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Liberation
CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)



**DECEMBER 13 AND
THE DEVIOUS SAFFRON DESIGN**

PROTESTS AGAINST POTO

**COMMUNAL RECASTING OF HISTORY
BUDDHADEV'S ROYAL BENGAL PERESTROIKA
CPI(ML)'S CENTRAL PARTY SCHOOL**

DECEMBER 18 -- COMRADE VINOD MISHRA MEMORIAL MEETING

On Combating Communal Fascism

THE THIRD Vinod Mishra Memorial meeting was held on 18th December by the Delhi State committee of CPI-ML. Addressing the audience were Justice Rajinder Sachar, eminent journalists Praful Bidwai, Prabhas Joshi, Political Scientist Yogendra Yadav and CPI-ML General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya and Polit-Bureau member Comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya.

Justice Sachar equated the struggle against WTO with that against POTO and said that POTO was anyway being brought in even before the attack on the Parliament and the BJP was using December 13 for paving the way for furthering its agenda. He cautioned that in the communal frenzy that was being generated, it was possible for ideologically weaker forces to tilt in support of government's policies.

Bidwai said that the communal fascist nature of the government was coming to the fore in three ways. The forced entry into the disputed site at Ayodhya and the Sangh outfits' threat of keeping the 12 March deadline, the forcible imposition of POTO and now the threat of war by the government.

Bidwai said that India was trying to get into the league of Israel and the US and was trying to call for a war, which he warned would have dangerous implications. He said there was no evidence yet, of the basis on which the war call was being drummed up and said that the so-called terrorist camps, which would be targeted, were nothing but firing ranges and drill grounds. Any attack on them would mean a full-fledged war, as it would violate the territorial integrity of Pakistan. Both countries were armed with nuclear weapons and their use would mean generations of people in the sub continent being affected.

Yogendra Yadav said that a Home Minister, who had no time to address the distraught Manipuri people when their Assembly was being burnt down, was on television day and night declaring the danger from Islam and a Prime Minister who did not shed a tear for the thousands dying of starvation wept for the September 11 attack in the US. Prabhas Joshi paid tributes to VM and compared communal fascism with Ravana whose life force could be taken away by a youthful radical force like that of CPI-ML.

Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya said that VM recognized the threat of communal fascism 15 years ago even as people thought that India was safe because of constitutional amendments declaring it a secular republic. He said that VM began to feel during the Ayodhya movement that to talk of secularism alone was inadequate.

Comrade Dipankar traced three sources of communalism. He said that communalism had gained in strength

by winning recognition as nationalism even as the other definition of nationalism as represented during the freedom struggle and by the legacy of Bhagat Singh could not assert itself in the post-independence period. He said that the BJP could consolidate itself early on as everyone accepted Indira Gandhi's rhetoric of India's unity being threatened while the BJP used religion to do the 'uniting' act. The anti-imperialist struggle fumbled in this period and this brand of false nationalism under the garb of cultural nationalism began to establish itself.

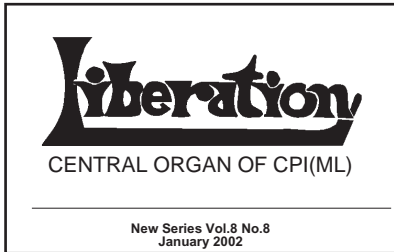
Com. Dipankar said the economic changes in the last 15 years proved to be the other source of communal fascism and the new economic policy helped in setting BJP's agenda. Advani himself is said to have claimed that Congress was following the BJP's economic programme.

Com Dipankar said that the combination of colonialism with communalism resulted in the partition of 1947, and during the phase of globalization communalism was emerging as fascism within the country. It has been manifesting itself in the rewriting of history, POTO, temple construction at Ayodhya, and the Kashmir Question. He said all this was in line with their principal agenda of reconstructing the nation as a Hindu Rashtra, and hence, had to be countered with an equally determined democratic agenda. Elaborating on the democratic agenda he said that it needed to be broad based but at the core of it should be the firmness associated with the struggles of workers and peasants. Any lapse on this count would only weaken the democratic movement.

Com. Dipankar drew a parallel between the attack on the Parliament and the fire in Reichstag in February 1933 which Hitler had utilized to the hilt in furthering his agenda. He said the war cries, POTO etc. are to be seen as attempts to transform what Advani feels is a 'soft society' by bringing in his idea of an 'effective state'. In the past some believed that the North-South divide would prevent the fascist growth but the compromises made by the regional parties of South India with the BJP makes it clear that this theory has failed. Similarly those who thought that the OBC and Dalit parties would prevent the growth of fascism got a sense of their theoretical lapse when the BSP tied up with the BJP.

Polit-Bureau member Comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya, who chaired the meeting, reiterated the resolve to strengthen the worker-peasant alliance in the fight against communal fascism. Delhi State Secretary Rajendra Pratholi thanked the party activists, members, sympathizers and friends who had come for the memorial meeting.

– Radhika Menon



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dipankar Bhattacharya

EDITORS

Arindam Sen
 Brij Bihari Pandey
 B.Sivaraman

MANAGER

Awadhesh Kumar Singh

EDITORIAL OFFICE

U-90, Shakarpur, Delhi.110 092
 Phone:011/2221067 Fax:011/2218248
 e-mail: liberation@cpiml.org
 Web Site: www.cpiml.org

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Stop this brinkmanship!

INDIA HAS been steadily upping the ante vis-a-vis Pakistan ever since the dastardly terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament. The latest is the diplomatic adventurism in recalling the Indian High Commissioner from Islamabad; an extreme gesture never resorted to since 1965. Meanwhile, large-scale troop movements by both countries along the Line of Control and international border have been reported. Heavy shelling across the LoC make it to the newspaper headlines almost everyday. Side by side, there is also an escalation in the war of words. Direct threats of war and retaliation are freely exchanged at the highest levels.

It is foolish to resort to diplomatic attrition and stretch it to a point of no return. War is no solution to terrorism. It is not a good security scenario if half-a-dozen armed desperados can push the neighbours to the brink of a war. The obvious risk about brinkmanship is that it can get out of hand at any moment. Even a major provocation like Kargil intrusion did not lead to India crossing the LoC and launching attacks on targets inside Pakistan. What is the pressing need to engage rhetoric on the same now?

Concern and anxiety are mounting both at home and in the international community. Thanks to its dangerous war mongering, India risks frittering away whatever diplomatic goodwill and sympathy it has been gaining from the international community over the question of terrorism. Far from restraining Pakistan from abetting terrorist acts in India, the international concern is already shifting to cautioning India against any military adventurism. It should be noted that India is yet to offer any conclusive proof that the terrorist groups operating from Pakistani soil continue to enjoy backing from the military regime in their terrorist acts in the post-September 11 scenario. India would only be playing into the hands of these autonomous groups if it escalates its tension with its neighbour to the point of war. If its war of nerves with Pakistan becomes a case of overkill the military regime would have no incentive to rein in the jihadis. More ominously, it would provide an excellent opportunity to the Americans to meddle in the subcontinental affairs in the name of cooling down the tempers. Only by normalising its relations with Pakistan can India hope to get the Musharraf regime to play any restraining role, which is very crucial in view of the present Afghan developments.

It is high time all the peace-loving forces in the country gear up on a war footing to bring the present brinkmanship to an end. India cannot fight a war for the simple reason that the people of the subcontinent cannot afford a nuclear holocaust. It is also high time that the Indian rulers stop giving out statements like "we are fully prepared". They don't have minimum capability to evacuate big cities like Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Jaipur or Chandigarh, which are vulnerable to nuclear attacks in the event of a war. The nation is also fully aware by now as to how the coffin-chors get 'fully prepared' in the name of war.

It is impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that the BJP is beating the war drums only to reap electoral harvests in UP and Punjab. The Congress complicity in the war games can also be attributed to the same reason. What recklessness on the part of these ruling class parties for the sake of narrow electoral gains!

The BJP also seems to be preparing for another communal war on the domestic front. The party is considering inclusion of Ram temple in its election manifesto in UP. The VHP leader is claiming that Vajpayee has promised to handover the acquired land for temple construction. The saffron hordes are soon to launch a campaign in this regard. The POTO is already in place to browbeat Muslims into submission. Needless to say, this would also a push the minorities to the brink and bring the communal situation to a boil. It is also time for forces of democracy, peace and communal amity to go on high alert.

Pre-election scene in UP

THE STAGE is all set for the crucial UP Assembly elections. Already delayed by six months in blatant violation of democratic norms — thanks to the BJP's shameless greed for power, and its endorsement by the so-called 'autonomous' agencies on the basis of dubious interpretation of rules — the elections are now scheduled for February, provided they are not postponed again for the sake of the BJP's 'crusade against terrorism' which might even develop into a full-fledged war against Pakistan. Obviously, the war build up has a direct bearing on UP elections.

Actually, despite all possible political acrobatics by its chief minister Rajnath Singh, the BJP was forced to bank upon its traditional communal-jingoistic plank. In the aftermath of America's Afghan war, the BJP strategists went on record admitting that the struggle against terrorism (and not the achievements of Atal-Rajnath governments) would be the main agenda in the Assembly elections. When the Machiavellian saffron masters designed POTO as a major political weapon, and when it faced a stiff resistance from a wide cross-section of the socio-political spectrum, Rajnath claimed that even if POTO was not passed by the Parliament, UP would have its own POTO.

The MBC-MDC card [Most Backward Castes and 'Most Dalit Castes'], said to be a master stroke of Rajnath Singh, did not really click. In the first place, Rajnath's promise of providing jobs to the MBC-MDC youth was not kept, though it was attributed to judicial intervention. [The Supreme Court recently stayed MBC-MDC reservation]. Secondly, and more importantly, it could not alter the social equations to the BJP's advantage to any great extent.

Rajnath indulged in high-sounding rhetoric about development and wel-

fare of all sections, which was epitomised in the populist panchayats of farmers, workers, teachers, students etc. [Khiladi panchayat being the last in the series, organised by Raja Bhaiya, Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs and a mafia don] Despite all this, according to reports based on internal assessment of senior bureaucrats recently dispatched to district headquarters by the Chief Minister, the situation is disappointing.

As part of his image building exercise, Rajnath recently dismissed one of his ministers Amar Mani Tripathi, from whose house in Lucknow three kidnappers, who had kidnapped a boy, were arrested. Tripathi was the third in the series of sacked ministers. Naresh Aggarwal, the first to be expelled, has now joined the Samajwadi Party. Ashok Yadav, the second to be expelled, has successfully stalled the MBC-OBC reservation through the Supreme Court. If the involvement of a minister in a kidnapping case did not cause much surprise in UP, his dismissal from the cabinet too did not impress the voters much because many such gems continue to adorn the BJP crown. People find it ridiculous that after running its governments with the help of criminals and corrupt politicians for five years, now, on the eve of the elections, a BJP CM suddenly discovers that Naresh Aggarwal is corrupt and Amar Mani Tripathi is a criminal.

The Samajwadi Party appeared to be a major beneficiary of the situation. However, of late, there have been disturbing signals for the party. Recently, Dr. Masood, once an education minister in the Mayawati government, who rebelled to form the National Loktantrik Party, a predominantly Muslim party, and who was working with VP Singh's Kisan Morcha, has tilted towards the Congress. According to reports, some

powerful Muslim leaders of the Samajwadi Party, including sitting MPs, are tilting towards Congress. Apart from sending out a message regarding a possible post-poll alliance to form a government against the probable BJP-BSP government, Mulayam Singh's parleys with his one-time enemy number one, Sonia Gandhi are necessitated by this compulsion to stop the drift of Muslim voters. Mulayam Singh reportedly faces the same problem in his own home turf of Etawah. Mulayam Singh's retrogressive stand on MBC reservation, his opportunist competition with the saffron brigade on the question of striking at terrorist camps in PoK [his party even surpassed the saffron brigade by organising a demonstration in Lucknow demanding an immediate attack!], his growing relations with the Congress etc., make him doubly suspect in the eyes of secular democratic forces.

Recently, the BSP organised a big rally in Lucknow, where in true dynastic Raja-Rani style, Kanshi Ram formally declared Mayawati to be his political heir. Though, for all practical purposes, Mayawati had already replaced (nay, ousted from UP!) her mentor, the succession question became important at this juncture as some other powerful claimants have entered the arena. The union minister Ram Vilas Paswan is now making hectic efforts to carve out a niche for his Lok Janashakthi Party in the dalit politics of the state. Similarly, RK Chaudhary, once the second most important leader of the BSP after Kanshi Ram, and BR Verma are also staking their claim as the main legatees of the Bahujan movement. Similarly, a bureaucrat-turned-politician Ramraj, baptized in Buddhism as Uditraj, has recently emerged to fill the vacuum created by the decline of the BAMCEF, which was once the main weapon of Kanshi Ram. He organised a big rally of dalits, including employees and bureaucrats, in New Delhi, for conversion into

Buddhism. Mayawati, in her Lucknow rally, attacked Ramraj too besides Ram Vilas Paswan. Obviously, Ramraj alias Uditraj, has political plans and he seems to be in league with the Congress. In a significant development, Mayawati launched a vitriolic attack on the Congress in her Lucknow rally. It was obviously intended to check the possible drift of dalits to the Congress fold.

The BSP rally was impressive. But, according to observers, its composition was a bit different from the earlier rallies. This time there was a sizable presence of middle sections, thanks to Mayawati's offer to provide tickets to a large number of upper caste candidates. Though its core constituency remains more or less intact, there is a decline in the profile and image of the BSP. There are strong undercurrents of fragmentation and disintegration in the monolithic dalit politics of the state.

Having suffered a not so insignificant split at the altar of its morcha politics in the past, the CPI has submitted a list of 17 constituencies to Mulayam Singh. But, according to reliable sources, they are prepared to end up with half a dozen seats. Against this opportunist and suicidal course of the leadership, there is widespread discontent among its cadres all over the state. The CPI(M) has submitted a list of some 16 constituencies. But they have publicly pledged not to weaken the Lok Morcha for the sake of a few seats and they have also advised the CPI to toe the same tailist line!

