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# Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

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## **Change in Conduct of Election Rules Government's Attempt to Throttle Electoral Transparency**

The CPIML strongly condemns the Union government's unilateral amendment to Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, which effectively curtails public access to crucial election-related documents. This amendment represents a deliberate assault on the principles of electoral transparency and democratic accountability, raising serious concerns about the ruling dispensation's intent to subvert democratic institutions.

This move comes just days after the Punjab and Haryana High Court, on December 9, directed the Election Commission to provide videography, security camera footage, and copies of documents related to votes polled at a polling station during the recent Haryana Assembly elections to

advocate Mehmood Pracha. Rather than ensuring greater transparency considering such judicial directives, the government has chosen opacity, signalling its disregard for accountability.

This knee-jerk reaction by the government suggests that it is attempting to hide something at a time when concerns are being raised across the country about the conduct of elections and the conspiracy behind the push for a so-called One Nation, One Election (ONOE).

The CPIML also points out the troubling parallels between this amendment and the government's previous actions to undermine transparency, such as the now-scrapped electoral bond scheme.

This scheme legalized anonymous and opaque political funding, creating avenues for unaccountable money to influence elections while favouring the ruling party. The government is once again attempting to cloak critical aspects of the electoral process in secrecy, raising serious questions about its commitment to free and fair elections.

We call on the Election Commission of India (ECI) to uphold its constitutional responsibility to ensure public trust and transparency in the electoral process. Instead of enabling such regressive changes, the ECI must take proactive steps to ensure accountability and transparency. The CPI(ML) demands the immediate repeal of this anti-democratic rule amendment and urges all democratic forces to unite in defence of transparency, accountability, and the people's right to scrutinise their electoral system. ■

## **Simultaneous Elections Bill Undermines the Basic Spirit of Democracy and Federalism**

On December 17, 2024, the Modi government introduced two bills aimed at forwarding the undemocratic and unconstitutional Simultaneous Elections idea. The Constitution 129th Amendment Bill 2024 and The Union Territories Laws Amendment Bill 2024 were introduced in Lok Sabha. CPIML Lok Sabha MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad noted that the 'One Nation, One Election' or Simultaneous Elections proposal is undemocratic, and this pet idea of the BJP undermines the basic spirit of democracy and federalism that constitutes the lifeblood of the Constitution. Today, in the name of 'One Nation, One Election' the BJP wants to set the political clock back and enforce a regimentation of the polity through constitutional amendments.

Speaking about the ONOE proposal, CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said that driving this project of course is the Sangh-BJP scheme of over-centralisation of power and systematic weakening of India's diverse culture, plural politics and federal framework. By clubbing all elections together, the Modi government seeks to rob elections of their distinct

contexts and limit the political choices of the people. Federal India offers the most vibrant opposition and determined resistance to the Modi government's Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan paradigm as can be seen from the growing cultural and political churnings in states beyond the Hindi heartland (as well as increasingly within it). 'One Nation, One Election' is a formula to curb those churnings and subject democratic India to the imperial designs of a fascist regime.

"This design is of a piece with the whole of range of attempts going on in the spheres of law, governance and constitutional architecture to reduce empowered citizenship to loyal subjecthood and enslave India in a fascist straitjacket. India must defeat this design by all means," added Com. Dipankar.

CPIML in a statement highlighted that assembly and Parliament elections have their own specific contexts as do the panchayat and municipal elections. Clubbing elections together for logistical considerations will mean stripping Assembly elections of their autonomous domain and making them subordinated to the central context. The

assumption that holding simultaneous elections would make for logistical convenience and financial savings is not backed by any credible study or analysis of election expenses or logistical arrangements. Furthermore, as per the Law Commission's 2018 draft report on simultaneous elections about 3586 crores was the cost incurred by the ECI on the 2014 elections (para 2.10). To put this in perspective, since the BJP came to power at the Centre in 2014, the Union government has spent Rs. 3,260.79 crore on advertising in electronic media and Rs. 3,230.77 crore on advertising in print media. If money is truly to be saved, the scope clearly lies elsewhere. Expenditure cannot be made a prime consideration in pursuing the core principles of democracy.

In a bid to justify the wide-ranging amendments to the Constitution to facilitate simultaneous elections, the entire ONOE proposal attempts to play down the right to vote, and the right to elect in Indian jurisprudence. Parliamentary democracy, multi-party system and free and fair elections are all part of the basic structure of the Constitution. ■



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# Why is Amit Shah Afraid of Ambedkar?



**T**he Sangh brigade always wanted India to become a Hindu Rashtra with Manusmriti as India's Constitution. Ambedkar not only chaired the drafting committee which gave India a Constitution that declared India as a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic with the resolve to secure for all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, but two decades before finalising the Constitution, he had publicly denounced the Manusmriti as India's code of social slavery and burned it. It is therefore inevitable that the Sangh-BJP brigade will have nothing but contempt for Ambedkar and his legacy. In his recent Rajya Sabha remarks concerning Ambedkar however, Amit Shah has ended up exposing more than this characteristic Sanghi abhorrence of the prime architect of India's Constitution.

The BJP is perfectly aware that as long as it has to operate under the prevailing Constitution, it has no option but to pay lip service to Ambedkar. In fact, it has been audaciously trying to appropriate Ambedkar by building a few statues and developing a few sites in the name of protecting his memory and promoting his legacy and even attempting to use him to serve the fascist agenda of hate and lies. But with the Constitution emerging as a potent weapon of popular anti-fascist mobilisation, first during the anti-CAA protests and then during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with the Preamble becoming a manifesto of our times, the BJP's 'Operation Ambedkar' has fallen flat. Because of this exasperation Amit Shah could not camouflage his contempt and the 'man ki baat' came out on the floor of Parliament.

Amit Shah not only expressed the BJP's deep discomfort over Ambedkar

and the Constitution being repeatedly invoked by the people, in the process he also revealed the Sangh's Manuvadi mindset and agenda. If only the people chanted the name of God instead of taking Ambedkar's name so many times, they could be sure of having a secure place in heaven for seven lives, quipped Shah after mocking people for invoking Ambedkar. An assured place in heaven in the next life is precisely the promise that has always been made to gullible people to condemn them to hell in this life. The caste system and every other injustice has all along been justified by invoking the idea of rebirth and exploiting the religious belief of the common people.

All through his life Ambedkar fought against this exploitative use of religion to keep people enslaved in shackles of caste and gender oppression. Securing justice, equality, liberty and fraternity for the oppressed here and now was Ambedkar's sole concern. And here's Amit Shah invoking the idea of heaven and rebirth to mock people he accuses of excessively chanting the name of Ambedkar! Who are these people who invoke Ambedkar? They are first of all people from India's oppressed and deprived bahun communities who have to fight every day and everywhere for their survival and dignity. From earning their livelihood to securing any degree of reservation and representation, nothing comes without struggle and assertion of the rights affirmed in the Constitution.

Amit Shah says his viral video clip was divorced from the context. What follows his derogatory remarks about Babasaheb

Ambedkar is a mischievous attempt to pit Ambedkar against Nehru and hold the Congress responsible for Ambedkar's resignation from the Nehru cabinet. This is a blatant lie about the circumstances that led to Ambedkar's resignation. While Ambedkar did voice his differences with the Nehru government and the Congress on some issues, what prompted him to resign was Nehru's decision to drop the Hindu Code Bill ahead of the 1952 elections. Nehru was in full agreement with Ambedkar on the content of the Hindu Code Bill and the urgent need for this legislation to promote equity and justice for Hindu women. Dropping and deferring the bill however became a tactical imperative to save the Bill in the face of massive opposition within Parliament and society at large.

And who were spearheading this fierce opposition to the Hindu Code Bill? It was primarily the Hindutva brigade led by the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha that had been whipping up a frenzy across the country, burning copies of the Bill and effigies of Ambedkar and Nehru. The Hindutva brigade which had been badly isolated following the assassination of Gandhi and the ban on the RSS, decided and announced by none other than Sardar Patel, India's first Home Minister, sensed a great opportunity to bounce back by exploiting the conservative opposition to the Hindu Code Bill. The withdrawal of the Bill robbed the RSS, Hindu Mahasabha and Jan Sangh of their agenda and they could win no more than seven seats in India's first Lok Sabha elections compared to the Congress tally of 364 and Left-Socialist tally of 34. Elections over, the government got the Bill

passed as a set of four separate legislations.

Ambedkar's resignation from the cabinet over the withdrawal of the Hindu Code Bill was a statement of protest and an expression of counter-pressure against the virulent conservative opposition to measures of progressive social reform and gender justice. It showed the importance Ambedkar attached to the urgent task of women's empowerment. This was his way of telling us that social justice is incomplete without gender justice and that the road to annihilation of caste passed through the defeat of brahmanical patriarchy. At a time when the agenda of social justice is being systematically robbed of its essential transformative and egalitarian thrust and sought to be reduced to a status-quoist exercise of social engineering, we need to grasp Ambedkar's passion for women's rights and his focus on gender justice in the battle for social equality.

The Modi government and the entire Sangh brigade have jumped to the defence of Amit Shah, with the ludicrous attempt to distract people's attention from the real issue by filing a case against Rahul Gandhi over an alleged assault on BJP MPs. This reveals the panic in the Sangh-BJP camp on being caught red-handed over their actual attitude to Ambedkar and the Constitution. We must answer their contempt for Ambedkar and their assault on the Constitution and parliamentary democracy by grasping the radical legacy of Ambedkar and intensifying the battle for social equality with renewed vigour and determination. ■

# Centenary of the Communist Movement in India: Achievements, Lessons and Challenges

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**T**he communist movement in India is now a century old. While there are different opinions regarding the actual foundation day of the communist party, the CPI and CPI(ML) both recognise 26 December 1925 as the formal foundation day of the CPI as a party. By all accounts, we can identify the early 1920s as the period when communist ideas and activities had begun to take shape in India and the movement is therefore clearly a century old in India.

The purpose of this paper is however not to revisit the history of the communist movement in India but to draw inspiration and lessons from the past to focus on the challenges of the present. Broadly we can divide the first century of the communist movement in India into four phases - the colonial era, post-Independence period leading to the Emergency and its aftermath, the post-1990s period of neoliberal policies and aggressive ascendance of Hindutva far right, and the current period of outright fascist offensive.

Internationally too, this period can be divided into similar phases. While the period till 1949 witnessed the remarkable global rise and consolidation of the communist movement marked by victorious revolutions in Russia (November

1917) and China (October 1949) and decisive politico-military defeat of the fascist alliance in World War II, the victorious Cuban revolution (1959) and defeat of US imperialism in the Vietnam war (1975) marked the high points of the post-War period.

The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War phase and pushed the world into a new phase of imperialist aggression and corporate plunder. While the communist or socialist movement is yet to regain lost ground in the old Soviet bloc region, during this period it has discovered more hospitable turf in Latin America and Asia. However, in large parts of the world we are currently witnessing a renewed rise of the fascistic far right.

During its formative years, the initial inspiration and impetus for the communist movement came from the success of the Russian revolution and from the deep urges of freedom from colonial rule, feudal oppression and social slavery within India. Beyond the formal camp of communists, the impact of the Russian revolution ran deep in India's anti-colonial awakening and the quest for social equality and emancipation. From Bhagat Singh and his comrades to Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and from Ambedkar to Periyar, we can see this impact in India's freedom

movement, social justice movement, literature and other fields of popular culture.

In some countries communists were successful in emerging as the leading political force in the course of anti-colonial struggles and integrating the agenda of national liberation with the task of building or advancing towards socialism. In India, communists made considerable progress, but did not succeed in emerging as the leading current. Yet the catalytic impact of the communist ideology and movement was far more than the actual organizational strength of the Communist Party. The greatest youth icon of India's freedom movement, immortal martyr Bhagat Singh, was a communist pioneer in many ways. The communist leadership in building powerful movements to fight landlordism, organising the working class, championing social equality and communal harmony produced a wider impact and gave the freedom movement a broadly progressive orientation.

While the freedom from colonial occupation came with the trauma of territorial partition, unprecedented communal carnage and displacement of millions of families across the border, it was significant that the Constitution of India which was written and adopted

\* This paper was presented at the International Seminar on The Future of Marxism, Democracy & Socialism (18-20 December 2024), organized by the EMS Chair for Marxian Studies and Research, University of Calicut.

after that traumatic turning point in Indian history rejected the idea of making India a Hindu state and opted for a secular democratic character for the new republic with equal rights for all citizens regardless of their religious identity. The RSS and Hindu Mahasabha which wanted a Hindu Rashtra and doggedly opposed the Constitution remained isolated and weak. In the first parliamentary election held between 25 October 1951 and 21 February 1952, the communist party emerged as the second largest party with 16 MPs and together with the RSP, PWP and Forward Bloc, the Left camp won 22 seats followed by 12 seats won by the Socialists while the Hindu Mahasabha and Jan Sangh won only 4 and 3 seats respectively.

The growing communist footprint in India's electoral map saw the communists emerge as the first non-Congress party to head a state government when communists under the leadership of Comrade EMS Namboodiripad won the first assembly election in the newly created state of Kerala. The government was of course not allowed to complete its full term and became the first victim of the toppling of an opposition government, a trend which has now assumed phenomenal proportions in the current Modi era.

The radical trend of the communist movement also tried to reignite the revolutionary flame of the Tebhaga and Telangana struggles and that's how Naxalbari happened in May 1967 and the CPI(ML) was born two years later. The peasant upsurge of Naxalbari blazed a revolutionary trail across the country and the spirit has endured in spite of the most brutal state repression. Even though the militant upsurge failed to achieve its goal of turning the 1970s into the

decade of people's liberation, it took the communist movement deep into India's most oppressed social segments and backward areas.

In electoral terms too, the biggest expansion of the communist influence happened in the post-1967 period, with the beginning of the historic decline and split of the Congress in the late 1960s and especially in the wake of the Emergency. Land reforms, wage struggles and defence and extension of democracy through local self-government were the key planks that sustained and expanded the communist influence and enabled the Left to lead three state governments and send a sixty-strong contingent to Parliament only two decades ago.

Over the last decade and a half, the electoral strength of the Left in India has however suffered a steady and serious decline. The decline in West Bengal was triggered by an attempted policy adjustment with the corporate-driven development paradigm at the cost of the welfare agenda. The resultant rightward shift within the state was soon reinforced by the rapidly rising fascist consolidation in the all-India context.

Indeed, the rise and consolidation of fascism in India today poses the biggest challenge not just to communists but to the very constitutional vision of modern India as a secular democratic republic and an open and diverse society. Communists will have to reestablish themselves at this juncture as the most courageous and consistent champion of democracy and bulwark of resistance to the onslaught of Indian fascism.

I prefer the expression Indian fascism to the more generic term fascism

in India to take due note of the national and historical peculiarities of fascism in today's India. Way back in the early period of rise of fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany, the international communist movement had rightly identified fascism as an international political trend with national specificities. The rise of fascism in India today is happening against the global backdrop of a renewed aggressive surge of the far right, but we can never lose sight of the typically Indian dimensions of this phenomenon especially given the crucial historical role of the RSS.

Unlike the various instances of European fascism in the first half of the twentieth century which had a rather stormy rise and fall, Indian fascism has had a very slow and steady rise, gathering momentum only in the last three decades, more particularly since the ascent of the Modi regime in 2014. While drawing strength from the regressive features of Indian society, especially the caste system, the patriarchal order and the feudal survivals that have had a long lease of life in the absence of a decisive rupture that could only be accomplished through a victorious democratic revolution, Indian fascism has also deeply penetrated the institutional mechanism of parliamentary democracy and formed an intricate nexus with India's crony capitalism. It also leverages the Indian state's strategic partnership with the US-Israel axis, the global attractions of the Indian market and India's resources and the growing presence of the Indian diaspora in the international arena. We should also take note of Hindutva's close ideological ties with Zionism and growing outreach among other far-right ideologies under the emerging international brand of national conservatism.

To build a powerful resistance to the escalating fascist onslaught, the communist movement will have to sharpen the edge of anti-caste and anti-patriarchal struggles alongside a sustained anti-corporate mobilisation of the working people. While there has never been an easy electoral escape from fascist forces entrenched in state power, every effort must be made to weaken and isolate the fascist camp in the electoral arena and rescue the Constitution and the Republic from their clutches. This of course calls for the fullest utilisation of the united front strategy, the broadest possible mobilisation of all forces opposed to the fascist regime, to combat the fascist campaign of hate, lies and violence and defend the rights and interests of the people.

We are now nearing the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Indian republic. It is remarkable that right at the time of adoption of the Constitution, its architects had forewarned us about the pitfalls that could obstruct and derail the journey of the republic. Some of the most insightful remarks were made by Dr. B R Ambedkar in his address in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November, 1949 on the eve of the adoption of the Constitution. It was Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee appointed by the Constituent Assembly, who warned us right then that "however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad (if) those who are called to work it happen to be a bad lot." Today, we are facing precisely such a juncture when the RSS, which was explicitly opposed to the Constitution and its core ideas and principles in the formative years, today controls the reins of state power, and the result of this paradox is there before all of us. We now have High Court judges who say majoritarianism is

law, Governors who take special interest in obstructing and toppling non-BJP state governments, and parliament sessions that are used as a slaughterhouse of dissent and debate only to pass dubious unconstitutional laws.

