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SECOND COVER

AISA National Convention And March to Parliament

In June this year, Jadavpur University had witnessed a police crackdown that sparked off a massive student movement. That movement did not stop with winning the withdrawal of unfair suspensions of 5 students; it has continued to demand a judicial enquiry into the incident – and to demand that the LF Government of W Bengal acknowledge and take responsibility for the crackdown. On August 11, the AISA unit of JU took the initiative of inviting students from campuses all over the country to share their experiences of struggles for democracy on campuses.

The National Convention on 'Democracy in Campuses' held on the JNU campus began with the presentation of a paper on democracy in campuses by the AISA President. The paper discussed the World Bank sponsored perspective on student movements, based on a World Bank Report which argued that political activism on campuses needed to be restricted, in order to curb protests against fee hikes and unemployment. It pointed out that the governments in the country, including the West Bengal Government, reflect the World Bank concern that campuses and students should present a 'corporate-friendly' image. This is why they feel threatened when Engineering students of Jadavpur boycott exams against muzzling of protests, or when JNU students kick out an MNC outlet like Nestle. Similarly, they worry that the workers' movement of Gurgaon will give India a bad image among investors.

In order to muzzle students' movements, democratically elected Student Unions as well as all democratic activity is often banned on campuses like BHU, Jamia as well as most Universities in Bihar. The paper discussed a recent judgement of the Rajasthan High Court which tried to ban elections to Unions in all campuses in that State, and pointed out that contrary to the myth that activism discourages academics, academics tend to be most meaningful and rich where student activism thrives.

Student activists from campuses all over W Bengal, including Presidency College and Kolkata University; student leaders from Delhi University and JNU; Prem Shankar, the Joint Secretary of the Allahabad University Union; Comrade Saleem, President of the RYA, as well as hundreds of students from Patna University, Bhagalpur Univ., Vir Kunwar Singh Univ. Ara, Mithila Univ. shared experiences of struggles against Administrative highhandedness, police crackdowns, bans on activism and other assaults on students' democratic rights.

On August 17, the day that the Employment Guarantee Bill was slated to be tabled in Parliament, AISA held an all-India March to Parliament, in which hundreds of students from Punjab, Uttarakhand, Assam, Karbi Anglong, Bengal, as well as DU,

JNU and Jamia Millia participated. The March was also addressed by Ashokumar Singh, the President of the Manipur University Students' Union as well as Manipur student leaders Kapu.

The March opposed the dilutions in the Employment Guarantee Bill and the Supreme Court judgment scrapping SC/ST reservations in private educational institutions while allowing NRI quotas. The March also raised the demand for restoration of Students' Union Elections in Banaras Hindu University and Jamia Millia Islamia, and a judicial enquiry into the police crackdown on students of Jadavpur. The March also demanded a Common School System, which would guarantee schooling of an equitable quality for all students.

EDITORIAL

Minimum Employment at Less than Minimum Wages

Fifty-odd years ago when our newly independent republic adopted its constitution, the state was asked to make it one of its directive principles to provide gainful employment to every able-bodied citizen. Some sixteen years ago, VP Singh came to power promising to make 'right to work' a constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right of every Indian. That was the first and last time the ruling elite in this country flirted with this slogan. Now the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre has come up with a highly diluted National Rural Employment Guarantee Act that promises potential annual employment worth Rs. 6,000 to every rural family. The scheme would initially be operational in only 200 districts of the country and then extended over the next five years to all the 600 districts.

The proposed Act has already had a trial run in the form of the ongoing food for work scheme, currently in force in 150 backward districts of the country. This scheme has evoked wide criticism because it is highly restricted and offers no real guarantee on the ground. Its coverage has been restricted to only BPL families and that too only in 150 districts, and there is no guarantee of minimum wages or assured unemployment allowances in the event of work not being provided to a job seeker. Worse, field reports suggest that in most cases the scheme has been subverted, with the balance tilting in favour of contractors and tractors as opposed to the men and women who are desperately seeking some employment to survive. The nexus of contractors, corrupt officials and dealers has translated the scheme as a food-for-loot package, while for the labouring men and women it has been little more than starvation-for-work.

How does the proposed NREGA take care of these criticisms? The coverage has been raised from 150 to 200 districts with a promise to extend it to the entire country over the next five years and every rural family has potentially been brought within the purview of the scheme. But in place of minimum wage, the draft NREGA promises a fixed daily wage of Rs. 60 which is way below the stipulated minimum wage in many

states. Thus in the name of empowering the common man and honouring the common minimum programme, the UPA government seeks to use the NREGA as an instrument to depress the wage level across the country. Worse still, if irregularities are detected in implementation, the upshot would be an immediate suspension of the scheme, a clause that effectively provides the corrupt with yet another lever to force the poor into submission and silence.

The Congress fondly believes that the NREGA would serve as the ultimate 'human face' (read mask) for the government's elitist economic agenda and would power another major revival of the Congress as the 'garibi hataao' slogan had done in the early 1970s. The party also hopes to silence all the critics and opponents of its economic agenda with this one single legislation. The high voltage publicity campaign surrounding the NREGA is a well calculated part of this political strategy. The people's movement for securing the right to work as a constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right must see through this political game plan. We must use this legislation as a tool or platform for effecting a broader and more vigorous mobilization and assertion of the rural poor and the unemployed youth for their basic rights while relentlessly exposing the limitation and dilution inherent in the legislation and intensifying the movement against the overall agenda of neo-liberal economic reforms.

Interestingly, the tabling of the NREGA bill in the Lok Sabha coincided with the current World Bank President's maiden visit to India. Paul Wolfowitz, the hated American hawk who has played a key role in scripting Bush's worldwide war and the so-called Project for a New American Century that seeks unchallenged and unilateral US domination over the entire world, has now been made World Bank President to carry on the job in other ways. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chose the occasion to seek more funds from the World Bank to implement the UPA's ambitious 'Bharat Nirman' agenda. Starvation wages for the poor, royalty and interest payments to the MNCs and their global benefactor, the Fund-Bank establishment. That's Manmohanomics in action, for the aam aadmi!

COMMENTARY

Dancing with the US Devil

The ghost of former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi must be dancing away in her grave at Rajghat in New Delhi. Over three decades after she sanctioned the first nuclear bomb test at Pokhran in 1974 – and shocked the world – India has finally been recognized as a member of the global club of nuclear-armed states.

The recognition however comes with a heavy price tag – one that requires the Indian

state to assume duties as a junior partner in the service of US Imperialism, giving up all pretences of being a sovereign and independent nation.

Announcement of the de facto membership came in July this year during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Washington where a joint statement with US President George W. Bush declared that the U.S. would now "work with friends and allies to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy and trade with India."

31 years ago the US had walked out of a nuclear cooperation agreement with India because of the Pokhran nuclear test. At that time India was seen as an upstart third world nation trying to barge into the global nuclear club that included only five established nuclear weapon states (NWS) – the US, UK, France, China and the former Soviet Union. All five crossed the atomic threshold before 1967 while India became a self-declared NWS only in 1998, when the BJP government carried out the second Pokhran nuclear test.

Significantly, the US has maintained a studious silence on demands from Pakistan to be accorded the same kind of 'cooperation' in nuclear technology that India has now received. Obviously, with the changing global equations in the post-Cold War period, and particularly after September 11, 2001, the US has found a new slave in South Asia.

Under the agreement now signed between Bush and Singh, the U.S. has promised to sell nuclear materials and equipment to India and also to involve it in "advanced" areas of research. The new Indo-US agreement says India would "assume the same responsibilities" and "acquire the same benefits and advantages as other leading countries with advanced nuclear technology".

Besides "working to prevent the global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," India would take a series of steps toward "identifying and separating civilian and military nuclear facilities and programs."

India would also be required to file a declaration regarding its civilians facilities with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and place them under its safeguards, continue its "unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing," and work with the U.S. for the "conclusion of a multilateral Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty."

India would also "secure nuclear materials and technology through comprehensive export control legislation" and through "adherence to Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) guidelines," even though it is not a member of either grouping.

Though ostensibly related to civilian uses of nuclear energy, the Indo-US deal is widely seen as a decision by the George Bush Jr. administration to recognize India as a de facto NWS, a move that has raised fears over the future of the entire global nuclear non-proliferation regime. The Indo-US deal many analysts point out is only going to spur countries like Japan, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Sweden, and

others to rethink their foreswearing of nuclear weapons thus sparking off a uncontrollable global nuclear arms race. In fact, it is expected that these countries, which are members of the NSG, will put up a stiff resistance to the US unilaterally granting nuclear power membership to India.

Significantly, the Indo-US deal on nuclear power was preceded by the signing of a "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relations" by the defence ministers of the two countries a few weeks prior to Manmohan Singh's trip to Washington.

This commits them to collaborative "multinational operations" and to strengthening their military capabilities "to promote security," and "combat proliferation" of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). They will also have a "defense strategy" dialogue and intelligence exchanges

The so called 'strategic partnership' will see the two countries launch joint military operations in the future, especially in the Asian continent, and collaborate politically and diplomatically to contain China. According to US defence analysts, through this 'partnership', the United States would strategically "embed" itself in Asia through an alliance with India.

In return, India will probably obtain limited "benefits", including access to U.S. arms and technology, permission to carry on with its regional imperialism in South Asia and a possible role in the US attempts to reshape the Middle East.

Politically, the United States has offered to "help India become a world power in the 21st century." It has also dangled the carrot of endorsing India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, albeit without veto power.

There is little doubt that the US recognition of India as a NWS is also part of the same basket of goodies that the US has promised India for giving up its long history of non-alignment and signing up as a loyal soldier in the ranks of US Imperialism. Given the long list of 'US junior partners' strewn by the wayside throughout history the future of India looks very 'bright' indeed.

– **Sundaram**

Nanavati Commission Report: Getting Away With Murder

*(In 1984, when thousands of Sikhs in the capital city were burned alive in a State-sponsored bloodbath, a citizens' team of PUCL-PUDR visited the affected areas and prepared a report – Who Are the Guilty - that was testimony against the State's pleas that the violence was a 'spontaneous' outburst of grief and anger following Indira Gandhi's assassination. In conversation with Liberation, **Uma Chakravarti**, one of the members of that team, reflects on the implications of the 1984 victims' frustrated quest for justice in the light of the Nanavati Commission Report.)*

Forgive and Forget?

Following the PM Manmohan Singh's apology to the Sikh community and the nation in the wake of the Nanavati Report, there have been many voices – from the liberal, secular intelligentsia and media – suggesting that it is time to forgive and forget the carnage of 1984. For instance, a commentator in *The Hindu* writes that it is time to 'move beyond the politics of memory'. Justice Nanavati's report has done precious little to provide any modicum of justice, contenting itself with the barest minimum genuflections towards indicting the guilty. Yet, even that, it seems, may be too much – the same article concludes that 'rather than firmly closing the book', Justice Nanavati has given enough 'ammunition to those who want to keep the pot boiling'. The article's recommendations are not specific to the 1984 carnage alone – it generalizes the argument that 'A society is entitled to put an end to the politics of memory over any organized violence'. True enough, the Nanavati Report on 1984 is a warning that we are soon likely to be asked to whitewash the memory of the Gujarat Genocide. It is probably a sordid sign of what to expect from the Enquiry into Gujarat 2002 – also presided over by Justice Nanavati, even as it comes to light that his son is the counsel for the Gujarat Government in the matter of the 2002 carnage!

21 years after the event – when every door of justice has been closed in the face of the survivors – what are the apologies of a Prime Minister, and promises of rehabilitation and compensation worth? In the months that followed November 1984, what was the response of that other Prime Minister who presided over the carnage orchestrated by leaders of his Party? Less than a fortnight since the genocide, he made the infamous remark – 'When a mighty tree falls, the earth shakes'. In the next six months, repeated demands for a judicial enquiry were stonewalled by Rajiv Gandhi who insisted that such an enquiry would 'serve no purpose' and would in fact not be 'in the interests of the Sikhs' – a remark that echoed canards about the Sikh 'celebrations' that triggered off the violence! Only when Rajiv Gandhi planned to sign the accord with Longowal did the need to appoint the Ranganath Mishra Commission manifest itself – as late as April 1985.

21 Years of Commissions, Committees, Courts - And Justice Denied

To understand the full charge of disappointment and betrayal that the Nanavati report carries, it is necessary to take a look at the long struggle waged by the survivors – the vast majority of whom are women – for justice.

- The PUDR-PUCL plea for a judicial enquiry into the carnage was dismissed by the Delhi High Court. A city level enquiry into the role of the police – the Ved Marwah Committee – was scuttled when the Ranganath Mishra Commission was appointed.
- The Mishra Commission, finally appointed 6 months after the event, which submitted its report in February 1987, had curious terms of reference. Rather than being asked to enquire into the 'causes and course of disturbances', as is

- customary for such commissions, the Mishra Commission was ‘to enquire into the allegations in regard to the incidents of organized violence which took place in Delhi following the assassination of the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi’. The Nagrik Ekta Manch and the Shiromani Akali Dal (Longowal) were allowed to participate in the proceedings but withdrew in protest over the fact that the enquiry was held *in camera*.
- Amazingly, of the total number of affidavits (2905) submitted to the Mishra Commission, as many as 78% (2266) were what the Commission called ‘affidavits against the victims’! Hundreds of such ‘counter-affidavits’ were filed in favour of HKL Bhagat, anticipating that he would be implicated. The PUDR-PUCL report *Who Are the Guilty* had demonstrated that while there might have been some sporadic spontaneous incidents on 31 October 1984, the events from November 1 onwards were organized and orchestrated by the political establishment and the police. The Mishra Commission, held that the riots were spontaneous in origin – a ‘reaction’ of grief and outrage; but that later, ‘organised violence’ took place. However, according to the Commission, ‘such organization was not by any political party or a definite group of persons but by the anti-social elements. Such ‘anti-social elements’, the Commission held, were ‘quite a formidable and powerful element in the Indian capital’ due to the population growth in Delhi, the increase in industrial labour which the Commission claimed was accompanied by increased criminal activity, and so on. The Commission exonerated top-level Congress (I) leaders and indicted 19 local level Congress (I) men – taking care, however, not to name them!
 - The Mishra Commission spawned several Committees – to look into the death toll, police role and to monitor registration of cases. One of these – the Kusumlata Mittal Committee to investigate the police role - distinguished itself by a detailed and painstaking report. Mittal found evidence of refusal to file FIRs, filing of ‘omnibus FIRs’, failure to conduct Test Identification Parade, fudging of records and evidence - all the hallmarks of police complicity that we saw repeated in Gujarat. Mittal recommended action against 72 policemen – and summary dismissal of six officials (under Article 311(2) (b) of the Constitution). These six included Chandra Prakash (then DCP South) and Sewa Das (DCP East) as well as the ACP HC Jatav – who had presided over the worst the massacre. Far from dismissal, however, these police officials were all promoted – Sewa Das is now number two in Delhi.

What of the survivors – the widows and women who filed the hundreds of affidavits and cases and made rounds of the Commissions, Committees and Courts? Most of the cases never came to trial. Of those that did, 92% were acquitted – on grounds that there was ‘sole testimony’, ‘no corroborative evidence’ and so on. The PUDR report –

1984 Carnage in Delhi: A Report on the Aftermath – mentions a case that was dismissed due to the ‘unreliability of the witness account’. The eyewitness was a woman – the sole survivor of a joint family that was massacred by the mob while she sheltered with neighbouring women. The judge declared the ‘*attitude and conduct of the witness...strange. Her kith and kin were butchered and she had the audacity to say that she took shelter with a crowd of women.*’

Nanavati Commission: ‘Pretending He Just Doesn’t See’

In it to be noted that despite this long, tortuous and insensitive denial of justice, 2500 affidavits were filed before the Nanavati Commission – this means that in the year 2000, 16 years after 1984, there were 2500 people still looking for justice.

Justice Nanavati selects only some of these affidavits for attention. Several of the affidavits mention rape – but Nanavati selects none of them. He examines – and exonerates – Rajiv Gandhi, on the basis that he had made appeals for communal harmony, and that there was no evidence to show that he had masterminded the violence. He examines the affidavits filed by several eminent citizens (many with Defence experience) – including Lt. Gen. Arora (retd), Patwant Singh, Khushwant Singh and others who had visited the Home Minister Narasimha Rao before noon on November 1 and demanded his intervention. These citizens had remarked on the fact that Rao’s residence showed no sign of crisis, no sign of any unusual activity, and that he himself seemed remarkable unmoved. On this Nanavati summarises Rao’s reply approvingly that he was man who did not believe in ‘hustle and bustle’ and ‘tall talks’ – and that his home was quiet because he had deployed his staff elsewhere where they were needed.