Against this rank parliamentary cretinism, the CPI(ML) is engaged in strengthening its identity as the struggling left. Recently, in Mirzapur, the Party successfully rebuffed state repression against its leaders, cadres and innocent toiling masses of adivasis and dalits, where a reign of terror was

let loose in the wake of the Khoradikh incident, where a PAC camp was attacked by MCC squads. Basing on our areas of struggle and our ever expanding work in various regions of the state, the Party is gearing up to participate in the elections with full vigour.

Some parties based on single communities have carved out their areas of influence and they may join hands in the elections to garner a sizable number of seats. Most notable among them are Apna Dal, a party based on Kurmi kulaks, and Rashtriya Kranti Party, based on Lodh kulaks and led by ex-CM Kalyan Singh. Recently, they organised large rallies in Lucknow. Though still dominated by the trinity of BJP, BSP and SP, the social life and politics of the state seems to be passing through a transition, where there are strong undercurrents of change.

— Lal Bahadur Singh

New realignments amidst reforms and repression

IN HER characteristic Maharani-style, Ms. Jayalalitha displayed her munificence recently by getting her minion, the dummy CM Pannarselvam, to partially rollback some of the harsh revenue measures announced earlier. The occasion was the judicial exoneration of this Booty Queen when the Chennai High Court set aside her conviction. Underlying this celebratory gesture was fear. The upsurge in workers' struggles and popular protests had clearly unnerved the AIADMK government which had adopted a very hard approach in pushing through a plethora of reform measures and adopting a tough posture in dealing with major labour agitations.

Ms. Jayalalitha is expected to be directly in the saddle soon after the Andipatti by-election, her party might be enjoying a comfortable majority in the Assembly

and she might have received a judicial clean chit. But she still has a major image problem. Probably in order to overcome that she decided to ape the neighbouring AP by putting reforms on the fast-track and making them wide ranging. The financial crisis in the state was severe but not unmanageable. Under the pretext of empty coffers, the AIADMK government has signed a MoU with the Centre for financial restructuring assistance, the IMF-style, for restructuring power sector and other infrastructural and public sectors. Subsidies have been cut on a wide front. The pernicious package of reforms included greater privatisation of the transport sector, increase in power rates, ban on recruitment and reduction in staff strength by 30%, privatisation of loss-making PSUs, wage freeze and even wage cuts in the government and public sector,

no bonus to public sector employees, cut in food subsidies and increase in PDS prices and so on. The story is, of course, old and the same everywhere but what's new is the sudden spurt in the implementation of all round reforms, which is now becoming a phenomenon in TN as in AP and other 'reforming' states. It is too early to say whether these reforms would salvage for Jayalalitha her sullied image and make her once again a darling of the bourgeoisie and their media. But she has already started facing the heat of popular anger.

Take, for instance, the recent 14-day transport workers' strike. The attitude of big trade union leaderships was one of pusillanimity: whether to stick the neck out in the face of a defiant government just for the sake of bonus. But the mood among the workers was one of militancy. The government resorted to all-out strike breaking. Private buses were pressed into service. Tens of thousands of workers rallied in solidarity with the striking busmen. Some 20,000 workers were in jail. Workers' rallies defied police restrictions despite the notorious reputation

Protests at the grassroots

A novel protest came up in Nellai. The hike in the price for PDS rice for APL category was steep – Rs. 3.50 to 9.50. The existing stocks vanished from the shops even before the price hike came into effect. The masses were terribly agitated when they went to the ration shops. Party leaders in Tirunelveli went around the Pettai area beating drums “Tappu” calling out to the people to march towards the collectorate. One hour ahead of the schedule around 600 women assembled with ration cards. Sensing trouble police reached the spot along with the town supply officer and tehsildar who were held up for 3 hours and let off only after giving assurance in writing that rice would be supplied at the old rates.

In Kumarapalayam, Namakkal district, several hundreds women, mobilised by our comrades, converged into the streets and blocked traffic for eight hours. They threw their ration cards at the local officials who pleaded helplessness at the price hike.

Such protests and resistance sprang up throughout the state. Sensing trouble, the government rolled back the food price increase.

In Ambattur Industrial Estate, after a street-corner meeting, slips were distributed among the gathered workers for a spot vote on POTO. About 95% of the workers voted against POTO.

the TN police had earned in attacking rallyists, as witnessed during an earlier DMK procession. The Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation workers’ strike coincided with the transport strike. The power workers too had put the government on notice through a token strike against restructuring. The industrial actions, amidst savage austerity measures, brought about a mood change. Protesting against bus fare hikes and food price increased people started storming ration shops and detaining the buses.

The left parties, rudely jolted by the new turn, ended their honeymoon with Jayalalitha and gave a bandh call which was supported by the CPI(ML), DMK and the Congress and TMC. Our comrades got into the streets to actively enforce the bandh, in many places jointly with other left ranks. To be sure, there were matching political moves in the opposite camp. The BJP opposed the bandh. Jayalalitha began with a wholehearted support to the POTO and went on to declare unilateral issue-based support to the NDA government at the Centre. DMK, in turn, expressed its reservations about POTO but chose to cling on to the NDA. After all, not all was lost. Maran was making waves at Doha! Soon the Parliament witnessed the unusual

spectacle of both the Dravidian parties vying with each other in supporting the Vajpayee government. The baffled CPI(M) and CPI have been spared the ignominy of having to wait at the Poes Garden gates for everything even as ‘corruption’, the ‘lesser evil’, started a fresh round of flirtation with communalism. Now they are looking up to Karunanidhi, even though the DMK is ambivalent about the reforms and is in no mood for any display of ‘self-respect’ by coming out of Jaya-friendly NDA.

Jayalalitha did not extend any invitation to the left parties, to the Congress and TMC, not only for the Iftar party she hosted but also for jointly fighting the panchayat elections. The PMK and MDMK are already out in the woods. The neo-liberal reforms and the industrial actions of the working class have helped in bringing about the circle of political realignments almost to completion. But the question of a broad left unity in TN is not going to be an easy affair. A turn in the political situation, howsoever favourable like both the DMK and AIADMK finding themselves in the saffron camp, is not going to automatically bring about a left and democratic unity. The CPI(M) and CPI in Tamil Nadu are more keenly looking for opportunities to hobnob

Homage

Comrade Suseela Gopalan

Veteran CPI(M) leader in Kerala and a leader of AIDWA, Comrade Susheela Gopalan passed away on December 18 after a grim battle against cancer. A parliamentarian for two terms, Comrade Suseela Gopalan was a key national figure in the movement for women’s liberation led by communists. She was one of those few outstanding first-generation women leaders in the communist movement and her sad demise is a big loss to the left and women’s movements in the country.

Comrade Biren Roy

Veteran communist leader and a leading light of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights, Comrade Biren Roy breathed his last in Calcutta at midnight, 8-9 December. He was 86. He had joined the Communist Party in 1936. After the 1964 split, he did not join either the CPI or the CPI(M), but remained active in the CITU and preferred to work for communist unification. Comrades Kalyan Goswami and Kartick Pal paid floral tributes to the departed leader.

Liberation pays its homage to both the leaders.

with DMK and other major parties of opposition rather than going in for a movemental coordination of political forces as in the neighbouring TN. Hence the mass organisations of the left parties, objectively pushed into an agitational course, have acquired greater significance. For us the question of left unity is subordinated to the orientation of fighting unity. But the opportunities for a fighting unity are galore.

The CPI(ML) has given a call for a Jail Bharo movement on 2nd January. We are gearing up the party and mass organisations in a big way to provide political expression to the growing popular anger.

– Balasundaram and Mathivanan

Democracy must survive both terrorist grenade and Advani's salvo

THREE MONTHS after the World Trade Centre towers in New York fell to terrorist strikes, the Parliament building in New Delhi became the target of another stunning terrorist assault. Whether or not there were specific intelligence inputs regarding this particular incident, there were indeed widespread apprehensions about such an attack. December 13 would now be remembered as the unfortunate day which saw one of those worst fears come true.

While the casualties have been mercifully quite low, the political magnitude of this abominable assault can indeed prove to be enormous. The aftermath of the attack has already started following the American pattern in the wake of September 11. Media headlines in India have begun to scream "India Under Attack". The cabinet resolution adopted five hours after the attack echoes the same language and accent the world has heard ad nauseam from President Bush. And hawks of the Sangh Parivar are being joined by their non-saffron or not-so-saffron counterparts in the political establishment in demanding Afghanistan-type action against Pakistan.

Spokespersons of the Vajpayee government describe the incident as a handiwork of the Pakistan-based militant outfits Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. In fact, they see the entire incident in the framework of the India-Pakistan-Kashmir triangle and the retribution is therefore seen to lie in teaching Pakistan a 'befitting lesson'. They believe that after September 11, the US will not be able to prevent India from pursuing such a course however much it may be fraught with the grave danger of a fourth full-scale war between India and Pakistan. A variant of

this argument would like the US to intervene on India's behalf and extend the Afghanistan war straight inside Pakistan.

But the December 13 attack need not necessarily be a direct offshoot or fallout of the insurgency in Kashmir or of Indo-Pak hostility for that matter. By siding so uncritically with Washington in the Afghanistan war and by virtually condoning the heinous Israeli attacks on Arafat and Palestine, India has incurred the wrath of the entire Islamic and Arab world. Every terrorist grudge against Washington is now also directed against New Delhi. Indian policy of blind pro-Americanism has evidently increased India's vulnerability manifold. There is of course little that is Islamic or anti-Islamic about it, many other pro-US regimes in Islamic countries or in countries with sizeable Muslim population are liable to suffer a similar fate.

Beyond the obvious immediate parallels between the World Trade Centre tragedy and the assault on the Parliament House, observers of world history may well remember another 'attack' on another parliament in another time. The Reichstag fire of 27 February 1933 in Germany had served as a major pretext for Hitler and his men. Whoever might have been responsible for the burning of the Reichstag, the incident was used to the hilt by Hitler to silence the opposition, ban the German Communist Party and consolidate his fascist Nazi rule. It is not difficult to discern a similar reflex in Advani's response to the December 13 terrorist assault on the Indian Parliament.

In his interview published in the Sunday Times of India, Advani has once again started complaining about the 'ultra-soft' nature of the society

and state in India. "The nature of our polity is a constraint when it comes to countering terrorism. We have allowed ourselves to become a soft society and our government, being a part of the same society, is also too soft," says Advani. The answer, according to him, therefore lies in a fascist transformation of the Indian society and state. Post-December 13, Advani has set his sights not just on enacting POTO but on reaffirming the fascist orientation of the Sangh Parivar.

While condemning the terrorist assault on the Parliament House, it is therefore all the more necessary to reject not just POTO but the entire gamut of fascist arguments emanating from the Sangh Parivar. In the same TOI interview, Advani has also confessed that it is difficult to stop a suicide attack. We can only add that while it is difficult to eliminate terrorism, it is possible to lessen the risks by creating a political environment that discourages terrorism. Advani's is however a prescription for greater terrorist risk and bigger disasters. For every genuine arrest of a terrorist under POTO, at least a hundred innocent citizens or imaginary terrorists would also be subjected to state repression. And this is the surest way of producing at least a dozen more terrorists in real life.

Fascism can only breed and feed terrorism, it can never weed it out. If terrorists had chosen Parliament as their theatre of action to threaten democracy, it is no wonder that Advani has also fired his fascist salvo on the same polity. Terrorists and fascists are indeed fast friends.

This is undoubtedly a testing time for India. We must reject any military misadventure and fascist short-circuiting of the constitutional rule of law. Without a firm democratic resolve combined with a patient and realistic political handling, there can be no reduction of the terrorist threat. □



Reject POTO in Toto!



Mirzapur: Maaley wins a battle against dress-rehearsal of POTO regime

IN THE night of 23 November, police raids Takia village of Mirzapur in U.P. and arrests Com. Ramkrit Biyar, Ashok Kol and Jitendra Kol, members of Party's Mirzapur district leading team, while they were in their sleep. Their mouths are gagged with a cloth and they are kept confined for the whole night in Sukrint police outpost, and brutally beaten there.

Next day, when Com. Sudhakar Yadav, member of Party's state standing committee, goes to the outpost to ask the reason behind the arrest of the three leaders, the outpost incharge misbehaves with him and later resorts to brutal lathicharge over the Party activists and people sitting on a dharna 250 yards away from the outpost. Even women are not spared. Twelve persons including Com. Sudhakar are arrested, tied to a tree within the outpost premises and badly beaten. They are beaten repeatedly while being taken to the magistrate at Mirzapur. On the night of 25 November, these comrades are sent to Mirzapur Jail, where they are even denied potable water. They are forced to take the gutter water.

Around noon on 25 November, state Party secretary and Politburo member Com. Akhilendra Pratap Singh informs the district administration regarding these acts of police high-handedness and sits on an indefinite fast before the district collectorate in protest. In the night, police arrests him, along with Com. Md. Salim, district Party secretary and RYA state president, and ten others, on the apprehension of violation of peace.

At the same time, police is on the rampage throughout the district since 23 November. CPI(ML) activists and sympathisers are arrested from village after village, and beaten in the police stations. The background to this

police crackdown is the ransacking of a PAC camp at Khoradih village in Rajgarh block of Mirzapur district on 22 November. While initiating his fast, Com. Akhilendra puts forth three questions before the administration: Why don't they come out with the name of the organisation they think that had perpetrated the attack? Why the CPI(ML) activists were being attacked and arrested? Would the administration take action against the police personnel guilty of brutally beating Maaley leaders? However, without answering these questions, the administration goes on butchering democracy and unleashing a reign of terror throughout the area. Raids are conducted in dozens of villages including Takia, Madhupur, Batt, Banthara, Bhawanipur, Gaurathi, Chaukhatha, Bhati, Bahuara, houses are searched without warrant, cash and jewelry looted and youth are caught, women are raped, an example of this brutality being the rape of Gita Kol, wife of Babloo Kol, by policemen in the village Chikhuria.