In the same address, Ambedkar had identified bhakti in politics, the cult of hero-worship, as "a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship" and had stressed the need to reinforce political democracy with social democracy. A year earlier while introducing the draft of the Constitution he had described democracy in India as "a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic" thereby posing the task of democratisation of the Indian social soil for the sustenance of the constitutional 'top dressing'.

It is also remarkable that the Constitution had upheld individual citizens, and not the much romanticised traditional village communities, as the constituents of the Republic and preferred the expression 'we, the people of India' in all their diversity as the collective democratic identity instead of entertaining the delusional idea that India had already become a nation. Ambedkar categorically considered caste as the biggest anti-nation impediment and emphasised the inseparable trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity as the foundation of social democracy and national cohesion. The Constitution was also alive to the perils of majoritarianism and overcentralisation and was careful to safeguard minority rights and federal interests from these fatal threats. And let us also remember the most categorical warning that Hindu Raj becoming a reality would be the greatest calamity for India and had to be prevented at any cost.

The communist movement today has to lead India out of this calamitous juncture. The calamity being perpetrated every day using the levers of state power will have to be resisted tooth and nail to rescue the beleaguered republic and fortify democracy on a stronger foundation. The communist movement will have to rise to the occasion and ensure a decisive defeat of fascism through all-round democratisation of the society and state.

Communists in India also have the responsibility of finding solutions to the unresolved challenges before the international communist movement. There are questions left behind by the collapse of the Soviet Union that are particularly relevant for communist parties in positions of governance whether in post-revolution situation or otherwise. In Soviet Union eventually the communist party got so cut off from the people and so completely immersed in governance and the bureaucratic apparatus of the state that after seven decades the entire structure eventually evaporated without any major military intervention from outside or within. Apart from economic stagnation and foreign policy distortions, clearly there was a great lack of internal democracy and dynamism leading to a massive loss of popular support and even legitimacy of the communist party's governing role. The erosion of the 'from the masses and to the masses' communication between the party and the people upsets the equilibrium between the people, party and the state. Communists in power in any set-up will have to be seen to be superior in terms of democracy, transparency and accountability in comparison to bourgeois dispensations. This is a major lesson that communists everywhere must learn from the Soviet debacle.



Socialist models everywhere have made a mark for themselves in terms of redistributive equity, alleviation of poverty and unemployment and basic improvements in conditions of life and work for the working people. But when it comes to processes of production, the use of machines and technology and its adverse implications in terms of environmental degradation and human alienation, there has been little to demarcate existing socialism from capitalism. This is another area where in today's conditions of climate crisis, environmental degradation and growing unemployment and redundancies caused by indiscriminate use of labour-displacing technologies, socialist models will have to stand out in qualitative contrast to the destructive and disastrous trajectories of capitalism.

To conclude, let me return to the compelling national context. As history would have it, over the last few decades the communist movement in post-independence India had branched into diverse streams and formations. Today in the face of the unprecedented crisis of our Republic and the constitutional rule of law, communists must come ever closer with the necessary sense of urgency. The greater the unity of the fighting ranks, the stronger will be the anti-fascist resistance and the brighter will be the future of India's democracy. Paraphrasing the Communist Manifesto, we can say we have nothing to lose but the fetters of fascism while the promises of freedom await to be redeemed. ■

## Call and Pledge on the 26th Memorial Day of Comrade Vinod Mishra

**I**mportant questions of history are always resolved on the streets, Comrade Vinod Mishra had reminded us in his last note to the Party Central Committee in December 1998. He had appealed to young communists to go for all-round initiatives and intensify the battle against the fascist threat which had already begun to raise its ugly head. A strong communist party firmly upholding the red banner of revolutionary Marxism, a powerful movement of the rural poor and all-round initiative against the saffron conspiracy - Comrade VM highlighted these three key challenges in his last note. Today as we observe the 26th death anniversary of Comrade VM, his words ring ever more true.

The Modi government has now been in power for more than a decade. The fascist agenda of the government has been considerably exposed and there is also a good degree of resistance building up on various fronts. Occasionally, the resistance has been successful in inflicting electoral setbacks to the fascist expedition, but as recent elections to Haryana and Maharashtra Assemblies showed, the fascists are desperate to hold on to power.

Clearly we will need more sustained and powerful people's upheavals to stop the fascist onslaught. The fascists draw their strength from communal hate and polarisation, caste and gender oppression and the fullest backing of corporate power. Our resistance to fascism will therefore have to acquire a sharper anti-communal, anti-caste, anti-patriarchal and anti-corporate edge.

Under Comrade VM's guidance the party had begun to build an extensive network of mass organisations and develop a range of united fronts in various arenas of struggle. Today in the context of the fascist threat, we are pursuing these policies much more widely than any other period in the past. Apart from mass organisations and campaign platforms for various classes, communities and occupational categories, we are now part of the all-India opposition coalition and effective electoral blocs in Bihar and Jharkhand. There are also some early signs of a broader Left unity taking shape in West Bengal.

This 26 December we are entering the centenary year of the Communist Party of India. Ironically, 2025 is also the centenary of the RSS. Hence we will be commemorating the CPI centenary as much to salute the glorious history and heritage of the communist movement as to focus on the contemporary challenges of defeating fascism and defending and extending the Constitutional commitment to a socialist, secular, sovereign democratic Indian republic to achieve genuine social transformation and human emancipation.

On the 26th death anniversary of Comrade VM, let us take the pledge to strengthen his beloved party in every way to meet today's challenges. Only a few months ago, the party got a big boost in Jharkhand with the merger of the Marxist Coordination Committee founded by Comrade AK Roy. The merger has given us much needed strength to defeat the BJP in Jharkhand and win two seats in the Jharkhand Assembly from the important Dhanbad-Bokaro working class belt. The CPI(ML) Central Committee extends warm revolutionary greetings to all comrades joining the movement and the party organisation at this historic juncture of the Indian republic. Let us work hard to take the CPI(ML) deep among the people across the length and breadth of our beloved country and make it more robust, vibrant and dynamic to carry forward the revolutionary march of modern India. That will be the best tribute we can pay to Comrade VM and all other departed leaders and martyrs of the CPI(ML) and the Indian communist movement. ■

- Central Committee, CPI(ML) (Liberation)



## *Celebrating the Centenary of Communist Movement in India*

# Uphold the Banner of Communism in the Struggle against Fascism

▲ ARINDAM SEN

**F**rom late nineteenth century onwards, India's national struggle against British imperialism had been quite responsive to international political currents. There is a lot of evidence to show that enlightened Indians were aware, though rather vaguely in most cases, of the Fabian and other streams of socialism (remember, for example, Vivekananda's remark: "I'm a socialist"). Again, from the minutes of a meeting of the General Council of Marx's First International held on August 15, 1871, we learn that some radical elements from Calcutta had written a letter to the International Working Men's Association (First International) asking for powers to start a section in India. Unfortunately, we know no more of details, except that in the said meeting the secretary was instructed to give a positive answer to the letter. Decades later, when Japan defeated Tsarist Russia in 1905, this victory of a tiny Asian country over what was considered a major European power greatly encouraged the Indian struggle. The Russian revolution of 1905 inspired leaders like Tilak and a few revolutionary patriots like Hemchandra Kanungo (the latter was among the first in India to get attracted to Marxism). In March 1912 Har Dayal Mathur, then in the USA, became the first Indian to write a biography of Karl Marx in the *Modern Review*, though he clarified that he was no Marxist. Towards the end of the year S Ramakrishna Pillai

published the first biography of Marx in an Indian language, ( Malayalam) probably on the basis of the Har Dayal article. In October 1916, Ambalal Patel wrote an article on Karl Marx in a Gujarati magazine.

The progressive international impact, however, rose to a new plane after 1914. The First World War, arising out of intensified inter-imperialist contradiction for redistribution of limited world resources, markets and territories, snapped the global chain of imperialism at its weakest link and the new Soviet state was born in 1917. Across the earth there was a tremendous upsurge in struggles against imperialism and its lackeys. For peoples fighting for emancipation from colonial bondage, the Russian revolution and its leader Lenin emerged as a great source of inspiration. Founded in March 1919, the Comintern provided further impetus to the spread of communist ideals across national and continental frontiers and a number of communist parties came up in the early 1920s — among them those of China, Indonesia and India.

### **Russian Revolution and the Indian response**

The soil of India was thus growing fertile for the growth of communism. The Raj sensed this accurately and early enough, as the following note prepared by the Government of India, Foreign Department, in August 1920 (that is, a good five

years before the actual founding of the CPI) shows:

"Now there is no doubt that at present the lower classes in India, both in the towns and in the rural areas, are going through a very hard time. ... This growing atmosphere of social unrest opens the door to Bolshevik propaganda ... In the first place, it will be directed against the British Government, for as long as the British Government exists, the present social structure will also exist.

... the embarrassment and overthrow of British rule is only the first step, after that will come the real Bolshevik programme of upsetting the wealthy, the educated, the well born, and placing in a position of mastery the lowest classes of the population..." (Foreign Department, Secret-Internal, August 1920, Nos. 8-26. Cited in *Communist Movement in India* by K. N. Panikkar, pp 222-24).

This was a fairly realistic observation. *Dainik Basumati*, then a leading nationalist daily of Calcutta, commented just ten days after Bolshevik power was established in Russia: "The downfall of Tsardom has ushered in the age of destruction of alien bureaucracy in India too".

"Our hour is approaching, India too shall be free. But sons of India must stand up for right and justice, as the Russians did" — spoke out the Home

Rule Leaguers in South India, as soon as they got the news of the great emancipation, in a pamphlet entitled *Lessons from Russia* (Madras, 1917).

And so on and so forth, exclaimed the exuberant Indian patriots, and this on the basis of the droplets of news that trickled through the British censorship net. The very first decrees and treaties of the Soviet Union (e.g., the unilateral renouncing of the imperial rights in China and other parts of Asia acquired under the Tsar; proclamation of the rights of nations to self-determination and its immediate implementation in Finland; and so on) electrified the people of India. The Soviet government on its part was also stretching out its hand of friendship in different ways to the radical nationalists fighting against imperialism, the common enemy.

It was in this atmosphere surcharged with a new hope, a new passion for liberation, that the most dynamic revolutionists of India got attracted first towards the new “Red” heroes and then towards Marxism/communism because, they were told, that was the great secret behind the Bolshevik miracle. They came basically from three backgrounds:

(a) Revolutionary patriots working from Germany (e.g., the Berlin group led by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya), Afghanistan (e.g., M Barkatullah of the “Provisional Government of Independent India” established in Kabul), USA (most notably Ghadrites like Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh who revived the movement in early 1920s) etc. and roving revolutionaries like MN Roy and Abani Mukherjee;

(b) National revolutionaries from the Pan-Islamic Khilafat movement and the Hirjat movement (involving those who went to Afghanistan and Turkey

during and after the First World War (e.g., Shaukat Usmani, Mohammad Ali Sepassi etc.); and

(c) Radical patriots -- working from within the Congress movement or without -- who, disillusioned and shocked at the sudden withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1921, turned to socialism and the working class movement in search of a new path. Among them were Dange and his associates in Bombay, Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta and Singaravelu in Madras, the Inquilab group of Lahore, and the Babbar Akali faction of the Akali movement.

The common urge that propelled these diverse forces was the liberation of the motherland. Herein lay the original impulse of communism in India. Of these three streams, the first two joined together in the Soviet Union to form a ‘Communist Party of India’ in Tashkent. However, being cut off from the internal dynamics of Indian society, this combination never developed beyond an emigre communist group. It was the third stream that arose out of the evolution of the Indian society itself and therefore became the real Communist Party of India.

MN Roy, the main leader of the ‘CPI’ founded in Tashkent on October 17, 1920, did try to build political bridges to India through journals, manifestoes, letters etc. and by sending emissaries and funds. In these efforts he was fully financed and politically assisted by the Comintern, on whose behalf he was acting (he was inducted into its leadership in 1921 itself). The emissaries and the funds were not of much help, but the Comintern reports and guidelines contained in magazines edited by Roy certainly was, notwithstanding the fact that many if not most copies

of these magazines were routinely intercepted by the police.

## The First Communist Groups in India

Almost simultaneously with but quite independently of the formation of a communist centre in Soviet Russia, the first communist elements and groups sprang up in India during 1921-22. These were:

(1) The Bombay group around Sripad Amrit Dange, who published his *Gandhi vs. Lenin* in mid-1921. Dange was then one among a group of student leaders just rusticated from Bombay’s Wilson College, which they had earlier boycotted as part of the non-cooperation movement. Based on very scanty information about Lenin and Russia available at the time and penned by a 21-year-old who was then just transforming himself, in his own words, from “Tilak’s *chela*” (meaning disciple) to “Lenin’s *chela*, the pamphlet is full of errors both in theory and in facts. But the importance of the book lies in its backdrop and the follow-up. It appeared in the course of a debate, among politicised students’ circles in Bombay and for that matter elsewhere too, as to what should be the correct path for India’s emancipation; and it remains the best available historical documentation of the very first phase in a generation’s ideological transformation. This is proved also by the fact that after the publication of *Gandhi vs. Lenin*, Dange and his friends engaged themselves in trade union activities and evolved into one of the earliest communist circles in India and began publishing *Socialist*, the first communist journal in India, from August 1922.

(2) The Calcutta group around Muzaffar Ahmad, a young man who did not participate in the

non-cooperation movement but published, for a few months in late 1920, a literary-cum-militant nationalist journal in Bengali named *Navyug* (New Age) together with the firebrand Bengali poet Nazrul Islam. Towards the end of 1921 Ahmad bought a few books by Lenin and on Marx from the first secret consignment of such books to Calcutta and from the next year started organising the workers in Metiaburuz and other industrial centres near Calcutta.

(3) The Madras group around Singaravelu M Chettiar, a middle-aged Congressman already active on the working class front when he embraced Marxism. He played an active role at the Gaya session of the Congress (end of December 1922) and founded the Labour Kishan Party of Hindustan in 1923.

(4) The Lahore group around Ghulam Hussain, who used to teach economics at a Peshawar college and was brought towards Marxism by his friend Mohammad Ali, one of the founder members of "CPI" at Tashkent, in 1922. After this he left the job, went to Lahore, started work in the Railway Workers' Union there and edited the Urdu paper *Inquilab*, only a few issues of which were published.

How come all these groups sprang up in literally the four corners of India just within one year, as if by some grand design? The fact is that they were totally unknown to each other and, barring Ghulam Hussain, of the activities of MN Roy or Comintern. Their development was conditioned by a peculiar combination of historical circumstances — of two internal factors and one external impulse: (i) the contradiction between Gandhian ideology and politics on

one hand and the revolutionary sweep of class struggle and national liberation movement on the other; (ii) the new stage in Indian working class movement both in quantitative and qualitative terms; and (iii) the international appeal of the October Revolution.

Among the three, the first was the most fundamental. The compromising character of the Congress and the fact that it was basically a party of the rich unconcerned with everyday problems of the working people was already known, but it was during the non-cooperation-Khilafat movement and thereafter that the said contradiction manifested itself most sharply. Numerous incidents — e.g., Gandhi's announcement in early 1921 that strikes "do not fall within the plan of non-violent non-cooperation", his urgent directive to stop the no tax campaign started by Congressmen in Guntur under pressure from below and so on — led to the emergence of three parallel critiques of Gandhism.

One was from within the bourgeois camp -- concerning the question of expediency, tactics and timing. CR Das and the senior Nehru felt, for instance, that the Congress should have accepted the British peace gestures during the visit of Prince of Wales in return for some constitutional gains and they were angry because Gandhi, after refusing all compromise at that opportune moment, later beat a retreat suddenly and without any benefit. Another was from the petty-bourgeois revolutionary-patriots, who either supported the non-cooperation-Khilafat movement or at least suspended their activities during this period but strove to return to the 'politics of the bomb' after the movement collapsed. The third critique was developed by communists who emerged mostly

from among Congress activists like Dange and based itself on the growing clash between the conservative bourgeois leadership and the militant popular forces. However, its beginnings bore the inevitable birth-marks: both the first communist pamphlet in India (*Gandhi vs. Lenin*) and the first communist speech at a Congress session (Gaya, 1922, by Singaravelu) accepted non-violence as an effective method in Indian conditions. In time the socialist critique would come into its own, but this could be achieved not simply by subjective theoretical exercises. An objective social force capable of completing this transformation was crucially needed.

And this was available in the second factor noted above: the working class movement. The working class in India had, by 1921-22, already established itself both as a front-ranking detachment of the national movement (though without a political programme of its own) and as a formidable fighter against the exploitation and injustice meted out to it as a class. Naturally, the new Marxists everywhere turned to work among this class and found there the social vehicle for communism. By this act they also took a crucial step forward in their ideological remoulding, differentiating themselves substantially and effectively from all shades of bourgeois and petty bourgeois critiques of Gandhism and thus started laying the real foundation of a communist movement. But for a certain level of development of the working class in India, all this would not have been possible. This necessary proletarian dimension, however, suffered from a basic weakness: the lack of serious work among the struggling peasantry. This weakness lingered on into the 1930s



and deprived the working class of its crucial mass ally — the toiling peasantry — and thereby disabled it to snatch the leadership of the national liberation movement from the bourgeoisie.

