

Liberation

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No To Communally Targeted Evictions in Assam, Detention Camps in Bihar

21 September, 2021

Amidst heavy monsoons and flooding, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, hundreds of households (overwhelmingly those of East Bengali-descent Muslims) have been violently evicted from their land and homes in Darrang in the Char-chapori (sand bar) regions of Assam. The BJP Government is conducting a series of such eviction drives on the heels of a communal and xenophobic campaign about “encroachment by illegal immigrants”. 259 such families were evicted between June and August. On September 20, 200 families, all Muslims of East Bengali descent whose ancestors have lived in Assam for generations, were evicted and their huts bulldozed in Fuhuratoli in Darrang District. They were given just a day's notice prior to eviction; and were offered no means of rehabilitation. Four mosques were also declared “illegal” and bulldozed: displaying a clear communal intent. Assam's Brahma Committee report and the Land Policy 2019 paved the way for this communally and ethnically targeted eviction policy. These had proposed to redistribute lands in the char areas, which they claimed are occupied by “illegal immigrants”, among “indigenous peoples of Assam.” The government's definition of who is “indigenous” is unclear - and there are apprehensions that it excludes communities of certain ethnic origins and religious identities. Meanwhile, in Bihar, a Patna High Court bench has raised the bogey of “illegal migrants” and ordered the Bihar government to construct a permanent detention camp, and to use digital and print media to alert the state's residents and incentivize them to become informants against “foreigners living illegally”. Such an order threatens communal harmony in the state, and encourages Bihar's people to look with suspicion, fear, and hatred towards religious and linguistic minorities. Moreover, there is no factual basis for the court's order, which was passed while hearing a petition of a trafficked woman from Bangladesh who had pleaded to be allowed to stay in India and attempt a new and safe life. The court deported this victim of trafficking, and then used this case of a trafficking victim to raise the bogey of “foreigners” choosing to “illegally migrate” to India. Even the NDA Government in Bihar has declared in an affidavit to the court this January, that there are just 38 undocumented “foreigners”, mostly from Nepal, living inside jails or remand homes in the state. In spite of this, it is deeply disturbing that district authorities in the border district of Kishenganj are citing a letter from Bihar's Home Department, to justify vigorous propaganda in electronic and print media “sensitizing people” in border areas and “associating the public spirited persons/N.G.O's for deportation of illegal migrants”. Such plans are tailor-made to give official sanction and cover to ongoing communal campaigns by RSS outfits seeking to instigate Hindus in the Seemanchal region against Muslims.

Detention camps and communally targeted evictions are part and parcel of the BJP's fascist policy that aims to strip Muslims all over India of citizenship, land, and livelihood, relegating them to life and death inside concentration camps. Indians committed to safeguarding democracy and equality in India must protest such fascist actions with all their might.

- CPIML Central Committee □

Condemn the Attack By 'Hindu Sena' Thugs On MP Asaduddin Owaisi's Delhi Home

We condemn the vandalisation of MP Asaduddin Owaisi's home and violent attack on his caretaker by thugs belonging to a violent Hindu-supremacist outfit 'Hindu Sena'. How could armed thugs feel emboldened enough to march up to an MP's house and indulge in violence, a mere stone's throw away from Parliament Street police station and next door to the Election Commission of India? This question demands an answer from the Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, to whom the Delhi Police reports. It is clear that the "Hindu Sena" (Hindu Army) has chosen to target Mr Owaisi because he is Muslim. An MP from the minority community is not safe in his official quarters in India's capital city Delhi. This is the result of the fact that for the past year the Delhi Police has refused to act against repeated acts of hate-speech and violence against Muslim minorities by BJP leaders; and Hindu-supremacist thugs roam free even after publicly wielding weapons and attempting murder. This was not the first attack on Mr Owaisi's home; yet the Delhi Police was unable or unwilling to prevent a repeat attack. We demand a court-monitored investigation to expose the entire network of violent Hindu-supremacist outfits operating in the Delhi-NCR region. □



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Modi's Monetisation Mantra Is A Blow Worse Than Demonetisation

The Modi government is known for its penchant for springing periodic shocks and desperate measures. In economics we have been familiar with the demonetisation disaster and GST, in politics with the sudden stripping of Jammu and Kashmir of its constitutional status and statehood or the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act or more recently the farms laws. The latest shock inflicted by the government has a strange name – National Monetisation Pipeline or NMP. True to the Modi government's habit of bypassing parliament and not holding any prior public discussion with concerned stakeholders, the government announced this sweeping grand plan on 23 August, soon after the monsoon session of Parliament.

Let us first consider the case being made by the government in support of the NMP. The government says it hopes to earn about 6 trillion rupees over the next four years by leasing out public assets in thirteen sectors. We are told that these are assets that are languishing or remaining underutilised, by leasing them out the ownership still remains 'public' and the money the government makes will be used to fund new infrastructure projects. In other words, it is a very judicious use of national resources by the government and it certainly does not involve any privatisation since ownership remains with the government.

Let us now take a look at the kind of resources the government wants to lease out. One look at the scale and composition of the resources will tell us that the government is telling a blatant lie that these are underutilised resources. 26,700 kilometres of national highway; 8,000 kilometres of gas pipeline; 4,000 kilometres of oil pipeline; 42,300 kilometres of power transmission network; 2,86,000 kilometres of optical fibre network; 21 million tonnes of storage capacity; 400 railway stations; 9 ports; 25 airports; 150 trains: does this look like an inventory of idle public assets?

Modi government assures us that there will be no transfer of ownership. But what will be the duration of the lease. Niti Ayog CEO Amitabh Kant has said that average duration of the lease will be forty years. Assuming the resources return to the public after the expiry of the lease period, we must keep in mind the kind of depreciation most of these assets will suffer in these forty years. It is also not difficult to see who will grab most of these strategic and lucrative assets. Given the profile of these assets and the growing infrastructural interests of India's two topmost billionaires, Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the answer is pretty obvious.

During his last three Independence Day addresses, Narendra Modi has been repeating his grand idea of investing one hundred trillion rupees in India's infrastructural development. Even if the government succeeds in realising the projected six trillion rupees through the NMP route, it will hardly fund the government's proposed infrastructural investment plans. It is therefore not difficult to guess that the funds will effectively be used

to meet the government's growing deficit and declining revenue. In other words, the Modi government is mortgaging the future interests of at least two generations to manage its present crisis.

The government may earn six trillion dollars over the next four years if the NMP projections are right and duly realised. How much will the wealth of Ambani and Adani grow during this period? If we take the rate at which their wealth has grown during the pandemic period (Ambani has added Rs 90 crore every hour in 2020 and Adani Rs 75 crore during the first five months of 2021), the wealth of India's richest duo will accumulate another sixty trillion ($165 \times 24 \times 365 \times 4 = 5,781,600$ crore) rupees over these four years. And this does not take into account the incremental wealth that will accrue from the newly acquired NMP assets. In other words, NMP will further aggravate India's obscene extreme inequality, where the richest one percent people already account for more than forty percent of India's total wealth.

With assets, the government will naturally also shed jobs. Less government jobs will mean loss of reservations for the socially deprived and loss of job and income security for all who will now have to look for jobs in private companies. There will be bigger blows to wider sections of people. Prices will go up with little regulation by the government and growing monopoly power of the big companies. Tariffs of all services are already going up, and the government has already amended the Essential Commodities Act to pave the ways for an across the board rise in prices of all essential items.

While consumers will have to bear with increased prices, small traders, roadside vendors and livelihood earners will suffer a major jolt. Privatisation of roads will mean appearance of toll plazas and expensive eateries and disappearance of roadside dhabas, tea stalls and repair shops. Adani-Ambani railway stations will be more like airport lounges and shopping malls where food courts and expensive coffee shops will

replace the fruit and tea vendors and providers of cheap meals who will lose their access to stations and trains.

Like the new farm laws and labour codes, the NMP is also designed entirely to promote Adani-Ambani Company Raj. India is yet to recover from the blow of November 2016 demonetisation, the combination of note ban and GST has already crippled India's MSME sector, small traders and ordinary consumers. NMP by its very nature will have much more enduring effect, with the public sector virtually being replaced by powerful private players and consumers and small producers being completely subjugated to the extortionist ways of big business. India will have to resist this trident attack of new farm laws, new labour code and the wholesale mortgaging of public assets built with public money to crony capitalists. Let the 25 September Bharat Bandh sound a powerful bugle call of united resistance to the disastrous Modi laws and policies. □



The Battle Against Privatisation Should Become a Social and Political Agenda

DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

(Based on the talk delivered at the webinar hosted by the West Bengal unit of All India Bank Employees' Association - AIBEA on 15 September 2021)

The All India Bank Employees' Association was formed just a year before India's independence. The All India Trade Union Congress had already been formed in 1920. As India fought for

independence from British rule, various segments of India's working class combined the struggles for their own rights with the nation's quest for freedom and the battle for nationalisation of India's strategic resources and future economic assets. With the arrival of national independence in 1947, the stage was set for a steady nationalisation of India's key economic sectors.

Life insurance was nationalised in 1956 followed by banks in 1969 and coal mines in 1973. This was the direction set by India's freedom movement. Today this direction is being reversed at breakneck speed. The loud invocation of nationalism in politics serves only as a war cry for aggressive de-nationalisation or privatisation of all key sectors of the Indian economy.

Banks play a key role in capital formation. They attract savings of common people and turn them into loan capital. Bank nationalisation had given banks stability and security and the banking industry grew enormously following nationalisation with growing proliferation of branches of nationalised banks and the allied rural and cooperative banks. Nationalised banks could have played a bigger role in promoting balanced economic development if the loans were directed more to priority sectors to support agriculture and small and medium industries. This has however never really happened; private big business has grabbed the lion's share of bank loans. With the rise of crony capitalism, the loans grabbed by big companies have increasingly turned into bad loans, euphemistically termed non-performing assets or NPAs and successive governments have gone on writing off much of these loans. This has been the root cause of the banking crisis in recent years and the Modi government has now been using this crisis as an excuse to push for systematic de-nationalisation or privatisation of banks.

In other words, the crisis that resulted from the derailment and distortion of banking policy by crony capitalism is now being used to subvert the entire banking sector and subject it to more direct corporate control. Business houses that have been sitting atop mountains of accumulated unpaid loans, with some prominent members occasionally even fleeing the country with the complicity of the government, are now being handed the reins of the banking industry. From grabbing loans, they will now graduate to controlling the loan factories themselves. This is the real implication of the

various measures the government is adopting in the name of resolution of the banking crisis. From merger and consolidation of banks and writing off or buying out of bad loans to expanding opportunities for private banks and outright privatisation of public sector banks – all these measures of banking reform are aimed at what we can broadly call the privatisation of the banking industry. The insurance sector too is being privatised alongside banking.

This privatisation of the financial sector is part and parcel of the Modi government's larger privatisation offensive. From health, education and transport to infrastructural construction and maintenance, the government is rapidly abdicating its responsibility and handing over the economy to private players. Since neoliberal policies have run into a major crisis and privatisation stands increasingly exposed and discredited as a bad idea, successive governments have been adopting roundabout ways like public-private partnership or PPP mode, disinvestment, outsourcing and, as the Modi government's latest policy goes, asset monetisation. In all these measures of tacit privatisation, the government misleads the public by maintaining a fiction of continuing state ownership while handing over effective control and enduring revenues to private hands.

If we take a close look at the recently launched National Monetisation Pipeline, the scheme contemplates leasing out of public or national assets for private profit for a minimum average period of forty years, the time frame for two generations of Indians to reach voting age. The assets listed for leasing out cover thirteen core areas like road and rail transport,

ports and airports as well as networks of power transmission, telecommunication and internet connectivity. Private corporations getting exclusive rights to exploit such wide-ranging key resources is nothing short of a massive asset stripping programme. The fund that is projected to accrue to the government exchequer over the next four years through this so-called asset monetisation is only a tenth of what India's top two corporate houses would accumulate during the same period even at their current rate of accumulation, without taking into account the additional income that would accrue to them from the newly grabbed resources. While the government exchequer will suffer, electoral bonds that anonymously collect corporate cash for the BJP will swell as the Modi government gifts away precious public assets to its closest corporate friends.

Privatisation will adversely affect the job market and erode the rights of workers. Secure jobs with rights to unionisation and collective bargaining will increasingly disappear as resources change hands. Shrinking of government jobs will also mean a growing reversal of even the limited social mobility and justice secured by people belonging to oppressed castes through reservation. Beyond this crucial shift, there will also be a bigger blow to the informal sector. Millions of small traders, street vendors, and daily wage earners will experience a major erosion of livelihood as they get evicted from the vicinity of the newly corporate held assets. Privatisation will thus aggravate the misery of the masses while swelling corporate wealth. The battle against privatisation will have to address this larger socio-economic dimension. It is certainly possible and absolutely necessary

if we want to resist and reverse the privatisation offensive of the Modi government.

Privatisation is all about expansion and consolidation of corporate power. The struggle against privatisation is therefore a battle against corporate power and in this battle, bank employees and the wider sections of the working class have a firm ally in the ongoing farmers' movement. For nearly a year now, India's farmers have been waging historic resistance against the Adani-Ambani Company Raj with exemplary unity and determination. It has exposed the anti-farmer pro-corporate character of the Modi regime with absolute clarity. Narendra Modi keeps saying that his government has no business to be in business. The country now realises the business being transacted by the Modi government. It is busy selling national assets to buy enduring corporate support, all the while mouthing the slogan of Atmanirbhar Bharat or self-reliant India. More and more people are now seeing through this game and rising in protest against this scandalous sale of assets built over

decades with public money. The bank employees fighting against privatisation will have to join hands with this larger public campaign to stop this sale of national assets, this auctioning of India to foreign and Indian corporate plunderers.

The farmers' movement has another important lesson for all of us. It began with the demand for repeal of the Modi government's farm laws. But when the government refused to listen to the farmers and sought to suppress the farmers' movement by unleashing anti-farmer propaganda and repression, the farmers were quick to realise that to repeal the laws the regime had to be voted out of power. Today the farmers' movement has emerged as a powerful opposition to the Modi regime which is daily challenging the government on the street. The bank employees' movement has been in the forefront of working class resistance for the last three decades and if nationalised banks still dominate the banking sector, the credit for saving the banks certainly goes to the united and determined struggle of bank employees. But now that

the government has launched an all-out offensive, the resistance too has to be all-out. Like the farmers' movement, the working class movement too will have to grow into a powerful political opposition to the regime.

The struggle to resist privatisation is not a defensive struggle to save the existing state of affairs. It is to bring about a shift in the policies and priorities of the banking sector away from serving the corporates to serving the people. It is to change the lending pattern where indebted farmers are driven to suicides and microfinance schemes turn into an extortionist racket targeting women seeking livelihoods, while crony capitalists run away with subsidised loans and mega defaulters are rewarded with periodic bailout packages. The struggle against bank privatisation is an integral part of the wider struggle against corporate power and the fascist state being propped up by this unbridled corporate power. We wish the AIBEA and the united struggle of bank employees victory in this struggle and pledge our fullest support to this end. □



Movements of Farmers, Workers, Youth Intensify Against Yogi Misrule in UP

As the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls due in early 2022 draw closer, the determination and fighting unity of vast sections of UP's people against Yogi Adityanath's misrule is growing in intensity.

The most inspiring manifestation of this unity is no doubt the Muzaffarnagar farmers' panchayat – where lakhs of farmers gathered to issue a veritable war cry against the Yogi and Modi regimes. What was most significant was that the farmers were united not only against



the three anti-farmer laws and the repression unleashed on farmers by BJP regimes in UP and Haryana; they also decisively rejected the politics of communal hatred that had helped Modi and the BJP achieve electoral victories in western UP in the parliamentary and assembly elections.

If farmers are leading the way, workers are not far behind. More than 100 organisations of government employees, teachers, officers and pensioners have come together to form a united platform to amplify their voices against the shameful treatment meted out to them by the UP Government headed by Yogi Adityanath. They are incensed that the government has robbed employees and teachers of dearness allowance to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore; has got rid of transport allowance and at least ten other kinds of allowances that these employees used to receive. The contract teachers – ‘shiksha mitra’ teachers – are now paid just Rs 10,000 a month instead of the Rs 45,000 they used to receive. As a result, a large number of such teachers have committed suicide due to deprivation and desperation. Teachers in non-funded schools are no longer being paid honorariums; and more than 2000 teachers in Kasturba Gandhi girls’ schools have been laid off. Principals’ posts in Basic schools have been done away with, thus depriving teachers of promotion opportunities. And of course, over 1600 teachers and employees in the Basic Education department were killed through Covid-19 because they were forced to perform poll-duty even when sick, at the height of the second wave.