But lack of visible concern is not the only charge that is brought against the Home Minister. What about the crucial question of deployment of Army and the conduct of the Delhi Police (which falls under the Home Minister)? The PUCL-PUDR had noted the late deployment of Army – and the fact that in the areas where it actually was deployed, it received no guidance and co-operation from the police, which in fact misguided the troops. Nanavati has an affidavit by Major General Jamval, stating that he had his troops ‘in readiness’ and had also commissioned troops from Meerut – and waited for an order from above that did not come. There is also the fact that no Joint Control Room set up between the police and the Army. Faced with evidence of these acts of omission, Rao says, amazingly, that the ‘Home Minister is not competent to call troops’. If not, who is? According to Rao it is the Chief of Army Staff under the Defence Minister. This is, of course, patently false; the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 empowers an Executive Magistrate to call in the army for help to disperse a crowd or control a situation. But even if one takes Rao’s word – why doesn’t Nanavati enquire why Rao didn’t contact the Defence Minister? After all, it was Rajiv Gandhi himself who held the Defence Portfolio! Rao then says that the Commissioner of

Police does not take orders ‘directly’ from the Home Minister ‘unless it is urgently required’. Wasn’t a direct order ‘urgently required’ when the Home Minister had been informed that thousands were being burned alive? Aren’t the above remarks of Rao an admission that he did not, in fact, call in the Army and direct the Police to quell the violence? Later, Rao, however, goes on to say that he did ‘give instructions whenever necessary’ to deploy Police forces and the Army. Nanavati sees no evasion or discrepancy in these mutually contradictory statements. Rao, in his statement also makes the breath-taking claim that he visited relief camps, which was ‘more important’ than visiting the places where incidents of violence were reportedly occurring! He says Lt. Gen. Arora and the others are lying – if they are telling the truth, why, he asks, didn’t they speak out twenty years ago? At the end of it all, Nanavati spends a few sentences concluding that there was ‘no delay or indifference’ in the Home Minister’s conduct!

He goes on to indict the then Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, PG Gavai and another police officer SC Tandon for ‘colossal failure of maintenance of law and order’ and callousness, but – recommends no action! He lets off Sewa Das (former DCP East) on the grounds that he has already been exonerated by a departmental enquiry – but states that Chandraprakash can face an enquiry despite also having been let off by a departmental enquiry.

Allegations against HKL Bhagat are not investigated on the grounds that Bhagat now suffers from dementia. About Sajjan Kumar, Nanavati concludes that there is a ‘probability’ that he is guilty; and so he recommends that those cases in which chargesheets are yet to be filed be pursued. About Tytler, he recommends further investigation in one case.

How are Nanavati’s conclusions different from Mishra’s, which was widely seen as a biased and partisan whitewash job? Nanavati too concludes that there were stray incidents of spontaneous violence on the first day but that there was organised violence from the morning of the first. He notes what *Who Are the Guilty* had recorded in 1984 – the huge organized mobs, the use of DTC buses to transport violent armed crowds. But the crucial question is: who did the organizing, when and how? Here, Nanavati, unlike Mishra tells us he has ‘evidence on record’ that meetings were held on the evening of 31 October, and that the mobs moved ‘without fear of the police’. But who actually organised and masterminded these meetings – Nanavati leaves them nameless, faceless.

He too lays the blame at the door of ‘anti-social elements’ and local level Congress leaders. He, like Mishra, has his own sociological analysis of the pathological violence inherent in the poor: ‘Poorer sections of society who are deprived of enjoyment of better things in life’ took the opportunity to loot. Criminals, free of fear of the police for once, got a free hand. But who was responsible for making sure the killers had nothing to fear from the police? Who was responsible for the police turning

a blind eye? He also holds that local Congress leaders indulged in violence for 'personal political gains': these petty *personal* gains, mind, are distinguished from the Congress Party's own lofty political ends! Again, in most of these cases too, Nanavati finds himself unable to recommend action.

The political imperative seems to prevent the force in power from indicting even its own Opposition – and State power in itself seems to bestow immunity; one doesn't need the AFSPA for immunity from prosecution. We are thus faced with a total alienation from the political system – where even the judiciary does not provide any checks or balances. In such a situation, civil liberties groups, victims and democratic forces all seem to be floundering for an answer: how to prevent another 1984; another betrayal in Gujarat? Many of us are able to think constructively in segments on this question – for instance to suggest that the evidenciary requirements in such instances (such as a time bar for filing an FIR) be changed. But institutional solutions being offered do not offer hope. The Communal Violence (Prevention) Bill prepared by the UPA is not designed to nail down the Rajivs, Raos and Modis for their acts of omission and commission in genocide – it only allows for them to be armed with more draconian powers.

It seems now that the Congress' calculated 6-month delay in tabling the Nanavati Report was a deliberate ploy – resulting in diverting attention *away* from the Report's highly questionable exoneration of Rao and Rajiv, and focussing all attention on Tytler. Now, the Congress move is to plead that Tytler's head and Manmohan's apology are 'enough' – the most that an honourable man of integrity like the PM could have done.

It is true that the Sikh community, deprived of all justice, possibly does see Tytler's being axed as a vindication, however symbolic. Equally true is the fact that for all its pleas, the Congress is widely seen as guilty of the 1984 carnage. But the fact remains that the common wo/man's cry for justice has been tragically, cruelly aborted. We have seen the VP Singh Government, the Gujral Government fail to pursue justice for the 1984 victims. The Nanavati Commission, appointed by the BJP-led NDA, too has refused to unequivocally identify and indict the guilty. The BJP itself has fallen silent on the issue after the action against Tytler and the PM's speech. The UPA has smoothly shifted gear and is talking only about compensation and rehabilitation. No one, not even the Left which is supporting the Government seems to be asking – precisely how does the UPA Govt. plan to reopen investigation into the cases against Tytler and Sajjan? After Nanavati's clean chit – have we no choice but to accept the polite fiction that Rao and Rajiv stand posthumously vindicated and virtuous?

Those who call for an end to the 'politics of memory' assume that it is only the Congress' political opponents who have a stake in that politics. What do we tell those individual survivors who kept alive their memory in the face of threats and demoralisation; who chose justice over retribution? That they must exchange that

memory for an apology by a Sikh PM – which is all the justice they must expect? Surely the politics of forgetting does violence to that of memory – and surely ‘forgetting’ Delhi 1984 will pave the way for ‘forgetting’ Gujarat 2002, and invite those horrors to repeat themselves?

– **KK**

EC Must Deter Criminals, and not Disenfranchise Citizens

The Election Commission of India has asked that names of all those against whom non-bailable warrants (NBWs) are pending for over six months be deleted from voters' lists. The Commission argues that since voters are expected to ordinarily reside at their given addresses, 'absconders' are obvious candidates for deletion. This, the EC would have us believe, would put an effective brake on criminalisation of electoral politics. Ironically, a delegation of RJD MPs that met the EC to oppose this order included the infamous criminal MP from Siwan, Md. Shahabuddin, who has got as many as six NBWs pending against him. The EC must be aware as to why these six NBWs have not been executed so far. Shahabuddin continues to be protected and patronized by the state administration of Bihar, even under President's Rule. In fact, the state's response to the recent NBWs has been to transfer the young, courageous SP of Bihar who had found fresh incriminating evidence against the notorious MP!

This takes us to the real crux of the problem - criminalisation of state-power or governance. The malady is much more acute than the much talked about issue of criminalisation of politics or entry of criminals into state legislatures or Parliament. The latter aspect - direct entry of Shahabuddins into Assemblies and Parliament - has only added a new stunning visibility or transparency to the phenomenon and exposed the utter hollowness and hypocrisy of the bourgeois pretension of rule of law. Instead of addressing the crux of the problem, the EC has come out with a 'cure' that will only aggravate the malady by curbing the democratic rights of the people who are resisting criminalisation on the ground.

More than a decade ago the Union Government had appointed a committee headed by the then Home Secretary NN Vohra to go into the question of operation of crime syndicates in the country. The Committee came up with a damning indictment of a growing criminal-politician-bureaucrat-police nexus. The report has since been gathering dust and no serious effort has been made to challenge, let alone dismantle, this nexus and streamline the judicial process to ensure prompt prosecution and conviction of criminals. Anybody familiar with the criminal prosecution and justice delivery system in the country knows how difficult it is to file FIRs against big criminals and how rarely do such FIRs lead to issue and execution of arrest warrants. The rate of actual conviction of the big bosses of the crime world is most negligible.

By contrast, people fighting against feudal oppression, economic loot and criminalisation are easily implicated and convicted. False cases and NBWs against political activists working among and for the rural poor are a routine feature in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Almost all political agitations lead to FIRs that involve hundreds of unknown and unnamed people and agricultural labour and poor peasant activists are often subsequently framed and even convicted in such cases as and when the 'need' or 'opportunity' arises. The EC's order depriving people with NBWs of the right to vote or contest elections is thus heavily tilted against the fighting rural poor and forces of radical transformation while state-protected criminals would continue to call the shots. It may be argued that the people with NBWs may still contest the polls from within jails. But one can easily imagine the difficulty movement activists would face in restoring names that have already been deleted. Moreover, some legal brains in the country have already called for debarring prisoners from contesting elections. They argue that it is anomalous to allow prisoners to contest because after all they are not allowed to cast their votes.

If criminalisation has become so rampant in a state like Bihar, it must be understood that it is no longer an aberration but a characteristic feature of governance in Bihar. Criminals play a purposeful 'social role' in the decadent semi-feudal and unproductive milieu of Bihar - they help maintain the status quo by suppressing and terrorising the rural poor and they help accumulate wealth without any production-related hassle! The real battle against criminalisation is therefore a battle against this decadent social order and it can only be won through a more organized and vigorous participation of the masses of people in the political process. The EC's order would actually hinder this process of people's participation and real democratization of the electoral process. By ordering deletion of names of people with NBWs from voters' lists, the EC has opened one more avenue for manipulating electoral rolls, and provided the powers that be with one more 'legal' incentive to harass and disenfranchise the rural poor. The EC must not stop the people in the name of containing criminals. The EC's approach is akin to the TADA-POTA policy of curtailing civil liberties and democratic rights in the name of taming terrorism. Like TADA and POTA, this order is also liable to result in large-scale denial and distortion of democracy. In the name of deterring criminals, the EC must not disenfranchise citizens.

Washing Away the Myth of 'Mumbai to Shanghai'

On 26th July and the week that followed, Mumbai was devastated by floods. It is ironical that more than 400 people died in the most modern city of India directly due to the floods. Another 4-500 people died a few weeks later in outbreaks of various diseases. This disaster has exposed the vulnerability of the city, which has been growing rapidly and haphazardly over the last two decades, without any consideration

for the environment or the vast majority of the population. A small river called Mithi runs through the north of the city, emptying its waters on the western coastline into the sea at Bandra. Over the years, this river has been encroached upon by human settlements. The two major developments which have blocked the natural course of the river are the Bandra Kurla business complex and the international airport at Sahar. Needless to add, slums have come up all along the river's bank, on low lying marshy land, which was considered too worthless to 'protect' from the poor.

Having worked in one such slum for the last five years, we have been able to observe the city's perverse logic at work. These two large fixed structures have been created using public money at a great cost to serve the commercial interests of the city. Any suggestion that they be relocated or demolished would be met with indignation and complete disbelief. On the other hand, removing a few thousand hutments along the river's bank would be easily accomplished and would meet with the approval of the middle class and the popular media. The state would prove that they have taken 'concrete' steps to tackle threats facing the city and everyone would go back home happy - till the next disaster.

In the period between December 04 and February 05, the present state government displaced nearly a lakh people by conducting arbitrary demolitions. This campaign was finally stopped when the local MPs, MLAs pressurized the Congress high command to rein in the state government. During the campaign, the deputy chief minister announced with great satisfaction that all those displaced were 'going back to the villages' and they were successfully reducing the population of the city. For someone who has worked in Mumbai slums, it's easy to see that nothing could be farther from the truth. While the immediate response may be to return to the village, most migrants come back. They simply look for more degraded land to settle on, where they will not come in the way of the interests of builders-politicians who are running amok all over the city. Much of this is land which is unstable and dangerous (river banks, hillsides, bogs, marshes, etc). Over the years, this lobby has pushed the poor to the brink. Even the land which they thought was valueless is catching the eye of the builders. Hills are blasted and leveled to create land for buildings, marshes are filled up, open spaces are taken over.

Given the anti-poor policies of the present state government and the obsession of the city's elite with making Mumbai into a 'world-class' city, it is difficult to predict how long public pressure will be able to prevent the demolition of hutments along the Mithi. Of course, this time the people can take solace in the fact that they are being made homeless for their own 'safety'. Till date, the poor had not threatened the elite of the city beyond being an 'eyesore', which deflated their mood as they went about in their cars. If the state is able to convince them that the illegal hutments caused the flooding which damaged so much property and cost several lives, there will be a much stronger public support for carrying out demolitions.

Over the decades, the governments have learnt to talk of 'rehabilitation' rather than demolitions. This has been prompted partly by pressure by activists groups as well as international agencies that balk at the prospect of being seen as 'human rights violators' on Indian soil. A much more effective factor has been the realization by politicians and bureaucrats that there is a lot of money to be made from rehabilitation. However, the fact even after two decades of slum 'rehabilitation' programmes, the proportion of slum population has increased shows that they have been nothing more than a cosmetic change, which wins good publicity and does not disturb the status quo.

With the decline of all working class movements in the city, political parties are the only avenue left for the working class. This has dragged the entire issue out of the realm of progressive politics and human rights into the politics of populism. In spite of knowing that political parties have no real commitment to the interests of the vast population of slum dwellers in the city, they are compelled to depend on ad hoc strategies to manipulate the political system for their survival. So the people are resigned to getting 10 kgs of rice as relief material in one week and facing the lathis and bulldozers in the next.

– **Neha Madhiwala**

‘Suspicion’ – Or License for State Repression?

Suspicion seems to be the umbrella explanation and excuse for State-sponsored murder and suppression of civil liberties. In London – the Brazilian electrician de Menezies was a ‘suspected’ suicide bomber – that was offered as justification for the fact that the police pumped bullets into him even after he had been overpowered. The 3 boys in Kupwara shot by the Army while returning from a marriage celebration were ‘suspected’ militants.

Recall that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) licenses the Army to shoot suspects. In Kupwara and Kashmir, as well as all over the North East – human rights violations and killings are justified as the inevitable “collateral damage” of the Indian Army’s war on terror.

The victims of that collateral damage are not just civilians in the Valley – Kashmiri Muslims in India face a never-ending witch-hunt. The arrest and death sentence for the DU lecturer SAR Geelani in the Parliament Attack case was a stark case of how an innocent man could be set up for public lynching- by the media, the Special Branch, the Indian Government. The chauvinist hysteria whipped up over the Parliament Attack makes the civil liberties campaign leading up to Geelani’s acquittal all the more remarkable. A group of DU teachers, lawyers and civil rights activists launched a campaign to save the lecturer – in the face of hostility from official quarters, and even from the CPI(M)-led Delhi University Teachers Association. But the campaign

succeeded in challenging the death sentence and securing an acquittal from the Delhi High Court – an acquittal that has been upheld by the Supreme Court recently. The SC judgment acquitted Geelani and Afsan Guru, and reduced Shaukat's life sentence to a 10-year sentence, but upheld the death penalty for Afzal. This judgment is a significant victory for and vindication of the campaigners for Geelani – because it upheld their claim that there was no evidence against Geelani.

But even as the Supreme Court upheld Geelani's acquittal, it sentenced him to lifelong victimization – by holding that his behavior had been 'suspicious', although there was no evidence against him. Isn't it the Police's and the Court's role to sift through evidence and back up suspicions with fact? If the Police has been unable to come up with *any* evidence – shouldn't the Court have had the grace to accept that the Police was in fact biased and Geelani innocent? It seems that the Supreme Court, while having no choice but to acquit Geelani, has sought to 'acquit' the Delhi Police 'honourably' – by implying that the Police was justified in its witch-hunt and persecution of Geelani. Pointing a 'needle of suspicion' at Geelani is a useful precaution against proceedings that ought, logically, to be moved against the Police.

Afzal's conviction too hangs on a flimsy thread – the confession extracted by the Police under POTA. There are several unanswered questions: Afzal is a surrendered militant – always under State surveillance; could he plan and execute such a major conspiracy without the knowledge of the State? If he was indeed involved - who backed him and supported him? The public has rejected the fiction that the Attack was the accomplishment of a college lecturer and a couple of surrendered militants – they demand to know more. Citizens are moving to demand that Afzal's sentence be suspended until a fresh, thoroughgoing Parliamentary Enquiry be launched into the Parliament Attack, as well as into the frame-up that has followed.

Draconian laws like POTA aim to define 'terrorism' in a way that can justify suspension of the human rights of ordinary citizens and dissenters, suspected of 'sympathising' with what is branded terrorism. Geelani – one of the most visible victims of POTA in the most celebrated terrorism case in the country has proved his innocence – and exposed the politics of State repression. POTA may have gone – but its spirit is alive and well. In Bettiah, (Champaran, Bihar) recently, doctors were arrested for treating Nepali patients 'suspected' of being Maoists, and charged with 'sedition'! Treating Nepali people without informing the police is apparently equivalent to waging a war against the State!

Doctors protested against this attempt to gag doctors for honouring their Hippocratic oath and intimidate them into 'policing' themselves; demonstrations were held in Delhi as well as many other places. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) also spoke out against the arrests.

An announcement in the Delhi Metro warns people 'not to befriend strangers'; an advertisement in the daily papers tells us how to 'spot a terrorist' (by his bulky

clothing, big bags, foreign looks, etc...): posters with a huge eye stare out at us telling us that constant suspicion, chauvinism and xenophobia is the citizens' answer to terrorism. Menezies and the three boys in Kupwara paid with their lives (Geelani escaped with scars) for the State-sponsored policy of using suspicion to justify witch-hunting and victimization. If we are to defend our democracy, we must resist this policy of using the excuse of 'fighting terrorism' to crackdown on civil liberties and people's movements.