About the third factor, the important thing to note is this. The anti-imperialist appeal of the Bolshevik Revolution was welcomed by all working people and even by enlightened sections of the propertied classes, but its socio-political content and world-historic significance were grasped only by Marxists — the ideologues of the working class. While the responses of all others were emotional and superficial, only the working class acquired and assimilated from the land of Soviets its philosophy of life and proceeded to build the political party of its own in that light.

So, these are the three sources of the communist movement in India. They are closely interconnected and one cannot ignore any of these.

### **The First Communist Conference in India**

One of the many curious events in the history of communism in India was that the credit for organising the historic conference which united the scattered communist groups into one party — the CPI — goes to a person named Satyabhakt who left the party within days after foundation. This Satyabhakt was a former member of a patriotic-terrorist group in UP, and a disillusioned disciple of Gandhi who, after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement, got interested in Soviet Russia and communism. He set up an open “Indian Communist Party” in mid-1924 with a membership, according to his own claim, of 78 persons which grew to 150 by 1925. He felt emboldened to form

the party openly when in May 1924 the Public Prosecutor (PP) in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case (Satyabhakt’s name figured in the first list of thirteen accused in this case, but not in the second list of eight persons) made a statement to the effect that the accused was being prosecuted not because they held or propagated communist views, but because they conspired to overthrow the government. From this Satyabhakt inferred that a communist party which is open and above board and manifestly Indian, i.e., having no connection with Bolshevism or the Comintern, would not perhaps incur the wrath of the authorities.

The existing communist groups did not take this party seriously (nor did Cecil Kaye, the British intelligence chief, though Satyabhakt was closely watched), but when he announced the decision to organise what he called the “First Indian Communist Conference” in Kanpur late in 1925, they took notice and sat up. Already in jail there had been a discussion among them on the propriety or otherwise of holding an open conference to set up the Communist Party on an all-India basis utilising the above-mentioned statement of the PP in the Kanpur case. The idea was Dange’s, so the Bombay group (Dange himself was in jail) co-operated with Satyabhakt and participated wholeheartedly in the Kanpur Conference (25-28 December 1925). Ahmad was against the idea but, released from jail just three months before the conference on the ground of severe tuberculosis, he also attended. Delegates from other places were also present.

The conference was attended by 300 delegates according to the

February 1926 number of Kirti (a communist-sponsored Punjabi magazine, where young Bhagat Singh worked as deputy editor), though intelligence sources put the figure at 500 (probably an exaggeration aimed at overplaying the ‘communist menace’). The British communist MP Shapurji Saklatvala had sent a short message to the “Congress which I hope will be the beginning of a large and stable Communist movement in India”. It was read out at the first session, followed by the speech of the reception committee chairman Hasrat Mohani (who had moved the famous “Independence Resolution” at the Ahmedabad session of Congress in December 1921). Next came the presidential address by M Singaravelu.

The second session met in the evening of 26 December and adopted the resolutions placed before it by a resolutions committee comprising SV Ghatge, Satyabhakt, KN Joglekar (Bombay), JP Bagerhatta, S Hassan (Lahore) and Krishnaswamy (Madras). There was no debate in the conference, but earlier, in the committee itself, there was a sharp controversy. While all others, following the Comintern norm, were for naming the party as “Communist Party of India”, Satyabhakt smelt a Bolshevik flavour in it and stuck to the name of his own party. He was alone and therefore defeated, but within a few days he founded a new party and to stress his point more conspicuously, he named it as the “National Communist Party”!

To come back to the conference, the third session on the 27th adopted the Constitution and elected the Central Executive Committee. The CEC was to consist of 30 persons, but only 16 were elected, leaving the rest for co-option from different provinces.

The next day the CEC elected the office bearers. We reproduce below a slightly abridged version of the party's Press Communique.

### **“Communist Party of India: Aims and Objects**

“... The ultimate goal of the party will be the establishment of a workers' and peasants' republic in India. And the immediate object of the party shall be the securing of a living wage for the workers and peasants by means of nationalisation and municipalisation of public services; namely land, mines, factories, houses, telegraphs, telephones, railways and such other public utilities which require public ownership. The party shall, for the attainment of the above object, form labour and peasants' unions in urban and rural areas, enter district and taluk boards, municipalities and assemblies and by such other means and methods carry out the ideal and programme of the party with or without the cooperation of the existing political parties in the country.

“The party shall have a central executive of 30 members returned by provincial committees and a council of seven members to execute all emergency matters.

“The party shall consist of communists only who will pledge themselves to carry out its objects and no one who is a member of any communal organisation can be admitted as a member of this party.

“Every member shall pay eight annas annually as subscription

for his membership to the enrolling secretaries.

“The office of the central executive shall be in Bombay with comrades Janaki Prasad Bagerhatta and SV Ghate as general secretaries for the year. Maulana Azad Sobhani of Kanpur has been elected as its vice-president ... Comrade Krishnaswamy Ayyangar (Madras), S Satyabhakt (Kanpur), Radha Mohan Gokulji and Muzaffar Ahmad (Calcutta) and SD Hassan (Lahore) will be working as provincial secretaries to organise provincial committees in their respective provinces. The next meeting of the central executive will meet early in April to begin effective work and formulate a scheme of work for the year.”

After some initial hesitations, M N Roy on behalf of Comintern accepted the CEC elected at Kanpur as a basis for further work and put forward the following main suggestions or directives: (a) “the Communist Party of India in the process of formation” should immediately and formally affiliate itself with the Communist International (CI) and repudiate the statements of Satyabhakt, Singaravelu and Hasrat Mohani which gave an opposite impression; (b) “the CPI shall make a UF with the nationalist movement” on the basis of Roy's “Programme” placed before the Gaya Congress session; (c) “the foreign bureau” (meaning Roy and other Indian communists working abroad under CI auspices) to act as “the ideological centre” and “the organ through which the party's foreign relations will be maintained”; (d) a book shop should be opened and arrangements made for the receipt and distribution of the

Masses (a magazine brought out by Roy from abroad) via Pondicherry and Madras, and (e) there must be no “illusions” about “a legal communist party” — “We must be prepared for attack any moment and organise the party in such a way that an attack on legality will not destroy the party.”

Of these suggestions, the fourth was fully implemented and the first and fifth completely ignored. The suggested “united front with the national movement” would be attempted, but not on the basis of Roy's “Programme”. As regards the third suggestion on “foreign bureau” and “ideological centre”, *it was accepted with conditions which sought to ensure that the party in India will not be dictated by a foreign bureau, rather the latter must work in accordance with the party's decisions:*

“The Presidium [of the Central Executive or CE] with the sanction of the CE will maintain a foreign bureau as an ideological centre, composed of comrades who are not in a position to work inside the country. *The foreign bureau will be representative of the CE and will act as the organ through which the international relations of the party will be maintained. But it will not in any way work inconsistent with the party's program and resolutions.* The foreign bureau will have a regular office at a place of their convenience and will keep a constant touch with all the CPs and the Comintern and will give publicity to Indian affairs.”

Before we move on, a word on Satyabhakt would be in order. A journalist, he also used to sell imported communist literature, maintain contact with Hindustan Republican Association, and had links with workers in Kanpur. In his own

way, he sincerely sympathised with communism, but he was too narrowly nationalist (and perhaps afraid of the repression that even a presumed link with the Comintern would invite) to tolerate international connections. He was one of the fellow-travelers of the communist party. His post-conference “National Communist Party” remained confined to UP and become defunct by 1927.

## 26 December 1925: Party Foundation Day

Major weaknesses notwithstanding, it was this conference that adopted the first Party Constitution and elected the nucleus of an all-India leadership where all the existing communist circles were represented. This leadership or CEC (minus Satyabhakt, who resigned in February, 1926 and Bagerhatta who became aware of other comrades’ suspicions about him and resigned in mid-1927) met irregularly from time to time till the Meerut arrests (March 1929) and played a commendable role on the working class front and in organising the Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties during this period. Satyabhakt’s narrow nationalist attitude was defeated, and the CPI started its journey as a part of the international communist movement. So, the foundation of the party should be counted from the Kanpur conference and not from the Tashkent initiative, as indeed was decided by the Central Secretariat of the (undivided) CPI on 19 August, 1959. At the time there was no debate about this, at least in public.

After the CPI-CPI(M) split, however, a peculiar position was taken by Muzaffar Ahmad, who had sided with the CPI(M). In his book *Amar Jiban O Bharater Communist Party* (Myself and the Communist Party of India) published by National Book

Agency in 1969, he describes the Kanpur conference as a “tamasha” and declares the Tashkent formation as “the real date of the foundation of the CPI”. His main logic is that the CPI formed in Tashkent was affiliated to the Comintern and the CPI established in Kanpur was not. Ahmad thus takes international recognition as the sole criterion in determining when and whether a communist party comes into existence, and disregards all other factors like organic links with the mass movements in the country concerned. And on this point also his argument is far from perfect, for as we have seen before, the CPI at Tashkent was indeed registered with the Comintern (with its Turkestan Bureau to be more precise), but the Comintern was certainly not so stupid as to recognise the motley group as a full-fledged party.

However, the question remains as to why did the CPI formed in Kanpur not appeal for affiliation with the Comintern? Ahmad, who was elected to the CEC in the Kanpur conference, explains this before the CPI-CPI(M) split in this way: “... as the party members did not consider the membership sufficient, so they did not apply for the party being affiliated to the CI. All the same, the CI considered the CPI as a part of itself.” Ahmad, thus, did not consider non-affiliation as a great crime at that time, as he did after the split. In fact, just like his other comrades he took the Kanpur decisions in all seriousness and made a fervent appeal to all “Communists in Bengal” to “come together and build the party” in a statement published in Langanal on 21 January, 1926.

Without wasting time in explaining Ahmad’s self-contradiction, let us record here our own views on this matter. First, the absence of formal

recognition did not prevent the CPI founded in Kanpur, either during the 1920s or later, from making reports to and seeking advice from the Comintern, which on its part guided, assisted and issued directives to it just as it did in relation to other affiliated parties. For all practical purposes, therefore, the CPI acted very much as a part of the international communist movement. May be a formal affiliation with the Comintern was avoided for the sake of legality, but that does not render this party and its founding conference less bona fide or legitimate than the still-born Tashkent group.

Second, we regard the entire historical period between the Bolshevik revolution and the second world war as the formative years of the CPI, in the sense that a more or less full-fledged communist party actually developed only in the second half of 1930s after overcoming major ideological-political problems and reorganisation of the leadership structure. It is in this overall historical context that we take 26 December 1925, when representatives of all the active communist circles of the country met together and adopted the resolutions founding the all-India party, as the foundation of the CPI. If the October Revolution ushered in a great new stage in national liberation struggles worldwide, for India this general advance was concretely realised — for the first time and therefore in an embryonic form — through this conference. Ideologically this meant a historic leap from petty bourgeois revolutionism to proletarian revolutionism guided by Marxism-Leninism and in terms of organization, laid the foundation for building the Communist Party in India. ■



# Ayodhya 1992 to Sambhal 2024: The Escalating Sanghi Assault on India's Constitution

**D**ecember 6, 2024 marks 32 years of the tearing down of the Babri Masjid by a Hindutva mob cheered on by top BJP leaders, becoming that one defining moment of communal fascism in the country. This demolition took place despite the assurance to the National Integration Council by Kalyan Singh, the then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, that his government will “hold itself fully responsible for the protection of the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid structures”. What makes the demolition even more egregious is that this undertaking was incorporated into an order of the Supreme Court on 15th November 1991, in the matters challenging two notifications dated 7th October and 10th October, 1991 under which certain property in Faizabad close to Ram janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid Complex had been notified for acquisition for the purpose of development of pilgrimage and providing amenities to them at Ayodhya.

While Kalyan Singh and the BJP government in UP was held in contempt by the Supreme Court in October 1994 for failing to keep its promise and handed a token punishment of one day imprisonment and a fine of Rs.2000, the others including LK Advani, Uma Bharti, Murli Manohar Joshi and scores of others who mobilised the mob to demolish Babri Masjid and were caught on camera gleefully celebrating the demolition, were acquitted by the CBI Court in September 2020. This verdict, came after the Supreme Court Constitution

Bench verdict effectively validated the post-demolition circumstances by awarding the ownership of the ‘disputed land’ to the very people who had demolished the mosque even after terming the act of demolition as an egregious violation of law. While the demolishers got what they wanted, the seekers of justice got a ‘compensatory’ offer of a separate plot of five acres for the construction of a mosque.

The Constitution Bench while passing its judgment specifically referred to the Places of Worship Act, 1991, which has been enacted by Parliament to serve two purposes. First, it prohibits the conversion of any place of worship. Second, it imposes a positive obligation to maintain the religious character of every place of worship as it existed on 15th August 1947. The Constitution Bench held that in providing a guarantee for the preservation of the religious character of places of public worship, “Parliament determined that independence from colonial rule furnishes a constitutional basis for healing the injustices of the past by providing the confidence to every religious community that their places of worship will be preserved and that their character will not be altered”. The only exception carved out by this statute, as per the Constitution Bench, is a suit, appeal or proceeding instituted on the ground that the conversion of the religious character of a place of worship had taken place after 15th August 1947 and such an action was pending at the commencement of the Places of Worship Act.

It was said then that with Ayodhya dispute and the Places of Worship Act, 1991 coming into force communal harmony and reconciliation would be the way forward. This ignored the oft repeated slogan of the Sangh brigade that, ‘Ayodhya sirf ek jhanki hai, Kashi Mathura baki hai’ (Ayodhya is only a glimpse of what will happen in Kashi and Mathura). Going beyond, the Sangh brigade has deployed their two-pronged strategy combining litigations with aggressive communal mobilisation on the ground to target scores of mosques including Gyanvapi mosque, Sambhal Mosque and even Ajmer Sharief Dargah. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has a list of around 3000 Mosques that they eventually want to convert and one can only expect a plethora of civil suits and targeted communal violence as the Sangh brigade seeks to rewrite history and paint the whole of India with a saffron brush.

This only confirms that there can be no reconciliation with the Sangh brigade’s cultural aggression, decimation of India’s historical and cultural diversity and its long-cherished dream of converting India into a saffron monolith. From the renaming of cities of roads to the re-writing of history books, the Sangh seeks to erase all signs of Muslimness in public life.

One expects the judiciary to apply the 1991 Act, which is a legislative device designed to protect the secular features of the Indian polity. However, its response is unsurprising given the judiciary has become amenable to capture by theocratic

judges espousing Hindutva ideology and seeking the source of law in religious texts rather than the Constitution. Jst Chandrachud, former Chief Justice of India, who was part of the bench that wrote the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi judgment, confessed, to the thrill of Hindutva politicians, that he prayed to god for a solution of the case! In an order that has surprised most, revealing the depths to which expectations from the judiciary has dropped, the Supreme Court, while orally expressing its reservations on the Trial Court ordering survey, asked the Sambhal Trial Court not to proceed with the case till the petition of the Masjid Committee was listed before the Allahabad High Court.

The events around Sambhal Mosque repeat the same modus operandi of the Sangh Brigade to target an old Mosque with the claim that it was built over a demolished temple, and a Trial Court judge ignores the 1991 Act, and orders a survey, which is carried out within hours amidst chants of Jai Shri Ram. Muslims, bitter at such injustice, respond through protests, which is met with disproportionate force in the form of lathi charge and firing, at the end of which 5 young Muslim men are dead. The killings are sought to be justified as a consequence of police force to bring under control protesting Muslims; however that such killings are reserved for Muslims becomes apparent when contrasted with the police response to repeated violence and lawlessness of Hindutva mobs or even Kanwriyas who went to the extent of pelting stones on a school bus with school-going children inside.

Meanwhile Hindutva forces have developed another front against Muslim religious structures. In Uttarakhand, the bogey of "land jihad" has been raised to attack Mosques claiming that these have been built illegally. Earlier this year, in October, the Sanyukt Hindu Sangathan protest for the demolition of a Mosque on private land in Uttarkashi owned by a Muslim, turned violent resulting in injuries to several policemen. Not a shot was fired.

December 6, 2024 also marks the 68th death anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, who had warned: "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country". The disaster Babasaheb Ambedkar warned about is staring us in the face; the challenge is to rescue India from its ravages and to harness our collective determination and strength against this communal fascist onslaught.



## Private Sector Profits Soar, Workers' Wages Stagnate

▲ MADHURIMA

A recent FICCI-Quess report highlights a glaring dichotomy within the Indian economy: while private sector profits have skyrocketed, employee wages have stagnated or even declined. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), which describes itself as the voice of Indian business and industry, partnered with Quess Corp, a business service provider, to present these findings. The report's origin is worth noting, as it frames the issues through the lens of the corporates.

The data paints a stark picture. Between 2019 and 2023, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of wages across six sectors ranged from a meagre 0.8% in the engineering, manufacturing, process, and infrastructure (EMPI) sectors to 5.4% in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. Other sectors fared similarly: 2.8% in BFSI (banking, financial services, and insurance), 3.7% in retail, 4% in IT, and 4.2% in logistics. Meanwhile, retail inflation for the same period rose by 4.8%, 6.2%, 5.5%, 6.7%, and 5.4% in successive years. This means that for many workers, wage increases did not even keep pace with inflation, effectively reducing their purchasing power.