Uttar Pradesh’s youth too are in no mood to forgive the Yogi and Modi regimes for the historically high levels of joblessness in the state and the country. Student and youth groups have come together to hold a convention for the Right to Work at the state capital Lucknow. They are pointing out that suicide cases in India

due to unemployment have increased by 24 per cent from 2016 to 2019. The figures in these National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) records pertain to data before Covid-19 hit the country. So the job losses and related suicides have only gone up further in the last two years. Calling out CM Yogi’s lie that unemployment rates have fallen dramatically in the State, they are demanding that the government stop fudging job-loss data and acknowledge the crisis of joblessness that besets people in the state. In particular, they demand to know why the government has failed to fill even existing government posts: a fact that points to rampant corruption in this matter. As per data compiled by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, for example, Uttar Pradesh topped all states in the number of posts (1,11,865) lying vacant in the state police.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s claim of zero-tolerance towards corruption is proving a joke, as a letter from the Director-general of Basic Education has exposed financial irregularities to the tune of Rs 9 crore, misappropriated from funds meant for Dalit schoolgirls in the Kasturba Balika schools. Another case of corruption emerged in the King George Medical University (KGMU) where medical kits used for Covid-19 treatment have been purchased at much higher rates compared to other states. Even the son of a sitting BJP MLA has alleged that corruption is rampant at all levels of government under Yogi Adityanath.

The Yogi regime’s boast of curbing crime is an even more cruel joke, contrasting starkly with the complete collapse of law and order, rampant mob lynchings of Muslims and rapes all over the state. It is a full year since the infamous Hathras gangrape and murder took place, where the UP police was caught in the act of forcibly burning the Dalit victim’s body at night to destroy evidence. The victim’s family is yet to receive

any measure of justice, and has not even got the compensation funds, job and home promised to them by the CM himself. The latest NCRB data shows UP topping the list of murders, crimes against women, and atrocities against Dalits; and is second only to Rajasthan when it comes to rapes. The CM claims that crimes against women declined in UP in 2020 due to the UP police’s “Mission Shakti” – but that is a lie. In fact, registered cases in certain categories of crimes against women, mostly cases of “cruelty by husband or his relatives”, have declined all over India in 2020. This is no achievement to boast of – rather it is a failure; domestic violence cases against women actually rose during the lockdown, but could not access police and the help of women’s groups to register complaints.

The NCRB data establishes the Yogi regime as the most repressive and undemocratic one in India: UP is among the top four states (the other three being Manipur, Assam, and Jharkhand) when it comes to cases registered under the draconian UAPA and sedition laws – and it is the only state without the pretext of any ongoing armed insurgency to record such high numbers.

The Yogi regime has distinguished itself by its violence against minorities, women, Dalits; the lawlessness of its police force; its protection of rapists; joblessness and hunger deaths; the worst record of handling Covid-19 resulting in the grim image of the corpses in the Ganga; repression and crackdown on basic civil liberties. Its only answer to all these issues has been to turn up the heat of venomous rhetoric and violence against Muslim minorities. But the growing unity and resistance among farmers, workers, and youth raises hopes that the people of UP will punish the communal, corrupt, incompetent and repressive misrule of Yogi Adityanath and send it packing. □

The Politics Around The Caste Census

CLIFTON D'ROZARIO

Caste manifests in social, economic, political and educational inequalities among various classes of the Indian society, yet there is no official caste populations available except of Dalits and Adivasis (SCs and STs in official parlance), which is collected in the decennial Census of India, last in 2011. In fact, a full caste census was last carried out about 90 years ago, in 1931. The last effort at a caste census i.e. the Socio Economic and Caste Census-2011 (SECC) launched in June 2011, meant to survey the socio economic status of rural and urban households besides conducting a caste census, was given a quiet burial. The SECC data excluding caste data was finalised and published by the two ministries in 2016. The raw caste data was handed over to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which formed an Expert Group under former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairperson Arvind Panigrahi for classification and categorisation of data.¹ Nothing has happened thereafter.

There are two crucial questions that emerge here: firstly, why the need for a Caste Census? Secondly, why has it not been conducted since 1931?

On the face of it, the apparent justification for Caste Census, is that the enumeration of castes and their populations and collection of data regarding their social



backwardness and educational and economic status, would provide a concrete basis for the formulation of a comprehensive framework to address class/caste inequities. Actually seen, dataset of castes obtained by a caste census is imperative in view of the liberal pretensions of social reforms mandated by the Constitution in the form of reservation. This is more so from a programmatic viewpoint. However, the structural and political imperatives for the Caste Survey are inescapable.

Caste, Class Mobility, And Poverty

Abject mass poverty is a worsening with India being home to the largest number of poor people in the world. Using the Rangarajan committee's estimates² of the poverty line

(poverty line is estimated as Monthly Per Capita Expenditure of Rs. 1407 in urban areas and Rs. 972 in rural areas), it is estimated that in 2021-22, about 51-56% of rural populations and 40-43% of urban populations are poor.³ Thus, even the pathetically low standards of the Indian State to measure poverty, paints the picture of rampant mass poverty. What this means is that majority of Indians have insufficient food, live in shanties/inferior quality houses, have no proper access to health and education, live a life of utmost insecurity in inhuman and unhygienic conditions.

Who are these poor? A study⁴ on income and wealth disparity in India is revealing in this regard:

- Population share of SCs/STs/

[1] <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-the-caste-census-debate-7422053/>

[2] "Rangarajan Report on Poverty", <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=108291>

[3] "The pandemic has worsened India's poverty crisis", <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/the-pandemic-has-worsened-indias-poverty-crisis-7394367/>

[4] "Wealth Inequality, Class and Caste in India, 1961 – 2021", published in 2018, <https://wid.world/document/n-k-bharti-wealth-inequality-class-and-caste-in-india-1961-2012/>

OBCs in the top decile of wealth and consumption is lower than their overall population share.

- Average household income in India was Rs 1,13,222/- . Among dominant caste groups, Brahmins earned 48% above the national average while non-Brahmin dominant caste earned 45%. On the other hand, STs and SCs earned 34% and 21% less than the national average respectively. OBC groups earned 8% less than the national average.
- In matters of wealth ownership: 50% of the Brahmin, 31% of Rajputs, 44% of Bania and 57% of Karyasth fall in richest category. For other caste groups, only 5% ST, 10% SC and 16% OBC fall in richest category.

Another study⁵ concluded that of the total national assets, 41% is owned by upper caste Hindus, 31% by OBCs, 7.6% by SCs and 3.7% by STs.

Caste and Class, according to Babasaheb Ambedkar, are next door neighbours, and it is only a span that separates the two; *caste is an enclosed class*.⁶ The striking feature of caste, gradation and rank, regulates inter-generational entitlements to basic social and economic rights. Unsurprisingly, economic status largely follows caste hierarchy, with some exceptions (economically deprived sections among dominant castes) and income/ wealth distribution, mirrors caste hierarchy. The poor are predominantly from the

SC/ST/OBC communities, while dominant castes are the majority in higher social classes. The above-mentioned study⁷ finds that the population share of SCs/STs/ OBCs in the top decile of wealth and consumption has reduced over the last 40 years. Indeed, upward class mobility is also a factor of caste. This is the Indian form of inequality.

Modernisation has failed to appreciably dilute, let alone destroy, the relationship between caste and class. Neo-liberalism has not only continued to perpetuate caste hierarchies, but created grounds for production of its newer manifestations further limiting any possibility of upward mobility. This belies the claims of votaries of neoliberalism that capitalism has resulted in the economic empowerment of the historically deprived sections. Most ironically, Mukesh Ambani, who earned 90 crores per hour during the pandemic while others were struggling to survive, in his column on the occasion of 30 years of economic liberalization, lamented that the three decades of economic reforms in India have benefited citizens unevenly and there is a need for the “Indian model” of development to focus on creating wealth at the bottom of the pyramid!

The failure of successive governments at the Centre and in the States indicates dominant caste interests coalescing to form a political consensus. Indeed a caste-based census would reveal

the scale to which dominant castes have benefited from liberalisation at the cost of other historically subjugated sections of society.

Flexing Caste Muscles

Karnataka occupies a position of prominence both culturally as well as politically in the history of India. Karnataka is divided into three regions viz. Bombay Karnataka⁸, Kalyana Karnataka⁹ and Southern Karnataka¹⁰. These regions are marked by regional disparity in terms economic growth and human development. Population-wise, Karnataka is the eighth largest state. As per the 2011 Census, the population of Karnataka was 6.11 crores with the religion-wise break-up as follows: 51 million Hindus (84.00%), 7.8 million Muslims (12.92%), 1.1 million Christians (1.87%), 440,280 Jains (0.72%), 95,710 Buddhist (0.16%) and 28,773 Sikhs (0.05%). Remaining 0.02% were belonging to other religions and 0.27 % of the population did not state their religion.

As pointed above, the decennial Census of India collects data on the populations of SCs and STs, and as per the 2011 Census, the SC population constitutes about 16.2% of the total population in Karnataka, while the ST population is about 6.6%.

Caste-wise population details, however, are also available in the report of the Karnataka Third Backward Classes Commission (Jst. O. Chinnappa Reddy Commission Report dated April 1990). The said Report projected

[5] ‘Wealth Ownership and Inequality in India: A Socio-religious Analysis’, published in 2018, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2394481118808107?journalCode=sisa>

[6] “Castes in India”, at pg 15, https://www.meaweb.org.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf

[7] Supra at note 4

[8] Kalyana Karnataka was earlier known as Bombay Karnataka and consists of the seven districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Dharwad, Gadag, Uttara Kannada and Haveri. On 17 September 2019, the Government of Karnataka renamed the Hyderabad Karnataka region as Kalyana Karnataka.

[9] Hyderabad Karnataka consists of six districts, namely Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Yadgiri, Koppal and Bellary.

[10] The remaining seventeen districts are part of south Karnataka.

caste-wise populations for the year 1988, by relying upon the figures in the Venkataswamy Commission Report (1984), as follows: Scheduled Castes were 16.7% of the total population, Lingayats were 15.3%, Muslims were 11.7%, Vokkaligas were 10.8%, Scheduled Tribes were 6.7%, Kurubas were 6.3% followed by Brahmins at 3.5% and Christians at 2.1%.¹¹

Recently Karnataka has witnessed a vicious assertion of fundamentalist caste politics. The BJP government, in what is a blatant effort to institutionalise caste hierarchy and privilege dominant castes, has gone about establishing development boards for Brahmins, Marathas, Veerashaiva-Lingayat with more caste-based boards in the pipeline. Emboldened caste and sub-caste lobbies are now demanding special status and reservation – Panchamashalis demand to be shifted from 2B to 3A in what is a reclassification of the OBC list; Kurubas demand for them to be re-designated as a STs. Valmiki-Nayakas have renewed their demand for increasing ST quota from 3% to 7.5%. Several other castes and sub-castes have also joined the chorus.

These mobilisations are being spearheaded by religious leaders of the caste groups and has found support of prominent political leaders of all hues, that betray the true intentions of these mobilisations, which is to entrench caste, and not only for political gain. Caste mobilisations employed by the RSS yielded a massive electoral victory to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh and kept them afloat in Bihar. Caste politics is of course not new to Karnataka, yet the aggressive collaboration

between religious and political leaders is setting a new course, and represents the weaponizing of caste politics.

One agenda that has bound the two most dominant castes in Karnataka is the Caste Census question. The Vokkaliga Veerashaiva-Lingayat Sourda Vedike has been formed with the single-point agenda of rejecting the Kantharaj commission's caste census report (2016), which the State Government too is dragging its feet on. The leaked findings of the Report suggest that Scheduled Castes (SCs) are 19.5% of the total population in the state, Muslims are 16% while Lingayats and Vokkaligas make up 14% and 11% of the population, respectively. Among the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Kurubas alone account for 7% of the state's population. Overall, the OBCs make up 20% of Karnataka's population. This is contrary to the belief that the Lingayats and Vokkaligas are together the numerically strongest castes in Karnataka. This Report is explosive to this extent, and, without doubt, the release of the Report would comprehensively alter the political landscape of Karnataka especially in the possible resurgence of AHINDA politics.

Caste plays a dominant role in the politics and governance of the state. The crux of caste politics lies in its translation into vote bank politics towards capture of power. In this, Lingayats and Vokkaligas have dominated politics with majority of the Chief Ministers of the State being from these communities and the rest being backward classes and Brahmin. Significantly no Scheduled Caste or Scheduled tribe has ever been the chief minister of Karnataka. The two castes have

always accounted for 50% of the MP and MLA seats from the state, irrespective of the party in power. One of the challenges foisted on this monopoly over political power has been Siddaramaiah's political ideology of AHINDA (acronym for the Kannada words Minorities, Backward Classes and Dalits). AHINDA was coined by the Karnataka's first backward class leader Devraj Urs. The political coalition he stitched together, AHINDA proved to be a caste combination that could effectively counter the traditional hold that Lingayats and Vokkaligas have on the state's politics. Siddaramaiah's resurrection of AHINDA, can be said to have caused Congress's victory in the 2013 State elections. However, another key factor was the shifting of the its core vote base of Lingayats to Karnataka Janata Paksha (KJP), formed by the Yeddyurappa after he split with the BJP. JD(S), which remains the Vokkaliga Party too improved its tally in the 2013 elections. The subsequent return of Yeddyurappa and Sriramulu to the BJP fold, and the Modi factor ensured a good performance in the 2018 elections. BJP swept the seats where Lingayats were dominant. Moreover, BJP's Hindutva triumphed over AHINDA with BJP not just consolidating its Lingayat vote but also that of other Hindus, including non-dominant backward classes and Dalits and Adivasis. The Kanthraj Commission report or a Caste Census report which will accurately reveal the population of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes to be higher than dominant Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes in Karnataka, would provide an impetus to the

[11] "Karnataka Backward Classes", P. Radhakrishnan, Economic and Political Weekly, 11th August 1990

AHINDA political movement of Siddaramaiah.

Simultaneously, one section of SCs, the Madigas, are calling for the implementation of the Justice A.J. Sadashiva Committee report, which has recommended reclassification of all SCs into four groups - Right Community, Left Community, Touchables, and Other Scheduled Castes - for equitable distribution of the overall reservation being given to SCs. The report was submitted to then Chief Minister Sadananda Gowda in 2012, but no action was taken. In May 2018, Social Welfare Minister B Sriramulu had said that a Cabinet sub-committee will be set up to study the recommendations of the Sadashiva Committee report and then the government will decide on internal reservations but he did not commit to any time-frame. It remains unclear whether any progress has been made in this direction so far.

Additionally there is the Justice HN Nagamohan Das Commission Report (July 2020) regarding the increase in reservation for SCs from the existing 15% to 17%, and for STs from 3% to 7%. Newsreports indicate that the Report has noted that despite existing reservation, a significant section of these communities do not have access to even primary education, eventually leading to unemployment, besides addressing issues pertaining to internal reservation, creamy layer, reservation in promotion and that in private sector.¹²

The politics around Caste Census being played out in Karnataka provides an insight into the situation that would obtain pan-India, if and when, the Caste Census is carried out.

Privileging Forward Castes Through 10% EWS Reservation

The vast income and wealth inequality between, and within, castes, are significant in the light of BJP's flagship legislation to provide reservation in jobs and education for "economically weaker sections" among the forward castes. In January 2019, BJP pushed through the 103rd Constitutional Constitution introducing this 10% reservation to "poor sections" that do not belong to SC/ST/OBC categories.

There is a valid apprehension that this is a covert move to open the doors for a subsequent undermining the SC/ST/OBC quotas, which the RSS has been demanding for long. One reason being the undermining of the Constitutional logic of basing reservation on systematic social and educational discrimination and exclusion and not solely economic deprivation. Indeed the attempt is to erase the link between caste, social status and economic power.