– **KK**

Reversal of Land Reforms: CPI(M)'s Achilles' Heel in West Bengal

The countrywide official campaign for reversal of land reforms has assumed a particularly farcical dimension in West Bengal. On August 4, the State Assembly witnessed a rare unity of the treasury and opposition benches when the House resolved to pass the West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill after ridding it of the most controversial clause 14q which had proposed to do away with rural land ceiling on a whole set of pretexts. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and industries minister Nirupam Sen were however absent during the vote. While Bhattacharjee walked out minutes before the Bill was put to vote, Sen did not attend the House at all. The unity in this case however meant not the opposition supporting the treasury bench, but vice versa, as Left Front MLAs backed an amendment moved by the opposition Trinamool Congress! This manoeuvre was necessary because apparently a government cannot retract or amend a bill placed by itself!

West Bengal has of late been witnessing an alarming conversion of agricultural land into plantations and construction. The state government wanted to legalise and encourage the process and accordingly section 14q of the Amendment Bill had proposed to lift the ceiling to attract investment in the name of promoting cash crops, plantations, contract farming, tourism, infrastructure, urban construction and renewal and what not. But alongside investment, such a measure would have surely also invited enormous peasant resentment, and that is a risk sections of CPI(M) leadership are not prepared to take at a time when Assembly elections are less than a year away. The workers and employees of the state public sector and government departments are already up against the government's campaign to downsize the workforce, and any convergence of worker-peasant anger could prove too much for the Left Front government to handle.

While land ceiling limits thus remain in force for the time being, the Amendment Bill has nevertheless managed to create enough 'legal' room for a shift in land use pattern away from agriculture or for transgressing the ceiling limits. The bill provides for outright sale of land belonging to closed factories and empowers district collectors to

sanction changes in land use pattern. Ganashakti, the CPI(M)'s Bengali daily, ironically portrayed the amendment bill as an exercise in 'plugging the loopholes' of the existing Act. State CPI(M) Secretary Anil Biswas claimed that the 'backtracking' actually illustrated the CPI(M)'s commitment to evolving consensus views on contentious issues.

The Chief Minister however had another story to tell. After the Land Reforms Minister Abdur Rezzak Molla informed the Assembly of his reservations regarding the attempt to do away with land ceilings, the Chief Minister tried to put up a brave front by telling the press that he too shared these reservations! In fact, he said he was surprised to discover such a clause in the bill and said someone must have overlooked it! The CPI(M) never tires of brandishing its record of land reforms in West Bengal. Is the CM then confessing that the Left Front government now treats the land reform agenda so casually that a clause seeking to do away with rural land ceiling could surreptitiously find its way into the bill presented by the government on the floor of the Assembly!

With their conflicting claims and clever pretensions, the CPI(M) leaders are however only managing to deepen the controversy. The day after the controversial clause was dropped, Abdur Rezzak Molla reiterated his reservations on the floor of the Assembly and called for a wider debate on land-use pattern so that the people of West Bengal get "a chance to express their opinion on the alarming shrinkage of agricultural land in the name of development." He put the estimated magnitude of conversion of agricultural land at an alarming rate of 50,000 acres a year. Incidentally, right at the moment one Salem group of Indonesia, which has been invited by the Chief Minister to set up a new township, has asked for more than 5,000 acres of land in Molla's home district South 24 Parganas!

While the Minister stressed the need to save agricultural land in the course of his speech in the Assembly, on the same day Anil Biswas held forth in a Party meeting in Kolkata on the need to find more land for industrialization. As a report puts it, "Biswas made it clear that the party apparatus was solidly behind the Chief Minister, almost daring leaders who had opposed the amendment to stand up and resist." 'Make no mistake, there are 277,000 members in the CPM and another two crore with frontal and mass organisations, who will be directed to rally behind the government to enable it to carry out industrialisation,' said the State Secretary.

As the Salem group and its corporate cousins from across the world hunt for thousands of acres of arable land to set up Bengal's own Gurgaons and the party-turned-government apparatus called the CPI(M) rewrites land reform laws to bulldoze Bengal's poor peasantry and bargadars into a renewed state of landlessness, the land question is bound to spring more surprises in West Bengal's deceptively 'stagnant and predictable' politics.

CAMPAIGN

CPI(ML)'s Month-Long Campaign Against UPA Government

Coinciding with the Monsoon Session of Parliament, the CPI(ML) launched a month-long campaign from July 25 to August 24 against the anti-poor, pro-imperialist policies of the UPA Government. The campaign began with mass demonstrations all over the country on July 25, demanding that the Government during the Monsoon session pass laws for Universal Employment Guarantee, central legislation for agrarian labour, social security legislation for unorganised sector workers, debt remission and alternative agricultural policy for the distressed peasantry, and 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. Burning local issues were also highlighted in some states.

As part of the campaign, August 6 (Hiroshima Day) was observed as day marked by protests against US imperialism and the UPA Government's surrender to it. The campaign is due to culminate in militant mass protests of rasta roko/rail roko/chakka jam/jail bhara on August 24. We carry reports of the campaign from some of the States.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Growing CPI(ML) Campaign in Andhra Pradesh for Land and Liberty for the Rural Poor

The blatant subversion of Mandate 2004 by the Congress-led UPA government is perhaps most clearly evident in Andhra Pradesh. If Mandate 2004 had been likened to a mini political earthquake against the NDA government's rabidly neo-liberal and communal fascist agenda, the epicenter of that earthquake lay in Andhra Pradesh. In the Assembly elections held along with the Lok Sabha elections, the Andhra electorate had pulled down Chandrababu Naidu's cyber-savvy regime with an overwhelming verdict that came to be recognized as a popular referendum against the Fund-Bank establishment and its disastrous policies.

Till his May 2004 poll debacle, Naidu was the poster boy of India's economic reforms and Andhra was projected as the biggest success story of 'globalisation' of Indian economy. The Andhra 'model' sought to illustrate the 'spectacular potential' of achieving rapid economic growth and development through a concentrated thrust on the 'new economy' (IT sector, in particular) even as agriculture and manufacturing, the two basic sectors of the 'old economy' remained starved of investment. It is this criminal neglect of agriculture that reduced Andhra to a shocking graveyard for farmers and agricultural labourers.

The Congress made a big issue of the agrarian crisis and rural distress during the elections, but back in power it has done scarce little to remedy the situation. The

number of suicides has gone up and the debt burden continues to mount. The government also made a huge noise about implementing land reforms, but land redistribution means nothing more than building a land market and 'enabling' the rural poor to buy lands by borrowing money at market rates from the government! Instead of regularizing the land in possession of the rural poor, the government is trying to redistribute the same land, dividing the landless population in the process. Worse still, leaders and activists of land struggles are being harassed and persecuted by implicating them in false cases.

Against this backdrop, the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of our Party has been steadily intensifying land struggles in East and West Godavari, Krishna and Visakhapatnam districts. As part of the nationwide mass campaign against the UPA government's anti-people and pro-imperialist policies, the AP State Committee held two big conventions on the agenda of land and liberty, first at Kakinada on 6 August and then in Hyderabad on 16 August. This was the first time such a major programme was organized independently by the Party in Hyderabad. Both the conventions saw an encouraging participation of rural activists. The Hyderabad convention reflected the growing influence of the land redistribution movement led by the Party and the agricultural labour organization (see separate report) as well as the expanding contours of Party work in Andhra Pradesh with activists arriving not only from the Party's traditional pockets in the coastal region but also from Anantapur, a Rayalseema district which witnessed hundreds of suicides.

Addressing the Kakinada convention, noted human rights activist K Balagopal lauded the landless poor for their courage, determination and resilience. Giving a historical account of the land reforms legislation in the state, rendered ineffective through deliberate exemptions, carefully cultivated loopholes and tardy implementation thanks to the pro-landowner nexus of the judiciary, bureaucracy and political leadership, he called for intensifying the struggle for more effective identification, acquisition and redistribution of ceiling surplus land, including the hundreds of thousands of acres that are still being held in the names of temples and endowments. He condemned the state repression let loose by the YSR government on the activists of land struggles and extended full support to the growing popular campaign for land and liberty.

Among the speakers at the Hyderabad convention were eminent academicians Prof. K Gopal Aiyer, who has been closely studying the implementation of land reform measures in Andhra, and Prof. Hargopal, a member of the 'Committee of Concerned Citizens' which had been instrumental in facilitating the talks between the state government and the Maoists, apart from Comrade Omkar, veteran leader of the historic Telengana movement and senior central leader of the MCPI, and Comrades Dipankar Bhattacharya and N Murthy from the Party Central Committee. Prof. Aiyer estimated that at least another one million acres of land could be made easily available for redistribution if exemptions given to temples and absentee landlords are

eliminated. Drawing attention to the dangerous policy of diverting agricultural land in the coastal region for so-called 'aqua culture', Prof. Aiyer underlined the importance of coastal Andhra in the present phase of land struggles.

Comrade Murthy placed a written report of the land struggles being waged by the Party in the coastal region and also a report submitted by a Party fact-finding team regarding the hundreds of deaths being caused by malaria in the agency areas of Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam. Comrade Omkar welcomed the Party's initiative and stressed the need for closer cooperation among communist revolutionary organizations around the basic agenda of the people in Andhra Pradesh. Comrade Dipankar called upon the assembled activists to intensify the struggle and emerge as the champion of the rural poor's quest for land, liberty, social security and dignity. He also appealed to the progressive democratic intelligentsia of Andhra Pradesh to exert greater pressure on the Andhra government and thwart its design to curb democracy and impose the elitist pro-privatization agenda of the World Bank.

ASSAM

July 25 demonstrations in Assam

The month-long campaign against the anti-people and pro-US policies of the UPA Govt. was started in Assam through protest demonstrations in different places including state headquarters Guwahati and in other cities like Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Tinsukia. In Guwahati, the Party took out a procession from Judges Field to the Deputy Commissioner's office, where the protesters staged a dharna and submitted a memorandum to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha through the D.C. of Kamrup. Apart from Party-led organizations, employees of CGHS participated in the programme.

Apart from the main five demands raised in the all-India campaign, the Assam demonstrations also demanded withdrawal of the decision to handover the oil fields of Assam to foreign companies, withdrawal of the decision to abolish the Central Government Health Scheme, and immediate intervention of the government to ensure a reasonable wage-revision agreement for the tea garden workers of Assam and to ensure the long-awaited Sunday wage for the tea workers. Similar programmes were also held at Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Jorhat.

BIHAR

In Bihar, many Central Committee members joined the dharna on July 25 at Income Tax Crossing in Patna. At district H.Q. Arrah, a huge dharna was organized. Similarly, at Masaurhi and Paliganj blocks of Patna, at Jehanabad, Arval, Dehri-on-Sone, Bhabhua, Biharsharif, Buxar, Aurangabad, Navada, and Gaya etc., dharnas were organized and memorandum submitted to the D.Ms. In Siwan, a protest march, attended by 1000 people, was organized from the Party office to Babunia Mor, which later culminated into a dharna in front of D.M. office. In Darbhanga, a march was

organized from Lahariasarai to the district H.Q. where a dharna was held. In Bhagalpur, a march was taken out and a mass meeting was held in front of the railway crossing. In Muzaffarpur and Begusarai, processions were taken out while dharnas was held in Betia, Gopalganj, Samastipur and Hajipur

JHARKHAND

CPI(ML)'s Statewide 'Rail Roko-Rasta Roko' in Jharkhand

More than six months have elapsed since the cowardly killing of Comrade Mahendra Singh, CPI(ML) leader in Jharkhand. But the government and the CBI are yet to come out with any thing substantial in that regard. One may recall that Comrade Mahendra Singh's murder was masterminded by the then Giridih SP Dipak Verma and BJP leader Ravindra Rai and the government was forced to order a CBI inquiry under tremendous pressure of the democratic opinion all over the country. However, the reinstalled BJP-led government in Jharkhand transferred Dipak Verma to Palamu, instead of taking any action against him, obviously, on another 'assignment' by the BJP regime, i.e., to deal with the militant assertion of the rural poor in that district.

As part of its month-long campaign against the UPA Government, the CPI(ML) organised a statewide 'Rail Roko-Rasta Roko' agitation in Jharkhand on August 16 to warn the governments, UPA's in centre and BJP's in the state, of more intense agitations if the culprits, including Dipak Verma, are not arrested and CBI failed to complete its investigation in time. While more than two thousands activists were arrested and there were incidents of lathicharge by the police like the one in Gharwa of Palamau region, this agitation forced the state's routine to come to a halt as railway and road traffic was blocked at many places. A procession was taken out in Ranchi which blockaded the roads converging at the Albert Ekka square despite heavy police arrangement. All the roads connecting Ranchi main road were blocked. Later, hundreds of CPI(ML) activists including Polit Bureau member Swadesh Bhattacharya, CC member Rajaram and State Secretary Subhendu Sen, were arrested and sent to a camp jail where a protest meeting was also held by the agitators. Ranchi-Tata main road was also jammed at Bundu.

In Giridih, the constituency which elected Comrade Mahendra Singh to the State Assembly for many terms, people expressed their resentment over the governmental inaction and complicity by blocking the Grand Trunk road for a whole day. This was done under the leadership of Vinod Singh, CPI(ML) MLA. Giridih-Jamua road was also blocked for hours. At Saria, place where Mahendra Singh was assassinated, a complete blockade was there. Rail traffic was disturbed as dozens of trains were stopped for hours at Hazaribagh Road and also at Koderma. Dhanbad-Sindri Rail line was also blocked. Trains were also blocked at Nagaruntari station. Roads were blocked at places like Koderma, Nirsra, Dhanbad, Jharia, Baliapur, Garhwa,

Daltanganj, many places is Latehar and Bokaro, and also in Jainamor, Kasmar and Santhal Pargana besides several other places.

This statewide agitation has expressed once again people's desire to punish the killers of Comrade Mahendra Singh and if this was not done by the government at will, people have their option of forcing the govt. to do so.

UTTAR PRADESH

CPI(ML) organizes statewide demonstrations on July 25

CPI(ML) organized demonstrations at district headquarters all over the state, demanding that the Central government pass the Employment Guarantee Bill in the monsoon session itself. Demands on central legislation for agrarian labourers, legislation for the social security of unorganized workers, an alternative agriculture policy and 33% reservation for women were also raised. Along with this, the Party started a month-long campaign exposing the anti-people, pro-American policies of the U.P.A. government. Thousands of people participated in demonstrations in Chandauli, Sonbhadra, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Pilibhit, and Moradabad etc. In Lucknow, a dharna was organized in district headquarters where construction workers participated in a large number. In Ballia, 1500 people marched to district headquarters. In Mirzapur, 1000 people participated in a march and dharna at district headquarters while 200 participated at Jamalpur block. In Chandauli, 300 people participated at Niyamatabad block headquarters while 200 attended a dharna at Chakia. A dharna was organized at Naugarh. In Sonbhadra, dharnas were organized at Robertsganj and Duddhi, where 250 and 200 people participated respectively. In Sitapur, 400 people marched to the D.M. office. Here, a large number of women agrarian labourers participated enthusiastically. In Unnao, where our work has recently started, 400 workers marched to the D.M. office. In Allahabad 250 people participated in the dharna at district headquarters. In Deoria, 400 men and women attended the dharna at district headquarters. In Pilibhit, 250 people marched to the district headquarters and sat on a dharna.

Box

CPI(ML) to organize 'Bihar Bandh' on August 24

CPI(ML), along with CPI, Forward Bloc, RSP and SUCI, would be organizing a 'Bihar Bandh' on August demanding recall of Bihar Governor Buta Singh.

FACT-FINDING

Battered bodies but hardened spirits!

[Excerpts from the report of an AICCTU team comprising Santosh Roy, (National Secretary, AICCTU), N. M. Thomas (National Vice-President, AICCTU), Shankaran (State Vice-President, AICCTU), V. K. S. Goutam (National Councillor), Ardhendu Roy (NC), Sarvaraj (NC) and Rajinder Singh (NC) which went to meet the aggrieved workers of the Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) in order to inquire about the situation on 26th July 2005. The delegation visited the wounded workers in the Sadar Hospital and adjoining areas, interviewed the local people and the police personnel on duty about the incident. The delegation was not allowed to meet the workers who were arrested and kept under police custody at Sadar Thana; nor were they able to meet the union leaders as there was no information regarding their whereabouts. On the basis of the personal accounts of the incident gathered, the following report was submitted]

Backdrop to the struggle

According to a rough estimate given by the workers of Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India, 3,500 employees are on roll. Among them, nearly 1,000 were permanent and the remaining employees were working as line associates. Tension began in the company in the month of December 2004 when a visiting Japanese Honda official reportedly kicked and slapped a worker in the welding unit and terminated four of them for allegedly carrying on trade union activities and demanding a hike in wages. The workers had been trying to register their union during this period, and in order to curb any kind of organized effort on the part of the workers relating to issues of employment and wages, hire and fire policies, etc. the management began terminating and suspending the leaders and activists, Suresh Gaud, C. D. Takkar and one Surinder and others. Subsequently fifty more were suspended on charges of misconduct and indiscipline within factory premises. The problems within the factory kept accumulating and on 25th June advertisements for fresh recruitment of line associates were out. On 27th June, the agitating workers who reported for duty were forcibly debarred from entering the factory premises as an illegal lockout had been declared. The management had suspended 1,900 employees by then, and according to a well thought-out plan sabotaged the production, reducing it by almost 75%. As the agitation intensified, in the third week of July, the management met a delegation of the workers in the Labour Commissioner's Office at Chandigarh and agreed that 1,600 employees would be taken back in batches of 400 provided they gave a written undertaking giving up their rights to unionize and register protest, violating all norms of labour relations in the name of maintaining discipline. But the management was hardly interested in abiding by the promises they made. The uncertainty caused forced the workers to once again take to the streets. The large-scale victimization of the

workers by the management all through the month-long agitation had intensified the feelings of insecurity on the one hand, and resentment on the other. The team found that the Labour Conciliation Office at Gurgaon and the Labour Commissioner's Office at Chandigarh had not taken any initiative to address the issue of dispute. The Haryana police had conducted raids at the instigation of the Honda management threatening the striking workers with dire consequences.

