

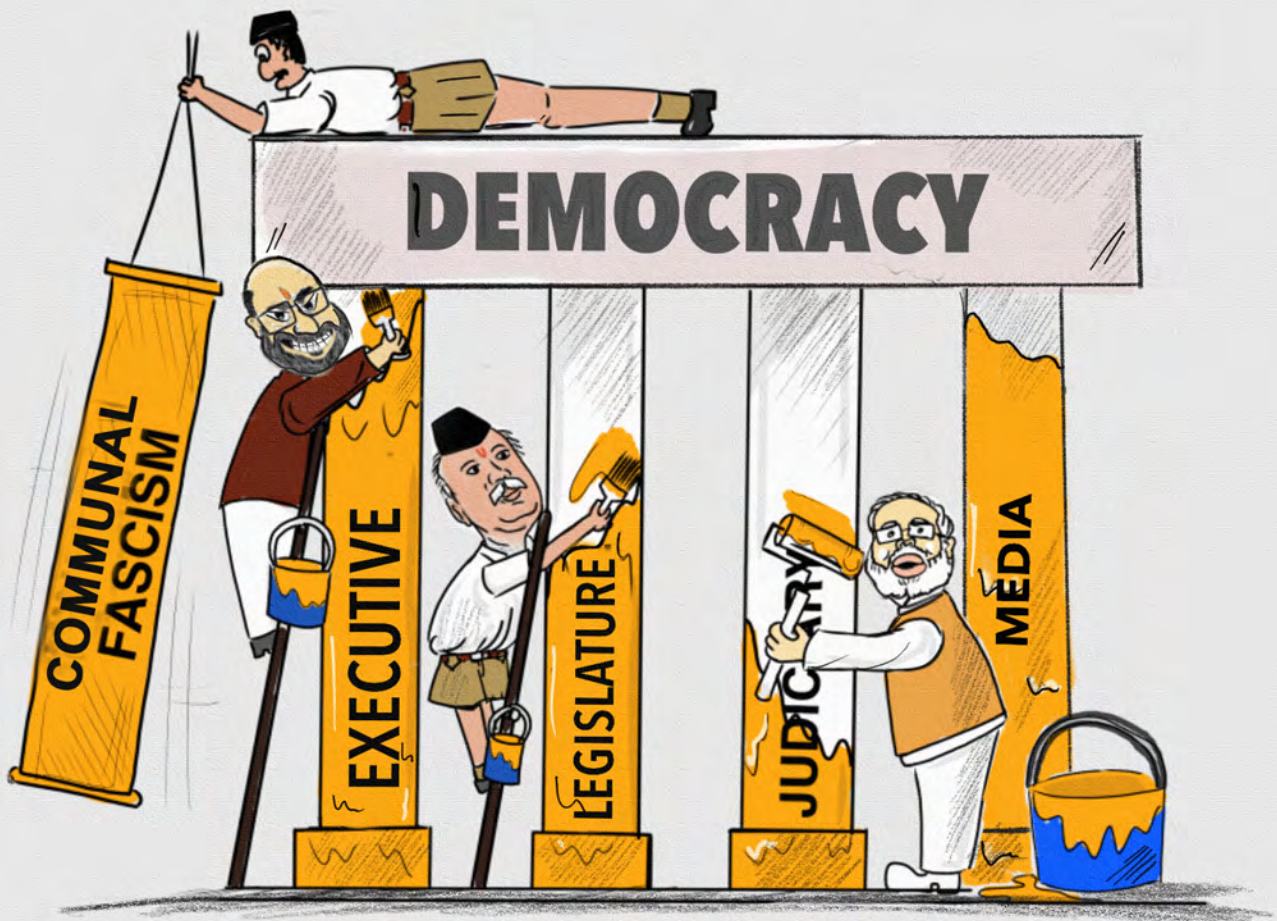
# Liberation

NOVEMBER 2022

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

Rs. 25

## **FOIL THE COMMUNAL FASCIST SCRIPT**



# Annabhau Sathe's Play - *Mumbai Konachi?*

*Annabhau Sathe (1 August 1920 - 18 July 1969) was an immensely admired dalit communist writer, performer who galvanised people's struggles in Mumbai in the 1940s and 1950s. He was also a key cultural protagonist of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, the movement for a linguistic Marathi-speaking state which led to the emergence of Maharashtra and Gujarat as two separate states carved out of the erstwhile bilingual Bombay State. A folk play written by him during this movement Mumbai Konachi (Whose Mumbai) was staged on 2 October by IPTA before a packed audience. The play perhaps resonated even more in today's context of urban crisis and dispossession, and the precarious, insecure conditions of life of large sections of the urban poor and working people many of whom have no access to secure shelter and stable job or livelihood. A short review of the play by journalist and culture critic Vidyadhar Date.)*

Seeing Annabhau Sathe's play on Mumbai's working people's struggles against capitalist domination, written in the 1950s, makes one realise that he in a way preceded eminent urban radical thinkers like David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre who have emphasised the concept of people's right to the city, shape its economy, space and so on.

This consciousness in him was created out of a mass upsurge, big demonstrations and morchas were taken out in Maharashtra in protest against the decision to separate Mumbai from Maharashtra. Police firing took a toll of 107 protesters from different walks of life, it is in their memory that we have Hutatma Chowk at Flora Fountain.

The Samyukta Maharashtra movement was in good measure for merger of some border areas into Maharashtra but it was also rooted in the struggle against economic injustice, domination of the city by vested interests. Perhaps nowhere else in statehood movements was the working class so strongly involved in the struggle. The class element in Mumbai was very prominent with S.A. Dange, veteran communist leader, and other progressive leaders at the helm in Maharashtra.

The city is the most central site for capitalist accumulation and exploitation of workers. Mumbai's capitalists wanted to have the cake and eat it too, get all the benefits of the infrastructure and not share the surplus wealth generated by workers with the rural population. The upper class in the elite South Mumbai area look down even upon the better off sections in other parts of Mumbai. So one can imagine their indifference, hostility to the rural masses.

The first performance of *Mumbai Konachi?* was staged by IPTA at a packed Ravindra Natya Mandir on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti day. It got a rousing welcome from the audience. Real solidarity between the actors and audience and all for a good cause. All seats were taken, some seniors like Kuldeep Singh, noted music director, did not seem to mind sitting on the steps. Also present were IPTA veterans, producer Masud Akhtar, Ramesh Talwar, Anjaan Srivastava. Sulabha Arya played the sootradhar. The set was designed by M.S. Sathya and the play directed by veteran Shivdas Ghodke with so much passion and enthusiasm despite his illness.

The serious theme of the play, revolving around the conflict between capital and labour, the rich and the poor, was presented in a very lively manner with a lot of humour. There were no stereotypes. Even the exploiter Shetji, the businessman, was far from hackneyed. The performance began with Sathe's famous lavani, the popular musical genre, depicting the inequality in Mumbai from Malabar hill to the working class areas. A large young and energetic cast did it in folk form with actors expressing so much with their bodies, adding so much to the written word.

There is now world wide recognition of people's right to the city which is clear from so many charters and declarations. But the urban power elite does not recognise the enormous contribution of ordinary people and workers to the creation and maintenance of urban wealth. There are also indications that Mumbai may well be sought to be separated from Maharashtra. Governor Koshiyari's widely condemned statement is reflection of this anti-people bias. He had to apologise for his comment that only certain communities created wealth, hinting that the common people had no role in it. Annabhau Sathe showed how common people created wealth and urban infrastructure. Mumbai got its electricity at the expense of hundreds of peasants who lost their land for the Mulshi dam in the hinterland for a hydro electric project.

Annabhau's vision was humanistic and universal. That is why he wrote a powada, a ballad, on the battle of Stalingrad against Hitler and the Spanish people's struggle against fascism. It is in recognition of his contribution that recently a statue was installed in Moscow in his memory to mark his centenary. ■





# Liberation

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# Reject Hate! Resist Fear! Assert Constitutional Rights!



India's downslide on the Global Hunger Index continues uninterrupted. From the 94th position among 107 countries covered in 2020, India's ranking dropped by seven positions to 101st out of 116 in 2021 and by another six positions in the latest 2022 index dropping to the 107th rank among 121 countries. Except war-ravaged Afghanistan, all our neighbours are considerably ahead of India in this list. China, still marginally ahead of India to occupy the slot of the world's most populous country, is way ahead in the topmost GHI range of 1 to 17. In other words, while the incidence of hunger in China is considered low, it is considered serious in India. India's child wasting rate, which reflects acute malnutrition among children under five, is the highest in the world.

The Modi regime combats hunger by banishing it from the public discourse and calling the GHI a western conspiracy. A decade ago the Sangh brigade and the dominant media used to go ballistic against rising prices and the falling rupee. Now, the prices of petrol, cooking gas and every essential item of mass consumption are shooting through the roof and the rupee is daily falling against the dollar, just a few hits away from reaching the century

***When the state thus threatens to make a complete mockery of parliamentary democracy, it is the job of citizens to stay alert and foil this fascist design by reclaiming the electoral arena and animating it with the issues, struggles and rights of the people.***

mark. Ten years ago, Gujarat CM Narendra Modi used to cite the fall in the rupee's exchange value as the ultimate sign of a weak government and economic mismanagement. Today, Modi as the Indian PM keeps deafeningly silent about the rupee's free fall while the Finance Minister explains it as the strength of the dollar! Instead of confronting the reality of acute hunger, soaring prices, dwindling rupee or vanishing jobs, Modi continues to bombard his audience with the fairytale of 'ease of doing business', an index which the World Bank has discontinued since September 2021 after an independent audit exposed how the rankings were tampered with.

The Sangh brigade is all too aware that it can only win elections by spreading lies and harvesting hate. Ahead of the forthcoming Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat elections, we therefore see a renewed focus on hate campaigns. Before the UP elections we saw the BJP perfecting the hijab ban experiment in its Karnataka laboratory. Now while the hijab ban issue continues to linger in the Supreme Court, Sangh brigade leaders in Delhi and NCR are once again busy spewing venom,

calling for persecution ranging from anti-Muslim boycotts to outright genocide. And within Gujarat the polarization that began on the very day of the 75th anniversary of India's independence has been sharpened further during the Navratri festival and attendant Garba celebrations with the targeted exclusion and public humiliation and flogging of Muslims. It is now on record that the August 15 release of the rape and murder convicts in the Bilkis Bano case was sanctioned by the Union Home Ministry, against the advice of the CBI and a Special Judge and contradicting the amnesty policy announced by the ministry itself which ruled out releasing convicts of heinous crimes like rape and murder.

Compounding this campaign of communal polarization and hate is the doctrine of paranoia and vendetta as state policy. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval had famously dubbed civil society the latest frontier of war. Now Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has taken this doctrine to an altogether new level by terming the idea of independence of every institution – be it media or social media, judiciary, NGOs or political parties – a looming threat to the nation's unity and security. This paranoia drives the executive in framing conspiracy cases and invoking draconian laws against dissenting citizens and keeping them imprisoned for years, even as the apex court overturns the acquittal of a wheelchair-bound professor suffering 90% disabilities by citing the brain as the most dangerous organ in cases involving charges of terrorism or Maoism. While professional peddlers of hate roam scot-free, bail petitions of movement activists like Umar Khalid who campaign against hate are dismissed for allegedly 'not having any merit'.

Can we have free and fair elections in

such an overwhelming environment of hate, lies and fear? The Election Commission, it seems, does not even want us to think of free and fair elections any more. On the ground the electoral roll is being systematically linked up with Aadhaar cards even as the EC keeps telling us that this linkage is purely voluntary and no existing or aspiring voter will be disenfranchised for not furnishing Aadhaar details. While the BJP is busy announcing pre-poll project launches and tax cuts in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, the EC is proposing to amend the model poll code of conduct to subject poll manifestos of political parties to economic viability tests, thus arrogating to itself the power of political censorship undermining the very spirit of political freedom in a multiparty parliamentary democracy.

Additionally, the EC in Gujarat is signing MoUs with individual firms and industry bodies giving them the right to monitor the electoral participation of their workers, including naming and shaming of workers who fail to vote! In place of free elections without fear or favour, we now thus see a system being evolved to subject voters to intimidation and surveillance through Aadhaar-electoral roll linkage and corporate monitoring of electoral participation. Needless to add that it will take only a small step to pass from 'monitoring participation' to influencing and dictating voter choice and determining the actual outcome. When the state thus threatens to make a complete mockery of parliamentary democracy, it is the job of citizens to stay alert and foil this fascist design by reclaiming the electoral arena and animating it with the issues, struggles and rights of the people. ■

# Defend Political Liberty and Foil the Communal Fascist Script

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**W**ith less than two years left for the 2024 general elections and the economy tumbling rapidly downhill, the Modi regime is desperately working on its tested and trusted strategy of communal scapegoating to divert the people's attention from the most burning issues facing the common Indian – soaring prices, vanishing jobs and dwindling income. The NIA raids in Phulwari and elsewhere in Bihar in July, the release and felicitation in Gujarat of the rape and murder convicts in the Bilkis Bano case on the very day India celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of Independence and now the ban on PFI and allied organisations, all these tell us how the Sangh-BJP brigade is preparing for the forthcoming elections – Gujarat and Himachal later this year, several Assembly elections due in 2023 and the crucial battle of 2024.

In the wake of the 2002 post-Godhra Gujarat genocide, Modi had portrayed the global condemnation of his regime as an attack on the very identity and honour of Gujarat and made 'Gujarat gaurav' or the pride of Gujarat his election plank to retain power. Twenty years ago the balance of forces and the character of the mainstream media discourse were still quite different – while Modi managed to retain Gujarat, Vajpayee and Advani had to pay the price despite their high-voltage 'India shining' campaign. Apart from the disturbing reality of farmer suicides and economic distress, the genocide in Gujarat was a key reason that led to the demise of the Vajpayee-Advani era.

Within Gujarat, Modi however

managed to secure the loyal support of India's big corporates who rallied around him under the banner of 'vibrant Gujarat'. The power of the state – an arbitrary police state driven by an unbridled executive – completed the fusion of communal ideology and corporate interests and turned it into a vice-like grip. This Gujarat model is now being replicated on an all-India level to ensure an uninterrupted reign of the RSS-anointed supreme leader. Periodic surfacing of alleged threats to the supreme leader and to the Hindu community and India as a country is central to this script.

During the declared Emergency of the mid 1970s we had heard a slogan stating the equivalence of India and Indira, the then supreme leader. Now the equivalence is stretched to insert the Hindu identity in the middle because the leader is also known as the 'Hindu Hriday Samrat' (emperor of Hindu hearts). Critics of the regime and its vicious politics and disastrous performance are now routinely accused of being both anti-national and anti-Hindu or Hinduphobe. This of course follows from the Sangh brigade's definition of India as a Hindu nation. The government is constantly talking of either external or internal threats and classifying dissenting citizens into various categories of designated internal enemies. The rant against 'urban naxals' has already led to the arrest and even custodial death of some of India's most active human rights defenders and now the ban on PFI and allied organisations indicates the beginning of a new stage of the indiscriminate witch-hunt against Indian Muslims.

During the Emergency, India's press was subjected to censorship and a large

spectrum of opposition leaders and activists were put in jails. Restoration of democracy therefore became a key slogan and widely felt need. The lifting of Emergency and the defeat of the autocratic regime also witnessed a spirited campaign for release of political prisoners and reinstatement of employees whose jobs were terminated during the 1974 railway strike. This time round, much of the mainstream media has effectively been transformed into a propaganda tool for the regime and the incarceration campaign still remains largely confined to non-party activists with the exception of Jammu and Kashmir, where following the deactivation of Article 370 the entire political opposition was put in jail or under house arrest.

