



**Liberation Central Organ of CPI(ML)**

**March 2006**

# **Butcher Bush, Go Back!**

**Tribute to Bhagat Singh**

**AIALA's Second National Conference**

*Review of Rang De Basanti*

**Second Cover**



## **March 18 -19 Global Days of Action**

**New York - Los Angeles - San Francisco - Boston - London - Rome - Jakarta  
- Seoul - and across the globe**

Activists across the globe are mobilizing to take to the streets on the weekend of March 18-19, the third anniversary of the beginning of the criminal war against the Iraq.

As the threat of new war grows, and politicians of both parties in the US demonize and threaten the people of Iran, repeating the same lies used to justify the invasion of Iraq, it becomes clearer that only a massive peoples movement will stop the warmongers. As Democrats compete with Republicans to see who can sound more hawkish, we must take action now to stop the war and prevent any new military actions.

From New Zealand to New York, activists are responding to the growing crisis by planning for massive demonstrations against war and occupation.

A call for actions March 18-19, 2006, to end the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq has received support from international bodies and been turned into specific calls for demonstrations

those days in over a dozen countries and in cities across the United States. Demonstrations on the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq will be held worldwide, as the protests were in the months leading up to the invasion.

The main focus of these protests will be on ending the criminal occupation of Iraq and getting all foreign troops out. At the two gatherings of the Polycentric World Social Forum, in Bamako, Mali, in Africa and in Caracas, Venezuela, there was widespread support for demonstrations on March 18-19, 2006. In Bamako this was expressed through the Bamako Appeal, a document prepared by 100 activists from Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as from Europe and the U.S., and in Caracas it received the thunderous support of thousands of participants at the Assembly of Social Movements that ended the WSF there.

**President Hugo Chavez called for an organization to inspire global anti-imperialist actions; the March 18-19 demonstration can be a first step toward that goal.**

Internationally, TONC has already heard of demonstrations planned in Austria, Britain, Denmark, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Puerto Rico, South Korea, and Turkey. Some will be single national actions, others decentralized demonstrations in various cities throughout the countries. Most actions are calling for an immediate end to the occupation of Iraq, and warn against new threats to Iran, Syria, and also to Venezuela and Bolivia.

With less than six weeks left to mobilize for the protest, the time is NOW to do the mass outreach to campus, community and workplace needed to make these actions both effective and as large as possible.

## EDITORIAL

# Killer Bush Go Back:

### **Saying a Loud No to 'Enlightened' Spinelessness and Bankrupt, Benign Barking**

So, Manmohan Singh wants us to believe that his government's act of siding with the US on two successive votes on Iran in the IAEA is just an expression of "enlightened self-interest"! Not only that, the 'soft-spoken academic-turned-administrator' has also gone on to accuse whoever is opposing his government's decision on this score of indulging in 'minority vote-bank politics'! To use an expression often used by the RSS against Singh's own government, he is simply blaming the voices of opposition as being prompted by considerations of 'Muslim appeasement'! More than merely justifying his government's vote on Iran, the man is trying to use this instance for developing a new doctrine of nationalism: whoever supports his government's blatant pro-American stance is an 'enlightened nationalist', everybody else is an overt or closet communalist, a minority appeaser!

For all the noise it may currently be making on Iran or more precisely on India's N-deal with the US, the BJP can surely have no argument with Singh on this new nomenclature of nationalism. While in power, the NDA had religiously practised this nationalism which

internalises every American dictate or interest as India's own 'enlightened self-interest' and attributes any opposition to, or even deviation from, this grand and 'globalised' nationalism to sheer minority appeasement or vote-bank politics! But what about our 'enlightened communists' who had earlier threatened to take the Iran issue to the people? Comrades Karat and Bardhan have now made it clear that they only want a full discussion in Parliament on the subject, and not even a vote, let alone tabling a no-confidence motion against the UPA government! Media analysts are now left wondering if this 'climbdown' is prompted by the latest decision of China and Russia to back the US-led resolution!

Beyond the possible influence of the Russian and Chinese position, it is also quite likely that the comrades have begun to see some merit in Singh's explanation of 'enlightened self-interest' and concerns about signs of nuclear irresponsibility in India's neighbourhood! This is why they now insist only on a full discussion in Parliament so that there can be an 'enlightened dialogue' before a consensus is possibly created around the UPA government's 'progressive' foreign policy. After all, generations of CPI and CPI(M) leaders have been schooled and trained to assess the Indian ruling classes on the basis of this delightful dichotomy between 'progressive foreign policy and retrograde economic policy'! Apart from this strategic perspective to the classical confusion dogging the Indian parliamentary communists, there is also the long tactical tradition of blowing hot and cold, which has now come to be known as the art of 'biteless or bitefree barking'! The pre-poll revival of the agenda of a 'third front' is only a confirmation of this syndrome.

For the people of India, and especially the inheritors of Bhagat Singh's anti-imperialist legacy, the issue of New Delhi's growing convergence with Washington's global offensive and design, cannot however be a matter of just parliamentary gossip or haggling among the partners and allies of the ruling coalition. More so when on the eve of the March 6 deadline, the head of the American war-machine and pirate-brigade is himself scheduled to visit India. This is the most opportune moment for Bhagat Singh's India to rise in roaring protests and demarcate itself from Manmohan Singh's India Inc. For Manmohan Singh and his cohorts 'enlightened national interest' consists in paying glowing tributes to colonial slavery and celebrating neo-colonial bondage. For the heirs of Bhagat Singh, patriotism demands integrating the international fight against imperialism with the domestic battle against all the Indian retailers and retainers of the Bush brigade. There can certainly be no middle-of-the-road parliamentary partnership between Bhagat Singh's people and Manmohan Singh's cabal.

This coming March we will observe the 75th anniversary of Bhagat Singh's ever-inspiring martyrdom. This coming March we are also scheduled to witness a new low in India's spineless foreign policy when the 'enlightened' rulers of globalised India behave in a manner as though to stake India's 'claim' to becoming the fifty-first state of the United States of America! Let us reject the spinelessness of India's 'enlightened ruling elite' and reaffirm with all our strength the people's spirit of independence, national dignity and anti-imperialism. Let March 2006 witness a grand celebration of this indomitable spirit at every nook and corner of our great country.

## COMMENTARY

# **Nepal's Quest for A Democratic Republic**

**– Political Observer**

Quite predictably, the municipal elections in Nepal have turned out to be a huge farce. We have seen similar farces enacted on a few occasions in India when voter turnout in Assembly elections in states like Assam, Punjab and Kashmir has dropped way below the 'normal'. As part of their 12-point understanding reached last November, seven major political parties of Nepal as well as the Maoists had called for an active boycott of the polls and it proved highly effective. In spite of trying all kinds of intimidating techniques and fraudulent means, the Royal Palace could not inflate the official turnout beyond 20 per cent! King Gyanendra's attempt to claim international political legitimacy even as his regime denies basic democratic rights and civil liberties to the people, keeps major opposition leaders almost permanently under house-arrest and routinely attacks mass demonstrations for democracy, has thus fallen flat - even the US has been compelled to describe the elections as a 'hollow exercise'!

The failure of the municipal polls has left the illegitimate Gyanendra regime further weakened and discredited. The popular movement for restoration of democracy is again gathering momentum and the King's attempt to check the movement by killing pro-democracy activists and putting senior leaders including the CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Nepal under renewed and extended house-arrest is only adding to the people's anger. The growing isolation of the King has also been underlined by the 12-point understanding reached between major political parties including the Nepali Congress and the CPN(UML) and the Maoists who have been waging a major armed struggle for the last ten years. The domestic balance in Nepal is daily tilting against the King and the regime has to rely increasingly on international (read American) support for its survival.

Where does Nepal go from here? The Nepali Maoists who have accumulated considerable military might in the course of their one-decade-long people's war now seem to be positioning themselves for a major political intervention. The first indication came in the form of the 12-point understanding which conspicuously did not mention the word 'republic', but called for abolition of the present "autocratic monarchy" through a "nationwide storm of democratic protests" and holding of elections for the formation of a constituent assembly under the aegis of the UN or some other suitable form of international supervision. The political thinking underlying this charter has now been elaborated by the CPN(M) chief Prachanda himself in a couple of recent interviews.

Prachanda's interviews clearly convey the urgency with which the Nepali Maoists now want to have an effective political say. The understanding reached with the seven parties and the calculated silence regarding the future of monarchy, leaving everything

to the constituent assembly and the people's verdict are all intended to create an immediate political space for the Maoist movement. While combining the military and political aspects, the CPN(M) also expresses its commitment to the multi-party framework and to international mediation. The proposal for suitable international mediation, not only to supervise elections but also to facilitate the dialogue process leading to the formation of an elected constituent assembly, seems to be an anticipatory move to pre-empt any possible US intervention in Nepal. In this context, Prachanda also expresses satisfaction over the positions adopted by India and China with regard to the present situation in Nepal.

The political imagination and initiative of the Nepali Maoists stands in a refreshing contrast to the dogmatic militarism and political bankruptcy of their Indian counterparts. In his interview, Prachanda also provides an example of 'international mediation', when he advises Indian Maoists to subject themselves to political competition while trying to persuade the Indian government that any positive contribution from India to the cause of democracy in Nepal would also go a long way to solve India's own 'Maoist problem'. At a time when Indian foreign policy is locked in a grand 'enlightened convergence' with the global military and political objectives of US imperialism, what positive contribution can New Delhi make to the cause of 'total democracy' in Kathmandu is anybody's guess. We in India must always remain alive to the danger of any kind of imperialist intervention in the region even if the intervention takes on an appearance of 'peaceful mediation'. Have we forgotten the IPKF expedition in Sri Lanka?

Following the failure of the February municipal elections, America's ambassador in Kathmandu, James F. Moriarty has publicly asked the King and the seven political parties to resume negotiations and end the present deadlock. According to Moriarty, only the Maoists have gained from the current stand-off between the parties and the palace (the two pillars of Nepali democracy!) and if the stalemate is not quickly resolved Nepal would only be inviting the spectre of a Maoist victory, a terrorist and totalitarian takeover in American eyes. Does not Moriarty's 'advice' bear a keen resemblance to the kind of 'opinions' that Mr. Mulford is daily offering to us in India? The Mulfords and Moriartys are only acting in a manner that they consider to be the prerogative of American ambassadors in today's world. It is for us, the fighters for sovereignty and democracy in India and Nepal to give a fitting rebuff to this ugly imperialist arrogance.

## **Rightwing Ascendancy in Karnataka**

Karnataka, the most sought after destination of IT-BT industries, has undergone a political shake-up. The dislodging of the Dharam

Singh-led coalition of Congress-JD(S) alliance, the culmination of a series of political developments in the past few months, has clearly exposed the political opportunism of the JD(S) and the bankruptcy of the Congress model of 'secular' alliance. It has once again proved that politicians from the bourgeois centrist camp can hardly be consistent secularists.

Apart from being a pro-communal turn, these developments also mark assertion of dominant castes over Karnataka politics.

Karnataka politics has traditionally been a bastion of the Congress, which always tried to balance all caste forces. Devaraj Urs' impact on the backward class mobilization was tremendous. He kept upper caste domination at bay by relying on the OBC and dalit forces.

The successive governments that followed him have expressed a dominant caste re-assertion. The Assembly election of 2004 gave a fractured result, wherein the JD(S), which had only 4 MLAs earlier, rose to 59 and the Congress was reduced to 64. The resounding victory of the BJP with 79 made it the single biggest party in the Assembly. People rejected the Congress' S. M.

Krishna government on the basis of anti-incumbency and failure in various fronts. His hi-tech gimmicks did not cut much ice with the people. The fall of Krishna has many parallels with the Chandrababu Naidu story of Andhra Pradesh. The success of the BJP in the coastal districts, in urban areas and also in [malnad](#) areas is due to its sustained campaign on communal lines against Muslims. Its attempts to make Baba Budangiri a second Ayodhya partially led to its electoral success. Obviously, the newly elected members of the biggest party were hungry for power and looking for a key coalition partner. The political ally turned out to be Kumaraswamy, one of the sons of Deve Gowda.

The Dharam Singh-led Congress-JD(S) coalition was not even a functional coalition. In the early phase of 20 months of the Congress-led coalition period, the working JD(S) president Kumaraswamy threatened to withdraw support for not expanding the cabinet and Dharam Singh quickly obliged. The drowsy Dharam government was always controlled by Deve Gowda and

his family. Meanwhile, a section of the Congress and the JD(S) were restless in the background of demolition of Kanaka Gopura at the Krishna temple in Udupi. Deputy Chief Minister Mr Siddaramaiah, with his OBC background, was the key rallying point for protest over the issue. It was at this time the OBC section under the leadership of Siddaramaiah tried to assert their rights by organizing conventions of AHINDA (minorities and OBC conglomeration), which was a "non-political" forum. In these conventions, Siddaramaiah was compared to Devaraj Urs and projected as the next Chief Minister of Karnataka. The assertion of the OBC leader was perceived as a political threat by Deve Gowda. In a clever political manipulation, he expelled Siddaramaiah not only from the Deputy Chief Minister post but also from the JD(S) on charges of anti-party activities. Now, Siddaramaiah has formed a new political party AIPJD (All India Progressive Janata Dal) along with few MLAs of dalit and OBC groups. The AHINDA formation posed a threat to the Congress and the JD(S) in the zila parishad and panchayat elections. The fragile coalition of Congress-JD(S) became shaky when the Congress planned not to extend the coalition with the JD(S) to the state and local level and went ahead to share power with Siddaramaiah's AIPJD. Unnerved by these developments, Kumaraswamy not only accused the Congress of humiliating the JD(S) but decided to form a new alliance with the BJP on the slogan of giving a better government harping on "Development" as the key orientation.

Throughout these political manoeuvres, Deve Gowda kept on shedding bogus tears for the adventurism of Kumaraswamy. Deve Gowda was quick to expel Siddaramaiah because of association with AHINDA, an OBC formation, but, on the contrary, but was extremely slow to expel his son for his path-breaking opportunism in joining hands with the communal BJP. Even now, many observers suspect that Deve Gowda is far from being just a hapless onlooker to his son's actions.