25th July 2005 – Black Monday

Nearly 3,000 workers assembled at the Kamla Nehru Park on Monday to peacefully demonstrate against the anti-worker stance of the Honda management that had not only ignored the demands of the workers but also tried to use all kinds of pressure tactics to disrupt their unity and threatened them persistently so that they roll back their agitation. The unarmed workers had assembled with prior permission of the police and had planned to march in an organized manner to the Mini Secretariat to demonstrate for their rights. As the procession started to march towards the ITI Chowk, they saw that a group of policemen in plain clothes and certain intelligence officers merged within their rank and file. When they reached the ITI Chowk, the procession was stopped by a contingent of armed policemen under the charge of SDM Jai Singh Sagwan and DSP (Head Quarter), Jag Parvez Dahiya. They asked them to call off the procession and when the workers did not relent, they cracked down on them. One of the workers heading the procession received a severe blow on the head and seeing him wallowing in a pool of blood, his compatriots snatched the lathis from the police personnel deployed for the action. The sheer number of the workers and their moral cause was enough for them to overpower the police force and despite the casualties they suffered, they marched on. When the procession had moved quite some distance ahead, workers at the back witnessed that the group of unidentified men who were among them had retreated and had started pelting stones at the police. Some of them also saw a police gypsy on fire and they allege it was the handiwork of the plain-clothed miscreants among them planted by the administration to create a 'just' cause for the brutality unleashed on them later in the most inhumane of manners. The workers reached the Mini Secretariat by 2.30 p.m. and assembled in an open area as they had already informed the administration about their intentions. Despite the scorching heat of the day, almost 36 degree Celcius, - the dust, sweat and blood accumulated on the three hour long walk, - hardly were they prepared for the sequel that was yet to happen. The workers started settling down under the clump of trees in the area in the park adjoining the Secretariat when they were informed that Sudhir Rajpal, Deputy Commissioner, would like to meet their delegation. Little did they know of the reinforcements that were taking place behind the scenes as the Haryana police had called for assistance from the neighbouring districts and also sought the help of RAF, Haryana Reserved Police Force and fleets of the Fire Brigade. What

happened to Rajpal's commitment to meet the workers delegation is still a mystery. In its place, he ordered the combined troops of the state to attack the protestors. In fact, he was the first man (armed with his helmet and lathi) to strike the workers. Surrounding the workers on all sides the police started reigning blows on their heads, arms and legs creating a bloody mayhem. The workers who tried to escape were chased and caught and spread-eagled on the ground, they were beaten up with lathis and police boots relentlessly for lawfully demanding their wages and their dignity as workers. The violence continued for more than an hour and not a single worker among the 3,000 could escape unscathed. The verbal expletives that were hurled by the uniformed 'protectors' of law were targeted at the workers who dared to raise their voices against the atrocities perpetrated by their management. Phrases like '*Ab bolu hum sab ek hain*', '*lal lal lehraiga*', were hurled by the police with uncalled for contempt and bitter venom ridiculing the efforts of the Honda workers who were engaged in the month-long agitation. The battered and bleeding protestors were herded into buses and taken to various police stations, mainly Sadar, where neither first aid was given nor a drop of water to quench their thirst. According to a rough estimate, more than a 1,000 workers have suffered multiple fractures on their arms and legs and also their heads. Due to lack of proper medical attention, it is still unknown as to the nature of the cranial concussions and fractures they have suffered and what their long-term implications are. On the 26th of July 2005, when the families of the aggrieved asked for information about their near and dear ones, they met with another round of lathi-charge, tear gas shelling and blank firing near the Civil Hospital. If there is any one lesson that we can draw from the heroic struggle waged by the Honda workers, it is the tenor of the spirit of their resistance. The nature of the State-perpetrated atrocities in Gurgaon is not an isolated incident. It indicates the inability of the ruling alliance to contain the simmering discontent of the Indian working class. There has been a blanket suspension of all labour laws protecting the worker from victimization by managements of industries operating in the National Capital Region (NCR) to encourage the growth of private investment, particularly by the multinational corporations. Gurgaon had become the new El Dorado for profit-making private industries as the government had laid the red carpet welcoming them, giving them all kinds of liberties to do what they liked with the workers. AICCTU expresses solidarity with the on-going struggle of the Honda workers and takes the initiative to campaign widely for their cause.

CPI(ML) and AICCTU Protest in Solidarity with the Gurgaon Workers

The CPI (ML) has expressed deep anguish and outrage at the barbaric police repression on workers of a Japanese multinational company, the Honda Motorcycle

and Scooter India (HMSI), at Gurgaon in Haryana on July 25 which resulted in the death of at least one worker and injury to more than 700. The Party held protests on July 26 in Delhi and several other centres of the country.

At Parliament Street in Delhi, hundreds of Party activists held a demonstration and burnt the effigy of the Haryana Chief Minister. Agitators broke the police barricades. All the protesters were arrested by the police.

An effigy of the Haryana CM was burnt by AICCTU in Robertsganj in UP. Hundreds of workers held a protest demonstration in Ranchi and a protest was also held at Patna. In West Bengal, protest demonstrations were held at Subodh Mallick Square in Kolkata and in Raiganj, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Asansol and many other places. AICCTU also held protests at Bhadreshwar Jute Mill and at few other places in the state. In Tamil Nadu, demonstrations have taken place in Ambattur and Thiruvallur industrial estates under the banner of AICCTU besides protests at some other places including Namakkal and Palempet. Protests were also held at many other centres in the country.

All India Central Council of Trade Unions observed 'Chetawani Diwas' on August 1 all over the country to protest the police and administrative repression on the Honda factory workers in Gurgaon. AICCTU demanded that the Prime Minister apologise to the nation on 15 August in his Independence Day speech for this ugly incident.

Protests were organised in many state capitals and important industrial centres including Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Ranchi, Bokaro, Dhanbad, Patna, Guwahati, Lucknow, Varanasi, Sonbhadra and Port Blair in Andamans. Programmes were also taken up in almost every district of Bihar while Coal Mines Workers Union in Jharkhand organised protests in Dhanbad, Nirsa and Hazaribagh.

In Delhi, a joint protest dharna and demonstration was held at Jantar-Mantar by AICCTU, CITU, UTUC (LS), UTUC, and TUCC which was also addressed by CPI(ML) MLA in Bihar and All India Agricultural Labour Association's General Secretary Rameshwar Prasad.

In Guwahati, a protest against this barbaric incident was held on July 28 by CPI(ML) and AICCTU and the effigy of Haryana Chief Minister was burnt near the DC office. Members of AISA and AIPWA also participated in this protest. Another protest was held at Tinsukia town.

In Lucknow, construction workers affiliated with AICCTU burnt the effigy of the Haryana Chief Minister Bhupendra Singh Hooda on July 27 in front of the Assembly. Protests were organized and effigies were burnt in Unnao industrial area, Allahabad, Kanpur, Varanasi, and Anpara of district Sonbhadra.

The Controversial Gurgaon Agreement

An agreement was signed between the management and the pro-AITUC trade union of the Honda Motorcycle and Scooters India Ltd on July 30, 2005 in the presence of the Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and other senior officials. Honda president and chief executive officer Yukihiro Aoshima, director Masayoki Kato and manager Vivek Vishwanath signed the agreement. Workers union president Suresh Gaur and two other leaders signed on behalf of the workers. As per the agreement, the Honda management agreed to take back all dismissed and suspended employees but the agreement said nothing about the arrested workers who were still in jail. Worse, the union was forced to agree not to press for any demands for one year. The Honda management decided to take back all 50 suspended employees and the four dismissed employees and other agitating trainees and apprentices. But under the agreement, the dismissed employees would have to tender unconditional apology for their "conduct". Investigation against the suspended workers would continue and they would be posted in departments other than manufacturing after the probe is over. There was no compensation to the injured workers from the Haryana Government. The Deputy Commissioner Sudhir Rajpal and Superintendent of Police Yoginder Singh Nehra were transferred from Gurgaon but no case was filed against them and the demand for their arrest and dismissal from service was not met. The guilty officials were not even suspended even though a judicial enquiry into the incident is pending. The workers were not paid any compensation for the days of work illegally denied to them by the Honda management. The cases against the workers have not yet been withdrawn. The workers who resumed work were forced to sign an undertaking which said they "shall abide by good conduct, discipline, devotion to duty, meet company targets, completely observe the certified standing orders applicable to the establishment and refrain from sabotage activities etc." But there was no commitment from the Honda management that they would adhere to all labour laws and respect the rights of the trade union. Despite the agreement, the police camp outside the factory gates was not removed. And around 45 personnel from a private security agency were inside the factory. There is apprehension among the workers that these people would unduly harass them. The workers were under tremendous pressure from the management to resume peak production within a few days after resuming work though numerous workers were suffering due to fractures caused by the police lathicharge.

JNU Students Visit Orissa

(In May 2005, AISA councilors from the School of Social Sciences, JNU, organized an exposure trip to the Kashipur-Koraput-Kalahandi region of Orissa. 9 students – Dheeraj, Sandeep, Deepa, Banajyotsna, Sejuti, Jitendra, Nicholas, Elizabeth, Hansraj

and ...visited the region and took a first-hand look at the politics of development, displacement and hunger there – as well as the struggle to resist and organise. One of the team members recounts their impressions.)

The students' team from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) that went to Orissa to observe the existing reality in the remote corners of India was aware of its limited capacity. That it can't effect any changes was a fact that we bore hard. But, yet it was an attempt to question the notions with which we have grown with in big cities under bright lights. Notions that ensured security of living, prosperity of existence, that our country is a 'developing' one, that the Constitution encodes the word 'socialist'! The short visit to Orissa, the limited experience we had gathered, deconstructed the developmental notion to naked reality.

We gathered in Orissa from different parts of India. Nine of us reached Rayagada town on 22nd May, 2005. A red flag welcomed us in the station. Our mission was to observe mainly two things: I) Displacement and ii) Land Reform. The following eight days we travelled through various villages, and each of them unfolded a new story of class, caste and gender discrimination.

Displacement as we have seen in Narmada Valley is not an isolated case in itself. Thousands of similar instances are strewn all over India. The scenario prevailing in Orissa is quite grotesque. The Navin Patnaik government in Orissa is determined to embark upon an absolutely uninterfered project of industrialization for Orissa. As a result, twenty projects on Aluminium extraction, one hundred on sponge iron extraction and twenty five on manganese and iron extraction have already been signed. All these projects would probably provide substantial mineral resources to the companies involved, but at the same time would also devastate the more crucial natural resources along with displacing a shockingly huge number of people residing in these areas. We saw two instances in Kuchai Padhar and Lanjiguda.

India accounts for 13 per cent of the world's repository of Bauxite. After companies like BALCO and NALCO, new companies like HINDALCO and Vedanta have joined in the trade to extract aluminium. The Aditya Birla Group and the Canada-based company ALCAN have merged to form HINDALCO. Their extraction in the Niyamagiri range would directly affect and displace about eighty-two villages. The number of people going to be affected are a shocking fifty thousand. The government sources however record the displacement of only about twenty-four villages, the residents of which would get a minimal compensation. The environment in the Saubahumali and Waflimali range would also be affected. The dynamite blasting, bauxite dust and waste dumping would also bring enormous environmental peril and perpetual health hazards to the people residing there. The most alarming environmental fallout however is the fact that about three hundred water streams would dry up in these hill ranges. This includes two perennial streams called

Wamsivali and Naganala which flow through five districts. The measureless problems, which this might bring about, are left unanswered by the State government. The resistance that is being put up by the people of Kuchai Padhar are more cultural than political. A few NGOs are working against the projects. In some parts they are rendered support by political parties like the CPI (ML) Liberation as well as CPI (Maoists). A Prakriti Sampada Suraksha Parishad (PSSP) has been formed as a conglomeration of eight different organizations. They have put up a resistance mainly peaceful in its form for the last thirteen years. On 16th December 2000, the procession of PSSP was fired upon by the police in Maikanj. It resulted in the deaths of three villagers namely Damodar Jharia, Raghunath Jharia and Avilash Jharia. But little change has been effected ever since. The lives of thousands lie precarious before the combined oppression of the state and the MNCs, the former giving open support and security to the latter.

Similar depiction was seen in Lanjiguda, which is in Kalahandi. A UK-based company Vedanta would blast about twenty kilometers of land affecting about 400 villages and four lakh people. These highly technologised companies generate no scope of employment for the local illiterate tribals. They just receive state orders to vacate their homes and lands in which they have thrived for generations over centuries. The compensation and rehabilitation from the government reach a miniscule minority; the rest an obnoxious majority, are left nowhere.

However, we did find a sharp difference in the way and approach of resistance in Kuchai Padhar and Jagannathpur. Unlike the former the people in Kalahandi are more politically organized under CPI(ML) Liberation. They thus displayed better consciousness and did not, unlike the people of Kachai Padhar, see displacement as an issue by itself alienated from other forums of greater exploitation.

The other aspect of our study was to observe land reforms and the general condition of Oriya peasants. The peasantry in Orissa is a dreadful reminder of the colonial legacy. Despite an existing ceiling rate of land possession, some 'landlords' actually possess 2000 hectares of land. Most of the people are landless laborers and a few are marginal farmers. Two-third of the peasant community live below the poverty level. Women and children are also forced to work in the fields in the face of extreme poverty. Literacy rate is quite low. There is not much of provision for higher education and the health facilities are minimal. Probably this is a truth all over rural India but our first-hand experience was unnerving.

However, one ray of hope shimmered in the land snatching instances we had come across. In Patraguda village of Bissam Cuttak a substantial amount of land had been snatched from Manmatha Rao, a Congress advocate and Babulal Sahoo, a BJD MLA. The villagers, under the leadership of CPI (ML) Liberation engaged in strifes and physical fights with the goons of the landowners to capture the land. The crops yielded from this land is divided into three parts. One goes to the local fund of the CPI

(ML) Liberation, one part is spent to meet the expenditure on land related litigations and a third is distributed among all the families of the villages. The instance of Patraguda as we found out had become one of the inspirations to other villages of nearby locality.

In a village called Lauguda, also under the leadership of Tirupathy Gomango, the MP candidate of CPI (ML) Liberation from Rayagada, land snatching took place. The struggling people faced police firing; yet carried their struggle successfully through. Padampur, a village that faces caste discrimination as it is a Harijan village, also had snatched 12 acres of land. In 2002, two people were killed in the course of their land struggle.

Orissa was a great experience for us. We saw from closest proximity how the people suffer, how they are being exploited and how they are putting up a resistance. The eye-wash of development was exposed in its utmost crudity.

Independent - are we? Probably in the pages of history books, yes. But this new colonization by the MNCs and the Indian state itself of its people tells a different story, hitherto untold or probably unheard of. But one thing remains clear - we need to fight a second battle of independence, right now!

- Banajyotsna

Box

Orissa forest land scam

With the complicity of the Government officials and Public Administration authorities, public lands around Bhubaneshwar and all over Orissa are being grabbed by powerful citizens. In particular, forest lands are being grabbed by those who wield influence in the State Administration and are wealthy enough to bribe revenue officials. Forest lands, right from coastal lands to the Eastern ghats, are thus being illegally privatised. It is not uncommon to see farm houses belonging to bureaucrats and others come up on what was once dense forest land in the Chandrika forests.

How is this made possible, given the Forest Conservation Act (1980)? Through an ingenious method evolved by bureaucrats: community lands are now open to privatisation through back-dated pattas from ex-rulers of the former Estates like Kalahandi. These hand-written sale deeds (Hata Patta) issued by ex-zamindars and ex-rulers are being entertained by revenue officials. Through such a ruse, public lands worth crores of rupees are either tenanted or in the process of being tenanted in the Bhubaneshwar tehsil. Overnight, vast areas of coastal mangrove forest lands of the Mahanadi estuaries were sold out through the issue of back-dated hand-written sale deeds by the ex-Manager of the Kujang Zamindari! Subsequently such Hata Pattas are regularised to Stitiban or tenant-right, issued by the Anchal-Adhikari/Tehsildar. The entire Tiger project Similipal Forests covering an area of 2200 sq. km, is in danger of

being grabbed and privatised by anyone who can arrange back-dated pattas from the ex-ruler of Mayurbhanj.