This may partly explain why the ending of the witch-hunt and the release of prisoners of conscience have not yet emerged as core demands of the parliamentary opposition. There is also the old mistaken belief that the opposition only needed to remain focused on the economy. Narsimha Rao had famously thought that the market would deflate the BJP's communal agenda, but the rise of the Modi phenomenon has clearly revealed the high compatibility quotient in the marriage between market fundamentalism and communal fascism. It is time India's parliamentary opposition woke up to the pressing need to make political liberty a key item on its agenda. When the BJP is bent upon subverting the Constitution and turning India into an opposition-free one-party polity, the opposition must rise unhesitatingly in defence of democracy and the Constitution. There can be no deferring or truncating the democratic agenda in the battle against fascism. ■



# Fascist Assault on the Working Class

▲ CLIFTON D'ROZARIO

*One does not go to a convention against fascism to get hold of a definitive analysis of fascism. One goes there to see what fascism means and does to people of different modes of existence, and how – and how effectively – they are resisting it.*

*- K. Balagopal<sup>1</sup>*

*Talk given at the 13th Balagopal Memorial Meeting held on 9th October 2022 at Hyderabad and organised by Human Rights Forum (HRF)*

**T**he working class is being rendered evermore precarious with insecure jobs, lack of social security, exploitative working conditions, low wages, and union-busting. The reality is that over 90% of the workers are in unorganised sector<sup>2</sup> and 60% workers earn less than Rs. 375/- per day. Unemployment, is in fact, at a 40-year high. Indeed the precariousness of workers today is reflected by the fact that daily-wage workers account for more than 25% of the deaths by suicides annually in the country, which was a staggering 42,000 lives lost. Majority of workers belong to the category of the working poor, having to negotiate their daily needs through uncertain livelihood opportunities that make them, in the words of Jan Breman “wage hunters and gatherers” and “footloose labourers”.

At the same time, caste-feudal and patriarchal structures continue to dominate in several sectors. For instance, sanitation workers and manual scavengers are mostly Dalit, scheme workers and domestic workers are predominantly women, while bonded labours are mostly Adivasi. The proportion of women

workers remaining low even as the gender wage-gap continues to grow.

Not only has the promise of 2 crore jobs been all but forgotten, the Union government's economic policies continue to snatch existing jobs and exacerbate unemployment. This unemployment crisis is pushing entire sections of workers, particularly those from marginalised and oppressed sections, back into poverty, debt-traps, insecure livelihoods, hunger and further marginalisation.

## Fascist assault on the working class

The spectre of Fascism looms large over India. Indeed there is battle for the idea of India, which has no parallels in history. Many people make the mistake of equating today's political situation with the Emergency forgetting the fundamental distinguishing features, most importantly that the present-day Indian brand of fascism is rooted in ideology, Hindutva if you please, and the Union government with Modi as its face, is the front-office of RSS and its vast network of organisations.

Some of the stand-out features of the Indian brand of fascism commonly deliberated upon include the mockery of the Constitution and parliamentary democracy, dismantling of institutions of democracy and accountability, persecution of any

ideological dissent, the discourse of Hindutva nationalism, the privatisation of violence in hands of Hindu supremacist organisations, the coding of Hindutva into the law (abrogation of Article 370, Citizenship Amendment Act, proscribing Hijab in education institutions in Karnataka, etc.), the unprecedented communal polarisation and marginalisation of Muslims and the consolidation of caste and belligerent caste aggression, and of course the naked pro-corporate agenda of Modi regime.

Another core feature is the open ruling class war being waged on the working class on four key planks.

## Neoliberal policies, corporate Raj and crony capitalism

*“A populist fascism, for instance, would today have made a big show of opposing the new economic policy. The BJP will not only not do that, it offers the most brazen arguments in defence of liberalisation of the economy.” – K. Balagopal<sup>3</sup>*

The neoliberal prescriptions to the global economic crisis, of liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation and withdrawal of the welfare state, have decimated the lives of workers causing increasing unemployment, precarious working and living conditions, and ever-sharpening inequality. Unsurprisingly, this has provided

[1] “Rise of Gangsterism in Politics”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 4, 1989

[2] As of 2018, India had about 461 million workers (some estimates put it at 470 million), with 80% of them working in the informal sector, such as in agricultural work and in MSMEs with not more than 10 workers. The remaining 92 million workers are designated as being in the formal sector, of whom 49 million are employed as informal workers and called variously as contract labour, daily wagers, outsourced staff, etc.

[3] “Why did December 6, 1992 happen”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 24, 1993

a base for fascist and authoritarian regimes to come to power across the world. In this overall global climate of rise in reactionary bourgeois regimes, Hindutva fascism returns in the unconditional defence of a crisis-ridden capitalism.

The entire Indian economy is now opened to foreign capital, whether in the name of 'Make in India' or 'National Monetisation Pipeline', through systematic privatisation and outright sale of public sector establishments. This along with the combined effect of demonetisation, GST and the authoritarian imposition of lockdown has further pauperised the workers with the parallel unprecedented increase in the wealth of the corporates and elite. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few corporates (Adani's wealth has grown thirty-fold over the past eight years) as a result of transferring public assets and resources to the corporates, enabling monopolies in all sectors, is the result of the most brazen variety of crony capitalism.

One of the direct consequences of this transfer of public assets into the hands of corporates, is that the employees will be thrown out of their jobs and the reservation policy for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be abandoned.

A taste of things to come is evident from the experience of Air India. On 8<sup>th</sup> October 8, 2021, the Union government announced the sale of Air India to the Tatas. In June 2022, Tata-owned Air India launched a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) for its employees while at the same time announcing that it intended to hire the "right persons" for important positions. Hiring and firing simultaneously!<sup>4</sup>

## Contempt for the workers

The open defence of capital by the Union government is not merely a quid pro quo offered to corporates for fund-rolling the BJP's election campaigns, but derives from an ideology that is inherently anti-worker. At its core, Hindutva fascism has sheer contempt for workers as rights-bearing, militant, non-submissive, organised citizens demanding their due of what their labour power has produced, as a step towards the capture of state power. On the contrary, it patronises a relationship between the employers and the workers, premised on servility and subservience.

Relentlessly battling for corporates, Modi has condemned the *"culture of criticizing industry and corporates" since he believes they are doing exemplary social work alongside their business. In his election victory speech on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019 he stated: "Now, there are only two castes living in the country and the country is going to be focused on these two castes. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a caste in India, the poor, and other castes in the country who have some contribution to free them of poverty. There are the ones who want to come out of poverty and the one who wants to bring people out of poverty. We have to empower these two." Immediately thereafter, in his Independence Day speech on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019, Modi celebrated wealth creation as a great national service, and warned against seeing "wealth creators with suspicion".*

In the eyes of this regime, the workers whose labour power produces everything, are not the wealth creators. On the contrary the corporates, who accumulate wealth by the sheer exploitation of labour and resources, are supposedly the wealth creators and while workers are to be grateful to them!

One of the many policy attacks on the working class was demonetisation which caused untold devastation with workers struggling to meet expenses of basic needs including food, medical expenses, school fees, transport, etc. Compelled to stand in long queues for days on end, workers lost their livelihood and wages. Utter contempt marked the manner in which this was imposed and implemented.

The 4-hour notice for imposing the Covid lockdown further revealed this contempt for workers, their lives and livelihoods. Announced on 24<sup>th</sup> March, the last week of the month, it enabled employers to deny workers their wages thereby facilitating wage-theft. Workers and their families faced impoverishment, starvation and destitution. Migrant workers were compelled to walk back to their homes thousands of kilometres and many hundreds lost their lives. indignity was heaped on the migrants in various ways. In Bareilly, UP they were sprayed with disinfectants in the middle of the road, while in Bihar they were refused entry at the border itself. Incidentally in June, 2022, the UP government earned Rs 21 lakhs from auctioning the thousands of cycles confiscated from laborers going towards their homes in lockdown!

The contempt for workers is further seen in the increasing criminalisation of working class struggles. The migrant workers in Surat, who during the Covid lockdown, protested demanding that they be allowed to return to their homes, were tear gassed, lathi charged and then arrested. Another shocking indication of this trend is the experience of the 5 contract workers working at Reliance Energy Ltd., Mumbai and members of the Mumbai Electric Employees Union, fighting against the precarious working conditions and for the basic rights of workers. They were implicated in false cases

[4] <https://www.freepressjournal.in/analysis/tatas-aim-to-right-size-air-india-by-hiring-and-firing-simultaneously>

and charged under UAPA for their Union activities. They have since been released on bail after spending between 2-3 years in jail. Incidentally one of the allegations against them is that deliberately stopped the work of Reliance Energy Ltd. for one day! With the coming of the new Labour Codes, the Union government has made clear its intent of destroying even the most basic rights of workers and any struggles against it will be met with brute force.

## Dismantling the existing labour law protections

In previous regimes we have witnessed two strategies to deny workers the benefits of existing labour laws. The first strategy par excellence, which has defined labour law, ever since its inception, has been the startling discordance between the law on the books and the law in action. The fact that these legislations were not being fully implemented reduced workers to a condition of precarity. The second is the gradual whittling away of labour protections through judicial interpretation. The locus classicus (among many others) in this hall of constitutional shame is the judgment in SAIL, which has effectively gutted the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.

Now, what we are witnessing is the complete dismantling of entire labour law protections itself. Even as the country was battling Covid, the Union Labour Ministry issued a communication on 05.05.2020 to all the State Governments mandating that in order to address the "... challenges emerged due to COVID-19 pandemic, it is requested to undertake labour reforms on priority basis", namely enabling self-certification, reduced inspection system, and effecting labour law changes including:

- Increase in threshold from 100 to 300 workers under the ID Act
- Increase in threshold under the Contract Labour Act from existing 20 workers to 80 workers
- Increase in threshold under the Factories Act from 10 (with power) and 20 (without aid of power) to 20 and 40 respectively
- Fixed term employment
- Increasing working hours from 8 to 12

Simultaneously the Union government went ahead with getting the 4 Labour Codes passed in Parliament, thereby declaring a veritable war on the working class. These Labour Codes take away most hard-won rights of the workers. They have increased the thresholds for applicability thereby placing workers outside the protection of law, attacks the workers' rights to organise and strike, withdraws several protections to women workers, institutionalises contract labour, etc.

Importantly the Labour Codes are an attack on the workers rights as envisaged in the Constitution. For instance, while the Constitution envisages "living wages", the Codes institutionalise "starvation wages"; the Constitution mandates state policy towards participation of workers in management of industries whereas the Codes institutionalise dictatorship of the employers.

Interestingly Ambedkar, who the Sangh Parivar pays pretentious respect to, had this to say, which has huge relevance!

*"In an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals someone must make rules so that workers will work and the wheels of industry run on. If the State does not do it the private employer will. Life otherwise will become impossible. In other words what is called liberty from the control of the State is another name for*

*the dictatorship of the private employer. How to prevent such a thing happening? How to protect the unemployed as well as the employed from being cheated out of their Fundamental Rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness? The useful remedy... is to invoke the ordinary power of the Legislature to restrain the more powerful individual from imposing arbitrary restraints on the less powerful in the economic field. It seeks to limit not only the power of Government to impose arbitrary restraints but also of the more powerful individuals or to be more precise to eliminate the possibility of the more powerful having the power to impose arbitrary restraints on the less powerful by withdrawing from the control he has over the economic life of people."*<sup>5</sup>

## Manufacturing consent for Hindutva among the working class

Another plank of attack on the working class is the concerted effort to blunt the revolutionary potential of the working class and simultaneously manufacture consent for Hindutva. It must be understood that the neoliberal project necessarily requires the crushing of the organising and fighting capacity of the working class and their trade unions. This has now coalesced with Hindutva, an ideology that eschews a class-conscious militant working class.

We have reached a stage where a section of workers subscribe to the communal, Manuvadi and fascist political ideas and influence. Studies reveal that, even during the colonial period, sections of the working class were seen to participate in communal violence. Instead of "class consciousness", these sections of workers exhibited some "community consciousness" but this could not deter their unity in working class struggles. Today, however we are faced with a section of workers who

[5] Appendices, States and Minorities



are completely persuaded by the ideology of Hindutva.

In no uncertain terms this has been facilitated by an uninterrupted continuity of ideology and mobilisation of the masses, particularly the working class by the Sangh Parivar. Let's remember that the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) has been engaged in the mobilization of workers under the banner of Hindu nationalism for decades.<sup>6</sup> Formed in 1955, BMS was established to work among the working class with RSS ideals. It claims that "Bharatiya culture" forms its ideological basis and "that National goal cannot be achieved if there exists any feeling of enmity" and "all the constituents should act and work in unison", which can be achieved by "developing the concept of "family" in the industry." On this basis, BMS outrightly rejects class struggle, and promotes the concept of "industrial family". Comprising more than 5000 affiliate unions it has a membership of almost 1 crore in all States and is the largest central trade union in the country. It has played an instrumental role in blunting workers' class consciousness and manufacturing consent for Hindu nationalism.

Moreover, informalisation and poverty coupled with communal riots in previous decades, and a fascist ideological onslaught now, make workers an easy prey to fascist political influences. Jan Breman while studying the communal riots in Ahmedabad argues that there is "a direct causal relationship between the massive expulsion of labor from the formal sector of the city economy and the eruption of communal violence at the end of the twentieth century."

## Resisting fascism

*If Hindu Raj does become a fact it will no doubt be the greatest calamity for this country. It is a menace to liberty,*

*equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost. - Ambedkar*

The working class has a history, and the subjective necessity to fight this fascist assault. During the Indian freedom struggle, workers again and again rebuffed divisive communal politics and united to deliver spirited blows to the colonial powers. Even a fascist Nazi rule faced a fight-back in the form of, what Timothy Mason calls, political resistance of the German working class and workers' opposition.

More recently, we have witnessed the heroic struggle of the farmers, one of the largest protests in independent India. The Union government bulldozed its way in Parliament to pass the 3 anti-farmer pro-corporate laws, yet the unprecedented farmers' movement brought this tyrannical regime to its knees. The Union government, with the media as its mouthpiece, failed despite all possible tricks to demonise and divide the farmers. Indeed it was a defeated Union government that was compelled to finally repeal the farm laws.

The working class has to draw inspiration from this courageous farmers' resistance and mount a spirited resistance to this fascist assault. Militant struggles, without falling into the trap of economism, have to be the guiding norm. The joint central trade union protests and strikes are necessary, but insufficient. To escape the trap of economism, it must be understood that the class question being a social question, class struggle cannot be solely economic struggle and is basically the struggle against all economic and social oppression including class, caste and gender. In particular gender equality and

the annihilation of caste must be an integral part of the working class organising and struggles. Fighting communal divisions is a principal task of the working class, not because they divide the working class, but because these are facets of the Indian brand of fascism that spells disaster for the entire country. These are part and parcel of the democratisation that is necessary for any justice to the working class.

As against "communal consciousness", we must strive for real unity of, and fraternity amongst, the working class. Bhagat Singh who saw revolutionary Marxism as the answer to communalism, was of the view that: "*To prevent people from fighting each other, "class consciousness" is the need of the day. The poor labourers and the farmers must be clearly taught that their real enemies are the capitalists.*". This can be effectively done by moving beyond the confines of the factory gates, and building the movement of the working class in their localities and as citizens.

Balagopal<sup>7</sup> said:

*The only hope is the resistance that the people have been expressing time and again, and their capacity for not only uncontrolled outbursts but also disciplined and organised protest... It would be cheating oneself to believe that the resistance is strong enough to overcome the fascist onslaught; but then it is only by courageously facing the onslaught that resistance can strengthen itself.*

Workers, desirous of a life of dignity, have no choice but to fight this assault. Let us draw hope from the struggles against fascism growing across the country.