*The stagnation or decline in real wages for the majority, contrasted with the exorbitant growth in profits for corporate owners, has fuelled a surge in inequality across the country—a reality highlighted by many.*

To make this clearer, consider the hypothetical case of Narendra, an employee in the infrastructure industry. If his wage in 2019 was Rs. 100, it rose to only Rs. 100.8 in 2020. Adjusting for the 4.8% inflation that year, his real wage would fall to Rs. 96. In contrast, Amit, working in the consumer goods sector with a 2019 wage of Rs. 100, saw his wage rise to Rs. 105.4 by 2020. After accounting for inflation, Amit's real wage was just Rs. 100.6—a mere Rs. 0.60 gain.

Contrast this with the corporate sector's soaring profits, which grew fourfold between 2019 and 2023. If a company earned Rs. 100 in profits in 2019, it made Rs. 400 in 2023. For employees like Narendra, whose real wage fell, this disparity underscores a troubling trend: the wealth generated by corporations is being concentrated at the top while workers struggle to maintain their standard of living.

Corporate giants like Ambani and Adani continue to amass wealth, while workers in their companies see diminishing returns on their labour. As essential goods become increasingly expensive, families are struggling to balance their budgets. This is not a new phenomenon—we have been raising these concerns for years. Yet, it is curious why business leaders and policymakers, including Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran, are now urging the corporate sector to act.

The answer lies in the fact that consumer spending drives corporate revenues. Salaries enable people to purchase goods and services—be it cars, vacations, or kitchen appliances. If wages fail to outpace inflation, discretionary spending shrinks. For instance, Narendra may abandon plans to buy a car, and Amit might cancel a family vacation. A drop in consumer demand leads to unsold goods, shrinking corporate profits. This, in turn, threatens the cycle of profit growth and the political funding that corporations provide to the ruling BJP. Declining wages, therefore, pose a dual threat: to corporate profitability and to the political machinery that relies on it.

Yet, no one appears genuinely concerned about the struggles

of ordinary people. These figures represent the formal sector, where conditions, though dire, are still better than in the precarious informal economy. Public funding for health and education has been consistently eroded, pushing families toward costly private providers. Welfare schemes have also seen significant cuts, leaving many without a safety net.

In sum, the picture for India's working population is bleak. While corporate profits soar, wages stagnate, public services falter, and basic necessities become harder to afford. The system is pushing workers to the brink. The BJP government, to profit generation for its cronies, is further changing labour laws, cutting down corporate tax. Policies are being made to benefit the corporate sector and to the detriment of the common people.

The stagnation or decline in real wages for the majority, contrasted with the exorbitant growth in profits for corporate owners, has fuelled a surge in inequality across the country—a reality highlighted by many. According to Oxfam International, a staggering 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1% of the population, while the bottom half saw their wealth rise by a mere 1%. Shockingly, rising healthcare costs are driving two people into poverty every two seconds! For someone working on minimum wage in rural India, it would take an unimaginable 941 years to earn what the highest-paid executive at a leading garment company makes in a single year.

Earlier this year, the World Inequality Lab reported that income inequality in India today

surpasses even the levels seen during the British regime! Yet, when questioned about this alarming trend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly responded: "So should everyone be poor?" Such a response underscores the shocking insensitivity and apathy of the government toward the working class. The policies of the BJP government have been clear from the outset: prioritise filling the coffers of capitalists, even if it means leaving the poor to struggle for their very survival.

These figures only scrape the surface of the grim reality faced daily by millions of Indians striving for a dignified life. Basic necessities—dignified housing, access to clean water and toilets, nutritious food, affordable education, and healthcare—remain a distant dream for the majority. While Narendra Modi is busy defending 'wealth creators' like Adani and Ambani, the people of India are consumed with the fight for survival. The government's fixation on 'start-ups' rings hollow when it cannot even guarantee proper employment for the youth. Families are increasingly reliant on loans to meet essential needs, and with debts piling up, jobs scarce, and incomes dwindling, the future appears relentlessly grim.

The demands for dignified employment, affordable housing, accessible healthcare and education, increased corporate taxes, and greater government spending on public goods must take centre stage in our politics. The priority for a just and equitable future is clear: ousting the RSS-BJP government, which has worked tirelessly for crony capitalists. ■



# European Colonisation and Noble Institutions

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The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economics, commonly known as the Nobel prize in economics went to Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (AJR henceforth). Nobel prizes lend a certain credibility and normalisation to the ideas of the awardees. One of their papers which has become extremely influential is *The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation* published in 2001 in which they argue that countries that perform better today are where European colonisers found it easier to settle. Using European mortality rates they show that wherever Europeans found it easy to settle (i.e. they faced lower mortality rates), they set up 'good' institutions which help those countries perform better even today. Those countries in which they faced higher mortality rates, they set up extractive states and institutions and those continue to have low per capita incomes even today. Paradoxically, this year's prize comes at a time when the brutality of imperialism is in full display with widespread destruction of lives and livelihoods in the global south, especially in west Asia. This destructive feature bears a continuity with old style colonialism and much of the horrors of settler colonialism remain true for many parts of the globe, e.g. the ongoing genocide in Palestine and west Asia unleashed by settler colonialists in Israel. It is obvious that developed countries and underdeveloped ones are very much impacted by the colonial past – one set of countries developed by colonising the others. But AJR don't

state this, what they do is to create a false dichotomy of good colonial institutions as opposed to extractive ones.

There are three contestable premises on which AJR's basic argument rests. The first one is that countries that do well in terms of developmental indicators are those where colonisers found it feasible to 'settle' as opposed to where the feasibility of settling was far more challenging. So countries that the Europeans found conducive for settling (measured by their mortality rates), they invested in building good institutions because they found it in their long-term interests to settle and make the settlement resemble their Europe. So AJR show statistically that the feasibility of settlements can be measured by colonisers mortality rates – so wherever this was less, they settled well. Also in measuring mortality rates, they use disease deaths as their mainstay explanation. Thus, the settlements where colonialists encountered disease were unfeasible or unfit for their long-time settlement and hence they were more extractive in those countries. This is a fallacious argument both in terms of the method and the claim. Purely, in terms of statistics, incidence of deaths could be higher due to wars and violent conflicts and not just disease deaths. Their feasibility of settlements is measured by colonisers mortality rates and explained largely as disease deaths – so wherever this was less, they settled well. This feasibility argument could be flipped if one

looks at anti-colonial resistance as an indicator instead of disease deaths – high mortalities could be because of resistance battles and wars fought by the colonised subjects and not disease. The theoretical leap that they then take is to differentiate between good and extractive colonialism. They give Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States as examples of good as opposed to Congo which was extractive. What this cleverly hides is the fact that in a place like United States, there was a near total genocide on the indigenous population inflicted by the white settler colonialists.

Coming to their next premise, the better performing states were those where colonisation policies were 'non-extractive'. This better performance they broadly trace to institutional structures that were put in place by colonialism. In simpler terms, their central claim is that well defined private property rights and good institutions were a result of colonialism. In short, the preconditions of a well-defined private property rights for capitalist accumulation were sown by colonialism, thus clearing the way for conducive capitalist development in post-colonial periods. This conveniently makes the colonial past benign and in fact makes the performance of post-colonial societies a function of how good colonial institutions were. The argument that there were different types of colonisation policies, and they can be differentiated between those that can be clubbed as being

extractive states vis -a-vis the term that they borrow from the historian Alfred Crosby “Neo-europes” (i.e. non-extractive states with well-defined property rights and good institutions) is even more baffling. Neo-Europe betrays a deep seated Eurocentricity of terminology by making an almost obvious natural reference to developed Europe by default. This hides the preliminary fact that colonisation is by definition taking over someone else’s land by force, much like denying primitive accumulation as the birthing moment of capitalism. This leads to their third premise –persistence of colonial state and institutions post-independence have led to better performance.

This premise is one sided because it paints private property rights and capitalist institutions as the foundation for better performance. In other words, better capitalist principles/ institutions lead to better post-colonial performance. This conveniently invisibilises the decolonisation articulation which most ex-colonies had made the basis of their national liberation - anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism. Thus by focusing on good institutions of private property and claiming these to be the basis for better performance what they are in fact arguing is for the demise of the decolonisation agenda. They betray this bias by the examples they give – West and East Germany and North and South Korea. The Institutional school’s mask slips away by trying to run down socialist experiments by trying to establish that capitalist democracies like West Germany and South Korea have done better because of good institutions. Convenient indeed, since both South Korea and West Germany are stellar examples of being squarely within the imperialist camp. One wonders where in this scheme would South Africa fit? Afterall, this is where the colonialists found feasibility in settling, setting up and running an apartheid state (read good institutions) for the longest possible duration and leaving the country and its people in utter devastation due to its extractive accumulation process. White-washing European colonisation and painting capitalist institutions as good institutions is the ideological core of the Institutional school. And this obfuscation is obviously noble! ■

## Looking back The Remarkable 75 years of the Constitution of India

▲ ARINDAM SEN

**W**ith the Constitution of India coming into force on the 26th day of January 75 years ago, our country became an independent sovereign republic. For all of us, it is a red- letter day to celebrate. But at the same time, it is also a day to look back on the history of the grand document: how it was actually drafted, what social and political forces impacted the process, how it has survived so far through more than 125 amendments (including a big bunch of major amendments passed in 1976) and also through administrative interference in the working of the Constitution, which dealt mortal blows to many of its basic ideals and features.

### A Pleasant Surprise: Ambedkar at the head of Drafting Committee

The story of the Constitution of India is largely a story of Babasaheb Ambedkar -- so decisive was his role in preparing the momentous document we the people of India gave ourselves on 25 November 1949. And the story begins with the utterly unexpected entry of the harshest critic of the Congress into the Congress bastion of Constituent Assembly (CA) and then the Drafting Committee (DC) followed by his appointment to the most crucial post of the chairman of the DC.

All this was made possible by two individuals. The first was Jogendranath Mandal, a progressive *Namasudra* lawyer and MLC from Barisal district (now in Bangladesh) associated with both Ambedkar’s Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and the Muslim league. SCF did not have the required number of members in Bombay or any other provincial Legislative Assemblies to send him to the CA. Mandal invited Ambedkar to contest the CA election from the Jessore-Khulna constituency in eastern Bengal. With the support of Congress MLC Gyananath Bishwas, he mobilized the required number of MLCs, mostly from *Namasudra* and *Adivasi* backgrounds, to get Ambedkar elected from Bengal.

The second was the Congress patriarch M K Gandhi. He prevailed upon die-hard opponents of Ambedkar such as Sardar Patel that in the new post-independence situation, old feuds should be left behind and Ambedkar’s outstanding flair should be used to give the constitution a brilliance that the world will appreciate. This was indeed a strategic masterstroke: by accommodating Ambedkar, the party in power could kill at least two birds with one stone. It would get a major facelift by demonstrating that

it was broadminded enough to promote a known adversary to the top post in an assembly charged with the responsibility of charting the future course of the nation. Second, Ambedkar's credentials as a staunch fighter for the poor's cause would easily earn the trust of the lower strata in the emerging state of India.

Ambedkar was smart enough to understand that in discharging the great responsibility, his hands will not be free. Yet he gladly accepted the offer because this was the last and only practicable option for him to try and influence the political course of India. The struggle for laying the foundation of a thoroughly democratic, broadly egalitarian and as-far-as-possible humanitarian state began in an arena closely guarded by his political opponents.

*"I came into the Constituent Assembly with no greater aspiration than to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes. I had not the remotest idea that I would be called upon to undertake more responsible functions. I was therefore greatly surprised when the Assembly elected me to the Drafting Committee. I was more than surprised when the Drafting Committee elected me to be its Chairman. ... I am grateful to the Constituent Assembly and the Drafting Committee for reposing in me so much trust and confidence and to have chosen me as their instrument and given me this opportunity of serving the country. (Cheers) ..."*

**- Dr. Ambedkar's address to the Constituent Assembly, 25 November 1949**

## Under Watchful Eyes

Was the DC free even to prepare the revised draft as it thought best? Not at all. Actually it did not author any original draft. *It was tasked to 'scrutinize' a draft already prepared by Sir Benegal Narsing Rau*<sup>1</sup>, an eminent jurist who had been appointed as the advisor to DC. Every such revision (of the first draft prepared by Rau) had to be sent to the relevant ministry, and to the Congress Parliamentary Party headed by the quadrumvirate of Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Azad for rigorous checking. The two-tier checking and consultation (when required) took much time and Ambedkar submitted a revised Draft Constitution to Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, on 21 February 1948 (the DC was formed on August 29, 1947). The CA on its part spent even more time on debates and finalization, and adopted the Constitution on 25 November 1949.

Muhammad Saadulla, a member of the DC, gives us a vivid account of how the DC functioned:

"I remember that many sections of our Draft Constitution had to be recast as many as seven times. A draft section is prepared according to the best in each of the members of the Drafting Committee. It is scrutinised by the particular Ministerial department of Government. They criticise it and a fresh draft is made to meet their criticism or requirements. Then it is

considered by the biggest bloc, the majority party in the House—I refer to the Congress Parliamentary Party, who alone can give the imprimatur of adoption in this House: and sometimes we found that they made their own recommendations which had to be put into the proper legal and constitutional shape by the members of the Drafting Committee."

From Saadulla's account it is clear that the DC was not, in his words, a "free agency". It was "handicapped by various methods and circumstances from the very start"<sup>2</sup>.

The behind-the-scene control over Constitution-making thus shows that Ambedkar was not far from the truth when he said, during a discussion on the role and power of the governor in the Rajya Sabha on 2 September 1953, that he was "used as a hack". He went on to say, "What I was asked to do, I did much against my will. . . . I will be the first to burn it down". At this point someone quipped, 'But you defended it' and Ambedkar shot back saying, 'We lawyers defend many things...'<sup>3</sup>

## Making the Best of a Bad Bargain

In the first draft the DC received from Mr. Rau, about three-fourths of the Constitution, mainly dealing with *administrative provisions*, was taken directly from the Government of India Act, 1935. Apart from the interventions by the Congress leadership, this was also responsible

[1] In his 25th November, 1949 speech to the CA, Ambedkar declared that the credit for authoring the Constitution belongs not him but to Mr. Rau.

[2] *Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly*, BAWs, Vol. 13, 1994, p. 1174.

[3] Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* vol. 15 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), pp. 860, 862. From the last part of his comment, one gathers that he was bound by his brief (which refers to prewritten a summary of the legal position a lawyer needs to present in court on behalf of his client) and often could not act or speak as he would like to. In fact a comparative study of Ambedkar's 1947 document *States and Minorities*-- which reads like a mini-constitution -- and the draft constitution he presented to the CA would reveal that in the latter instance he did not press for many of his original positions such as State Socialism (which he considered appropriate and necessary in the concrete conditions of India) because he knew that such an attempt would be only a waste of time.

for the many *limitations* of the Constitution or, one might say, for many provisions that one would not expect from Ambedkar. If this was in a way normal, given that it was after all a bourgeois constitution in the making, what was really extraordinary and remarkable was the fact that even in the prevalent communal tension and riots and in the face of aggressive RSS campaign for formatting independent India in a Hindu mould, the CA boldly resisted veiled attempts at diluting India's secular character highlighted in the draft under consideration. During debates in the CA there was no open call for a Hindu Raj, but a few proposals like depicting India as "a religious country", and highlighting the state's duty of imparting "spiritual training" to citizens, did come up. Ambedkar along with some other members thoroughly defeated such proposals and the Congress leadership supported this stance. So we got a Constitution that firmly stands by the principle and practice of secularism. The source of this strong commitment was none other than the glorious legacy of our protracted freedom struggle, unitedly fought and won by Hindus, Muslims and other communities, of which the Constitution is a political product.

Combined with the strong secular overtone, the independence movement was also marked by a vibrant Left imprint. The communist movement and the transition of Bhagat Singh and his comrades from revolutionary nationalism to communism, the activities of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and its alliance with the CPI, the Kishan Sabha movement under the leadership of Sahajanand Saraswati, even Ambedkar's tryst with workers' movement under the banner of Independent Labour Party -- all these served to make the

demands of peasants and workers an inalienable part of the national movement. The Constitution, evolving out of this movement, could not but endorse these concerns.

Finally, it was Ambedkar who, drawing upon his deep knowledge of legal and constitutional matters, enormous intellectual prowess, skill of persuasion and sincere commitment to full-blown democracy, led his team to insert into the golden book of Indian Republic sparkling ideals and provisions like the Liberty-Equality-Fraternity trinity, the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, the principles of federation and division of power among the three wings of the state, independent judiciary, affirmative actions like reservation and so on -- which, together, made the constitution the Indian people's most potent weapon in the struggle against injustice, discrimination, exploitation and oppression by private actors and the state.

### **Beyond the Constituent Assembly<sup>4</sup>**

It is well-known that there were ninety-three representatives of the princely states worked in the CA. But it is rarely noted that parallel to the constitution-making process in the CA, more than sixty princely states also wrote their *own constitutions* before or just after India achieved independence and that this also should be counted as a *part of the history of the Constitution of India*.