That aside, in Karnataka, it will result in reservation to communities highly disproportionate to their populations. At present, Karnataka provides 15% reservation for SCs, 3% for STs and 32% for OBCs. The reservation covers 101 scheduled castes, 50 scheduled tribes and 207 OBCs, including Muslims, Christians and Jains. There are a handful of communities in Karnataka including Brahmins, Vaishyas, Mudaliars, etc. who do not have reservation and who constitute a minuscule proportion of the population. They now enjoy reservation more than their cumulative population in the State.

There is another aspect. We have seen above the conservative standards to measure poverty. Contrast that with the economic criteria laid down to define "economically weaker sections" for EWS reservation, which is:

- Annual income is lesser than Rs 8,00,000/- i.e. Rs 66,000/month
- Owns less than 5 acres which includes small, marginal, medium & semi-medium holdings that collectively account for 89% of agricultural holdings.
- Own house less than 1,000 sqft or residential plot less than 100 yards (less than 900 sqft) in municipal areas, which is larger than most houses.

Thus, the economic criteria clearly is tailor-made to allow middle class sections of the forward castes to enjoy reservation benefits.

Imagine the political fall-out of a caste census that exposes the manner in which dominant castes are privileged in the name of EWS reservation.

Caste-free Religious Communities?

One important debate around the Caste census question is the manifestation of caste in other (non-Hindu) religions. The notified minority communities in India, and as per the Census 2011, constitute 19.3% of the total population of the country as follows: Muslims (14.2%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.7%), Buddhists (0.7%), Jain (0.4%) and Parsis (0.006%).¹³

Caste has manifested itself in almost all other religious sects in India, including Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. The Ranganath Mishra Commission (Report of the

[12] <https://www.deccanherald.com/state/top-karnataka-stories/justice-nagamohan-das-commission-submits-report-on-hike-in-reservation-for-sc-st-communities-856309.html>

[13] <https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/MsDP%20%28FAQs%29.pdf>

National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities with Jst. Ranganath Mishra as its Chairman, dated May 2007), found that "... the caste system to be an all-pervading social phenomenon of India shared by almost all Indian communities irrespective of religious persuasions...", and that "... Many of the particular castes are found simultaneously in various religious communities, equally facing problems of social degradation and mistreatment both by their co-religionists and the others...", and hence recommended that "...the caste system should be recognised as a general social characteristic of the Indian society as a whole, without questioning whether the philosophy and teachings of any particular religion recognise it or not – since the Indian brands of certain faith traditions like Christianity and Islam have never assimilated many puritan principles of those religions, posing this question in respect of the caste system only and singling out for a differential treatment is unreasonable and unrealistic...".

Doctrinally these religions may preach egalitarianism, but in practice, they observe caste system and hierarchy. In fact, Dalits and Adivasis in these religious groups face triple discrimination: from the clergy itself, the wider society, and the government. As such one of the demands is that the Caste Census must not be limited to just Hindus but extended to all religions in India.

RSS's Historic Opposition To Reservation And The Caste Census

RSS has always created opportunities to initiate a debate

on reservations. Speaking at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2017, RSS ideologue Manmohan Vaidya said reservation is not required in India as it promotes separatism and friction in society.¹⁴ In contrast, more recently, RSS joint general secretary, Dattatreya Hosabale said that reservations are required because there is a social and economic disparity in society.¹⁵ Then again, a month prior to Dattatreya Hasabale's statement, in August 2021, RSS sarsanghchalak, Mohan Bhagwat called for a "harmonious conversation" between those in favour of reservations and those against it.¹⁶ These are not honest mistakes or unconscious contradictory positions being put out. This is part of RSS's deliberate and concerted effort to produce an alternate discourse on reservations betraying its deep commitment to alter the current caste-based reservation policy.

Though the RSS has not made any recent statements on a caste census, on May 24, 2010, the then RSS leader Suresh Bhaiyaji Joshi¹⁷ had stated as follows: "We are not against registering categories, but we oppose registering castes.", adding that caste-based census is against the idea of a casteless society and will weaken ongoing efforts to create social harmony.

On 20th July 2021, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nitin Gadkari said in response to a question in Lok Sabha: "The Government of India has decided as a matter of policy not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census." However, previously, on August 31, 2018, following a meeting chaired by

then Home Minister Rajnath Singh that reviewed preparations for Census 2021, the Press Information Bureau stated in a statement: "It is also envisaged to collect data on OBC for the first time." The in September 2018, just few months before the 2019 general elections, the then home minister Rajnath Singh announced in Parliament that the 2021 census will carry data on the OBCs.

Understanding why the Modi government doublespeak on the caste census question is as important as acknowledging the definite need for the enumeration of all castes in India. It is however clear that the political will with which the Modi government pushed through EWS reservation, is clearly lacking in regard to the Caste Census.

The reason is apparent. The RSS/BJP fear that a Caste Census will reveal the true numbers of the SCs/STs/OBCs and their deprivation and oppression, as also the population of the forward castes and their dominance. The political ramifications of this is the dent in the RSS/BJP's carefully constructed caste alliances especially with non-dominant OBC and SC/ST groups in several states under the dominance of upper castes. Moreover if the true numbers of OBC communities comes out, their Brahmanical project of undermining and finally dismantling the reservation system will face a decisive blow as the demands for restructuring the present configuration of reservation system, which is based on 90-year old data, will grow. □

[14] <https://www.india.com/news/india/rss-against-reservation-says-it-promotes-separatism-in-india-1772113/>

[15] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/reservations-should-continue-as-long-as-inequality-exists-in-society-rss-general-secretary-dattatreya-hosabale/articleshow/85210591.cms>

[16] <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat-pitches-for-harmonious-conversation-on-reservation/336597>

[17] Supra at Note 1

75 Years of India's Independence

Workers In India's Freedom Struggle

(As independent India approaches 75 years, Liberation marks the occasion with a series - starting with the August 2021 issue – of commentaries and features on the richly diverse freedom struggle, especially on under-represented aspects and chapters of the struggle that hold inspiration for the challenges that the country and its people face today. It is our effort to remind ourselves that the workers, peasants, adivasis, dalits, women, were not mere “followers” of charismatic leaders – they were the true makers of history, leaders in their own right. India's March to Freedom: The Other Dimension (Dipankar Bhattacharya, Liberation Publications, July 1997) noted that in most of the dominant, official narratives of the freedom movement, ordinary people, workers and peasants, “are never shown in action as men and women fighting their own battle with their own vision, dynamism and initiative and trying to become arbiters of their own collective destiny. The working people are thus not only denied their due in the present. They are also denied their role in the past. They are sought to be delinked from their own past and turned into permanent refugees relegated to the margins of history.” In this issue, we carry some edited excerpts from India's March to Freedom, to foreground the role of the working class in the freedom movement.)

Arrival of the Indian Working Class

The first footsteps of the Indian working class could be heard in the second half of the nineteenth century. Facilitated by the introduction of railways in 1853, industries like cotton textile and jute as well as coal mining and tea plantation began to come up in different parts of the country. Early instances of workers trying to organise and revolt against their oppressive living and working conditions date back almost to the same period. Strikes of non-industrial workers like palanquin bearers and scavengers have also been recorded in the dosing years of nineteenth century.

Quite understandably, the formation of trade unions proper was preceded by the launching of various welfare organisations often by non-worker philanthropist citizens. At a time when the working class was still in its inception or infancy, with no tradition of trade unions or factory acts or labour

laws, clear demarcation between various forms of organisation and categories of demands was often not possible. But given the fact that the mill managements were overwhelmingly white and the air was heavy with the humiliation and hatred generated by a racist, colonial order, even the most ordinary and primary attempts to organise the workers and articulate their demands tended to acquire an unmistakable political significance.

Swadeshi: The First Surge of Working Class Action

The first surge of working class action came in the wake of Partition of Bengal and the subsequent swadeshi agitation. On 19 July, 1905 Curzon issued his fiat partitioning Bengal. This sinister application of the British strategy of divide-and-rule in one of the most sensitive Indian provinces anticipated the eventual vivisection of the country in 1947. The Partition of Bengal provoked angry outbursts

Calcutta in Mourning

Yesterday was one of the most memorable days in the history of the British administration of India. It being the day on which the Bengal Partition scheme took effect, ... the people of Calcutta, irrespective of nationality, social position, creed and sex, observed it as a day of mourning ... From the small hours in the morning till noon, the bank of the Ganges from Bagbazar to Howrah presented a unique spectacle. It looked, as if it were, a surging sea of human faces. The scene in the roads and streets of Calcutta was quite novel and was perhaps never before witnessed in any Indian city. ... All the mills were closed and the mill hands paraded the city in procession. The only cry that was heard was that of Bande Mataram”.

- Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 17 October, 1905

not only in Bengal itself but also in distant Maharashtra, a sure sign of the rise of a popular national consciousness.

In a two-pronged campaign, spearheaded primarily by the so-called extremist wing of the Indian National Congress led by Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal (the famous Lal-Bal-Pal trio), people were urged on the one hand to boycott British goods and promote Swadeshi ways on the other. Most of the Swadeshi leaders advocated the use of religious idioms to mobilise the masses. Tilak came up with the idea of celebrating Ganesh and Shivaji Utsavs.

This was also the formative phase for revolutionary terrorists. The attempt made by Khudiram Basu and Prafulla Chaki at Muzaffarpur on April 30, 1908, on the notorious British magistrate Kingsford was the most well-known terrorist action of this early period. But beyond this interface between religious revivalism and revolutionary terrorism, Swadeshi also had a distinct working class dimension.

The first real trade union, the Printers' Union, was formed on 21 October, 1905 in the midst of a stubborn strike in government presses. During July-September 1906, workers in the Bengal section of the East Indian Railway launched a series of strikes. On 27 August there was a massive assertion of workers at the Jamalpur railway workshop. The rail strikes would become more decisive and widespread between May and December 1907 covering important centres like Asansol, Mughalsarai, Allahabad, Kanpur and Ambala. Between 1905 and 1908, strikes were also quite frequent in the jute mills of Bengal. In March 1908, workers at the foreign-owned Coral

Cotton Mills at Tuticorin in Tirunelveli district of the then Madras province went on a successful strike. Efforts to suppress the Coral mill workers led not only to protest strikes by municipal workers, sweepers and carriage-drivers, but municipal offices, law courts and police stations at Tirunelveli town too were attacked by the masses.

More importantly, Swadeshi signalled the arrival of the working class as a political force with workers beginning to take to the streets together with students and peasants demanding freedom and democracy. Militant street fights would soon become the order of the day. In the first week of May 1907, about 3,000 workers of the Rawalpindi workshop and hundreds of fellow workers from other factories joined the students in a huge protest demonstration against the conviction of the editor of the journal Punjabee for publishing 'seditious' matters. Peasants from nearby areas also joined this militant rally and virtually everything with a British connection came under attack.

Lenin Hails the Political Awakening of Indian Workers

Meanwhile the Russian revolution of 1905 had failed but not before it had inspired the entire international working class movement with a new vision and with a brand new weapon: the mass political strike. When Bipin Chandra Pal was arrested, the Calcutta journal Nabasakti wrote on 14 September, 1907: "The workers of Russia today are teaching the world the methods of effective protest in times of repression – will not Indian workers learn from them?"

This anticipation soon came true in Bombay. The arrest of Tilak on 24 June, 1908 provoked a storm of

protest not only in Bombay but also in industrial centres like Nagpur and Sholapur. While court proceedings were on, workers would explode in protest and clashes would ensue with the police and military. In one of these street battles, on 18 July, several hundred workers were wounded and many killed. The next day some 65,000 workers belonging to 60-odd mills went on strike. Dock workers of Bombay also joined the movement on 21 July. On July 22, Tilak was sentenced to six years of rigorous imprisonment. In protest, for six days striking workers converted Bombay into a veritable battle field.

Lenin hailed this heroic assertion of Bombay workers as an inflammable material in world politics: "... in India the street is beginning to stand up for its writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak ... evoked street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. In India, too, the proletariat has already developed to conscious political mass struggle — and, that being the case, the Russian-style British regime in India is doomed!"

The Swadeshi aftermath had already seen a significant upswing in revolutionary militancy in Bengal. The Yugantar and Anushilan groups emerged as the two key centres and in spite of the revocation of Partition in December 1911, the Bengal militants continued to gain in strength and popularity. The foremost leader of this school, Jatin Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin), died a hero's death near Balasore on the Orissa coast in September 1915.

Revolutionary militancy also struck strong roots among Indian expatriates, mostly Sikhs, in British Columbia and United States. The famous Ghadr (revolution)

movement began in 1913 in San Francisco. In contrast to the Hindu overtones of early Bengal militants, Ghadrites invoked the 1857 legacy of Hindu-Muslim unity. Many of the terrorists and Ghadrites were to be transformed eventually into communist activists.

With the outbreak of the First World War, British imperialists intensified their reign of repression in India. Even after the war was over, the British tried to perpetuate and legalise the war-time suspension of basic rights by pushing through the so-called Rowlett Act, against which a popular offensive was soon unleashed by various sections of Indian people.

Brutal Repression and Upswing in Worker-Peasant Action

British colonialists tried their level best to crush the post-war popular upsurge through sheer repression. The worst instance of repression in this period was the barbaric Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar on 13 April, 1919. The infamous General Dyer who executed this massacre defended it in terms of "producing a moral effect" and his only regret was that had he not run out of ammunition he could have killed many more! In the face of such acute state terror and Gandhian vacillation and dilution, if the Indian people succeeded in producing a different 'moral effect' on the British administration, it was largely due to the powerful working class initiative and wider expressions of peasant discontent.

Parallel to the upswing in peasant movement, there was a strong strike wave sweeping across the country. The following figures quoted from a 1923 publication (cited by Sumit Sarkar in *Modern India*) give an idea about the depth and sweep of the strike-wave:

Period	Place	Industry	Participation
4.11.19-2.12.19	Kanpur	Woollen mills	17,000
7.12.19-9.01.20	Jamalpur	Railway workers	16,000
9.01.20-18.01.20	Calcutta	Jute mills	35,000
2.01.20-03.02.20	Bombay	General strike	2,00,000
20.01.20-31.01.20	Rangoon	Mill workers	20,000
31.01.20	Bombay	British India Navigation Co.	10,000
26.01.20-16.02.20	Sholapur	Mill workers	16,000
24.02.20-29.03.20	Jamshedpur	TISCO	40,000
9.03.20	Bombay	Mill workers	60,000
20.03.20-26.03.20	Madras	Mill workers	17,000
May 1920	Ahmedabad	Mill workers	25,000

There were 110 strikes in Bengal in the second half of 1920 alone.

Workers' Organisation Acquires All India Shape

It was in the midst of such a powerful countrywide assertion of the working class that the first central organisation of Indian workers came into being. The All India Trade Union Congress was founded in Bombay on 31 October, 1920. Tilak was a key inspiration behind the birth ofAITUC, but he expired on 1 August, 1920, three months before the actual inception of the organisation.

The inaugural session had all the fervour of a new-found proletarian identity, but it could not move out of the Congress trajectory of constitutional reforms. In his presidential address, Lala Lajpat Rai emphasised the role of organised labour as the antidote against capitalism as well as "militarism and imperialism ... the twin children of capitalism" and underscored the need to "organise

our workers (and) make them class conscious"; but with regard to the British government he said the attitude of labour should be "neither one of support nor that of opposition."

The "Manifesto to the Workers of India" released on this occasion by the first General Secretary of AITUC, Dewan Chaman Lall, called upon the "Workers of India" to "assert your right as arbiters of your country's destiny". It reminded them that they must remain "part and parcel" of the movement for national freedom and urged them to "cast all weakness... and ... tread the path to power and freedom". Vice-President Joseph Baptista, however, waxed eloquent about "the higher idea of partnership", emphasising that mill-owners and labourers "are partners and co-workers and not buyers and sellers of labour".

The second, conference of AITUC

(30.11.1921 - 02.12.1921) held at the coal-town of Jharia in Dhanbad district of today's Bihar (reckless and faulty mining by BCCL has unfortunately jeopardised the very existence of this historic working-class centre which also hosted the ninth AITUC session in December 1928 that called for transforming India into a Socialist Republic) was, however, much more emphatic about the goal of the Indian workers and the people at large. "The time has now arrived", the conference declared, "for the attainment of swaraj by the people". The Jharia session was an extraordinary event-some fifty thousand people, most of them coal miners and other workers from nearby areas and their family members, participated in this unprecedented show of worker power.