In fact, though the attack on PAC camp at Khoradih provided the immediate pretext for launching a district level terror campaign, the main motive behind Rajnath Singh's move was to take revenge of the initiative taken by the Party in his home district (Mirzapur) to punish police officials guilty of perpetrating Bhawanipur massacre. With this move Rajnath also intends to push back the rising wave of mobilisation of the downtrodden agrarian labourers and poor peasants under the banner of Naxalism and break the morale of the poor.

The whole party rose up in mass movements against the police atrocities on the rural poor and the arrest of Party state secretary. The next day, on 26 November, roads were blocked at

several places in Mirzapur, Sonebhadra and Chandauli districts and the effigy of Rajnath Singh was burnt. On 27 November, a state-wide protest day was observed, under which dharnas were held at district collectorate in Sonebhadra, Ghazipur, Chandauli and Ballia districts, before Vidhan Sabha in Lucknow and also in many other towns. The administration denied permission to hold this programme in Mirzapur and clamped section 144, to remain in effect till 10 December. However, large number of youth activists led by Com. Pradeep, district convenor of RYA, brought out a resistance march covering their eyes with black bands, and burnt the effigy of Rajnath all the same. The main road was blocked for hours and a meeting was held there decrying the police atrocities, addressed by Comrades Radheshyam Yadav, Munna Bind, Ramkrit Bind, Dr. Vijay Patel and Nandlal. The wave of resistance spread to village after village. In Chandauli, there was a powerful protest against these arrests. In Chakia, Naugarh and Shikarganj, people spontaneously burnt the effigy of Rajnath Singh. Socialists, intellectuals, human rights organisations, literary personalities including Anand Dipayan, Dipak Malik, Anand Tiwari, Balraj Pandey, Dinbandhu Tiwari etc. of Varanasi passed resolutions to condemn the state terror. Chittarajan Singh, state vice-president of PUCL, rushed to Mirzapur, visited the villages to meet the victims of repression. He also met the arrested comrades in the jail, prepared a report and submitted it to the Human Rights Commission. He found that Comrade Ramkrit Biyar was bleeding while urination because of the police torture, but the insensitive jail administration was not sending him for treatment. On the other hand, Comrade Akhilendra continued with his fast inside the jail and refused to meet the emissary of the DM unless all the arrested comrades were unconditionally released.

Hearing the news, a team comprising Comrades Swadesh Bhat-tacharya, Party Politburo member, Krishna Adhikari, CC member, ex-MP Rameshwar Prasad and Arun Singh, MLA rushed to Mirzapur. They visited the villages and also met the District Magistrate. A meeting of the opposition parties was called on 28 November, participated in by political parties and mass organisations, and it was decided there to stage a dharna on 1 December. The well-attended dharna was led by CPI(M) district secretary Pyarelal Jaiswal. As the administration constantly refused to unconditionally release the comrades, the Party issued a call "Mirzapur Chalo" (March to Mirzapur) on 5 December. The prospect of a state-level militant protest mobilisation in Mirzapur and resultant law and order problem put the administration on defensive and it had to bow down. Ultimately they released all the comrades unconditionally on 2 December.

However, the Party did not call off the "Mirzapur Chalo" programme and thousands of activists and sympathisers poured into Mirzapur on the scheduled 5 December. A large procession, in which local rural poor, dalits and adivasis, including large number of women, with red flags and placards in hands, passed through the main streets of Mirzapur town raising slogans: "Naxalbari Zindabad", "Off with police hooliganism", "Down with Rajnath Singh's fascism" and "Stop butchering democracy". Wide cross section of people of Mirzapur, including the trading community of Wasliganj rendered their support to the processionists. The collectorate was literally flooded with the people on that day. The mobilisation was unprecedented for a small town like Mirzapur. Newspapers even commented that the commonman tasted the power of mass mobilisation that day and the administration and the police were at the receiving end. The hands that showered lathi blows on the poor were

shaking that day.

Addressing the dharna-cum-mass meeting at the collectorate, Party General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya attacked Rajnath Singh for boasting that he would clamp POTO in the state even if it were not passed by Parliament. He said that the people of Mirzapur-Sonebhadra-Chandauli have on the basis of their organised and struggling strength and democratic movement have given a fitting rebuff to Rajnath's dress-rehearsal of POTO regime. And the dharna today has proclaimed that if the BJP Govt. in the centre does not wind up POTO, the people have conducted the dress-rehearsal of their battle to wind up BJP rule in Delhi. He said that such attempts to finish off the struggle for justice, democracy, land and wages have been made for umpteen times since Naxalbari, time and again in Bihar, but the only result has been further strengthening of the poor people's grip over the red flag. And this repression campaign will also result in turning this region of eastern U.P. into another citadel of CPI(ML)'s resistance struggle. CPI(ML) has a history of making sacrifices in the struggle against emergency and Indira autocracy, and now its activists are braving lathis, bullets and jails of Atal-Advani-Rajnath Singh government. Like the earlier dictatorial rules, people will throw off the present repressive regime too.

He said that this repression on the eve of legislative assembly elections in the state only proves that Rajnath Singh has planned to stay in power relying on repression and terror. So the questions for land, wages, dignity and democracy must be made an issue in the coming electoral battle and the defeat of this government will mark a step ahead in the course of this struggle. He said that the CPI(ML) is the heartthrob of democracy and a fitting rebuff to the attempts to silence it will be a thorough elimination of communal fascism.

Addressing the meeting Comrade Akhilendra said that the agrarian labourers of dalit and adivasi origin throughout this region have been suffering for weeks at the hands of brutal police repression. Still people have displayed the courage to reach here in this dharna in such a large strength, defying police cordons. On the basis of this struggling spirit of the people, we hold a firm faith that our struggle will continue till the police officials including the IG, who are culprits of Bhawanipur massacre, are punished to death by the High Court. He also said that for landlords Naxalism is a spectre, but for the poor it is a path of liberation. He pointed out that the responsibility of Khoradih incident did not lie with the PAC men, it lay with Rajnath government which had closed all the avenues of democratic protest and resistance. Instead of punishing the culprits of Bhawanipur massacre, it was rewarding them. Taking a dig at BSP he said that it is Mayawati who has weakened the movement of dalit and adivasi agrarian labourers by entering into opportunistic alliances with the communal fascist BJP. Now she does not even issue a statement on incidents of massacre and rape of dalits and adivasis. Our Party has a tradition that the leaders shed their blood where agrarian labourers shed their blood, he proclaimed. Com. Rameshwar Prasad, Chittaranjan Singh, CPI(M) district secretary Pyarelal Jaiswal, Naugarh block pramukh Basmati Kol, Sudhakar Yadav, Ambarish Rai, Yashwant Singh, district panchayat member of Ghazipur Ishwari Prasad Kushwaha, district panchayat member of Mughalsarai Tilakdhari Bind, Dinkar Kapoor of AICCTU, Ajit Singh Yadav of AISA, Shubhra of AIPWA, Party leaders Bigan Ram Gaur, Ramkrit Biyar and Ashok Kol also addressed the meeting. The dharna was presided over by Ramgulli Chaturvedi and conducted by Md. Salim.



Central Party School at Bhubaneswar

[The CPI(ML) held its Central Party School on 28-30 November, 2001 in the newly inaugurated Nagbhushan Bhavan in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. A report by **Kavita Krishnan**.]

FOUR TOPICS were taken up for study and discussion at the Central Party School. Comrade Shankar presented a paper on *Caste, Class and the Dalit Question*, Comrade Arindam Sen on *Communal Fascism*, Comrade Sivaraman on *Agrarian Question Revisited* and Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya on *Globalisation and Imperialism*. Altogether there were 151 participants in the school. Members of the editorial boards of central and state organs, one-fourth of the members of all state committees and an equal number from outside the state committees were taken as students for the school. For the convenience of students, the school was divided into 3 groups based on students' language preference: English, Hindi and Bengali, and discussions were conducted separately for all the three groups. As a result the discussion and debates could be deeper and more lively.

The paper on Agrarian Question Revisited had two parts: the Present Agrarian Crisis and the Agricultural Labour Question. The paper began with an overview of the agrarian crisis in India. Identifying the crisis as a crisis of capitalist transition in Indian agriculture, this overview discussed Punjab as an example of extreme crisis in a highly developed region which was the showpiece of the green revolution, and UP and Bihar as instances of the other extreme of the crisis in extremely backward regions. Another significant dimension of the agrarian crisis which was discussed was the underlying crisis in class relations, especially the crisis of peasant farming and the intensification of the contradictions among the ruling classes. The paper also discussed how some of the solutions to the crisis being currently offered by the establishment (for example, NIRD) involve measures like relaxation of

land ceiling and contract or corporate farming. Such solutions vindicate the Marxist-Leninist position that any agricultural crisis ultimately gets resolved by big capitalist farmers eliminating smaller ones and increasing investment to be competitive in the market. The class dimension of the crisis, therefore, involves an alliance of multinational capital and kulaks, pitted against an alliance of rural proletariat and middle peasantry.

The main focus of the paper was on the dynamics of agricultural labour struggles and related theoretical issues. The paper discussed agricultural labour struggles which had marked the breaking up of unfree labour relations and their transformation into free casual labour. The paper also looked at the subsequent failure of social democratic forces (in particular the CPI(M)) to advance these struggles further and launch wage struggles of free laborers, due to their policy of class collaboration with kulaks, advocacy of "broad peasant unity", and reluctance to organize agricultural labour as an independent political force. The paper then looked at the new forms of struggles, in particular the 1997 experience of Kerala, which significantly showed how agricultural labourers utilized chinks in the

social democratic armour to revive their direct class struggle of high militancy after being forced to lie dormant for years. The paper also discussed the phenomena of share-cropping and tenancy as disguised forms of labour exploitation, as well as the role of the state and the reformist framework relating to the agricultural labour question.

Comrade Shankar's paper on Caste, Class and Dalit Question traced the shift of the Dalit discourse from anti-Brahminism to the dalitbahujan variety, and the major theoretical trends of the latter discourse which challenge Marxist propositions. The paper analysed the phenomenon of the BSP, and the class basis which fuelled its rise. The paper also looked at contemporary strands of the Dalit movement, the politics of reservations, and the question of land in relation to Dalits.

Comrade Arindam's paper focused on understanding the life process of communal fascism in India. The paper emphasized three basic ingredients of communal fascism in India:

- 1) The first is nationalism, which fascism appropriates in order to mobilize mass frenzy. Just as fascism in Italy and Germany used bourgeois nationalist chauvinism, in India, a distorted anti-minority, pro-imperialist nationalism is the mainstay of fascism. The paper pointed out how the bogey of "national unity and integrity", raised and fanned up by various parties including the Congress and the CPI-CPI(M), infected the psyche of Indians with communalism and jingoism. The BJP-RSS then exploited this "communal commonsense" in its favour.
- 2) The second was the economic crisis which necessitated a major reorganization of the

economy. For this, the bourgeoisie required an extremely hard, autocratic regime, which could however create consent for itself by a suitable ideological cover. It was this ideological cover which made the Sangh Parivar and the BJP the natural choice the ruling classes in this phase. In this sense, the politics of communal fascism is a concentrated expression of LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation).

- 3) Communal fascism has deep linkages with imperialism – linkages which in this phase have been raised to the level of a strategic partnership, not only between the dependent Indian ruling classes and the US, but also between the US and a "Hindu India" which can provide a counter to the Islamic world and China.

Comrade Dipankar's paper on globalisation and imperialism analysed the present round of globalisation. It noted that capitalism has an inherent tendency to go global, but this tendency is much more pronounced in this phase. The most prominent feature of this phase is the overwhelming dominance of speculative finance. While the ongoing globalisation has a largely post-colonial context, it is accompanied by a constant mockery of this formal independence and national sovereignty.

The paper discussed the recurring crises and synchronized recession which have gripped the world economy, especially the finance sector. It addresses the question of what continues to sustain the globalisation drive in the face of such severe crisis. The paper suggests that globalisation is eventually sustained by power, especially by the military might of the US. The paper refers to the claim of pro-globalisation commentators that "the hidden hand of

the market will never work without a hidden fist", to make this point.

The paper goes on to address the question of whether the major contradiction of this era is in fact between global economy and nation-states, and whether, therefore, the resolution lies in a global society and global governance. The paper discusses theorists like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri [authors of *The Empire*] who declare that imperialism has been replaced by a decentralized global Empire, whose rule is timeless and eternal. Its alternative, they claim, can lie only in a counter-Empire created by the forces of "the multitude" – which they locate in the ongoing wave of anti-globalisation protests.

The paper discusses the rumoured "retreat of nation-states" – a notion which is undermined by the fact that most MNCs are, overwhelmingly, "nationally embedded", and that nation-states, far from succumbing helplessly to globalisation, actively adopt policies and intervene to facilitate globalisation. The paper remarks that in the backdrop of the domination of speculative finance and insulation of economy from politics, anti-globalisation protests are serving to repoliticise the issues relating to economy. The paper takes a bird's eye view of the trends in the anti-globalisation movement internationally as well as on the national terrain, concluding on the note that we need a strong grounding in Marxist-Leninist fundamentals to grasp and analyse the intricate workings of globalisation today.

All the papers evoked lively discussions, heated debates, and, most of all, fresh suggestions and information in all the groups. The major questions or debates were summarized in the final plenary session of the school by the four teachers. In his concluding address, Comrade Dipankar responded to the issues which had emerged in the

course of the school.

On the question of caste and class, Comrade Dipankar pointed out that the tendency to assume that we need to “add” caste to our concept of class, in fact represents a narrow and a non-Marxist understanding of class. Class is a universal and fundamental category, and bourgeoisie and proletariat are international classes. However, one may, in the different phases or paths of capitalist development, often encounter identities like caste etc., on the way to the mature evolution of bourgeoisie and proletariat. He quoted the Marxist slogan of “workers and oppressed people of the world unite” to point out that fighting oppression is naturally allied to class struggle. He further illustrated this with the experience of the CPI(ML) movement in Bihar, which though never set out to organize dalits against brahminism, naturally raised questions of social dignity, along with those of land and wages, as an organic part of the task of organizing landless labourers and agrarian poor.