The non-Congress electoral politics of Deve Gowda and Siddaramaiah proved fruitful in raising the strength of JD(S) from

4 to 59 in 2004 . Meanwhile, the BJP, which was traditionally a Brahmin-Baniya conglomerate, could draw to its fold Lingayats, and they have now aligned with Okkaligas, a dominant landowning community.

After bringing down the Dharam Singh-led government, Kumaraswamy publicly declared that he did not know the meaning of 'secularism'. He claimed to have searched for its meaning in dictionaries and have consulted many intellectuals, who could not enlighten him on the subject! Principles and ideology do not bother this youngster. On the contrary, the Deputy CM Yediyurappa of BJP said that Hindutva was very much on their agenda.

On swearing in as the Deputy CM, Yediyurappa instructed to remove Ambedkar's photo from his chamber. The dalits and the left and democratic forces took to the streets protesting over the insult to Ambedkar. They are demanding Yediyurappa's resignation and are organizing the mass movements. At this stage, it is clear that the casteist and communal forces have won. Right reaction is going to unfold its fangs. The left and democratic forces should swiftly launch a counter-offensive.

—Dr.V.Lakshminarayana

### **Muslim Census in Armed Forces:**

#### **Endangering Secular Democracy or Promoting It?**

The request by the High Level Committee headed by Justice Sachar for statistics of Muslim representation in the Armed Forces has generated an outcry - by the Army authorities as well as by the BJP-NDA. The hue and cry is that the request amounts to an attempt to communalise the nationalist institution of the Army. Will a census of Muslim/SC-ST/women in the armed forces foster divisive and anti-national sentiment? Or will such records ensure that the nation remains alert about preventing and correcting discriminatory practices in our national institutions?

Let us consider the issues and facts:

The Chief of Army Staff claimed, self-righteously, that the Army recruits purely on merit and does not seek or keep information on the religious origins of soldiers. Is this true? Not quite. The Army does, in fact, collect such information: on the application forms published and issued in the press by the Armed Forces, there *is* a column entitled 'Religion', which means that the Army *does* know and possess records of the religious profile of its soldiers.



Further, the Army continues to maintain certain colonial traditions of regiments based on 'traditional', 'martial' communities: Gorkha Regiment, Sikh Regiment, Rajputana Regiment, etc... Why is this practice not considered 'anti-national' and against the 'nationalist spirit'? The Army itself has often approvingly provided the information that Gorkhas from Nepal constitute 5% of the entire Army. If such information can be maintained and made public about the Gorkhas, who are paradoxically, not even Indian citizens, what is so dangerous about providing information about Muslim representation, of that of SC/STs and women?

Reports about racial discrimination against African-American blacks as well as gender discrimination against women in the US Army abound. Is there evidence that there is similar discrimination on communal lines in the Indian armed forces?

Sheikh Abdullah, the first post-Independence CM of Kashmir, wrote: "I was taken aback when a secret circular came to my attention that directed recruitment officers not to enlist Muslims in the Army...I asked Gen. K.M. Cariappa why Kargil Muslims were not recruited, to which he replied that their loyalty to India was suspect!" (*Atish e Chinar*, Sheikh Abdullah, 1986, cited in Omar Khaledi, *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India*, Three Essays Collective, 2003). Cariappa, a former Army Commander-in-Chief, writing in the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* on Independence Day, 1964, justified ill-feeling by 'a large percentage of the majority' as being "understandable" since Muslim "loyalty seems to be primarily to Pakistan." These prejudices were aired despite ample evidence that Muslim soldiers had fought in large numbers and died in wars against Pakistan.

Did the prejudice against Muslims, and the tendency to suspect their loyalty change after 50 years? Not much. Many Kashmiri Muslims died fighting in the Indian Army, and many Muslim porters too died giving support to the Indian Army in difficult terrain, during the Kargil war of 1999. Despite this, one senior Army officer, Maj. Gen. V. N. Budhwar, "wanted Muslim villagers evicted from the Turtok area along the LOC" in Kargil. (Praveen Swami on the Kargil Conflict, *Frontline*, 31 July-13 August 1999, cited in Khaledi). A handout issued by the Army in Jammu on April 2001 declared: 'No vacancy for Muslims and tradesmen'!

A former Adjutant General, Lt. Gen. M. L. Chhibber, also declared that Muslims themselves are responsible for the low levels of Muslim recruitment, since "Muslims would rather fight for Allah and not for the country". (Khaledi, p 13) This stereotypical allegation is belied by the fact that according to Army sources themselves, "thousands of Kashmiris" participated in an Army recruitment drive (*HT*, April 4, 2002, Khaledi).

Former Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat stated that "There are hardly any Muslim officers in the Navy and none of them hold posts of any consequence." Don't we recall how, in 1998, Bhagwat himself was dismissed from his post after his subordinate alleged that his wife Niloufer was "half-Muslim"?

Cariappa's tradition of strong Hindutva links in the Army also continues. The Army forbids Friday prayers and forbids Muslim soldiers from keeping beards, but Sikh soldiers are permitted to retain their beards and turbans! Gen. B. C. Joshi, Chief of Army Staff, exhorted his troops to "follow the Path of Dharma" and the principles "enshrined in the Vedas". (*India News*, 15 July, 1993). Rear Admiral Vijay Shankar announced that new naval cadets would be supplied with the Ramayana for classroom exercises. (*Indian Express*, April 13, 2001) Former Chief Gen. V. P. Malik encouraged the practice of inviting Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray and editor of RSS' *Organiser*, Tarun Vijay, to attend military events. VHP is also in the habit of distributing *rakhis* as well as anti-Christian, anti-Muslim hate literature to the Armed Forces. (Khaledi, p 28). In August 1998, Lt. Gen. Budhwar provided logistical support to the RSS-sponsored *Sindhu Darshan* festival in Leh. And on 31 May, 1999, Defence Minister George Fernandes took Army Officers to brief the BJP National Executive! On 14 December 1999, Minister of State for Defence, Bachi Singh Rawat declared that soldiers would be indoctrinated with RSS philosophy and RSS *swayamsevaks* could be recruited into the Army! (Khaledi, p 39).

Clearly, the above facts reveal an unfortunately high degree of anti-Muslim prejudice amongst Army personnel. Further there is the fact that Muslims are shockingly under-represented in *most* institutions – their educational and employment statistics are close to that of Dalits. For the UPA Government to buckle down before RSS-BJP jingoism and withdraw the move to get statistics on Muslim representation in the Armed forces is highly unfortunate. Evidence of Army discrimination against women was revealed in the way in which the Army court-martialled and witch-hunted a woman soldier who complained of sexual harassment. We need to monitor the representation, not just of Muslims, but of all marginalised groups, including women, in *all* institutions; the Armed Forces cannot claim to be above such public scrutiny. Only such scrutiny can ensure that our Army is capable of remaining truly just when it intervenes in a situation of communal riots and genocide.

## **Supreme Court Order on Protests against Clemenceau**

THE SUPREME Court order restricting all articles, write-ups, demonstrations, protests etc. on the issue of the entry of the asbestos-laden French Ship Clemenceau into India is not only a violation of the settled law on the issue of contempt of court but it is also a gross violation of the fundamental rights of citizens under section 19.1A of the Indian Constitution which guarantees citizens the right to protest and demonstrate on issues of public interest. The order demonstrates the imperious nature of courts and the psychology of some judges in this regard. The issue of contempt of court being committed by commenting on matters which are pending in court has been the subject of longstanding debate in the courts of various countries.

The law, as settled, is this: It had been held that making comments and writing about pending court matters in a manner that would influence the independent judgement of the court has been held to be contempt because the question was balancing between the right to free trial and the right to free speech. It was therefore held that in individual cases comments in a matter and in a manner, which would influence the independent judgement of the court, would influence the right to free trial of a litigant or of an accused. And therefore that right was held to be more important than the right to free speech in individual matters.

However, when it comes to matters of grave public interest and public concern, the courts held that in such matters right to free speech is more important than the right for free trial. Or in other words that the public interest involved in protecting the right to free speech – because when it is a matter of public interest, it is an issue of the democratic right of a citizen to influence the behaviour of public authorities and to influence public opinion – this is one of the most important and sacrosanct rights in a democracy. And that right was held to be far more important than any possible prejudice that such comments or such demonstrations etc. might cause to pending court proceedings because it was held that if you restrict the right to speech and expression and demonstrations etc. on a matter of serious public interest merely because a case on the issue is pending before the court that will completely stifle democracy itself. Because not only are many public interest issues pending before the courts – because if this were to be the law it would spell the end of democracy, – since it would be very easy for the Government to get anybody to file a petition which in the country, and the way the courts function, it may remain pending in the court for years together and thus stifle all public debate and public criticism of the Government. Therefore, in the light of all this, the law, that comment on pending cases of public interest do not constitute contempt, is also settled in India. In the light of this the order of the Supreme Court in the Clemenceau matter is not only very anti-democratic, retrograde, violative of fundamental rights of citizens but it also displays the imperious psychology of many judges in the Supreme Court.

– Prashant Bhushan

## FEATURE

### **Beware US-Sponsored ‘Democracy and Freedom’**

Addressing the Asia Society in Washington on the eve of his visit to India and Pakistan, George Bush declared, “mobs must not be allowed to dictate the future of Asia”. He was referring to the protests over the Prophet cartoons, but he undoubtedly meant the kind of ‘mobs’ which

protested against US wars of aggression and US' killer economic policies as well. Well, if we translate the Bushspeak, we can easily hear his real sentiments and his unsaid words: "Mobs must not be allowed to dictate the future of Asia...that must be the prerogative of Emperor Bush and the US Viceroy (Ambassadors)".

In the same speech, Bush waxed eloquent about how "the United States and India are working together to support democracy around the world". When US Presidents speak of 'democracy', red lights and danger signals ought to flash: it is usually a sure sign of impending war, plunder, assassination, military coups or rigged elections. Consider one of the latest examples of 'democracy' as sponsored by the US: Condoleezza Rice has promised, "We are going to work to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for freedom in their country". The fatal footfall of an impending 'Operation Iranian Liberation' can be heard by all.

Towards this, the US has announced an 85 million dollar program to promote 'democracy' in Iran. What's the money going to be used to do? Round the clock US propaganda in Farsi, for one, as well as funding organisations outside Iran with "direct ties" to what the program calls "eligible groups and people" including trade union groups and opposition candidates, inside Iran. The program is quite sensitive to the fact that the cash shouldn't flow directly from US coffers to the 'eligible' suitable boys in Iran; they have been warned that the recipients of such funds are likely to be seen as "traitors who receive money from the enemy to undermine Iran's national interest".

All this US concern for their aspirations for democracy and freedom must seem like a joke to Iranians, when they recall how in 1953, the CIA along with the British, overthrew the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh, after which the Shah of Iran came to power, resulting in 25 years of repression and torture. Marcos in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia are just two Asian examples of bloody mass murderers and dictators who have been best buddies of the US; about Suharto, a senior official of the Clinton administration declared in 1995, “He’s our kind of guy!”

On the same day that Bush made pious remarks about democracy at the Asia Society, an article appeared in an online journal, which recommended a return to the ideas of the Cold War US policymaker George Kennan. The article opens with the remark:

“Sixty years ago, on February 22, America faced a difficult geopolitical situation. We had just won World War II against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, but



the smoke had barely cleared from those conflicts when we realized that a new enemy loomed dead ahead: Soviet Russia. Confronted by an increasingly ominous Stalinist threat, Americans, who had been hoping for peace, found themselves preparing yet again for war. And so it is today. We won in Iraq, but now we must face Iran.” (James Pinkerton, ‘Kennan’s Comeback’, TCS Daily, 22 February)

The article goes on to talk about how the US is rediscovering the virtues of George Kennan's recommendations, and quotes Condoleezza Rice paying tribute to Kennan on his death in 2005, "He was one of the great architects of an American foreign policy at the end of World War II that is largely responsible for the great gifts of freedom that many people enjoy today, that is largely responsible for many of the alliances that the United States enjoys today".

It is quite illuminating to take a look at what "great gifts of freedom" and pearls of wisdom Kennan left behind, which presumably inspire Bush, Rice and company to promote 'democracy' in Iran. In 1948, Kennan candidly diagnosed the US condition and made some sound and enduring policy recommendations:

*"We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population...In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships, which will permit us to **maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security**. To do so we have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction...**We should cease to talk about vague and ...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization**. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in **straight power concepts**. The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans, the better."*

What a clear exposition of the US' own 'enlightened self-interest'! We can be sure that in their own policy rooms, when safely free from the compulsion to deliver bytes on TV, Bush and his cohorts are just as clear headed about their "national objectives", which are, as Candid Kennan points out, bound to be at odds with human rights, democratisation and the like, since their primary concern is to *maintain*, through "straight power concepts", a position of obscene and unjust disparity. In 1907, former US President Woodrow Wilson's declared:

*"Our industries have expanded to such a point that they will burst their jackets if they cannot find a free outlet to the markets of the world...doors of the nations which are closed must be battered down...even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process..."*

This, from the same man who called for a war to "make the world safe for democracy"! Wilson's words go a long way towards explaining *how*, in the first place, the US came to possess the disproportionate proportion of the world's wealth that Kennan talks about – by "battering down" the doors, and outraging the sovereignty, of "unwilling nations"! And there is remarkable consistency and continuity in US policy down the ages: witness the battering of Iraq for oil! 'Making the world safe' for US corporations, and peddling imperial hegemonistic designs fuelled by corporate greed as 'democracy' – these have always underwritten US foreign policy objectives.

*Newsweek* has expressed the hope that Bush's visit to India will "alter the strategic landscape, bringing India firmly and irrevocably onto the world stage as a major player". This is

a view that the Indian ruling establishment too is peddling. The ominous signs of US' growing interventionism in Asia are on the wall. But Manmohan Singh fondly fosters the notion that India will remain safe from these designs, as long as we remain obedient and loyal 'partners' of the US project. The notion that India can pursue her own 'self-interest' while acting as a US stooge in South Asia, all along without endangering her *own* democracy and sovereignty, is a suicidal one. Such an illusion can only be maintained by those who have received sufficient imperial 'enlightenment' as to believe that the British Raj was actually an example of 'good governance'!