Worker Vanguard Embrace Communism

The 1920s saw an infectious rise of political activism in almost all major working-class centres. New states joined the map of the working class movement. In May 1921, tea gardens of Assam, especially at Chargola in Surma valley witnessed a major upsurge of tea workers leading to a massive exodus of some 8,000 workers from the valley. Sporadic struggles were again reported in December 1921 from the tea gardens of Darrang and Sibsagar districts. On November 17, 1921, workers in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras played a key role in organising a highly successful countrywide hartal (general strike) in protest against the visit of the Prince of Wales. Madras had just witnessed a bitter four-month-long strike from July to October at the Buckingham & Camatic Mills. As many as seven workers were killed by the police in the course of this strike. On 1 May,

1923, elderly Madras lawyer and labour leader Singaravelu Chettier organised the first major May Day celebration in India on the Madras beach. Singaravelu was critical of the repeated brakes applied by Gandhi on the non-cooperation movement and went on to be among the communist pioneers in the country. North Western Railway witnessed a major strike lasting from April to June 1925. Textile strikes, of course, continued to rock Bombay at regular intervals.

This was also the period that saw the beginning of introduction of communist ideology in the Indian working class movement. Communist circles began to operate among Indian expatriates as well as inside the country. On December 26, 1925, leaders of various communist circles active in the country met at Kanpur and formally launched the Communist Party of India. In the 1920s, communists also operated from within organisations called workers' and peasants' parties apart, of course, from the Congress. Such parties became quite active and popular in Bengal, Bombay, Punjab, UP and Delhi. In Punjab the party was known as the Kirti Kisan Party and was formed at Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar on the ninth anniversary of the infamous massacre.

Workers Demand Complete Independence

To stem the rising tide of working class movement, the British government came up with the highly restrictive Trade Unions Act legislation in 1926. This Act virtually declared all unregistered unions as illegal and placed all sorts of restriction on trade unions collecting and contributing funds for political purposes. Ironically, this was in sharp contrast to the prevailing norms in Britain where

trade unions formed the backbone of the Labour Party and played a key role in the country's politics. But this retrograde and restrictive piece of hypocritical legislation could hardly dampen the rising spirit of working class movement.

In February 1928, 20,000 workers marched in Bombay against the arrival of the all-white Simon Commission. The Lilooah rail workshop witnessed a major struggle from January to July 1928. From 18 April to September 1928, TISCO workers went on a protracted strike. Bombay had yet another massive textile strike from April to October 1928. July 1928 saw a brief but very bitter strike on the South Indian Railway. Its leaders, Singaravelu and Mukundlal Sircar, got jail sentences while a worker striker, Perumal, was extemed for life to the Andamans. The most spectacular assertion of the working people could be seen in Calcutta where in December 1928, thousands of workers led by the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal marched into the Congress session, occupied the pandal for two hours and adopted resolutions demanding Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

Alluri Sitarama Raju to Bhagat Singh: Inquilab Zindabad

The beginning of the 1920s had witnessed a great example of peasant guerrilla war in Andhra. From August 1922 to May 1924, Alluri Sitarama Raju and his band of hundred tribal peasant guerrillas waged a successful war against the British state over an area of about 2,500 square miles in the hills of the Godavari Agency region. With his accurate ambushes and successful raids on police stations, Raju won the grudging admiration of the British as a formidable guerrilla tactician. The Madras

Government spent Rs. 15 lakh to suppress the rebellion with the help of the Malabar Special Police and the Assam Rifles. Raju was finally caught while he was bathing in a pond, and after inflicting heavy torture on this great fighter the British administration shot him dead on 6 May 1924. Incidentally, the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence also marks the birth centenary of this legendary peasant revolutionary.

If Alluri Sitarama Raju symbolised the courage and capacity of the rural poor to wage a militant battle for independence, Bhagat Singh held out a really potent promise of a much more meaningful freedom that could have been ours. In September 1928, he and his comrades set up the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army at a meeting held on the ruins of Delhi's Ferozeshah Kotla. In one of its first actions, the HSRA avenged the assault on Lajpat Rai (he was seriously injured by the police while leading an anti-Simon protest march at Lahore on 30 October, 1928 and finally succumbed to death on 17 November) by killing the guilty police official Saunders at Lahore in December 1928. On 8 April, 1929 Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta threw bombs in the Legislative Assembly even as discussion was on in the Assembly on the anti-labour Trades Disputes Bill and a bill to bar British communists and other supporters of Indian independence from coining to India.

While carrying out such specific terrorist actions under the HSRA banner, Bhagat Singh and his comrades also built up an open youth organisation in the name of Naujawan Bharat Sabha. The clarion call popularised by Bhagat Singh, Inquilab Zindabad, has

become the permanent war cry of every Indian struggle for justice, freedom and democracy.

Sholapur Commune and Chittagong Armoury Raid

From 12 March to 6 April, Gandhi accompanied by 71 inmates of his ashram drawn from different parts of the country undertook the famous Dandi March. The issue of salt served as a simple yet very potent rallying point and the movement soon assumed a countrywide mass dimension. The arrest of Nehru in the middle of April led to bitter clashes between mill workers at Budge Budge near Calcutta and the police. The mood of the jute mill workers of Bengal was then quite upbeat, only the previous year they had organised a highly successful general strike in jute mills to beat back the employers' bid to increase working hours from 54 to 60 hours a week. Calcutta transport workers too waged a militant struggle. A major upsurge was also witnessed at Peshawar in North Western Frontier Province. The city continued to be rocked for ten days on end following the arrest of Badshah Khan (the Frontier Gandhi) and other leaders on 23 April, 1930 leading to the imposition of martial law on May 4. Refusal by the Garhwal regiment led by Chandra Singh Garhwali to open fire on peaceful demonstrators at Peshawar opened up a new possibility of fraternisation between the fighting people and the armed forces. Dock labourers in Karachi and Choolai Mill workers in Madras were also up in arms.

The climax came at Sholapur following Gandhi's arrest on 4 May. The entire work force in the textile industry went on strike from 7 May onward. Till martial law was clamped down on 16 May, the town remained virtually under workers'

control. Liquor shops were burnt down and police outposts, law courts, the municipal building and the railway station all came under attack. Something like a parallel government seemed to have taken over the entire township and if soon became well-known across the country as the celebrated case of the Sholapur Commune.

Congress Rule in Provinces: An Early Pointer

The twenty-seven months of Congress rule in the provinces served as a clear early pointer to the conservative character of the Congress-led social coalition. A whole set of democratic demands of the working class and the peasantry had already come to be articulated not only by the AITUC and the All India Kisan Sabha (formed in Lucknow in April 1936 under the presidency of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati) but also in various AICC sessions and by the Bihar and UP PCCs. The Congress governments in the provinces refused to take any significant step in this direction.

The betrayal was perhaps most glaring on the working class front. While in Bengal, the Congress Working Committee expressed solidarity with the jute workers who went on a massive general strike from March to May 1937 and denounced the non-Congress Fazlul Haq ministry for adopting repressive measures, similar measures continued to be freely applied by Congress ministries in other provinces. In Assam, during the Digboi oil strike of 1939 against the British-owned Assam Oil Company, the Congress ministry led by N C Bordoloi allowed free use of the war time Defence of India rules to crush the strike. And in Bombay, the Congress ministry rushed through the Bombay Trades Disputes Act in November 1938

which was far worse than the earlier 1929 version of the Act. It imposed compulsory arbitration thereby making virtually all strikes illegal and raised the prison-penalty for illegal strikes from three months to six months. The Bombay Governor found the Act "admirable" while Nehru found it "on the whole ... a good one". Barring the Gandhian labour leaders of Ahmedabad, the entire trade union movement opposed this draconian Act; 80,000 workers attended a protest rally in Bombay on 6 November addressed among others by Dange, Indulal Yajnik and Ambedkar and the next day the entire province observed a general strike.

Quit India: Unprecedented Countrywide Upsurge

On 8 August, 1942, at Gandhi's behest the Congress Working Committee adopted the famous Quit India resolution calling for "mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale". Anticipating immediate arrest of the Congress leadership, the resolution even asked "every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it ... (to) be his own guide". Gandhi delivered his celebrated "Do or die" speech and for once even went to the extent of saying "if a general strike becomes a dire necessity, I shall not flinch".

All Congress leaders were arrested and removed by the early morning of August 9. With the British unleashing wholesale repression, almost the entire country exploded in violent protests.

What eventually came to be known as the great Quit India rebellion was thus a largely spontaneous outburst, led in pockets by socialist leaders working underground and local-level Congress activists. Bombay and Calcutta were rocked by continuous strikes. Striking

workers clashed with the police in Delhi, and in Patna, control over the city was virtually lost for two days following a major confrontation in front of the Secretariat on 11 August. The Tata steel plant was completely closed down for 13 days from 20 August with the TISCO workers refusing to resume work till a national government was formed. Ahmedabad textile workers were also on strike for no less than three and a half months. As many as 11 B & C Mills workers died in police firing in Madras.

The Tumultuous forties

To prevent any repetition of a mass upsurge on the Quit India scale and best preserve their long-term interests in India, Britain quickly initiated the process of negotiations for the eventual transfer of power. Indian capitalists were also in great hurry to have an early transfer primarily because they were afraid that delay would only raise the profile of the working class and the communists in the future alignment of forces in free India. The fear of a revolution was quite real both for British imperialists and their would-be Indian successors.

After the ill-conceived isolation of 1942, communists were soon back in mass action in a big way. With exemplary zeal and dedication, the Communist Party organised massive relief operations in the wake of the severe 1943 famine. Mention must be made here of the excellent role played in this relief work as well as in all subsequent mass upsurges by the communist-led progressive cultural activists of the Indian People's Theatre Association.

In an increasingly communally surcharged situation when almost all established leaders

were busy angling for their own loaves of power, the working people marching and fighting under the great red banner were the only force to uphold the ideals of communal harmony and secularism, selfless sacrifice and progressive anti-imperialist nationalism.

INA Trials and the Great Naval Mutiny of Bombay

On 21 October, 1943, when the Second World War had nearly entered its last phase, Subhas Chandra Bose issued his famous Delhi Chalo call from Japanese-controlled Singapore. He announced the formation of the Azad Hind Government and the Indian National Army, the latter had rallied about 20,000 of the 60,000 Indian prisoners of war in Japan. Between March and June 1944 the INA made its brief entry into India, laying siege to Imphal along with Japanese troops. But this campaign ended in an utter military failure even though it had a great psychological impact on the popular Indian mind.

In November 1945 British rulers began public trial of INA soldiers in Delhi's Red Fort. This provoked a very powerful and determined wave of protests in Calcutta. On 20 November, students took out nightlong procession demanding release of INA prisoners and when two students were killed in police firing, thousands of taxi drivers, tram workers and corporation employees joined the students. Pitched battles were fought on Calcutta streets on 22-23 November leaving 33 people killed in police firing. Between 11 and 13 February, Calcutta was shaken by a second wave of protests when Abdul Rashid of INA was sentenced to seven years'

rigorous imprisonment 84 people were killed and 300 injured during these three days of street battle.

While Calcutta exploded in protest over the INA trials, Bombay was rocked by the heroic naval mutiny. The sequence of events had a close resemblance to the Black Sea Fleet mutiny in the Russian revolution of 1905 which has been immortalised by the great Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein in his all-time classic Battleship Potemkin. In India there has been no film on the Bombay mutiny, but playwright director Utpal Dutt did pay tribute to the great naval fighters in his inspiring play Kallol in the 60s.

On 18 February, 1946, ratings in the Bombay signalling school Talwar went on hunger-strike against bad food and racist insults. The strike soon spread to Castle and Fort Barracks on shore and 22 ships in Bombay harbour raised the Congress, League and Communist flags on the mastheads of the rebel fleet. The Naval Central Strike Committee combined issues like better food and equal pay for white and Indian sailors with the demands of release of INA and other political prisoners and withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia. On 21 February, fighting broke out at Castle Barracks when ratings tried to break through the armed encirclement. By 22 February the strike had spread to naval bases all over the country involving no less than 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 ratings.

The Bombay unit of CPI, supported by Congress Socialist leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Achyut Patwardhan organised a general strike on 22 February and despite Congress and League

opposition 30,000 workers struck work, almost all mills were closed and according to official figures 228 people were killed and 1046 injured in street fighting. Senior Congress leaders only intervened to end the mutiny. On 23 February, Patel succeeded in persuading the ratings to surrender on the assurance that their demands would be conceded and nobody would be victimised. But the assurance was soon forgotten with Patel pointing out that "discipline in the Army cannot be tampered with", Nehru emphasising the need to curb "the wild outburst of violence" and Gandhi condemning the ratings for setting bad "an unbecoming example for India".

The Great Working Class Actions of July 1946

1946 also saw a massive wave of working class struggles and peasant insurgency crossing all previous records. The strike-wave this year recorded 1629 stoppages involving 1,941,948 workers. And with government employees too throwing in their full weight, strikes increasingly became all-India affairs. Most significant in this context was the July strike of postal and telegraph employees. On July 11, 1946, the Postman Lower Grade Staff Union went on an indefinite strike. The All India Telegraph Union too joined in. By July 21, posts and telegraph employees all over Bengal and Assam also threw in their lot. Bombay and Madras observed solidarity industrial strikes on July 22 and 23 respectively. On July 29, general strike was observed in Bengal and Assam.

The same day, Calcutta witnessed a massive rally, which has perhaps had very few parallels since in terms of spontaneous mass involvement, firm in its

belief that "this historic general strike has marked the beginning of a new chapter of unity and fighting consciousness in the labour movement of the country". The strike wave continued in 1947 with Calcutta tram workers striking work for 85 days. Kanpur, Coimbatore and Karachi also emerged as prominent centres of working class action.

The Working Class Today

In the 75 years of independence, India's working class waged many battles, and wrested a measure of rights from the capitalists and landlords that rule India. But today, each hard-won right is under a lethal attack from the current rulers who are descendants of the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha that betrayed the freedom struggle and served the British rulers back then. Today in their labour laws, working conditions, treatment of union leaders and working class movements, they mirror the colonial "Company Raj", serving corporations and sacrificing workers. And at the same time, the current regime tries not only to replicate the colonial "Divide and Rule" policy but to dismantle India's constitutional democracy and hard-won freedom and replace it with fascist oppression under the garb of "Hindu Rashtra" within the country, together with subservience to US imperialism.

During the freedom struggle, workers again and again rebuffed divisive communal politics and united to deliver spirited blows to the colonial rulers. Now, once again, India's workers must rise to the challenge, resist every attempt to poison the well of workers' unity with anti-Muslim venom, and unite to defend India's democracy and freedom. □

Hundred Years of CPC: Great Legacy, Grave Concerns

ARINDAM SEN

If 1949 marked the culmination of New Democratic Revolution (NDR) it also meant, by definition, the simultaneous initiation of the socialist revolution/transformation. Yes, by definition, because here lies its uniqueness - - its distinctive feature - - that separates it from the bourgeois democratic revolutions. In part one of this article we revisited the legacy of the Chinese revolution up to 1949, in this part we shall outline what followed next.

From New Democracy to Basic Socialist Transformation (1949-56)

In the first three years after liberation, the new government cleared the mainland of bandits and the remnant armed forces of the KMT reactionaries, confiscated bureaucrat-capitalist companies and transformed them into state-owned socialist enterprises, established people's governments at all levels throughout the country, systematised the country's financial and economic work, stabilized commodity prices, carried out agrarian reforms in the newly liberated areas, peacefully liberated Tibet, and suppressed counter-revolutionaries. With the exception of Taiwan and a few small islands, genuine unification and stability were achieved in the People's Republic.

Under the leadership of the party, the people unfolded the movements

against the "three evils" of corruption; waste and bureaucracy and against the "five evils" of bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts and stealing of economic information, the latter being a movement to beat back the sabotage attempted by the bourgeoisie. The educational, scientific and cultural institutions of old China were reorganised, as far as possible with meagre economic means, on a modern basis. Simultaneously with these internal reforms, New China entered the war to resist US aggression and aid Korea.¹

After these initial achievements, the party called upon the people to vigorously carry forward the general line for the period of transition to socialism, which meant "basically to accomplish the country's industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce over a fairly long period of time." (Mao Zedong, The Party's General Line for the Transition Period, August 1953; emphasis added).