Comrade Dipankar also pointed out that caste identities are now emerging in new ways, where caste relations are not only vertical and oppressive, but also sometimes horizontally structured. Caste has now emerged as an aspiration, a basis for assertion, with the claim of historically deprived castes to accumulation and appropriation in a stagnant economy. Whole castes cannot be categorized as democratic or otherwise. Instead, communists must welcome all measures (for example, reservations like Mandal) which evoke such aspirations, and must then sharpen the differentiations within castes by championing and democratizing the aspirations of the deprived classes within castes.

Responding to debates about whether communists should mobilize dalits on a caste banner, Com-

rade Dipankar said it was an open question, however reminding that communists must always emphasise the question of class differentiation within castes.

On the topic of agrarian labourers, Comrade Dipankar responded to the questions raised by several comrades regarding the land question and land-related struggles of agrarian labourers. He pointed out that Lenin defined labour as “doubly free” – i.e. free to work for anyone, and also free from the means of production. Hence, an agrarian labourer who is tied to a small piece of land is actually, in a sense, unfree. Of course, where there is significant land hunger, land seizure and struggles for land will continue to be a major issue which we must champion – but we must remember that agrarian labour must eventually outgrow such micro struggles, while, in a macro sense, the question of land (e.g. abolition of big landownership and land nationalization) will remain the key question of agrarian revolution.

Comrade Dipankar made several observations relating to communal fascism. He remarked that the classic Comintern definition of fascism as the “open terroristic dictatorship of capital” is actually a definition of the fascist state, and we tend to forget that a fascist coup has a complex history, a complex life-process. So the question of “whether RSS was fascist to begin with, or at what point it turned fascist” is actually baseless. Fascists may occupy a fringe for years, but may, through a specific process, or at a conducive juncture, become a huge wave – so the RSS, fascist in inception, ideology, purpose and organization, rose to power through a process. He reminded that fascism is not only an idea, but also a movement which aims at mass mobilization.

He also commented that fascism

might be very flexible in the routes or forms it takes. In India, the fascist regime may not necessarily take the form of a Hindu theocratic state headed by sadhus or an Ayatollah-like Advani. It may well choose to maintain the tactical façade of a secular democracy, while effectively, practically enforcing Hindutva. He also stressed that a liberal Hindu path alone cannot counter communal fascism – a core of solid democratic resistance is required to do so.

Comrade Dipankar addressed several of the questions related to globalisation – including the seeming paradox of the dominance of speculative finance over production, coexisting with the phenomenon of overproduction. He also discussed the ‘open question’ of how a nation-state can tackle the menace of speculation.

The School ended on the note of determined resolution to continue the process of Marxist study at local levels. Spurred on by references to the paucity of documentation and analyses of the agrarian situation in UP and Bihar, several comrades offered to systematically study specific areas of our struggle. A beginning had already been made by AIPWA comrades who had studied the struggles of women agricultural labourers in Bihar. It was also suggested that earlier studies, like the 1933 work on agrarian labour by Sahajanand Saraswati, be re-read and discussed. On the whole, the School spurred the energies of the students to develop the Party’s skills in Marxist analysis of contemporary phenomena and issues, and fresh theoretical inputs and insights.

Finally, the School saluted the Herculean efforts of the Orissa comrades, especially the students and youth, as well as the team of translators, who had worked day and night to make the School a success.

Nagbhushan Bhavan Inaugurated

NAGBUSHAN BHAVAN, an auditorium-cum-office complex, dedicated to the memory of veteran revolutionary and late CPI(ML) leader Comrade Nagbhushan Patnaik, was inaugurated on 27 November, 2001. Former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray and senior CPI(M) leader and former MP from Orissa Shivaji Patnaik, CPI State Secretary Divakar Naik, Forward Bloc State Secretary Sharad Mansingh, Samajwadi Party leader Vaishnab Parida, noted intellectuals Prof. Vibhuti Patnaik and Prof. Lakshminarayan Rai Singh, Anadhi Behara, leader of the Chilka Fishermen's Association, Phanibushan Patnaik, son of Nagbhushan Patnaik and leader of Gunupur Motor Workers Union were among the guests who graced the inaugural function. A statue of Comrade Nagbhushan Patnaik donated by Gunupur Motor Workers Union was also unveiled by senior polit bureau member of CPI(ML) Ram Naresh Ram on the occasion.

Inaugurating the Bhavan, the CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya recalled the pledge of Comrade Vinod Mishra at the time of Comrade Nagbhushan's funeral meeting in 1998 that a memorial would be constructed in honour of the departed leader, declared the fulfillment of the pledge and dedicated the Bhavan for the cause of revolution. The construction of the Bhavan, located near the Bhuvaneshwar Railway Station, was completed within three years despite all odds. The auditorium has a seating capacity of 400.

Describing Comrade Nagbhushan as an extraordinary revolutionary with an iron will, Comrade Dipankar recalled Comrade VM's words that Nagbhushan was the nearest real life

character he had seen resembling the revolutionary hero in the Russian novel *How the Steel was Tempered*. He said the leader's legacy of dauntless struggles against enemy repression amidst severe physical ailments would continue to inspire newer generations of revolutionaries. Having been one of the key leaders of the heroic Srikakulam armed struggle, he always remained a revolutionary mass leader and even till his last days he was actively leading mass struggles in southern Orissa.

Comrade Dipankar said that Nagbhushan personified a broad left unity in the country. He always stressed the need for the Left to forge a broad unity against the communal fascist forces and the same he reiterated in his last write-up, a message he delivered at the all-India party congress of CPI at Chennai.

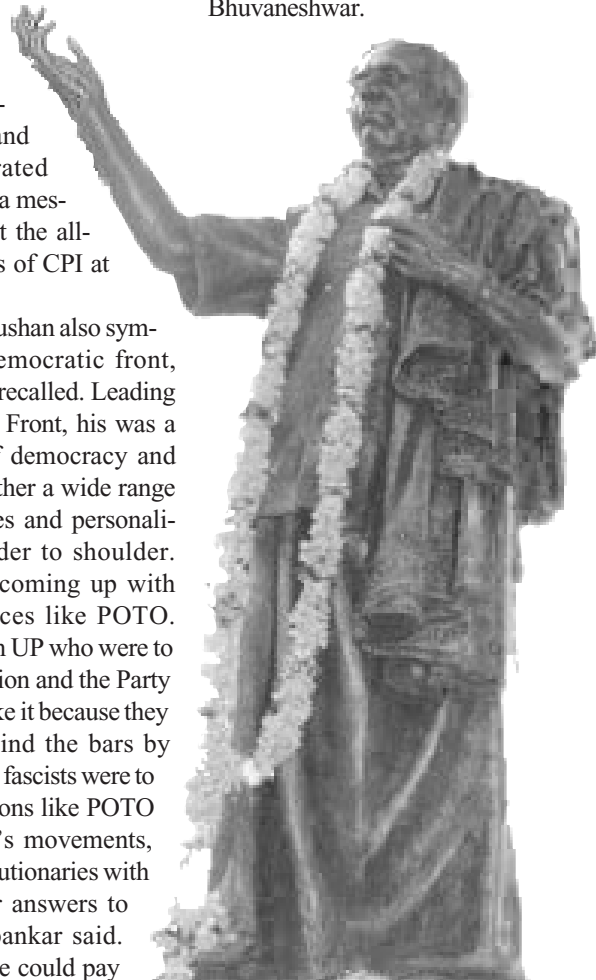
Comrade Nagbhushan also symbolized a broad democratic front, Comrade Dipankar recalled. Leading the Indian People's Front, his was a consistent voice of democracy and he could bring together a wide range of democratic forces and personalities to fight shoulder to shoulder. The fascists were coming up with draconian ordinances like POTO. Even comrades from UP who were to attend the inauguration and the Party School couldn't make it because they have been put behind the bars by Rajnath Singh. If the fascists were to come up with weapons like POTO to suppress people's movements, Nagbhushans, revolutionaries with iron will, were our answers to that, Comrade Dipankar said. The best homage we could pay

to Comrade Nagbhushan was by forging a broad unity of communists, socialists, civil liberty activists and other democratic forces to fight draconian measures like POTO, he added.

Concurring with Orissa State Secretary Comrade Kshitish Biswal, Comrade Dipankar said that the Bhavan would serve as a center of activity for all streams of progressive activity in Bhuvaneshwar.

Describing Comrade Nagbhushan as his close friend, Rabi Ray said Nagbhushan maintained a warm friendship even with those with whom he differed ideologically. He was universally respected for his sterling revolutionary qualities.

The same afternoon there was a convention against POTO which was addressed by several civil liberties activists and prominent intellectuals of Bhuvaneshwar.



Twisting History – The Saffron Scheme

THE HRD Minister's latest move of deleting portions from history textbooks and forbidding students from discussing these portions in classrooms has stirred up a hornet's nest. The BJP poses the issue as one of 'nationalist' history versus 'leftist' history, or of 'Hindu' history versus an 'anti-Hindu' history. In its favour the BJP argues that there can be no such thing as an 'objective' history; history-writing has always been political, and now it is high time for the 'Congress-patronised leftist' monopoly on history to be replaced by the Hindutva viewpoint. Those opposing this move often refer to the hitherto prevalent official histories as 'objective', in contrast to the BJP's communal and biased history.

What, in fact, is the issue? Is the history which the Indian state taught in its schools prior to the BJP, the 'objective truth', beyond criticism or challenge? Can any history be completely 'objective' and 'apolitical'? Let us recall that Marxist historians the world over, challenged the official histories which told the stories of dynasties and kings, and insisted that social and material processes, relations of production and distribution, and the lives and struggles of those whose labour sustained society, be brought to centrestage. Let us also recall how feminists challenged the claims of 'His-story' to objectivity, and introduced the long-hidden or lost accounts of women's lives, struggles and writings. Internationally, history as a discipline has no single official version to offer. There are sev-

eral schools of historians, all of whom write history using different sets of methods and viewpoints. History is based on archival or archaeological findings, on painstakingly researched facts: but historians interpret these facts differently, and with different emphases, based on their political positions. The RSS and the BJP's project is not simply to introduce a new historical method, a new interpretation of historical facts – it is to blatantly erase and delete facts, and to concoct a whole set of new myths which can provide a convenient historical past for the future Hindu Rashtra!

The portions of history which the BJP has found dangerous enough to delete refer to the fact that Brahmins in ancient times ate beef, and to the fact that Brahmanical indoctrination enslaved shudras. Note that nowhere has the BJP denied the truth of these facts. Who can deny the reality of Brahmanical oppression in India? But the BJP wants to create young minds who are unaware of this oppressive past and present, who do not know or care about oppression of 'lower' castes or women (remember the attack on *Water*). The idea is to create perfect brainwashed citizens for their communal, casteist and anti-woman Hindu Rashtra. It is this dangerous fascist project which we are called upon to resist today.

Resisting the BJP's project of saffronisation does not mean standing in defence of the official state-sponsored accounts of history doled out by governments prior to the BJP. It means assert-

ing the right of students to know all the facts and debates, so that they can learn to analyse and understand social and historical processes. This means challenging all attempts to present students with a sanitised version of history, or with a glorified account of 'national heroes', shorn of all debates, criticisms or questioning. After all, we must remember that the Congress, on several occasions, prepared the ground for the BJP's saffronisation project, by peddling such sanitised histories. Even recently, it was after all a Congress MLA who attacked Satish Chandra's textbook for "hurting Sikh sentiments". Such moves only legitimatise the RSS project, where any fact which challenges Hindutva is being deleted from history.

Students opposing saffronisation are not struggling to preserve a 'Congress version' or a 'Left version' against a 'Hindutva version' of history. They are demanding their freedom to know, research, interpret and analyse their past, using the rigorous tools and methods which History as a discipline offers them. They are rejecting any censorship of academics by religious leaders and Hindutva thought-police. They are challenging – "Why fear history? Why delete facts? If you have new facts, new evidence, new research, prove it and we'll welcome it. But do not call yourselves historians when your only achievement has been to prepare an elaborate mythical past for a communal, casteist and anti-woman Hindu Rashtra!"

From AISA, we solicited the views of three renowned historians on this controversy. Here is a brief summary of their views.

● **Kavita Krishnan with Srikant Singh and Radhika Menon**



Professor DN Jha

Q: *The HRD minister says history textbooks need to be screened by religious leaders, so that they do not hurt religious sentiments. Panchjanya editor Tarun Vijay says only those facts must find mention in history textbooks which are in the interest of "nation-building". Will the censoring of history by religious leaders be in the interest of the nation?*

Prof. DNJ: I entirely disagree with the HRD minister when he says that the history textbooks should be screened by religious leaders, because, religious leaders will allow only those ideas and facts to go in the textbooks, which they would consider to be in the interest of their religious propaganda. In the name of history they will only peddle mythologies, promote superstition and suppress reason. History is a distinct field of knowledge in which scholars trained in historical method and capable of critically handling the original sources have a place. Historical evidence cannot be convenient to all across the board and religious leaders will certainly compete among themselves to prove religions except their own as false and thus create animosity among the followers of different faiths. Priests, sadhus and sants can only churn out myths and fables. But mythology

must not be allowed to masquerade as history because faith cannot be a substitute for fact. Religious leaders therefore should keep their hands off history writing.

As regards the question of 'nation building', the real issue is: what kind of nation we want to build in future? Do we want to have a nation of religious fanatics and perpetrators of injustice in society? Do we want to have a nation in which poverty, disease, illiteracy and age-old social injustices of various types have to be fought? If we wish to build a nation of the latter type then historians must expose the inequities that we have inherited from the past. People must be told objectively how their ancestors lived, what they ate, what they wore, how their social structure has evolved and changed over a period of time. In telling the students about all these points a historian cannot escape the responsibility of telling them about both positive and negative aspects of our past social life, religious customs and practices. If we wish to build a nation, in which the teeming millions of India should feel safe and happy, religion does not have any role to play.