After all, this is a resistible fascism! ■

[6] "Workers and the Right Wing: the Situation in India", Smriti Upadhyay, Johns Hopkins University

[7] Supra note 2

# Voices of Protest Rise against Continued Incarceration of Political Prisoners under Modi-Shah Regime

**O**n 8th October, despite heavy rains, citizens of Delhi joined the 'India Behind Bars' Conference at Press Club of India in solidarity with political prisoners incarcerated under various acts like UAPA, AFSPA, NSA and PSA, etc. Along with family members and friends of those incarcerated, teachers and activists spoke against the assault on democratic rights by the BJP regime.

Khalid Saifi is one of among dozens of anti-CAA activists who have imprisoned since 2020. Nargis Saifi, political activist and wife of Khalid Saifi addressed the gathering saying, "The injustice inflicted on Khalid is injustice to the country. Khalid's fight was the fight for constitutional values. We shall not rest until all prisoners facing wrongful targeting by BJP government are released." Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of CPIML said, "This fight against the BJP is of the magnitude of our freedom struggle. We must awake a new political consciousness to fight this regime of hate and violence." Jenny Rowena, Professor in DU and partner of Hany Babu spoke against UAPA saying, "the UAPA is a way of punishing people when you have no way of silencing them. It is not a law but a tool of violence on democracy." Rajya Sabha MP, Manoj Jha addressed the gathering saying, "I was present in the Parliament when latest amendments to UAPA was introduced. All the fears and criticisms that we had articulated, today stand vindicated by this brutal attack on democratic forces." Vasantha, activist and partner of GN Saibaba said, "Saibaba has been battling various health issues for so



many years. This government has no basic sense of responsibility and empathy towards its own citizens."

"Cases, arguments and laws that sound bizarre to our minds have

been normalized by this dictatorial government", said Banojyotsna Lahri, political activist and friend of Uma Khalid. Colin Gonsalves, Senior Advocate stated, "Nowhere in the world does a democracy give

## Rama Teltumbde's Note to the 'India Behind Bars' Press Conference

Thank you to all the people who have come together to hold this meeting in solidarity of those arrested in BK case and for the case of other political prisoners. I would like to take this opportunity to speak of despair as after nearly 3 years of incarceration I do not know when I will be able to see Anand as a free citizen! At the age of 72 with his many health concerns I am increasingly afraid of what may befall upon him. The BK case is probably going to be a blot in the history of this country. I would like more people to read and make themselves aware of the many reports which have surfaced in the recent past which talk about the level of evidence tampering and fabrication that has taken place in the BK case. We urge conscious citizens like your self to come out in support and to urge the judiciary to impartially look into the case and at least grant bail to these people who have suffered immensely.

The last 3 years for us and many more years for the rest have surely scared us in many ways and we would like for you to stand in support of these political prisoners, the true protectors of the countries constitution and its democracy. They need you more than ever.

Again I would like to thank you and express deep solidarity with the families of all the political prisoners present here. ■

this absolute power to the police and the political executive in determining whether someone is a terrorist. UAPA is an anomaly for a democratic society." Nandini Sundar, Professor, DU addressed the gathering saying "Now the police is deciding what intellectuals of the country can write and what they cannot write. They are deciding what people can say or not say."

Neha Dixit, independent journalist spoke of the eroding independence of judiciary. She said, "There has been complete politicization of lower and higher level courts in the sense that senior officials of courts are filing cases against independent journalists and activists today. This government and the RSS have destroyed the independent character of the judiciary." Arfa Khanum, Senior editor of the Wire said,

## Sahba Hussain's Note to the 'India Behind Bars' Press Conference

I am truly sorry for not being able to attend this important meeting, even though I had earlier confirmed my participation. However, I am certain that there will be more such meetings in the future, as the road to justice is long and arduous - as many of us experience it in our everyday lives.

I offer my heartfelt solidarity to the families and friends gathered here to talk about their loved ones who are languishing behind bars, bravely coping with the many hardships in jail but steadfast in their fight for justice.

Apart from the undertrial political prisoners of BK and CAA, charged under UAPA, who have name and visibility, there are countless other prisoners/political prisoners who remain invisible and without a voice or support network to help them in their quest for justice. Let us also remember them as we demand justice for our loved ones and the release of all political prisoners. ■

"today, any person who questions repression. This normalized fear the government knows the fear of must be fought with courage." ■

## CPIML STATEMENT ON SC STAY ON SAIBABA RELEASE ORDER

### The Supreme Court Did Not Just Stay the Release of Prof. G.N. Saibaba and Others, It Suspended the Rule of Law

**W**hile the acquittal of GN Saibaba, Mahesh Kariman Tirki, Hem Keshavdatta Mishra, Prashant Sanglikar and Vijay Tirki, by the Bombay High Court was a victory for the battle for the release of all political prisoners, the same was short-lived as the Supreme Court in a special sitting held on a Saturday morning, suspended the said order and stayed their release. After being incarcerated for 6 years, Prof G.N. Saibaba the others were acquitted by the Bombay High Court in its order delivered on 13th October 2022. Sadly, Pandu Narote died during the pendency of the appeal.

Prof. G. N. Saibaba, who is in a wheelchair with a 90% physical disability also suffers from a serious heart condition, acute pancreatitis

and gall bladder stones and is in need of immediate medical attention. A request for house arrest was also rejected. In the Press Conference held in Delhi on 'India Behind Bars', Vasantha, activist and partner of GN Saibaba had said, "Saibaba has been battling various health issues for so many years. This government has no basic sense of responsibility and empathy towards its own citizens."

The manner in which the present regime has weaponised an already unjust criminal justice system to lock up anyone standing up against its unjust policies is clear in its use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

CPIML will continue to fight for the release of political prisoners and the repeal of all draconian laws. ■

## Protests Demanding release of GN Saibaba

### Delhi

The students and teachers were beaten and detained by Delhi Police on 15 October from Delhi University while they gathered for a protest called by AISA demanding release of Prof GN Saibaba and others as ordered by the Bombay HC. As soon

as students gathered at Arts Faculty, a brutal repression was unleashed by the authorities and Delhi Police. Students were beaten, manhandled and injured when the police forcibly detained them. The protesters were taken to Burari Police Station where a protest public meeting took place.





Teachers of Delhi University, Nandita Narain, Saroj Giri and Jitendra Meena visited and addressed the gathering at Burari Police Station in solidarity with the students demanding release of GN Saiba and all political prisoners.

The protesters were released at 6PM after filing FIR on several activists including AISA Delhi President Abhigyan and AISA DU Jt. Secretary Manik.

### Patna

A citizens' protest was held in Patna on 17 October condemning SC

order against the release of Prof. Saibaba and others. The protesters demanded release of all political prisoners and to stop persecution of activists by the BJP government.

AIPF, RYA, AISA and Dasham called for this protest which was attended by many prominent citizens. The protest was addressed by ex-Prof. of Patna University Santosh Kumar, AIKM leader KD Yadav, AIPWA's Shashi Yadav, Vikas Kumar of AISA, AIPF convenor Kamlesh Sharma, Prof. Satish Kumar and many others. They strongly opposed the government for using the criminal

justice system as a weapon against its own citizens who stand for the rights of the people.

### Kolkata

A protest was held in Moulali, Kolkata by AISA and CPIML on 17th October demanding release of Prof Saibaba and others. An effigy of the Narendra Modi government, that has unleashed NIA and other central government agencies to silence and imprison dissenters, was burnt at the protest. CPIML West Bengal State Committee member comrade Basudev Basu addressed the protest saying that the Maharashtra Government, that is essentially a puppet in the hands of the BJP led central government, was swift in approaching the Supreme Court against the release order of Prof. GN Saibaba and others. He added saying that this swift action reveals the real intention of imprisoning Saibaba and other political prisoners. The government is not ready to tolerate any criticism of its functioning. This is a scared and anti-people government. ■

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## Why is the Sangh Brigade Afraid of Dalits Embracing Buddhism?

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**O**n 14 October, 1956, Babasaheb Ambedkar, accompanied by lakhs of people, had embraced Buddhism. The place was Nagpur, and the venue is since known as Deekshabhoomi where a stupa was inaugurated on 18 December 2001 by then President KR Narayanan and is now a widely recognised heritage site in Nagpur. The day was Ashoka Vijayadashami, to mark the anniversary of the

occasion when Emperor Ashoka is believed to have abjured violence and embraced Buddhism after being moved by the devastation caused by the Kalinga war. Incidentally, while Ambedkar chose the day to start a new Buddhist movement in India which has now given us a whole new community of Ambedkarite Buddhists, the RSS, founded on the same Vijayadashami day and headquartered in the same city of

Nagpur, celebrates the occasion by organising public display and worship of weapons.

The two histories thus highlight two contrasting trajectories – while Ambedkar's Dhammachakra Pravartan represented a determined quest for liberty, equality and fraternity, the militaristic and patriarchal culture of RSS has left a trail of hate, violence and

oppression. The contrast acquired a new sharpness this year, right in the national capital in Delhi, when a few thousand people assembled at Delhi's Ambedkar Bhawan, repeated Ambedkar's famous 22 vows and took the Buddhist oath. The event irked the RSS no end and the Sangh brigade launched a vicious campaign against Delhi government's Social Welfare Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam for his presence in the event forcing him to resign.

This incident also raises a serious question about the politics of the Aam Aadmi Party which has made it mandatory to put up Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar portraits in all Delhi and Punjab offices only to leave its own minister in the lurch when he is found following Ambedkar's legacy. On several occasions the AAP in Delhi has also been found to ditch its own Muslim MLAs and leaders in the face of the Sangh brigade's Islamophobic campaign of hate, lies and violence. Religious conversion is no crime but a constitutionally guaranteed right and Dalits have every right to seek a way out of the caste hierarchy and oppression by moving out of the Hindu fold. Incidentally, on the same day Mohan Bhagwat in his RSS foundation day address asked India to forget jati and varna as things of the past! If anything, the vicious RSS campaign against Dalits embracing Buddhism and repeating Ambedkar's famous 22 vows showed us how much the RSS was still committed to defending India's oppressive caste system. Caste cannot be overcome by just pretending that it is over, it can be overcome only by annihilating it as Ambedkar had asserted way back in 1936.

An impression is being sought to be created that RSS has evolved into a broad-based and inclusive organization. Events like the meeting between Bhagwat and five Muslim intellectuals which apparently signaled the 'readiness' of the RSS



*On 14 October, 1956, Babasaheb Ambedkar, accompanied by lakhs of people, had embraced Buddhism in Nagpur. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS*

to accept Indian Muslims as Indian citizens, and Bhagwat's visit to a mosque and madrasa, are all being propagated as signs of change. But nothing could be a bigger fake news! Bhagwat did visit a madrasa, but he went there only to ask students to read Gita alongside Quran. Will the RSS-run Vidyamandirs ask students to read Quran from now on? And if we needed his message to be decoded, it was done promptly in Bidar in Karnataka where a saffron squad entered a heritage mosque and madrasa to perform puja on Dussehra day.

There can be no mistaking the fact that the Sangh-BJP project is all about demonisation of Muslims and further exclusion of Dalits. Even as we hear Mohan Bhagwat talk about a 'false sense of fear and insecurity being spread among Muslims' we find a BJP MP in Delhi issuing an open call for total boycott of Muslims while another speaker repeats the call for genocide of Muslims from the stage of the same event. In the run-up to the impending Gujarat election, we also saw the Navratri celebrations and the Garba dance events in Gujarat being turned into a public display of anti-Muslim hate and violence with Muslims being debarred from taking part in social festivities and even publicly flogged by the police and goons with the crowd cheering in approval. Likewise, it should be abundantly clear that the 'caste-is-past' talk is only aimed at subverting the policy of reservation, trivializing

caste atrocities and denying Dalits and Adivasis their constitutional right to religious conversion.

No less mistaken is the impression that the RSS is waking up to the deepening economic crisis and is exerting pressure on the Modi government for some urgent course correction. RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale's remarks about poverty and unemployment in a Swadeshi Jagran Manch were part of the same package as Modi's frequent rants against 'freebies' and advice to job-seekers to turn into job-givers and citizens to focus on their duties instead of insisting on rights. In his Vijayadashami address, Mohan Bhagwat not only did the predictable drum-beating for the Modi government but also put the focus back on one of the Sangh brigade's pet propaganda points – the presumed threat to India's religious demographic balance, a dog-whistling euphemism to instigate the paranoid fear of Hindus becoming a minority in India or India suffering another partition because of an imaginary exponential growth in Muslim population! With the RSS only three years away from its centenary it is already celebrating with an escalation of its war on India's constitutional vision of a sovereign democratic socialist secular republic. ■

## *11th Report of the Official Language Committee:*

# Stop Undermining India's Linguistic Diversity

▲ RADHIKA MENON

**Y**et another salvo has been fired by the BJP government at the Centre towards advancing the RSS's agenda of 'One Nation, One language', this time with the 11th Report of the Official Language committee headed by Amit Shah. The recommendations of the committee were submitted to the President of India in September 2022. As has emerged over the last one month, the Report has given pre-eminence to Hindi over 21 other official languages of the Indian Republic. The committee's recommendations thus brush aside a long history of language struggles and democratic aspirations of the Indian people.

The content of the Report is supposed to be confidential. However, journalist previews, clarifications put out by the members of the committee, changes in medium of instruction being introduced in technical and non technical institutions- especially medical schools of Madhya Pradesh, as well as the National Education Policy released in 2020, are clear enough indications of the special attention being accorded to Hindi in all transactions of the Union government.

In the meantime, protests have begun in non-Hindi speaking states, with Tamil Nadu and Kerala officially communicating their apprehensions. It would do well here, to note that despite numerical dominance of what is categorised as Hindi speakers, the Census of 2011 shows that for 56.37% of the Indian population, Hindi is not the first language.

The imposition can only cause further erosion of democracy. To understand this, let us first look at the

recommendations that have invited opposition.

### **Recommendations for eroding democracy and denying opportunities**

The Report recommends that in Central government funded institutions Hindi is to be the compulsory medium of instruction. This includes all Kendriya Vidyalayas, IITs and central universities, which are supposed to be open to people from across the country. Thus, putting to disadvantage students who have not studied in Hindi.

Work in Hindi speaking states, termed as Category A states, as well as Central government offices is to be done in Hindi. The extent to which it must be undertaken lies in the recommendation for writing even addresses on envelopes in Hindi, thus demanding knowledge not only from the senders but also from the carriers and recipients!

It suggests replacing compulsory English with Hindi papers in government recruitment exams, for selecting government employees, thus cutting down eligible candidates for the posts. The Report also suggests Hindi as an official language at the United Nations.

For those government officials, who do not abide by the new language rules, the Committee instructs, they must be marked out in their "annual performance report."

If someone wants to seek justice, in the High courts of Hindi-speaking states, they can expect it only in Hindi. However, neither is justice sought only by those speaking Hindi, nor is

it dispensed only by those fluent in it.

The financial push for the language is being facilitated with the recommendation that 50 per cent of the government budget for advertisements is to be allocated to Hindi. Needless to say, this implies that the other 21 official languages are to be starved of funds and will have to compete among themselves.

In violation of the federal structure, the Committee also seeks to review implementation in state government offices.

Thus, from who could access education, to who would constitute the government, how the executive will act and how justice will be dispensed are all to be filtered through one official language.

As language supremacy is being charted out by linking it with citizenship rights, a few things stand out: One, threats and punishment for those who do not follow the line of Hindi dominance. Two, denying employment to Indians who may be fluent in other Indian languages but not in Hindi. Third, declaring non Hindi official languages as unworthy of government funding, thereby making the Union government a borough of Hindi speakers. Four, homogenising official Hindi speaking states and dismissing the language diversities within those states. Five, choking educational and employment opportunities for candidates from non Hindi speaking areas. Six, internationalising only Hindi, thereby projecting India as a Hindi land, in addition to the pet BJP project of a Hindu land.

With this undermining of the



democratic rights of citizens and the federal structure, the recommendations of the Report are certainly no benign move for language promotion. It is in fact an integral package of the Hindi-Hindu nation, that wants to iron out all diversities.