A day before India's independence day, *His Highness the Rajadhiraj Sahib* of Shahpura, a small state in what is now Rajasthan, gave assent to his state's new constitution. It granted the people of Shahpura responsible government based on universal adult franchise and declared the ruling prince as

constitutional head of state, with all his executive, legislative and judicial powers to be exercised through the State Council, its Assembly and the courts respectively. In striking similarity with the yet-to-be-drafted Constitution of India, the constitution of Shahpura contained a section entitled 'Fundamental Rights including General Directions of State Policy'. The very next day -- on 15 August -- the prince signed the instrument of accession to the Dominion of India in the three areas of defence, external affairs and communications. Next month, the post of *dewan* (chief administrator) was abolished and an interim government headed by a prime minister was formed.

Many other princely states such as Aundh, Banswara, Baroda, Benares, Berar, Bhavnagar, Bhopal, Bikaner, Gwalior, Indore, Jaipur, Jammu and Kashmir, Rewa, Tehri-Garhwal, Udaipur etc. followed more or less the same course.<sup>5</sup> The ground work had been done at the 'Princes' Meeting' held as early as on 29 January 1947, even before the DC was formed. A resolution passed at the meeting declared that (a) the entry of the States into the Union of India shall be on no other basis than that of negotiation, and the final decision shall rest with each State, and (b) the Constitution of each State, its territorial integrity, and the succession of its reigning dynasty in accordance with the custom, law and usage of the State, shall not be interfered with by the Union. The meeting was preceded, in most states, by some form of dialogue between the respective ruler and his subjects, with both sides bargaining for securing their own interests in the emerging political set-up. Thus the subjects and rulers of non-British India also played an indirect but vital role even in the *preparatory stage* of the constitution-making process,

[4] This section draws heavily on Rohit De, *Assembling India's Constitution: Towards a New History* in *Past & Present*, no. 263 (May 2024)

[5] However, Hyderabad and Kashmir, along with Junagad, did not accede to the Dominion of India on 15 August 1947.



thereby adding to the vitality and authenticity of the Constitution that was finally adopted.

Apart from the princely states, numerous tribal groups also put forward their own demands, e.g., asking for tribal-majority provinces where their 'customary law [would be] supreme', or demanding 'rights of territorial unity and solidarity and self-determination' within a province. An interesting example would be the 'Memorandum on the Adivasis of Jharkhand, Demanding Separation from Bihar on a Constitutional Basis, Requesting Final Decision before June 1948'. The demand was not immediately met, but it continued to agitate the minds of Adivasis of the region, who ultimately achieved it in the year 2000.

Also notable in this connection is the Naga demand for their own constitution and flag. This was not entertained in the Constitution adopted in 1949, but remained a basis of political struggle and negotiations until the Indian government was forced to *consider* it as part of a peace agreement with Naga groups in August 2015; to this day it is still a crucial bargaining point.

## Onslaughts on the People and the Constitution

The Constitution we the people of India gave ourselves was a new social contract for a new India. We saw in it the promise and prospect of a new dawn. But as years and decades passed by, we woke up to a bitter truth. We realised that Ambedkar had got it right: the constitution is only as good as the people who 'work' it. Those who sat on the seat of power in the name

of the Constitution, went on killing its body and soul with a thousand cuts. And now under Modi, social justice remains elusive, as Dalits, Adivasis, women and marginalised groups face systemic discrimination and violence. Liberty is increasingly compromised, as restrictions on freedom of expression and the press intensify. Communal polarisation, religious intolerance and exclusionary rhetoric lead to growing alienation of religious minorities, particularly Muslims. Fraternity looks like a fleeting will-o'-the-wisp, as state-sponsored Sanghi terror, hate speech, fake news, pre-planned pogroms grip the country.

In a democracy, dissent is a fundamental right, yet activists, journalists and academics are routinely targeted with sedition and UAPA charges just for telling the truth to power. Manipulation of elections, disruption of parliament, passage of key legislations with minimal debates and frequent resort to the ordinance route, subversion of rule of law by encounter killings, bulldozer 'justice', misuse of central agencies and saffronisation of vital institutions like the Election Commission, the Army, cultural and educational institutions and even the judiciary – there is really no end to the list of brazen violations of the Constitutional mandate.

## The Neoliberal Offensive

Our Constitution prioritises economic justice for humans over GDP figures. It counts equality as one of the founding principles of the republic of India. Article 38(2) of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) insists that the state shall strive to minimise the inequalities of income and eliminate inequalities in status,

facilities and opportunities. Further, Article 39(c) emphasises that the economic system ought not to result in a concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. And yet, continuing attacks on livelihood issues like food, shelter, health, education, income etc., and policy-induced escalating inequality, are rarely recognised as *violations of the constitutional mandate*. So let us examine the matter in some detail.

The rising inequality in India was graphically captured by Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty from the Paris School of Economics documented in their 2019 work, "Indian Income Inequality, 1922-2015: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?" It shows that in the 1930s the top 1% of earners had a share of nearly 21% of total income. After Independence, however, this gap came down to a level where, in the 1980s, the top 1% earners had a share of no more than 6% of the total income. The thing is that the neoliberal reforms in the 1990s led to a gradual withdrawal of the interventionist welfare state and unshackled market forces, while prioritising and facilitating foreign and domestic private capital investment. As a result, by 2014-15 the top 1% income earners were eating up as much as 22% of the total income, pushing India back to an inequality situation worse than what prevailed in the pre-Independence period.<sup>6</sup>

The chief beneficiary of this skyrocketing inequality has been, as expected, the upper castes. A recent document<sup>7</sup> from the World Inequality Lab at the Paris School of Economics clearly demonstrates this overlap between economic inequality and social inequality. By 2022-23, 90% of the billionaire

[6] From these telltale figures, the authors of the study conclude: "... income and wealth inequality in India have reached historical highs under the Billionaire Raj. These extreme inequalities and their close link with social injustices can no longer be ignored. To tackle concentration at the very top of the distribution and create valuable fiscal space for crucial social sector investments, we propose a comprehensive wealth tax package on the ultra-rich."

[7] Towards Tax Justice & Wealth Redistribution in India: Proposals based on latest inequality estimates, May 24, 2024.

wealth was held by the upper castes, while Scheduled Tribes had no presence in the billionaire club. Other Backward Classes had a mere 7.4% representation here, and Scheduled Castes were at a microscopic 2.6%. The upper castes are the only group which owns wealth more – much more – than its proportion of population, underscoring how social capital and economic advantages overlap in our country.

As these documents correctly indicate, the rising inequality graph is an outcome of a deliberate policy shift from the initial welfare economy (with the state sector playing a major role) model to the market economy (with privatization and opening up to global market forces as its essential component) paradigm. Introduced in small doses from the 1980s on the pretext that the egalitarian approach was not delivering desired growth and needed to be replaced by a free market approach, the neoliberal model took a definite shape in early 1990s. It continued to gain momentum ever since and, with the installation of the Modi regime, scaled dizzy heights. To make matters worse, diabolical measures like the note ban and a cruel lockdown not only caused immense hardships, they inflicted deep

wounds in the economy that are yet to heal. These two measures, together with others like the badly planned and callously implemented GST scheme, effectively ruined the unorganised sector, killing jobs and therefore, effective demand. For the working people, this has meant nothing less than a dystopia marked by vanishing jobs and rising prices, even as the rich and super rich revel in obnoxious plenitude. If this is not a betrayal of our Constitution, what is?

## **THIS CONSTITUTION IS OURS**

### **We must Protect it to Save our Democratic Rights**

As we go to press, we confront the latest salvo of the fascist rulers – the ONOE conspiracy. Modi and Shah hate the Constitution and abhor Ambedkar, they dream of a fascist Hindu Raj in India. So they are now out to destroy the basic structure of the Constitution and undermine the federal principle and the crucial democratic rights of citizens. We must face the challenge head on – on the streets, in parliament and legislatures, in every form and forum available to us. We shall fight, we shall win. This is the only way to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution and foundation of the Republic of India. ■

## **Protests Rage Across the Country Condemning Amit Shah's Insulting Remarks Against Ambedkar**

Widespread protests erupted across India against the Union Home minister for his derogatory remarks about Dr B.R. Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha. Across the country, CPIML, AISA, RYA, AICCTU, and AIPWA led demonstrations, effigy burnings and marches to demand Amit Shah's resignation and a public apology by Modi government. On 18 December, CPIML MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad joined the INDIA bloc MPs in Parliament to condemn Amit Shah's remarks against Ambedkar. In Delhi, on 18 December, AISA activists staged a protest at Delhi University, burning Amit Shah's effigy and demanding accountability for the insult to Ambedkar's vision. The Delhi Police responded with violence, detaining several protesting students.

Meanwhile, in Bihar, on 19 December, CPIML and AISA activists burnt Amit Shah's effigy at various locations, including Bankipur, Patna Sahib, Digha, and Danapur. At Jakkampur near the Gaya line crossing, CPI(ML) senior leaders K.D. Yadav and Kamlesh Sharma led a march culminating in the effigy's burning. Protesters declared that the BJP's mask of "constitutional respect" had been exposed and vowed to resist any attack on Ambedkar and his ideals. Protests also took place in other districts including Saharsa, Jehanabad, Buxar, Arwal, Begusarai, and Madhubani.

Similar protests were held in Uttar Pradesh's Allahabad, where AISA members, led by State Executive President Manish, marched from Swaraj Bhawan to Balsan Crossing, holding Ambedkar's portraits and placards. They called for Amit Shah's immediate resignation. The protests extended to rural areas,

with workers and farmers joining the protest. At the Phulpur IFFCO factory, contract workers held a gate meeting on 19 December, condemning Amit Shah's statement and demanding his resignation. In Sonbhadra, CPI(ML) Polit Bureau member Ramji Rai and State Secretary Sudhakar Yadav addressed a gathering in Shivdwar village after garlanding Ambedkar's statue. In Jharkhand's Dhanbad, CPI(ML) members protested at Randhir Verma Chowk, burning Amit Shah's effigy and highlighting the Modi government's attempts to dismantle Ambedkar's vision of a socialist, secular, and egalitarian India. The party's State Secretary Manoj Bhakt stated that Amit Shah and the BJP's hostility towards Ambedkar stemmed from their desire to replace the Constitution with Hindutva's Manusmriti. "Ambedkar represents the aspirations of Dalits, tribals, minorities, and women. Amit Shah's statement is an affront to millions of Indians who cherish Ambedkar as the architect of modern India," he said.

On December 21, AIPWA along with other women's organisations held a protest in Delhi. AIPWA leader Shweta Raj said that Ambedkar's principles remain an indomitable barrier against Hindutva's regressive ideology. She asserted people of India will not allow the Manuvadi rule and ideology to throttle Ambedkar's constitution and his legacy of social justice. The people's anger transcended state borders, with protests organised in Karnataka, West Bengal, Odisha, and Uttarakhand. At Freedom Park in Bangalore, AISA activists and other organisations burnt Amit Shah's effigy, denouncing his insult to Ambedkar.

As the BJP faces mounting backlash over Amit Shah's comments, the CPI(ML) and other left parties, in a meeting held on 22 December, have called for a joint nationwide protest on 30 December to resist the BJP's attack on India's constitutional values and Ambedkar's legacy. ■

# Fascist Regime versus Fighting People

## *For democratic functioning of parliament, judicial accountability and electoral transparency*

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**O**n the eve of the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India, the Supreme Court rejected the appeal by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy to remove the words secular and socialist from the Preamble which had been inserted through an amendment in 1976. On the face of it, this categorical clarification from the apex court should have put an end to the relentless campaign against the Constitution, but within a few days we heard a most virulently majoritarian statement by a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court. Addressing a convention of the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Justice Shekhar Yadav who has been a judge of the High Court since December 2019 said the law would have to satisfy the majority. He went on to make vitriolic remarks about the Muslim community calling it inherently violent.

Such brazenly Islamophobic remarks have of late become rather routine in courts across the country showing the deep inroads made by the RSS and Hindutva ideology in India's judiciary. In this particular case it remains to be seen how the Supreme Court which has taken note of the statement chooses to deal with it. The future of the impeachment move initiated by a few MPs in the Lok Sabha will also be known over the next few days. Regardless of the outcome of this particular event, the gross

violation of the constitutional spirit by a sitting High Court judge only reflects the growing threat to the Constitution and the secular democratic foundation of the republic.

This adverse judicial environment needs to be seen in conjunction with the growing mockery of the other core institution of democracy - the Parliament of India - by the executive arm of the Indian state. The Prime Minister and his entire cabinet and other members of the ruling coalition have made it a policy to disrupt parliament proceedings and not allow any discussion or debate on issues raised by the opposition. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha too have shed all semblances of neutrality and parliamentary decorum and become fully complicit in this exercise. Repeatedly silenced and ridiculed by the Chairperson, Opposition MPs in the Rajya Sabha have now been forced to serve a notice of no-confidence against him for his utterly partisan conduct.

In the wake of its utterly dubious victory in Maharashtra Assembly elections, the Sangh-BJP brigade feels emboldened enough to intensify the fascist onslaught and target the opposition on all fronts. The damning indictment of the Adani group in the bribery scam is being presented as an anti-India conspiracy and the opposition is

being sought to be delegitimised as a tool of this grand external design. The growing foreign policy challenges in South Asia, especially in the wake of recent political shifts in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, are also being seen in the same light. On the domestic front, the government has no answer to the deepening economic crisis. Hence the systematic silencing of parliament and orchestrated whipping up of Islamophobia.

Forces of the people's movement must face this juncture by carrying forward the democratic agenda. The villages of Maharashtra are showing a new determination to question blatant electoral irregularities and the complete lack of transparency and accountability of the Election Commission by their innovative insistence on holding a parallel poll through ballots. The government's desperate measures to stop this democratic exercise of the people only reveal its utter vulnerability on the question of electoral transparency. The government must not be allowed to delay the census any further or manipulate the forthcoming delimitation round to upset the federal balance of the country. If the Modi government thinks it can silence the people by rigging elections, disrupting parliament and subverting institutions, the people's movement will have to prove the regime wrong by its tenacity, determination and political imagination. ■

# The Constitution's Founding Principles Keep It Steady Despite Inclement Weather

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

## Secularism, Socialism and More

**T**he Supreme Court granted the Constitution, or we the people of India who adopted, enacted and gave it to ourselves, a well-deserved present. On 27 November, 2024, it upheld the inclusion of 'socialist, secular' in the Preamble of the Constitution. The judgment had more to it than the fate of these two words. The most reviled by the Hindu majoritarian forces, the attack on these two concepts encapsulates a big attempt to undermine the Constitution. Ironically, the foundational spirit of the constitution – our (inter)national quest for a plural and equal society, which is reason for the ongoing attack, is precisely that which keeps it from foundering.

“The word ‘secular’ denotes a Republic that upholds equal respect for all religions. ‘Socialist’ represents a Republic dedicated to eliminating all forms of exploitation — whether social, political, or economic,” a Bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar interpreted, in the 24 November order.

The order was based on a batch of petitions filed in 2020 challenging the validity of the inclusion of 'socialist' and 'secular' in the Preamble through the 42nd Constitution Amendment in

1976. The petitioners, who included Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Subramanian Swamy, argued that the insertions made with retrospective effect, that is, from the date of adoption of the constitution by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949 amounted to a fraud on the constitution. Besides, they argued, the word 'secular' was deliberately eschewed by the Constituent Assembly and the word 'socialist' fettered the economic policy choice of the elected government, which represents the will of the people.

*The core principles of the Constitution were drawn from the freedom struggle, which was a fundamentally transformative process.*

The Supreme Court order, coming just before the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Indian Constitution, provides us with an opportunity to recall what it stands for in spirit and substance.

The Hindu supremacists have always suggested that the Constitution is not rooted in Indian traditions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The core principles of the Constitution were drawn from the freedom struggle, which was a fundamentally

transformative process. The freedom struggle was never about rescuing an unattainable pristine 'Hindu' ancient India; on the contrary, it was about building a diverse and united modern India by undoing historical structures of oppression and discrimination and by foiling British attempts to divide and rule through tacit encouragement to ethnic nationalist forces. That is where socialism and secularism as ideas were great sources of inspiration to our freedom fighters and constitution-makers.

In his 4 November, 1948 address presenting the draft Constitution Dr. BR Ambedkar rebutted the criticism about the alleged lack of 'originality' and 'Indianness' of the constitution. Every written modern democratic Constitution, he asserted, should reflect common or universal features and the efficacy of the Indian Constitution should be assessed in terms of adapting those basic democratic features to the diversity and particularities of the Indian context. There were strong opinions that the Constitution should uphold the democratic heritage of the ancient Indian polity and base itself on India's so-called self-sufficient village republics. Ambedkar refused to romanticize the so-called 'village republics' and boldly declared that he is “glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.”

Ambedkar also responded to the allegation that the Constitution had borrowed heavily from the 1935 Government of India Act in matters of administrative details. While acknowledging the scope for future amendments and administrative evolution, he emphasized the role of developing an administration compatible with the Constitution



and ensuring that the legislature could not pervert the administration and make it inconsistent with and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution. It is in this context that Ambedkar highlighted the need to cultivate constitutional morality as the guiding spirit and reminded us prophetically that democracy in India is a top-dressing on an essentially undemocratic Indian soil.