Corrupt bureaucrats play the greatest role in these land scams. All land records and maps are with these officials. They can easily tamper with these records as it suits them. Not only the coastal tracts of Orissa but even the ex-Gadjat forest blocks and other public lands are victims of such scams. Even now, no correct map of any forest block of the State is available for scrutiny by conscious citizens.

Other than Reserve Forests, areas where forest growth is removed are deemed to belong to the Revenue Department - such lands are called Anabadi lands. It is shocking that 31,785.80 square kms of forest lands lie with Revenue authorities, which lease them out for different purposes. Due to such practices, the forest cover in the State is gradually depleting. Lessees like different mine owners in the State illegally occupy forest lands other than those granted to them for mining operations - they indulge in deliberate destruction of forest cover in such areas. So far, the State has not prepared a consolidated map of mines, where information about mine-leasehold areas is publicly available.

The mercury column in Orissa is sharply increasing largely due to the mishandling of dense forestlands and changing topography of Orissa. These lands will soon turn into deserts if steps are not taken to curb such scams in forestlands.

Today, several cases relating to land scams are pending in law courts and at the level of the member, Board of Revenue, Orissa, awaiting a decision. But many such cases are lost because State-appointed advocates oblige the corrupt top bureaucrats by failing to fight the cases seriously. These top officers who have tampered with public records in order to privatise public property are being protected rather than punished! If public awareness on these scams is not heightened, and if immediate steps are not taken, Orissa will be irrevocably defaced.

– **Nadiya Chand Kanungo, Rtd. DFO**

REPORT

AISA's Go-to-Village Campaign

Beginning June 10, responding to AISA's gaon chalo abhiyan (Go-to-Village Campaign) a team of students from Allahabad and Lucknow universities conducted a padyatra (traveling on foot) of several villages, falling under Ghorawal tehsil of Sonbhadra district in eastern Uttar Pradesh, to learn and know about the life of poor tribals and labourers. Sonbhadra district is considered one of the most backward districts of UP, despite the fact that a lot of money is allocated by the state govt. for this district, and, at the same time, a large chunk of capital flowing out of eastern UP is produced in this district owing to its industries like Obra, Anpara and Hindalco.

Notwithstanding all this, the tribal-dalit labourers of the district are facing acute starvation and malnutrition apart from being subjected to extreme forms of feudal oppression. There is widespread joblessness and mounting incidences of starvation related deaths. This district is in the limelight for one more reason – Naxalism. Crores of rupees are being pumped into the district for tackling and containing Naxalism.

Let us lay bare the facts:

Hunger, instead of Work

The drought since last year has completely pauperised not only the landless labourers, but even the small peasants. Due to the drought, agro-based jobs are impossible to find. In such a situation the pauperised labourers cannot exist, hence their desperate need for any sort of employment. Under the much-publicised food-for-work scheme, pond digging and road construction work is underway in all villages. But an interaction with tribal labourers revealed the fact that despite the back-breaking labour, their families rarely get two square meals a day. There is not a grain to eat in their thatched hutments. Their children are perishing out of hunger. This scheme is gradually turning into hunger-for-work scheme. People of many villages told us that they haven't received a grain or a paisa even after slogging for months. Even where wages in grain was distributed it was only partial. The labourers in Rampur Dogolia village told us that a Patel contractor queued up labourers and got himself photographed with them to produce it before the BDO and claimed that he distributed Rs.70,000 as wages, whereas the labourers had been given only Rs.10,000. In this way the labourers are being cheated and looted of their sweat and blood, when the contractors siphon off the major part of their wages. On an average, the contractors owe Rs.2000-3000 per labourer. All this has enabled gram pradhans and contractors to reap bumper harvests, and the food-for-work scheme has come as a boon for them. What the contractors do to cheat the labourers is to initiate work at several places simultaneously. The labourers, desperately waiting for employment start running helter skelter. Taking advantage of this kind of situation the contractors manage to pocket half the wages. The labourers, looted in this way by one contractor went to the BDO to complain. They were shocked to know that the work the contractor made them do was not legally sanctioned. When the SDM was approached with the grievance he suggested a simple solution – that the labour be considered voluntary work (shramadan). Not only are feudals and contractors involved in this dirty game of snatching the bread of even the starved population, but also those who claim themselves to be champions of the poor and tribals. Now the labourers are waiting in the wilderness with the hope that some day they will

be paid the worth of their toil. Under the food-for-work scheme the official wage has been fixed at Rs. 86 for dispensing the dug earth. But they are being given only Rs. 58 (five kg of paddy plus Rs. 23).

The Story of Forest and Land

The majority of labourers here are tribals belonging to the Kol community, 50% of whom are landless. They have no other option than to work as labourers. And at the same time, in every village there are people who own 200-500 bighas (1 bigha = 0.6 acres approx.) of land and the Land Ceiling Act has never troubled them. Many feudal lords like Raja Barhar of Rajpur estate and the Seth Balmukund Lohia of Bhagardaha own more than 1000 bighas of land, on which hundreds of tribal labourers perform begar (unpaid labour). Till a few years back Balmukund Lohia paid Rs.10 in wages for 12 hours of labour. After the CPI(ML) movement in the region this wage was increased to Rs.30. Raja Barhar continues to live like a king even today. One of our comrades gave us a rather amazing and ironic information. The 1000s of bighas of land of Raja Barhar is in the name of different members of his family (to evade the Ceiling Act), of this 400 bighas of land are in the name of Gajraj Singh, whereas no such member of this name exists in his clan. Actually this Gajraj Singh is the name of his elephant (quite a prosperous elephant)! On the other hand, poor and helpless tribals are being chased away from their forestland. After years of hard work they render forestland arable, and nurture a fond dream that in this way they may escape from feudal bondage; but the feudal lords are evicting them from this hard worked land with the help of the Forest Department officials. We heard of an incident in village Newari, where in 1969 about 600 bighas of land were distributed to the tribal people by the then Indira govt. The tribals worked hard for 20 years on this land to make it fit for cultivation, but in 1996, by an order of the Governor under Article 20, the land was declared reserved forest which is now being gradually encroached upon by the feudals and the forest department never bothers to prevent them. However, if the tribals assert their land ownership rights, they are met with unprecedented police repression and even after if this they stick to their demand the police uses its ultimate weapon – branding them naxals and shooting them down. The tribals are demanding that either the govt. plant trees on that land and give them their just right or the land be redistributed among the tribals. In this light, the CPI(ML) has demanded the constitution of a Lands Commission.

The Spectre of Naxalism

When we went to the villages and asked villagers about their problems, everywhere we felt that a kind of fear immediately gripped the youth, women and men. They would evade talking and many villagers would soon leave. It can be understood that this fear is due to the perceived threat from the police. They are afraid that if they ask

for their just wages, talk about land rights or dignity they will be declared naxalites. We got to see an example of police repression nearby where the thatched roofs of labourers had been destroyed, their poultry, goats and even their utensils had been forcibly taken away by the police; and this is a common phenomenon. If any youth talks unhesitatingly about repression, very next day the police will take away the youth on information from the feudals and then the youth is hung upside down from a tree and beaten mercilessly. He is set free only after a warning that if he repeats the 'mistake' he will be shot dead.

How strange it is that you cannot talk about your miseries, you cannot ask for your just wages, cannot secure your land and your dignity and if you do this you are branded a naxalite. Sixty-year-old Rajkumari of village Aruaon says, "if demanding your wages and rights over your own land is naxalism then we are naxalites".

Marching Forward from Hunger to Struggle

When we went to tribal bastis in village Newari and told people that we would have our meals with them their eyes became blank and they were speechless. The silence was broken when young Buddhu revealed - "Comrade, there are no grains in our houses since many days." They showed us their sick children and turned their faces to stare in the wilderness. We held a meeting that evening. The same youth stood up and said that struggle was the only way to fight hunger. The fiery young man took resolve that he would see to it that the Party organisation is sufficiently strengthened. The youth of village Barank were hesitant to interact with us, but later when a meeting was held they were so encouraged that they arranged a dholak and harmonium and began singing songs of resistance and liberation. One of the youths sang –

"whatever terror you create in the name of naxalism,
your machinations will not work
the red flag will continue marching ahead
and your machinations will not work"

The team of student leaders also sat on a dharna at Ghorawal in front of the govt hospital. During the three-day dharna questions were raised about the irregularities and corruption in the hospital. The dharna compelled the authorities to dispense MDT and TB medicines for 6 months to each deserving patient.

– **Ramayan Ram**

Criminalisation Is Common Minimum Programme of UPA and NDA:

Need for Unleashing Common Maximum Protests of the People

[Citizens in Patna stress people's action against criminal-politician-administration nexus in Bihar]

Buta Singh's controversial order transferring 17 IPS officers in Bihar evoked widespread criticism and condemnation in Bihar. Administrative officials too voiced their protests with the Chief Secretary proceeding on a long protest leave. While the Chief Secretary eventually returned to work following a patch-up, the debate understandably did not stop with that. Beyond the question of bureaucratic seniority and propriety, the people promptly grasped the political essence of Buta Singh's action - providing administrative 'immunity' to notorious criminals and easing out officials who had been taking a hard line against the criminal-politician nexus.

Against this backdrop a seminar on "Criminalisation and Challenges for Democracy in Bihar" was held in Patna on August 10 under the auspices of Nagarik Manch (Citizens' Forum) in which retired and even serving officials voiced their opinions alongside Left and democratic political personalities. It was presided over by a 3-member presidium comprising advocates Ratneshwar Prasad Singh and Ravindra Giriyaage and noted human rights activist Kishori Das. Ramji Rai, editor, Samkalin Janmat, conducted the proceedings. The well-attended seminar was addressed by CPI(ML) General Secretary, Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya, Shankar Prasad Tekariwal, leader of Samajwadi Party and former Finance Minister of Bihar government, Kedar Nath Pandey, CPI leader and MLC, Shashi Bhushan Sahai, former DGP, Bihar, Ajai Verma, an upright IPS officer who has filed a PIL in Patna High Court challenging the transfer orders issued by Buta Singh, and retired IAS official Ram Updesh Singh.

Initiating the discussion, Ajai Verma said corruption and criminalisation could never assume the proportions they have assumed today without the complicity or collusion of civil servants. He regretted that civil servants had lost the moral courage to uphold the Constitution and the spirit of public service. He called upon civil servants to think and act as conscientious citizens and not as bureaucratic appendages of the powers that be.

Retired IAS officer Ram Updesh Singh said today power-politics had become rotten and the bureaucracy crippled. He called for a massive awakening of the people as the only answer to criminalisation and degeneration of the administration.

Former DGP Shashi Bhushan Sahai said that criminalisation of politics had now assumed menacing proportions with state power itself getting criminalized. It is becoming commonplace to see political leaders, MLAs, MPs, ministers and bureaucrats summoned to courts. He said the transfer orders issued by Buta Singh were aimed at reining in police officials while giving a free hand to notorious criminals like Shahabuddin.

In his concluding address Com. Dipankar said that criminalisation in Bihar had become an integral feature of governance. Citing a recent example from West Champaran, the district widely acknowledged as the original haven of kidnappers and

big landowners, he showed how criminals and police worked in tandem to crush the rural poor's struggle for land and liberty. On July 27, 2005 criminals dressed in police uniform attacked a group of agricultural labourers in a village in Gaunaha block, killing a woman and critically injuring several others while the actual police guarded them at a distance. The next day when Com. Birendra Gupta, a senior CPI(ML) leader of the region visited the spot, he was kidnapped by the criminals. When the Party District Secretary called on the SP in Bettiah, his first response was an outright denial. But as luck would have it, the SP received a phone call at that moment from the very criminals who had abducted Com. Gupta. They wanted instructions from him as to what was to be done to Com. Gupta! Since the telephonic talk took place in the presence of the CPI(ML) Secretary, the SP had to ask them not to take law into their own hands, and hand him over to the police. Com. Gupta was abducted at around 4.30 p.m. and the SP talked about sending police at 7.30 p.m. but they reached the spot only by 1.30 a.m. And even after 13 days, none of the culprits have been arrested. "Police and criminals function as the two hands of the administration and there is usually perfect coordination between the two," Comrade Dipankar said.

Referring to the large-scale defection of criminals from the LJP to the JD(U), Comrade Dipankar described criminalisation as a great leveller in Bihar politics, as the common minimum plank of both UPA and NDA in the state. The oppressive feudal-kulak power structure in Bihar rests on the support of the criminal-politician-administration nexus and the Indian ruling elite is prepared to shelve the Constitution and tolerate, and even promote, criminalisation to prevent Bihar from proceeding in the direction of radical social transformation. The answer to this common minimum programme of the ruling elite lies in unleashing the common maximum protests of the people and the revolutionary movement of the rural poor can and must provide the backbone of such a people's resistance. The struggling masses must show the way to combat and transform the criminalized polity in Bihar.

Champan Peasant Movement Challenges Brutal Repression Sankalp Sabha against Kidnapping and Murder

Despite the reign of terror let loose by the feudal-criminal-police-politician nexus, the peasant movement is surging ahead in West Champaran, one of the last surviving feudal bastions of Bihar. On July 27, Kisan Sangh goons in uniform, on the behest of landlord Baldev Prasad, attacked poor peasants in Araria-Barava village. The villagers, mostly women, mistook them for policemen, and began to resist them; they then opened fire, killing 65-year-old widow Tetaria Devi and seriously injuring 35 year old Krishnawati Devi. They burnt two houses and looted lakhs of property from around one and a half dozen houses; they tore the clothes of two women and tried to

rape them. The Police, instead of arresting the criminals, took 20 villagers into custody. On the next day, when Com. Birendra Gupta, Bihar State Committee member of CPI(ML) visited the spot, he was abducted along with three other comrades and severely beaten. It seems that the abductors, in collusion with the police, had planned to kill him: in fact, when our district secretary was present when the S.P. received a call from the kidnappers asking him what to do with Comrade Gupta! Seriously injured, Comrade Gupta was later freed by the kidnappers but brought to Betia and placed in the police lock-up. However, as soon as the news of kidnapping spread, a massive protest began. In the night itself, the road near Belva village was dug up and blocked. Next day there was a day-long road blockade in Mainatand. Attempts were made to stop trains in Sikata. The Betia-Mainatand road was blocked for the whole day. Com.Gupta was later taken to hospital and released. However, none of the culprits has been arrested so far. In fact, according to the police case, the poor people themselves are being held responsible for the murder of Tetaria Devi and there is no mention of Com.Gupta`s kidnapping. This is the travesty of justice under President`s rule in Bihar!

On August 7, a mammoth Sankalp Sabha was organized in Pipara Chowk, where thousands of poor peasants pledged to carry forward the dreams and struggles of Shaheed Com. Tetaria Devi. Addressing the Sankalp Sabha, Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya said that the battle for country`s freedom started from Champaran. India became free but the poor of Champaran could not get freedom. Bihar was the first state where land reform was implemented but still there are thousands of acres of surplus ceiling land under illegal occupation of feudal-princely estates in Champaran. Where pattas were distributed, landlords got them cancelled with the help of courts and are dispossessing the poor from the land. Araria-Barava is the most glaring example of dispossession of the patta- holders under court protection. Com. Ramji Rai, Central Committee member, Com. Birendra Prasad Gupta, Bihar State Committee Member and Com. Vidyand Vikal, State Secretary, AIALA also addressed the meeting.

A sustained movement continues demanding the arrest of Baldev Prasad, Kisan Sangh ring-leader Madhu Verma, Sheikh Mosannif, Ramji Yadav and Jahangir; a ban on the Kisan Sangh - the Ranvir Sena of Champaran; ensuring possession of the patta holders on the land; as well as seizure of arms of the Kisan Sangh goons. A Memorandum was submitted to the D.I.G. in Champaran. A Dharna was organized in Bagaha on August 12 and at the District H.Q. on August 16 under the AIPWA banner. On August 17, CPI(ML) held a Dharna at the district H.Q. A mass campaign is ongoing which will culminate in August 24 Bihar Bandh.

Obviously, this battle of the poor under CPI(ML) leadership has disturbed the age old monopoly and peace of the feudal estates of West Champaran - because these poor are fighting not only for land, wages and dignity but they are also forcefully asserting

as political force. CPI(ML)'s polling second in the Sikta assembly segment in 2000, was a real cause of worry for them. Led by Dilip Verma of Shikarpur state, who is MLA of Sikta, they made massive preparations to crush the battle of the poor. In the last assembly election, they ensured cancellation of the nomination papers of our candidates from Sikta and Shikarpur, both assembly segments. However Dilip Verma's votes drastically declined from 56 thousands in the last election to 26 thousands, thanks to the sustained struggle of the poor against him. This feudal lord-turned politician was so infuriated that, in his cadre meeting, he declared a reward of 150 acres of land for killing or helping arrest of Com. Shambhu Yadav (Harendra), CPI(ML) State Committee Member. All political parties are actually tools in the hands of the estates and Shikarpur is the foremost among them. Their kith and kin hold major positions in all political parties. They control all panchayat-Raj institutions from village to Zila Panchayat level. Owning 3500 acres of land, the Shikarpur estate controls all economic resources in the district. Apart from cinema halls, factories, shops etc, they run NGOs also for cheap popularity and, of course, easy money. To retain their Raj, they resort to all sorts of fraudulent, hypocritical games as well as cruel repression. They did not let parties from CPI to CPI(ML)TND function in that area. However, if the spirit of Com. Krishnavati, (who sustained a bullet injury in Araria and declared 'We will never leave the Party') is any signal, the Raj of the estates is sure to end.