Meanwhile, in USA's own backyard, Latin America, which bore the worst brunt of a century of the most brutal imperialist repression from the US, is fighting back. Defying US imperialism, Venezuela and Bolivia have joined Cuba in offering a new model of national development that does not involve obedience to US economic, political and diplomatic dictates. It is these models and these struggles that ought to inspire us in India, as we tell Bush to Back Off, and warn his Indian agents to desist from turning India into a lackey of US imperialism.

**Boxes:**

**"Where are my ancestors? Whom shall I celebrate? Where shall I find the raw material? My first American ancestor, gentleman, was an Indian - an early Indian; your ancestors skinned him alive, and I am an orphan." – Mark Twain, New York Times, 1881**

'Making the World Safe'... for Corporate Greed

**"I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall-Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism...I**

helped make Honduras 'right' for American fruit companies in 1903. I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914...I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Down



Brothers in 1909-1912, I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American Sugar Interests in 1916.”

- Major General Smedley Butler, author of *War as a Racket*, in a speech in 1933

### **Clash of Civilisations?**

“The US’ idea of what constitutes torture is not the same as ours and doesn’t appear to coincide with that of most civilised countries.” - A senior Judge of the British High Court, Lawrence Collins, in the context of human rights violations at the US Detention Centre at Guantanamo Bay.

## **India is not your Cat’s name!**

### **An open letter to ‘Emperor’ George Bush Jr.**

*[A team of filmmakers, Films for Peace Team, is screening a series of anti-war, anti-imperialist films at 80 places all over the country. The team has written this Open Letter to Bush.]*

**To  
George Bush Jr.  
Would-be Emperor  
(Former Clown Prince)  
Currently US President**

**Dear George ‘WMD’ Bush,**

It is with both great happiness and grave apprehension that we the people of India await your arrival in our country.

Happiness because in the few hours you will be engaged in shaking hands with our country’s leaders your fingers will be - at least for a little while - away from the nuclear doomsday button. Happiness also in the hope that the grease you put on the palms of your political underlings here will make the many triggers all of you control that much more slippery.

There is a lot of apprehension too as your visit could become the latest source of pollution in our ancient land already poisoned over the years by your country’s various multinationals- from Union Carbide of Bhopal gas notoriety to Monsanto of GM seeds infamy. Your own crimes against humanity in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo are of course far worse than that of these corporations and if the Ganges were not already as contaminated as it is unfortunately today - we would have happily recommended a long dip in its holy waters.

We know you have friends - or shall we call them loyal subjects - in very high places in our country. Shri Manmohan Singh, misleadingly called 'Prime Minister of India' when he is really a CEO of your subsidiary company- will be there constantly at your beck and call. But then for this former civil servant turned international servant - whose soul and spine were stolen many moons ago by the IMF, World Bank and other dark forces you represent - it seems to make little difference what master he serves.

You will also find the Congress that rules India even more pliant than the US Congress you control back home. Having buried Gandhi and Nehru in both body and spirit long, long ago this political party that once fought the British Empire has become the Trojan horse of American Imperialism in India today.

There are others too from our country that will welcome you – captains of industry, merchants, bureaucrats and sections of the Indian media- who already think of themselves as junior partners in your vile Empire. Truth is they are as much in awe of the weapons of war you so wantonly wield as they are mesmerized by the petty commercial carrots you dangle before their eyes.

But make no mistake 'Mr Wannabe President of the World' - India is far more than the name of your pet cat on the lawns of the White House. And though our leaders lovingly wag their tails at you it is not a domesticated dog either.

Instead it is a full-blooded country of over a billion people who have seen through many tyrants of your type several times over in their long history. We packed off the British Raj just over half a century ago and have no intentions of letting its illegitimate American offspring sit on our heads instead.

And we are not alone in our struggle against Imperialism on this globe either. From Vietnam to Venezuela and Iraq to Indonesia we have had and continue to have deep ties with people everywhere from around the world who have stood up in defence of their national dignity, sovereignty and the right to conduct their affairs in whatever manner they see fit. We have long historical memories too of the US establishment's atrocities and massacres around the globe –Hiroshima, Haiti, Greece, Guatemala. Cambodia, Chile - the sacrifices of countless brave citizens will not go in vain.

Your regime's latest attempts to bully or bribe the Indian government to join your machinations against Iran will also go nowhere because the people of this country will forever resist your immoral attempts to capture the assets of weaker nations by force. By tempting the foolish Indian government with a dubious nuclear pact you have attempted to divide and rule the developing world but we can see through your imperial politics and have the means to unravel it too. Mr 'Emperor' not only do you not have no clothes on you are trying to pull some non-existent textile over our eyes too!

So Mr 'Emperor' when you soon land in India remember - irrespective of what your weather 'experts' tell you- the temperature on the ground will be several degrees hotter

than anybody can predict. True, this will be partly due to the general rise in global temperatures your regime has so shamelessly contributed to plus the hot air you have such a talent for - but much of the heat will really be due to the burning anger aroused by your presence in our midst.

Believe us we promise a very warm welcome to you and all in your entourage and hope to make your trip as memorable as possible.

It is still not too late to turn your jets back to Washington where Uncle Dick 'Shotgun' Cheney eagerly awaits your presence on a long and exciting safari somewhere. Happy hunting and watch your back.

**Yours very, very warmly**

**Films for Peace team**

## **Tribute to Bhagat Singh**

### **Bhagat Singh: People's Hero in the Freedom Struggle**

*Hawa me rahegi mere khayal ki bijli*

*Ye muste-khak hai fani, rahe rahe na rahe*

(The fire of my ideas will remain in the air/This life's a handful of dust, no matter if it remains or not)

March 23 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Shaheed-e-azam Bhagat Singh, and September 28, 2007, his birth centenary. It will be interesting to see how Manmohan Singh, having given a red carpet welcome to the leader of world imperialism George Bush, reconciles his tributes to Bhagat Singh with his glowing tributes the 'great Raj' that hanged the 'dangerous man' till he was dead.

It is certainly no less than a miracle that without any state patronage, rather in spite of a deliberate attempt by all the powers-that-be to dilute his ideological-political vision, Bhagat Singh's charisma, in contrast to that of most other leaders of national movement, refuses to fade away.

It is not without reason that all political streams are trying to appropriate his legacy. The BJP website informs the nation of its discovery that a copy of the Bhagwatgita can be found in the

museum at his native village Khatkarkala! But, quite understandably, it is careful not to mention his atheism-rationalism, Marxism or socialism.

The Congress government at the centre may certainly plan a *sarkari tamasha* in the eventful year to pay lip service to the revolutionary leader, for whom even the tallest of their leaders had at best to say 'though we praise the courage of these brave men, we should never countenance their activities' as they will result in a 'terrifying situation' and 'our people will become victims of our atrocities' (Gandhi on Bhagat Singh's martyrdom in *Young India*, 1931).

Our 'official' communists, meanwhile, are urging Manmohan Singh 'to initiate and set up a celebration committee to organize the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of martyrdom of Shaheed-e-azam Bhagat Singh, to instil the lofty ideals of patriotism and self sacrifice among youth.' Isn't this the same commonsensical, clichéd portrayal of Bhagat Singh merely as a man with lofty ideals of patriotism and self-sacrificing youth, which has been propagated by the ruling classes all these years? Even with this perception, it is insult to the great national hero, to say the least, to urge Manmohan Singh, the chief architect of cotemporary national sell-out to imperialism and admirer of the 'Great Civilising Raj', to initiate the celebrations. In fact the whole celebration, if it is not to be turned into a ritual, must be focused precisely against such 'brown rulers' ruling in the country since independence. It is one thing to pressurize the rulers to accord our heroes their due place, while it is altogether different matter to collaborate with them in trivializing and falsifying their real legacy.

In fact, the Britishers killed Bhagat Singh physically, but their successor - the Indian rulers, did everything they could to kill his ideas. A popular myth was manufactured that reduced the whole debate between Gandhian Congress and Bhagat Singh to a difference of 'paths' and 'methods', i.e., 'non-violent' and 'violent'. Gandhi himself and the entire official historiography reinforced this myth. Behind this smokescreen, the debate, which

was essentially between two alternative models of national liberation movement, was pushed to the background. However nothing could be farther from truth. Indeed, Bhagat Singh was influenced by anarchist ideas in his earlier phase, but in a remarkably short span of time he evolved into a Marxist revolutionary.

Bhagat Singh, first and foremost, was a political leader and for that matter a revolutionary political leader, waging war for national liberation, democracy and socialism. His vision of nation-building was certainly different from the Congress model. In his article 'Draft for A Revolutionary Programme', he noted, 'I am of the firm opinion that the present movement will either end in some kind of compromise or in an utter fiasco. What prompts me to say this is the fact that, in my opinion, real revolutionary forces are not in the battlefield today ... Real revolutionary forces are in rural areas and factories - peasants and workers. But our 'bourgeois' leaders are afraid of them. Because, if these sleeping lions are awakened from their deep slumber, they won't stop just with the fulfilment of our leaders' objectives. In 1920, after his first encounter with Ahmedabad workers, Gandhi said, 'We should not collaborate with the workers. Political engagement with the factory proletariat is dangerous'. Since then, he made no efforts to take this class along with his movement. It was the same with peasants. The Bardoli Satyagraha of 1922 amply proves that when leaders saw the peasant upsurge targeting not only the domination of foreigners but also the fetters of the native landlords, they became really panicky. That is why our leaders prefer to surrender before the Britishers than yielding to the peasants.'

Further explaining his orientation in the same document, he says, 'we want socialist revolution, which is first and foremost a political revolution...And political revolution means seizure of state power by Indians from Britishers, that too, by those Indians whose strategic goal is similar to ours. More precisely - capture of state-power by revolutionary party with active and conscious participation of the people. And then we will have to engage ourselves, with utmost seriousness, to carry forward the whole society on socialist path...But if you say that your aim is national revolution to establish Indian republic, then my question is on what social forces you will rely to help advance this revolution? Whether the revolution be National or Socialist, the forces on which we must rely are peasants and workers.'

What a brilliant exposition of the essential character of the Congress, the fate of national movement under its leadership and the alternative course to be pursued by the Revolutionary Party! In fact, one may venture to say that, born in an enlightened peasant family of freedom fighters and 'product of our great composite culture', Bhagat Singh's Marxism was more concrete and grounded than most of his contemporary, Oxford educated Communists from an elite background.

His theoretical-political battle stands testimony to the fact that he never harboured any illusions about the Congress, and this is all

the more significant in the light of the fact that the question of assessment of and relationship with the Congress has remained an enduring and lifelong puzzle for the mainstream Communist movement in India, and is proving to be its nemesis.

He was acutely conscious about the growing menace of communalism and the serious threat it posed to the national and people's movement. At a time when even the tallest of Congress leaders were oblivious to the grave danger they were inviting for the whole nation by practicing a 'liberal Hindutva' variety of secularism, later officially nicknamed as doctrine of 'Sarvadharmā Sambhava'; when they were using and appeasing communal sentiments, and collaborating with communal bodies at different levels, thus preparing ground for growing Muslim alienation and the great tragedy of 1947; Bhagat Singh stands out in bold relief as a modern national leader asserting that true secularism means separation of religion from politics and state. He maintained that growth of class-consciousness was a correct way to combat communalism. Although he had great respect for Lala Lajpat Rai as a national leader, he did not hesitate to take issue with Rai when he turned to communal politics. He then launched an unrelenting ideological-political campaign against Rai, referring Lajpat Rai as a "lost leader". In 1928, during the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS) conference, he categorically opposed the idea that youth belonging to religious, communal organizations be permitted to become the members of NBS.

Barring the singular exception of Dr. Ambedkar, the approach of different streams of national movement to the extremely important question of caste oppression was pathetic, to say the least. While for most of them, it was no issue at all, for some the anti-British movement or economic struggle was to take care of all these 'social-cultural' questions, while for yet another category, the reform of caste-system through benevolence and charity was the answer. However, Bhagat Singh, with an acute insight into the reality of Indian society, recognizes the great revolutionary potential of the dalit struggle for emancipation: 'Rise o real servants of the people and brethren, look at your history. ... Your sacrifices are inscribed in golden letters... Organise yourself, stand on your feet and challenge the whole society. You will find then that no force on earth dare refuse you your rights... You are the real proletariat... Be organized. You have to lose nothing except your fetters of slavery. Arise and rebel against the present system'

However, with great foresight, he does not fail to see the pitfalls, and warns, 'Don't become fodder for others. Don't look towards

others. Keep in mind, never fall in the trap of the bureaucracy. Instead of helping you, it just wants to make use of you. This bourgeois bureaucracy is the main culprit in perpetuating your slavery and poverty. So, you should never collaborate with it and should beware of its traps.’ Prophetic words indeed when we look upon the misery of dalits even today after 6 decades of rule by the Nehru dynasty, the Vajpeyees and Mayavatis, too! The only road to dalit liberation is still through revolutionary transformation of the society, and not through any bureaucratic dream of ‘DM or CM’ in the present set-up.

Bhagat Singh, in a sense, was a continuation and development of the great tradition of 1857, our first War of Independence – its tradition of uncompromising battle against imperialism and its domestic allies; its recognition of the potential of the peasantry; its grounding in a rich tradition of composite culture. 2007 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1857, too. Let us resolve, on the occasion of this historic confluence, to carry forward the heroic legacy of 1857 and Bhagat Singh to its fulfilment.

**- Lal Bahadur Singh**

## Bhagat Singh

The Lighthouse of the Revolutionary Mindset of Indian Youth  
*[Below we reproduce the introduction written by Comrade Vinod Mishra to a publication by Radical Youth Association (RYA) on Bhagat Singh.]*

Fiftieth year is to pass since we became independent. Casting a glance over our surroundings, we find a putrefying scene around. Particularly, the all-round degeneration of the Congress party, that claims to have led the country in the freedom struggle, raises some basic questions. During the freedom struggle,

revolutionaries had raised their fingers at the ideology and working methods of Gandhi and Congress. They even had apprehensions that independence might prove to be mere transfer of power from white sahibs to coloured ones. Today, that apprehension has come true. The most resolute representative of this revolutionary stream was Bhagat Singh, whose ideals and ideology have become quite relevant in the present phase.