But when Tarun Vijay talks of nation building he has in mind 'one nation, one culture and one religion', which, in fact means 'a nation of Hindus'. Certainly this is not in keeping with the cultural, and religious pluralism of India. At one level therefore the present battle over the issue of history writing is also a battle between those who stand for cultural diversity and those who are keen to establish the supremacy of the non-existent monolithic 'Hinduism'.

Q: *The BJP says the Congress-sponsored textbooks authored by leftist historians are biased, and the present regime only intends to correct those biases. How would you respond?*

Prof. DNJ: I think the textbooks

that have been in use are definitely as objective as possible. Objectivity is quite often relative and cent-per-cent objectivity may not be always possible, but these textbooks are as objective as could have been possible. As regards the question of bias, where is the bias in those passages which have been deleted? Take, for example, the question of beef eating. There is no doubt that the ancient Indians ate beef. This is supported not only by the Vedic texts but also by subsequent literature of ancient India. The Dharmasutras, Grihyasuras and the Smritis – all tell us that cattle were killed in ritual contexts. Varahmihira even recommends ceremonial eating of bull's flesh by the monarch. The practice of beef eating has been referred to by scholars who were not even remotely interested in Marxism – R.L. Mitra, P. V. Kane and so on.

Similarly, look at the passage relating to caste. All that it says is that the Brahmanical indoctrination played a crucial role in perpetuating the caste system and in the subordination of the lower orders – a fact which cannot be contested by any serious scholar of history. Clear evidence of this is provided in many texts, notably in the law book of Manu who unequivocally states that a shudra should serve the brahmins for the sake of attaining heaven and that he should not be permitted to accumulate wealth because he gives pain to them. Where is the bias?

Similarly, the statement made about Mahavira Jain. Isn't it the responsibility of a historian to tell the students that the mythology woven round the tirthankaras does not fit in with available historical evidence? Questioning the historicity of Rama and Krishna may not be to the liking of believers but is perfectly in order from the point of view of historians who cannot slaughter history for

faith. The Puranic evidence, which could be used to date Rama of Ayodhya to around 2000 BC, is not corroborated by archaeology. The excavations conducted by B.B. Lal at Ayodhya do not indicate any settlement there before the 6th/7th century BC. So how could have the historical Rama existed there in 2000 BC? Similarly, the historicity of Krishna is considered doubtful because the inscriptions from Mathura from 200 BC to AD 300 do not mention him at all. In fact, perhaps the earliest artistic representation of the many-faceted Krishna, found at a place called Arra near Varanasi and not Mathura, belongs to around the 5th century AD. This naturally raises questions about the historicity of Rama and Krishna and the Sangh Parivar's frenzied effort to push back their antiquity according to their fancy. The passage relating to Guru Teg Bahadur in Satish Chandra's *Medireview India* has not raised any eyebrows for all these years, not even during the height of the Khalistan terrorism in Punjab. The author cites several sources and then states that sifting "the truth from these conflicting accounts" is not easy. While he thus cautions the reader about the nature of sources he also describes the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's action as "unjustified" from all points of view – an action which "betrayed a narrow approach". Where is bias in all these statements? In the name of correcting biases, the Sangh Parivar is only replacing rationality by its ignorance and philistinism.

Q: *Are you satisfied with the kind of textbook writing sponsored by the state since Independence, even prior to the BJP rule?*

Prof. DNJ: Well, so far as the NCERT textbooks are concerned, I do not have much to complain. But it is always desirable to revise textbooks from time to time by consulting the authors and not through

administrative flats. In this context, I would like to point out that there are thousands of "Shishu Mandirs" controlled by the RSS, over which the state has no control and these institutions have been peddling wrong notions about Indian history. These Shishu Mandirs have been in existence for long and the political parties, which were in power before the BJP, have not paid any attention to the kind of history that is being taught in these schools. It will not be correct to say that non-BJP rule has always been conducive to writing and teaching of history on scientific and rational lines.

[Professor DN Jha is teaching history in Delhi University]



Professor Uma Chakravarty

Q: *Many historians would agree that no history-writing can be completely 'objective', every historian has a politics. Many competing schools of historians, with different ways of writing history, do exist – all of whom enjoy academic legitimacy. If there is no single "correct" history, isn't it inevitable that history textbooks will be coloured by the politics of the party in power?*

Prof. Uma Chakravarty: It is

true that one cannot have the position anymore that there would be completely "objective" history; that is now not acceptable. That there would be different interpretations of history is also widely recognised; the factual school of history is no longer enjoying the kind of acceptance as it did, say about a hundred years ago. But having said that it is not acceptable that history should then become completely subjective. History writing certainly has a 'politics'; that politics or standpoint will inform – and will certainly determine the kind of questions that we are going to ask of our past or any field that we are exploring. So you may decide that you are going to explore the history of the working class, or your politics might decide that you will explore the history of say women or other sections that have been left out of the frame of the history and your politics will then determine what questions you are seeking to answer. Having done that, however, it is incumbent on the historian to actually use the range of sources that are available to build up a credible picture of the field that the historian is exploring; the actual writing of history must flow from the range of sources that one explores. So to my mind the idea that we cannot have objective history which is not somehow shaped by the historians' political understanding is not to be countered with the idea that all history is totally subjective, that history will fluctuate according to the specific kind of political positions that people in power want to establish. I think that is the difficulty today.

What is happening today is that the Hindutva forces are trying to erase certain histories because these dimensions of history are not convenient for them; they are obsessively trying to supplant the existing understanding of history without actually supporting their position with evidence, with sources, and without

exploring the range of sources that exist for a given period. They are therefore writing a clearly biased history.

There is an important difference between writing a history which is informed by politics, in terms of determining the kind of question you are going to ask of your past, but then you have to go on to do the job of a historian which is not to cook up history but to examine it according to the sources that we have; academic legitimacy will only be available to that kind of history writing which is supported by the sources themselves. So there is no doubt you will have different ways of writing history. It is this that makes for the fascinating task of history writing, i.e., you can have the history of the sections that have been left out in the past, you can have a history of women, you can have a history of peasants, you can have a history of tribals even though these were not the traditional focus of history. This is the acceptable way of writing a different history. You can shift from the state-centred history to a people-centred history. But there is a fairly rigorous way in which that would have to be written, otherwise history writing will not enjoy academic legitimacy.

The notion of “correct” is to be examined critically. What do we mean by “correct”? Yes it is true that the history of the working class will not be the history of governments in power – the history of working class will not be the history of the elites or the landlords. But when you explore all such histories you will get the full picture of the historical experiences of human beings in the past. So in that sense I think the idea of “correct” history or the question about a “correct” history is wrongly framed. I don’t think one should say this is a “correct” history. Rather one should recognise that the fields of history are many and diverse and

we will have to explore them and certainly the kind of questions the historian is posing to the sources will mean that we will write different histories; there cannot be one single history. But I think the terms used should not be “correct” and “incorrect” histories. On the other hand, I repeat that whatever history is written, it must be rigorously argued otherwise it will certainly not have academic legitimacy.

The argument that the history textbooks will inevitably be coloured by the politics of the party in power is not acceptable at all because then it will mean that we are accepting that the party in power is entitled to writing a biased history on the basis of its own narrow point of view.

Most serious practitioners of history will not accept such an argument. Even in the past, under the Congress regime it was attempted to create a time capsule; there was this plan to put a lot of sources and different pieces of evidence that was going to go into what was called the time capsule, and it was going to be buried under so many feet of the earth because the idea was that if there was going to be some moment in history when all of what we have in existence is ruined then there will be still some evidence that will ultimately be unearthed and that would be used to write history in the future. And there was a big debate on what was going to go into that because the attempt was to fill it with the Congress version of history and that was also strongly resisted. It was not accepted by the historians, by the academic community and they therefore resisted the move which was ultimately given up.

Q: *Are you satisfied with the kind of textbook writing sponsored by the state since Independence, even prior to the BJP rule?*

Prof. UC: The point I was making earlier actually is amplified by and would be better understood by my

discussion of the way in which textbooks were originally written. The advantage of the NCERT books was that they tried to be secular. That was good, because it did consider that India comprises many different religious communities and therefore any one point of view that is reflective of only one single community is not acceptable to a diverse country like ours. But having said that, although the premises of the NCERT textbooks was perhaps to create a sort of “scientific” history there were two problems with NCERT textbooks: one they were too strongly Gangeto-centric, i.e., they were too strongly focussed on the experiences of the culture and the history of the Indo-Gangetic region. I don’t think it included the history of all the regions to the extent they should have if they were meant to be taught across the country. For instance, the history of north-east did not figure there; and, second, the history of other fringe groups were not really reflected in the textbook. So I think there was a problem with NCERT textbooks. They were also too strongly loaded with information; they were not accessible, not friendly to a young person’s way of understanding the world. There were thus a lot of problems with them. But that is a qualitatively different kind of problem. And what is important is that there were alternative textbooks being written. New experiments in democratic syllabus making began to come in the late eighties. This was done for example by Eklavya, an organisation centered in Madhya Pradesh.

It is such experiments that need to be furthered. In fact by now there is even a critique of the Eklavya textbooks. They are not sufficiently inclusive of the women’s history and gender questions are not satisfactorily addressed in the Eklavya textbooks. Also, to some extent, questions like caste and the contra-

dictions between different groups are not addressed in the Eklavya textbooks; they could be further improved if peoples' history is to be more reflected in the history textbooks. What the BJP is doing is however qualitatively different. Under the guise of a different version of history, they are actually trying to insert a highly distorted understanding of history. In fact, at one level, they are trying to knock out history altogether because they do not want to deal with the complexities of history. They are also trying to erase rather than expand the history of our people. They are doing this because they do not want to admit that the history of India or the subcontinent has been very-very complex, very, very rich and they do not want to accept that change and social processes have a dynamism or that societies are not static. For the Hindu Right history must be completely reduced to a static phenomenon. In a fundamental sense the BJP and its forces are anti-history because they don't want to recognise that change is an essential element in history, or that diversity of human experience is an essential element in history. The history of the tribals or the history of the labouring classes, or the history of peasants, or the history of workers cannot be the same as history of some small elite groups of people. Also the Hindu right wishes to celebrate the ancient past – the so-called glorious Hindu past; not only is this communal but in the name of glorification we are also being told that we cannot criticise hierarchies of caste or forms of exploitation. In a fundamental way their whole agenda is problematic. And not only problematic but highly offensive and must be resisted at all costs.

[Professor Uma Chakravarty is teaching history in Miranda House, Delhi University]



Professor Satish Chandra

Q: *The HRD Minister says history textbooks need to be censored by religious leaders, so that they do not hurt religious sentiments. Panchjanya Editor, Tarun Vijay has been saying only those facts must find mention in history textbooks, which are in the interest of 'nation building'. Do you think history that is censored by religious leaders is in the interest of the nation?*

Prof. Satish Chandra: I find a certain contradiction between them. I would agree that history is part of nation building in the sense that you look at the past from a certain point of view. For instance, we look upon India as a cultural unit despite having different languages, different traditions, and different regions which have their own traditions. When the British were here they emphasized the divisive aspects and denied that India had unity, they were basing themselves on the western tradition of Britain, France, Germany and Italy where they had one language and that was equated to be a nation. And from the beginning they argued that India could not claim to be a nation. We as historians did not accept this approach. Therefore, while rec-

ognizing distinctive elements in various regions, even to some extent, in religions, we asserted the fundamental unity of India.

The divisions were not denied but they were placed in the focus of an overall unity.

They say that these historians are leftist, but leftism is not a crime. The BJP spokesman says that communists are anti-Hindu and anti-national. This is also divisive, as they do not accept multiple streams of thought in the country. They have been arguing all the time that we secularists are anti-Hindu because we are not laying separate emphasis on the negative aspects of Muslim rulers. What they want is that the negative activities of Muslim rulers should be emphasized at the cost of everything positive.

Coming to the particular controversy over Guru Teg Bahadur, there is a certain historical methodology. First you put forward the different points of view regarding any issue, then you examine them critically, and then alone you come to a conclusion.

Reversing the process here, the conclusion was that in addition to being a religious leader Guru Teg Bahadur was acting as a spokesperson of the poor, who were being persecuted by the royal officials. Secondly, that he was also representing the anguish of Hindus of the region because Aurangzeb had destroyed the temples of old standing. Now, it was further argued that the action taken by Aurangzeb was because he saw it as a narrow law and order problem whereas Guru Teg Bahadur gave up his life for cherished principles. The premise was according to a Persian source, the earliest one available to us. It has been argued that Guru Teg Bahadur, who had a large following, was carrying out plunder (Rapine, which is causing

the controversy, does not mean rape but robbery). The imperial officer Wakia Navis brought this to the notice of the Emperor to take action for insurrection. Another Persian writer who gives further details says Guru had a large following and peasants who were recalcitrant to zamindars, imperial tax officers etc. used to take refuge with Guru and that the Royal officials complained.

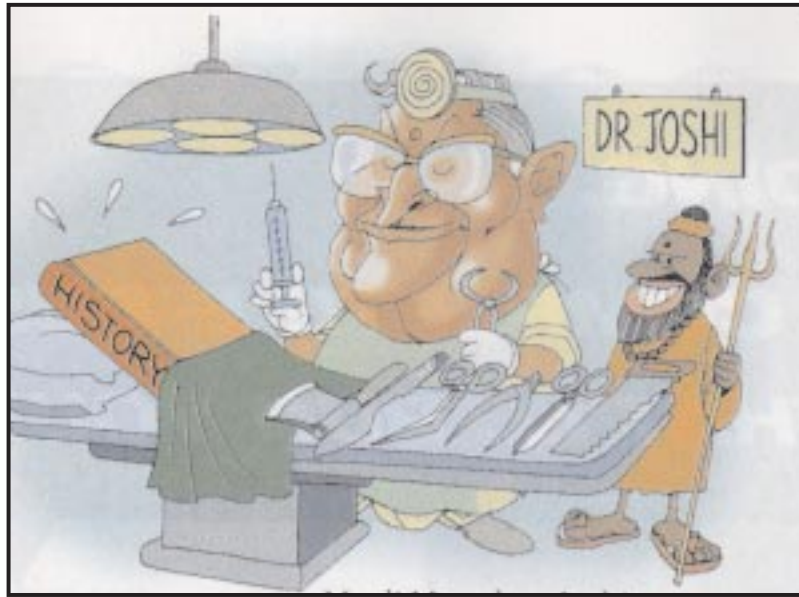
Those who have been accusing me say that I have accused Guru Teg Bahadur of plundering. But that is the official charge, my interpretations are the opposite.