Land Struggles in East Godavari District

[Excerpts from the paper presented by N. Murthy in the Hyderabad convention on "Land Reforms and State Repression in AP"]

Of late, East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh has been witnessing a new wave in land struggles by the rural poor under the leadership of the CPI(ML). At present, land struggles are going on in at least 15 villages simultaneously. The struggles are primarily being led by the village-level struggle committees of agricultural labourers and poor peasants under the leadership of local Party committees.

In recent times, about 1500 people have been arrested implicated in around 30 false cases, mostly under non-bailable sections, in different villages. The police are also resorting to brutal repressive measures like severe lathicharge on women in Lachireddypalem village. Unable to suppress the movement through repression alone, the administration is also resorting to new divisive tactics to split the struggling people. For example, the district administration is forcing the Endowments Department (Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department) to conduct auction on lands already under the occupation of the poor and lease them out to middle peasants from intermediate castes and kulaks. In several instances, it is making

use of the SC Corporation to lease in the lands which promises to rent them out only to dalits while denying any land to non-dalit agricultural labourers though they are also organized under AIALA and are already occupying the lands. The rural poor unitedly rebuffed this divisive tactics of the administration, rejected the offer of the SC Corporation unitedly and took up land redistribution into their own hands. With its policy of equitable land redistribution to agricultural labourers of all castes, the district unit of AIALA carried out independent land survey and redistributed the land to agricultural labourers belonging to all castes and sections who participated in the struggle and thus defeated the divisive schemes of the administration. The example of Tondangi village in Tuni mandal is a case in point.

Below we give some examples of land struggles in some villages.

Tuni Mandal

In Thetagunta village, 17 acres and 60 cents of ceiling-surplus land was given to the Forest Department to raise nursery instead of distributing it to landless poor. Enraged by this attitude of the government, people organized under the banner of AIALA demanded distribution of these lands. They also identified 8 acres of poramboke land in which a landlord had raised a cashew garden and 9.5 acres of ceiling-surplus land which has been under a High Court case for a long time. In the month of May, 400 people hoisted flags on the lands. Reacting to this, landlords filed a police case on 250 people. Police came twice to the village to arrest the people but they resisted.

In the same village, 2 acres of revenue poramboke land was occupied and huts were erected by the people. The landlords instigated some people under the banner of caste who are aspiring for this land and filed cases, brought the MRO and police, and in their presence landlords' henchmen removed the huts. Condemning this incident, people from different villages were mobilized under the banner of CPI(ML) and the landlords were warned of dire consequences if any of them tried to suppress the people. Ultimately, the landlords came to a compromise and conflicts arose among them.

Kotananduru Mandal

In Agraharam village of Kotananduru mandal, 19 acres of land belonging to the Vidhya Sankara Swamy temple was captured by an absentee landlord. He managed the Endowment Department and delisted this land from the endowments property list. He leased out this land to 6 middle peasants. 120 people hoisted red flags on the land and seized the mango crop and distributed it among the people. Police came twice to the village and seeing the determination of the people they went back.

Thondangi Mandal

In Tondangi village, struggle started during the earlier Telugu Desam regime centering on 508 acres of Endowment land. 34 acres of this land was under the possession of small and middle peasants and the remaining 474 acres were under the possession of kulaks and landlords. After several rounds of struggle our people captured the lands under the possession of landlords. So far the police and the administration supporting the landlords filed 8 cases implicating 224 members of poor people from all castes. A 37-member people's committee is leading the struggle. So far the MRO office has been gheroad 5 times and dharnas were conducted 6 times before the Collectorate. There were clashes with landlords' forces on four occasions but the final clash took place on the day when people entered the fields to hoist the flags. This incident took place in the presence of police who encouraged the landlords and their henchmen. Landlords mobilized 180 people to obstruct the people entering the fields numbering 400. The landlords' goons threw stones on the people, 17 of our people were injured, and in retaliation, people chased the goons injuring 13 of them. The SC Corporation tried to divide the people along caste lines and its efforts were foiled. Though the negotiations are dragging on our people have started cultivation despite the fact that the AP High Court played a reactionary role by granting a stay against our people.

In Sringavriksham village, the issue centered on Endowment lands of 180 acres. Two cases were. 30 members, including leaders, were arrested. Later the Revenue Department entered the scene and brought the SC Corporation into the field. Our people forced the SC Corporation to lease in 180 acres under the occupation of rich farmers from the Endowments Department and redistributed it among the poor. The membership of AIALA is 332 in this village.

In PE Chinnayapalem village, 35 acres of ceiling-surplus land still under the occupation of landlords was identified and AIALA demanded that the government seize and distribute it among 160 AIALA members. After several representations, the mango garden (35 acres) was seized at last. Landlords' forces and the police jointly came to raid the dalits' settlement but they foiled their attempt and forced them to retreat through resistance.

In Kommanapalli and Ravikkampadu villages a land struggle has been going on for more than a decade. 663 acres of land spread over in the above two villages belonged to landlords who were brothers who had no legal heirs. After a period of time, the government declared 95 acres and 85 acres of lands belonging to the two landlords respectively as surplus land. But the government distributed only 37 and a half acres and 47 acres of these lands and left the remaining lands with the landlords. In the meantime one landlord died. In the absence of legal heirs to the deceased, the other landlord who was alive started selling the surplus land of his brother also.

The rural poor people of Kommanapalli as well as the people of Ravikampadu, armed with CPI(ML) and AIALA banners, seized the surplus lands. Landlords mobilized their forces and 70 policemen to raid the dalit settlement of Ravikampadu. They raided the dalitpeta, latched on to the people arrested some people. Three false cases were foisted on them. Nevertheless the agricultural labourers are continuing their struggle. Now the RDO has intervened and talks are going on. The AIALA membership is 500 in these two villages.

Pratipadu Mandal

In Dharmavaram village, 300 acres of Endowments lands belonging to Srivenugopalaswamy temple are there. In May 2005, local AIALA seized 75 acres of this under the control of landlords and hoisted red flags. Mainly dalits have joined AIALA in this village. A section of BCs have also joined. The landlords announced through a mike that the dalits and BCs should not join CPI(ML) but can join the Congress of the TDP. But when our people asserted that they would join only CPI(ML), the upper caste landlords, under the leadership of the village sarpanch, declared a social boycott against them, refusing them agricultural work and preventing them from drawing water from the common water sources of the village for cattle etc. CPI(ML), AIALA and AIPWA organized a big dharna before the District Collectorate on 11th July, 2005 and 300 people from this village participated.

In Ommangi village a struggle is going on over 90 acres of ceiling-surplus land and the police arrested and filed cases against 165 AIALA members twice. But the struggle is continuing.

Kakinada Rural Mandal

Land struggles are going on in Gaigogulapadu and Panduru in Kakinada rural mandal. Gaigogulapadu is located on the outskirts of Kakinada town and due to expanding urbanization a single acre of land cost more than 25-30 lakhs here. Here we are waging struggle over poramboke land for housesites for the poor.

In the adjoining village of Panduru, we are conducting a struggle over 11 acres of poramboke land under the illegal occupation of kulaks. After an intense struggle, the kulaks came for a compromise under the mediation of the MRO and offered only 5 acres for us. Our people did not reject compromise in principle but went in for a hard bargain offering only 3 acres for the landowning farmers. The struggle is continuing.

Yeleswaram Mandal

In Yeleswaram mandal, 90 acres of land was seized by AIALA in Marribandam village and distributed among the tribals.

In Gontivanapalam village, AIALA launched a struggle to occupy lands acquired by the government for the Yeleru canal but left unutilized. The landlords who had given

this land to the government and taken compensation are still in possession of these lands. A struggle was launched by the local AIALA to seize these lands. One landlord gave a false complaint to the police that CPI(ML) activists had stolen the teak trees from his land though he had sold these trees to merchants a few months back. To challenge the temerity of this landlord who dared to file a false case against CPI(ML) and to create red terror, a 'Gontivanapalam Chalo' call was issued in that mandal. Thousands of people from all the villages in this mandal marched to this village to gherao this landlord who ran away from the village seeing the militant mood of the people.

Militant resistance struggles have also been organized in recent times in Lachireddypalem village and Sangavaka tribal village in Kotananduru mandal. Successful land struggles have also been conducted in new delta areas like Karapa village in Peddapudi mandal and in another village in Sampara mandal.

Status of Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh and the Need to Implement Radical Land Reforms

[A summary of the paper presented by K. Gopal Iyer in the Hyderabad convention on "Land Reforms and State Repression"]

1. Background: Tenancy Reforms

Telangana movement is the precursor to land reforms initiative in Andhra Pradesh. The Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act enacted in 1950 with its subsequent amendments resulted in the Conferment of Protection to nearly 6 lakh tenants with over 75 lakh acres in their possession. This constituted 33 percent of the total cultivated area. The Andhra Pradesh Tenancy Act, 1956 sought to give protection to certain categories of tenants in the Andhra Region from unjust evictions. However, it was preceded by large-scale eviction of tenants by the landlords. In the absence of militant peasant movement, the tenancy legislation in Andhra area had only a negative impact on tenants as the landowners resorted to large-scale evictions and leasing out lands only on oral basis.

1.1. Land Ceiling

The land ceiling which came into effect in June 1961 allowed a family to retain 180 to 360 acres wet land or 1080 to 2160 acres of dry land. It provided nothing about the large-scale benami transactions that had taken place prior to June 1961. High levels of ceiling exemptions were allowed in the case of plantations, orchards, specialized farms, sugarcane farms, religious and charitable trusts etc. There was no provision in

the Act regarding the clandestine transfer of land in favour of other members of the family by way of gift, partition etc. The land leased out by the landowner was not taken into account in fixing the ceiling area. The impression given to the legislative assembly was that about 30 lakh acres constituting a little under 10 per cent of the total land would be available for redistribution. After a decade of implementation it was found that only 25584 persons had filed declarations and a total area of 4305.37 acres in the Andhra region and 29995.27 acres of land in the Telangana regions had been declared surplus.

As a corrective the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms (Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings) Act of 1973 was enforced on 1st January 1975. The unit of application of ceiling was not more than five members. 'Family' as defined in the Act consists of an individual, his spouse, their unmarried sons and unmarried minor daughters, major sons and daughters, married and widowed daughters, mother, father, brothers and sisters are not included in the family unit. The ceiling limit ranged from 10 to 54 acres depending upon the class and category of land. Exceptions were made to land held by the government, religious, educational and charitable trusts, land devoted to plantations etc. At the time of introduction of the Bill in the Assembly Government thought that approximately 20 lakh acres of land would become surplus. On 31st March 2004, the distribution of Ceiling Surplus Land in Andhra Pradesh was as follows:

(Area in acres)

1	Area Declared Surplus	799663
2	Area Taken Possession	641655
3	Area Distributed	582319
4	Area declared surplus but not distributed	207722
5	Area involved in Litigation	147450
	Litigation in Revenue Courts	55289
	High Court	78047
	Supreme Court	14113

(Source: Annual Report, 2004-2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, Pages 207-208)

The total number of beneficiaries was 540344. Much of the land distributed was dry and of inferior quality. This is a clear indication of the ineffective implementation of the land ceiling legislation in Andhra Pradesh.

1.2 Government Land

However, the distribution of government land (commonly known as Banjar land) constituted an important component of the land reform programme in Andhra Pradesh. As on March 2004, the distribution of Government Wastelands in Andhra Pradesh was 42.02 lakh acres which constituted the highest area to be distributed by any other

state in the country. (Annual Report 2004-2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, page 211). There are several constraints in the implementation in the State of Andhra Pradesh in the distribution of Government land. In reality a large part of the government land, particularly the better cultivable lands, have been encroached by big landowners. The process of evicting them from their illegal occupation and allotting the land to the landless has proved to be a formidable task. Another problem in implementation is ensuring physical possession of the allotted land as the landlords implicate the poor people in litigation or use coercive methods to prevent the allottees from cultivating the land. There are also cases of land assignment in Andhra Pradesh pending for two or three decades.

1.3. Tribal Land

Andhra Pradesh has a very long record of legislation for the protection of Tribal Land. There are large tracts of tribal lands which are still under the occupation of the non-tribals. For example, as on March 2004 the status on alienation and Restoration of Tribal Lands in Andhra Pradesh are as follows:

1	No. of cases filed in the Court	65875
2	Area	287776 (acres)
3	Cases disposed of by the court	58212
4	Area	256452 (acres)
5	Cases rejected	31737
6	Area involved	150227 (acres)
7	Cases decided in favour of tribals	26475
8	Area	106225 (acres)
9	Cases in which land was restored to tribals	23383
10	Area	94312 (acre)

(Source: Annual Report, 2004-2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India Page 213).

Thus only one-third of the total area alienated has been restored to them. Besides, they are subjected to displacement from thousands of acres due to various development projects and evictions by forest department on the plea of encroachment of forestland. The Samta Judgement and the Panchayat Extension Act of 1996 are silver linings in this respect which should be utilized by the peasant organizations in protecting the land rights of the tribals.

1.4 Impact of LPG

One of the major threats being posed to the land reforms programme is the adverse impact of Globalisation, Liberalization and Privatization under the pretext of

encouraging Aqua culture. The Andhra Pradesh Government, by a mere executive order Go/Ms/No. 27 of January 11, 1994 (Revenue Department), granted exemptions U/S 18/2 of Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms Act, 1973 for prawn/pisciculture project upto 200 hectares (500 acres). The area under prawn farms in Andhra Pradesh increased from 19500 Ha in 1993-94 to 66290 ha in 1997-98. The Supreme Court through its directives in 1991 banned the conversion of agricultural land and brackish water poramboke lands into aquaculture. In spite of this, large area of agricultural lands have been converted to aquaculture and Poramboke Brackish Water lands have been encroached by big prawn farmers. Another point is that 92% of the total area under prawn farm in Andhra Pradesh is located within CRS which is prohibited. Besides, the extent of agricultural land converted into aquaculture until 1999 was 31081.74 Ha and 25188-19 ha of poramboke brackish water lands are encroached. Andhra Pradesh agriculture is virtually in an explosive situation and in a seething cauldron.

2. Measures for Radical Land Reforms

In view of this, certain radical land reforms measures are inevitable. There are still enough scope for radical land reforms as indicated below:

2.1 Land ceilings

1. All the exemptions from land ceiling legislations e.g. for temple lands, Charitable Trusts, Plantations etc. should be immediately withdrawn. This would enable 6 to 7 lakh acres of surplus lands to be distributed among landless agricultural labourers.
2. The cases under litigation in Land ceiling should be decided within a year and the lands involving 1.4 lakh acres should be distributed among landless.
3. 'Absentee Landlordism' is prevalent on a considerable scale in Coastal Andhra and Telangana Region which should be strictly discouraged by enforcing rigorous definition of 'Personal Cultivation' on the pattern of West Bengal Land Ceiling Legislation. This would bring more than 5 lakh acres under ceiling net in Andhra Pradesh.

2.2 Tenancy Reforms

4. The Coastal Andhra has increasing area under tenancy. The latest research studies indicate that the informal/concealed tenancy in the Coastal Andhra ranges from 15% to 30% of the total owned area.
5. It is suggested that Andhra Pradesh Tenancy Reforms Legislation should be amended to confer proprietary rights to all tenants/sharecroppers who are cultivating the lands during last three years on the pattern of Assam. Madhya Pradesh legislation even prescribes proprietary rights to tenants cultivating for past one year as well.

6. The revenue officials at the village level should record the names of actual cultivators in the village revenue records each year to facilitate the tenancy records and conferment of proprietary rights.

2.3 Government Land

7. The Encroachment of Government lands done by landowners should be evicted within six months and such lands should be distributed to landless labourers.

8. A through survey should be conducted of available government lands for distribution to landless labourers.

9. As per Government of Andhra Pradesh Policy Note on the Assignment of Government Lands the Andhra Pradesh Government has undertaken a crash Programme of assignment of lands to tribals in eight districts of Adilabad, Khamman, East Godavari, Warangal, West Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, Vijayanagaram, and Srikakulam. An estimated 12,80,968.22 acres of banjar land is available in the tribal areas of the state. So far area of 5,57,768.87 acres have been surveyed and balance 7,23,199.35 acres are yet to be surveyed. This survey work must be undertaken on a priority basis to be completed within one year for distribution to tribals.

2.4 Reversing the Impact of Globalisation, Liberalization and Privatization

10. The Government of Andhra Pradesh should immediately withdraw the Executive order GV/MS/ Ho. 27 of 11th January 1994 with which the exemptions from land ceiling upto 500 acres have been permitted for Aqua Farms.

11. In Future also the Land ceiling limit as contained in Land Ceiling Act 1973 should continue and exemptions should be withdrawn.