However, since the socialist transformation was to take place "over a fairly long period of time", capitalism would also remain, in fact thrive, under state control. As Mao pointed out in very precise terms,

"The present-day capitalist economy

in China is a capitalist economy which for the most part is under the control of the People's Government and which is linked with the state-owned socialist economy in various forms and supervised by the workers. It is not an ordinary but a particular kind of capitalist economy, namely, a state-capitalist economy of a new type. It exists not chiefly to make profits for the capitalists but to meet the needs of the people and the state. True, a share of the profits produced by the workers goes to the capitalists, but that is only a small part, about one quarter, of the total. The remaining three quarters are produced for the workers (in the form of the welfare fund), for the state (in the form of income tax) and for expanding productive capacity (a small part of which produces profits for the capitalists). Therefore, this state-capitalist economy of a new type takes on a socialist character to a very great extent and benefits the workers and the state." (*On State Capitalism*, July 1953).

The "transformation", i.e., gradual socialisation of the privately owned means of production, was essentially completed in most parts of the country by the year 1956. Comrade Mao's speech *On the Ten Major Relationships*, delivered in April that year, presented a deeply insightful guideline for a dialectical approach to the practical problems of socialist construction in the peculiar situation

[1] Following frequent border clashes between North and South Korea (both states were established in 1948) the Korean War broke out on 25 June, 1950. The United States immediately dispatched its Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. US military aircraft intruded into China's airspace, and bombed areas along the Sino-Korean border. The US navy also attacked Chinese commercial vessels and fishing boats. The US troops landed in South Korea on 15 September, crossed the 38th parallel (the border between the two Koreas) and entered North Korea on 7 October. At the request of Kim IL Sung, the Premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Chinese Government organised the Chinese People's Volunteers to go and fight in Korea. Among the first who volunteered was Mao Anying, Mao Zedong's eldest son, who along with many others would embrace martyrdom fighting American imperialism in Korea. After entering Korea on 19 October 1950 with the help of air cover provided by Soviet fighter planes, the armed volunteers worked alongside the Korean People's Army and drove the US troops from the Sino-Korean border back to the south of the 38th parallel. The fight continued for several months. Ultimately the US Administration, realising that it was not possible to unify Korea by armed force and make it their vassal state, proposed talks on a cease-fire. It was the first defeat suffered by US imperialism post World War II.

in China. His *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (February 1957) stressed the necessity of correctly distinguishing between and handling the two types of social contradictions -- those "between ourselves and the enemy" and those "among the people" -- in a socialist society. Around the same time, he called for the creation of "a political situation in which we have both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness".

Thus with a correct ideological and political orientation, New China was pulsating with new energy and liveliness and 1957 saw encouraging progress in socialist economic construction as well. But, due to the party's inadequate understanding of the laws of economic development, impetuosity for more quick results and an overestimation of the role of revolutionary will-power, the Party launched the "Great Leap Forward" (GLP, 1958-62) without proper trials and careful investigations.

The Great Leap -- an Overambitious Socialist Project

The central idea behind the GLP was that extremely rapid development of China's agricultural and industrial sectors can and must take place, simultaneously, by unleashing the collective revolutionary energy of the masses through people's communes. While major investments in larger state enterprises were made -- which was of course necessary -- absurd targets like doubling steel production in less than six months (most of the increase was expected to come through small backyard steel furnaces, an idea that proved to be patently absurd) and China's industrial output surpassing that of the UK within 15 years were set. Mandatory agricultural collectivization was introduced, private farming was

sternly discouraged. The campaign not only failed to reach anywhere near the targets but worse, combined with adverse climatic conditions, it resulted in a famine-like situation and huge loss of lives.

In the winter of 1960, Mao led the party in rectifying many of the "Left" errors. Comrades Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping were put in charge of supervising implementation of correct policies. In January 1962, the enlarged Central Work Conference attended by 7,000 comrades made a preliminary summing-up of the experiences of the GLP in different places and unfolded criticism and self-criticism. A majority of the comrades who had been unjustifiably criticized during the campaign against "Right opportunism" were rehabilitated. Thanks to these economic and political measures, the national economy recovered and developed fairly smoothly between 1962 and 1966. However, within four years after ending the Great Leap, the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (GPCR) was launched, which would prove to be a much bigger disaster.

Deng Xiaoping made an interesting observation regarding this backslide from the GLP to the GPCR in an August 1980 interview with eminent Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci² in Beijing (see box, next page).

Cultural Revolution - A Failed Attempt to Preempt Restoration of Capitalism

The principal theses of the Cultural Revolution (CR) were that many representatives of the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary revisionists had sneaked into the Party, the government, the army and cultural circles, captured leadership in a fairly large majority of organizations and departments, even formed, within the Central Committee, a bourgeois

headquarters³ which had agents everywhere; that since the forms of struggle adopted in the past had not been able to solve this problem, the need of the hour was to carry out a great cultural revolution by openly and fully mobilizing the broad masses from the bottom up, so as to expose these sinister phenomena; and that the cultural revolution was in fact a great political revolution in which one class would overthrow another, a revolution that would have to be waged time and again. The Central Committee's famous "May 16 Circular" (of 1966) served as the programmatic document of the CR, and the theses were incorporated in the political report to the Ninth National Congress of the Party held in April 1969.

The cult of Chairman Mao was frenziedly pushed to an extreme. Lin Biao, Jiang Qing, and others, acting chiefly in the name of the "Cultural Revolution Group", exploited the situation to their own sectarian interests. Many leading comrades including Political Bureau members who sharply criticized the mistakes of the "cultural revolution" were attacked and repressed. In 1970-71 the counter-revolutionary Lin Biao clique plotted to capture supreme power and attempted an armed counterrevolutionary coup d'état. Comrades Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai ingeniously thwarted the plotted coup and Lin Biao died in September 1971 in a plane crash over Mongolia when he was reportedly trying to flee the country.

Following this dramatic episode, the Party launched a campaign to criticise and repudiate Lin Biao. Comrade Zhou took charge of the day-to-day work of the Central Committee and things began to

[2] From the collection "Interviews with History and Conversations with Power", published by Rizzoli (1911). The conversation was translated by Shi Yanhua, former interpreter of Mao Zedong.

[3] Hence the "My Big Character Poster" written by Mao himself on 5 August, 1966: "Bombard the Headquarters".

improve in all fields. He correctly proposed that the repudiation of Lin should be expanded into a critique of the ultra-Left trend of thought as a whole. But Mao believed that the task was still to oppose the "ultra-Right". So the Tenth Congress of the Party (August 1973) perpetuated the "Left" errors and made Wang Hongwen a vice-chairman of the Party.

By 1974, however, Mao belatedly realised that Jiang Qing (Mao's third wife), Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and even Wang Hongwen, handpicked by himself to be vice-chairman of the Party, had formed what he openly called a "Gang of Four" inside the Political Bureau by turning the "Cultural Revolution" to their advantage in order to seize power. He severely criticized them, specifically saying that Jiang Qing harboured a wild ambition of making herself chairperson of the Central Committee and "forming a cabinet" by political manipulation. In 1975, when Comrade Zhou Enlai was seriously ill, Comrade Deng Xiaoping, with the support of Mao, took charge of the day-to-day work of the Central Committee. But very soon Mao developed serious differences with Deng and triggered a movement to "criticize Deng and counter the Right deviationist trend". Once again the party and the whole country were pushed into confusion and turmoil.

In January 1976, Premier Zhou Enlai passed away. About three months later, machinations by the "Gang of Four" resulted in the PB once again removing Deng from all his posts inside and outside the Party. As soon as Comrade Mao Zedong passed away on 9 September 1976, the counterrevolutionary Jiang Qing

"... we cannot attribute all the responsibility [for the GLP] to Chairman Mao ... we veterans had our share of the blame; we acted against the laws of reality; and we claimed we could hasten economic development with methods that ignored all economic laws. So it is true that the person most responsible for this was Chairman Mao, but he was also the first to understand our error — to suggest ways to correct it. And in 1962 ... he admitted he was at fault. But even that wasn't enough for us; even that didn't teach us the lesson we should have learned. And so the Cultural Revolution occurred."

"But what was the Cultural Revolution really trying to accomplish?" -- the journalist asked.

Deng replied, "It wanted to avoid the restoration of capitalism in China. Yes — that was the intention." He explained why the good intention yielded very bad results, and added, "A year or two before his death, Chairman Mao ... said that the Cultural Revolution was wrong in two things: destroying the revolutionary leadership and provoking a wide-ranging civil war."

clique stepped up its plot to seize supreme Party and state leadership. However, early in the next month the PB resolutely smashed the clique and brought the catastrophic "cultural revolution" to an end. Hua Guofeng, the pre-designated successor to Mao, took charge as Party chair⁴. Deng was rehabilitated with full honour and responsibility for the second time (not counting the first punishment he was subjected to, back in 1934, by the then leader Wang Ming on the allegation of working for "Mao's group"), and gradually rose to be the Party's top leader.

The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee (December 1978) called for emancipating the mind from the spiritual shackles of personality cult and dogmatism and seeking truth from facts. This ushered in a lively atmosphere where people inside and outside the Party try their best to study new things and seek solutions to new problems. And to ensure that this is done properly, the Party reiterated "the four

fundamental principles of upholding the socialist road, the people's democratic dictatorship (i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat), the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought", which "constitute the common political basis of the unity of the whole Party and the unity of the whole people as well as the basic guarantee for the realization of socialist modernization."

With the curtains thus coming down, in both ideological and organisational terms, on one of the two most controversial chapters of the story of modern China, started the other one: that of market oriented economic reforms with attendant ideological-political issues. But before we come to that, a brief -- and necessarily inconclusive-- assessment of the CR will be in order.

Good Intentions and Serious Mistakes

Without a doubt, tendencies of 'Left' as well as right deviation did manifest themselves within the Party both

[4] He contributed to the struggle to overthrow the counter-revolutionary Jiang Qing clique. But he promoted the erroneous "two-whatever's" policy, that is, "we firmly uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and we unwaveringly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave", and he took a long time to rectify this error.

before and, no less calamitously, after the revolution; as they did in Russia. In post-Lenin Soviet Union also, the methods adopted in handling inner-party debates/struggles turned out to be highly problematic, if not atrocious.

In China the CR was launched in the shadows of the international great debate correctly led by Mao and targeted against the right revisionism of Nikita Khrushchev. From the very beginning, Mao believed that

[The] anti-party and anti-socialist representatives of the bourgeoisie (there are a number of these in the Central Committee and in the party, government, and other departments at the central as well as at the provincial, municipal, and autonomous region level) ... [and also in] the army, and various cultural circles, are a bunch of counter-revolutionary revisionists. Once conditions are ripe, they will seize political power and turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Some of them we have already seen thoroughly, others we have not. Some are still trusted by us and are being trained as our successors, persons like Khrushchev, for example, who are still nestling beside us." (Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, May 16, 1966)

Can we brush aside such concerns just as a sort of 'Left' paranoia? No we can't; although one could argue that perhaps the danger was overestimated, leading to unnecessarily harsh methods of struggle that proved counter-productive. The CPC's 1981 document "Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party

since the founding of the People's Republic of China"⁵ itself says,

"Of course, it was essential to take proper account of certain undesirable phenomena that undoubtedly existed in Party and state organisations and to remove them by correct measures in conformity with the Constitution, the laws and the Party Constitution. But on no account should the theories and methods of the "cultural revolution" have been applied. *These erroneous "Left" theses, upon which Comrade Mao Zedong based himself in initiating the "cultural revolution", were obviously inconsistent with the system of Mao Zedong Thought, which is the integration of the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution.*"

How far was comrade Mao personally responsible for the disruption in socialist construction caused by the CR? According to the resolution,

"All the successes in these ten years [1956-66] were achieved under the collective leadership of the Central Committee of the Party headed by Comrade Mao Zedong. Likewise, responsibility for the errors committed in the work of this period rested with the same collective leadership. Although Comrade Mao Zedong must be held chiefly responsible, we cannot lay the blame for all those errors on him alone. Likewise, ...[c] hief responsibility for the grave "Left" error of the 'cultural revolution'... does indeed lie with Comrade Mao Zedong. But after all it was the error of a great proletarian revolutionary. Comrade Mao Zedong paid constant attention to overcoming shortcomings in the life of the Party and state. While making serious mistakes, he repeatedly urged the whole Party to study the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin conscientiously and imagined that his theory and practice were Marxist and that they were essential for the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Herein lies his tragedy. "While persisting in the comprehensive error of the 'cultural revolution', he enabled some leading cadres to return to important leading posts. He led the struggle to smash the counter-revolutionary Lin Biao clique [and] made major criticisms and exposures of Jiang Qing ..."

Moreover, the 1981 Resolution goes on, "there are complex social and historical causes underlying the 'cultural revolution' ... Our Party had long existed in circumstances of war and fierce class struggle. It was not fully prepared, either ideologically or in terms of scientific study, for socialist construction on a national scale. ...we were liable, owing to the historical circumstances in which our Party grew, to continue to regard issues unrelated to class struggle as its manifestations when observing and handling new contradictions and problems which cropped up in the political, economic, cultural and other spheres in the course of the development of socialist society. And when confronted with actual class struggle under the new conditions, we habitually fell back on the familiar methods and experiences of the large-scale, turbulent mass struggle of the past, All ideological differences inside the Party were [seen as] reflections of class struggle in society, and therefore frequent and acute inner-Party struggles were conducted. All this led us to regard the error in broadening the scope of class struggle as an act in defence

[5] In the absence of our own sources for ascertaining or verifying exactly what all actually happened in China in those days or are happening now, we are quoting from this document -- and from some other interviews, articles etc. -- excerpts that are not from our party sources but which we think are sensible and worth pondering over. This by no means signals our complete agreement with the views expressed therein.

of the purity of Marxism. ... normal differences among comrades inside the Party came to be regarded as manifestations of the revisionist line or of the struggle between the two lines. This resulted in growing tension in inner-Party relations.” (emphasis added)

The document also points to another aspect of the abnormal and unwarranted inner-party situation that contributed to the initiation and prolongation of the CR:

“Comrade Mao Zedong’s prestige reached a peak and he ... increasingly put himself above the Central Committee of the Party. The result was a steady weakening and

even undermining of the principle of collective leadership and democratic centralism in the political life of the Party and the country. This state of affairs took shape only gradually and the Central Committee of the Party should be held partly responsible.”

Obliquely alluding to the infamous purges and personality cult of Stalin -- whom the CPC always held in high esteem without being blind to his mistakes -- the CC resolution goes on to mention the relevant international experience too:

“ ... In the communist movement, leaders play quite an important role. ... However, certain grievous deviations, which occurred in the

history of the international communist movement owing to the failure to handle the relationship between the Party and its leader correctly, had an adverse effect on our Party, too.”

So these were the main reasons why, according to the resolution, the Party failed to fight out the ‘Left’ theses that culminated in the CR. Now as we move forward from cultural revolution to economic reforms, let us enrich ourselves with some deep insights comrade Vinod Mishra shared with us, some twenty five years ago, about Mao and Deng -- the best-known icons of the two most-discussed chapters in the history of post-revolutionary China. □

VM on Mao, Deng and the Cultural Revolution

Mao repeatedly pointed out that the contradiction between capitalism and socialism is far from resolved. This struggle will go on for many years to come, may be a few hundred years, and thus the question who will win is yet to be resolved. Soviet leadership claimed that socialism can only grow into developed socialism and then into communism. Mao said no, this is wrong. This was yet another major contribution of Mao in the field of Marxist philosophy and theory.

“He had also pointed out how exactly a socialist country may transform itself back into capitalism. He opined that class struggle exists in socialist society too and there remains a bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie organises itself within the communist party, and capitalist roaders emerge from within the Party headquarters. Later on events in Soviet Union have corroborated his analysis. Socialism’s retreat to capitalism and the capturing of Party headquarters from within by capitalist roaders occurred in Russia in exactly the way Mao had predicted. And this is the basic reason

for the growing attraction towards Mao’s thought particularly after Soviet collapse.

“Summing up the experiences of various socialist countries, Mao tried to resolve this problem of great importance. This led to what is known as the Cultural Revolution in China. The Cultural Revolution ended in a failure and finally some persons, who were in no way communists, [temporarily] seized power in the Party. ...