## Language as empowerment and dissent against Hindi imposition

India witnessed a steady rise of language struggles soon after Independence. On 15 December 1952, Potti Sriramulu, a veteran freedom fighter, who had earlier sat on hunger strikes for temple entry of dalits, died after 58 days of fasting. He had been demanding the formation of a Telugu speaking state, a call given right from the 1910s. Public anger caused by his death and the subsequent movement led to the first linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh. In the years that followed, several other linguistic states emerged in line with people's aspirations, struggles and movements.

India chose to be bilingual in English and Hindi following the language debates of the Constituent Assembly. It was the only way out to bring together India's diverse people, without new threats of domination. The debates however also showed the rising signs of language intolerance with a section of pro-Hindi members lashing out against dissenters. In 1946, in the Constituent Assembly, RV Dhulekar declared, "People who do not know Hindi have no right to stay in India" - a line very close to the anti-national handles being used by contemporary Right wing bigots. The groups of pro-Hindi lobby had radical right wing members as well as moderate Hindi promoters. Their arguments were seen as "Hindi imperialism" by the likes of T.T. Krishnamachari who warned of the explosive situation that may arise out



of this imposition. Bilinguality was a compromise formula of Munshi and Ayyangar after three years of debate, wherein Hindi and English were to continue as official languages till 1965, instead of having Hindi as a National language.

As 1965 grew closer, the anti-Hindi movement grew in Tamil Nadu, especially after the Official Language Act of 1963, which was seen as a tool for future administrations to impose Hindi on non Hindi speakers. The militant protests that raged through 1965 brought with it assurances for indefinite continuation of English alongside Hindi for connecting with the Centre and inter-state communications and for public service examinations.

## The recent report and its insidious political design

The Committee of Parliament on Official Language was first set up in 1976 under Section 4 of the Official Language Act 1963. It has all along been entrusted with the agenda of promoting Hindi, but under the Modi government and the stewardship of Amit Shah, the Committee's recommendations have assumed a new urgency of centralisation and linguistic homogenization. This is part of RSS tradition and its political offsprings Jan Sangh and BJP. The calls for Hindi supremacy is posed often in a decolonisation vocabulary to cover up the imperialist Akhand Bharat project.

The politics of language supremacy runs counter to the democratic

spirit and aspiration of language promotion. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution has 22 Indian languages. Significantly another 38 languages have been demanding to be listed in this Schedule. This is a democratic aspiration, considering India has 1369 'rationalized' mother tongues and 121 broad languages, as per Census 2011. Notably, many of the languages waiting and mobilising for a place in the Eighth Schedule are from states that are categorised as Hindi speaking, pointing to the diversity that is being covered up!

It should be remembered that attempts at linguistic imposition have triggered many a turmoil in independent India. The Eighth Schedule stands as the available democratic option for official languages. The connecting language of the people has to emerge in the natural course of interactions and not bulldozed in. But the recommendations of the Amit Shah led committee threaten to take the country backwards in its discourse of official languages.

Homogenisation and polarisation are the go-to tactics of Hindutva leaders in a country that is reeling under youth unemployment. In a climate of homogenisation, languages as well as social and political expressions are stifled. This agenda must be identified and exposed both within and outside Hindi speaking states. It is only in the many languages of the Indian Republic that democracy can become a power of the people and the 'official' must reflect it. ■

# 'Revdi Culture' Bogey: Insulting the Poor, Appeasing the Rich

▲ SAURABH NARUKA

**J**ust when Gautam Adani has become the second richest man in the world with the most generous backing of the Modi regime and India's crony capitalism is becoming an unbearable burden on the public exchequer with massive loan write-offs and tax exemptions and reductions, Narendra Modi has launched a verbal war on what he calls 'revdi culture'. The phrase is used to ridicule subsidies and welfare schemes demanded by the deprived people and promises of free or subsidised distribution of goods and services being made by rival parties, calling it the biggest drag on the Indian economy. A BJP leader has gone to the Supreme Court seeking a stop to such so-called freebies and nudged by the Supreme Court, the Election Commission has now proposed an amendment to the model poll code of conduct to censor election manifestos of political parties (CPIML's response to the amendment proposal is carried separately in this issue of Liberation). If the term freebie has to be used meaningfully, it deserves to be applied first of all for the obscene concessions being extended to the big corporates and the super rich. But concessions given to the rich are called incentives while relief provided to the poor and the needy is termed freebies or revdi!

## Double Standards

In fact, the BJP under Modi has been the classic case of the most cynical use of the so-called 'revadi' strategy. Most of its promises have of course been exposed to be empty rhetoric and plain lies or joomla. Now in power, the government seeks to arrogate to itself the exclusive advantage of making pre-poll announcements

about the launch of new schemes and projects or distributing some relief in the form of token transfers of so-called benefits. The launch of the Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme promising an annual relief of Rs 6000 to some 11 crore small and marginal farmer households before the 2019 elections was a glaring case in point. This is done tactically just on the eve of elections before the schedules are announced and the 'code of conduct' restrictions kick in. If rival parties can now be stopped through the amended model code from making competitive announcements in their election manifestos, they will be put to a permanent disadvantage.

## Freebie bogey to sidetrack MSP and fair wages demands

The revadi bogey is being raised precisely when farmers across the country are demanding a legal guarantee for MSP for all crops, employees are demanding restoration of the Old Pension Scheme in place of the fraudulent scheme of loot disguised as the New Pension Scheme and workers are opposing the new Labour Codes that are threatening to depress the already low minimum wages to an abysmal floor wage of Rs 178 per day.

It is shameful that the combined social expenditure of Centre and State Governments in India has remained stagnant between 6 to 7 percent of GDP from 2014-15 to 2019-20 (Page 352, Economic Survey 2021-22). To put it in perspective, in EU it is around 22 percent on a pan-European basis with figures for individual countries ranging from 12 to 40 percent. It was only in last two COVID-19 years that

social expenditure in India recorded a slight increase due to one-time expenditure on food security, MNREGA and health. But this was clearly to meet the extraordinary situation and is unlikely to reflect any kind of trend.

It is more than likely that with normal resumption of economic activities, the government will return to its usual mode of austerity for the people, especially in the name of keeping fiscal deficit in check at 3% of GDP as mandated by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

The talk of pressure of revdi culture on government finances is just an alibi to effect cutbacks in social expenditure and bring it back to the pre-pandemic level. This is happening when India ranks 107th amongst 121 countries on Global Hunger Index (GHI), 132nd on Human Development Index (HDI) among 192 countries and in the lowest rung in terms of per capita income despite being the fifth largest economy in overall GDP ranking. The abysmally low per capita income is not just due to India's population size but equally because of extremely high income inequality. The richest 1% in India 33% of national wealth and 22% income while the bottom 50% have to make do on just 13% of national income and less than 6% of national wealth.

As per the World Social Protection Report 2021 of the International Labour Organisation the spending on social protection (excluding health) in India is 1.4% of the GDP, while the average for even low-middle income countries is 2.5%. During Covid Pandemic, as per the Oxfam Report 2021, 'Inequality Kills' 84% of the Indian households reported reduced incomes, while the wealth of the 142

billionaires doubled. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Report, 2021 about attaining social goals in domain of education, health, housing, life expectancy India ranks 121st out of 169 countries.

### **Challenging the Insulting 'Freebie' Discourse**

The Modi Govt is moving rapidly ahead with its privatization and assets sale plan to transfer more

resources to its corporate masters while simultaneously labelling India's extremely low level of social sector spending as being unnecessary and wasteful. With growing privatisation more and more people will have diminished access to public services. Such excluded and deprived citizens will be called 'beneficiaries' surviving on token transfers from the state for which they will have to remain eternally

loyal to the ruling dispensation, now increasingly monopolised by the BJP. The propaganda being built around the 'revdi culture' or freebies discourse needs to be challenged head-on with a powerful assertion of the real producers of wealth, the working people of the country, to claim their rightful share and fair delivery of public goods and services. ■

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## **Ankita Bhandari Murder: The Cost of Saying No to Sexual Exploitation in BJP Ruled Uttarakhand**

▲ SHIVANI NAG

**A** 19-year-old girl comes to town with hopes of a better life. She joins as a receptionist in a resort and days later she is first reported missing and soon after her body is recovered from a canal. As her dreams and life are brutally cut short by perpetrators close to power, justice and administrative mechanism in BJP ruled Uttarakhand engage in massive cover ups to drown the real questions.

On 17 September, Ankita Bhandari, who had come from a village in Pauri district in Uttarakhand to work in a resort called Vanantara in Rishikesh, was found missing. It had been less than a month that she started working in this resort owned by Pulkit Arya, son of BJP leader Vinod Arya (former minister in the BJP led government in Uttarakhand). Pulkit himself has been associated with RSS student wing, the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad and had been the coordinator of its Technical Education Cell. After Ankita went missing, her father went to three police stations seeking help to find his daughter. He was told that since the area falls under revenue police jurisdiction he needed to approach the Patwari. When Ankita's

father went to meet the local Patwari Vaibhav Pratap, he was first refused entry and was later told the complaint could be filed only after 24 hours of missing. On much insistence, he took Ankita's identification details. But instead of following up the case, he went on a leave approved by the Tehsildhar. After six days of Ankita's disappearance, on 23 September, the matter was transferred from the revenue police to the civil police. On 24 September Pulkit Arya along with two other accused was arrested and he confessed having thrown Ankita into Chilla canal from where her body was recovered.

Further investigation revealed that Ankita was being forced to provide 'special services' (sexual services) to the VIP guests of the resort and she had refused to do so. In a resort owned by a powerful person connected to the ruling party in Uttarakhand, the female staff were being forced to provide sexual services to their guests and resistance had life threatening consequences.

While the common people of the state were out in protests demanding justice for Ankita and

a thorough investigation into the happenings in the resort, there have been serious attempts to drown these concerns through careful diversion mechanisms. The initial investigations clearly revealed that the resort was forcing the female staff into providing sexual services to some guests and as Ankita's murder shows, refusing to accept 'No' for an answer. Since the resort was owned by a person closely associated with the ruling party BJP, it is all the more important to inquire who were these VIP guests who were being 'served' through exploitation of women. There were clear indications that the rot ran deeper and hence there was an urgent need to take over the premises to extract all possible evidences present. What we witnessed instead, is a deliberate attempt to destroy all evidences by the administration. The administration, taking clue from bulldozer politics of BJP governance, bulldozed the resort. This was a clear attempt to destroy crucial evidences that could expose the vicious network of a system that resulted in the murder of a girl like Ankita. Reports suggest that the resort in question had been



built under the pretext of starting a factory for Ayurvedic medicines. Considering that now the SIT probing the matter claims that the resort was being run illegally, the question of destruction of serious evidences become all the more important.

Today as we stand in demand of justice and truth, it is important to remind ourselves what questions do we need to raise and what should justice mean. As questions are being asked around the trio of Vinod Arya and his sons Pulkit Arya (the main accused) and Ankit Arya, mere expulsion from the party or the arrest of Pulkit does not absolve the party in power of its complicity in what happened. The ruling party in the state should tell us:

1. Why was the police denying to inquire into Ankita's disappearance initially? Whom is the administration protecting by destroying site of crucial evidence in the murder of a young girl?
2. In a state that is being ruled by the

BJP twice in succession now, how is it that a resort run by the family of its former minister was not registered with the state tourism department and lacked even a fire NOC (No objection certificate)? Can such blatant violations occur without complicity of higher ups in the government? Does a party that rules based on CBI and ED raids, nurture such corruptions in its own states?

3. There is a conscious attempts by sections in the administration to divert the debate to jurisdiction of revenue police vs regular police, thereby giving easy route to the ruling regime to escape accountability on such a heinous crime. While the Patwari who refused to register complaint has been rightfully arrested, he could not merely have been acting on his own, given that his leave was hastily approved and the case involves the bigwigs of the state. Also, when right from establishing the resort to running it, laws have been violated at every step, does it not become evident that

those close to the power in the state enjoy impunity irrespective of the governance structures?

The case once again and for the umpteenth time brings out the largely gender unsafe, exploitative and hostile environments at workplace, especially in the private sector. There is no protection to female workers when they try to resist sexual exploitation by saying No to powerful people close to the employer. From Kathua in erstwhile J&K, Unnao and Hathras in UP to Pauri in Uttarakhand- the pattern is clear. When women speak out against sexual exploitation by powerful people and when families seek justice for the daughters who were assaulted and murdered, they are dealt with most brutal form of violence and incarceration in BJP ruled states. It is important that as citizens we remain alert to these questions and not be led astray by accepting mere expulsions of criminals from the party and destruction of evidence by administration as justice. ■

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## CPIML Reply to ECI's Proposed Amendments to the Model Code Of Conduct Regarding Promises Made In Election Manifestos

**Text of CPIML letter sent to ECI on 18 October 2022**

**I**t is our considered opinion that the proposed amendments issued by the Election Commission of India vide Letter dated 04.10.2022 bearing no. 437/6/Manifesto/ECI/INST/FUNCT/MCC/2015 are not grounded in law and are inherently undemocratic in nature.

At the very outset, we would like to bring to your notice that per Article 324 of the Indian Constitution, the ECI is vested with the power and

responsibility of superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and smooth conduct of elections. It was widely reported (*No power to check parties, govts from promising freebies: ECI to SC, Indian Express, April 9, 2022*) that the ECI itself had mentioned this constitutional context in the affidavit filed in the Supreme Court (Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v. Union of India).

To quote from the affidavit submitted by the ECI: "That offering/distribution of any freebies either before or after the election is a policy

decision of the party concerned and whether such policies are financially viable or its adverse effect on the economic health of the State is a question that has to be considered and decided by the voters of the State. The Election Commission of India cannot regulate state policies and decisions which may be taken by the winning party when they form the government. Such an action, without enabling provisions in the law, would be an overreach of powers".

Despite admitting to not having any such powers, the proforma

prescribed by the ECI amounts to precisely such an overreach. It would require political parties to provide detailed plans for implementation of their poll promises, complete with intended coverage of beneficiaries and sources and methods of necessary financial mobilisation. Such a proforma would give the governments of the day and the ECI undue powers of control over election manifestos of political parties and hence over the elections themselves.

Let us make it clear that we reject the approach of viewing welfare measures needed to provide immediate relief to people in distress and uplift the economic and social conditions of deprived and marginalized sections of our population as “freebies”. If we have to identify freebies, we can actually see them in the enormous benefits being handed down to the big corporates and super rich through tax exemptions and tax holidays, cheap loans, loan write-offs and waivers, sell-off of public assets and transfer of control over natural resources by sundry means.

Such ‘freebies’ are a huge burden on the public exchequer. Every year the public exchequer is being robbed of lakhs of crores of rupees in the process. In 2020-21, Rs. 5,51,000 crore was written off by the Union government in corporate income tax, excise and customs duties benefitting the rich. The previous year it was Rs 5,00,823 crore. The total since 2005-06 is well over Rs 42 trillion.

Our Constitution has made a solemn commitment of equality and comprehensive justice to the people of India. Fundamental rights apart, we have a section on directive principles of state policy in the Constitution which should actually guide our election manifestos. Instead, the proposed amendment and the prescribed proforma seeks to subject poll manifestos to prevailing budgetary allocations and priorities that have failed the people miserably in guaranteeing universal food security, shelter right or access to education, healthcare or employment. After 75 years of independence, we find India at the 107th position among 122 countries

on the Global Hunger Index.

The entire purpose of policy-making and budgetary exercise should be to reorient priorities and mobilise necessary resources and use them in appropriate ways to guarantee basic rights of our people and ensure their greatest welfare. It is for the people to judge political parties on the basis of their track records and hold them accountable especially when voted to power. The bureaucratic status-quoist checks on the freedom of political parties to draft their poll manifestos will hamper the very dynamics and role of electoral democracy and competitive politics as a means of achieving progressive social and economic change and fulfilment of people’s needs and aspirations.