In 1925, at the age of 18, Bhagat Singh became the General Secretary of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, formed in Lahore in 1925 and on March 23, 1931, after spending two years in prison, was hanged to death along with his comrades-in-arms Rajguru and Sukhdev. At the time of his martyrdom, he was only 23 years old. In such a short tenure of office and in such a tender age he organised so many revolutionary activities on the national level and studied and wrote on almost all subjects on such a vast scale that one is bound to feel astonished.

The ruthless British rulers thought it better to silence this brilliant brain, overwhelmingly popular those days. And history bears testimony to the well-known fact that rejecting the public opinion, Gandhi refused to pose cancellation of death sentence to Bhagat Singh as a precondition to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

Bhagat Singh's popularity was fast becoming one of the greatest challenges to the Gandhian leadership. The authentic history of the Congress party itself says, "It would not be an exaggeration to say that those days Bhagat Singh was known all over India and his name was no less popular than that of Gandhiji." Still more important was Bhagat Singh's transformation from a revolutionary terrorist to a Marxist. It formed the main basis of the tacit agreement between British rulers and the Congress leadership to send Bhagat Singh to the gallows. Gandhi himself admitted that he dismissed the idea to make revocation of death sentence to Bhagat Singh a precondition to the agreement he entered with Irwin; rather, he stressed that the death sentence must be executed before the Karachi session of his party and it was what exactly followed.

The revolutionary terrorist current initially under the spell of strong religious sentiments gradually transformed to Marxism. Bhagat Singh proved to be the symbol of this transition and the moment he ceased to exist, this stream too breathed its last.

## **From Anarchism to Marxism**

Bhagat Singh deeply studied all the progressive ideas till then the West imparted to India. He expressed his views on almost all problems of Indian society, be it the Brahminical



attitude towards untouchables, the tendency of communalism or the form of Indian Union. In his early days, deep influence of anarchist philosophy and its ace proponent Bakunin was well discernible in him. He wrote a series of essays on anarchism, which appeared in the then Punjabi periodical *Kirti* from May to August 1928. These articles depict him as highly impressed by anarchist pronouncements concerning total eradication of religion, God, state and private property from the world.

In this phase, he considers religion and God as the products of human ignorance, fear and lack of self-confidence and speaks very high of Bakunin's *God and the State*, which severely criticises God. But in his essay *Why am I an Atheist?*, written on October 5-6, 1930, firm grasp of Marxism is well discernible in his thinking on the questions of God and religion.

He writes, "Unlike certain radicals I would not attribute its origin to the ingenuity of the exploiters who wanted to keep the people under their subjection by preaching the existence of a supreme being and then claiming an authority and sanction from Him for their privileged positions. Though I do not differ with them on the essential point that all faiths, religion, creeds and such other institutions became in turn the mere supporters of the tyrannical and exploiting institutions, men and classes. Rebellion against king is always a sin according to every religion.

"As regards the origin of God, my idea is that having realised the limitation of man, his weakness and shortcomings having been taken into consideration, God was brought into imaginary existence to encourage man to face boldly all the trying circumstances, to meet all dangers manfully and to check and restrain his outbursts in prosperity and affluence. God both with his private laws and parental generosity was imagined and painted in greater details. He was to serve as a deterrent factor when his fury and private laws were discussed so that man may not become a danger to society. He was to serve as a father, mother, sister and brother, friend and helper when his parental qualifications were to be explained. So that when his parental distress having been betrayed and deserted by all friends he may find consolation in the idea that an ever true friend was still there to help him, to support him and that He was almighty and could do anything. Really that was useful to the society in the primitive age. The idea of God is helpful to man in distress." Here we find in Bhagat Singh the essence what Marx meant when he described religion as "the opium of the people". Bhagat Singh proceeds, "when man tries to stand on his own legs, and becomes a realist he shall have to throw the faith aside, and to face manfully all the distress, trouble, in which the circumstances may throw him." And it was because of this unwavering faith on materialist philosophy that he kissed the gallows with smiling face.

Bhagat Singh was not unaware of the difference of opinion between anarchists and Marxists on state power. In his articles on anarchism he says that the ultimate aim even of communism is the abolition of state. Nevertheless, he is sympathetic to the anarchist ideal of rejecting each and every type state power. Anarchists nourished the idea that complete eradication of the concept of state power alone can make freedom of mankind meaningful. Later, Bhagat Singh favours the idea of proletarian hegemony. Expounding his ideas on revolution, he said in the lower court, "By revolution we mean ultimately the establishment of a social order where one would not have to encounter such fatal hazards and proletarian hegemony is accepted and setting up of a world union, which saves

human beings from the shackles of capitalism and predicaments and miseries sue to imperialist wars.”

When he got rid of the anarchist concept of elimination of private property, he understood only proletarian revolution and socialism would make it possible.

As a matter of fact, Bhagat Singh was inspired by anarchists to hurl bombs in the Assembly. Depicting anarchist activities throughout the world, Bhagat Singh writes, “of late, there have been wrongs even in Europe, anarchists had to clash increasingly with the police and the government, finally a youth named Callent, hurled a bomb in the Assembly and defending his action he roared, “To make the deaf hear an explosion is essential.” After a year, on April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh repeated this action in India. However, for Callent it was an act of revenge, but for Bhagat Singh it meant a way of political protest. Here it must be kept in mind that Bhagat Singh threw the bomb opposing the bills brought against the communists and the working class. The British government had tabled the two bills in the Assembly: The Public Safety Bill, meant to invest powers to drive out British or foreign communists from India on the Governor General and the Trade Disputes Bill, aimed at curtailment of trade union rights. Within moments the Speaker announced the passage of the second bill, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta sitting in the visitors’ gallery hurled two bombs, raised the slogan ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ and showered pamphlets explaining their political aims.

On February 2, 1931, in his appeal *To Young Political Workers*, he advised them to study Marx and Lenin, to work among the working class and the peasantry and to arouse class consciousness among them. He favoured the Leninist concept of party building with professional revolutionaries and wrote, “The party must begin its work by conducting propaganda among the masses...It is of paramount importance to get peasants and workers organised and to garner their sympathy. The Party may be called the Communist Party”. It was the last call by Bhagat Singh to the Indian youth and is no less relevant today as it was in those days.

In independent India, the more the government institutions tried to ignore Bhagat Singh and push him to the margins in the history of independent struggle, the more Bhagat Singh found his place in the hearts of the people. Even today, Bhagat Singh’s portraits are the most widely sold in the country. His portraits are seen adorning the walls of common people’s houses, and thousands of martyr’s columns are found in all parts of the country erected at people’s own initiative. If there is a single person who can be awarded the status of people’s hero in the struggle for independence, it is only Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh is not only a great source of inspiration to the revolutionary mindset of the Indian youth, he is its lighthouse too.

## **Bhagat Singh’s Letter to the Second LCC Convicts**

*[On March 22, the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case convicts, who were locked up in Ward Number 14 (near condemned cells), sent a slip to Bhagat Singh asking if he would like to live. This letter was in reply to that slip.]*

March 22, 1931

Comrades,

The desire to live is natural. It is in me also. I do not want to conceal it. But it is conditional. I don't want to live as a prisoner or under restrictions. My name has become a symbol of Indian revolution. The ideal and the sacrifices of the revolutionary party have elevated me to a height beyond which I will never be able to rise if I live.

Today people do not know my weaknesses. If I escape gallows those weaknesses will come before them and the symbol of revolution will get tarnished or perhaps it may vanish altogether. On the other hand, if I mount the gallows boldly and with a smile, that will inspire Indian mothers and they will aspire that their children should also become Bhagat Singh. Thus the number of persons ready to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of our country will increase enormously. It will then become impossible for imperialism to face the tide of the revolution, and all their might and their satanic efforts will not be able to stop its onward march.

Yes, one thing pricks me even today. My heart nurtured some ambitions for doing something for humanity and for my country. I have not been able to fulfil even one-thousandth part of those ambitions. If I live I might perhaps get a chance to fulfil them. If ever it came to my mind that I should not die, it came from this end only.

I am proud of myself these days and I am anxiously waiting for the final test. I wish the day may come nearer soon.

Your comrade,  
Bhagat Singh

## **Chandrashekhar, Bhagat Singh, We Shall Fight, We Shall Win!**

‘Yes, I have ambitions. My ambitions are to live like Bhagat Singh and die like Che Guevara!’ – Chandrashekhar Prasad in answer to a question during the Presidential Debate in JNUSU polls

On 31 March 1997, Chandrashekhar, who had served two terms as JNUSU President, was shot dead at JP Chowk at Siwan, Bihar, while addressing a street-corner meeting. Chandu, who had returned to his hometown Siwan as a wholetime of the CPI(ML), had been assassinated at the behest of the mafia don and RJD MP, Shahabuddin. March 2007, along with marking Bhagat Singh's birth centenary, will also mark ten years since Chandu's martyrdom.

Chandu, in life, you led a robust student movement against privatisation and communalism; in death, you sparked off one of memorable youth upsurges of our time, in which hundreds of students faced police brutality on the streets of Delhi and other cities and towns all over India.

Your life and death will always inspire young people to find ways to prove that Bhagat Singh lives on in today's youth!

## **SPECIAL REPORT**

### **AIALA National Conference At Rajahmundry**

On 30 January, Rajahmundry, on the banks of the Godavari, was awash in a sea of red flags. The town had been christened Alluri Sitarama Raju Nagar after the great peasant guerilla freedom fighter of Andhra Pradesh. A Rally of thousands of agrarian labourers, mostly from Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, as well as delegates from all over the country, had gathered there to participate in a Rally marking the inauguration of the second All India Conference of the AIALA on 30-31 January. The Rally, led by CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Poliburo members Swadesh Bhattacharya, DP Buxi and Kartick Pal, as well as AIALA leaders from various states, marched from the railway station through the town, garlanding the statues of Bhagat Singh and Alluri Sitarama Raju. At the head of the procession full of colourful banners and flags, were the team of cultural activists of JSM, performing a traditional tribal dance. The Rally culminated in a mass meeting at the Shaheed Subramaniam Grounds, (the first peasant martyr of the East Godavari region, during the freedom struggle). Veterans of the Telengana movement and the freedom struggle were honoured at the mass meeting.

Comrade Ramnaresh Ram, President of the outgoing committee of AIALA, sent his message of greetings to the Conference as he is seriously ill and undergoing treatment in AIIMS, Delhi. He hoped that AIALA would become the biggest and strongest organisation of every agricultural labourer and rural poor in the country. Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, General Secretary of the outgoing committee, also sent his message from the Beur Jail in Patna. Both the messages were read out in the rally.

Addressing the Rally, Comrade Dipankar remarked that two years back, AIALA held its founding Conference at Bhojpur, a noted centre of agrarian struggles; it was fitting that the second Conference was being held at Andhra Pradesh, the historic soil where the Telengana struggle was waged against the British and the landlords – a struggle which made Communism a household word in India. Today, when we face the onslaught of US imperialism, we are inspired by the struggle of the heroic peasant warriors of like Sitarama Raju. He said that the second Conference of AIALA was being held at a time of great assaults on the rural poor – the UPA's attempt to cut back on food subsidies is the latest instance. The question of land continues to be a central one. The Telengana movement had waged a war for land reform – but land reforms have yet to be completed. In every state, ceiling surplus land is grabbed on one or the other pretext. Eviction from land in the name of 'development' is a burning issue. At Kalinganagar, not only were tribals protesting eviction shot dead, their limbs were chopped off as a 'lesson' to those who protest. It is time to turn the tables, and make Kalinganagar a lesson for the ruling class instead.

Comrade Dipankar congratulated agrarian labourers for forcing the UPA to pass the NREGA, but pointed out that past experience showed how many laws enacted under

pressure of movements remained on paper and were never implemented on the ground. Local power groups are seeing the EGA as a new treasure house of loot and plunder; AIALA must foil them and break the stranglehold of tractors and contractors on the EGA. We must demand that the minimum wage be fixed at Rs. 100, and at least one man and one woman per family must be guaranteed a job under the EGA. Comrade Dipankar concluded by calling upon agrarian labourers not to confine themselves to their own issues, but to play a leading role in national politics. In particular, he called upon AIALA to resist the entry of imperialist war criminal George Bush in India.

After the Rally, the delegate session was held at a Hall named after Comrade Mahendra Singh. A total of 882 delegates from 17 states (including 101 women delegates), including Assam, Tripura, Manipur, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, UP, Bihar and Jharkhand, as well as Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills regions of Assam participated in the deliberations of the Conference. Cultural teams from Orissa, Andhra, Assam, Karbi Anglong, and Jharkhand presented colourful and rousing songs and performances. The guests and observers who expressed solidarity with the Conference included leaders of AISA, AIPWA, RYA, AICCTU, AIKS, the Mazdoor Kisan Sanghatana and the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) of Maharashtra, leaders of the Chilika Matsyajeebi Association, the Chhattisgarh Naagar Jotta Samaj, as well as noted economist and activist Jean Dreze.

During the Conference, delegates from various centres and states shared their experiences of organising agrarian labourers and leading struggles. Comrades from Andhra spoke of the recent success in expanding the movement in the Telengana region, and waging land struggles. Delegates from Orissa spoke of the ongoing struggle against eviction and state repression after the Kalinganagar massacre, as well as the Chilika fisherpeoples' struggle.

Those from TN described the initiatives taken by AIALA in the wake of the tsunami that devastated the rural poor in the coastal regions of the State. Activists from West Bengal discussed the complexity of struggles in a Left Front ruled State, where land laws were being reversed to facilitate corporate takeover; those from Tripura spoke of the successful attempts to organise adivasis and win them over from the CPI(M). Leaders from Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills shared their experience of building AIALA and achieving more than 1 lakh membership in the face of the state-sponsored extremism and massacres; also their success in exposing corruption in the Food For Work scheme and preparing to ensure implementation of the NREGA. Activists of the tea garden workers of Assam also spoke of their struggles against state repression, closure, starvation and unemployment.

A moving point in the Conference was when Baljeet Kaur, the daughter of Bant Singh, the Dalit AIALA leader from Punjab who was mutilated, spoke up. She said that her father had had to pay such a heavy cost for fighting for justice when she was raped; it was now time for her to fight for her father, for her people and for the class of agrarian labourers.

Comrades from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan discussed their experience of organising agricultural workers and poor peasants in the region.

