpur, Gazole, Chanchal, Harishchandrapur, Malatipur and Maldaha. Thus, the two parliamentary constituencies with the same number, seven in this example, contained pretty different assembly segments; hence making comparisons by constituency number would be misleading.

To solve this problem of comparability, I used the following two types of information: (a) the assembly segments that make up the 2009 parliamentary constituencies (available from the 2008 delimitation order of the Election Commission);

(b) the vote share of the LF in precisely these assembly segments in the 2004 general elections (available from Volume 3 of the 2004 Lok Sabha election results). Using these two, I computed the vote share of the LF in the 2004 general elections by aggregating results for the assembly segments that make up the 2009 parliamentary constituencies. This gave me comparable vote share figures for the 2004 and 2009 general elections. I have summarised this information in Table 4. More detailed data, i.e., at the assembly segment level, is available from the author upon request.

Two caveats are in order. First, the comparison is still not perfect because there were some assembly segments in 2009 that seemed to be new and there were some assembly segments in 2004 that were no longer there in the 2009 parliamentary constituencies. Going further down one level in terms of disaggregation would probably solve this problem; I leave that as a future research problem. Second, for each parliamentary constituency, I have left out the postal vote cast; since this is a very small percentage of the total votes cast (usually less than 1%), this will not take us very far from the "true" results.