“The Cultural Revolution failed but this is not the main thing. The important thing is that Mao pinpointed the real questions and made an attempt to resolve them. The danger has been proved real and future attempts by Marxists-Leninists in resolving these questions will bank heavily upon the essence of Mao’s efforts.” (From Remembering Mao, Liberation, February 1994.)

“Deng Xiaoping, the last link in the chain of veteran revolutionaries of China, remained a controversial figure all through his political career spanning over 70 years. The debate, whether Deng was building socialism or capitalism in China, remains inconclusive; still, there is no disputing the fact that under his command

China indeed emerged as a major world economic power within a period of just 10 to 15 years. The pace of economic development in China has been described as unparalleled in world history — a miracle ...

“Deng has built the super-structure of modern China only over the foundations of a socialist infrastructure built under the charismatic leadership of Chairman Mao. Committed to the rule of the Communist Party and the goals of socialism, both Mao and Deng were outstanding personalities of 20th century and both played their historical roles to the hilt. Yet the million dollar question posed by Mao ‘Which will win, socialism or capitalism?’, could neither be resolved by Mao’s Cultural Revolution nor by Deng’s agenda of socialist modernisation. The quest for its resolution shall continue to haunt China of the 21st century. ...

“Liberation pays tribute to the last great man in the series of historical personalities who shaped the 20th century.” From Deng Xiaoping - The Maverick Departs (Vinod Mishra, Liberation, April 1997) □

The Zig-Zag Course of Reforms and Opening Up

The reforms agenda got going since 1978, but it really took off in 1980–81, when two of Deng's close comrades came to the helm -- Zhao Ziyang became Prime Minister and Hu Yaobang replaced Hua Guofeng as the Party General Secretary.

The reforms affected the whole spectrum of China's economic, political and social fabrics, though not with equal force. The point of departure was agriculture and rural economy, which was in a very sorry state. An household-responsibility system, which divided the land of the People's Communes into private plots, was put in place. Peasants were now allowed to exercise formal control of their land as long as they sold a stipulated portion of their crops to the government. This move by itself increased agricultural production to a great extent.

More importantly, as a well-researched paper from 2008 written by Shenggen Fan and Ashok Gulati⁶ points out, since agriculture provides employment to majority of the people, by making it "the starting point of market-oriented reforms," the government was able to ensure widespread distribution of gains and build consensus and political support for the continuation of reforms. And prosperity in agriculture promoted rapid development of the rural non-farm (RNF) sector. "The rapid development of the RNF sector", the authors observe, "also encouraged the government to expand the scope of policy changes and put pressure on the urban economy to reform as well, since non-farm enterprises in rural areas had become more competitive than the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Reforms of the SOEs, in turn, triggered macroeconomic reforms, opening up the economy further ..."

The important point to note here, according to Fan and Gulati, is that "The Chinese policymakers first created the incentives and institutions required by the market economy and then, in the

mid-1980s, they began to slowly open up markets, by withdrawing central planning and reducing the scope of procurement [by the state] while expanding the role of private trade and markets..."

This particular trajectory or sequencing of the reforms was the exact opposite of what the successive governments in India have adopted, and naturally the results -- including the crucial question of popular support or opposition -- have been very different too. As the co-authors from China and India assert at the very beginning of their paper, "Despite similar trends in the growth rates, the two countries have taken different reform paths; China started off with reforms in the agriculture sector and in rural areas, while India started by liberalising and reforming the manufacturing sector. These differences have led to different growth rates and, more importantly, different rates of poverty reduction..." .

Well, so much (should we say, so little!) for agrarian/rural reforms. Among social reforms, an early and important one was the world's largest, most rigorous and intensely debated family-planning program -- the one-child policy -- in order to check China's burgeoning population. In urban industry, a dual-price system was introduced. State-owned industries were allowed to produce and sell above the plan quotas, and commodities were sold at both plan prices (for the quotas) and market prices (for the additional products). As a result, better capacity utilization was ensured and people who had the money could buy more than the what was allotted to them under state rationing, and that without waiting in cues.

Decentralized economic management was introduced at the micro level, with factory managers in most sectors largely freed from the control of the central government and given the authority to determine production levels and to pursue legitimate profits for

their enterprises. This was combined with steps to improve the quality of centralized management of the macro-economy by roping in academically and technically proficient cadres and non-party experts. Moreover, the adoption of Industrial Responsibility System in late 1980s further promoted the development of state-owned enterprise by allowing individuals or groups to manage the enterprise by contract. Private businesses were allowed -- and encouraged -- to make profits and generate employment.

Chinese enterprises were gradually opened up to foreign investment; trade and cultural ties with the West were straightened. A series of Special Economic Zones, starting with Shenzhen (1979), were created. Relatively free from government regulations (and lacking in labour rights) the SEZs became engines of growth for the national economy. The lifting of price controls in 1985, a very important reform, was soon followed by significantly curbing protectionist policies and regulations.

In early 1990s, the Shanghai Stock Exchange, which was closed down some forty years ago, was reopened and the Shenzhen Stock Exchange was established. In 1997 and 1998, large-scale privatization took place. As in India, many workers lost their jobs. The difference was that thanks to rapid and real growth of the economy most of them, sooner rather than later, got alternative (albeit of lower quality in many cases) jobs. State monopolies in strategic sectors like petroleum and banking, were maintained, however. The financial sector also was brought under the purview of reform so as to make it more business-friendly, while much of the old social welfare schemes were drastically altered or dismantled.

In 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization. Between 2001 and 2004, the number of state-owned enterprises

[6] "The Dragon and The Elephant: Learning from agricultural and rural reforms in China and India", The Economic and Political Weekly, 28 June 2008.

decreased by 48 percent. The private sector (domestic and foreign-owned taken together) grew remarkably, accounting for as much as 70 percent of China's gross domestic product by 2005.

In view of problems like increasing income inequality and excessive predominance of private capital, some recalibration was made in 2005. Hu Jintao, Party GS from 2002 to 2012, restored some of the previously slashed subsidies, enhanced state control over the healthcare sector, and put privatization on hold. The government once again started investing heavily in the state sector and promoted the emergence of large "national champions" which could compete with large foreign corporations. Many dubbed these measures as populist-nationalist. By

2010 China surpassed Japan as the world's second largest economy.

The next GS Xi Jinping, while continuing with the old policies like further opening up, greater market-oriented decision-making and further reduction or discontinuation of support for poorly-managed state-owned enterprises, declared a new policy orientation in July 2020. Speaking to a group of public and private business leaders at the Entrepreneur Forum in Beijing, he batted for "a new development pattern, with the domestic or internal circulation as the main body and the domestic and international dual circulations mutually promoting each other." In the face of hostile trade wars launched against China by the US and its allies, this appears to be an attempt to reduce

dependence on exports as a major growth engine and significantly promote the domestic market.

These apart, the current phase of reforms is characterized by some other policies, measures and campaigns - such as sharply enhanced Party/state control over big business, the "Common Prosperity" campaign and so on, - the implications of which are often more political than economic, and deserve to be studied as such. This, together with the major takeaways from the entire trajectory of economic reforms and political twists and turns in the post-Mao era, we shall take up in the next and concluding part of this article. □

(To be concluded)

• • • The Fight For Education: Koilvar's School-On-The-Street Movement

SANTOSH SAHAR

Khushi Kumari's face is shining with 'khushi' (happiness). And why not, she is the 'heroine' of the Sadak par School movement that has been going on for some time in Bhojpur District's Koilvar. When asked what she wants to become, she says, "I want to join the army. But first I have to study. And for that I have to fight also." Khushi is an Intermediate student. Her sisters Chhoti Kumari and Nikki Kumari study in 8th and 7th Standard respectively, while brother Vishwakarma Kumar is in the 3rd Standard. Her mother and aunt chime in, "She is fighting for everyone including her brother and sisters."

Khushi is not alone in this fight for education. On returning from her Miyanchak mohalla to Adarsh Colony (where the local CPIML office is located) we meet another Khushi Kumari. Also, Priya, Komal, Ripu, Anshu, Ritu, Babli, Amrita, Arati,

Nandini, Meena, Seema, Chhoti, Kajal, Shalu, Anjali, Shobha, Sakshi and Anu, all of whom are leaders in this Sadak par School movement. They have worked together with the school reconstruction committee members Abhishek, Premsagar, Ajay, Sindhu, Santosh, Golu and Vikas to achieve this victory.

CPIML Block Committee member and tireless leader of sand workers Comrade Bhola Yadav says, "About three years ago when the Taramani Bhagwan Sao Higher Secobday School was being acquired for the Patna-Buxar 4-Lane, CPIML organized a movement to stop this. At that time the administration assured us that the school would be reconstructed on 1.57 acres of flood control land. Three years have passed, the road has been constructed, new bridges have come up, the inauguration is over, leaders have come and made speeches and gone, MPs and Ministers assured

us that the school will very soon be reconstructed, but that assurance has proved to be a 'jumla' (gimmick) and so we are forced to come out again on the streets".

He further says, "I have also been a student of this school. Shatrujan Raut, brother-in-law of former Education Minister Ramchandra Purve used to be the Principal then. He was a disciplinarian who loved and championed the cause of education and brought renown to this school. The school was considered the best in the District for studies, sports, NCC, building and infrastructure and cleanliness. I have myself represented the school in the Subroto Cup football tournament. The school auditorium was magnificent, with a seating capacity of 1000-1200. The school also had a huge playground, laboratory, library, and separate common rooms for students and staff. There were 25-30 rooms and

2 huge semul trees. For years, we were the District football champions. Our school was also the site for the NCC District camp. 20-25 students from the school figured in every year's list of students who passed in the First Division. Many awards were also conferred on the Principal."

Khushi tells us, "When the demolition of the school began I asked our teachers, now where will we study? I also gathered about 50 girls from our mohalla and we all protested. My parents asked me, will you be able to fight such a big battle? When the AISA people arrived here the first question I asked them was, where were you all these days?"

The Sadak Par School (School On The Streets) movement has been going on in Bhojpur for the past several years, initiated by Comrade Manoj Manzil who is now the CPIML MLA from Agiaon. Dalit and working class children depend on Government schools for education. When Government school buildings are repurposed as police camps or otherwise allowed to fall victim to neglect, it is these students who suffer. So the students adopted a new form of protest – they organised and held a model "school" (complete with teachers, class periods separated by ringing bells, school songs, uniforms and so on) on the streets. They demonstrated that the "school" was ready and waiting – and demanded that the district administration provide a building and infrastructure for it. The movement at Koilvar is only the latest in a series of such protest actions. While some achieved a degree of success, district administrators have responded in many instances including at Koilvar, by booking the parents of schoolchildren as well as AISA, RYA and CPIML activists in criminal cases.

The CPIML Block Committee started preparations for the movement at Koilvar from 1st August itself. AISA leader Vishal Kumar tells us, "From 7th August



we started organizing meetings for students in the catchment areas of the school. Not just from Koilvar and neighbouring areas, but students from as far as villages in Badhara Block and Bihata Block (Patna District) came to study here. 1800-1900 admissions took place annually. We organized meetings for guardians in Surondha Colony, Adarsh Colony, Ramswarup Tola, Banpar Tola, Miyanchak, Bichli Mohalla and many other Wards and Mohallas in Koilvar. A huge rally was organized on 14th August. The flag was hoisted on 15th August."

On 17th August a 11-member School Reconstruction Committee was formed headed by AISA leader Vishal Kumar. A separate committee for girls was also formed. CPIML and AISA leaders including Block Secretary Nandji, Comrades Lalan Yadav and Bhola Yadav and Vishal Kumar got down to preparations for the movement. Also working day and night for the success of the movement were CPIML Politburo member Swadesh Bhattacharya, RYA National President and Agiaon MLA Manoj Manzil, CPIML youth leader Raju Yadav, AISA State Secretary Sabir Kumar and RYA leader Shivprakash.

Vishal Kumar tells us, "The school reconstruction committee has also organized meetings for students and guardians in dozens of villages including Old Haripur, New Haripur, Jamalpur, Chainpura, Kesarhian, Mahkampur and Kajichak. From

these meetings we came to know that the people give a lot of importance to schools and education, and are worried about their children's future. They also gave us the confidence that Taramani Bhagwan Sao Plus-2 School, Koilvar has built the future of several generations. The people will not let the glorious history of this premier school in the District be erased."

Block Secretary Nandji tells us, "When it was decided to conduct the school on the 4-Lane itself, we started preparations on a war footing--meetings, funding campaigns, and so many things to be done. We completed the work under the guidance of experienced leaders like Comrade Lalan Yadav and others. For me, this was not a school but an exam!"

The school on the street lasted for 11 days, ending when the demand to reopen school in 12 days and to construct a new school building were accepted.

The local correspondent of a national TV channel says, "I have not seen such a movement in Koilvar ever before. This was unprecedented. I am also very happy at this victory!"

CPIML State Secretary Kunal says, "The Modi-Nitish governments are anti-education. They want to keep students out of schools. We will not allow this to happen." □

Comrade BB Pandey

And The Revolutionary Legacy Of The Durgapur Trio

DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

With the passing of Comrade BB Pandey, we lost the last member of the famous Durgapur trio - Comrades Vinod Mishra, Dhurjati Prasad Bakshi and BB Pandey - who played such a key role in the revival of the CPI(ML) after the setback of early 1970s. Comrades VM and BBP had come to study engineering in Durgapur in 1966 after finishing school in Kanpur. Comrade DP Bakshi was from Chinsura (Chunchura) in Hooghly district and had joined Durgapur Regional Engineering College the year before. Of the Durgapur trio, Comrade VM was the first to depart most prematurely in December 1998, DP Bakshi died just four months after the party's Tenth Congress held at Mansa, Punjab in March 2018, and BBP who passed away on 26 August, 2021.

Those were tumultuous times. Nehru had just passed away in 1964, two years after India's shock defeat in the hands of China in the 1962 India-China war. Lal Bahadur Shastri who followed Nehru too died soon after the 1965 India-Pakistan war and Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister leading eventually to a split in the Congress. Two successive wars, two successive prime ministerial changes, confusion and split in the ruling party and deepening crisis in the economy triggered a period of mass disillusionment and the air was thick with the spirit of change. In 1967, the Congress lost power in nine states. West Bengal was one of those nine states. Additionally, West Bengal was also the state of Naxalbari.

The authorities of Durgapur RE College wanted the college to remain insulated from all the struggles and changes happening all around. They imagined that the liberation war of

Vietnam or the peasant uprising of Naxalbari meant nothing to the students of Durgapur who would only bother about their courses and job prospects. The campus culture was designed to keep the students regimented in barrack-type living. Real life however did not comply with the calculations and diktats of the authorities. Students began to defy and revolt and with this the social and institutional boundaries also started getting breached. Students joined mess workers in the campus and industrial workers in the steel town of Durgapur.

The radical student movement in Naxalbari-era Durgapur has not really been adequately discussed. The brewing student revolt within the campus and its growing organic connection with the militant working class movement in the district and the communist revolutionary stirrings in the state produced a powerful steel foundation for revolutionary communist ideology and organisation. Most sensitive among students left the campus and their engineering courses to join the revolutionary movement as full time organisers while scores of their comrades grew into committed supporters.

Durgapur was also a key laboratory and theatre for the working class dimension of the Naxalbari movement. Naxalbari was all about integration of students and workers with the landless poor and vanguard workers and trade union activists of Durgapur responded passionately to this call along with revolutionaries emerging from college and university campuses. While we lost the trio from the Durgapur RE College campus, some of the worker leader comrades are still alive and active. Along with the anti-feudal social upheaval in Bihar and some other parts of rural

India, this Durgapur steel foundation contributed immensely to the rise and consolidation of the CPI(ML) Liberation since the re-organisation of the party Central Committee on 28 July, 1974.

Today once again we are witnessing powerful movements on India's streets. Movements in defence of citizenship rights and our constitutional Republic, movements to save India's agriculture from corporate plunderers, movement to save India's strategic resources from being mortgaged to corporate extortion, movement for freedom from all kinds of social, cultural and political subjugation, freedom from fascism. Once again we see great potential of convergence of struggles with students fighting not just for their own immediate future but for the collective interests of the people and for the realisation of the unfulfilled dreams of the architects of modern India. Let the revolutionary legacy of the Durgapur trio inspire us to face today's challenges.

Pledge to Carry Forward Struggle for Change: Final Farewell to Comrade BB Pandey

Comrade Brij Bihari Pandey's sudden demise in Patna on 26 August 2021 due to complications following colon surgery in Patna has been a heavy blow to the entire party.