**We therefore reject the proposed amendment lock, stock and barrel and request the ECI to drop the very idea of such unwarranted regulation and institutional overreach in violation of the constitutional jurisdiction and brief of the ECI. ■**



# Message of Greetings from the CPIML Central Committee to the 24th Congress of the CPI

**C**omrade Presidium, esteemed guests, delegates and observers assembled at the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of India,

Warm revolutionary greetings to you all.

Thank you, Comrade D Raja, for inviting me to greet this inaugural session. It gives me great pleasure to wish your Congress every success

on behalf of the Central Committee and entire membership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). I cherish my memories of having interacted with many stalwarts of your party including Comrades Chandra Rajeswara Rao, Indrajit Gupta, AB Bardhan, Jagannath Sarkar, Chaturanan Mishra and Bhogendra Jha. I pay my respectful tribute to all these departed stalwarts of the CPI and

the great martyrs and leaders of the historic Telangana uprising and the subsequent waves of struggles in Srikakulam and other areas of undivided Andhra Pradesh.

Comrades, we are meeting at a time when the world finds itself drawn once again into the vortex of a major war even as global capitalism is mired in a deep and prolonged recession and the world is yet to recover from the massive disruption and disaster caused by the Covid19 global pandemic. It has been nearly eight months since Russia unilaterally invaded Ukraine, calling Ukraine’s independence a flawed Leninist legacy that needs

to be undone. This unjust war has already taken a heavy toll and must be brought to a quick end in a way which respects and guarantees Ukraine's sovereignty. Amidst disturbing signs of a pronounced rightward shift in Europe, we draw inspiration from the renewed resurgence of the Left in Latin America and the powerful assertion of women in Iran that is growing into a popular uprising against the repressive theocratic regime.

Ever since Modi's second successive victory in the Lok Sabha elections we have been facing a rapidly escalating fascist offensive on all fronts. Proceeding from the 2014 election slogan of 'Congress-mukt Bharat' the regime is now bent on making India an opposition-free democracy. Opposition MLAs are being bought wholesale; opposition-led governments are being toppled in a series; opposition parties and leaders are being heckled by central agencies; and movement activists, fake news busting journalists and justice-seeking lawyers are being hounded out and jailed. Muslims are being demonized day in and day out and genocide calls are being issued more openly, frequently and loudly. Dalits are facing increased atrocities and exclusion, the latest example being the persecution of Delhi AAP leader Rajendra Pal Gautam for organizing a mass conversion to Buddhism on the occasion of Ashoka Vijayadashmi.

When JP Nadda boasts that the BJP is the only party that will survive in India, when Amit Shah tells us that the BJP is here to rule for the next fifty years, when Mohan Bhagwat insists that India is a Hindu Rashtra or Hindu nation, when Ajit Doval dubs the civil society the new frontier of war, they portray for us the India of their dreams. This dream of a communal fascist India was rejected by our freedom movement which went on to adopt

a constitution and opt for a secular democratic republic. Today from the vantage position of state power the Sangh-BJP establishment is working overtime to subvert and overturn this constitutional vision of a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic to imprison India in its communal fascist framework.

The RSS has all along harboured this design since its inception in 1925, what makes it capable of inflicting its design on the country today is the power it enjoys through the Modi government and its ability to combine this state-power with the street-power of its vigilante squads. The increasing centralization of power in the hands of the Modi government is weakening India's federal framework and democratic institutions and granting greater patronage and impunity to the vigilante squads of the Sangh brigade. The other source of power is the unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of India's richest billionaires with the government increasingly being reduced to a dispensation of the super-rich, by the super-rich, for the super-rich.

We must rescue India from the ravages of this social, political and economic disaster and rebuild India on the basis of powerful and deep-going democratic foundations to realise the dreams of Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar. We cannot but remember that the journey of the Hindutva forces and India's communists began around the same time in the 1920s. Today, if the RSS has amassed the strength to inflict its design on the country, we Indian communists certainly have the responsibility to foil this design and lead India towards the fulfilment of the constitutional promise of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. We understand that this is going to be a protracted battle akin to a second

round of freedom movement and we communists need to unite all our strength, harness all our energy and summon all our courage to rise to the occasion.

During the freedom movement and for much of India's post-Independence journey, the RSS had remained relegated to the margin. We communists must once again push them back to the fringe. We must draw on the entire spectrum of the radical legacy of India's freedom movement – from the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles to the rich tradition of anti-caste resistance and assertion of rationalism and India's cultural diversity as well as the vast range of powerful struggles for radical social transformation and defence of democracy in the post-independence period. We must unite the people as extensively as we can in their everyday struggles and build powerful mass opposition to the growing corporate plunder and privatization of public assets and services. And building on the power of united mass struggles, we must forge a broad functional and dynamic unity of diverse opposition forces to isolate and defeat the fascists through a determined resistance. Once again, I wish the CPI Congress every success to this end and promise our fullest cooperation on behalf of the CPI(ML) to overcome the unprecedented challenges facing us today.

**Long live the unity of all fighting forces!**

**All for a resurgence of the communist movement to defend democracy and defeat fascism!**

*Dipankar Bhattacharya*  
General Secretary, for Central  
Committee, CPI(ML) Liberation ■



# NREGS in Andhra Pradesh and the Modi Government's Anti-Labour Changes

▲ PS AJAI KUMAR

As per the existing employment scheme, any adult living in a rural area who is willing to do manual labor can get enrolled in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and get a job card. A household can get work for not more than 100 days in a fiscal year (1st April to 31st March). In the financial year 2022-2023, the Centre has fixed the wage at Rs. 257 per working day for the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. According to this, if a rural household works for 100 days in a year, they will be entitled to receive Rs 25,700 (100 days x Rs. 257). This amount is often potentially a crucial support for families engaged in rural agricultural labour, especially for Dalit and Adivasi agricultural labourers, for whom it can be both a source of income and a means towards their social independence. However, these calculations are only on paper. In the employment scheme, a rural labourer is paid based on the amount of work done, and this is called a 'piece wage'. The minimum wage of Rs. 275 notified by the Centre, is only an upper limit wage. This implies that if the work done by a worker is measured and the corresponding wage calculation comes to Rs. 200 then this wage will be paid. However, if the measurement of the allocated work completed corresponds to a wage of Rs 400, the worker will receive only Rs. 257.

In 2021-2022, the daily wage notified by the Centre wage was Rs. 245. However, the average daily wage received by the labourers was Rs. 228. The average number of working days provided to households having job cards in the same year was 51 days, which amounts an average of

Rs. 11,628 per household over the year.

## What are the objectives of the new changes in the scheme?

While making any changes in the scheme, the aim of any government should be to provide the rural workers with 100 days of work and full notified wage for each working day in the EGS. However, the changes being made in the programme in the two Telugu states since last November and December are not towards this aim. What then is the purpose of these changes? It appears that, rather than ensuring 100 days of work and notified wages to the workers, the new changes seek to discourage workers by reducing their working days and wages as much as possible.

## EGS is a Partial Recognition of 'Right to Work'

While our Constitution upholds 'Right to Life' as a fundamental right, it does not guarantee 'right to work'. The NREGS is a partial recognition of the 'right to work' of the rural masses, as by including the right to work for a

limited period of one hundred days, it gives legitimacy to that right. The scheme upholds this right in two forms. First, if the state fails to provide work within 15 days, the workers are entitled to get an unemployment allowance. Second, after completion of one week of work by workers if they do not receive wage payment in cash within 15 days, they have right to compensation. Passed through an Act of Parliament 'The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA)', the scheme does not discriminate between men and women in terms of wages, it ensures work site facilities, and includes provisions for social audit. These are important rights under the law and any changes made in the structure of the scheme should strengthen the rights and not weaken them.

## EGS programme design in composite Andhra Pradesh and its positive features:

NREGS was launched by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Andhra Pradesh. Since then, as



undivided Andhra Pradesh and after bifurcation of the state into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the two states have been leading in the implementation of the scheme.

The AP design was studied by several national and international institutions and before the 2014 general elections, the then Central Government planned to introduce some of the ideas of the AP model to the national level.

**Some of the important elements in the design of the AP's EGS program are as follows:**

After receiving the work from the EGS functionary, a group of workers would agree a time among themselves to complete the work. For example, a group comprising 20 members would go to the worksite at 6 am, finish their task by 11 am, and then could go for other work.

This was particularly convenient for women workers who were engaged in animal husbandry at home. This was one of the reasons why women workers' participation outnumbered the male workers.

The AP programme introduced the idea of "summer allowance" which starts at 20% in February and reaches 30% up to May. The concept of "summer allowance" refers to the percentage reduction in the unit of work to be done. For example, if a unit of work is considered to be 100, 30% allowance means that if a worker completes 70% of the unit work, it will be treated as 100.

Another creative and an extremely important aspect was formation of micro level workers' group called "Srama Shakti Sangham" (SSS). Each SSS comprised of 15 to 25 workers. Each was given a name, for example "Ambedkar Srama Shakti Sangham". The group members elected one person as 'Mate' and the mate was responsible for maintaining the muster (attendance sheet). This

eliminated the possibility of large-scale muster manipulation. It also made it easy to supervise the groups owing to their small sizes and allowed the groups an opportunity to fix the work time on the day and complete it in accordance to their needs.

Each worker was given a 'pay slip' at the time of payment for the work done in a week. It contained details such as the ID of the worker, details of work, dates on which the work was done and wage details. The chronology of pay slips gave the total information on the work and wage details of the household. As activists, we always told people to keep these pay slips carefully.

In several EGS works, workers are required to use some tools such as spade, tools for digging, baskets for removing mud, etc. Andhra Pradesh EGS programme paid between Rs 3 to Rs. 5 to each worker for the tools used for working. Workers were also given Rs. 5 in summer and Rs. 2.50 in non-summer months for drinking water. These details were also recorded in the 'pay slip'.

It was mentioned earlier that the maximum of 100 days is set per household. If two members from a household come to work, each will be able to work only for 50 days. It is here that the AP and Telangana took a novel direction. For example, if a household completed 100 days but were not able to earn the full amount of Rs 25,700 (100 days x notified wage of Rs 257), the household was allowed to continue working till they had earned this amount.

Another unique feature of the composite Andhra Pradesh EGS Program design was that the entire program is managed through a software (called Ragas) on a real time basis. All the activities and information such as job cards information, history of works done, payment received by each job card holder, budget estimation of each work and its progress, generating

pay orders and pay slips, were documented through the software and open to the public.

Activists and community workers could download the information and conduct local audits in their Panchayats. If necessary, they could also approach the courts. The author of this article has filed three important cases in the High Court. In a case pointing out the difference between the wages declared under the Minimum Wages Act-1948 and the wages notified under the EGS, the interim orders of High Court gave a jolt to the Central and State governments. The case was filed by noted human rights activist and advocate, K. Balagopal and after his untimely death, Prashant Bhushan appeared before High Court of (composite) AP.

In the year 2020-2021, 14% of the total expenditure on EGS at the national level was spent in AP and Telangana.

**Modi government's anti-rural labour changes**

In his first speech in Parliament as Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the employment scheme as a programme only meant for digging up and filling in the soil. While any government feeling this way about the scheme would have been expected to abolish the scheme, the PM declared that the scheme would be continued 'only' as a sign or reminder of the previous Congress government's failures. This was the motivation underlying the continuation of this scheme.

As mentioned earlier, the Manmohan Singh Government had given the States the flexibility to release the employment budget and spend it according to their circumstances. Although EGS appears to be purely a Central government scheme, the financial responsibility of the scheme has to be borne by the states too. According to the Employment Guarantee Act, the Centre bears 75 percent of the cost incurred in the

form of wages paid to the workers, the salaries of the ESG employees and the materials used.

The financial responsibilities had to be shared by the states. For instance, states had to bear the cost of the 'Unemployment allowance', given in case the government fails to provide any work to a worker within 15 days of applying. If Government failed to pay wages within 15 days, after completion of one week, there was to be a compensation for the delay. 3.25% of the costs of materials was to be borne by the states.

The first change made by the Modi government was to stop the State Governments from paying workers, in the name of eradicating corruption. The role of the state governments was restricted to sending information to the Centre about who had done how much work and what was due to them. The payments would be made directly to the workers' accounts. The States were reduced from implementing agencies to becoming information providers.

A key concern that emerges is that if the Centre does not pay wages to the workers even after 15 days, the State is still required to pay the 'compensation for delay' according to the law. As is being reported, many workers are not getting wages on time and the Centre is discriminating against the non-BJP ruled states in releasing the wages, so that the BJP state units of those states can discredit the State governments.

The Central Government has its own EGS programme software and pressurised the States to change to the Centre's software. The governments of AP and Telangana succumbed to this pressure and started changing from Ragas software to the Centre's NIC software last November-December. The technical issues aside, the day-to-day problems faced by the rural

workers after these changes need to be examined.

Despite the fact that they are paid piece rates and not by the hour, the workers are required to take and upload two photos daily while at the work site. One at 11am and the other at 2pm. These photos are geo-tagged using GPS. Kesarapudi Adivamma, an adivasi woman, told the author, "How can we live? The work site is more than 2 km from my house; our group went to worksite early morning at 6 am and completed the task. But we are expected to wait till 2 pm for the second photograph. If we are not photographed, the musters will not be uploaded and even if we completed the work, we may not get the wages. I am not able to look after my two buffalos". People like Adivamma are thus being deliberately discouraged from taking up EGS work.

SSS groups of 15-20 workers have been abolished, and larger groups of 40 introduced. The previous mates of SSS groups were removed and replaced by a 'Work Site Supervisor' for a 40-member workers group.

The muster recording was modified against the interests of workers. For example, if we consider one week as a unit, if after three days, a worker had to stop attending due to personal problems, then the remaining three days would still be subtracted from their 100 days entitlement. At the same time, they would not be paid for the days missed.

Meanwhile, the concept of summer allowance is no longer implemented. The Department of Rural Development of AP said that they have done a 'work motion study' with the help of National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and there is no need for "summer allowance". They did not place the details of the study before the public. At the work site, the payments workers received for using tools was withdrawn along

with the drinking water allowance.

These new changes are clearly aimed at - (i) discouraging and reducing the attendance of workers in EGS; (ii) reducing the workers wages; and (iii) complete centralization of the scheme without the Centre taking responsibility. Since 2014, there has been a reduction in the labor budget and regular non-payment of wages. In Telangana state, in 2020-2021 the workers wage bill was Rs. 4643 crores, and after the changes were introduced, it declined by 12% to Rs. 4087 crores in 2021-2022. Workers are definitely moving away from EGS, and not because employment is being generated in other sectors. It is as a result of these anti-worker changes.

Rural workers must fight for the "right to work" to be recognised as a fundamental right, and for the partial right of 100 days work under the law to be guaranteed.

### **Proposed demands from Andhra Pradesh rural workers:**

- The SSS group system should be reinstated.
- The anti-labour policy of deducting absent days from overall entitlement should stop immediately.
- Payment for tools, drinking water and summer allowance should be reinstated
- The State government should be in charge of paying wages and have the power to enforce the law in letter and spirit
- EGS should be linked with agricultural operations of tenant farmers, small and marginal farmers.
- Wages should be paid under the EGS as per the Minimum Wages Act.
- Centrally notified wage should be increased from Rs 257 to Rs 400.
- "Right to work" should be recognised as a fundamental right. ■



# Feudal-Criminal-Police Nexus in Samastipur and BJP's Terror Campaign

▲ KUMAR PARVEZ

**S**amastipur has recently witnessed a gruesome incident of rape and murder of a minor girl from an oppressed caste by elements belonging to a locally dominant and BJP-backed feudal-criminal gang. This is the latest incident in a series of several instances of violence against the socially oppressed. During the regime of the last BJP-JDU government, Ramsevak Ram, a sanitation worker, was killed in police custody. In another incident in Adharpur, a mob led by an organization named Hindu Putra had set three Muslim houses on fire and lynched three members of a family including a woman school teacher to death in broad daylight. The Muslim population of that village is still displaced. Earlier in Sarai Ranjan, a JDU activist Khaleel Rizvi had been kidnapped and lynched to death.