Those from UP spoke of the AIALA's growing influence in areas which used to be pockets of Maoist influence, and also of their strategies to fight severe state repression, with AIALA leaders being booked under Gangster and Goonda Acts. Activists from Jharkhand narrated how they raised the issue of corruption and how they sustained the blow of Comrade Mahendra's murder and led the movement against this assassination.

Comrades from Bhojpur and Jehanabad in Central Bihar spoke of their long struggle against the Ranveer Sena and the movement against the use of TADA to book agrarian labour activists. Those from West Champaran spoke of the growing struggle against the feudal repression in that region, while activists from North Bihar spoke of the agitations launched on the issue of recurrent floods.

Delegates debated the draft document at the Conference, which analysed the current political situation and the question of evolving an agenda in the light of changing political context. The document discussed issues of land struggles, wages, dignity, democratic participation in and control of rural poor over Government schemes, and challenged the Government's anti-people model of development based on displacement and eviction. They also discussed strategies to mobilise around issues like health, housing, education, water and so on. The Conference resolved to develop panchayats as a centre of struggle, by organising rural poor at the panchayat level. In particular, delegates from all over the country shared their plans in preparation for ensuring implementation of the EGA, especially of ensuring registration and issue of job card to all agrarian labourers. A booklet suggesting guidelines for struggle on the EGA issue was released at the Conference.

The delegates noted that AIALA had borne the brunt of several attacks: its General Secretary Rameshwar Prasad had been in jail on flimsy charges for several months, several of its activists had been killed by anarchists at the behest of the RJD in Paliganj, and its popular leader of agrarian struggles, Comrade Mahendra Singh, had been assassinated. Despite this, AIALA had succeeded in achieving a membership of 16,66,643 – marking a 20.5% increase. This included the four districts which achieved more than 1 lakh membership – Bhojpur, Giridih, Karbi Anglong, and Siwan; and also those which achieved more than 50,000 membership – Patna, Rohtas, Garhwa, and Darbhanga. The delegates passed the draft document unanimously after having adopted suitable amendments.

The Conference adopted several political resolutions, and called upon agrarian poor to resist the assault by the UPA Government on food security and food rights through cuts in the rationing system and food grain subsidies. It reiterated the demand for an integrated all-India law for agrarian labourers, and demanding extension of NREGA to the whole country; and resolved to wage struggle for land reforms, and for the right of rural poor and adivasis over land, forests, water sources and homestead land. The Conference also resolved to increase the membership of AIALA to 25 lakhs and expand AIALA's influence to wider areas.

The Conference then went on to elect a National Council of 142 members. The Council in turn elected a 35-member Executive. Comrade Ramnaresh Ram was nominated the Founder President, Comrade Rameshwar Prasad as President and Comrade Dharendra Jha as General Secretary; 7 Vice Presidents – Swadesh Bhattacharya, Kshitish Biswal, Ibnul Hasan Basru, S. Balasundaram, Pwawan Sharma, Krishna Adhikari and

Malleswara Rao, and 6 Secretaries – Janardan Prasad, Bangar Rao, Satyadev Ram, Ravi Kumar Phangchu, Srikant Rana and Sanjay Sharma, were also elected. Speaking on behalf of the newly elected Committee, Comrade Dhirendra Jha concluded the Conference by announcing the resolve to achieve a target of 25 lakh membership and to develop and consolidate AIALA structures and activities from the panchayat to the State level. The Conference ended with rousing rendition of revolutionary songs by the various cultural teams and by the entire house.

## **Messages to the Second National Conference of AIALA**

### **Message of Comrade Ram Naresh Ram, the Founding President of AIALA**

I, Ram Naresh Ram, warmly welcome all delegate comrades and wish grand success for the Second National Conference of AIALA. I am extremely sad that despite my earnest wishes I am not able to participate in the conference.

Comrades,

I am fully confident that AIALA will emerge as the biggest, struggling revolutionary class organisation of agricultural labourers in the country. I am hopeful that in its course of development it will attract the overwhelming mass of agrarian labourers who are presently under the fold of various misleading organisations that pose to represent them, as well as revolutionary democratic organisations and even left organisations, and its banner will fly high all over the country!

I convey my revolutionary greetings to the newly elected office-bearers and committee members of AIALA.

Comradely yours,

Ram Naresh Ram

### **Message of Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, General Secretary of AIALA, from Beur Jail, Bihar**

Friends,

From Beur Jail of Bihar, I salute all delegates, observers, guests, and the struggling masses gathered on the occasion of the Second National Conference of AIALA. On this occasion, I would like to greet the heroic masses who are waging anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles all over the country.

Comrades, we have developed our organisation at the national level through immense sacrifices and hard work. Even today many of our comrades are facing repression day and night. Still, they are holding high the banner of political and social assertion of the poor and the workers. This is the greatest strength of our movement. I hope that, basing itself on this strength, this conference

of AIALA will concretise the issues emerging in the new situation, and along with the old issues it will come out with newer initiatives and spirited movements on the new issues.

Today, the Congress regime is ruling in the country. The Congress-led UPA is systematically throttling democracy in our country, implementing anti-labour policies one after another and is turning the whole country dependent on the USA. Recently the BJP and the Congress held their national conclaves and both have come out more openly with their pro-US and anti-poor policies. Today, the country is once again reeling under the policies of the ruling parties. Starvations deaths have become the order of the day and the phenomenon of farmers' suicides continues unabated. The government is even conspiring to cut the ration foodgrains quota and kerosene. Recently, the people of Bihar avenged the Lalu-Rabri regime for their betrayal. Nitish Kumar has come to power promising good governance and development but there is no let up in repression on the masses of poor or in crime.

Nitish Kumar wants to solve the issues of Bihar's backwardness or poverty on NRI-Naidu model. It will certainly not help the poor but there will be loot of development fund. Development mafia will benefit.

Friends, repression on the poor has intensified after the Jehanabad jailbreak and Giridih operation. Along with initiatives on the economic issues of the poor, we should intensify our initiatives on the social question and strengthen the forces of resistance.

Lastly, I will appeal to you once again to make AIALA the united platform of broad agrarian labourers and poor of the country. This is the wish of the comrades held here in jail.

Long live AIALA!

Long live CPI(ML)!

Comradely yours,  
Rameshwar Prasad.

## **Veterans of Telengana Honoured by Comrade Dipankar**

1. Kancherla Sanjeev Reddy
2. Doodipala Sathi Reddy
3. Bummi Bakka Reddy
4. Bathina Yadagiri



## 5. Garlapati Raghupati Reddy

Veterans of Srikakulam Struggle Honoured by Comrade Dipankar

1. Bendalam Appa Rao
2. Barla Chiranjeevulu
3. Tamada Polamma

**Agricultural labourers have begun to arrive on the stage; nothing can stop them from winning the great battle for survival and social transformation**

[Excerpts from the concluding address delivered by Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya at the Second All India Conference of AIALA at Rajamundhry, Andhra Pradesh]

It is impossible to deny the growing presence of agricultural labourers in today's India. From Andhra Pradesh and Bihar to Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, agricultural labourers are increasingly making their presence felt. They are in the news not just for their sufferings, but increasingly also for their heroic struggles. This is the class that is producing heroes like Comrade Bant Singh of Punjab who has lost his limbs because of his insistence on bringing the rapists of his daughter to justice, but who has the courage and determination to declare that he still retains his voice and he would continue to sing for his people. This is the class which is full of brave daughters like Baljeet who has come here to tell you that if her father Bant Singh has lost his limbs fighting for justice for his daughter, she is now going to take up cudgels for her father and for securing justice for all her people.

We at CPI(ML) salute this growing fighting spirit of India's agricultural labourers, the courage and determination with which the rural proletariat is fighting back for survival as well as social transformation. The All India Agricultural Labour Association has emerged as a fighting class platform of the rural poor for carrying forward this great battle and here in this second conference we have seen ample reflection of its growth and expansion, not only in terms of membership and areas of operation but also in terms of experience of struggles and the development of a courageous and confident leadership. In the 1940s, the great Telengana movement had advanced the clarion call of "bhoomi, mukti, vimukti". It is time for the AIALA to resurrect that great spirit of Telengana and mobilise the entire class of agricultural labourers to realise the Telengana war cry - land, livelihood, liberation!

While we revolutionary communists would like to do all we can to raise the level of organisation, consciousness and fighting capacity of agricultural labourers as an all-India class, the ruling classes and the state are obviously worried about such a prospect and are trying their level best to disintegrate and disorient this class and contain its assertion. They do this not only by unleashing repression and invoking black laws like TADA, but let us not forget for a moment the fact that the state also pursues its agenda even when it is forced to address the basic issues of living conditions of agricultural labourers and come up with apparently pro-poor pieces of legislation.

Take the example of the much hyped employment guarantee act. While the government is busy congratulating itself for this legislation, delegate after delegate have informed this conference that there is little, if any, official preparation on the ground to ensure its immediate implementation. The NREGA is scheduled to become operational from February 2, yet we see little administrative homework in most of the 200 districts for which the Act has been notified. Almost the entire responsibility for implementation of the Act is entrusted with the panchayats and it is not difficult to imagine how in the absence of a powerful

organisation and movement of the rural poor the entire scheme would be used by the dominant parties and vested interests to reinforce their power and influence. We must remember that even though the NREGA does not have much of a direct bearing on agrarian relations, like other agrarian legislations, its fate would also depend very much on the organised and conscious intervention of agricultural labourers and the AIALA must strengthen itself in every way to meet this challenge.

Meanwhile, the UPA government is cleverly trying to use the NREGA as a propaganda instrument to sideline other equally explosive concerns of the rural poor. In fact, the government often pits the agenda of employment against issues like food subsidy. In the name of increasing the efficiency of the public distribution system, it has already been heavily truncated. And now the government wants to bring about still greater reduction in food subsidy by increasing prices of food grains and/or reducing the quantity of food grains hitherto available to BPL families. If an agricultural labourer household earning a daily wage of Rs. 60 is subjected to the tyranny of open market prices, employment guarantee will mean no more than guaranteed starvation and malnutrition. AIALA will therefore have to pursue the agenda of assured employment and living wages in conjunction with other basic issues like food, clothing and shelter, healthcare and social security.

Almost everywhere in the country the agricultural labourers' movement experiences severe state repression and the wrath of both feudal forces and the emerging kulak power. The question of democracy and people's rights must therefore figure on top of the AIALA's agenda. It should consistently unite with the democratic aspirations and struggles of other sections of the society. In particular AIALA must forge a firm alliance with the struggles of the displaced and the dispossessed, the adivasis and indigenous people whose traditional rights on land and forest are now being sought to be crushed under the combined weight of state repression and corporate plunder. The middle peasantry is also facing a huge

crisis - indebtedness and the increasingly unremunerative terms of agriculture are even driving many to suicide. AIALA will surely stand by the distressed peasantry to resist the disastrous new agricultural policies of the central and state governments.

## UPDATES

### **CPI(ML) General Secretary visits Kalinga Nagar**

A 9-member CPI(ML) delegation comprising General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, West Bengal State Secretary Kartick Pal, Chhattisgarh incharge Rajaram, CPI(ML) MLA from Jharkhand Vinod Singh and five other party activists JP Minz (Jharkhand), Radhakanta Sethi, Tirupati Gomango, Meghnath Sabaro and Upendra visited Kalinga Nagar on 5 February, 2006 and spoke to leaders of the ongoing anti-eviction struggle and members of the families of the Kalinga Nagar martyrs. At a press conference held at the Party's Bhubaneswar headquarters at Nagbhushan Bhawan on 6 February, Comrade Dipankar expressed total solidarity with the ongoing struggle of the Kalinga Nagar people against eviction and for justice. He also appreciated the adivasis' resolve to turn down token monetary compensation and insist on comprehensive rehabilitation and a halt to any fresh drive for mass eviction. The CPI(ML) would strive for developing effective solidarity within Orissa among all anti-eviction struggles and especially between the Kalinga Nagar agitation and the land struggles of south Orissa and Chilika fisherpeople's struggle for livelihood, he added. "We will also try to forge closer links among similar struggles in the three neighbouring and NDA-ruled states of Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh", he said.

The visiting team found that the Kalinga Nagar industrial complex was launched with a promise of turning this area into Orissa's second Rourkela. Ironically, the original Rourkela is suffering from lack of investment and systematic neglect while all that has come up in the name of second Rourkela is a huge complex with little by way of actual industry and employment. It has a total area of 13,000 acres leased out to a dozen industrial houses. This area was not included in the 1966 land settlement and so land records go back to the 1928 survey. The land is quite fertile with two crops a year. The struggle over adequate compensation has been going on for a decade – there would be periodic protests and the government would announce some increases. On January 2, the Kalinga Nagar people thought they were in for only just that while the government had made up its mind to issue a stern message that it meant business. Kalinga Nagar is thus a case of premeditated mass murder and the role of the SP and DM was very dubious. The SP's wife is an advocate for the Tatas and the DM apparently has close links with the Vedanta steel, and he was earlier posted at Kalahandi. The people appeared quite spirited and determined to continue the struggle. An indefinite dharna is going on in front of the Orissa Assembly

To resist evictions, the CPI(ML) will organise a massive Kalinga Nagar solidarity demonstration in front of the Orissa Assembly on 9 March. The CPI(ML) campaign will focus on the demands already raised by the Kalinga Nagar struggle and insist on penal action against the guilty former DM and SP of Jajpur including prosecution under Section 302. The Party will sharpen mass struggles against the anti-people BJD-BJP government headed by Navin Patnaik on all fronts

with special emphasis on the land question and the rights of dalits, adivasis and other sections of the toiling masses of the state.

## **Protest Against Attack on Bant Singh Continues**

The struggle to bring Bant Singh's attackers to justice and make the State Government take responsibility for his treatment and compensation continues. Till date, the Amrinder Singh Government only offered a paltry token sum of a lakh, which was refused by Bant Singh and his family. On 25 January, people had gheraoed the District Headquarters at Mansa, and then declared their intention to gherao the State Assembly at Chandigarh on March 3.