Hundreds of CPIML activists bid a final farewell to their beloved leader Comrade Brij Bihari Pandey on 27 August 2021 with the pledge to carry forward the struggle for change. The final journey started from the legislative party office in Patna at 3 pm and proceeded through various parts of the city to reach Baans Ghat.

Accompanying the final journey were

CPIML General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya as well as senior party leaders and leaders and activists from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Jharkhand and other states who had worked closely with Comrade BB Pandey. Earlier, a condolence meeting was organized at the legislative party office which was also attended by Mahagathbandhan leaders including former Bihar Assembly Speaker and RJD leader Shri Udaynarayan Chaudhury, Vrishan Patel, CPI leaders Vijay Narayan Mishra and Ghaznafar Nawab, CPI-M leaders Arun Kumar Mishra and Rampuri, RJD MLA from Makhdumpur Satish Das, Forward Bloc leader Amerika Mahto, SUCI(C)leader Suryakar Jitendra, Pushpendra and Mahendra Suman (Patna TIMS), physician Dr PNP Pal and former MLA Ramesh Kushwaha.

Party leaders who paid tribute to Comrade BB Pandey included senior leader Swadesh Bhattacharya, Nandkishore Prasad, UP party in-charge Ramji Rai, senior leader from West Bengal Kartik Pal, Jharkhand State Secretary Janardan Prasad, Bagodar MLA Vinod Singh, Central Control Commission member Uma Gupta, Comrade BB Pandey's wife and AIPWA leader Vibha Gupta, daughters Aditi and Riya, family members, CPIML Bardhaman District Secretary Surendra Singh, IREF leader Kishanu, AIARLA National President Shriram Chaudhury, Bihar State Secretary Kunal, Amar, Dhirendra Jha, Meena Tiwari, Shashi Yadav, Madhu, KD Yadav, Pawan Sharma, RN Thakur, Santosh Sahar, Aleem Akhtar, PS Maharaj, central Committee and State Committee members, party MLAs, and many District Secretaries.

Speaking at the condolence meeting, General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said that 2020-21 has been an extremely sad period for us as we have lost many of our comrades. We lost Comrades Arvind Kumar and Ramjatan Sharma some days ago and now we have gathered

here to bid our final farewell to Comrade BB Pandey. Comrade BB Pandey had worked for the party for the past 50 years in various areas and on various fronts, discharging all his responsibilities with utmost dedication. He was a childhood friend of Comrade Vinod Mishra and came into contact with the party while studying in college. Both he and Comrade Vinod Mishra turned their studies into a struggle for people's freedom. Another of his comrades in this campaign was Comrade DP Bakshi whom we had lost in 2018. Many students and industrial workers from the Durgapur region joined them in this drive. Later, Comrade BB Pandey played an important role in the re-organization of CPIML.

Comrade BB Pandey and his comrades did the work of taking the party forward, expanding party activities, and running the party. He played a huge role in giving impetus to party publications. He was consistently active in Lal Jhanda, Liberation, Janmat and Jansanskriti Manch where his intellectual capabilities were invaluable. His was a rare combination of an intellectual and a dedicated and disciplined party soldier and it was due to this quality that he became Chairman of the party's Central Control Commission. He played the role of teacher to students in the party and also outside the party and taught them to practise Marxism.

A condolence meeting was also held in Delhi at the party's central office on August 29. At the meeting, many comrades shared their warm memories of Pandeyji. Comrades recalled how Pandeyji was a polyglot with an encyclopaedic mastery of a vast range of subjects. Along with English, Hindi, and Bengali, he could also speak a fair bit of Punjabi, and even understand some Tamil. From science to literature and culture to politics and history – Pandeyji had an abiding interest in it all, and would quickly gain command over whichever subject to which he turned his attention. He had the rare

quality of patience to accompany this intellectual wealth: which made him an ideal teacher and mentor. Innumerable young comrades – from editors of party publications to activists on the range of mass fronts – availed of his generously offered mentorship. He would gladly be as willing to teach a novice to use a computer; or to discuss quantum physics with a student of physics, or the latest interesting novel or volume of poetry with comrades of Jan Sanskriti Manch; as he was to discuss any knotty problem a comrade faced in her everyday organising work.

Prof Gopal Pradhan recalled how he met Pandeyji as a student at JNU and learnt a lot about politics and life from spending time translating materials from Hindi to English with Pandeyji. Comrade Roopal remembered the day the infamous Operation Bluestar took place and the armed forces entered the Golden Temple at Amritsar. He and other working class comrades in Delhi did not know anything about this episode. That night Comrade Pandeyji (whom comrade Roopal then knew as "Jayant ji" explained what policies of Indira Gandhi's government had brought Punjab to the point of insurgency. He also recalled how at an event in Delhi, Pandeyji noticed that a slogan in Urdu was misspelt on a banner, and promptly took up a brush and paint, knelt down and corrected it even as the program continued undisturbed. Comrade Dipankar, Comrades Prabhat, Sanjay Sharma and Kavita Krishnan shared their memories, as did Comrades Srikant, Ranjan Ganguly, Awadhesh, Uma Gupta and many other comrades. CPIML Delhi Secretary Ravi Rai presided over the meeting, and CCMs Comrade Rajendra Pratholi and Rajiv Dimri were also present.

With Vinod, Since My Childhood

(Memoir written by Brij Bihari Pandey in tribute to Comrade Vinod Mishra)

on the latter's death in December 1998. Edited and excerpted from Liberation January 1999.)

I cannot exactly recall when I first met that lanky, dark complexioned, curly haired boy. May be around early 1956. His house was hardly 100 yards away from mine. The colony was built by the labour department of the UP government; where the quarters were allotted to industrial workers and non-gazetted employees. Much later, while dwelling on our common past Vinod surmised that we were fortunate enough to have spent our childhood and adolescence in this working class neighbourhood.

By the end of the 1950s, a cricket team had emerged under Vinod's captainship. It was not that he was the best cricketer, but a born leader, he was indeed. He was called Bade Vinod because there was a junior Vinod Shukla among us, called Chhote Vinod.

Those days too he took interest in playing cards but more so in chess, in which he beat us all. He was very fond of reading books, particularly detective novels, of which he was a voracious reader. At a point, however, he got fed up with their content. He planned to produce a novel against whom he thought real criminals in the society, the rich and corrupt politicians, in a joint venture and proposed me to co-author it. I had started penning it but later the project was silently abandoned.

In late 1958 Suren Ghosh, an apostle of Vinoba Bhave came to reside in our neighbourhood. He mobilised us in a Sarvodaya club. Ghosh da had persuaded our parents to let us use their club in the daytime on working days. In the evening he held Vedic prayers and preached us about Sarvodaya. He had a vow not to touch money, so one of us had to accompany him to handle it. Initially Vinod took a tremendous interest in the whole affair and this went on for about a year and a half. Parents were pleased to see their children busy receiving moral education. But soon

Vinod saw through the hypocrisy and withdrew from the affair. What irked him, firstly, was an "Akhand Ramayana Path" organised by Ghosh da, in which Vinod declined to participate. Secondly, Ghosh da mobilised us to go with brooms in hand for a cleaning operation in the sweepers' colony. This seemed dubious to Vinod, who had by then turned critical of Gandhian approach. What was the point in going once in the lifetime to teach cleanliness to the people who clean the whole colony? Vinod also found Ghosh da making status differentiations among us. The club winded up by the time Vinod passed his High School examination.

He used to think that revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad had opportunity to serve the motherland because they were born in the colonial era, but there was no such scope now. However, towards the mid-60s, when he was in the final year of his graduation, he began thinking about society in terms of a socialist solution. But still he had no access to Marxist education.

He was 18, just adult, when he joined Christ Church College to do his M. Sc. in Mathematics. For the first time in his life he contested for the post of councillor to the students' association. It was not an act of a "good boy". But Vinod took a chance. With a lot of difficulty he somehow mobilized the money required to get propaganda bills printed, putting his own pocket expenses, or loans from friends, all into it. He didn't have sufficient hands, so for most of it he had to propagate for himself. As was expected, he lost, but this event brought a significant change in his personality. He had started off his course as a student leader.

No more a "good boy", he used to remain outside till late in the night with his new acquaintances. Transcending the neighbourhood, now he had moved out to make friends with people mostly older than us. Those days he came into contact

with some left leaning persons including a poet, and also read some socialist literature available in Kanpur.

At this juncture, when the direction of our life was quite unsettled, an unexpected thing took place. Just to answer the challenge put up by the same braggart friend of ours, Vinod and myself took the IIT entrance examination, and owing to our received notion that mechanical engineering was the best of all branches, both of us landed at the Regional Engineering College, Durgapur in 1966.

It was in the 2nd year (67-68) that Vinod and other leftist students could form a sort of loose group in the college. The impact of Naxalbari was being felt and Vinod was quick to adopt radical positions.

During the vacations when we went to Kanpur, Vinod and some of us in our colony met Comrade Ram Asrey, a respected communist leader belonging to the CPI(M), in the quarter of a worker in our neighbourhood. We had a day-long meeting. We got several booklets in Hindi and English published by USSR on the occasion of 50th anniversary of Great October Socialist Revolution. We also got booklets carrying Mao's articles. The most important thing we learnt in our discussions with Comrade Ram Asrey was that the key to solutions of problems in India lay in agrarian revolution. Vinod's association with leftist students provided him the urge to learn Bengali and in a short time he could speak and read Bengali magazines. This broadened the scope of his interaction with students.

In the 3rd year (68-69), Vinod and his radical group had already forged links with the AICCCR and the political differences with CPI(M) had become clear. Mishra was one of the leaders of the group that planned to capture all the posts in the students' gymkhana. He used to join night-long wall-writing programmes, writing slogans related to election boycott and hailing the armed peasant

struggle in Naxalbari and Srikakulam. Apart from Deshabrati, he read Mao's selected writings; he read Edgar Snow, Felix Greene, Stuart Schram, John Reed, Anna Louis Strong, Neville Maxwell and many others, even books about Che Guevara and by new left writers including Regis DeBrey, Hebert Marquis, Franz Fannon etc. He read the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

It was after the police firing on the last day of our third year examinations that Vinod decided to become a whole-timer. In the 4th year he never attend any classes; he stayed in the hostel just to conduct political activities among students as well as workers in the nearby area. After I overcame my dilemma and was at last admitted to the secret leading team, I came to know that Vinod himself was the leader of the college group, and not Gautam Sen, the well-known mass leader. Later this leading body was transformed into a local committee, which enjoyed influence not only among students, but also among workers and the school students in the township. In the beginning of '70, when Bardhaman DOC decided to merge this organisation with the township local committee to form the Local Organising Committee (LOC), Mishra was appointed its secretary. Then onwards he started spending more time out of the hostel.

It was under his leadership that the ringleaders of lumpens and anti-communist elements were given a thorough drubbing in March '70. In the face of workers mobilised by CPI(M) entering the campus to attack us, Vinod decided not to have a confrontation and planned a retreat, advising all others to vacate the hostel and go home. Our leading core took shelter in different areas of the township. He had decided to call a meeting after three days to plan a comeback. When we were caught by the CPI(M) following a leak, in confinement an undaunted Mishra engaged in sharp debates with the CPI(M) leaders, and launched a hunger strike demanding our release.

When he was ultimately released, instead of going to Kanpur he got down at Asansol defying all threats issued by CPI(M) leaders, contacted the local organisation and started making preparation for a counterattack. And after we gained control of the campus in spite of the fact that the CRP was posted at the hostels and there were FIRs lodged against us all, he asked the lumpen anti-communist elements to surrender, and gradually all of them did comply.

In the March itself CM had issued his famous call to youth and students exhorting them to leave schools and colleges and plunge headlong into the revolutionary struggle. A new upsurge of students and youth came in its wake and the cities were afire with actions. Under VM's leadership, Durgapur became a live volcano of struggle. Soon came CM's twin articles "To the Working Class" and "A Few Words on Our Work among the Working Class". Comrade Saroj Datta had also come up to attend Durgapur party meeting. Putting utmost emphasis on party work among the working class, VM implemented these instruction in a most creative way; as a result the workers' struggle acquired a new dimension in Durgapur, namely the struggle on the question of workers' prestige. The organisation expanded among workers as well as youth. It was due to this pioneering role that VM was soon coopted to the Bardhaman DC. However, he got arrested while on his way to attend the DC meeting. He withstood inhuman torture meted out by the secret police but revealed nothing. Ultimately the PVA Act was clamped on him and he was sent to Behrampur Central Jail. In the jail he studied CM's articles and explained them to others.

When he was released unconditionally following the withdrawal of the PVA Act, I met him in Durgapur. First he was sent to Chittaranjan and then for some time he remained in Durgapur, awaiting his deployment in the countryside of

Bardhaman district. I found that jail life had brought a lot of change in him. He had earned much more maturity; his resoluteness, concentration and determination towards the party and revolution had increased manifold. He talked with surprising clarity in his interpretations of the party line. Workers acquainted with him admired him deeply, he was still their leader beyond organisational considerations. Later when he left for the countryside, I happened to take shelter in a DSP worker's house, where Dilip (VM) had stayed for a few days. This worker of Madhya Pradesh origin revealed that whenever he returned from the factory, he could sense that Dilip had been thinking about him all the time! He always wanted to have a live account of what had happened in the workplace.

In his party life, Vinod always avoided petty questions and concentrated on questions related to political line or those of major organisational importance. Nor did he ever indulge in unprincipled gossips where some people are targetted for criticism. Instead he always highlighted the positive side of the comrades and made suggestions on how to reform them. However, at times he would demolish hypocrisy with a cutting sarcasm. He always stood against narrow-mindedness and put emphasis on investigation and study. Due to all this he soon assumed leadership in his new area of work and then he was once again coopted to the Burdwan Regional Committee in the early '73.

The death of CM was a big blow to him because he strongly believed that despite all his ill health, CM would lead the Indian democratic revolution to its culmination. The formation of the new Central Committee manned by Sharma and Mahadev on 5-6 December 1972 could never energize him, because he read into the statement issued by them that they could not put politics in command. On Mahadev's insistence this CC was busy in finding out petty things like who informed about CM's

shelter etc. The resolution said nothing about the last instructions of CM or developing the party line in the changed conditions. He began reading the last article by CM "Its People's Interest That Is Party's Interest" but its authenticity was put to doubt by Mahadev. Vinod came out with the analysis that because of his ill health Comrade CM was surrounded by metaphysically self-centred persons who could not feed him with the real situation. They supplied him only their own jaundiced view. This isolation from the ranks was the real reason behind CM's arrest and his consequent death. From this he took the lesson that the leadership must have direct contact with the ranks if it desires to provide a dynamic leadership.

VM had by 1973 lost hope of finding any readymade party centre and decided to forge a new centre himself. Under his leadership the Bardhaman RC had expanded its network to several districts including the Naxalbari area. He did a lot of

theoretical work in interpreting CM line in a non-dogmatic, creative way. Ultimately a state committee was formed and he became its secretary. On the other hand, he came to know that Bihar State Committee had also severed its connection with Mahadev and rejected the leadership of Sharma as well. So he tried to forge links with Comrade Johar under whose leadership the peasant movement was surging ahead in the plains of Bihar. This endeavour culminated in the formation of the Central Committee on 28 July 1974.

I cannot forget the words that he wrote to me in a long letter. Those days I was working in Bihar but had lost faith in any of the functioning centres. For all practical purposes, my circle of 7-8 whole-timers coming from Bengal was my own centre, and I had serious reservations on the party's tactical line. Some comrades of that group later joined Sharma group. Vinod was unable to resolve the questions I posed before him, he admitted, but it was

his categorical assertion that only revolutionary practice can resolve them, and it would take its own time. He underlined the basics and then made a highly emotional appeal: "We have always been together in rain and shine, we have fought together, and I hope we shall win together as well". To this I couldn't but reply: "Yes comrade, I shall be with you". And in no time I started working with the party organisation in Bihar. It is correct that every person joins the party on his or her own behalf, there is no such thing like a friendship society joining a communist party en masse. Yet I cannot say whether I would have become a whole-timer at that juncture had Vinod not done so. I must concede that since the very childhood he had enjoyed such an influence over me.

Today Vinod is no more along with me in flesh and blood, but he will always remain with me at my heart as the moving spirit in our common fight and victory. □



Rest in Power, Gail!