In the latest instance of such violence, a minor Dalit/EBC girl, Swati, was gangraped and murdered in Satampur Panchayat of Ujiarpur block by local criminals patronised by feudal forces and the liquor mafia and having close association with the BJP. The local BJP MP Nityanand Rai is known as a powerful don is currently a Minister of State for Home Affairs in the Modi cabinet. On the night of 23rd September, when the girl was all alone only with her nine-year-old younger brother, she was assaulted and murdered. While her mother, family members and neighbours all allege gangrape and murder, the local police has been trying to present it as a case of suicide. Despite marks of brutality

all over her body the Ujiarpur police station did not bother to get a viscera report.

A CPIML team promptly reached the site, spoke to all concerned and demanded arrest of the accused named by Swati's mother. A protest meeting was held on 26 September at Satampur Chowk demanding viscera test. But the administration refused to listen to the demands. Again on October 1, a protest meeting was held at Malti Chowk and the demand for the arrest of the accused was raised. CPIML Block secretary Ganga Prasad Paswan, who was leading an effigy burning protest against the in charge of the police station, was attacked and injured by goons of a liquor mafia gang.

With the police refusing to take any action and trying to hush up this heinous crime, after several local protests the CPIML gave a call for demonstration outside the Ujiarpur Police Station on 9 October. What happened on that day revealed the disturbing nexus and collusion between BJP-backed criminals and goons and the Ujiarpur Police Station. With the connivance of the police, hundreds of lathi-wielding BJP goons had assembled in the premises of the police station waiting to attack the CPIML procession.

Showing great restraint and application of mind, CPIML leaders including District Secretary Comrade Umesh Kumar, CPIML candidate from Warisnagar in 2020 Assembly elections Comrade Phoolbabu Singh and former MLA and Chairperson of Bihar Women's Commission Comrade Manju

Prakash, stopped the procession a little before the police station and turned it into a protest meeting. Yet in the presence of the police some comrades including Comrade Manju Prakash were manhandled. A delegation of Party leaders comprising Party MLAs Satyadeo Ram and Gopal Ravidas and AIPWA leaders Shashi Yadav and Manju Prakash met the DM and SP of Samastipur on 14 October and demanded justice for Swati. The delegation demanded suspension of the DSP and the local police station in-charge, measures to ensure safety of the victim's family, public disclosure of the post-mortem report public, payment of proper compensation to the victim's family and a high-level inquiry into the whole matter. A powerful mass demonstration was also held in Samastipur on these demands on 17 October.

Ever since being ousted from power in Bihar, the BJP is working overtime to create trouble. A section of the administration and police are clearly hand in glove with the BJP. The assurances and policy pronouncements made by the new government - like no eviction without prior rehabilitation, better delivery of public services and responsive governance - are being repeatedly violated on the ground and protests are being met with administrative highhandedness and police repression. CPIML is determined to face this situation with consistent mass initiative and intervention against every injustice and strong support to every just demand of the people. ■

# Coimbatore Sanitation Workers Strike For Minimum Wages and Regularisation

▲ VENKATACHALAM

**C**orporation of Coimbatore in Tamilnadu consists of 100 wards. Some 4,000 workers are employed in sanitary work by the corporation. In spite of their service for more than 13 years, sanitation workers are neither regularised nor paid mandatory minimum wages. They are being paid with Rs. 333 as daily wages for the last four years without any hike.

Even the Tamilnadu government has not paid the announced incentive for their contribution during COVID-19. The minimum wages announced 5 years ago, i.e., in 2017, by Government of Tamilnadu also has not been implemented since then. In the meantime, the District Collector of Coimbatore declared Rs. 721 as minimum wages for sanitary workers in July 2022 (now popular as ‘Collector Rate of Wages’). There were struggles independently by various trade unions for the implementation of the collector rate of wages, but in vain. So, it was decided to form a Joint Action Committee (JAC) of all trade unions and AICCTU was part of it. In a way, our pamphlet explaining Karnataka sanitation workers’ strike for regularisation and its successful experience was also an inspiration for such a move in Coimbatore. Unfortunately, CITU and another organisation of DMK alliance refused to join the strike. They also indulged in actions in support of the government.

The JAC decided to go for an indefinite strike from October 2nd with a 16-point charter, including regularisation, equal pay for equal work, collector rate of minimum wages, etc. It was also decided to rope in sanitation workers of municipalities, town panchayats and gram panchayats.

Two bi-partite meetings convened by the officials of the Corporation could not clinch any issue and strike began as decided by the JAC on October 2nd. Striking workers were threatened by the corporation administration, by the contractors and also by husbands of elected women councillors. Their intention was to break the unprecedented unity of workers. But, workers stood firm and continued the strike.

On the first day of the strike itself, thousands of workers gathered in front of the Collector’s office. October 2nd, being the day of Gandhi Jayanti, workers marched to garland the Gandhi statue in the city. To draw attention of the administration and as a form of a symbolic protest, a petition was also given to the statue of Gandhi.

On the second day, i.e., October 3rd, workers gathered before the collectorate en masse for a peaceful protest. But the police swung into action, started arresting all leaders and workers defying Supreme Court directions regarding industrial

disputes. The police had to backtrack at some point because of large mobilisation of workers.

Subsequently, negotiations were held before the District Collector. But, workers refused to participate, demanding release of arrested leaders and workers. As the pressure mounted, arrested leaders and workers were released to facilitate negotiation. Even though there was no amicable settlement during the negotiation with the District Collector, a written statement to pacify striking workers was released by the collector’s office.

As a show of solidarity with striking workers, a 7-member AICCTU team from Karnataka, including Comrade Clifton, national secretary AICCTU, and Comrade Nirmala, NEC member, visited Coimbatore and addressed the striking workers. Comrade Clifton elaborated on the experience of 5-day strike by the Karnataka sanitary workers which forced the ruling BJP government to concede their demand for regularisation. He also stressed on the issue of dignity of sanitary workers in the society.

On the 3rd day of strike, workers gathered in thousands and blocked the road successfully, thus ensuring that negotiations took place. During the negotiation convened by the Corporation Commissioner and the Mayor, AICCTU, represented by Bala Subramaniam, state vice-president and Santhanam, state committee member, effectively articulated the demands of workers.

At the end of the meeting, a written assurance was given by the administration assuring Collector Rate of Wages of Rs. 721 after passing a resolution in the Corporation Council meeting to that effect. The administration also assured that the striking workers would not be harassed or victimised for taking part in the strike. The JAC decided to temporarily withdraw the strike based on such an assurance from the administration.

The Corporation also announced Rs. 3,750 as Deepavali bonus on the eve of strike aiming at luring workers to avoid the strike. AICCTU protested the move to announce a bonus much less than mandatory minimum bonus and instead, demanded a bonus of twenty per cent. Hence, the Corporation administration withdrew its announcement in the course of negotiations and assured to call for a fresh negotiation on the subject which was accepted by the JAC.

Despite huge political and ideological differences among various unions of the JAC, the workers displayed exemplary spirit of unity that formed the basis for the success in the first phase of a long struggle of workers for regularisation and minimum wages.

Unlike other unions, AICCTU categorically stated that the government is responsible for the continuance of inhuman contract system and corrupt practices. AICCTU was consistent that the struggle for decent wages and dignity of sanitation workers is to be waged against the government and not only against any individual contractors or so. Unfortunately, the plight of workers continues unchanged under the DMK government which had promised regularisation of contract workers with 10

years of service, but ignored the promise.

AICCTU is determined to continue its struggle until the contract system for sanitation work is put to an end, for regularisation of their services and payment of equal wages for equal work. The historic struggle and the strike by sanitation workers of Coimbatore can very well turn into a state-level movement of sanitation workers and the days are not too far. ■

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## Punjab State Conference of CPIML Held in Amritsar

**T**he fourth Punjab State Conference of CPIML was held in Amritsar on 16-17 October. The conference was inaugurated by party General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya in an open session on 16 October. The open session was also addressed by many eminent guests and fraternal organisations.

Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya in his address in the inaugural session warned people of Punjab of RSS-BJP's attempts of communal polarisation and creating disharmony among communities in the state. He said that at a time when people in different countries all over the world are challenging the system of imperialist-corporate plunder, when women in Iran and elsewhere are fighting against patriarchy, and in many Latin American countries people are electing socialist governments as the only viable alternative, in our country Modi government is trying to take India into a regressive direction. We must unite and fight against such a regime. Under Modi regime India's relations with its neighbours have deteriorated while there is a need to improve bilateral trade, which could have decreased our defence expenditure helping the country in overcoming current phase of recession. There are continuous attacks of citizens' rights and human rights activists are being targeted. The government is misusing constitutional institutions including the Judiciary. This is a blot on our democracy that the release order by Maharashtra High Court of public intellectual and activist Prof. GN Saibaba who is 90% disabled and four others was reversed next day on a holiday by the Supreme Court on a special appeal of the government. We are witnessing such atrocities being fully aware that even after decades real perpetrators of 1984 anti-Sikh carnage, 2002 Gujarat carnage, human rights violators of Kashmir and scamsters responsible for looting crores of public money have never been punished. Moreover, there are many political prisoners languishing in jails in Punjab who have completed their full jail term but the judiciary as well as the government are letting this happen for no reason. They should have been freed.

He said that the poor are being victimised and pauperised through various government policies benefiting the rich more. The MNREGA scheme is being gradually starved of funds which is escalating economic hardships of poor women, workers and peasants. They are forced to take small loans

under very humiliating and repressive conditions.

Comrade Dipankar said that many organisations affiliated to RSS are working against the minorities and dalits. The central establishment is destroying the basic foundations of our nation by attacking the Constitution, rights of the States and the federal concept of our democracy. But the Aam Aadmi Party which has come to rule the state is neither taking any stand to defend the interests of the people of the state nor it is serious in implementing its own electoral promises. The Kejriwal led AAP government installed photos of Bhagat Singh and Dr. Ambedkar in government office, but its hypocrisy is exposed when its Delhi Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam was forced to resign from minister-ship for speaking out the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar.

The conference venue Amritsar has a rich legacy of people's unity, struggles and sacrifices against British colonial oppressors. This city is also a big center of humane and egalitarian traditions of Sikh Gurus. This city also has been a big center of the historic struggle of Gadar movement leaders like Baba Sohan Singh. The 4th CPIML State Conference was held in Amritsar to reiterate the resolve to carry forward this great legacy of martyrs.

Dr. Arit, daughter of Punjabi theater activist and great communist leader Gurusharan Singh, called for a protracted struggle against fascism. CPI leader comrade Bhupinder Singh Sambhar, RMPI state secretary comrade Pargat Singh Jamarai conveyed their greetings to the conference while emphasising on unity of all the left, democratic, secular and patriotic forces. Ramesh Yadav, Folklore Research Academy, greeted the conference and said that the people of Punjab desires trade as well as freedom to commute across the borders with Pakistan and friendship between the people of two nations.

The inaugural session was conducted by Gurmeet Singh Bakhtpur. Punjab incharge Purushottam Sharma, central observer Ravi Rai, party's Jammu & Kashmir Secretary Nirdosh Uppal, Gurnam Singh Daud, Sukhdarshan Natt, Bhagwant Samaon, Kanwaljeet Singh, Jasveer Kaur, Gurpreet Rureke, Balbir Jhamka and Balbir Singh Muthal were also present in the open inaugural session.

On next day of the conference delegates participated in the



discussion on the work report presented by State Secretary comrade Rajwinder Singh Rana on behalf of the outgoing Committee. Comrades Balkaran Moga, Vinder Alakh, Jasveer Kaur Natt, Gurjant Singh Mansa, Satnam Singh Pakkhikalan, Harbhagwan Bhikhi and Balbir Singh Muthal were among those who spoke on the work report. Central Committee members Sukhdarshan Singh Natt and Chandigarh Secretary Kanwaljeet Singh also addressed the delegates. Rajwinder Singh Rana concluded the discussion.

The conference passed many political resolutions in the concluding session that included criticism of the center for weakening federalism and infringing on the rights of the states, for building the opposition of the Modi regime for using central agencies like NIA, CBI, ED etc to suppress dissenting voices and opposition parties, against increasing attacks on minorities, and a resolution opposing hegemonic attitude of the central government with regard to sharing of river waters

unjustly. Resolutions were also passed demanding scrapping of contract with private electricity companies by the AAP government, against an incident of insulting Guru Granth Sahib, for punishment to the perpetrators and conspirators of Bahibal Kalan firing, for unemployment allowance, and for putting an stop to the drug menace in the state. A resolution for ending the VIP culture, criminalisation and corruption was also passed.

Resolutions were passed demanding complete loan waiver for poor women, workers and farmers, and to increase the wages of agrarian workers. The release of prisoners who have completed their jail terms was also demanded.

The conference elected a 27-member state committee which in turn elected Comrade Gurmeet Singh Bakhtpur as state secretary. The conference ended with the presentation of revolutionary literature as gifts to all volunteers and Amritsar-Tarantaran district committee members. ■

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## National Conference of All India Kisan Mahasabha

**T**he Fourth National Conference of All India Kisan Mahasabha was held across two days in Bikramganj of Bihar, and concluded with a call to strengthen farmers' unity and the movement to carry forward farmers' struggles against the betrayal of Modi government and non-fulfillment of promises made after the successful year-long Delhi agitation. Hundreds of delegates from various states as well as representatives from many constituent organisations, including Punjab Kisan Union, Satyashodhak Shetkari Sabha, Shramik Shetkari Sangathan and Jalla Kisan Sangharsh Samiti attended the conference which re-elected Ruldu Singh and Rajaram Singh as its National President and General Secretary, respectively.

The conference venue was named in honour Kripal Singh Bir, a senior AIKM leader who passed away in Punjab last month; whereas the dais of the conference was named after martyred Comrade Bhaiyyaram Yadav. Comrade Kripal Bir represented a generation of farmers' leaders who fought and won land rights during the historic Muzara Struggle in Punjab. Even at the age of 90 years, he stood firmly with the farmers at the Tikri Border against Modi's three farm laws.

The Conference began on September 23rd with a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat', which was attended by thousands of farmers and addressed by eminent farmers leaders and representatives of fraternal organisations, including All India Kisan Sabha president Ashok Dhawale, Narmada Bhachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar, Terai Kisan Sangathan leader Tejinder Singh Virk, Kisan Sangharsh Samiti leader Dr. Sunilam and many others, while CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya inaugurated the conference.

The Mahapanchayat reiterated the demands of the farmers in the country which included a legally mandated MSP with

C2+50 formula for all crops, extension of PDS for all poor and guaranteeing food security for all, along with Bihar farmers' long-pending demands for rejuvenating Sone Canal System and building of Kadawan Dam.

In his inaugural speech, Comrade Dipankar said that the government has no dearth of money but that money collected as taxes from the common people is being spent to fill the coffers of greedy corporates like Adani and Ambani. He said that the government is not giving minimum support price to farmers, nor minimum wages to workers, whereas corporates and capitalists have sell at maximum retail price, which is injustice. Com. Dipankar called upon the farmers present in the Mahapanchayat to spread the message of the farmers' struggle of Delhi borders to the villages of Bihar, in the past, this has always been the place where people's movements have given a new turn in the politics of the country. The struggle led by Bihar's poor and middle peasants and sharecropper farmers also effectively counters BJP's false propaganda that the farmers' movement represented only the rich farmers.

He added that Modi government is fulfilling the vested interests of its crony corporates by facilitating corporate takeover of Indian agriculture as well as handing them out all the country's resources and institutions. But in the last year, the farmers had shown their strength by forcing the government to withdraw three ordinances that facilitated corporate land grab and then against the three anti-farmer laws. This unity and struggle must be strengthened and expended to all the farmers and all the workers in the country for bringing a revolutionary change.