### **Ambedkar's Vision, Historical Realities**

A look at the memorandum 'States and Minorities' which Ambedkar had prepared on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation tells us how integral secular and socialist principles were to Ambedkar's vision. In this memorandum Ambedkar described India as United States of India, and promised for all its citizens a set of fundamental rights with comprehensive judicial protection against executive tyranny, unequal treatment, discrimination and economic exploitation. It promised the minorities effective remedies against social and official tyranny and social boycott and provided scheduled castes with due safeguards to ensure proper representation in all spheres.

The memorandum wanted the state to organize the main spheres of economic life including agriculture on socialist lines through comprehensive nationalization and collectivization, but it wanted this to happen within the framework of parliamentary democracy. To lend stability to state socialism it wanted the Constitution to guarantee it in a way that every government would have to abide by it. Article II Section III provided a whole range of protection for minorities: against a communal executive, against social and official tyranny, against social

boycott. It granted substantial power to governments to spend money for any purposes beneficial to the minorities.

Many of these were eventually placed in the non-enforceable section rather than the enforceable section because of the continuing undemocratic nature of the society out of which the Constitution grew, and the aftermath of partition. These principles were meant to be practiced, the society democratized, and socialism and secularism normalized.

As Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru reiterated on July 10, 1962, the concept of secularism was always inherent in its Constitution:

"We have laid down in our Constitution that India is a secular State. This does not mean irreligion. It means equal respects for all faiths and equal opportunities for those who profess any faith."

In his November 4, 1948 address Ambedkar had referred to the rightwing conservative and reactionary criticism. Without naming the Hindutva brigade's constant invocation of the Manusmriti he had addressed their charge of neglecting the framework of ancient India and defended the idea of taking the free individual as the basic unit of the constitutional republic. Early on in his public life Ambedkar had consigned the Manusmriti to flames in the course of the Mahad Satyagrah on December 25, 1927. There was no way he could use this code of caste oppression and patriarchal violence as the guiding spirit of the Constitution of modern India.

### **Hindutva Discontents, Our Role**

The Constitution does not need a fundamental revision; it is the society that needs a fundamental transformation. Hindu supremacists have tried to cleverly flip the narrative, justifying social conservatism, hatred and division; and chastising the constitution for failing to legitimize their worldview. The Sangh Parivar rejected the constitution from day one. Ever since the BJP came into national prominence, the Sangh Parivar has repeatedly mounted public pressure against the Constitution.

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*The Constitution stands strong because it empowered us to fight for the values we hold dear. And its strength gives us the necessary ballast to fight on.*

On December 25, 1992, a few days after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a press conference was held at the residence of a BJP member by two front-rank Swamis of the Parivar – Swami Muktanand and Swami Vamdeo Maharaj. They gave a call to reject the 'anti-Hindu constitution'. "We have no faith in the country's laws," they said, along with the proclamation that "the sadhus are above the law of the land." Indian citizenship law which considers all born in this country as its natural citizens is humbug, they appeared to claim.

On January 1, 1993 the Sangh Parivar published a 'white paper' labelling the Constitution as 'anti-Hindu' and outlined the kind of polity that must be established.

In its foreword, Swami Hiranand, a leading light of the Parivar, wrote:

“The present Constitution is contrary to the country’s culture, character, circumstances, situation etc. It is foreign oriented...It has to be discarded completely as a matter of high priority.”

The RSS chief Rajendra Singh apparently agreed with the views expressed in the white paper, and wrote:

“All this shows that changes are needed in the constitution. A constitution more suited to the ethos and genius of this country should be adopted in the future.”

Murli Manohar Joshi, who was then the president of the BJP, demanded “a fresh look at the constitution.”

The white paper condemned reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward classes and went to the extremely foul extent of calling the constitution ‘a pile of garbage’ and ‘an enemy of the nation’s unity and integrity.’

K.S. Sudarashan was appointed the sarsanghchalak of the RSS on March 10, 2000. Soon after taking over, he declared that Constitution of India should be scrapped.

Though the Vajpayee government (1998-2004) made attempts to alter the basic structure of the Constitution, it failed to do so as there was a big hue and cry after it appointed a commission to go into the working of the constitution. Advised by the then president K.R. Narayanan, it inserted a clause in the terms of reference of the commission – the basic structure of the Constitution will not be altered.

But the BJP governments, under both Vajpayee-Advani and Modi-Amit Shah, have found administrative means to bypass the Constitution. This was perhaps foreseen by the chairman of the Drafting Committee. While introducing the draft Constitution in the constituent assembly on November 4, 1948, Ambedkar had clearly spelt out: “The form of the administration must be appropriate and in the same sense as the form of the constitution.”

A communal civil service cannot work a secular Constitution. Ambedkar warned: “It is perfectly possible to pervert the constitution without changing its form, by merely changing the form of the administration and to make it inconsistent and opposed to the spirit of the constitution.”

The then home minister Sardar Patel in a letter dated April 27, 1948 to prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed with him: “The service must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations, either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum.”

Today the Sangh Parivar are doing their level best to infiltrate every layer of governance by their trained cadres,

sympathizers or pliant people. At the same time, they are trying to change the text of the Constitution by using their Parliamentary strength. The socially and politically transformative project – towards an equal and plural society – enabled by the Constitution is the target.

What the Sangh Parivar forgets is that socio-political transformation towards a democratic, socialist and secular country is the life-blood of modern India. India as we know it, is no doubt an ancient land. Like all ancient lands, it has undergone many transformations – some for better and some for worse. Either way, the wheels have never turned back.

The two centuries old anti-colonial movement marked the latest of these transformations. It gave birth to India as a political entity as we know it, and the quest to realize Begumpura was at the heart of it. The Constitution was accepted by all Indians, except those threatened by the distant possibility of Begumpura, because it gave us a platform to embark upon the next phase of this quest. The Constitution stands strong because it empowered us to fight for the values we hold dear. And its strength gives us the necessary ballast to fight on. ■



# COP-29 Dumps The Justice Principle And Pushes The World To The 'Mercy Of The Market'

▲ SOUMYA DUTTA

Many headlines in multiple news media and analytical pieces across developing countries have loudly proclaimed -- the 29th Conference of Parties (CoP-29) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has miserably failed to address the fast increasing climate change Crisis on all fronts. This 29th conference of Parties to the Convention and the simultaneous 6th Conference of the parties serving as Members of the Paris Agreement (CMA-6 , 6th after the Paris agreement in 2015 ) was billed as the "Finance CoP", and as one which will help and empower poorer developing countries address the severe impacts of Climate Crisis, through financing their adaptation measure and their transition to low-carbon low-emission economies, by substantially increasing the climate finance flows to them, as part of the long accepted 'climate justice' principle. On both fronts, CoP-29 miserably failed to meet expectations of developing and poor countries.

To better understand the above statement, we need to bring in a little background information. As is well known, the global convention to tackle 'climate change', UNFCCC, was created in 1992, in the famous Rio Earth Summit. The same Earth Summit gave birth to two other connected

global environmental conventions, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity or UNCBD and the less talked about United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification or UNCCD. The first climate change CoP-1 of UNFCCC took place in Berlin in 1995. And first decision that the rich polluting countries will have to bring down their climate threatening Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, was agreed upon in CoP-3 in Kyoto, Japan. Much 'proverbial water' has flowed through the UNFCCC CoP processes since then.

The well understood and accepted principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capacities (CBDR & RC) was the foundation based on the Climate justice concept. The rich countries have emitted the major part of cumulative GHGs in the post industrial revolution era (1850-1900 average to present, while poorer countries with much larger populations also emitted, but at much smaller percentage). This has created the fast-rising global warming, driving major disruptive changes in climate and other Earth Systems, by extracting, burning and dumping the 'lions share' of global cumulative fossil fuels extraction of Coal, petroleum (oil) and (natural) gas, they have the most responsibilities for creating the Climate Crisis and

for its redressal (CBDR). These same rich countries have built up their economic (& technological & infrastructural) capacities by this use of fossil fuels etc, so they have much higher capacities (RC part of CBDR & RC) to tackle it too.

Based on this globally accepted Climate Justice concept of CBDR & RC, the CoP-15 (Copenhagen, Denmark 2009) and CoP-16 (Cancun, Mexico 2010) finalized a "Fast Start (climate) Finance" of USD 10 billion a year to poorer / developing countries from 2010-2012, and an arbitrarily decided (by the developed countries) figure of USD 100 billion per year starting from the year 2020. This was reinforced in the Paris CoP-21 and Paris Agreement in 2015. Many studies (including by that Icon of Capitalism, the World Bank) even at that time have shown that the real minimum climate finance need of the developing countries even in 2008-2010 period was over USD 600 billion per year. So, the USD 100 billion /year from 2020 was far lower than needed even when first proposed. And it was decided that by the year 2025, a much higher and more democratically assessed climate finance goal, the so called "New Collective Quantified Goal" or NCQG will come into force by 2025. This CoP-29 in Baku in 2024, had that task cut out for its success.

In between, the long-standing demand of the poorer countries, for a separate "Loss and Damage Fund", was accepted in principle in the CoP-27 in Sharm el-Shaikh, Egypt in 2022, and was operationalised with a small capitalisation of about USD 700+ million, in CoP-28 in Dubai 2023. The Loss and Damage concept acknowledges that even with some adaptation and resilience building measures, all countries

are already suffering extensive losses and damages from sharply increased climate extreme events and also what are called climatic "slow onset events". The poorer (and heavily indebted) countries are unable to cope with the necessities of additional finance needed to address these new challenges, and require financial (and technological) assistance from rich countries that have created this crisis.

Well before the CoP-29 started on the 11th of November in Baku, the capital (& host) city of Azerbaijan, several studies have highlighted the massive gaps in essential climate finance. As per estimates of the International Renewable Energy Agency IRENA and the International Energy Agency IEA, the financial need for the global Energy Transition from a carbon-based fossil fuels energy economy to non/low carbon economy, is about USD 6,000 billion (one billion USD being roughly equivalent to Rs.8,450 crores in today exchange rate) each year (or about 5% of global GDP today). The present level of financing (market based, concessional, grants, all included) for Energy Transition is about USD 1.3-1.4 trillion, leaving a gap of about USD 4.7 trillion each year. The global need for adaptation exceeds USD 1,000 billion each year, while the actual financing is much below USD 100 billion. Given all these, the various developing country groupings, including the biggest, G77 + China, were demanding the NCQG to be at least USD 1,300 billion per year, with USD 600 billion as Grants and the rest as concessional loans. As indicated, their realistic expectations were somewhat close to USD 1 trillion.

In face of this massive climate finance deficit, the "finance CoP" at Baku came up with a final figure of USD

300 billion per year, that too - to start from the far off year of 2035! Also, by the year 2035, today's assumed figure of 300 billion will become just marginally higher than today's 100 billion, due to inflation, and will be a miniscule percentage of the then increased GDPs of rich countries. This pathetic finance 'deal' was almost 'graveled' or forced through by the CoP-29 Azerbaijan presidency and president Mr Mukhtar Babayev, in the last night of the extended CoP (as has become the norm over the last decade or so).

While the rich countries indeed conspired with the CoP-29 presidency of Azerbaijan to force this disastrous deal, it leaves some questions unanswered. The UNFCCC (and other) negotiation process works on the basis of consensus decision making. There are enough evidence to show that even if a few small countries strongly oppose any decision, that gets stalled. In the CoPs 15, 16, 17 etc, Bolivia and some other small South American countries strongly resisted similar bad proposals of rich countries, and these were stopped from being accepted as approved text. As recently as in CoP-26 in Glasgow, UK in 2021, the rich countries cleverly proposed a "Coal phase out", leaving Oil and Gas from the phase out proposal. This was okay for them as their economies are coming out of carbon-based fossil fuel coal, and become largely dependent of the two hydrocarbon based fossil fuels petroleum (oil) and natural gas (primarily CH<sub>4</sub> or Methane). China and India (along with a host of others), whose economies are today heavily dependent on Coal, objected strongly and the proposal was not accepted. A much diluted (and ineffective) proposal of "Phasing down of unabated coal" was accepted instead.

So, the public complaints of India and other developing countries, about CoP-29 presidency 'graveling down' this pathetic climate finance deal as the NCQG, sounds somewhat hollow. What is more true is that many of the poorer countries thought that this USD 300 billion/year is probably better than the present USD 100 bn/year, in absence of a better deal, and this became the least common NCQG of climate finance. Its sad to see such ignorance and absence of mind in thousands of negotiators from the developing countries, that they failed to understand that USD 300 billion post 2035 has little more value than USD 100 billion in 2020 ! Speaks volumes for our "trained negotiators".

The other major disaster that the CoP-29 created is the complete operationalization of the Article 6 of the Paris Agreement of 2015. "Article 6 of the Paris Agreement consists of nine paragraphs providing principles for how countries can "pursue voluntary cooperation" to reach their climate targets". Article 6.2 and 6.4 sets the rules and norms for "emission reductions through the market mechanisms", a grey area, considering that the so-called "free market" has very predatory and capital accumulation-extraction characteristics. We also have the earlier examples and discouraging learnings about how the Kyoto-protocol derived market mechanisms called "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM), failed to achieve any significant emissions reductions, while adversely impacting many vulnerable communities in poor countries, including in large number of CDM project sites in India.

If we just consider that extremely polluting coal power plants like the Reliance Sasan 4,000 MW Ultra Mega power plant in Madhya



Pradesh and the Adani Mundra 4,620 MW coal PP in Gujarat, have received hundreds of crores of rupees worth of "Clean Development Mechanism" finance, the farce of Carbon markets becomes clear. Both projects have devastated the lives and livelihoods of thousands of Adivasis, small scale fishworkers, small salt panners and pastoralists, while spewing deadly air and water pollution in large stretches of the sites. Despite that, they were considered "Clean Development" for India, and gave huge carbon credits to those polluting entities in rich countries who escaped reducing their own pollution. By complete operationalisation of the market mechanisms through Articles 6.2 and 6.4 of the Paris Agreement, the CoP-29 had opened the flood gates of dubious carbon credits, further displacements and exploitation of nature-dependent communities, and lead the whole climate action agenda into false solutions arena.

On top of all these, one must recall that the last 3 (even last 4, including Glasgow CoP26) were hosted by largely petrol States - UK has major oil and gas operations in North Sea, Egypt has a major petroleum sector, the United Arab Emirates depends massively on its Oil and Gas, and Azerbaijan is possibly the world's first petro-State, which is still primarily a petro-dependent economy. And for the last 3 CoPs, from Sharm el-Shaikh in Egypt in 2022 to Baku in Azerbaijan, the democratic space for protests, dissent has shrunk drastically, while the manipulating space for fossil fuels and global financial lobbyists have increased sharply.

The last disappointment was the complete failure of CoP-29 to advance the agenda of decarbonisation of global economies and pushing the agenda of "fossil fuels phase out" to the next CoP, the CoP-30 in Belem, Brazil in November 2025. We can possibly expect a better democratic space there, but looking at the failure of the Brazilian delegation to stand firm in defence of essential justice principles in Baku CoP-29, it's better to temper our expectations from a Lula led presidency of CoP-30. (Despite drawbacks there should not be any space left uncontested and open) But given all that, there is no scope of leaving any space uncontested and open for the fossil capitalists and finance-capital crooks, the fight must continue to curb their power and bring in people's voices louder and clearer.

*The author is associated with the environmental movement of India and is a key coordinator of MAUSAM (Movement for Advancing Understanding on Sustainability And Mutuality) and Friends of the Earth, India. ■*

## Bangladesh: In Defence of Secular Democratic Spirit

(Translated excerpts from the statement of Socialist Party of Bangladesh (SPB) published in Vanguard, December-January 2024)

**I**n the current situation, the SPB feels that people in Bangladesh must be inspired with a secular democratic spirit to confront national chauvinism and communalism. We feel that is the only way ahead.

After the mass uprising, there was no government in Bangladesh for three days. The internal law and order as well as police force was disorganized and uninitiated. This opportunity gave an uncontrolled outlet to the anger that had been accumulating in the public mind for 15 years against the misrule of the Awami League, lack of democracy and unbridled corruption in the country and the misdeeds of the Chhatra League. This anger turned violent in many places. During this time, many people associated with the Awami League were at the receiving end of unwarranted political attacks, and some of them belonged to the Hindu community. However, it is true that in some cases, the opportunity was used to attack minorities in a targeted way. However, it is also true that in many places, people from the majority community have resisted all these attacks and have taken to the field to ensure the protection of minorities.

We firmly believe that even a single incident of targeted attack against anyone from the minority community is totally condemnable. However, the Indian mainstream media is spreading these unwanted incidents in a biased manner, mixing truth with falsehood, exaggerating them and spreading them in a frantic way to create communal division between the people of the two countries.

The BJP with its ideology of Hindutva is creating ultra-nationalist and communal hysteria to fulfil its political objectives in India. The provocative media campaign in India regarding Bangladesh is being created to hide the misdeeds of Modi-Adani from the people of India.

Therefore, even if a section of the people of India is confused by the propaganda of the media, we must not fall into the trap of fanaticism and hyper nationalism by mirroring the actions of the Indian ruling class. Rather, at this moment, we must attempt to present the reality

of the conspiracies by the Modi government in front of the people of India. We want unity of the working people of both countries and want to say in a strong voice that the interests of the working people of both countries are one, the struggle is one, and the future goal is also one.