AJIT PATIL

Social scientist of international repute; founder member of Shramik Mukti Dal Maharashtra; a veteran researcher-writer on Buddha, Mahatma Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, and Marx; a feminist, a scholar who interpreted the Sant Literature and the Warkari tradition of Maharashtra in a new light; a participant in the women's movement and adivasi movement who travelled extensively throughout Maharashtra – Gail Omvedt, 81, died of old age at her home at Kasegaon village, in the Sangli District of Maharashtra.

Gail Omvedt was a Swedish American born in Minneapolis in Minnesota. Gail hailed from a family connected with the Democratic Farmer Labour Party. Her grandfather was a state representative four times. Gail's parents also worked for the same party. This party was and is still limited to the state of Minnesota and is nationally connected with the

Democratic Party. When I first met Gail, she told me how before the declaration of Independence, Connecticut and Massachusetts were Swedish colonies later handed over to the British in the same way Mumbai was handed over to the British by Portugal in dowry!

Gail participated in various student movements and anti-racist movements in the US as a student. She was at the forefront of the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War. After completing her Masters in Sociology she joined the doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley - a centre of anti-war progressive movements.

She took up studies on the Anti-Brahmin movement in India and during her research came in close contact with Lal Nishan Party and other progressive forces in Maharashtra. She travelled and interacted extensively across an entire spectrum of the Maharashtra society

transcending class and caste barriers to write her doctoral thesis, 'A Cultural Revolt In A Colonial Society: The Non Brahmin Movement in Western Maharashtra' which was translated into Marathi by the Late Comrade P D Dighe of LNP. My mother proof-read the book and the book was published through Scientific Socialist Education Trust, which also published the English version in 1976. The thesis helped revive interest in Mahatma Phule's contribution to the social liberation and anti-caste movement.

She met Bharat Patankar, a medical doctor by training who left his post graduation studies to become a full-time activist. He was a part of the "Magowa" group of left-leaning educated Maharashtrian youth ("Magowa" in Marathi connotes "Quest") of the 1970s: a product of the international and national ferment of the period. Magowa was unhappy about the established left parties

Our Visit To Gail Omvedt's Kasegaon Home

KAVITA KRISHNAN

On 8 September 2021, CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Politburo members Prabhat Kumar and I, accompanied by Comrade Ajit Patil of the party's Maharashtra unit, visited Gail Omvedt's home in Kasegaon village to offer condolences to her partner Bharat Patankar and her daughter Prachi Patankar.

Their home carried so many historical resonances. Photographs of Comrade Babuji Patankar dating to the parallel government in Satara; and of those inspiring women Indutai and Gail brought to mind the unbreakable relationships between the progressive currents in the freedom movement, and the left-democratic movements in the country.

Later, I held in my hand a copy of *A Cultural Revolt In A Colonial Society: The Non Brahmin Movement in Western Maharashtra* - Gail's thesis published in 1976 by the Lal Nishan Party's Scientific Socialist Education Trust. The print line

bore the address of the LNP's Dadar office "Shramik"; and comrades told me that the printer's office had actually stood at the place where the Pune municipality workers' union, also called "Shramik", now stands. That book in hand, I asked young comrades of the LNP if we could visit the Phules' home, and the school they first started.

It was the eve of the Ganpati festival, and we found ourselves among the crowds right opposite a Pune landmark – the Shreemant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganpati temple. Sandwiched between two small shops, there is a dilapidated stairway – blink and you would miss it. It is unsafe to climb it, we were told, but one could go up one at a time. Two of us went up the old wooden stairway that is practically crumbling, to find a few ruined rooms and a blackboard. This is where Savitribai must have taught girls; she must have walked the same street we had just walked up, getting dung thrown at her for daring to educate girls and Brahmin widows!

and were in quest of an alternative. They published a monthly by the same name which offered a rich independent Left analysis of issues and events. Sudheer Bedekar, Anant Phadke, Ashok Manohar, Kumar Shiralkar, Mukta Manohar, the Kanhere brothers, and Satish Kamat were some of the leading comrades in Magowa. Members of the group started working amongst the Adivasis in Northern Maharashtra at Shahada who were resisting feudal landlords. Later some of these activists - Bharat Patankar, Ashok and Mukta Manohar - started working together with LNP amongst industrial workers. The activists in Pune formed a commune to live together. Mukta and Ashok, the Kanheres, and Gail and Bharat were the members of the commune. Many others who came to Pune for work stayed there as well. LNP had established and run such communes for a long time - in Mumbai, Kolhapur, Pune and Ahmadnagar. Many of us, including Atul Dighe, Amol Kerkar and I from the Kolhapur commune, and Madhav Chavhan, and Neela Limaye from the Mumbai commune are surviving members of the communes - a unique chapter of socio-political life in Maharashtra - and we are all proud of that legacy!

Magowa then dissolved itself and the activists joined various parties of their ideological choice. Bharat had started working with LNP amongst the Textile workers as a full time worker. His father Babuji Patankar was a veteran communist leader and one of the leaders and organizer of the 'Prati Sarkar' - a parallel government in Western Maharashtra challenging British rule, between August 1943 and May 1946. His mother Indutai was a participant in this movement and rebelled to marry Comrade Babuji Patankar. Gail was close to Comrade Leela and A D Bhonsale of LNP. The marriage of Gail and Bharat was solemnized during Emergency in their house. Bharat and Gail have travelled together in the politico-social canvas of India and Maharashtra for over 45 years.

Gail became a leading theoretician and practitioner of social movements in India. She had differences with LNP over the assessment of the farmer's movement led by Sharad Joshi, and of the Dunkel agreement.

After formation of the Shramik Mukti Dal she participated in many struggles of women and peasants in the rural Western Maharashtra. She has been associated as

We went to the Phule Wadi next – and what a pleasant surprise it was to find that the Phules' home has been preserved beautifully. As soon as you step in, you are taken back a couple of hundred years. In the yard is the well the Phules dug to make sure Dalits, deprived due to untouchability from using the common wells, could get water. And in the wider compound, murals tell the story of the Phules, and the busts of the Phules are so well done that they look like they might speak. Paintings inside the house memorialise Savitri's comrade and friend Fatima Sheikh.

On the way back, we also crossed the bridge where the Sanatan Sanstha terrorists assassinated Narendra Dabholkar. It was sobering to remember how the contending legacies of the fascist Savarkar on one side and the revolutionary Phules and their inheritors (Gail and all the Shramik Mukti Dal and LNP comrades, as well as activists like Dabholkar) on the other, still contend with each other in this city. □

faculty with various universities in India - as the Phule Ambedkar chair in Pune University, the Ambedkar Chair in Niswas, Odisha, Asian visiting professor in Nordic Institute of Asian studies in Copenhagen, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and the IIAS Shimla.

She was an advisor to FAO, UNDP, and NOVIB. She carried out research on the Bhakti movement under the ICSSR. She was a regular contributor to the EPW and The Hindu. She has more than 25 titles to her credit. Those include Buddhism in India, Seeking Begampura, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution, Understanding Caste, We Will Smash The Prison, and New Social Movements in India.

My wife and I have fond memories of Gail. Our families are shared political ties: my father Comrade Santaram Patil and Bharat's father Comrade Babuji Patankar were both freedom fighters of a Left bent. Gail and Bharat worked with my father in various movements especially in Western Maharashtra. Gail together with my mother Comrade Sumitra Patil – popularly known by her maiden name Datarbai, and Indubai Sawant together organised many women's struggles. My mother had worked as the Head mistress of the

school established by Nagnath Naikwadi, a freedom fighter and a member of the Patri Sarkar at Walwa not very far off from Kasegaon in the mid-1950s for three years and so was well-known in the area.

When the workers' movement decided to field my father Comrade Santaram Patil against the then CM of the state Vasantdada Patil, Bharat was one of the main organizers in the campaign. The by-election had become necessary as Vasantdada Patil was not an elected member of the Vidhan Sabha. The election was held in June 1983 against the backdrop of the textile workers' strike which had started on the 18th of January 1982 and was in its 18th month. Comrades like my father who had deep roots in rural Maharashtra, helped collect grain and funds from farmers to sustain the striking workers' families. When the

striking workers decided to challenge Vasantdada Patil at Sangli on the issue of the textile strike, supported by all the opposition parties, they picked my father. He was an outsider to Sangli had no resources matching the Sugar Baron Vasantdada, with whom he shared only one comparable attribute – his participation in the freedom movement. The workers fought that uneven battle with grit and determination, and Santaram Patil lost to the class enemy by just 5000 votes!

My parents had close relations with Indutai since the 1950s, and with Bharat too. I still remember the various books and magazines published by Science For The People that Gail used to bring from the US. I remember when she and Bharat stayed at our house and dined with us after their marriage. I have a

vivid childhood memory of Gail's blue sapphire ring that matched her eyes. When I met Bharat after Gail's passing, my memories of Gail came alive when I saw that ring on Bharat's finger. Their daughter Prachi now lives in the US and is active in anti-racism movements and other democratic movements in the US. Gail was laid to rest in an institute named after her father-in-law.

In her obituary for my father Gail had written, "when the deprived Ekalavyas will take the bow and arrow to establish their own state Comrade Santaram Patil will be remembered as one of those who fought alongside." Yes Gail, so would they remember you as well!

The struggle for just, equal and honourable society will continue, inspired always by you, Gail. You rest in power. □



REPORTS

Struggle Against Baghmati Embankment Construction

The Chaas Vaas Jeevan Bachao Baghmati Sangharsh Morcha had organized a struggle against the construction of the proposed destructive embankment on the River Baghmati in the Muzaffarpur-Darbhang-Samastipur region, and the intensity of that people's struggle had forced the government to form a special review committee.

But before the review committee report could come, a tender has been issued for construction of the embankment, under pressure from the contractors' lobby. This is playing with the life of the river and people's lives. The Sangharsh Morcha has demanded to withdraw this tender and to extend the review committee's term. Moreover, this committee should be given the required resources and directed to submit its report at the earliest.

Construction of this embankment will convert lakhs of hectares of land into a huge heap of sand and about 70 villages will be submerged. Meenapur, Bochahan, Gayaghat, Bandara and Muroul will be situated between the Baghmati and Budhi Gandak embankments. Total mayhem will result if either of the two embankments breaks.

The proposed embankment will cross NH 57 at Beniwad and only 3 bridges are proposed. This will affect the water flow, cause water stagnation and result

in destruction. The Bihar government talks of protecting rivers through the Jal Jeevan Hariyali scheme but goes ahead with such projects that destroy rivers. The Baghmati river is not just a single river but a confluence of several streams. The embankment construction will thus kill many rivers. Keeping this in mind, the 4 decade old Baghmati project needs to be reviewed afresh. The government must give orders without delay to stop the disastrous move to construct new embankments.

Kisan Samvad Yatra in Maharashtra

At a meeting in Pune on 7 September 2021, the leadership of the Lal Nishan Party and the CPIML Liberation resolved to work in close cooperation for the success of ongoing people's movements in Maharashtra and all over India, for a powerful Left assertion and growing cooperation with wide-ranging democratic forces for a powerful anti fascist resistance.

In keeping with that spirit, the LNP, CPIML, and the Satyashodhak Communist Party together held a Kisan Samvad Yatra that covered some 2000 kilometres across the state and met more than a lakh farmers. The Yatra began on 13 September and ended on 21 September.

A rally was held on 14 September at Aurangabad. From there the Yatra moved to northern Maharashtra, with two rallies, each attended by 10,000 farmers,

at Nandurbar and Dhule. The next rally at Satana near Nashik was disrupted by police and the feudal forces in the area. But, defying this disruption, 2000 farmers held a gathering, even without a microphone and dais or tent.

The Yatra then moved to Srirampur, where 600 people attended a farmers' convention in an auditorium. On 19 September, 100 activists of all three streams met at Ahmednagar. A gathering of 600 people, mostly former textile workers, was held at Gadchinglaj. On 20 September, the Yatra met 104-year old freedom fighter and Kisan movement veteran Comrade Ganpati Patil of LNP in Kolhapur. The Gurudwara Prabandhak committees felicitated the Yatra participants at Srirampur and Navi Mumbai. Comrade Rajaram Singh, GS of All India Kisan Mahasabha and PBM of CPIML, Comrade Sukhdarshan Natt, CPIML CCM and one of the leaders of the ongoing Kisan movement in Punjab and at Delhi's Tikri Border; Comrades Subhash Kakuste and Rajendra Bawake of LNP and Comrade Kishor Damle, the organising secretary of Satyashodhak Communist Party, were with the Yatra throughout, as were Comrades Ajit Patil and Shyam Gohil of the CPIML Maharashtra CPIML unit. CPIML MLA and AIKM leader from Bihar Comrade Sudama Prasad joined the Yatra from Srirampur onwards to Kolhapur, where Comrade Atul Dige from LNP joined it. □

Women, Girls, and Boys are Protesting Every Taliban Move to Curb Freedoms

Afghan women and girls are defying Taliban efforts to render them silent and invisible. They are out on the streets, braving Taliban whips and tasers and bullets, protesting the moves to roll-back their freedoms and rights.

Soon after the Taliban announced an all-male interim government, women marched on Kabul streets, with placards declaring “No government can deny the presence of women” and “I will sing freedom over and over.” Some of the placards had the image of a pregnant police officer in Ghor province whom the Taliban is accused of killing in the presence of her family. One of the protestors, held a poster that said “A cabinet without women is a loser, a loser”, adding “They hit us with whips and they tell us to go to our homes and recognize and accept the Emirate. Why should we accept the Emirate while no inclusion or rights have been given to us?” Another woman at the protest said the Taliban have “proved that they cannot change,” and referring to US claims to have invaded Afghanistan twenty years ago to defend women’s rights, demanded “Where are those defenders of women rights today?” Another protester said of the Taliban men, “They told us to go home saying that’s where a woman’s place is.” She added, “They (my family) tell me not to go for protests. They [the Taliban] will kill you. I fought with my brother to attend the march on Wednesday. It’s important that we raise our voice. I’m not scared. I will keep going again and again and again, until they kill us. It is better to die once than die gradually.” The Taliban had announced that girls would be “allowed” to study in segregated institutions. But even though most secondary schools for students aged between 13 and 18 are segregated, the Taliban has allowed only boys’ schools to reopen, with a statement saying: “All male teachers and students should attend their educational institutions.” Another statement told female government employees in Kabul city to stay at home. Saleha Soadat, a former journalist with an Afghan news Tolo News, tweeted that thanks to such diktats, “more working women have been affected, and most of these women are unemployed and even in shock how to feed their families.”

A schoolgirl who wants to become a lawyer told the BBC, ““Everything looks very dark. Every day I wake up and ask myself why I am alive? Should I stay at home and wait for someone to knock on the door and ask me to marry him? Is this the purpose of being a woman?” In Herat, thirteen teenage schoolgirls held a protest in their own neighbourhood. One said that not going to school feels as if “we are moving backward” and another said, “We demand that all girls must return to their schools and all the women should be allowed to get back to their work.” Schoolboys protested by skipping school in solidarity with girls, holding placards declaring “We will not attend school till our sisters can” and “I won’t go to school without my sister. I support my sister. We are equal.” The storm of protests had the impact of making the Taliban claim that girls’ school would be reopened “soon”. But the schoolchildren are not backing down till the schools actually do open.

Tellingly, the Taliban has shut down the Ministry for Women’s Affairs, replacing it with a ministry for the “propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice”. Afghan women protested outside the new ministry chanting, “you took my holy soil don’t take my education!” and “Elimination of women = elimination of human beings.”

No country’s freedom must ever be taken away in the name of “rescuing women”. And no woman’s freedom must ever be taken away in the name of “protecting women”. No power can be allowed to place conditions on women’s rights – to study, hold jobs, dress, live and love according to their own choice – in the name “virtue and vice.” We must stand with Afghan women, girls and boys courageously protesting against Taliban oppression.

Condemn Attacks by BJP Goons in Tripura

We condemn the ghastly attack on offices of CPIML, CPIM and several newspapers by BJP goons. CPIML office in Udaipur and CPIM offices in Udaipur and Agartala were vandalised and set on fire by a mob of BJP goons on September 8. There is a complete collapse of law and order and BJP goons are ruling the roost. The BJP government in Tripura led by Biplab Deb has turned the state into a slaughterhouse of democracy.

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