Leader of Narmada Bhachao Andolan – Medha Patkar

said that we must fight back to protect our agriculture and environment. We must oppose corporate companies which are trying to snatch away the produce of farmers. And now a huge population is being deprived of basic rights like education and health, while big corporates are endangering the whole of humanity by damaging our environment and ecosystem. We are being ruled by those who had opposed and insulted our tricolour in the past, but the farmers have proved that only peoples' movement have power to give a befitting reply to such anti-people regimes.

Ashok Dhawale of AIKS called for a wider movement against the government allowing the corporates to loot country's resources under the pressure of WTO and other world institutions. He said that the three farm laws were enacted for the same reason, but the movement forced the Modi government to withdraw them. He also demanded from the Bihar government to implement the Bihar Tenancy Act and the recommendations of the Land Reforms Commission. Dr. Sunilam emphasized on need for a strong movement to save the democracy from those sowing the seeds of communal poison in society. He condemned the Lakhimpur Kheri administration for the attempts of building up communal atmosphere against the Sikh community in that district. Tejinder Singh Virk of Terai Kisan Sangathan said that the farmers will only be able to do profitable farming when the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission are implemented, and complete loan waiver for all farmers is declared, hence we all must work to spread the movement further. Cultural team Hirawal presented revolutionary songs during the Mahapanchayat.

The Mahapanchayat organisers honoured all the guests by presenting mementoes, which included leaders from fraternal organisations, and dozens of activists who dedicatedly organised camps, libraries and medical help at various Delhi borders during the farmers' agitation. The AIKM Conference continued till the next day which was attended by farmers representatives from UP, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, MP, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and other states. The conference was presided over by a presidium comprising Ruldu Singh Mansa, Prem Singh Gahalawat, KD Yadav, Phoolchand Dhewa, Shiv Sagar Sharma, Manju Devi, Ishwari Prasad Kushwaha, D Harinath and Kripa Verma. Rajaram Singh presented the work report before the delegates and Sudama Prasad read out the resolutions of the conference, which were unanimously adopted. The conference concluded after the election of new National Executive and office bearers with the resolve to take the farmers' movement to new heights by strengthening the struggles with emphasis on the needs of poor peasants, sharecroppers and middle peasants and to fight out the current regime which has imposed an agrarian crisis over the nation. The Bikramganj town was decorated in honour of farmer delegates with flags, banners and welcome gates remembering martyrs and leaders of farmers' struggles for the successful national conference. ■

- Purushottam Sharma

## 16th National Conference of Jan Sanskriti Manch

**J**an Sanskriti Manch held its 16th national conference in Raipur, Chhattisgarh on 8-9 October 2022.

The conference began with a resistance march from Ashirwad Bhawan to the statue of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh while paying tribute to the statue of Dr. Ambedkar. In a brief statement, outgoing president of Jan Sanskriti Manch, Prof. Rajendra Kumar called for solidarity against the current ruling dispensation, for the defence of the Constitution and for the fight for democracy.

Well-known Gandhian and human rights activist Himanshu Kumar, who is currently facing political vendetta from the ruling regime for demanding justice for killing of tribals by central forces in Chattishgarh, was the chief guest of the conference. He talked about the disastrous corporate plunder of our natural resources and displacement of tribals from their land under the power of the gun, with direct patronage from today's government. Noted author and activist

Bhanwar Meghvanshi said that today's fascist regime will have to be defeated not only on the political front but also on the cultural front. Documentary filmmaker Meghnad said that the virtues of democracy should be learned from the people. In today's time of authoritarianism and extreme centralisation of power, it is these values that are under attack from the government itself. Navkiran Natt, a youth activist and a member of the editorial board of Trolley Times, underlined the many cultural experiments done in the peasant movement.

Representatives of fraternal organizations also participated in the conference. Aanchal Baba read the message of Hiralal Rajasthani of Dalit Writers Association. Ranendra from Progressive Writers Association and Nasir Ahmed Sikandar from the Janvadi Lekhak Sangh gave their solidarity messages for the conference.

On the second day of the Conference a discussion on 'Forms of Resistance Against

Fascism' was organized. Noted poet and thinker Devi Prasad Mishra talked about the otherisation project of fascism. Poet and scientist Laltu underlined the need to form a joint front in the field of culture. Among others, Bharat Mehta, Ranendra and Radhakant Sethi addressed the session.

Social activist Soni Sori, the symbol of tribal resistance today, herself put forward the nature of fascism by telling her own story.

On the last day of the conference, the delegates elected a 141-member National Council and a 37-member Executive Council. Renowned Hindi critic Ravi Bhushan was elected as the new president of Jan Sanskriti Manch. Journalist and cultural Activist Manoj Kumar Singh was re-elected as the General Secretary.

The conference concluded with the resolve to strengthen cultural Resistance Against Fascism and defend freedom and Democratic Culture. ■

- Awadhesh Tripathi

# Demanding Justice for Invisibilized Mine Workers of Ballari

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

**S**hantamma worked for 30 years in the mines of Sandur, Ballari district in Karnataka – from earning a mere Rs. 50/- a month. Her children were born in the mines and grew up there. In 2011, she was thrown out of employment, and not paid a single rupee as compensation. Today, she works as an agricultural worker earning a mere Rs. 100/- a day when there is work, and with no earnings whatsoever when there is no work.

Umesh suffered serious damage to his eyesight and his respiratory system due to his work in the mines. He was forced to spend lakhs for his medical treatment. After being thrown out of employment, he was unable to find any job. His sons were forced to discontinue their studies and had to start working to sustain the family.

Amaresh was born and grew up in the mines at Ballari. His mother, a mine-worker too, had to take care of the entire family with Rs. 200 a week. The school he studied in was over 20 kms away, and there was no transportation available. Poverty, lack of transport made him give up school mid-way, and he became a helper in the mines.

Shantamma, Amaresh, Umesh and his sons came together with thousands of other mine-workers from 11th to 13th October for a padayatre from Sandur to Ballari demanding compensation for the mine workers of Ballari who had lost their employment when the mines were closed in 2011. Their struggle of over a decade is for their rightful share.

## Exploitative Conditions of Work of Mine-Workers

As of 2011, Ballari district had 148 mineral leases covering an extent of 10,868.44 hectares and employing more than 25,000 mine workers directly. The rampant illegal mining since the 2000s came to light with the report of the then Karnataka Lokayukta, Justice Santosh Hegde and culminating in the Supreme Court directing the closure of all mines in Ballari in September 2011. The extent of illegal mining, the huge amassing of wealth, especially by the Reddy brothers were written about. But, what was invisibilized was the tens of thousands of workers whose labour was exploited for decades in the mines and who found themselves without any employment or compensation overnight.

In July 2011, with the orders of the Supreme Court, more than 25,000 workers were thrown to the streets. The mine owners used the pretext of the Supreme Court orders to further deny the workers their statutory rights pertaining

to dismissal, retrenchment and compensation. While the mine-owners had made raging profits between 2003 to 2011, the workers, who had not been paid even minimum wages were thrown to the streets all of a sudden without any recourse, and denied any statutory process and benefits that accrue under law. The workers who were primarily from the neighbouring villages were largely from Dalit, minority and other vulnerable communities, with a large number of the workers being women. With the closure of the mines, the workers and their entire families, numbering more than 1 lakh people, including young children and senior citizens, were left with no source of livelihood and nothing to fall back upon.

The condition of the mine workers, from the beginning has been highly exploitative - not paid minimum wages, no basic facilities, no safety equipment, etc. It was through the exploitation of the workers that the mine-owners made huge profits. Any attempt at unionizing resulted in immediate termination of employment and even threats to life.

The Report of the Karnataka Lokayukta on the allegations of illegal mining activities in Ballari found that there was a complete collapse of the administrative and governance system, and found that “...it is observed that due to a big margin of profit in this illegal trade a mafia type of operation have started with the full connivance and support of Politicians, Officials of the Department of Police, RTO, Mines, Forest, Revenue, Commercial Taxes, KSPCB, Labour, Weight and Measurement department and others.”

## Exploited by the Mining Companies, Ignored by the State

While on the one hand, the mining companies who have built their profits on the sweat and exploitation of these workers have not provided them with any compensation. On the other hand, the government has completely neglected these workers, and have not taken any steps to ensure that the mine workers complied with the law while denying them employment or taking any steps towards their rehabilitation. While steps are being taken for the rehabilitation of the environment, these workers and their families, who are thrown to the streets have been completely ignored.

In fact, several of these mines have restarted operations while others are now being auctioned and there are employment opportunities in the same. However, these illegally retrenched workers whose rights were grossly



violated when the mines were operational and then closed, are even being denied their statutory right to 'first right under law' to re-employment. Instead new persons, especially migrant workers from other states, are being employed through an illegal system of labour contracts and sub-contracts. Thus, even though the mining work has restarted, the mine-workers who had lost their employment are not being given employment, in complete violation of the law.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court in the case related to illegal mining in *Samaj Parivartana Samudaya vs. State of Karnataka* directed the State of Karnataka to draw up a Comprehensive Environment Plan for Mining Impact Zone (CEPMIZ) to look at ameliorative and mitigative measure for socio-economic development and eco-restoration in the mining impacted regions of Ballari, Tumakuru and Chitradurga districts. Through the orders of the Supreme Court, an amount of Rs. 19,443 crore were collected as fines. However, the plan fails to acknowledge the suffering of the workers and ensure a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of the workers.

### **Padayatra to Demand a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan for Workers**

The Bellary Zilla Gani Karmikara Sangha, affiliated to the AICCTU, undertook a Padyatra of 70 kms over three days from Sandur to Ballari from October 11th to 13th. The padayatre was inaugurated by Social Activist Medha Patkar and social activist and Kannada cine-actor, Chetan Ahimsa.

In her inaugural address, Medha Patkar noted the importance of the padayatre, which was for livelihood, equal share, for change and for justice. She spoke of the need for the working class and the farmers' struggle to come together to fight against the pro-corporate anti-people government that is looking to privatize 'jal, jangal, zameen', and the need to show that India is built by the farmers and workers. Stressing on the need to fight the communal agenda of the government, she said that we would not allow the people to be divided on the grounds of religion or caste. The Government is saying that they will only give minimum to the people – minimum wages, minimum support price, but we will not accept this – we want our equal share, she said. Our fight is for what is rightfully ours, our fight is to protect the core values of the Constitution, she declared.

Chetan Ahimsa spoke of how struggle is the only way for justice, and the manner in which the farmers' struggle had compelled the Government to withdraw the anti-farmer laws. He declared his complete support for the mineworkers and their demands.



Thousands of workers started the padayatre from Sandur highlighting that the Rs. 19,443 crore that was collected as fines was all a product of their labour and demanding their rightful share in the same. Women, children, senior citizens were part of the padayatre that went through several villages highlighting the demands of the workers, with the residents of the villages also assuring complete support to the struggle.

After 70 kms, the padayatre culminated in a protest outside the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Ballari on October 13th. The workers were assured that their concerns would be looked into and the officials agreed that it was necessary to have a special rehabilitation plan for workers. A meeting was set up to discuss the special rehabilitation plan proposed by the workers under the chairmanship of the Ballari Deputy Commissioner.

The rights of workers can no longer be ignored and it is necessary that the Government immediately steps in and set right the historical injustice that has been done to the mine-workers. The struggle of the mine-workers of Ballari is one for justice, dignified life and equal share. ■

# Victory to the Fighting Women of Iran!

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**T**he death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's morality police for alleged 'dress code' violation has sparked off a veritable rebellion in Iran. The simmering anger among Iran's women and the working people against the repressive theocratic regime and worsening conditions of life is now exploding in protests across Iran. More than fifty people are already reported to have been killed by the regime, but defying brutal repression protests continue to spread.

Mahsa Amini was a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who had come to Tehran to visit her family. On 13 September she was detained by the Guidance Patrol, Iran's infamous morality police, and sent to a 'reeducation centre' ostensibly for a briefing on the right way of wearing the hijab. While her brother waited for her at the police station, the family was told that she had had to be hospitalised for cardiac treatment where she passed away on 16 September. Eyewitness reports reveal she was badly humiliated and beaten up.

The news of Mahsa Amini's death took the lid off the brewing anger among Iran's women and in no time they were out on the streets adding a new chapter of inspiring protests to the annals of international women's movement and people's assertion. Their chants "Zan, Zandegi, Azadi" (Woman, Life, Freedom), 'Azadi, Azadi, Azadi' (Freedom, Freedom, Freedom) and 'Ma Hameh Mahsa Hastim, Bejang ta Bejangim' (We are all Mahsa, We are all in this fight together) are resonating across the world. Their courageous act of hoisting their own cut hair as the flag of the movement will ignite the imagination of freedom-lovers and fighters for rights for generations to come.

Iran is a diverse country and the shocking death of Mahsa Amini has united Iranians from different backgrounds in their collective grief, anger and protests. Around the Iranian women's battle against theocratic control over their personal lives and choices we can now see wider waves of people's protests defying the state and state-backed vigilante groups and their attempts to crush the movement under brute force. Like in many historic instances in the past, the women of Iran today are playing the role of torchbearers in a deeply radical movement against theocratic tyranny. And that is why international solidarity for the fighting women and people of Iran is also on the rise.

There are of course attempts by religious bigots and pro-US interventionists to use the death of Mahsa Amini and the consequent protests in Iran to further their own Islamophobic narrative and clamour for regime change in Iran. The forces who persecute and humiliate women for wearing hijab in India are shedding crocodile tears for Iran's protesting women. The hijab is not the issue, the issue is autocratic and patriarchal imposition of dress code on women. Just as the women in Iran or Afghanistan have every right to reject the dress code that makes hijab or a particular way of wearing it mandatory, women in India have every right to reject any discriminatory diktat that stops them from wearing it.

The battle for women's freedom and rights remains as urgent in fascist-dominated India as in theocratic Iran or even in that self-styled champion and exporter of democracy, the United States of America, where women are once again having to fight to secure as basic a right as the right to abortion. If Iran is today having to fight for democracy free from theocratic

control, we must remember how imperialist intervention has retarded the progress of modern Iran at different junctures.

In the early 1950s Iran became a victim of the CIA-engineered coup Operation AJAX which toppled the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh to subject Iran to the monarchical rule of the Pahlavi dynasty. Mosaddegh was toppled for his progressive politics and especially his bold move to nationalise the oil industry in Iran.

The 1979 revolution was eventually taken over by theocratic forces to turn Iran into an Islamic Republic, but in terms of foreign policy Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini did not return to the pro-US pro-Israel line of the Pahlavi era. If we care to listen to the pro-democracy activists of Iran, we will understand how the US sanctions on Iran and the constant targeting of Iran by the US-Israel axis actually help the repressive regime in Iran to drum up domestic support and legitimise its repressive rule.

Afghanistan is another example of the disastrous impact of the sinister policy of American aggression and intervention in the name of women's rights and democracy in the Islamic world - after decades of military occupation the US recently exited Afghanistan only by transferring power to the Taliban.

Within India too, we are only too aware of how the Sangh brigade camouflages its own misogyny and bigotry by shedding crocodile tears for Muslim women. Its campaign against triple talaq and now against hijab is presented as proof of its concern for the empowerment of Muslim women, but its attitude to Muslim women became crystal clear in the wake of the Shaheen Bagh agitation for equal citizenship.

From malicious lies, online bullying and digital assault through toxic apps like Bulli Bai to victimisation under draconian laws and vindictive bulldozing - Muslim women activists continue to find themselves at the receiving end of the Sangh brigade's systematic campaign of persecution and unmitigated hate. With the contemptuous dismissal of Zakia Jafri's review petition, the vindictive

arrest of co-petitioner Teesta Setalvad and the brazen felicitation of the rapists and murderers in the Bilkis Bano case, Muslim women are now being openly denied their right to seek justice.