The point is representatives of the Congress in the Assembly and the BJP in the Parliament are aware of the facts, as these have been published in newspapers. Yet, they are deliberately distorting history for political advantage. They first incite and then say we are hurting the sentiments of certain people and then censor.

As for asking religious leaders to put down textbooks, question arises – what to put down? Different communities have different interpretations. In the entire medieval period they want to represent only the views of Hindu religious leaders and ignore the views of Muslim religious leaders.

The conflict of Guru Tegh Bahadur is not purely a religious conflict though in the Sikh tradition it would be seen as such. But this is not a viewpoint from which a historian would investigate.

Similarly, it has been said that the Guru had tried to defend the Hindus of Kashmir but no local governor by the name given in the Sikh tradition ever was the Governor of Kashmir. The local Governors of Kashmir in that period Sher Khan and Iftikar Khan have no accusations of religious bigotry against them. In any case, large majority of Kashmiris became



Muslims in the 15th century.

Historians have not ignored traditions but have examined them critically and used tradition constructively.

They have been trying to portray tradition differently. In the case of Rani Padmini, they say Khilji went to Chitor to appropriate her because of her beauty. No Rajasthan historian has accepted this story. It was considered a slur for a proud raja to show his queen to anyone. The Padmini story has been mentioned for the first time 100 years later by a poet, Malik Mohd Jaizi (in the book *Padmavat*) in an allegorical story of flying horses and talking parrots. For Jaizi, Padmini was a category of women and not a name. RSS Sarangchak Sudarshan, in an address at Nagpur, says by rejecting the story we are insulting the sacrifice of Padmini. That Padmini may have committed jauhar is a different issue. But why do they insist on saying Khilji attacked the fort for Padmini's sake? It is only to portray Muslim Rulers as lustful and always trying appropriate Hindu women. These are the people who are distorting history and playing one against

another and they say it is us who are doing it!

Q: *The BJP says textbooks authored by leftist historians are biased and they only intend to correct these biases. How would you respond?*

Prof. SC: In a book of 350 pages the only bias they have so far seen is a paragraph and half, which I have already responded to. They have not bothered to communicate any bias to the authors.

Q: *Are you satisfied with the kind of textbook writing sponsored by the state since Independence even prior to BJP rule?*

Prof. SC: NCERT textbooks were supposed to set a standard and within that limit these textbooks did serve the purpose. The purpose of university teachers writing for school was to bring to the notice of school children new research. The purpose was books of this quality also were to be introduced at the state level. It is not a question so much of bringing leftist ideology but of presenting a broad secular point of view.

[Satish Chandra is a former professor of history at Jawaharlal Nehru University.]

'Improved Left Front' Revisited

-- Political Observer

'A better, improved Left Front' was a key slogan of the CPI(M) during the May 2001 Assembly elections. The retirement of Jyoti Basu and the rise of a new post-Basu leadership had already marked a major change. In fact, it is believed that for good sections of the West Bengal electorate, especially for the managers of public opinion and for the corporate bosses, it was this 'change' which proved more exciting than any deliverance that the maverick Mamata Banerjee could promise.

But six months down the line, as the 'change' unveils itself in the form of enhanced electricity rates and relentless privatisation of essential services including healthcare, eviction of slum-dwellers and rail and street hawkers and arrival of Bengal's own POTO in the shape of POCA (Prevention of Organised Crime Act), disillusionment has started following suit. As the 'new regime' of Buddhadev Bhattacharya continues to conform to the hopes and dreams of the media managers and corporate bosses, activists and sympathisers of the Left in Bengal are feeling increasingly let down and disturbed. People are wondering if Buddhadev would turn out to be the Bengal version of Gorbachev for the state's ruling Left establishment!

Meanwhile, Bhattacharya has not given up on his poll-time slogan of 'improved Left Front'. Recently he has produced a 24-page booklet entitled *Unnatatara Bamfronter Sandhane* (In Search of a Better Left Front). More accurately, his own contribution to the booklet is a 9-page essay with the remaining pages being filled up with the Left Front's manifesto for the latest Assembly elections and excerpts from

the finance minister's budget speech on the floor of the Assembly and information regarding certain official schemes of decentralised development.

Of course, nowhere in this booklet does one get to read anything about Buddhadev's repressive brainchild which came to be known as POCO. Ordinary readers can however hardly complain, for the Left Front government had withheld this 'classified information' from even a seasoned international campaigner for civil liberties like Noam Chomsky when he visited the state the other day as the Left Front government's esteemed state guest! When contacted later by democratic rights activists in Kolkata, Chomsky admitted that he had not been told about POCA during his stay in Bengal even as he held forth against the proliferation of repressive legislation in the wake of September 11 from the USA PATRIOT Act to POTO. In fact, when Advani began to design POTO, Buddhadev was quick to oppose it, but on the curious ground of dubious federalism. He said he didn't need POTO for he already had up his sleeves a similar ordinance for his state called POCO! And wasn't 'law and order' after all a state subject! The cabinet, the LF partners and even his own party, it seems, were taken by surprise by this sudden announcement. Embarrassed, the party polit bureau intervened and got the project shelved for the time being, but it quickly turned out that what had been shelved was just the ordinance, and the idea would soon come back as a bill to be legislated by the Assembly into a proper Act.

Buddhadev was able to sell POCA to his Party colleagues on the plea that unlike POTO, it would focus on organised crime and that it was essential to prevent Bengal from being

turned into a hotbed of inter-state and international crime. The sensational incident of abduction and subsequent release of the owner of the well-known footwear chain 'Khadim' was played up to the hilt to justify POCA. But as it turned out, the abductors could be tracked down without any special Act like POCA, and yet one of the accused was soon to be shot down mysteriously by the Gujarat police in a Gujarat jail. If the abduction was organised by an international crime syndicate, it was clearly done in connivance with sections of the police themselves. And Buddhadev would like to check such 'organised crime' by arming the police with still more sweeping powers!

Crimes like abduction and extortion of huge ransom money are however not the only or even the main threat POCA is intended to address. The Kamtapuri movement in the northern districts of Bengal, outfits like the PWG and the Jharkhand groups operating in the south-western region of the state, and the so-called ISI-instigated immigrants from Bangladesh and Maoist insurgents crossing into the state from across the Nepal border are all cited as reasons for enacting a repressive law like POCA. In the face of determined opposition from various quarters including pressure from Front partners, the introduction of the POCA bill has been deferred till the next session, but Buddhadev keeps 'reassuring' his friends and admirers that POCA would soon be in place regardless of whatever happens to POTO at the Centre. One shudders to think about the possible outcome of Buddhadev's improved Left Front when it is soaked in such utter contempt for democratic rights.

Beleaguered Castle of Improved Left: Shaky Grounds, Blinkered Vision

Leaving aside the 'silences' like POCA, let us now look at what Bhattacharya has got to say in the course of his 9-page essay. With him, the Left Front becomes an exclusively Bengal-

specific or Bengali experiment. He even makes the astounding claim that running a Left-led government in a state is an uncharted territory as nobody has walked along this way before. One does not even find a reference to the first communist-led government in Kerala, not to mention the discussion and experiences of communist-led provincial governments or local self-governments. Even within the context of Bengal, he provides us with a very selective and distorted recapitulation of the history of the Left movement in the state.

He does emphasise the transition from the United Front of the '60s to the Left Front in the '70s as a transition from a predominantly urban working and middle-class-based phenomenon to a powerful peasant awakening in the countryside challenging the reactionary Congress citadel of landlordism. He locates this peasant movement in the late 1960s without ever mentioning the tremendous impetus generated by the great Naxalbari peasant rebellion. Naxalbari surfaces in his account after 1971 and that too as a source of sheer 'deviation and disorder'. It is well known that post-1971, it was a period of setback, confusion, disintegration and reorganisation for Naxalbari, but it is equally widely recognised that during the golden years between 1967 and 1971, Naxalbari brought about a sea change in the Bengal countryside. One may or may not agree with all that the CPI(ML) set out to do during those turbulent years, but to attempt to edit out Naxalbari from the history of peasant movement is to approach history with a blinkered vision. In fact, it was Naxalbari which delivered the biggest blows to the Congress bases in rural Bengal and with the CPI(ML) in disarray, it was the CPI(M) which emerged as the biggest beneficiary of the great inheritance of Naxalbari. Despite decades of distorted propaganda and cultivation of hostility towards Naxalbari, it has still not been possible for the bigoted and sectarian

CPI(M) leadership to stamp out the influence of Naxalbari and the spectre starts haunting them during every major inner-party political debate. It is of course pointless to expect a fair sense of history from Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya who has now taken it upon himself to steer the Left Front further rightward in West Bengal.

On the economic front, Bhattacharya's gospel of development revolves around what he calls the transition from agriculture to agro-based industry apart from the much-trumpeted IT revolution. In between, there is the usual talk on improving the state of infrastructure and delivery services in the so-called social sector ranging from literacy to healthcare. There is little to differentiate this discourse from the neo-liberal slogans of 'retreat of the state from production, safety net for the vulnerable and liberalisation with a human face'. In fact, Buddhaspeak is no different from Naiduspeak; like Chandrababu Naidu, Buddhadev Bhattacharya has turned out to be a great votary of the IMF-World Bank school of fiscal discipline propped on World Bank-funded projects and loans with stringent strings. But as with POCA, he has not embellished his essay on 'improved Left' with many gems from his new-found economic theory, possibly reserving his otherwise celebrated candour regarding the World Bank and his enthusiasm for a free market for other situations and other audiences.

Bhattacharya lays great stress on instilling greater cohesion and unity within the Left Front. This is the first time the CPI(M) failed to secure independent absolute majority in the Assembly. But far from having a sobering influence on the CPI(M) this seems to have made the 'big brother' more desperate in its attempts to impose its hegemony on the Left Front. Left Front partners like the RSP, Forward Bloc and even the CPI are being increasingly forced to openly voice their dissatisfaction with the quality and pattern of the Front's internal function-

ing. Buddhadev's plea for greater cohesion is being translated into new codes of conduct which are nothing but camouflaged attempts to silence all possible dissent within the Front.

More on Bengal and Kerala Polls: From the Horse's Mouth

It will be interesting to read the new Bengal discourse of 'improved Left' in conjunction with the review made by the CPI(M) Central Committee of the May 2001 Assembly elections. The review has some revealing remarks regarding both West Bengal and Kerala. With regard to West Bengal, the review qualifies the euphoria of the sixth successive victory of the Left Front with the admission that "A section of the working people have turned away from us and become hostile." Of course, the review blames it on the "unprincipled behaviour" of some panchayat functionaries and "wrong functioning on the part of cadres" rather than looking for any possible source of alienation in the government's policies or in the role of the higher leadership of the Party and MLAs and ministers.

In the very next point, the review calls for overcoming the reluctance to organise the agricultural workers and paying attention to developing their political consciousness. As far as we know it has been the CPI(M)'s official policy not to have a separate organisation of agricultural workers in West Bengal even though the party runs an all-India organisation of agricultural workers with millions of members. The CPI(M) propaganda has all along maintained that the impressive implementation of land reforms, the near-completion of Operation Barga and the institutionalisation of the panchayati raj in West Bengal have dismantled the earlier stranglehold of landlords, kulaks and rich peasants and minimised contradictions between agricultural workers and the rural rich so much so that it is possible and desirable to organise all sections of the entire rural

population under the Kisan Sabha's banner of broad peasant unity. The talk of any 'reluctance' is therefore misplaced, to say the least.

Independent studies and even commissions set up by the West Bengal government itself have however long been disputing this official description of the rural scene in West Bengal. Under conditions of reverse tenancy, operation barga has contributed more to the economic consolidation of the kulaks and rich peasantry, while panchayats too have been witness to a reformed domination of the rural rich and the middle sections with the rural poor's representation remaining confined to a marginal level. The massacre of six agricultural workers in May 1993 at Karanda in Bardhaman pointed to a growing unease among agricultural workers and a new desperation among the CPI(M) leadership and the rural rich to silence the growing voice of protest and opposition. Significantly, it was happening in a district like Bardhaman which the CPI(M) leadership would like to showcase as their biggest success story in agrarian reforms. During the run-up to the last Assembly elections when the Bengal countryside was reeling under terror, many academic and political observers traced the agrarian roots of this terror and violence to the increasingly aggressive character of the CPI(M)-backed domination of the rural rich.

The CPI(M) of course saw nothing but a conspiracy to dislodge its government and characterised it as a backlash of rural reaction against the Left Front government's spate of reforms. Even if we accept it for the sake of argument that this reaction is a backlash against the reforms, it raises more questions than it answers and the questions are no less disturbing. How come reaction suddenly acquired such a strong base in the countryside? What then happened to the presumed dismantling of the hegemony of the rural rich? What happened to the framework of broad

peasant unity and the so-called containment of class contradictions in the countryside within a non-antagonistic framework of 'friendly' class struggle? Evidently, there are strong reasons to argue and believe that while the earlier pattern of hegemony underwent some changes, the reforms could not bring about any basic change in the balance of class forces in the countryside. The framework of broad peasant unity may have put a check on the organisation and consolidation of agricultural workers as a class, but it has not been possible to contain the kulaks and capitalist landlords and reactionary rich peasants. At the end of the CPI(M)'s much-trumpeted rural reforms, these class forces have been replenished and their hegemony reinforced. They represent not just a reaction against the reforms; they are also products and beneficiaries of the reforms who are now demanding a greater share of rural resources and power. Whatever be the CPI(M)'s explanations regarding the Left Front's sixth successive victory in West Bengal, the defeat in Kerala can certainly not be attributed to any 'reluctance' to organise the agricultural workers. After all, Kerala is the state where the organisation of agricultural workers has the longest history spanning several decades and even today it contributes the biggest contingent of members to the CPI(M)-led All India Agricultural Workers' Union. Also, the defeat in Kerala in the May 2001 elections was much more emphatic than any previous victory or defeat. Here, the review mentions something much more damning than sheer 'reluctance': "There are many reasons for the erosion of our mass base in Kerala. It was a serious lapse that the interests of the poorer sections such as the agricultural workers, workers in the traditional industries such as coir, handloom, cashew, toddy tapping, fishing and handicapped and widows were forgotten."