Bant Singh's struggle has also inspired a tremendous response from people far and wide. A team of filmmakers, journalists, teachers and others from the Forum for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) had visited Punjab, and then launched a campaign for justice for Bant Singh. The London-based South Asia Solidarity Group submitted a petition Manmohan Singh as well as Amrinder Singh, signed by over 500 prominent individuals. This petition, in addition to demanding that the perpetrators be brought to book and that the Punjab Government take responsibility for compensation and rehabilitation of Bant Singh, expressed deep concern at "the attempts by senior police officials to dismiss any link between the attacks on Bant Singh and his courageous struggle against those who raped his minor daughter in 2002." It observed that the "successful sentencing of the rapists to life imprisonment by a Sessions Court in 2004 is a very strong motive for the repeated assaults by upper caste men on Bant Singh over the past year, and must not be swept aside as irrelevant to the case. 5." Also that the "Bant Singh incident is the tip of the iceberg as far as atrocities on Dalits in Punjab are concerned. Apart from the severe economic exploitation of Dalits, who form a very large percentage of all agricultural labour in the state, there is systematic sexual exploitation of Dalit women", and recommended that the SC/ST Commission, the National Human Rights Commission as well as the National Women's Commission conduct an immediate inquiry. On March 3, on the same day as the gherao of the Assembly at Chandigarh, a protest will also be held at the Indian High Commission in London.

## **Intensify Campaign for the Mass Registrations Under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act**

*February 2 was the day that the NREGA was to come into effect across the country. We carry reports from some States, about irregularities in implementation of the EGA and also regarding struggles to ensure its implementation.*

### **Why the Administration is Angry with AIALA**

In the wake of the mass campaign being conducted by AIALA from the panchayat to the Block level, the District Administration of Darbhanga has warned through an advertisement in the newspaper that it will take "stern action" against "groups that are

interfering with the process of registration by distributing NREGA registration forms". Such a response ought to be expected in most places. While the operational guidelines laid down by the Central Government promise to provide legal representation to labour organisations in the State Employment Guarantee Council, in real life, the State Government and a grudging bureaucracy fee the initiative of labour organisations is an obstruction. The Administration would like to restrict the registrations to a certain unsaid quota. Various AIALA units have printed application forms in Bihar and other states to help the aspirant poor families in view of limited supply of the same by the governmental agencies. At most of the places it was found that Panchayat Secretary and Block office are not willing to accept those forms, unless enough mass pressure was created through the agitation, as this will break the existing monopoly of the ruling elite in controlling the scheme.

### **Panchayat Offices Are Non-Functional: Where Are Labourers to go for Registration?**

Since most of the panchayats are non-functional, often without any building or office, and panchayat heads are usually notorious for their anti-poor character, the first stage of registration itself is an uphill task. Panchayat secretaries remain absent, despite prior information, and labourers have to remain empty-handed. At Darbhanga, 150-600 workers participated in the Panchayat-level demonstrations.

Even if labourers get registered, they do not get any receipt on the basis of which they can claim job cards. After this long and tiring battle, lakhs of registration forms have been deposited, but job cards have not been given. Through AIALA alone, around 5 lakh forms have been submitted in Darbhanga, Jehanabad, Samastipur, Muzaffarpur, Bhojpur, Gaya, etc..., but even two weeks after February 2, job cards are not yet available.

Rather, there are unwritten instructions from the Administration, discouraging registration and job cards. Because if job cards are distributed in large numbers, labourers will demand jobs. And if the Administration fails, it must provide unemployment allowance: something the Administration wants to avoid. In fact the political will and machinery required to implement such a huge scheme is missing.

So the work has neither started nor has the Administration any plans to provide jobs in the near future. The Government must prepare an alternative structure to implement this Scheme but it wants to get it done through the same old machinery, which is now busy preparing for Panchayat polls. So it is certain that the Scheme is going to be left hanging, unless powerful mass mobilisation ensures otherwise.

### **Darbhanga**

A district level review camp was organised by the All India Agricultural Labour Association in Darbhanga on Feb. 15 to assess the actual state of implementation of the NREGA and to discuss the problems being faced by the village/panchayat level activists in the process of registration for the job cards under this Act. Nearly 100 representatives from 70 villages participated in this camp.

It was a general complaint that the government has supplied the application forms in limited number at panchayat levels and the panchayat Secretaries are brazenly showing discrimination in distribution of these forms. Moreover, there are reports that the application forms are being sold by concerned officials at a cost, up to Rs. 50 per form. Additional money, Rs. 35 - 50, is also being charged for the photographs. In contravention of the provisions of the Act, neither meetings of gram sabhas have been

called by the concerned block and district authorities nor any survey was conducted to facilitate the registration process. At almost all the places central and state governments have not accomplished the ground work to fulfil the requirements for the implementation of the scheme, as was supposed to be done before the commencement of the Act.

AIALA unit in Dharbhanga has taken up an agitational programme from Feb. 24 to Mar. 6. Mass submission of application forms through organised demonstrations will be done from Feb. 16-24; '*Ghera Dalo- Dera Dalo*' programmes will be held at all blocks on Feb. 24-28. and a massive Collectorate march, primarily by women agrarian labourers, will be held on March 8 in this campaign. Similar programmes will also be undertaken in other districts of Bihar.

The review camp was presided over by AIALA General Secretary Dharendra Jha.

**Bhojpur:** Irregularities were observed from the very first day when job cards were issued to many without properly completing registration process, while many workers failed to submit even their application forms. Applicants have no proof of their applications submitted as no receipts are being given as required by the law. Many people could not submit their forms as Panchayat Secretary and village heads were absent at many places. AIALA took up agitations and organised cadre meets followed by sit-in programmes at block level. More than 3000 people gheraoed BDO Office in Sandesh, while hundreds of people entered inside the hall where BDC meetings were going on at Piro and Jagadishpur blocks, in protest. A demonstration of more than a thousand people was held at Udwananagar Block office. These protests created enough pressure over the administration and the latter had to agree to the demands, at least in principle, and ordered the panchayats to issue the receipts for every application.

#### **Initiatives in Jharkhand:**

Jharkhand government declared to launch a campaign for the registrations and to conduct a propaganda to 'educate' the rural poor from 2-15 February. Big advertisements were published in newspapers but nothing was visible at the ground level. Prospective candidates for this scheme are very poor and in villages no one reads a newspaper. A large section of them are illiterate. It was also announced to hold gram sabhas at panchayats, but these were not held at most of the places. And wherever they were held, respective officials were either totally absent or went there to complete the formality and came back in 10-15 minutes. Moreover, adequate number of registration forms were not there when gram sabha were being held. At some places only 10 or 20 forms were available and those were sold at a price of 2 to 20 rupees. When CPI(ML) and Jharkhand Mazdoor Kisan Samiti distributed application forms, they were not accepted with officials saying that only government printed forms are valid. Which is a false propaganda by the govt. machinery.

The proforma of the application forms as given in the 'NREGA Operational Guide Book' does not have a space for the receipt (counter-foil). Keeping in view the attitude of the authorities it is not difficult to understand that this is being used to dilute the provision for providing employment within fifteen days or the unemployment allowance. One more problem is providing photographs. Photography for the job cards is to be done by the authorities and a proper funding mechanism has been described in the Act. But, photos are being demanded from the applicants along with the forms, and an atmosphere is created that without photos they might be left out. If these practices are not stopped

immediately, such atmosphere will pave the way for greater corrupt practices ultimately making this Act as ineffective as its predecessor schemes.

JMKS has taken an initiative for the mass registrations and has printed two lakh forms for the campaign. At many places forms have been submitted to the appointed officers and wherever panchayat officials are showing reluctance, mass submissions are carried out through big mass protests. In Barwadih block of Latehar district administration is still insisting for the photographs. It has agreed to accept forms only after the mass protests held at panchayats and block. In Daltonganj and Chainpur blocks in Palamu, agitations forced the administration to accept forms of those people who were earlier denied for the same. As individual receipts were not given to the applicants, JMKS forced the authorities to issue a collective receipt to the organisation with total number of forms accepted clearly mentioned. Administration in Garhwa had to agree to the JMKS demand for conducting photography of the applicants, after a series of protests. Now district authorities have assured to provide cameras at every block.

In the mean time decisions are being taken by other blocks and district level committees for massive mobilisations and protests in order to cull the corrupt and anti-people attitude of the administration at the initial stage itself. District level bigger mobilisations will be organised in coming days.

But a question still remains, and will acquire prominence when the actual work under this scheme really commences. That the wage to be provided under this scheme stands equal to the minimum wage for the agricultural workers in the respective state. It is Rs. 58 per day in Jharkhand. The current wage rate for the heavy earthworks like digging and transporting soil is Rs. 74 or more. Is the minimum wage rate as decided for the Act is justified?

UP

As per government announcements, the NREGA was to become operative in 22 districts of U.P. since February 2, and accordingly the job cards were to be made available at Panchayat level latest by Jan. 27. But in most of the districts, the cards were not provided even after February 2. Obviously, the absence of the job cards only means that the launching of the scheme from the declared date has failed. Since the beginning, there are reports of irregularities from many places – for instance, village Pradhans taking money from the labourers in the name of photography for job-cards, despite official claims that fund worth Rs. 25 lakhs has been released for the purposes of job card printing, employment register and photography.

CPI(ML), through a memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister Mulayam Singh, has reminded him that apart from above anomalies, U.P. is notorious for scams and rampant corruption in various schemes implemented in the name of the poor. Memories of the megascam in the food-for-work scheme involving many higher-ups is still fresh in public memory. However for obvious reasons, the government had not conceded the popular demand for a CBI inquiry into the scam.

## **JAIL DIARY**

### **A Week in Tihar Jail**

Jails mean different things for different people. For the likes of Shahabuddin or Pappu Yadav, jails are a safe haven – you can run your mafia empires from there, you can hold parties and entertain guests, you are kept abreast of every move of your political



opponents, you can order your henchmen to shoot dead a young man fresh from JNU, who dares to speak out on a streetcorner and challenge your empire... For your common prisoner, and especially for those who resist the Shahabuddins of this world, jail means something quite different – it's a school which teaches you, on pain of violence, to lose your sense of human dignity and solidarity.

March 31 next month will mark nine years of Chandrashekhar's murder. The entire month of April 1997 had witnessed a tremendous upsurge of students and civil society. Some years after the student movement in 1997, charges of rioting, breaking the peace, assaulting policemen, etc ... were framed - against me, as well as two senior teachers of DU, who had tried to help the injured students. In Patiala House on February 8, I was taken into judicial custody because I missed the previous date in court. As I was kept standing in the court room the entire morning, I reflected on the irony: Shahabuddin defies non-bailable warrants and roams the land free, until he is good and ready to go to jail!

Jailors are well-groomed in the art of well-calibrated humiliation, violence and other kinds of more nuanced pain. If you've no money to buy/bribe, you have to scrub and cook and clean endlessly. You do personal chores (*maalish*, hairdressing, washing clothes, etc...) for the more privileged prisoners, in order to 'pay' for necessities like soap and underwear. Books from outside are not allowed in the jail – unless with special permission. Separation from babies and small children causes severe depression among mothers. Bribes, or 'corner-corner', as the women call it, is a way of life – necessary for being allowed to keep a TV, receive home-cooked food, and in my presence, family members of women who had got bail were even asked to pay 'kharch-pani' (a bribe) in order to be allowed to take the women home!

The Matrons would assume that the poor and derelict women, picked off Delhi's streets, are fair game for routine beatings. And friendship and solidarity amongst prisoners is feared and discouraged. I regularly visited an inmate in the Medical Ward who is a seriously ill heart patient, and on the 14<sup>th</sup>, I was helping her to go to meet her visitors. The Superintendent of the women's jail, Ms. Swatantar Pahwa, came and yelled at the sick woman because she hadn't stood up in her presence. When I tried to explain that she was sick, Ms. Pahwa advanced with raised hand, with two menacing Matrons on either side, and threatened to hit me for 'answering back'. When I told her she had no right to hit anyone, she said, 'Do you know who

I am? I have every right'. She then told the uniformed Matron next to her, named Minakshi, to 'teach her a lesson' ("*isko dikha dena*"). A few minutes later, Matron Minakshi came up and began hitting me around the head and face, telling me I had no business to be helping the sick women, and that she'd teach me what happened to those who argued with 'Madam'. She did not stop hitting me until fellow prisoners came up to protect me.

It took a long fight to be allowed to submit a complaint and get a copy duly stamped and received. All evening, I received warm congratulations and hugs from women all over the jail. They told me how Zohra, an Afghan prisoner, was beaten to death by a Matron in 2002. She had complained of pain after the beating, but the Superintendent and Doctor in the Jail dismissed it as '*nakhra*' (pretence), and eventually she died the next day. After this, women had united across Wards to wage an all-out battle; 8 women continue to serve terms for 'rioting' in the jail that year. Further, I saw high walls with iron netting being built between Wards now. Women prisoners called those walls *pinjra/chidiaghar* (cage/zoo), and told me they were being constructed to prevent women prisoners from being able to mobilise easily across Wards, as they did after Zohra's death!

But the next day, my Ward was kept locked the whole day so that other women in her Ward could share my 'punishment'. The attempt was to turn the women against me – but those women wouldn't play that game. 'We're with you', they said. They declared they would all refuse meals till the Ward was unlocked. We held a GBM in the jail, and I addressed them, explaining the whole incident.

We asked ourselves, why wasn't the Matron who killed Zohra also imprisoned in Tihar jail?

When I was released on bail that night, women shouted out greetings to me from their locked barracks. 'Tell the TV people to come and talk to us', they said. Another fellow prisoner who left the jail a couple of days after I did, told me that my Ward remained locked 24 hours a day after I left. The Superintendent visited the women, and warned them that this was the consequence of my 'bad behavior', my 'answering her back'. Small children were suffering the worst brunt of this 24-hour confinement in an enclosed space, and the women are under severe stress, caged in a small compound, and unable even to take a walk in the Jail grounds or have a cup of tea from the canteen. The official explanation is that there is a rule that the Ward which houses first-time prisoners in the jail is kept locked in order to protect newcomers from the 'dangerous' long-time prisoners. But the whole episode makes it clear that this confinement is relaxed as long as women express no protest against any action by the authorities; the minute some protest is expressed, the confinement is enforced as a 'punishment'.

Custodial violence as an instrument of 'discipline' violates human rights and dignity. It is rampant in most jails, and even in the so-called 'model' Tihar Jail. It is high time ordinary prisoners in Tihar got to testify to their conditions in the jail, before a proper human rights tribunal. Only this can ensure that Swatantar Pahwa and her fellows will hesitate to claim violence as their 'right'!