The mass spirit of the Liberation War desired for a secular democratic Bangladesh that will be free of exploitation. We believe that this time too, the mass uprising of students, workers and the public in July-August has been organized with the same secular democratic spirit in mind. We cannot help but

notice that some quarters have become eager to erase the history of Bangladesh's independence by using anti-dictatorship slogans as a tool. We believe that this an effort to dismantle the secular democratic spirit in Bangladesh and a manifestation of the latent desire to rehabilitate the defeated forces of 1971.

The left democratic progressive forces must take a firm stand against this trend and continue the united fight to ensure that the hopes and aspirations of the people expressed through the 2024 uprising are fulfilled. We also call on all the left progressive democratic forces to further strengthen and

consolidate the trend of mass unity at the national level. We must keep a vigilant eye on the new government so that it accelerates reforms towards this end and quickly transfers power to the government elected through a fair, acceptable and participatory election.

We call on the interim government to be more proactive and focused in addressing the existing crisis, including resolving the country's financial crisis, preventing the rise in commodity prices, restoring peace in public life, preserving communal harmony and ensuring that no one stays hungry and undernourished. ■

### **The Government of Bangladesh Must Ensure Full Security and Rights of the Minority Hindu Community**

The Polit Bureau of the Central Committee of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) expresses grave concern over reports of continuing attacks on members and institutions of minority Hindu community in Bangladesh. We urge the government of Bangladesh to ensure full security and rights of the minority Hindu community and individual citizens and stop fundamentalist and sectarian forces from spreading hate and disturbing harmony. We express our full solidarity with the voices of reason and peace in Bangladesh, standing up against divisive communal forces and wish them more strength in dealing with the situation. Religious minority communities must enjoy full freedoms and rights without being forced to succumb to majoritarian dictates. Minorities in India, Muslims in particular, are also facing heightened insecurity and communal forces are trying to use the reported events of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh as another tool to dehumanise and intensify attacks on Indian Muslims.

We call upon all peace- and justice-loving Indians to reject the politics of hate, lies and violence and stand firm and united in support of peace and harmony in India and good neighbourly relations between India and Bangladesh. ■

## **Where is Syria headed?**

▲ GILBERT ACHCAR

**W**hile observing the amazing historical events that unfolded since last Friday, the first thing that came to mind was relief and joy at the images of detainees being freed from the hell of the carceral society that Syria had become under the Assad family's regime. Our feelings were also overwhelmed by delight at the sight of Syrian families suddenly able

to return from nearby exile, whether from another area within Syria or from Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, to visit the towns and homes they were forced to flee from years ago. Add to this that the dream of millions of Syrian refugees, in the countries surrounding Syria and in Europe, of returning to their homeland, even if only for a visit, this dream that looked impossible a few days ago, has begun to seem achievable.

Now, as the Arabic saying goes, the time has come for meditation after elation. Let us reflect on what has happened so far to try to foresee what the future may hold. First of all, it is worth pointing out to those who supported the hateful Assad regime and claimed that it was representative of the Syrian people's will and that everyone who opposed it was but a mercenary for some foreign power, whether regional or international, and who also claimed that this regime, which had not moved a finger for half a century against the Zionist

occupation of its own land, and which had intervened in Lebanon in 1976 to suppress the forces of the alliance of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Lebanese National Movement and rescue the forces of the Lebanese Christian sectarian right, and which had joined the camp of the war on Iraq led by the United States and the Saudi kingdom in 1990, was the beating heart of the “axis of resistance” – it is worth point out to those that reality has conclusively proven that the hateful Assad regime was standing only thanks to two foreign occupations, out of the five foreign occupations across Syrian territory.

The truth is that if it were not for the Iranian intervention that started in 2013, especially through Lebanon’s Hezbollah, and for the Russian intervention that started in 2015, and also for the US veto that prevented the Syrian opposition from receiving any type of anti-aircraft weapon for fear that it might be used against the Israeli Air Force – if it were not for these three factors, the Assad regime would have fallen more than a decade ago, as it was on the brink of the abyss in 2013, and again in 2015 despite Iranian rescue. The plain fact is that once external support dried up, the regime collapsed like any “puppet regime” that is abandoned by the power that used to hold its strings. The latest striking example of such a collapse was what happened to the puppet regime in Kabul in the face of the Taliban’s advance, after US forces gave up propping it in 2021.

Thus, after Russia had withdrawn most of its forces from Syria due to getting bogged down in the quagmire of its invasion of Ukraine (Moscow left only 15 military aircraft in Syria, according to Israeli sources), and after the Lebanese Hezbollah had

suffered a severe defeat, which its new Secretary-General desperately tried to portray as a “great victory... that surpasses the victory achieved in 2006” and which prevented it from being able to rescue its Syrian ally this time, all this while Iran carried on with its cautious approach terrified at the prospect of an escalation of Israel’s aggression against it and the possibility that the United States might join it directly, after Donald Trump’s return to the White House – in the face of these facts combined, when Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized the opportunity thus created to launch an offensive on the areas under the control of the regime and its allies, starting with the city of Aleppo, the Syrian puppet regime collapsed like its Afghan counterpart.

The big difference between the Afghan and Syrian cases, though, is that HTS is much weaker than the Taliban were when they completed their control of their country. The forces of the Assad family’s regime collapsed not out of fear of a mighty enemy, but because they had no incentive to defend the regime any longer. The army, constructed on a sectarian basis through the Assad family’s exploitation of the Alawite minority to which they belong, no longer had an incentive to fight for the Assad family’s control over the entire country, especially in light of the collapse of living conditions that led to the nosedive of the purchasing power of soldiers’ incomes. The regime’s miserable last-minute attempt to raise their salaries by fifty percent could not change anything. As a result, the current situation in Syria is very different from that of Afghanistan following the Taliban’s victory. HTS only controls some of the Syrian territories, and its control is fragile in part of them, especially the area surrounding the capital Damascus,

where the regime collapsed before HTS reached it, preceded by the forces of the Southern Operations Room.

Syria is now divided into several areas under the control of heterogenous, even hostile, forces. First, there is the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, where the Zionist state has seized the opportunity to expand into the buffer zone that separated the territories it occupies and did formally annex in 1981 from the territories controlled by the Syrian regime, while its air force has begun to destroy some of the key military capabilities of the defunct regime to prevent whoever succeeds it from seizing them. There is also the vast area that HTS now controls in the north and centre, but the extent of this control in general, and especially in the coastal region that includes the Alawite mountain, is highly questionable. Then there are two areas on the northern border under Turkish occupation, accompanied by the deployment of the “Syrian National Army” (which should rather be called the “Turkish-Syrian Army”); a considerable area in the northeast, east of the Euphrates River, under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces dominated by the Kurdish movement, allied with some Arab tribes (which HTS will certainly seek to win over to its side) under the protection of US forces; a large area in the south, west of the Euphrates River, under the control of the Syrian Free Army, also linked to the United States and centred around the US base at al-Tanf inside Syrian territory, close to the borders with Jordan and Iraq; and finally, the southern region, where forces in the Daraa region that rebelled against the Assad regime, some of which were under Russian tutelage, and forces emerging from the popular movement in the Suwayda region, have gathered

together to form the Southern Operations Room, which is the Syrian Arab armed faction the most closely linked to the popular democratic movement.

Now, where might things go from here? The first observation is that the possibility of all these factions agreeing to submit to a single authority is almost nil, even if we put aside the Kurdish movement and limit ourselves to the Arab factions. Even Turkey, which has a longstanding relationship with HTS, and without which HTS would not have been able to hold out in the Idlib region in northwest Syria, will not abandon its occupation and its puppets as long as it does not achieve its goal of curtailing the Kurdish movement. The second observation is that those who hoped or believed in the transformation of HTS and Ahmed al-Sharaa, aka al-Julani, from Salafist jihadism to non-sectarian democracy have begun to realize that they were delusional. The truth is that HTS would not have been able to spread in place of the forces of the collapsed regime had it not pretended to change its skin and open up to a democratic, non-sectarian future. Otherwise, local forces from Homs to Damascus would have fiercely resisted it, whether under the wing of the defunct regime or after emancipating from it. Now, al-Julani's haste to claim that he has turned the "Salvation Government" that ruled the Idlib region into the new Syrian government, frustrating the hopes of those who expected him to call for a coalition government, highlights a fact that should have remained in people's minds: the fact that the residents of the Idlib region themselves demonstrated only eight months ago against HTS's tyranny, demanding the overthrow of al-Julani, the dissolution of his repressive apparatuses, and the release of detainees in his prisons.

Last but not least, the joy over the tyrant's fall should not make us overlook the haste of various European governments to stop considering Syrian asylum applications, and the beginning of various countries, especially Lebanon, Turkey, and some European countries, to consider expelling the Syrian refugees and forcibly returning them to Syria under the pretext of the Assad regime's termination. Syria has not yet emerged from its long historical ordeal that began 54 years ago (with Hafez al-Assad's 1970 coup) and tragically worsened 13 years ago (after the 2011 popular uprising). All countries must keep respecting the right of asylum granted to Syrians, and continue to consider granting it to Syrians who demand it.

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## **Amid Syrian Upheaval, Israel Bays for More Blood**

As Syria witnesses a new political situation after the fall of Assad regime, Israel has escalated its aggression, taking advantage of the regional instability to further its militaristic and expansionist agenda. The latest airstrikes and violations of Syrian sovereignty by Israeli forces demonstrate a blatant disregard for international law and human rights, perpetuating a cycle of violence in the region. These attacks, often conducted with impunity and bolstered by unconditional support from the United States, expose Israel's unrelenting appetite for bloodshed, as we continue to witness Gaza and West Bank in Palestine. As Israel pounds Syria, Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people continues unabated. Illegal Israeli settler outposts and expansion plans are growing rapidly as Israeli military carry forward the extermination policy against Palestinians. Now, with the "opportunity" in Syria, Israel is attempting to expand its settler colonialist ambitions in the region.

In recent weeks, Israeli forces have launched a series of strikes, including attacks near Syria's Damascus and other strategic locations, causing casualties and significant damage. Additionally, Israeli military actions have reportedly crossed the agreed-upon buffer zone along the Syria-Israel border, further violating international agreements. This blatant breach of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, which established the buffer zone monitored by the United Nations, underscores Israel's disregard for international norms and points towards Zionist regime's expansionist ambitions. The humanitarian cost of these actions is immense. With Syrians already enduring war, displacement, and economic collapse, Israel's continued aggression exacerbates their suffering, targeting infrastructure and civilians alike.

The silence and inaction of the international community, particularly Western powers, highlight the hypocrisy in their professed commitment to human rights and peace. While Israel's actions fuel instability and unrest, global powers remain complicit through arms supplies and diplomatic cover.

CPIML unequivocally condemns Israel's military aggression against Syria and calls on progressive and democratic forces worldwide to stand in solidarity with the Syrian people as they strive to find peace amid the political changes in the country. The international community must hold Israel accountable for its actions and work to end airstrikes and violations of Syrian sovereignty immediately.

Peace and stability in West Asia – from Palestine to Lebanon to Syria can only be achieved through an end to militarism, occupation, and imperialist meddling. ■



# Domestic Workers' Protest

Uday Bhat

A one day sit in of the domestic workers was held at Jantar Mantar on 12th December during the winter session of the Parliament. A coalition of more than 50 domestic workers' unions represented by SEWA led by Sonia, Ghar Kamgar Sanghatana of AICCTU affiliated M S Sarv Shramik Mahasangh led by Com. Uday Bhat, Gharelu Kamgar Sangh of Delhi led by Suman, TN Domestic Workers union led by Geetha and National Domestic Workers Forum led by Kristy and others participated under the national umbrella organisation.

The sit-in was held to focus the attention of the parliament and the government on a set of demands being voiced by individual organisations after the signing of the ILO convention In 2011. The government had then agreed to categorise the domestic helpers as workers. It was also agreed to legislate a holistic law nationally to enable domestic workers to a dignified life. No steps whatsoever have been taken in this direction by any governments beyond preparation of two uncirculated drafts.

The main demands flagged in the sit in were:

- A separate holistic law applicable nationally to the domestic workers to be enacted
- Specific inclusion of the domestic workers in the new labour code on social security
- Inclusion of the domestic workers in the code to provide social security cover such as pension, ESIC etc. And to make necessary provision and allocation in the union and state budgets
- Constitution of tripartite boards at the union and state levels. The representation of the workers should not be nominated by the government but chosen by the workers.
- The registration of the domestic workers and disbursement of benefits should be available on online platform as well as offline.

To ensure safety of the domestic workers at the places of work must be ensured with required legal provisions.

The domestic workers have undertaken various forms of agitations at the union and the state levels such as submission of memorandum to local MPs, meetings and demonstrations locally and in the national capital. Modi government in its 11 year tenure has not moved an inch in the matter.

The 1500 domestic workers from Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana were addressed by MPs Rajaram Singh and Sudama Prasad from CPIML and Sachinananand from DMK, Sidharth from CPM and Sukhdev Singh from Congress. They expressed solidarity with the domestic workers and supported their demands. Amarjit Kaur, GS of AITUC also addressed in solidarity besides the leaders of the domestic workers unions. They unanimously condemned the Modi government's utter neglect of this section of the workers, a majority of them being women from socially and economically deprived sections of the society.

The sit-in also resolved to intensify a nationwide struggle if the government does not act in the matter expeditiously. ■

## People's Rights Convention at Vijayawada

Uday Kiran

The People's Rights Convention hosted by the CPIML Liberation at Vijayawada on 04 Dec 2024 evoked a lot of interest and enthusiasm among the public and the political circles in the state. The convention was the first ever initiative to represent the interests of the people since Chandrababu Naidu led NDA assumed political power in the state. Despite tall claims, the state government has not implemented any of its promises but for Rs 1000 increase in the old age pension. The promises of free bus, three gas cylinders

and Rs 1500 per month for women, Rs 15000 for girls education, Rs 20000 for farmers, etc., are not implemented while Chandrababu Naidu is only interested in launching seaplanes and in saffronising Laddu. He is more focussed on making Amaravati as Singapore by taking loans from the World Bank and cares the least for the inequality and poverty of people of the state, particularly the people of the poverty-ridden Rayalaseema and North Andhra. Mr Pavan Kalyan, the Deputy CM, is more vocal about and by articulating Sanatan Dharma and its protection more than his own party and the plight of the

people of Andhra. BJP is busy taking roots and spreading its wings across the state by capturing temples and by transforming temples into centres of political power. The politically naïve Chandrababu Naidu and Pawan Kalyan have become vehicles of the BJP and RSS to carry them across the nook and corner of the state. It is in this context that the People's Rights Convention was organised by CPIML Liberation to bring the people's issues to the center-stage of state politics.

The convention gave a clarion call to build the people's movement as a real opposition in an opposition-less state of Andhra Pradesh. The convention resolved to root out the saffron fascism from the

soil of Andhra. Not just Super SIX (as promised by the Chandrababu Naidu led NDA government) But a People's SIX (land, housing, education, employment, unemployment allowance, health, minimum wages and NREGA and extension of the same to urban areas) was the major theme of the convention.

The convention was addressed by the General Secretary of CPIML comrade Dipankar along with the Polit Bureau members Swadesh Bhattacharya and Shankar V, the Incharge of the state. Comrade Bangarrao, the state secretary of the party, presided over the convention.

Comrade Dipankar demanded the arrest of Adani who was issued a warrant and scrapping of all solar power related agreements in Andhra entered into with the Adani's Solar Energy company which is accused of corruption by the US Court. He also cited the continuing protests by the opposition MPs in the parliament and exposed the Modi government for shielding the corrupt Adani and his company. Thus, the nexus between the corporate bosses, corruption and the Modi and BJP was exposed which is not even willing to order a probe. He elaborated on how the RSS-BJP-Modi are conspiring to replace the secular, socialist, democratic, sovereign constitution with the Manu Smriti. He also explained the ongoing "Save the Constitution" Campaign from 26 November, the day of the 75th year of adoption of the constitution to 26 January, the day of 75 years of the Indian Republic. He also underlined that 100 years of CPI in 2025 is the 100 years of the communist movement in India. The communist movement in the last hundred years has worked towards strengthening democracy and secularism whereas the RSS in the last hundred years has worked towards destroying the same. He

contrasted the hundred years history of the communist movement with that of RSS and Hindutva.

A colourful rally by thousands of people with red flags and festoons, led by state leaders Comrades Ramdev, Sattar and Satyanarayana preceded the convention. Workers, farmers, adivasis, women, youth and students joined the rally from all over the state. The rallyists marched on the streets of Vijayawada marking a beginning of the struggle against saffron fascist forces in power. The convention began with the flag hoisting by the comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya and the floral tributes to martyrs by comrade Dipankar.

Comrades of Jana Samskriti Manch, AP unit, led by Comrade Sanyasi Rao, electrified the convention with their revolutionary songs and dances. As a mark of re-launching of publication of the state party organ, Telugu Liberation, it was released by Comrade Dipankar. Ch Bhaskar Rao, all-India president of OPDR (Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights) and Venkat Reddy, state leader of MCPI, Andhra Pradesh received the first copies.