How could such a thing happen? After all, Kerala has been the CPI(M)'s

biggest fable after West Bengal. In terms of social indicators like literacy, infant mortality, women's education, access to healthcare etc., Kerala compares quite favourably with many developed countries and is even marginally ahead of China in certain respects. The concept of People's Plan evolved and implemented by the Nayanar government in Kerala was even projected by CPI(M) theoreticians and academics as a creative contribution to the enrichment of Marxism. When an eminent economist like Amartya Sen questioned the CPI(M)'s claims regarding the Kerala model of development, preferring to call it an experiment rather than a model, the CPI(M) establishment promptly rejected him. But now will the CPI(M) leadership tell us how the celebrated Kerala model bred such criminal insensitivity and distorted priorities leading to the forgetting of the interests of the poorer sections such as the agricultural workers and workers in the traditional industries?

Kerala has exploded the myth of the CPI(M)'s programme of reaching modest relief to the masses. Against the backdrop of deepening economic crisis aggravated by globalisation, far from mitigating the devastating impact of the crisis for the weaker and poorer sections of the society, the CPI(M)-led LDF government served as an agency that only managed to circulate and amplify the magnitude of the crisis. And now Bengal is exposing the meaning of the CPI(M)'s pet slogan of 'more powers to the states'. More powers not to increase the quantum of relief, not to expand the public sector and strengthen welfare legislation, but to implement the whole gamut of neo-liberal policies and add repressive laws like POCA to the state's arsenal.

How long can the empty and pretentious slogan of 'an improved Left Front' camouflage this rightward journey of the opportunist Left? Watch out for more details from Buddhadev's Royal Bengal Perestroika. □

ONE STEP LEFT, TWO STEPS RIGHT:

CPI(M)'s Reaction to September 11

IT IS strange and yet understandable that September 11 has become the most important date in history since the start of the Gregorian calendar, not because on this day, valued real estate was destroyed or many people lost their lives but because it happened on US soil, the epitome of the Western world and the nerve center of imperialism.

Buildings, bridges, power stations, water supply systems, hospitals, schools and much more was destroyed in the former Yugoslavia by NATO. So was the fate of Iraq, not to talk about hundreds of other mass murders committed by the US starting with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But in all these non-11 September instances (including the forgotten September 11 of Chile), the targets were in the countries of periphery, inhabited by real or potential enemies of the Western imperialism. Events are never judged by the magnitude of the effect they have on human lives but by the quality of humans involved – the lives of blacks and whites, of the poor and rich, of workers and industrialists cannot be treated as equal.

It is nonetheless strange because the significance of September 11 is not only a preoccupation of imperialist countries and the media but also of victims of imperialist plunder and even political formations of the Left. Obviously the left had to respond to the belligerent stands of the US government and its British and other allies by mounting as much opposition as they could muster. The left had to unequivocally denounce US imperialist war. Fortunately this has been done by CPI-ML (Liberation) and numerous groups and individuals, who are neither tuned to opportunism nor have anything

to gain by taking a wishy-washy stand against the US.

The strange part is that the stands of many Indian left parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] has been soft on the US and hard on the victims of the US aggression. Fortunately for them, crimes of the Taliban against their own people, especially girls and women, provided all the excuse they needed to come to the rescue of the US. Little do they realize, or if they do, prefer to ignore, that the damage done by the US bombs far exceeds anything that the Taliban could do even if they repeated their crimes many times over.

In a statement on September 29, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau demanded that the Prime Minister (Vajpayee) adhere to the assurance given at an all-party meeting [which included CPI(M)] that “India’s involvement in the war against terrorism will not be beyond exchange of information with the United States”. Two days after America started the war, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau (October 9) did not oppose the US war against Afghanistan; their position was “Oppose US Intent to Widen War”. The General Secretaries of CPI and CPI(M) demanded to “Curb Terrorism through Lawful Means” and by “Lawful” they meant “through the United Nations and on the basis of international law”, perhaps as was done during the Gulf war. Eager not only to resolve the problems of India but also of the world, an acknowledged prerogative of the US and UK, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau wanted (November 15 Press statement) “the (Vajpayee) government to stick to its earlier stand and not get pressurized to accept any Taliban participation in the new dispensation in Afghanistan.”

The CPI(M) Polit Bureau statements quoted above are pathetic attempts to please both the left and the right. They are pathetic not so much because they are indefensible but because they provide some insight into the motives of these leaders, of which their members may not even be fully aware. It might not be worth its while to detail the weaknesses of each of these statements. Perhaps each of these statements underscore the CPI(M)’s attempt to appear a responsible, respectable opposition worthy of being trusted as a constituent of an alternative government capable of maintaining a diplomatically acceptable relationship with imperialism. CPI(M)’s position is identical to that of the US and BJP that terrorism has no political bases and can be stopped by tightening security.

CPI(M) seems to believe that if there were no foreign, specifically Pakistan-controlled, terrorists there will be no problem in Kashmir and that there would have been no problem in Punjab. According to them, there is no internal basis for the rebellious dissatisfaction among Kashmiris, who left to themselves, would rush to declare their allegiance to the Indian Constitution and their desire to be an integral part of India.

The US and the imperialist media built a crescendo that any mention of the causes of terrorism is tantamount to condoning it. Despite this, the obvious was echoed by many though not by CPI(M). Even ex-cabinet ministers of the British Labor Government raised the issue that the causes of terrorism are rooted in extreme uneven distribution of wealth, humiliation of the third world especially the Arab world and the grave injustice done to the Palestinian people. Why then does CPI(M) demand that terrorism should be curbed through “Lawful Means” and not raise the issue of changing the existing world order?

It is redeeming to speculate that CPI(M) might have been a factor in the decision of the All-Party Meeting to

restrict India's involvement in the war against terrorism merely to exchange of information with the United States and not provide landing facility for American aircrafts. But then why agree to exchange of information and what information could India have that the CIA does not? Why does the CPI(M) not unequivocally condemn American war against Afghanistan rather merely does not wish it to extend beyond? And what business it is of the CPI(M) to decide as to who should form a government in Afghanistan? As it is, the composition of the new Afghanistan government is decided by the US and UK and that is why Hamid Karzai, a former friend of the CIA is at its head; neither is the advice of Vajpayee nor of the CPI(M) solicited.

The whole concept of liberal and hardliner Taliban is a western creation just as hard-hitting Advani and soft-hearted Vajpayee is an Indian invention. Of course, there are differences in the temperament of members of any party including the CPI(M). But Taliban are Taliban. They were all the same when it came to brutalizing Afghan people, especially girls and women. And that is one of the reasons why their regime collapsed so swiftly and Afghanistan could not become Vietnam for America. And yet who should rule Afghanistan is ultimately the collective decision of the Afghan people. CPI(M) is neither called upon to offer advice nor is it capable of giving a sound one. Nation states have their own historic evolutions; an artificial new course cannot be imposed. Soviets wanted to impose a government of their liking; the consequence was utter misery for the Afghan people and the collapse of Soviet Union. The present government imposed by the US, independent of the advice of Vajpayee and the CPI(M), might also lead to a civil war. Defeating Taliban is a responsibility of none other than the Afghan people and it will certainly happen.

The main question, however, is as

The suitable boy in brief(s)

[SomeNut's *if-taar* and *beh-taar*]

*Baying for something beh-taar,
SomeNut invited for If-taar,
Harki, Softy and lady of flair
Son'ya yet so far.*

*The urgency was to hammer out,
Who takes floor, who'll shout
What stunt and which grunt,
In the thriller called parla ment*

*With UP ringshow on horizon
It made sense to have one's
Fence mended with the only one
Who could make Third Front run.*

*So Raja cooled his feet
Outside gates at If-taar,
The party set out for new kichchri feast
Probing whether POTO or POCA was beh-taar*

*SomeNut is a terrific brat,
In a new avatar as a dinner diplomat
For beh-taar of parties' cause,
He toiled without a pause*

*Alas the best laid plans went awry,
Son'ya turned her coats and said Oh' Sorry,
You see, a bunch of militants have struck,
At that mighty sitting duck.*

*And to their utter dismay and horror
Son'ya went partying with Parivar,
Enjoying the hot pursuit,
Winking at POTO to boot.*

*No doubt it was a poor fare
A backflip with a somersault,
Which upset SomeNut's apple cart,
Left lot of pains, You know where.*

[SomeNut – Somnath; beh-taar – better; Harki – Surjeet; Softy – Mulayam; Son'ya – Sonia; Raja – VP Singh]

– Girish Ghildiyal

to why the CPI(M) is saying what it is saying. They have nothing to gain. One could understand this when Jyoti Basu was to become the Prime Minister. One could understand, if these manoeuvres

could make the CPI(M) a national party and win over Hindu votes from BJP. None of this can happen at least by following these methods.

– D. Gupta



THE SIXTH WEST BENGAL STATE CONFERENCE

Towards regeneration of the revolutionary left

THE SIXTH State Conference of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at Krishnanagar in Nadia district from 8-11 November. The Conference observed that the 6th Left Front Government (LFG) was a regime orientated more towards right. Led by CPI(M), this Government has committed itself to the privatisation-liberalisation course. Its new-found zeal for the Centre's economic ideals has increasingly endeared itself to the newer sections of big industrial houses. Since assuming power, this regime has gone on a fee-hike spree and resorted to many anti-people measures. Its decision to close the 'sick' undertakings sacrificing workers' interests for the sake of its courtship with the industry, commercialisation of education and health care, introduction of contract system, implementing with alacrity the Centre's decision to ban SIMI and launching a witch-hunt against their leaders, formation of an anti-naxal cell, and demolition of the huts along Tolly's Nullah by deploying RAF – all these

and other similar measures make its rightist shift more pronounced. The corporate sector, realising that only the Left Front (LF) is capable of providing the much-needed political stability for liberalisation and privatization, backed it to the hilt. The LF chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya has become a darling of the corporate world. And, the slogan of "improved left" – which was the slogan of the LF in the run up to the assembly elections – could only have one meaning: further renunciation of its left credentials. The Conference naturally decided to intensify the struggle against the LFG.

Resistance struggle was the other aspect on which the Conference laid emphasis, especially in view of CPI(M)'s rural terror which incidentally is also directed against revolutionary left and targets the agricultural labour base that is shifting towards CPI(ML). The conference noted that the question of resistance was inevitably related to the development of the peasant movement. The peasant movement everywhere was

confronting the political terror of the CPI(M), the threat of the Trinamool Congress ruffians, the wrath of the rural rich and the repression of the police and the administration. So any slackening of initiative or lack of planning in matters of resistance will affect the consolidation of the movement and it will also have its adverse effect on unleashing the activism of the masses. It is being urgently felt that self-defense squads should be formed and strengthened in keeping with the guidelines of the 6th Congress. Conscious efforts, educating and training the masses, active participation of the masses on the basis of their basic demands – this should be the approach in respect of building up the resistance struggle, the conference noted.

A major point of debate revolved around the question whether the focus should be on organising the agrarian labourers or mobilising the broader peasant community. Some comrades opined that as a consequence of the Centre's new agrarian policy the imperialist intervention in the agrarian sector has assumed serious proportions and this has ushered in a severe crisis on this front. The party should therefore focus on resisting the imperialist attack on the peasantry as a whole and thereby place the main orientation of the rural work on the peasant association. Though not belittling the work of the peasant association, the conference stressed that organizing agrarian labourers should be viewed as the basic work in the rural areas. Their numbers are on the increase according to the Census data. The Operation Barga and other agrarian reforms initiated by the LF have brought little improvement in the lives of the agrarian labourers. Everywhere they are always at the receiving end. The agrarian labourers as a class are increasingly finding themselves locked in conflicts with vested interests. From Karanda in Burdwan to Suchpur in Birbhum, the

killings of agrarian labourers by the CPI(M) make it glaring. Moreover, the major burden of the agrarian crisis will also be shouldered by this class. Developing class struggle in the rural areas with the class of the rural proletariat at the forefront is of paramount importance to organise them as an independent class. Deliberating on the issue, Party General Secretary Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya observed: "As a communist party, it is our duty to organise the marginalized agrarian labourers into a major independent force and thereby give a fitting rebuff to the attack let loose on them. Side by side, an opportunity has come upon us to organise the middle and even a section of the rich peasantry who are getting increasingly vocal against the TNCs, the pro-corporate sector agricultural policy and the WTO. But they are comparatively lesser in number. So those who would like to raise a Chinese wall between the agrarian labourers' organisation and the peasant association and argue in favour of the peasant association should reconsider. Our programme delineates that the communist party should intervene in the agrarian crisis on the basis of the totality comprising the rural proletariat as well as the broader section of the peasantry, and that is apt."