I am deeply disturbed by the fact that my having complained and taken up the issue, has resulted in further confinement and 'punishment' for the women behind the Jail walls in Ward Number 8. I will never forget my friends from the Jail - their brave efforts to keep the human spirit

alive, by sharing their meagre belongings, their stories, laughter and tears, and their celebration of every small act of defiance by one of them, despite the bitter and inevitable consequences.

**-Kavita Krishnan, National President, All India Students' Association.**

## **POLICY**

### **CPI(ML)'s Position on State Funding of Elections**

*[CPI(ML) response to the Union Cabinet proposal on state funding of elections mooted on December 22, which was circulated by the Election Commission among all parties for feedback.]*

To

Chief Election Commissioner  
Election Commission of India  
Nirvachan Sadan  
Ashoka Road  
New Delhi 110 001

Subject: Views of CPI(ML)(Liberation) regarding the December 22 proposals of the Union Cabinet

Sir,

Apropos of your request for our views regarding the December 22 proposals made by the Union Cabinet on state funding of elections, we hereby briefly summarise our positions.

We are in principle agreed to the idea of state funding of elections so that the impact of private money-power can be held in check and money does not become an entry barrier to the participation of the toiling and weaker sections of society in the electoral process. The proposals put forward by the Union Cabinet are however silent about these basic objectives.

Part (a) of the proposed package deals not with election-related expenses but with the general office functioning of recognized political parties. There is no reason why the state should extend such facilities or subsidies to political parties. Political parties, recognized or not, are not wings of the state, but are supposed to be organizations of the people. State funding of political parties is therefore

unnecessary and undesirable. It will distort the relations between the state and political parties and open the way to discriminations among parties and possibly also to state interference in the autonomous functioning of political parties.

As for allocation of time for recognized parties on private cable television network and electronic media, it may be considered as an extension of the present facility enjoyed by recognized parties on the Prasar Bharati network. But the current system of allocation needs to be reviewed and replaced by a more equitable pattern so that bigger parties do not enjoy disproportionately greater advantages. Also, the policy becomes meaningless if resource-rich parties are allowed to unleash massive private-funded publicity campaigns through the electronic and print media. It is therefore important to regulate and limit such private publicity campaigns in the mass media while extending state-funded facilities to recognized parties.

We do not see much merit in section (b) of the proposed package either. Unwarranted discrimination must not be introduced among candidates set up by recognized parties and others. The benefits of state funding of elections should not be such in nature as to put candidates set up by unrecognized parties to any major disadvantage or discrimination. Electoral rolls should be provided free of cost to all candidates. Facilities like some minimum arrangements for the candidates' camps at polling stations and supply of refreshments and food packets to the counting agents inside the counting hall should also be extended to all either free of cost or on nominal charges.

The moot question is to ensure proper monitoring and accounting of all election-related expenses incurred by candidates and parties. As for the distinction between recognized and unrecognized parties, the primary advantage accruing to the former is reservation of election symbol. A party securing state-level recognition should automatically enjoy the facility of a reserved symbol for at least two successive general elections not only to State Assemblies and Parliament but also to institutions of local self-government all over the country.

Thanking you,

Yours truly,

(Dipankar Bhattacharya)  
General Secretary  
CPI(ML)(Liberation)

## **REPORT**

# **Raging protests against Army Atrocities in Assam**

Tinsukia district of Assam is reeling under army terror. Violating all democratic norms and laws of the land, army rule has been clamped down in Assam and army operations – indiscriminate arrests and killings – are going on, particularly in the Upper Assam districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. Thousands of people came out on to the street to protest against state terror. The situation was sparked off by incident of killing of one Ajit Mahanta, father of two children, in army custody, who was arrested from his village by the 1/3 Gorkha Rifles on 4<sup>th</sup> February. Branding Ajit Mahanta as an active ULFA link-man, army officials said that Ajit sustained fatal internal injuries in a fall while trying to escape.

After hearing of Ajit's killing, people gathered at National High Way (NHW) 52, and his body was cremated near the NHW itself on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb as protests continued. Agitating people have been blocking the NHW since, which is the link road to Arunachal Pradesh. On 9 Feb, *tilani* – an Assamese ritual on the third day after a person's death – was performed, where nearly 10,000 people gathered at Hunjan Tiniali, near Kakopathar and the situation had become tense.

Nobody from the Government or Army dared to face the people who were holding continuous protests. On 10 February, at around 1 p.m., thousands of people started to march towards Kakopathar Police Station and armed police opened fire upon the procession. Just after the incident, curfew was clamped in the area, and army operations continued. The Army not only opened fired on the protesters; they killed one Wahida Ahmed inside her house, Golap Bailung was also killed in his campus. Anindita, Kunjalata, and Beauty were gunned down, and the toll has risen up to ten. Among those severely injured include a 15-year-old girl, Monik Moran, who has been paralysed due to a spinal injury and is currently battling for her life in AIIMS in Delhi. Apart from killing in Kakopathar, police opened fire on mass protesters at Makum on 10 February.

The day after the incident, the Eastern Command Chief of the Army visited Kakopathar and declared – “This was a very unfortunate thing to happen. I

am shocked. We have already constituted a court of inquiry and will get the report very soon...We know we have done wrong.”

Similarly, on 13 February, the Chief Secretary of the State, in a press conference held at Tinsukia, said that by killing Ajit Mahanta, the Army had violated the rules of Unified Command.

The Chief Minister waited for reports from four junior ministers and visited Kakopathar only on 17 Feb, a whole week after the killing. On 11 February, the day after the firing, he was busy with Sonia Gandhi, who visited Barpeta, Guwahati and Tezpur. On that very day of CM's visit, people held a protest procession peacefully, but police did not spare even journalists. As the procession marched towards the Inspection Bungalow, police blocked them at Kakopathar Tiniali and started to disperse them and Robin Dhekial Phukan, a local correspondent of an Assamese Daily, was brutally tortured and many others were detained at the Police Station. The Chief Minister had to face similar protest at the Assam Medical College Hospital when he entered the hospital to meet injured persons.

The ruling Congress is trying to diffuse the people's anger, on the one hand, by inventing the hidden hand of a 'third force' behind this incident, and on the other hand, offering compensation to the victims' families, but these efforts have no effect.

Protests all over the state are ongoing. An Assam bandh was called by ULFA on 13, and by AASU on 14 February. Both the bandhs were spontaneous.

CPI(ML) staged protest programmes in different towns including Tinsukia, Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Jorhat. On 12 February, a protest march was organized at Tinsukia, where an effigy of the Chief Minister was burnt. Another protest was held at Jorhat, where an effigy of the Chief Minister was burnt. Protests were held at Dibrugarh Town on 21 and at Guwahati on 22 February. On 22 February, another protest march from Durgabari to the DC office was held at Tinsukia and a memorandum was sent to the President of India. The memorandum addressed to the President of India demanded:

1. A high-level enquiry into the incidents of killing and torture and punishment to the guilty Army and police personnel;
2. Withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from Assam as well as other Northeastern states;

3. Army to be sent back to its barracks immediately; and
4. Dismissal of Tarun Gogoi Government, which is responsible for these killings.

A delegation of CPI(ML), Janasanskritik Parishad, AICCTU and AIPWA visited Kakopathar and met the family members of Ajit Mahanta, Mardhurya Gohain, Beauty Gohain, and Wahida Rahman. The delegation included Subhas Sen, Harendra Nath Barthakur, Gagan Sonowal (founder working president of Janasanskritik Parishad), and AIPWA activists Nizara Das and Bhagya Rekha Neog. The enquiry team which visited the spot noted that this area has been a site of Army repression for long. In 2003, the Army took away three youths from Pengari; two of them, Robin Moran and Maneswar, were killed and the latter's body was not returned. Unified Command has meant virtual Army rule, and thanks to the AFSPA license to kill, no culprit has yet been punished for these atrocities.

This killer Government must go. People of the state will surely give a befitting reply to it in the ensuing Assembly elections.

– **Naren Borah**

## **Atrocity on Kol Women in Mirzapur**

On December 27th, 2005, two women agrarian labourers belonging to the Kol tribe in Mirzapur district of Eastern UP stopped to rest in a field while returning from the day's hard work. Feeling hungry, they plucked two chana (gram) plants to eat. To punish them for this 'crime', the landlord beat them up mercilessly and paraded them naked. The police and administration refused to even file an FIR. It was only after prolonged and militant protests were launched by the Khet Mazdoor Sabha and CPI(ML), mainly by landless agrarian labourers, a majority of whom were women, that an FIR was finally lodged. Following the FIR no action was taken till the thana was gheraoed and a masive public meeting was held to protest against the criminal-police-administration-feudal nexus of the region. While the culprit is absconding, an order to seize his property has been issued. (kurki jabti).

The entire state has become a witness to the increasing atrocities by the mafia-landlord-police nexus, which the current regime of Mulayam Singh is patronising and protecting. Women are also organising themselves to fight inhuman working conditions in the agrarian sector, joblessness, meagre wages and brutal violence and humiliation meted out to them by landlords and their goons on a daily basis.

One very recent instance of growing awareness and assertion of organised women could be seen in Sitapur where women in large numbers destroyed a liquor theka (shop). This liquor store was located right near the tehsil office and opposite a women's college, in flagrant violation of one the basic rules of not permitting such stores to be located in such localities in town. It was the hub of molesters and eve-teasers and women had been demanding for a long time to shut it down. The Mulayam regime is well known for patronising liquor mafia all over the state. Naturally, state apathy was the most predictable response to this demand being made by women. It was on February 10, 2006 that women got together in large numbers under the banner of AIPWA and



marched up to the store and smashed it. They also warned the administration that if other thekas were not shut down in the district they will be forced to take up this task themselves.

– **Shubhra**

## **Dalit Girl's Arm Severed in Auriya**

Anju, a dalit girl of Auriya District in Uttar Pradesh, had her right arm severed by criminals near Achalda Station just because she dared to protest against constant harassment and eve teasing by a group of boys. The main culprit, Viresh Singh, son of Mansingh and his friends had been constantly stalking Anju and passing lewd remarks and trying to molest her. Earlier, on two occasions she had somehow managed to escape. But this time, when she was going to buy vegetables along with her younger sister, she was accosted by Viresh and two others. Anju raised an alarm and fought to release herself but the 3 proved to be too strong a group. Anju's sister ran to tell her parents but in the meantime the culprits had overpowered Anju and had chopped off her right arm right above the elbow with a sharp edged weapon used by butchers to cut animals. When Anju's parents came they found her unconscious and bleeding profusely, but could not find her severed arm. They approached the Achalda police station but their report was not lodged and the police inspector reprimanded them saying this was a case of rail accident which was being deliberately being made out to be a case of attack by youth. When the D.C. was finally approached, he too did not get the case registered, rather sent the girl to Kanpur for treatment. (Auriya is adjoining to Kanpur). But again nothing was done and the girl did not even get proper medical aid. AIPWA, along with the Dalit Panthers protested against the inaction and demanded arrest of the culprits at the Ramashray Park in Kanpur. Later, other organizations and political parties also began to protest. It was only then that the DIG ordered the C.O. of Achalda P.S. to lodge an FIR, which was finally lodged on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the incident. While Anju was in Hospital in Kanpur, her father and uncle were kidnapped from the hospital premises by the culprits with the help of the police and threatened to withdraw the case or face dire consequences. While the uncle managed to escape, the father's whereabouts is still not known. None of those named in the FIR have been arrested yet. AIPWA has demanded that the culprits be traced immediately and remanded to judicial custody as well Anju's father be rescued and provided security.

– **Vidya Rajwar**

## **LABOUR**

### **Privatisation Takes Off!**

### **Labour Rights Crashland!**

To call it a victory is a self-deception. Rather, it's a sellout, total and shameless. The strike by the workers of airports not only aired the demand for job security but also articulated the demand for a halt to privatisation of airports. The powerful demand of the workers should have ended either in a halt to privatisation or with the opportunist Left's withdrawal of support to the Congress-led UPA government. But, the Left has made a retreat, a shameful retreat indeed. The government invoked ESMA against airport workers' strike but the airport workers launched their struggle undeterred by this and braving police lathis. The central government employees made the Manmohan Government bow down to their demand for a Sixth Pay Commission by issuing a strike notice. If the Left unions had called for a nationwide strike in solidarity with the struggling airport workers, then the government might have bowed down in this case also.

The bourgeois media greeted the Prime Minister for having a 'spine', for having 'won a key battle with the Left' on the issue of airport privatisation. It was a key battle because the UPA

has declared that it will not compromise its class interests. It is the beginning of a forthcoming, hitherto stalled, series of sellouts of profit-making PSUs. It's a warning to the Left not to cross the 'Lakshman Rekha' drawn by the multinational and monopoly corporate houses. It's an advice to the Left to confine itself to taking few pennies more through pay commissions and agreements leaving the policies untouched. It's a message, 'This far and no further'. It is not surprising when an analyst called it a 'turning point' saying that the 'The Left is on the back foot. Congress has stared it down and made it blink'. Compromised are the working class interests.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharya promptly apologized to the domestic and multinational capital for the inconvenience caused as a result of the strike. Ironically, the trade union calls it a victory because it has managed to convert the oral assurance given by the minister into a written form. The Left could secure even this insignificant assurance only after striking work for four days. It has neither succeeded in halting privatization nor in arriving at any worthy face-saving formula but for the so-called job security that had already been promised before the strike. Some analysts even question the terms of reference for the tripartite committee that will 'look into the issues and proposals of modernisation of airports by the AAI and employment-related issues, including job security' in the future. They even question the claim of victory of the demand for job security as it is not actually settled but for a reference to the tripartite committee. The committee is to be composed of government officials, representatives of the state-owned Airport Authority of India (AAI) and the Joint Forum of AAI employees' unions. Even the claim of job security is yet to be validated. The Left boasts that they were able to cut down the percentage of foreign capital from the proposed 74 percent to 49 percent. This reduction does not make much difference as the foreign capital can still maintain its supreme position by the mere fact that it will be the single largest stake holder in the company while domestic corporate house would have 26 percent and the present sole proprietor AAI would own only 25 percent. AAI cannot claim any effective control over the foreign player who would be economically and politically dominant and the role of AAI would be reduced to a junior player.