Central Committee members Nagamani (AIPWA) and N Murthy (In-Charge of Telangana) addressed the convention while Arjun Rao, Standing Committee member of the party paid tributes to martyrs with a condolence resolution. Comrade Prabhat Kumar, CCM and the party Headquarters Incharge, also was present. DHarinath, Standing committee member, introduced the theme of the convention while B Vasudeva Rao presented the resolutions. Uday Kiran delivered the welcome address and Aruna thanked the guests and the rallyists. The convention concluded with reverberating militant slogans of the spirited participants. ■

### ***Andhra has been a glorious centre of the communist movement***

I found that Andhra Pradesh has changed. You had the YSRCP government and now its Chandra Babu Naidu's. Chandra Babu Naidu is not the old Chandra Babu Naidu. This is a new Chandra Babu Naidu who is helping Narendra Modi in Delhi and taking Modi's support for Andhra Pradesh. TDP today is an ally of the BJP. This is a backdoor or indirect entry for the BJP into Andhra Pradesh. In neighbouring Orissa, we had Naveen Patnaik government for decades and now suddenly we have a BJP government. We have a BJP government in Chhattisgarh. On the other day when there was an election in Jharkhand, The BJP thought of capturing Jharkhand after Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra, to complete the Adani Triangle. Because, they want all the resources of the country, the land, the water, our forest, our mineral resources, everything to be handed over to Adani. But, the people of Jharkhand won a big victory by stopping the BJP, by rejecting the Adani triangle and we, the left, played an important role in ensuring such a defeat of the BJP in Jharkhand.

Andhra is one state which has been a glorious centre of the communist movement. Over the last hundred years, we have witnessed a strong communist movement in Andhra and Telangana. It has inspired the workers movement, the peasant movement, the adivasis, the Girijans, the women and everyone. That's why I request all our Andhra comrades to take initiatives to commemorate the 100 years of the communist movement.

I pay my respects to all the great martyrs of Andhra Pradesh and the entire communist movement and thank you all for today's successful people's convention.

**- Dipankar Bhattacharya ■**

## Party Education Camp in Udaipur

A two-day party school was conducted on the 7th and 8th of December at Udaipur in Rajasthan. 27 comrades from the western states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra participated in the classes. CPIML's Rajasthan state committee hosted the school. All the central committee members from Rajasthan along with Comrade Prabhat Kumar, CCM in charge of the 3 states was present.

A presidium consisting of Comrade Shankar Lal Chaudhary, Comrade Deva, Comrade Ajit Patil and Comrade Amit Patanwadia was chosen to conduct the sessions. All the comrades paid homage to the departed comrades, martyrs and the Palestinian men, women and children killed by Israel.

The first session was on the geographical, cultural, social and political background of each participating state. Comrade Ajit

Patil, Comrade Patanwadia and Comrade Shankar Lal Chaudhary put across the essential features of the subject for each of the states. Comrade Deva also put across his views in the matter. There were many questions asked by the audience. A lively discussion took place related to the present political situation in these 3 states.

The second important subject was the history and the present scenario in the Adivasi dominated regions in the respective states. Comrade Patanwadia, Comrade Shankar Lal Choudhury and Comrade Shyam Gohil put forth their views in their respective states. Each presentation was followed by question and answer sessions. The demand of the Bhil Pradesh from some sections of the population from Rajasthan and Gujarat was discussed. It was felt that if a popular demand comes to the fore we can support it but we need not lead it. We should concentrate on party building in

these areas on the basis of basic demands of Jal, Jangal and Jameen.

Comrade Sudha Chaudhary, Comrade Farhat Banu and Comrade Rinku Parihar elaborated the present situation in Rajasthan related to women and the Muslims. The deep rooted patriarchy, the remnants of feudalism and the entrenched hindutvavadi forces were highlighted as some of the obstacles in organising the women .

Comrade Saurabh and Comrade Prabhat Kumar conducted the most important session on party building in the era of Indian fascism. A critical analysis was presented by comrades from each state.

Comrades from all the states expressed satisfaction for holding of the party school and felt that this education camp has added important lessons for them to understand the other states better. ■

## People's Assembly in Warangal

### Uday kiran

The CPIML, Telangana organised a People's Assembly in Warangal of Telangana on 6th December marking the 68th death anniversary of Dr. BR Ambedkar and the 32nd anniversary of the Black day of the Babri Masjid demolition. Hundreds of people from across Telangana participated in the public meeting. Dipankar Bhattacharya, Gen Sec of CPIML addressed the Assembly as main speaker. Shankar V, PB Member and N Murthy, CC Member and In-charge of Telangana were also present.

The Warangal town witnessed an enthusiastic rally of red flags before the People's Assembly. Thousands of workers and women participated in the rally from Azam Zahi mill to the Pochamma Maidan. Comrade Dipankar paid tributes to Dr.

BR Ambedkar at his statue in Kasibugga center.

Remembering the contributions of Dr. BR Ambedkar and his lifelong struggle for Human Rights and for the upliftment of masses, most downtrodden and weaker sections of the society, Com Dipankar called for resisting the attacks by the Sanghi forces on the constitution and its core values of Freedom, Liberty and Equality. He said that the Supreme court in its judgement on Babri masjid had said that the judgement shall bring peace in the country and there shall be no communal riots thereafter. But we see the recent attack of another mosque in Sambhal of Uttar Pradesh which marks the utter disregard of BJP/RSS for the constitutional principles and secular values. Behind this communal agenda Modi is helping Adani, Ambani and other corporate's to

loot the country. There is no access to proper Education and Healthcare facilities for the poor. Hence it is for the people to save the country and its resources from the corporate loot and to save the Constitution and its values from the clutches of Sanghi forces. He appealed to the people of Telangana to root out the communal fascist forces from the secular land of South India.

Ramesh Raja, State Secretary of Telangana and state committee members Royyala raju, Srinivas, Rajula Sambayya, G Kumar, Marepally Mallesh, Rajitha, Khaja Mohiuddin, Veeru Nayak and leaders of different districts and mass organisations have participated and addressed the public. A. Yadagiri presided over the meeting and delivered the welcome address. The family members of Ailamma, the great fighter of Telangana movement presented a memento on this occasion to Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya. ■

# Railways Union Elections: AICCTU- IREF Achieves a Significant Success

*NN Banerjee and Ravi Sen*

Election for the recognition of trade unions in Indian Railways was held on 4, 5 and 6 December 2024 via Secret Ballot. This election was scheduled to be held in the year of 2019, but at last Railway Administration was compelled to hold the election at the order of Delhi High Court. Election was held at Zonal levels. This election was held at 17 zones including Metro Railway Kolkata and two Production Units at RCF, Kapurthala and CLW, Chittaranjan.

As a significant victory, IREF (Indian Railways Employees Federation) affiliated 2 zonal and 1 production unit unions secured 1st position. Zonal Union East Central Railway Employees Union (ECREU) at E C Rly got the recognition as a single union through securing 20,924 votes (33.53%). At N E Rly, North Eastern Railway Men's Congress (NERMC) (got affiliated with the IREF some time back after splitting from NFIR) got the recognition as single union through securing 17,388 votes (49%). At Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala (Punjab), a production unit, RCF Employees Union (RCFEU) got the recognition as single union through securing 2,201 votes (43.8%).

Apart from the above, IREF affiliated Zonal Union Akhand Railway Karmachari Sangh (ARKS) (joined the federation recently) at South East Central Railway (SECR) secured 10,819 (27.9%) votes and secured 2nd position; and at West Central Railway, West Central Railway Workers Union (WCRWU) secured 7,402 (16.47%) votes and secured 3rd position. In some other zones too, our zonal unions have registered a decent

presence. IREF contested at 9 Zones and 2 Production Units.

AIRF (All India Railway Men's Federation) affiliated Zonal Unions got recognition at 13 Zones and no recognition at both the Production Units and NFIR (National Federation of Indian Railways) got the recognition at 12 Zones. Another significant aspect of this election is that CITU affiliated Union at Southern Railway DREU and CLU at CLW got the recognition. Importantly, the BMS affiliated BRMS has been ousted in the race for recognition.

## Attacks on TU Rights

Although these elections were held after a long delay and only on court orders, but the attacks on TU Rights through arbitrariness in framing of Rules / Modalities continues. The recognition granted to the Trade Union in Zone or production Unit can be withdrawn / suspended by the General Manager for any justifiable reason. Such authoritarian/ undemocratic provision in Rule 5.8 of the modality has been framed to curtail the right to collective bargaining. In the event of certain stoppage of work, Mass sick leave and work to rule, let alone the question of Wild cat strike, this black Rule can be indiscriminately applied on the recognised Unions. Moreover, such steps will be more stringent when the new code on Industrial Relations, 2020 will come into effect in Indian Railways.

## Emergence of IREF

IREF was formed in the year 2014 and got affiliated with AICCTU in 2019 with a motto of developing it as an alternative, struggling, Left Federation.

Naturally IREF contested the election as a Federation for the first time. IREF has 11 Zonal unions (out of total 17 zones) and unions at 5 Production Units, in total 16 unions.

IREF was initiated by RCF Employees Union, Kapurthala along with some other smaller unions following the Modi govt.'s all-out attacks on Railways and on the other hand, amid this attack, the attitude of inaction and collaboration with the central govt. by the established federations like AIRF and NFIR. Since then, IREF has been consistently fighting against neoliberal policies such as NPS/ UPS, Privatisation, Contractorisation / Outsourcing, Surrender of posts, non-filling of vacancies and on the question of safety. Some of the burning issues of Railwaymen particularly the worse working conditions of Track Maintainers (previously Gangmen) with their career progression issues were represented to the Parliamentary standing committee on Railways through CPI-ML MP, Sudama Prasad also.

The success of IREF was due to valuable support of all railway employees and workers of various categories, right from trackmen to loco pilots, guards, and we extend our revolutionary greetings to them.

AICCTU - IREF is emboldened by the support and confidence reposed by the employees by awarding significant victory. AICCTU - IREF assures to all rail employees that we will further intensify and carry forward the struggles to protect the interests of employees with much more determination and commitment. This victory is definitely an important step towards developing IREF as an alternative federation.

Let us all make all-out efforts to develop IREF as an alternative, struggling, left federation in the railways. ■



## AILAJ Successfully Concludes its 2nd National Conference at Cuttack

The All India Lawyers Association for Justice (AILAJ) successfully completed its 2nd National Conference in Cuttack, Orissa on 21-22 December. Over 150 delegates across 16 states were in attendance. The 1st National Conference of AILAJ was held in Bangalore, Karnataka in May, 2022.

The National Conference opened with a public lecture on the critical topic of 'Independence of Judiciary'. Retired Supreme Court Justice A.K Patnaik graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, and Retired Madras High Court Judge, Justice K Chandru, as the Guest Speaker. Maitreyi Krishnan, the President of AILAJ in her introductory comments stressed the importance of an independent judiciary for a thriving democracy and emphasised that judicial accountability and independence must comprise all three facets of the judiciary, namely administrative, behavioural and decisional accountability. She also decried in strong terms the increasing executive excesses, and its adverse impact on judicial independence.

Retd. Justice AK Patnaik, Chief Guest began his remarks by commending AILAJ for grounding its organisational objectives in serving the people and promoting the values of the Constitution. On the topic of judicial independence, he recalled the judgement of the Supreme Court which introduced the collegium system to protect the judiciary's independence and the larger context of judgment, which was passed against the backdrop of the emergency when the judiciary had abdicated its moral responsibility. He stressed that lawyers must be the protectors of democracy and act as the foot soldiers of the Constitution by spreading its values among common people. He also critiqued the political

class for being narrowly concerned with aggrandising power, and not with people's issues, and in this regard stressed the importance therefore of lawyers in holding them to account. Importantly, he remarked that democracy is not just about voting once in five years, but in demanding and enforcing daily accountability from the State. He concluded by encouraging the assembled lawyers to band together to uphold democracy, protect the constitution and defend the rule of law.

Retd Justice Chandru, the Chief Speaker began his speech by reciting the slogan Jai Bhim, and criticised the recent comments of Home Minister Amit Shah on Dr Ambedkar. He commented about the recently concluded national elections in the country and how BJP's reduced share count is an expression of people reclaiming the Constitution. He cited the example of the Waqf Bill, and how the government was unable to pass it in Parliament because of the BJP's reduced vote claim. However, he stressed that the Constitution must not be treated as a holy document or scripture but one that must be in service of people's power. He remarked that for our judiciary to be truly independent, judges must show fidelity to the Constitution in their judgment and conduct, given that they take oath under the Constitution. He shared that unfortunately judiciary has time and again failed to do so, giving the example of a Madras High Court judge who was appointed as the High Court judge despite opposition of several lawyers against her hateful vitriol against minority communities as well as the example of an Allahabad judge who recently stated that the country is run by the majority. Both these cases betray the judiciary's insolence with respect to the Constitution.

On the collegium system, he questioned its capacity in being independent, just and transparent, and cited the recent example of Saurabh Kripal being snubbed from Supreme court judgeship for his sexual preferences as an illustration of the collegium's biases. He added that the collegium is compromised and is mostly concerned with executing instructions from certain political headquarters in Nagpur by appointing politically biased judges. He also raised the issue of pendency of cases and its implications for justice, referring to the pending Sabrimala review case which is yet to be taken up by the Court. Despite the Supreme Court having stated that preventing women from entering the Sabrimala temple is akin to untouchability under Article 17, women as of now, are still prohibited from entering the temple due to the judgment pending before the Supreme Court. He also spoke about the unconstitutionality of state actions including the State hounding young muslim girls from wearing their hijab in education institutions and a recent incident in the Karnataka High Court where a judge found no issues with provocateurs shouting Jai Shri Ram at a mosque. He concluded his speech by stating that we must not treat the Constitution as the exclusive subject of lawyers, but as the subject of the people, and exhort common people to fight for its survival. He emphasised that if we as a community stand vigilant, judges cannot fail us.

The first day of the National Conference ended with AILAJ holding a candlelight vigil in protest of Home Minister Amit Shah's recent unsavoury comments on Dr Ambedkar in the Parliament, and added their voice to a chorus of social movements and groups seeking his resignation.

AILAJ over the course of its two day conference reviewed the activities and campaigns it undertook in the past two years, and drew up a plan for future

activities. Critical resolutions on AILAJ's position on various topical issues were also passed. Among the highlights was AILAJ's renewed commitment to pushing the government to pass an Advocate Protections Act in light of the recent spike in violence against advocates, secure social security benefits including

stipends for junior lawyers, medical insurance of lawyers and other holistic social security benefits for clerk and in opposing unconstitutional laws including labour codes and other communally laced laws. The conference concluded by electing a 43 member National Committee. Advocate Maitreyi Krishnan

was unanimously chosen to continue as the National President. AILAJ reaffirmed its commitment to be the voice of all sections of the legal fraternity, stand by the common people in their struggle for a life with dignity and freedom of expression and to protect the Constitution. ■

## Obituary

### AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI

Amiya Kumar Bagchi, the esteemed Marxist economist and educator, passed away on November 28, 2024, at the age of 88. Born in 1936, Bagchi's early academic journey began at Presidency College, Kolkata, where he cultivated his profound interest in economics. His scholarly pursuits took him to the University of Cambridge. Bagchi was the director of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC). Later he established and led the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata as its director.



His landmark book, "Private Investment in India: 1900-1939", dissected colonial policies and their devastating impacts on India's economy. His exploration of themes such as colonialism, globalisation, and underdevelopment continues to inspire both the scholars and activists alike. Among his many acclaimed works are 'Colonialism and the Indian Economy', 'Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital' and 'The Political Economy of Underdevelopment'. Bagchi's work was inseparable from his ideological commitment to socialism. He dedicated his life and scholarly work to unravelling the systemic roots of inequality and colonial exploitation, always with an unwavering commitment to the working-class and oppressed peoples of the world. Red Salute to Comrade Amiya Kumar Bagchi!

### JAGDEV MAHATO

Veteran CPIML leader Comrade Jagdev Mahato, at the age of 80, on the morning of December 10, 2024, at PMCH in Patna. Comrade Mahato had been battling the severe respiratory illness, COPD, for a long period. He was a former General Secretary of the Patna Mahanagar Workers' Union and Sudha Dairy Drivers' Union. Comrade Jagdev Mahato, fondly known as Bhaiya, was deeply committed to the CPI(ML) from his student days. During the underground struggle, his residence became a crucial shelter for the party leadership. His entire family was dedicated to the party's cause. It was from his house that Comrade Ram Naresh Ram contested and won his first legislative assembly election in Sahar, Bhojpur.



Born into a middle-class farmer's family in Rosera village, Samastipur, in 1944, Comrade Mahato completed his undergraduate studies from Samastipur College. In 1962, he started his career as a primary school teacher in Samastipur. After two to three years, he left the job in protest against the administration. He then joined the municipal tax collector's job in Samastipur but was dismissed due to his fight against corruption. In 1968, he moved to Patna, where he secured a position as a tax collector with the municipal corporation. He continued in government service for 34 years, from 1968 to 2002, during which he remained an active and dedicated member of the CPI(ML). With the passing of Comrade Jagdev Mahato, the party has lost a veteran and dedicated comrade. Red Salute to Comrade Jagdev Mahato!

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