12. The Brackish Water Poramboke land should be distributed to agriculture labour and fishermen.

13. The brackish water Poramboke lands encroached by prawn farmers should be retrieved and distributed to Agriculture Labour and Fishermen

14. The Agriculture land converted to Aquaculture should be taken over by Government and distributed to landless.

15. The Contract Farming and Corporate Farming should be completely discouraged.

It is, however, doubtful whether Government of Andhra Pradesh would be willing to undertake the radical land reforms measures as suggested above. It should be the task of the peasant organizations to mobilize the Agricultural labourers and peasants to implement radical land reforms measures.

LABOUR

Winding up of the CGHS:

Another Blow to Welfarism and Livelihood

The Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare of the UPA government, Dr. Anbumani Ramadass categorically declared in a press conference at Chennai on 1st June '05 that the government of India had planned to wind up the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), which benefits 50 lakh beneficiaries, and that it had also been decided to introduce in its place the "Health Card" scheme.

On 20th April, '05 the State Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Srimati Panabaka Lakshmi, placed her answer before the Lok Sabha to the unstarred question No. 4017 on the abolition of the CGHS raised by Sri. Bachi Singh Rawat, an MP. The essential point of the answer was as follows: The Planning Commission has completed its Mid-Term Appraisal (MTA) of the Tenth Five Year Plan in respect to major sectors of the Government. The chapter on health has drawn attention to several reports commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. These have reported on the low satisfaction level with the CGHS. The MTA further suggests that the concerned ministry could consider several options for the reform of the CGHS. The MTA suggests that the current and new CGHS subscribers may be given the option to shift to a system of health insurance.

On 6 May '05, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued an order to set up a 5-member committee under the chairmanship of Sri. P.K.Kaul (former cabinet secretary) to look into the functioning of the CGHS scheme and give recommendations for making it financially more viable and cost-effective. Interestingly, the order also said that the proposed committee also suggests conversion of the CGHS organization into a corporation on the lines of the ESIC.

The CGHS was established in 1954 with the objective to provide comprehensive healthcare to the central government employees. Later the scheme was extended to pensioners and various government personnel. At present this scheme is operating in 24 cities through 246 dispensaries, 19 polyclinics, 18 laboratories and 86 ISM units. More than 7000 employees are attached with this CGHS. Never before a question was raised on the very relevance of the scheme itself. Unfortunately, at present a perverse move has been advanced by different organs of the Central government to wind up or convert this crucial health service in qualitative way. And for making this move rational and justified, suddenly the question of examining the level of satisfaction of the subscribers has been posed. But, if the concern of the subscribers or consumers of the health service is the real agenda of the government, why not focus on the improvement of the functioning or the professional performance of the service? Why it is being proposed that the cost of 'better' service is to be imposed on the consumers themselves?

The question of financial viability and corruption has been raised by the Union Health Minister as the government has to spend Rs.500 to 600 crores per year on the scheme. However, categorically refuting the baseless allegations made by the Minister, the national president of All India C.G.H.S. Employees Association, Mr. Ram Kishan, rightly said, "the scheme was introduced as a welfare scheme to provide very cheap health service to a section of employees and so it can never be judged on profit-loss basis or level of expenditure of the government. If corruption or irregularities are the real concern, then why the Minister does not come out with a "White Paper" unearthing the factors behind it, and thus work out ways and means to improve the system, instead of conspiring to dismantle C.G.H.S".

During the last decade, irrespective of the colour of the govt., crucial sectors like education and health have been undergoing fundamental changes. The main components of ongoing restructuring are reduction of financial support of the govt, drastic reduction of workforce in these sectors, growing contractualisation and penetration of corporate houses and MNCs. In this backdrop, the proposal for the winding up of the CGHS is a concentrated expression of the onslaught on the health sector. The real question is not whether the existing employees would be retrenched in a crude manner or offered a 'graceful' exit; rather it would abolish thousands of posts "and further shrink the scope of employment and pave the way for all-out contractualisation of the employment, including in the appointment of doctors.

Some liberal ideologues may argue as to what is the harm in winding up a particular health scheme when it is being replaced by some alternative arrangement. But it is amply clear that the proposed alternative is essentially meant for withdrawal of the government role in healthcare and throwing it to the mercy of the corporate houses or MNCs. The Union Health Minister himself has admitted that this arrangement of "health card" would be on an experimental basis and in case it succeeds it would be expanded further.

The CGHS employees are organized into a single all-India association with a glorious tradition of militant agitations, which ensured them many economic gains and dignified working conditions. Recently, they went for a one-day token strike on 7th June, 2005 throughout the country on issues like timely supply of quality medicines, expansion of the CGHS services, promotion of employees, and filling up of vacant posts etc. They are organizing conventions at major centers all over the country. On Sept. 14, a national convention is proposed to take place in New Delhi which will be preceded by an all India strike on August 29-30.

– DP Buxi

AADHI ZAMEEN

Women's Parliament in Lucknow

A Women's Parliament was held at Lucknow on 29th July to highlight cases of violence on women in Uttar Pradesh. The Parliament was inaugurated by AIPWA President Srilata Swaminathan and renowned human rights activist Nandita Haxar was the Chief Guest. Speaking on the occasion Ms. Swaminathan said that there was not just one Imrana in India. Hindu women were also suffering in the same way. Women have to rise above religion and casteism and reject the capitalist forces represented by so many political parties so that they can be truly liberated. Ms. Nandita Haxar said that the media had communalized the case of Imrana. She said that the women's movement cannot go on in isolation rather it should link up with other progressive movements. Women from Sitapur, Chandauli, Lucknow and other parts of the state recounted instances of violence. The Parliament adopted the following resolutions:

1. The Parliament resolved to support Imrana's struggle and condemned Mulayam's statements supporting the fatwa (dicktat) against her. It also demand an end to caste panchayats held in Western UP.
2. It demanded action against the relative of a SP leader who had raped a minor girl in Ashiyana colony and condemned the partisan role of the State Commission for Women. It demanded action on the acid throwing case of Monika and the brutal killing of Chavi Jaiswal of Chitwapur.
3. It demanded arrest of the policemen involved in the gangrape of Manju Devi of Naugarh in Chandauli.
4. It demanded special courts for trial of cases of rape and violence on women and time bound trials.
5. It demanded that rights of dalit and adivasi women panchayat presidents be protected from feudal upper castes- The Pradhan of Bhadayun village Shubhwnti of Chandauli has been denied her rights by the nephew of Rajnath Singh, Block Pramukh of Dhanapur.
6. Each woman be guaranteed employment, failing which she be entitled to unemployment allowance.
7. Women's Reservation Bill be passed in its original form.

Ms Hamidia Habibulla of NFIW, Ex. V.C. Roop Rekha Verma, Shakila Khan, social activist and Deepika Vergi of Sahyog as well as Tahira Hasan, convener of Tehriq-e-Niswan also addressed the women.

Women's Bill

The UPA Government is again dilly-dallying on the Women's Bill. The Government proposal of increasing the number of seats in Parliament to around 900 and the Assembly seats to 9000 sounds ludicrous. The UPA has finally arrived at a formula which will not only help to delay the passage of the Bill and start a fresh round of

debate and controversy; the Bill may never see the light of day! To top it all, the entire thrust of the Women's Bill is diluted, with the Government trying to strike a compromise with male power, which is proving to be quite unaccommodating and headstrong. And Kudos to the CPI (M), which has no principled objection to the new formula and but seems to be just opposing it on technical grounds – that the delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies will take time. Sushmaji is most flexible this time, and has almost given a blank cheque to the Govt. (all is fine as long as Soniaji is not the PM). The only problem that the BJP may encounter is the on the stand of Uma Bharati on a quota within quota; she has already challenged Sushma Swaraj's statement saying she was not consulted. If the OBCs within the Congress and BJP vote according to their conscience, and the Social Justice camp keeps harping on the old tune of special quota for OBCs, Shivraj Patil's hopes for a consensus are going to be shattered. So, if after all the dilution and compromises, not to speak of extra expenditure, the Bill is going to face fresh controversies and is not going to be passed at all, isn't it better that we stick to our principles and have a vote so that those who oppose the Bill can be exposed on the floor of the house? Isn't it high time the UPA stops playing the NDA game?

AIPWA National Workshop in Punjab

On 5,6 August a workshop of national level activists was held at Ludhiana, Punjab. The topics were: Globalisation and the problems of working women–Aipwa's tasks; Imperialist Culture–Sangh Pariwar's response vs. AIPWA's; and Trends in the Women's Movement and AIPWA's tactics; How to strengthen AIPWA. About 41 delegates from 9 states attended.

The 1st paper was presented by Srilata Swaminathan, who said that in the period 1982-2004 neo-colonial exploitation had increased in leaps and bounds. The developing countries were steeped in debts. The impact of globalisation had intensified in India and women workers were the most affected. Farmers' suicides, starvation deaths, large-scale unemployment and migration had become the order of the day. Since women were the worst sufferers, working women should be organized as a vanguard force in the struggle for women's liberation she said. Some of the suggestions that came up during discussions were that AIPWA should develop links and express solidarity with struggles of working women worldwide; it should organize rural poor women on issues like employment, health care, children's education, development and against indiscriminate mechanization in the farm sector. It should try to organize women for social security in the unorganised sector and for pro-women labour laws. Punjab AIPWA recounted its experience of its solidarity movement on arrest of 1500 activists. Experience of organising handloom/powerloom workers and construction workers in T.N and successful struggles of glass bottle factory workers of Pondicherry were discussed. The paper on Imperialist Culture was presented by Ajanta Lohit who

said that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism and it had its own culture of war and loot. It had converted women's bodies into commodities for earning super-profits. Later, the paper discussed how imperialism had used feudalism and patriarchy in India to further its interests, and how the Sangh Pariwar had nothing to lose in advocating both market culture as well as feudal values. In the discussions that followed Bengal delegates said that in their state, during Dussera, 'sindoor festival' was being observed with the patronage of LF government. Liquor was freely distributed in this festival. Delegates said that the BJP, during its rule, had tried to revive outmoded customs like sati and encouraged imposition of dress codes on students and newsreaders as well as tried to bring in an insurance scheme for rape victims. In Rajasthan, sati mandirs were being advertised to attract foreign tourists. In T.N the Sangh Parivar was forming committees for temple construction. 'Devasthan' boards were formed in BJP ruled states. They said that Sangh Pariwar was using religion as a tool to fill the vacuum created by economic insecurity caused by globalisation. Youth were being mobilised using the icon of the 'macho' Ram and mothers through the image of 'Ram Lalla', the child Ram for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. From T.N the case of sexual exploitation of women by, Kanchi Shankaracharya and his aides came up. Some experiences of imperialist co-option of traditional culture, e.g. the commercialization of Bihu with new songs, obscene and feudal in content as well as the declaration by Sushma Swaraj suggesting that Paat-Moga (traditional cloth of Assam) should be launched in the international market. Bihar delegates said that while multinationals were being given a free hand in Bihar, feudal culture in the form of 'Satsangs' as well as nude folk dance of women in traditional fairs were been institutionalised.

In the next paper, presented by Kumudini, trends in the women's movement from the rightist Sevika Sangh to radical feminist and left-oriented women's groups and Dalit women's groups to NGOs were discussed. Experiences of joint struggles in different states were shared by delegates and it was decided that AIPWA would interact with diverse trends on varied issues while maintaining its independent ideological position and strength. On the question of NGOs it was felt that AIPWA should be clear that these organizations are agents of imperialism and blunt the fighting spirit of the people and finally make them dependent on the capitalist system. Yet AIPWA would engage in issue-based struggles with them on burning issues of women. The last paper on how to strengthen AIPWA, presented by Meena Tiwari, emphasized workshops and discussions for ideological consolidation of AIPWA, timely and continuous intervention on women's issues as well as democratic issues to politicize women, developing cadres through education in Marxism and careful nurturing, building movements and taking them to their logical end, strengthening the organizational structure and developing an independent propaganda network,

developing a flexible and dynamic work style, forming a legal cell. Several interesting experiences of successful struggles and developing new areas of work were discussed. On 6th, Hiroshima Day, a rally was held on the issue of imperialist intervention and loot in India as well as on the demand of withdrawal of Indian Govt.'s defence agreement with the US.

– **K.Pati**

ACTIVITIES

AISA

AISA's Two-day National Workshop at Dehradun

A two-day long national workshop of All India Students' Association (AISA) was held on 1-2 July at Shaheed Chandrashekhar Nagar (Dehradun). This was followed by AISA's National Council meeting on 3rd July. This three-day long affair was the first major national level programme in Uttaranchal's capital.

115 delegates from across Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, U.P., Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Karbi Anglong, and Uttarakhand participated in the workshop. The subjects covered at the workshop are "Imperialism since Lenin" and "Communist Manifesto". The last session on 2nd July was devoted to sharing the AISA activists' experiences and lessons from student movements and agitations in different states.

The workshop was inaugurated by Com.Dipankar Bhattacharya who urged the students to make all issues of people an integral part of their struggle and concern. He said that it was encouraging that AISA has been making efforts to increase their theoretical understanding while at the same time taking movemental initiatives, and he urged the students to make this kind of practice more frequent.

AISA's National Council meeting was held on 3rd July. Apart from discussing the recent developments and ongoing students agitations in different states, AISA NC expressed satisfaction over some of the victories like ousting a MNC from JNU campus, successful gherao of Senate meeting in Patna University, bus pass agitation in Punjab, exemplary courage shown by Kolkata students led by AISA and other left student organisations in confronting the brutality of Buddhadev Bhattacharya govt. on Jadavpur University students, followed with massive demonstrations and huge support for the students' demands, timely initiatives in sending a relief team to the Tsunami-hit Tamil Nadu, and taking a team of students from JNU to regions in Orissa where poor Tribals are being displaced from their traditional homelands.

AISA has resolved to meet the membership target of one lakh. The months of July and August would see extensive membership campaign in all states. It was decided that a national-level Parliament march would be held on 8 September on the slogan "No Employment - No Government!"

ASSAM

Protest against the Handing over of Oil Fields to a Foreign Company

A protest movement against the handing over of many oil fields of Assam to a foreign company is going on in Assam. The UPA Govt. is going to implement the NDA's decision to handover resourceful Amguri Oil Field under the ONGC to a Canadian company. The left parties including the CPI(ML), the CPI, and the CPI(M) and their trade union organizations and mass organizations are launching a movement against UPA Govt.'s anti-national policy. On 20th July, joint protest programmes were held in different places of the state, including in Amguri and Guwahati.

- Naren Borah

BIHAR

Administration Yields to Prisoners' Movement

Sustained agitation led by CPI(ML) leaders inside the Arrah jail, backed by solidarity action outside, ultimately forced the administration to yield. Earlier when prisoners, led by Com. Suresh, CPI(ML) State Committee Member, raised the issues of substandard food supply, repairing of fans, cleaning of toilets etc., they were brutally beaten by the jail police and the RJD supporters among the prisoners. In protest, Com. Sudama Prasad, along with other prisoners went on indefinite hunger-strike. In solidarity, agitation started outside the jail. A huge protest march was organized and effigy of D.M. was burnt. Ultimately, the administration was forced to negotiate and accept the 10-point charter of demands.

DELHI

Seventh Delhi State Conference

CPI(ML)'s Seventh Delhi State Conference Concludes with a Clarion Call to Become the Main Voice of the Delhi's Working People

The Seventh Delhi State Conference of the CPI(ML) was held on 6-7 August in MP Club at South Avenue. Veteran Party Comrade Mulkaraj inaugurated the Conference by hoisting the Red Flag.

Polit Bureau members Com.Swadesh Bhattacharya and Com.Nand Kishore Prasad were present as Chief Guest and Central Observer respectively. Other important leaders present were Central Committee members Prabhat Kumar and Swapan Mukherjee.

In the beginning, CPI(ML)'s State Secretary Rajendra Pratholi presented the work report. The report elaborates on the growing anger of the people of Delhi against troubles arising as a consequence of privatization of electricity and water. The report states that, "every attempt is being made to suppress the basic issues of the people amidst noises created by so much talk on metros and flyovers". Further, "in the era of globalization, while a pretty good section has prospered, the exploitation of poor has

intensified along with widening rifts in income levels." The report added that, "the poor are exposed to multi-pronged assaults due to unavailability of jobs, growing consumerist culture and ever-widening gap between the rich and poor. The life of the poor has become hell."

The Conference has presented some important tasks to the new Committee that include: giving a concrete shape to the struggles for social security, dignity and minimum wages; providing a sharp edge to the struggles of urban poor for BPL cards and ration supply as per their need and for round-the-year employment; and, bringing and making the issue of privatization of public goods and services and proper rehabilitation of the displaced poor, in the centre of Delhi politics.

The conference concluded with the call to make the CPI(ML) as the main voice of the millions of toiling and working people of Delhi. The Conference elected a fifteen-member State Committee which re-elected Rajendra Pratholi as the State Secretary.

JHARKHAND

Second Jharkhand State Conference:

CPI(ML) Pledges to Develop Peasants' and Working Class Movement to Newer Heights

CPI(ML)'s Second Jharkhand State Conference was held on 28-30 July at Comrade Mahendra Singh Sabhagar in Ranchi. The three-day Conference began on 28 July, the martyrdom day of Comrade Charu Mazumdar. The memories of the struggles which Comrade Mahendra Singh shaped, developed and led, reverberated throughout the Conference. The Conference pledged to fulfill the unfinished dream of Com. Mahendra Singh. The Conference also pledged to develop peasants' and working class movements to newer heights. The Conference adopted several resolutions and chalked out a comprehensive plan of action for strengthening of the Party organisation and movemental resurgence. The Conference also vowed to nail down the killers of Com. Mahendra Singh by intensifying the people's struggles on land, wage, dignity and democracy. Delegates pledged to develop a mass upsurge that will punish Dipak Verma and his political mentors.