Airport consortiums GMR-Fraport (Frankfurt based) and GVK-ACSA (Airport Consortium of South Africa) have assured the government that 60 percent of the workforce would be absorbed while the rest would be sent back to the AAI after initial three years of modernization project. All said and done, it is also very clear that the fate of 40 percent of employees of Delhi and Mumbai airports is uncertain in reality.

The airports would be leased out to the companies for 30 years and would be further extended for another 30 years. In fact, out of total 125 airports in the country, Delhi and Mumbai airports alone provide more than 65 percent of total revenue earned in the sector by the government. A major part of privatisation would be over when these two airports are handed over to the private sector. The most lucrative sections of the airport business are being awarded on a platter to the private and multinational companies and this will end the monopoly and control of the government in the key sector that concerns the national security.

The Left is keen in proposing Cochin airport, a joint venture company as a model. In this sense, they have made it amply clear that their opposition to privatisation is only a rhetoric that can play politics, well within the framework of politics of globalisation. The protest by the Left was the weakest in the face of a stern refusal by none other than the Prime Minister himself to reverse the privatisation of airports. The dilemma of the Left

was very much obvious in the whole process. Any keen observer can easily make out that the actual demand by the Left in contrast to that of the struggling workers who braved lathis and all sorts of harassment was not against privatisation. Still, they had to raise so much noise mainly in the context of the ensuing assembly elections in the states of West Bengal and Kerala where they had to confront the very same Congress that they support at the centre. The airport strike that was expected to be a morale booster for the Left in the coming elections turned out to be a damp squib.

The UPA government is much faster and ruthless in implementation of anti-workers agenda. It is unhesitant to implement even the agendas that were kept at the backburner by the BJP-led NDA government during its tenure. The project of airport privatisation was originally conceived by the NDA and was shelved in the face of rising protests. The agenda is expeditiously and ruthlessly implemented by the present UPA dispensation at the centre, ironically with full backing of the Left.

**Tail Piece:** The CPI(M) is opposed to inclusion of opposition to Kolkata airport privatisation in the LF manifesto for the polls. Differences have cropped up between the CPI and the CPI(M) over this issue. (*The Hindu*, 24-2-2006)

– Shankar

### **Sixth Pay Commission:**

#### **Freezing Across the Wage Pyramid**

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced on Feb.1 that the Sixth Pay Commission (SPC) would be constituted soon close on the heels of the central government employees' decision to go on an indefinite strike. Still, the Joint Action Forum of Central Government Employees served strike notice on 7 Feb. Serving strike notice in itself was a major event in the central government employees' movement. It was a festival of sorts all over when the employees delivered the strike notice to their authorities by taking out rallies. But, it proved to be a bubble very soon and the strike was deferred for another 60 days expecting the government to actually constitute the commission by then. The government has not conceded any other demand in the charter of 20 points except the demand for the Sixth Pay Commission.

The Fifth Pay Commission was formed in 1994 during Narasimha Rao's regime and the report was submitted after two years. Actual implementation of the report had to wait for another few years. Extending them to the state government employees took a few more years. In that sense, the periodicity of pay commission is, in fact, more than 10 years contrary to its claim.

Earlier pay commissions have not addressed the issue of paying 'need based minimum wages', the declared official policy of the central government. Payment of DA neutralizes the price level only partially. Effectively speaking, pay commissions are being reduced to neutralization commissions, in practice. Whatever quantum increase was given after the FPC was only the revenue saved by retrenchment, downsizing and rightsizing. The government's concept of hike in wages is not through increasing the real income but through cutting down the size of the workforce.

Achieving equality is said to be one of the declared objectives of the pay commissions, equality between a Class IV employee and a bureaucrat in the top slot. FPC claimed to have attempted to reduce this gap from 12:1 to 11.7:1. But now, the government is inclined

towards reducing the gap not between the peon and a Class I officer but between workers of organized and unorganized sector, which effectively would mean bringing down the salary of a government employee to the wage level of workers in unorganized sectors like beedi or powerloom. On the other hand, the concept of 'equal pay for equal work' is being discussed for the people in the top end of the salary pyramid. The example of reported salary differential between CMDs in SBI and ICICI Bank (6 lakhs vis-à-vis 12.5 lakhs in a month) is being considered with concern. Raising a wall, horizontally, across the wage structure in order to effectively prevent any upward mobility of the employees of lower end, and parity of pay packets of bureaucrats at the top end of the pyramid appear to be the dominant thinking behind any pay commission today.

There is a hue and cry about making laws of labour market operational particularly to those employed in Class IV segment. Government employees of Class III and IV are expected to compete with unorganized sector workers in terms of their salary level. The policy of hire and fire, introduction of contract system, outsourcing major operations of government services, etc., go hand in hand with the approach of making government employees compete with unorganized lot of workers.

Equity is a concept aimed at spreading and expanding the frontiers of prosperity and not of poverty. But, the official thinking making rounds in corporate circles regarding the concept of wages and labour market appears to be inclined towards spreading poverty on the one hand and reserving prosperity to the upper echelons, on the other hand. Perhaps, this is the concrete attempt to create a divide, i.e., two Indias, the India of the rich and the powerful and the India of the poor and the powerless. Government of India is firmly on the side of the rich and the powerful. Sixth Pay Commission is no exception to it. In fact, it is an attempt to readjust wage policies and restructure wage structures according to the demand of the market and of the globalization.

– Shankar

## INTERNATIONAL

### Venezuelan Travelogue: Experiencing the Bolivarian Revolutionary Process

*[Two comrades from CPI(ML), Surya and Tamarai, visited Venezuela for 10 days in December 2005. They have written this travelogue based on their firsthand impressions.]*

As the plane lands at the Bolivar international airport, between the mountain and the ocean, one is struck by the light from the mountainside. The mountainside is where the poor and working people live and struggle. A cursory look around Caracas from the skyline to the shopping malls, one cannot but miss the imprint of the multinational corporations (MNCs) and the Venezuelan oligarchy. In the midst of this landscape, the Bolivarian revolutionary struggle is being fought from the mountains of Caracas to the

rainforests of the Orinoco. This struggle for a new world attracted us to Venezuela's Bolivarian revolutionary process and the following is what we experienced.

Venezuela is a country with a population of 24 million with most of the population living in the urban centers. The capital Caracas is the biggest city with 8 million inhabitants. Simon Bolivar is considered the liberatador (liberator) of Venezuela as he was instrumental in winning independence from the Spanish colonisers. Venezuela has been undergoing an accelerated process of political and socio-economic transformation since 1998 when President Hugo Chavez was elected. At that time an estimated 80 percent of the population lived in poverty and more than half of the employment was in the informal sector.

### **Peoples' TV at ViVe**

First we visit the recently launched people's TV station ViVe. ViVe produces programs by workers, peasants, women, indigenous people, and barrio (neighbourhood) activists. ViVe is part of the initiative to promote community media in Venezuela. Private monopolies Venevision (Cisneros group), Radio Caracas Television (Phelps-Granier), Televen, and Globovision control 44 regional television networks in addition to the radio and national press [3]. During the April 2002 coup the government and community media were shut down and false anti-Chavez propaganda was broadcast via the private channels. ViVe is part of the initiative to promote peoples media organizations to counter the lies and propaganda of the commercial media. To see women activists in leadership roles at ViVe is not only refreshing but also quite telling of the revolutionary process. Our interactions with the different departments at ViVe and the Vice President of production revealed that they will do their utmost to ensure that 'the revolution will be televised.'

### **Housing Cooperative at La Ladera**

Caracas is situated in a valley surrounded by mountains. The workers and poor people have to live in small shacks in barrios on the mountainsides. The new national housing policy act provides for the legalization of land holdings on occupied and unproductive land affecting 60% of the population. Approximately 84,000 titles benefiting 630,000 families have been issued [6]. Inspired by this act the people of barrio La Ladera decided to take over 63 hectares of unproductive and vacant land owned by a sports goods manufacturer. They have setup temporary shelters and a community kitchen and are claiming rights to build on this land. The president of the

housing cooperative informs us that since the government is treading carefully with these influential capitalists the land is not legally theirs. Pointing to the mountain in front, he told us that it is obscene that a couple of people own this mountain and the next one, while thousands of families do not even have a place to live. The housing cooperative continues to struggle and the case is presently awaiting a decision from the President. The activists have organised numerous protests including a 20-km march to the presidential palace that stranded traffic for hours on a national highway.

### **Missions at Barrio La Vega**

A walk through barrio La Vega, a settled older neighbourhood near Caracas, reminds one of the state of the poor throughout the world. The barrios barely have any potable water and sewage facilities. In the last few years, three million people have received potable water for the first time and one million have received sewage services. The medical facilities were non-existent but now with the help of the volunteering 20,000 Cuban doctors, as part of Barrio Adentro Program, one doctor per 200 families has been made possible [4]. A conversation with a veteran barrio organizer, a libertarian anarchist, explains how the decades-long struggle has shaped the present Bolivarian revolutionary process and Chavez is a product of these struggles. In addition to Barrio Adentro, the barrio now has Mission Mercal, a major initiative to provide subsidised food, and Infocenter, which provides free high speed Internet access for the community. Their house also has a community kitchen for the elderly and disabled. The people in the barrio emphasize that these are gains of years of struggle and that they are going to defend the revolutionary process at any cost.

### **Co-Management at Inveval**

An important initiative that exemplifies one of the ways in which the Bolivarian revolution is rejecting neo-liberalism and capitalism is the establishment of co-management in factories. Cogestion (co-management) is the joint management of the factory with workers and the state. Succinctly stated at a meeting organised by National Union of Workers (UNT), "the point of co-management is to put an end to capitalist exploitation and to create the potential for building a truly human society" [5]. Co-management is part of the new Venezuelan constitution that was passed in 1999. A visit to Inveval, a valve factory supplying to the petroleum industry, located in the beautiful hills near Caracas is an example of co-management. Workers who struggled through several owner lockouts and other coercive tactics recently were able to convert their factory into co-management. The president of the

union, a socialist, showed how the factory is being run by workers. The workers not only participate in decision-making and work with the local community, they are part of the pro-Bolivarian revolutionary union the UNT. They are also actively running Marxist study circles. Besides the well-known struggles at the aluminium factory (Alcasa) and paper mill (Invepal), almost 200 mostly small companies in financial duress have voluntarily agreed to adopt co-management.

The union president informs us that Invepal previously called Constructora Nacional de Valvulas (CNV) was a monopoly producer of high-pressure valves for the state-owned oil company PDVSA for more than 30 years. CNV owner Andres Sosa Pietri belongs to the traditional Los Amos del Valle (The Rulers of the Valley) i.e. the Venezuelan oligarchy. Sosa Pietri closed the CNV in December 2002 during the oligarchy-organised lockout against the Chavez government. After the failed lockout, Pietri refused to pay wages and so workers started picketing the factory entrance starting April 2003 [2, 7]. After two years of struggle, which included occupation of the factory for several months, the workers won with nationalisation and co-management in 2005. It is now in the process of starting production in March.

### **Bolivarian Revolutionary Process**

Bolivarian circles with more than 2.3 million members are vital to the revolutionary process and participative democracy [1]. Citizens' assemblies are a constitutional right and people represent themselves through these neighbourhood associations, cooperatives and Bolivarian circles. The Bolivarian circle members are usually also members of other organisations such as unions. The people organised in different types of organisations provide vibrancy to the movement. This multitude of more than a million descended from the mountainsides and surrounded the palace thus foiling the 2002 coup and bringing Chavez back within 48 hours.

The circles activities involve working with the Misiones (Missions), the core of the social programs. In addition to Mission Mercal (subsidised food), there are missions in education namely Mission Robinson I and II (literacy and primary), Mission Ribas (high school) and Mission Sucre (university). In a short period, Mission Robinson has already eradicated illiteracy by educating more than 1.5 million people. Other important missions are to improve indigenous peoples' condition (Mission Guicapuro) and to help campesinos (peasants) with land struggles (Mission Zamora). The state oil profits of \$25 billion (2004) have helped fund these missions.

Thousands of women from housewives to former guerrillas have joined to form the Constitutional Front of Women of the Fifth Republic Movement (FCMMVR). New laws such the Law of Violence Against Women (1998) and the Law for Equal Opportunities for Women (1999) have been possible through their struggles. The National Institute for Women (INAMUJER), headed by a former guerrilla leader, is educating women about defending their political rights [8]. Women have not only actively participated in various organisations and are in leadership positions in the government but have also formed cooperatives, which total about 70,000. Housework has also been designated an economically productive activity entitling them to social security benefits.

The Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela has seen a convergence of people from various streams ranging from socialist to anarchists. Although they come with different beliefs and experiences and disagree about the details, they are united in struggle against the elite. What also stands out is the participative nature of the process. Venezuelan people are experimenting with different types of participative decision making from the factories to the barrios. Venezuela is a country fighting capitalism in its neo-liberalism avatar. Since most of the people live in urban areas the struggles have been for work, housing, food, and other basic necessities. In these struggles, they are constantly experimenting with new tactics and strategies.

For the last decade, Venezuela has been the battleground for anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles and the contradictions are sharpening. On the one hand are the old capitalist structures that are attempting to bring back the rule of the oligarchy while the Bolivarian revolutionary process is endeavouring to create socialism of the 21st century. On the other hand, Venezuela has to quench the imperial thirst for fossil fuels by being one of its biggest oil suppliers and concurrently fight imperialism. Venezuelan elite in collusion with the US continue to use all weapons in their arsenal from a military coup to an economic strike to defeat the revolutionary process. The contradictions are manifested on faces of activists and organizers of the revolutionary process – the resolve of struggle, the smile of achievement, and the anxiety for what tomorrow may bring.

At the 2005 World Social Forum (WSF), Hugo Chavez emphatically said, "... it is necessary to transcend capitalism. But capitalism can't be transcended from within capitalism itself, but through socialism, true socialism, with equality and justice." The juggernaut of peoples' organisations, united in struggle, has been able to successfully fight back US imperialism and Venezuelan oligarchy since 1998. The Venezuelan people



have resolved to build their own path towards socialism. We depart from Venezuela inspired by the revolutionary process.

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