We must extend warm and unconditional support to the fighting women of Iran to secure their full rights and freedom from theocracy

and patriarchy. We also support the Iranian people's right to chart their own course free from any kind of Western intervention. The battle against patriarchy and misogyny, essential for social transformation, should also be seen as a great source of strength in every battle for freedom and democracy. Victory to the fighting women of Iran! ■

## Pakistan's devastating floods: A historical legacy

▲ TOOBA SYED

**M**ore than thirtythree million people were displaced in less than a month in Pakistan after the devastating monsoon floods hit the country. Pakistan experienced unusual rains in July and early August leading to inundation of one third of the country. The rainwater was accompanied by glacial melting and a flawed drainage system.

The intervention in Pakistan's waters began in the 19th century when the French and British engineers set out to take control of the unruly waters and people of British India. The world's largest canal irrigation system was built using the justification that it would irrigate "wasteland" and bring an end to famine. In reality, the canal colonisation was a means to increase revenue and to find an avenue for capital investment of London financiers. The region continued to face famine despite the canal colonies; the canals were mostly supplying water to already irrigated areas leading to excess water supply. Crops such as wheat were replaced with water intensive crops such as rice and sugar leading to increased revenues for the British imperialists. The canals in various places have led to increased salinity and waterlogging, decreasing fertility of the soil.

The engineering of the Indus Basin

continued post-Partition as India and Pakistan fought bitterly over their waters. As a result the World Bank stepped in as a negotiator, and brokered a technical solution, the Indus Water Treaty of 1960. According to this treaty, the water was now to be divided between India and Pakistan, the western rivers allotted to Pakistan and the eastern to India. The World Bank experts decided that large infrastructural dams would solve the issues of Pakistan's hydraulic losses and provided funding for the Tarbela and Mangla Dams. As a result of these constructions, the water started depleting in the Indus Delta resulting in the migration of thousands of indigenous people. Pakistan is currently amongst the top 10 World Bank borrowers in the water sector.

Later, the World Bank continued interfering, with construction based on faulty plans, such as the Left Bank Outfall Drainage (LBOD) affecting the districts of Mirpur Khas, Sanghar and Badin. The design of LBOD was against the natural flow of the river Indus. Historically, the Indus effluent would fall in the Shakoor Lake before flowing to the sea. 80% of the Shakoor Lake is in India while 20% is in Pakistan. The experts again decided that instead of a political agreement, a technical solution should be sought. This time the technical solution was to dig forty miles into the sea to create an

artificial canal, and build channels and weirs to direct water towards LBOD. The plan failed terribly, as the direction of the river was changed and it was against the tidal winds. The district of Badin was flooded in 2010 due to this LBOD leading to mass migrations and displacements. The LBOD this year again contributed to flooding in the same areas.

The story of Pakistan's waters is one of colonial interventions, debt-fueled development models and no respect for the geography of the river. Pakistan as a result has multiple hazardscapes in the Indus Valley region, with flood water finding no way to reach the Arabian Sea. The once flourishing Indus delta is barren and has shrunk by more than 90% due to colonial and imperialist interventions.

Pakistan's external debt is at \$99 billion dollars, and even when the floods hit, most of the mainstream media was preoccupied by the approval of another loan by the IMF. It was not until 26th August that finally Pakistan's politicians and media could turn their attention to the devastation of the floods. While the international media continued confronting Pakistani activists about the inept government, it conveniently forgot to discuss the role of colonialism, imperialism and debt-dependency all



created by the global North. This is not to absolve the Pakistani state of its responsibility towards its people, but to learn about our collective pasts that have been engineered by the rich countries.

Today millions of Pakistan's working class and peasantry suffer irreparable losses while the world at large escapes responsibility for the global climate crisis as well as historical legacies of colonial interventions. Today when we speak of debt-cancellation and

colonial reparations, the global nexus of capitalists tries to shift the blame to our politicians, who as inept as they might be, are also not completely responsible for the devastation.

Today we know that South Asia is one of the regions worst affected by the climate crisis, which is no longer an apprehension about the future. It is already upon us. The crisis calls for a regional and internationalist politics rooted in anti-imperialism and decolonising our

approaches to water, and against debt-dependent development. It is up to us to collectively come together to fight the battle forced upon us.

*Tooba Syed is a Pakistani socialist feminist and gender researcher. She is associated with the left wing political party, Awami Workers Party and the feminist organisation Women Democratic Front which has been engaged in flood relief efforts since the devastating monsoon floods. ■*

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## ITALIAN ELECTIONS

# There is a Connection Between their Roots in Fascism and their Embrace of these Ideas

*The far-right is on the rise in Europe. In Sweden, once seen as a bastion of social democracy, the Sweden Democrats, a virulently racist and anti-immigrant party with neo-Nazi roots won second place in national elections in September, backed by one in five voters, and its parliamentary support is crucial for the new centre-right coalition government. Similar authoritarian parties marked by ultra-nationalist and racist ideologies, anti-migrant policies, crusades against women's and LGBT+ rights, and attacks on the left (often framed by rhetoric about 'elite' conspiracies) have been in power or close to power in recent years in Poland, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain and Serbia and of course in Hungary, where far-right pro-Putin prime minister, Viktor Orbán, and his Fidesz party have been in power since 2010.*

*In Italy, elections on 25 September saw Giorgia Meloni set to become the leader of Italy's most right-wing Government since the days of Mussolini. Her Fratelli D'Italia (Brothers of Italy) Party secured 26% of the vote in the recent General Election, and it is now in the process of forming a new right-wing coalition.*

*In this interview, which originally appeared in [Byline Times](#) on 28*

*September 2022, David Broder – author of [Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism In Contemporary Italy](#) – talks about the historical roots of the country's new far-right leadership.*

## What can you tell us about Meloni?

David Broder: Giorgia Meloni has been a political activist since a very young age. She's from a working-class district of Rome and joined the Italian Social Movement (MSI) in 1992. The MSI was a neo-fascist party founded by members of the defeated fascist regime in 1946... it has a long and often violent history.

In the post-war decades, it was always quite a small party, but Meloni joined at a time of great upheaval in Italian politics and she made her career in the MSI.

She was a councillor in Rome, then an MP, and became the youngest ever Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies when she was only 29. She was Youth Minister in the last of Silvio Berlusconi's Governments at a time when her post-fascist party was welcomed into a broad right-wing coalition.

So, already in the 1990s, former fascists were in government as a junior partner to Berlusconi. But what we've seen in more recent decades is that the most right-wing parts of that coalition, including former fascists, have become the dominant force. [Last month's] election result is really the culmination of that process.

## Is Meloni's party the same as the MSI which she originally joined?

Yes and no. In the 1990s, the MSI renamed itself the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance) and then it directly merged with Berlusconi's party (Forza Italia). In those years, its leader Gianfranco Fini made some efforts to distance it from fascism, with a commitment to taking part in electoral politics and rejecting violence and authoritarianism.

After Fini took the party into a merger with Berlusconi's party, Fratelli D'Italia was created in 2012 by people who rejected that process and who reasserted the claim to the party tradition. They adopted the MSI's logo, which is a tricolour flame, and Fratelli D'Italia's flag even now has the flame of the MSI in it.

In the early years of the party, Meloni leant into a very severe denunciation of those who had earlier dissolved the neo-fascist tradition.

## So Fratelli D'Italia wanted to reclaim the fascist tradition from which the MSI had grown?

Yes. Giorgia Meloni often cites as her political forefather Giorgio Almirante, who was the founding leader of the MSI and led it through most of its history until his death in 1988. Almirante had taken part in the [wartime fascist] regime; he had written for a journal called *La Difesa della Razza* (The Defence Of The Race) in which he advocated explicitly biological racist ideas.

At the time Meloni joined in 1992, many of the main leaders were still people who had directly participated in the Nazi collaborationist Social Republic [led by Mussolini].

Of course, over the decades, the way that they organised changed and it isn't just the same as historical fascism. For instance, they showed commitment to the constitutional process, taking part in elections and have generally, over time, rejected terrorist groups who were within the orbit of the party.

**But there is a genuine historical link between Mussolini and the party of the woman who is now set to be the leader of Italy?**

Yes, absolutely. And often, we hear the kind of story which goes, 'oh well, the party has broken with the past, that no longer applies and so on'. But when you look specifically at what her party is saying, it's actually very indulgent and [only a] partial criticism of fascism.

For instance, Giorgia Meloni about a month ago issued a video where she sought to dismiss claims that her party is steeped in fascism. What was really interesting was the pedantic phrasing she used it in order to not condemn fascism in general. A typical way of doing this is to condemn Italy's 1938 racial laws, which involved the segregation of Jews and other ethnic minorities from taking part in public life... and to say that participation in the Holocaust is to be condemned – but not to condemn the fascist experience in general. What this aims to do is suggest that Mussolini

went astray when he was led along by Hitler.

So this party has a much more distinctly fascist tradition than other far-right parties, such as [Marine Le Pen's National Rally] in France.

**Has Meloni tried to make her appeal mainstream like Le Pen?**

Yes, in part, but it's also a very contradictory process.

Meloni insists that she won't disturb Italy's international position, emphasising that she supports Ukraine not Russia, that she's committed to NATO, and that she wants to change the European Union rather than consider an exit.

At the same time, we have this very intense hostility directed against the 'conspiracies of globalists' like [billionaire US philanthropist] George Soros and the left, who are who are basically accused of a plot to destroy Italian society. Meloni has often resorted to the language of the 'Great Replacement' theory, which presents the idea of a shadowy plot to replace white Europeans with immigrants and Muslims.

Meloni has policies which are extremely hostile to immigrants and proposes very outlandish and harsh means of repression, including the call for a naval blockade in the Mediterranean to stop migrant boats. One of the key focuses of far-right agitation – including by Meloni – is that they're opposed to the idea that the children of migrants should have the right to citizenship, even if they're born in Italy. In some cases, in local councils run by the far-right parties, we've seen them denying free school meals to non-EU citizens, even though the children in question were born in the country and have no choice but to live there.

**Is there an underlying dog whistle of antisemitism too?**

Yes, and we see this in the prominence of George Soros in the party's

propaganda. There's the claim that Soros is the figure behind 'ethnic substitution' and, in one of her posts, Meloni refers to him as a 'usurer' – a word with strong [antisemitic] connotations.

**What about the LGBT community and women's rights?**

Meloni says she doesn't want to get rid of the existing right to abortion. Yet, already in the regions control controlled by her party, we've seen that they actually act to make access harder, including imposing unrealistic limits. For instance, a seven-week limit on abortion with a compulsory one-week cooling-off period.

One of the typical themes of Fratelli D'Italia is the destruction of our identity by speculators, by online social networks, by the 'International Republic Of Money' as they call it, to create a formless mass of atomised citizens who have no loyalty or roots.

Against this, they pose the traditional, heterosexual family. Within that, there's a very harsh idea of LGBT people who are portrayed as unnatural and rootless and not really belonging.

Victory for this party will be a boost to all manner of homophobes and reactionaries.

**So is this the return of Italian fascism?**

I'm not someone who has called every new right-wing phenomenon 'the return of fascism' but I think you'd have to be very blind to not see that there is a connection between their roots in fascism and their embrace of these ideas.

Beyond the actual policies pursued by the Italian Government, the example that Meloni sets and the fact that the state is controlled by people who hold these ideas, will unleash a very hostile climate in Italian society. ■

## Comrade Kumar Shiralkar

Comrade Kumar Shiralkar, erstwhile member of the central Committee of the Communist party Of India (Marxist), Joint Secretary of the All India Agricultural Workers Union passed away on 2 October after a protracted illness. He was 75.

Comrade Kumar was born in a middle class family in Miraj bordering Karnataka. He graduated in Mechanical engineering and enrolled himself as a post graduate student in IIT Mumbai after working in industry for 4/5 years to sustain his family. But he left the studies to join Baba Amte at Chandrapur.

The Aadivasis in Shahada, District Dhule were suffering large scale atrocities under the army of the kulaks called Purshottam Sena led by Congress leader P K Patil. The resistance of the Aadivasis was led by Ambersingh Suravanti called Ambersingh Maharaj guided by Sarva Seva Sangh. Within a short time after joining Baba Amte Com. Kumar was sent to support the resistance. He sent a message to Baba Amte that he will not return to the Ashram as this struggle was more important.

The struggle was taken up for support by various organizations in Maharashtra. They appealed to the youth who were then gathering politically to join the struggle in the area. A group formed under the name, Magowa, by highly educated youth mainly hailing from the high class and high caste Maharashtrian society as a kind of revolt against the traditional left decided to join the struggle. Prafull Bidwai, Sudheer Bedekar, Suhas Paranjpe, Achyut Godbole, Bharat Patankar, Dilip Kamat, Ashok Manohar, Kanhere Brothers, Chhaya Datar were some of the active members of the group. They published a magazine called Magowa. Kumar joined the group. This group was formed at the backdrop of the world, the country, the sub-continent and the state in turmoil, people all over the world rising in rage against imperialism, capitalism and injustices of all kind.



This group decided to work at Shahada and many members of the group worked there as full timers of the Shramik Sanghatana formed at Shahada. This was the last major participation of the middle class youth in a left movement after the Freedom Struggle wherein the Maharashtrian middle class participated actively. It has remained the last one till today. Com. Kumar was an active participant in Shramik Sanghatana and the running of the group and the magazine.

The Magowa group was disbanded after a lot of debate and ideological differences. With Com. Kumar others like Sudheer Bedekar decided to join the C P M. However Bharat Patankar, Ashok Manohar and others decided to choose different political ways.

Com. Kumar had integrated himself in the Aadivasi society completely. He lived with them and led a very simple life. He engaged himself in organizing them against all kinds of injustice. He was assaulted many times by the feudal elements but he escaped these attempts on his life with the protection of the Aadivasis. He had lost hearing in one of the ears though in one of the assaults. He actively pursued other initiatives in education, health services, and environment in the area. ■



# ***Hands off Haiti!***



## **NO TO US-CORE Group MILITARY INTERVENTION**

Battered after the debacle and withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US imperialist tentacles are rising again and this time the target is - Haiti. Haiti, a small Caribbean nation near the US, had been at the forefront of facing the brutal brunt of the Monroe Doctrine, which considers countries in Latin America and the Caribbean as a playground for US imperialism. The US intervention in Haiti that started in 1905 with the military occupation of the country continue even today through various overt and covert means.

Currently, Haitian capital and many areas are in the grip of gang-related violence. The violence in Haiti is on the rise since the assassination of the US-backed President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, with his interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry becoming the interim President. The violence, which the CORE Group (composed of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, the Ambassadors of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the European Union, the USA, and the Special Representative of the OAS) would like to project as lack of democratic understanding in the country, is in fact the product of years of throttling democratic aspirations of the people by the criminal-oligarchy nexus backed by the Core Group itself.

The US-Core Group now wants to 'send democracy' in Haiti through funding, electoral meddling and rehashing the horrors of military intervention in the country. In fact, today the Caribbean nation is the largest subject to foreign actors' constant self-insertion into internal matters. It was the same US-Core Group that helped in ousting democratically-elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the 2004 coup by right-wing ex-army paramilitary units, which invaded the country from across the Dominican border.

Anti-IMF and anti-austerity protests have been taking shape of popular uprising in Haiti since 2019 as international institutions like IMF, World Bank and USAID accelerated attempts to restructure and realign the country's economic system in favour of the US economic agenda in the region. When Moïse government implemented IMF demanded fuel price hike with a 38 per cent increase in 2019, massive protests forced him to revoke the move.

Any US-Core group backed intervention in Haiti will further deteriorate the political situation in the country. The political crisis in Haiti is the product of consistent foreign interference that has kept the country mired in poverty. As nation that broke shackles of slavery and French colonialism around the period US became independent, the people of Haiti can chart their own future.

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