The Conference began with flag hoisting by a veteran working class leader, Bhaiyalal Besra, and floral tributes by Party leaders and delegates at the martyrs' column. A two-minute silence was observed in the memory of the martyrs. Activists of Jharkhand Sanskriti Manch presented revolutionary songs. Party General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya lit the lamp and inaugurated the Conference.

After the inaugural address by Comrade Dipankar, CPI(M) State Secretary Com. Gyan Shankar Mazumdar, CPI State Council member, noted intellectual and Secretary of Jharkhand Sanskriti Manch Dr. V.P.Kesari, Vice-President of Jan Sanskriti Manch, Ravi Bhushan and Journalist Faisal Anurag addressed the session. Party Central Committee members Ramji Rai, who was also the Central Observer for the

Conference, and Swapan Mukherjee (General Secretary of AICCTU) also addressed the session.

265 delegates and 15 observers and guests attended the delegate session which began with the presentation of the work report by Subhendu Sen. More than 90 delegates participated in the discussions and put forth their opinions and suggestions. The work report was passed after incorporating some suggestions that came from the delegates.

The Conference elected a 31-member new State Committee which in turn re-elected Subhendu Sen as its Secretary. An 8-point task of organisational consolidation with increased Party membership, effective intervention in Panchayat elections, and developing mass organisations, etc. was adopted by the Conference which concluded with the Internationale.

KERALA

CPI(ML) Dharna against Coca-Cola at Plachimada (Palakkad)

The Palakkad District Leading Team of the CPI(ML) Liberation conducted a demonstration at Plachimada (Palakkad) against the Coca-Cola Company on 9th August 2005, the Quit India day. State Secretary Com. John K. Erumeli inaugurated the demonstration. Coimbatore CPI(ML) Liberation Secretary Com. R. Damodaran, Kerala State Committee Member Com. O.P. Kunju Pillai, Palakkad District Secretary, Com. Joy Peter, RYA State Convener, Com. Kanool Thumarampara, Com.T.K. Rajan, Coimbatore Auto drivers Union Secretary, Com. Shanmugha Sundaram, Com. Das, Lohiya Vichar Vedi State Secretary, Com. Janardhanan Namboothiri, Plachimada Campaign activist, Mayilamma, Plachimada Campaign Co-ordinator Vilayodi Venugopal, and Convenor Velur Swaminathan addressed the demonstrators. D.C. Member Com.Velayudhan presided over. The demonstration was against Coca-Cola setting up a plant in Plachimada which would drain enormous amount of groundwater.

- Joy Peter

MAHARASHTRA

Conference of Maharashtra Rajya Sarvshramik Mahasangh

Over 3000 activists and representatives from all over Maharashtra, defying trying circumstances caused by heavy rains, attended the founding conference of Maharashtra Rajya Sarvshramik Mahasangh at Pune on July 31. Workers, both men and women, reached in an impressive procession to the venue of the conference.

The Conference was presided over by a veteran of the trade union movement in Maharashtra, Madhukar Katre, who is also the President of the Lal Nishan Party. Swapan Mukherjee, General Secretary of AICCTU, was the chief guest. Recalling the glorious tradition of struggle in Maharashtra he congratulated the delegates for attending the meet in such large numbers defying the havoc caused by rains. He hoped

for a new rising tide of struggles under red flag in the state and appealed to make the All India Countrywide General Strike called by central trade unions a grand success in Maharashtra.

UTTAR PRADESH

Protest against assault on dalits

A day-long dharna was organized in front of the U.P. Assembly and Com. Akhilendra Pratap Singh, State Secretary, U.P., joined the protest programme at Ghazipur district HQ on August 9, against the assault on dalits in village Gahmer. In this village, the upper caste feudals had forcibly occupied the land which was distributed to dalits. Two years back, C.P.I.(ML) launched an agitation and organized a Gahmar March. As a result, around 150 acres of land was liberated and dalits got possession over it. The feudal lords were in search of an opportunity to teach dalits a lesson. On July 31, when one Manoj Singh was murdered in mysterious circumstances and his body was found on the rail track, the feudal goons made it an excuse to attack the dalit basti. Two houses were burnt and completely destroyed. An investigation team led by Com. Ishwari Singh, member of the Party State Committee, rushed to the spot. A protest dharna was started at district HQ demanding stern action against the culprits, security to the dalits and compensation to the aggrieved families.

INTERNATIONAL

Sharon's 'Disengagement' Strategy: Out of Gaza – and Into Jerusalem

[Ariel Sharon is a master of manoeuvres, writes Lindsey Hilsum (excerpted from New Statesman, 15 August 2005). While the world watches the withdrawal from Gaza, he is creating and expanding settlements in more strategic areas. Lindsey Hilsum is international editor for Channel 4 News]

The feint is an old military trick – the general sends a section of his forces to distract the enemy, so the battalions heading for the real target meet little resistance. Watch out for the feint in the Middle East in the coming week. Television news all over the world will show dramatic scenes of Israeli settlers in orange T-shirts being forced to leave the Gaza Strip, in what Prime Minister Ariel Sharon calls a "painful sacrifice" for peace. Thirty-two thousand soldiers and police are being sent to remove 8,200 settlers, by force if necessary. Viewers will see Jewish settler women dragged kicking and screaming from land Israel has occupied since 1967.

But Sharon is an old general, a master of manoeuvres. While we are reporting the demise of the Gaza settlements, he is presiding over the creation and expansion of settlements in more strategically important areas, where few are watching. According

to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, 3,981 new "housing units" are under construction in the occupied West Bank. At the same time, the Israeli government is building apartments and infrastructure on the outskirts of Jerusalem, to consolidate its hold over the city both Israelis and Palestinians claim as their capital.

A wall is currently being built around a hugely expanded Jerusalem that will thrust into the West Bank, almost dividing in two the main territory of any future Palestinian state. Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem are being surrounded by Jewish settlements, cutting them off from the West Bank and making it impossible for East Jerusalem to become a Palestinian capital. And while new Jewish settlements are under construction, some Palestinian houses in the heart of historic Arab East Jerusalem are threatened with demolition. After Israel was created in 1948, an armistice line, known as the Green Line, divided Israeli West Jerusalem from Arab East Jerusalem. In the 1967 war, Israel seized East Jerusalem and the adjacent West Bank from Jordan, which had previously had jurisdiction. While Israel occupied the West Bank, recognising that one day it might have to return the territory to the Arabs, it annexed East Jerusalem, arguing that not only had it won the city in battle, but also God had named Jerusalem as the sole and indivisible capital of the Jewish state. A new report, *The Jerusalem Powder Keg*, by an independent think-tank on conflict, the International Crisis Group (www.crisisgroup.org), charts how the Israeli government has gradually expanded the area defined as "Jerusalem". Now that the world is concentrating on events in Gaza, the city limits are being pushed back even further. Municipal boundaries drawn in 1993 already encompassed newly built Jewish settlements, which many Israelis regard not as encroachments on occupied land, but as mere neighbourhoods in their capital, Jerusalem. The Israeli government is now going a step further, creating a "Jerusalem envelope", which will requisition another 60 square kilometres of the West Bank. This will include the rapidly expanding settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, and – it hopes – the corridor to the north-west known as E1, which links Ma'ale Adumim to the city centre.

According to Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group, "Current activity around Jerusalem to link up Jewish West Bank settlements to East Jerusalem will not only undermine chances for a viable two-state solution, but create an explosive mix that will imperil the very security Israel says it is trying to guarantee."

Roughly 200,000 Palestinians will remain within the Jerusalem boundary. A further 55,000 will be excluded. There are already stories of families that find they live on one side of the wall, while their place of work or children's school is on the other. Whereas driving between the West Bank town of Ramallah, north of Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, to the south, would take 20 minutes if you could go through Jerusalem, it will take at least an hour and a half on roads beyond the new wall. (That's not including the time spent at Israeli military checkpoints.)

None of this is accidental. By unilaterally surrendering Gaza, Israel has seized the initiative, and bought itself international goodwill and time.

"We were stuck, so we decided to change the strategic equation," explained an Israeli general. Whatever the talk about the "road map to peace", after withdrawing from Gaza, there will be little pressure on Israel to negotiate on Jerusalem or anything else. The onus will be on the Palestinians to prove to the world that they can run Gaza. The Israelis will sit back and wait for them to mess it up. If the Palestinian Authority fails to stop Hamas from lobbing missiles into Israel, or if the factions fight among themselves in Gaza, creating a "failed state" before there is any Palestinian state at all, it will be more reason for Israel not to negotiate.

"The significance is the freezing of the political process," said Sharon's senior adviser Dov Weisglass, in an interview last year so frank that his boss tried to distance himself from the remarks. "When you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent discussion about the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. In effect, this whole package that is called a Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed from our agenda indefinitely."

As the Gaza disengagement proceeds, the louder and more violent the protests by the settlers and their supporters, the better it is for Sharon. Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun explained it to Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper: "Sharon needs national trauma to impress upon the Israeli public and the international community that it is impossible to do this again." The Palestinians, and left-wing Israelis, hope that the settler movement will be undermined: that it will be "Gaza first", not "Gaza last". But Sharon has made it as clear as he can, without embarrassing his American friends, that the purpose of the disengagement is to secure the future of most of the 235,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the 180,000 living in and around Arab East Jerusalem.

'Lie after lie...': Britain sees rise of authoritarianism

The brutality of the killing of 27 year old Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes on 22 July was matched by the scale of lies: within hours of his murder on a London underground train the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Ian Blair, told the media that the dead man was a suspect in the failed bombings of July 21st. In fact, his only 'crime' was to be seen walking out of an apartment building which the police had under surveillance. And this week it emerged that, contrary to police claims, he was not wearing a padded jacket which could have concealed an explosive device, nor did he leap over the ticket barrier while entering Stockwell underground station. In fact he walked calmly into the station, even pausing to pick up a free newspaper from a stand. And while Ian Blair claimed that the police were implementing the disturbingly termed 'shoot to kill to protect' policy by killing Jean at point blank range without issuing any warning to prevent him from potentially detonating a suicide bomb, a

member of the police surveillance team has now testified that he had grabbed hold of the victim in his seat and had his arms pinned before other police officers pumped seven bullets into Jean's head and one into his shoulder.

Not only did Ian Blair act at once to try and prevent an independent inquiry into the killing, which would normally have been routine, but it has now emerged that his deputy assistant commissioner, John Yates, flew to the small town of Gonzaga in the Minas Gerais region of Brazil three weeks ago to make an offer of £ 15,000 to Jean's family. His parents, Maria Otoni de Menezes and Matozinho Otoni da Silva, impoverished small peasants, rejected the offer as an insult, saying 'We will not be bought off. We will not be silenced. This is not about money, this is about justice.' Maria de Menezes told journalists, 'I wanted them to explain why they had killed Jean. But nobody explained anything. It has been lie after lie after lie'.

A campaign demanding justice for the family has spearheaded calls for the resignation of Commissioner Ian Blair but the government has demonstrated its contempt for the lives of ordinary people, particularly people of colour. It has proclaimed its determination to stand by Ian Blair and has confirmed that the 'shoot to kill' policy will be retained with only minor changes. This is in line with a number of proposed changes in the law that signal a move to a far more authoritarian state.

Under these the government will have the power to deport people (in contravention of Britain's Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights) to countries that are known to practice torture. It will also be able to close places of worship, strip citizenship from existing naturalised citizens and widen the criteria for banning organisations. While the offence of 'indirect incitement' is already being considered, the government's latest proposal extends this to 'justifying or validating' the use of violence.

'The concept of what will become a crime', says Tony Bunyan of the civil liberties group Statewatch, 'seems to be slipping dangerously...Does this mean that anyone seeking to understand - without condoning - the use of violence will be classified as 'justifying or validating' it? If so, it will constitute a major threat to the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press.' In fact those who oppose the 'war on terror' in the most moderate terms will be vulnerable to persecution, particularly if they are Muslims. Even 'good Muslim' leaders who had been nurtured by the government are finding their position increasingly untenable.

As Gareth Peirce a leading civil rights lawyer commented on Tony Blair's proposals: 'This is a statement of dangerous self-delusion, deliberately ignoring history, legality, principle and justice.' Perhaps, though, this is only to be expected as Britain's domestic policy shapes itself around Bush and Blair's ongoing project of imperialist war.

– **Kalpana Wilson**

THIRD COVER/FILM

History, Folklore and the 'Rising'

Two years from now the country would be commemorating the blaze that lit the Indian subcontinent 150 years ago in 1857. Reports have started coming in about historians being commissioned and crores of rupees being allocated for nation wide celebrations.

Officially during Congress rule, India's delivery from colonial rule has often been projected as a narrative of the actions of the Indian National Congress, Gandhi and Nehru - with others' role reduced to an agreement or disagreement with them. During the NDA rule though, history itself became an act of invention. Desperate attempts were made to portray the Hindu communalists as freedom fighters and the anti-British struggles of RSS were fabricated, Savarkar's apology glossed over and his portrait accorded a place of honour in the parliament. However, the ordinary people who played heroic roles remained in the margins of history as in contemporary Indian society.

The year 1857, and the First War of Indian Independence, though, has a special significance. This was the year when ordinary peasantry and the working people joined revolting sepoys in a struggle to overthrow the British and the Company rule. Yet, even today, the most referred aspects of 1857 continue to be the contribution of the Mughal Emperor and the princely states that fought fearing annexation and loss of privilege as well as the revolt of the sepoys, who fought fearing loss of caste and religion from the greased cartridges. However, an increasing body of scholarship indicates the role played by the tax-burdened, impoverished peasantry and the 'mutinies' of Meerut and Delhi, where ordinary people joined, just as they did across the Gangetic plain wherever it spread. In the repression that followed the uprising, the British acted with vendetta and of the lakh and a half people tried and killed, 1 lakh were civilians alone. Yet little is known and still little accorded a popular presentation or given official recognition, other than what one finds on stones and pillars etched by people on their own to commemorate those who fought and died.

The first time a face was being given to the action of the sepoys, was by accruing the actions of 1857 to the act of Mangal Pandey, in Barrackpore. However the act of giving a face remained and continues to remain symbolic. The arrival of two books and a film with a star cast has however pried open the discussion once again and attempt to unravel the sepoy, who pulled the musket on English Officers and the obedience demanded in the Company army.

Rudrangshu Mukherjee suggests that Mangal Pandey may be an accidental hero, whose individual act reflected collective disgruntlement, and acquired meaning following the events of May 1857. In another book by Amresh Mishra, however

Pandey has been suggested to be a conscious provocateur of the mutiny. The film however has no such doubts: it begins with the assumption that the events of 1857 and the subsequent freedom struggle were sparked off by the young sepoy who pulls the trigger on his officers for fear of losing his caste and religion, knowing the implications of his act.

The film, by and large unremarkable, to its credit goes with the byline 'The Ballad of Mangal Pandey' and begins with claims of "history meets folklore". However what passes off as folklore is orientalist kitsch - performers on elephants, girls doing the rope trick, colourful bazars, merry nautch girls, intoxicated revelry, mud wrestling and of course the melas - with a keen eye on the overseas market. The narrative carries references to the practise of Sati and untouchability and the discrimination faced by women and people born into the traditionally oppressed castes reflecting the imperfections of the social fabric. However, in the effort to make the film larger than life and saleable, irritating inaccuracies abound - with men and women dancing around in colourful designer Rajasthani costumes in Barrackpore! Mangal Pandey remains larger than what any ballad can portray and he is both in Berhampore and Barrackpore and in all acts of open rebellion.

The film is built around two central characters of Mangal Pandey and a British Officer William Gordon. All that is known about Mangal Pandey, historically is through the trial papers and almost nothing is known about the British Officer, and the film is an imaginative take off from accounts of one English man who fought by the side of the revolting sepoys. While folklore on Pandey may not be replete with Gordon, yet the latter overshadows the narration in the film, so much so that the tale at various points of time gets told from his perspective. While, the character does succeed in keeping the film from being a tale of Black Men vs White men and brings aspects of class within the British order, the flaw lies in the fact that by 1857 even the cordiality observed between officers and sepoys upto the 1820s had already ceased. The "not all British were not bad, some were also friends" thesis leads to strange and inaccurate presentation of Gordon pleading to save Mangal desperately in the trial.

Interestingly, however, the political economy of free trade espoused by the company, is brought out through the reflections of Gordon. In fact, the infamous speech of the Manmohan Singh in Oxford eulogising British Rule, interestingly, finds a resonance in Lord Canning's speech in the film, where he speaks of the wonders done by British in India. However, in an attempt to place Pandey in the nationalist pantheon, his actions are equated by paying mandatory tributes to officially recognised figures that emerged much later. And the ballad of Mangal Pandey ends, like all liberal nationalist history-writing, with Gandhi leading the Quit India movement and Nehru unfurling the Indian flag in 1947 - indicating that the struggle against imperialism ended at that juncture, and 1857 has no relevance to our struggles against the East India-like Companies of today.

- Radhika Menon