The conference attached due importance to the North Bengal situation. It noted that the grievances of the Gorkha and the Rajbanshi communities in North Bengal were growing. There is acute lack of development and a sense of deprivation in respect of their language and culture has made these communities restive. Instead of sympathetically considering the demands of the Rajbanshi community, the LFG has let loose police repression on them. Arable lands are being converted into illegal tea gardens and among the people evicted thus from their land very few find employment in the tea gardens. The Conference therefore decided

PROGRAMME FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS – HIGHLIGHTS

1. To contest in the coming panchayat elections on the widest possible scale. At least winning double the number of seats won last time.
2. To intensify the agrarian labourers' struggle on the basis of their various demands and mobilise them in struggle against the state government for a comprehensive legislation incorporating their interests. To raise the membership of the agrarian labour organisation to 2 lakhs.
3. To go in for substantial increase of the membership of trade union, youth and women's organizations.
4. To put pressure on the state Government for instituting an enquiry into the massacres of the 1970s, and side by side, initiate efforts for constituting an independent, non-governmental commission of enquiry within 28th July 2002.
5. To increase the circulation of the state party organ *Deshabrati* to 10,000, with a regular subscriber target of 1500.

to intervene in and strengthen the movement of the people of North Bengal for democratisation of the North Bengal Development Council and for its pro-people orientation.

The Conference also explored the reasons behind the prolonged stability of the LF. There was a proposal that we should have an alternative set of reform programmes in response to the reforms initiated by the CPI(M). The conference however stressed that there were specific reasons behind the emergence of the social-democratic rule in the state and it would be futile to search for its stability in its reform programmes. Its stability has to be perceived in the context of its integration in the bourgeois power structure and thereby emerging as the "natural ruling party". Touching upon the issue in his concluding speech, Com. DB delineated the historical perspective and observed that the Congress in its attempt to do away with Naxalism manifested itself in West Bengal in the cruelest and most abominable form. This has substantially weakened the Congress in the state. He went on to explain, "Congress is also weak in Bihar and UP, but in West Bengal its decline has assumed historical level. Coupled with this our earlier disintegration

and absence in the movemental arena invested in CPI(M) all the glorious legacy of the left movement and given it sort of a hegemony. This might have continued for 25 or 30 years or even more. But sooner or later the CPI(M) will meet its inevitable end."

In his concluding speech, Com. Dipankar also said a few words about some intellectual comrades who suffer from a sense of frustration. This, he held, was not an unusual phenomenon. Quoting Gramsci, he said that if they suffered from "pessimism of intellect" it had to be overcome by generating "optimism of will." And for this, any weakening of confidence in the party would only make matters worse. Confidence in the party, he categorically stated, must be unflinching. On the question of establishing the identity of the party, he said that mere obsession with the old identity would not serve any fruitful purpose. In the backdrop of its glorious tradition, a new identity based on specific demands of the situation had to be forged. He appealed to all to carry out an in-depth study of the West Bengal situation in its specificities, reinvigorate the party and make bold strides toward regeneration of the revolutionary left movement.

-- Jaydeep Mitra

TAMIL NADU
AICCTU STATE CADRE WORKSHOP:

What is to be done?

THE TAMIL NADU state conference of AICCTU is going to be held in a situation of all-round attacks of the Central and State governments on the working class. AICCTU membership in Tamil Nadu is yet to cross 25,000. Initially there was a rapid development in our work in Chennai and various sectors like beedi, powerlooms and leather and leather goods in the state. But now we face stagnation. To meet the challenges ahead, we must grow into a distinct force in the working class movement of Tamil Nadu and make fresh breakthroughs in the unorganised sectors like beedi and powerlooms and reorganise our work accordingly. Hence it was decided that our preparations for the conference would start from the discussions on the future course of the movement. A state-level cadre workshop was held in Tirupparangunram on 24-25 November, 2001 towards this end.

On the first day there were discussions on Lenin's *What is to be done?* Excerpts from the booklet were sent to the participants were sent in advance. Ten questions were formulated for discussion. The discussion concentrated on the following issues:

1. Are the scope and reach of our trade union work satisfactory?
2. Do we find any parallel between our functioning and what Lenin characterises as amateurishness and backwardness?
3. Capitalism restructures itself. Do we restructure our mode of TU functioning accordingly? If not, can this be related to spontaneity?
4. Trade union is a united front of various ideologies. It is the class organisation of the workers at a primary stage. What is to be done to carry

revolutionary ideology among the workers and to build the trade union as a weapon of class struggle?

In the discussions it was stressed that narrowing down the scope of activities will lead to economism and trade unionism and vice versa. This is a vicious circle and our fundamental duty is to break this vicious circle and come out of that.

It was also stressed that *What is to be done?* should be read from the premise that that the work was a critique of "leaders" of trade unions who were lagging behind in leading the emerging working class with a political approach in an intensive and extensive way.

Also, there was a realisation on aspects such as *amateurishness, backwardness* and *narrowness* that they were not problems arising due lack of skill in day-to-day practical work but problems originating in our mode of thinking, work style and organising, that narrow down the limits of our activities among the working class. *Spontaneity* in our functioning is exhibited in our failure to restructure our work to suit the needs emerging due to the restructuring of capitalism. Cadres emerge all through our work but we fail to identify such cadres and develop them in a consciously planned manner. We can overcome all these problems of our work only when we develop and raise our TU work into a multi-faceted and fullfledged working class movement.

On the second day of the workshop, papers were presented on work in beedi and powerloom industries by respective in-charges. Along with the Chennai paper an article, *Corporate Ideology and Trade Unions: Should Workers and Capitalists Join hands to Meet Competitiveness?* Was presented.

On beedi and powerloom industries there was a discussion on the scope for exposure of the cruelty of capitalist exploitation in these sectors. 72% of the textile production is from the powerlooms sector. The average production cost per meter of cloth in the mills sector is Rs.27 and it is just Rs.12 in the powerlooms sector. Powerloom workers fetch considerable income for the government too apart from the profit appropriated by the powerloom owners. But they live in sordid living conditions. Their wage rates are low. There is no opportunity for upward mobility. There are problems of bonded labour. They are forced to sell their kidneys, their children and so on. This is a sector where we have ample scope for exposure of capitalist exploitation and indifference of the government.

There are 2.55 lakh registered looms in Salem, Namakkal and Erode, and the unregistered looms in these areas are double this number. There are one million powerloom workers in Tamil Nadu. But we work only in some areas among a few thousand workers. This is our major problem.

There were suggestions regarding work in this sector that we should concentrate on anti-government struggles on issues of minimum wages, minimum bonus, implementation of labour legislations etc. Our work must be expanded among more workers, the office functioning in Kumarapalayam and Pallipalayam should be strengthened and new cadres should be developed.

In the beedi sector, the capitalists refashion their attack on workers. Utilising the ban on smoking in public places, they cut the wages and other benefits of the workers. Such a state of affairs has increased the opportunity and possibility for anti-government struggles. We have to make planned efforts to shift the focus of organising into the residential areas of beedi workers.

There were suggestions that we should organise publication of expo-

sure oriented propaganda material, fact-finding teams, conventions involving intellectuals, media personalities and academics interested in both the sectors. It was realised that our activities should not be narrowed down to mere TU activities and it was a challenge to raise them into a broad workers movement.

Discussions on Chennai work commenced with the reading of the article on 'corporate ideology'. The significance of capitalist attack lies in making the TU leaders acknowledge and conceptually recognise that LPG (liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation) is inevitable.

The reach and influence of the movement is restricted to the extent of success of capitalists and capitalist governments in co-opting the working class and trade unions conceptually on the issue of competitiveness. Capitalist competition and the resulting anarchy in production naturally lead to the destruction of productive forces.

Ideological hegemony plays a crucial role in the capitalists' calling the shots with regard to the trade union agenda and deciding the nature of the playing field and rules of the game. Capitalist restructuring is aimed at maintaining the profit rate and increasing it whenever possible. Their ideological success leads to the rejection of any alternative ideals on the part of the trade union movement. This always leads to the postponement of any alternative ideals to some distant future. This forever leads to a situation of class compromise – class collaboration today and class struggle tomorrow. Nothing is more naive, more disorienting or more debilitating to the trade union movement than the acceptance of the 'competitiveness' framework.

Discussion on Chennai work focused on the following points:

1. How do you explain the paradox that the decline in Chennai work occurred even as the work reached a higher stage of development? What is

the nature of this decline? What are its manifestations?

2. Capitalism restructures the production process to maintain and increase the rate of profit and to overcome the crisis. Do we restructure our ways of organising the workers, formulating tactics and developing suitable forms of struggle to face the challenge of capitalist restructuring?

The Chennai paper emphasised issues such as:

1. We cannot continue with the same method of functioning anymore. Everything has changed as to where to work, among whom to work and what sort of work to do. Our TU has not made suitable changes. The earlier institutional functioning, which developed out of our efforts to give an organised shape to our work, has turned counterproductive. Bureaucracy and formalism are inevitable in institutions and the modes of thinking and style of functioning developed reified in course of time were products of that institutionalised functioning. This led to a decline in our living contacts and interaction with the workers, their initiatives, their struggles and their movement, and in developing them as fighters against capitalism.

2. Our TU activities are confined to negotiations with the management, with the labour department and to fighting court cases. Struggles have become rare. An idea that struggles disturb our regular work also hinders our work. There are no vibrant grassroots struggles and there is no connection with such struggles, if there are any. Even the ongoing struggles are launched by the workers themselves. Our suggestions and approach towards problems such as closure, retrenchment, payment of dues and other benefits clearly reveal an attitude of avoiding struggles. Instead of unleashing the initiative of the workers and making them take their own decisions, we, their 'teachers', take decisions which will not 'harm them'. With such an attitude within the factories, in our trade unions, how can

there be dynamism in our calls against globalisation, against the politics of globalisation?

3. We exhibit weakness in conceptualising a workers movement beyond our TU activities. There is a gap on the part of our leaders on this score. We have to realise these shortcomings and make efforts to overcome them. Instead, we are looking for shortcomings outside the organisation and outside ourselves. Steel is tempered in fire. Our working class base, the workers movement, will be politicised through building a cadre force strong in ideology, by building a network of cadres.

Discussion on future plans focused on the following issues:

3. Taking efforts to attract workers beyond our trade union influence;

4. Specified comrades would concentrate in a planned manner among specific unorganised sectors;

5. Study circles would be formed at factory level to ensure dynamism at the grassroots level; bright workers would be involved in these study circles; these efforts would be made outside the TU structure; vanguards would be involved in "Learn Marxism" campaign;

6. The politicisation of our trade union base, which is weak and superficial, should be raised; and

7. A cadre force would be built up politically and ideologically in a consciously planned manner and a network from top to bottom would be built up with a dynamic functioning.

The workshop was presided over by a team of comrades comprising G.Radhakrishnan, NK Natarajan and Sankarapandian. The CPI(ML) State Secretary Balasundaram and State Committee member Pandian addressed the gathering. The first day discussions on *What is to be done?* was summed up by NK Natarajan and S.Kumarasami concluded the discussion on practical work on the second day.

-- S.Kumarasamy

DECEMBER 18 – COMRADE VINOD MISHRA MEMORIAL MEETINGS

PUNJAB

OBSERVING *SANKALP DIVAS* on the third anniversary of Comrade Vinod Mishra's demise was a unique occasion in Chandigarh because it was the first activity taken up there under the Party banner. On this occasion, a seminar on "Communal fascist onslaught and challenges before democratic forces" was held at Punjab Pustak Bhawan in the evening of 18 December. While Prof Jagmohan Singh, a civil liberty activist and nephew of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, was the main speaker, Com. Swapan Mukherjee, CC member chaired and state spokesperson of the Party, Com. Maninder Singh Randhawa conducted the seminar. Noted dramatist Gurusharan Singh, ex-editor of Chandigarh based left Punjabi journal *Deshsevak* Prof. Prem Singh and Party leader Sukhdarshan Natt also addressed the seminar. Representatives of various ML forces and MCPI were also present. On this day, district-level cadre meetings were held in Mansa and

Ludhiana. Punjab is going to polls shortly and the cadre meetings were aimed at gearing up the activists to meet the challenge. The cadre meeting at Ludhiana was addressed by CC member-in-charge of Punjab Com. BB Pandey and that of Mansa by Com. Rajvinder Singh Rana, state leading team secretary, Com. Jita Kaur and other members of SLT.

HARYANA

IN HARYANA, a seminar on "Caste, Class and Dalit-Backward Question" was held at Shiv Public School in Karnal. Paying homage to Com. Vinod Mishra, Party state in-charge Com. Prem Singh addressed the seminar and said that CPI(ML) has always stood by the cause of workers, agrarian labourers and poor and middle peasantry. It is on the basis of this class line Party has taken up all the issues and maintained its independent identity.

WEST BENGAL

THE THIRD VM death anniversary was observed in Calcutta through a meeting against POTO and POCA in Students Hall, College Street. The speakers including Santosh Rana from PCC CPI(ML), Saifuddin from CPI(ML) ND, Manik Mukherjee from SUCI, Sujaat Batro from APDR and Kartick Pal from CPI(ML) Liberation condemned the POTO and its West Bengal variant POCA [the propose Prevention of Organised Crime Act]. Lambasting the hypocrisy of the CPI(M) in criticising POTO while bringing in a similar draconian legislation in the state, they also took the Buddhadev government to task for empowering the police to even disconnect power supply to consumers to push through power sector reforms and

evicting hutment dwellers and hawkers through the use of force.

TAMIL NADU

VINOD MISHRA memorial meetings were held in Coimbatore and Tirunelveli. The meetings condemned war hysteria being whipped up by the Vajpayee government utilising the December 13 incident and its determination to enact the draconian POTO despite all-round opposition to it. The meetings also criticised the decision of the Jayalalitha government to go in for wholesale reforms, its highhanded suppression of the struggles of organised sector workers and its offer to extend issue based support to the Centre in this backdrop. The meetings were addressed by CCMs Balasundaram and Kumarasamy respectively. The Tirunelveli meeting was also addressed by CPI District Secretary MS Thenu and CPI(M) District Executive Member KG Bhaskaran.

ANDHRA PRADESH

AN AGRICULTURAL labourers' convention of about 400 people was organised at Yeleswaram in East Godavari district on the occasion of third VM death anniversary. Apart from demanding an agricultural labour legislation in Andhra Pradesh, the meeting also discussed certain specific problems of local agricultural labourers working in banana fields and resolved to organise a strike to tackle those problems including the question of equal wages to women labourers. CCMs N.Murthy and Bangar Rao and leader of the ALU Arjun Rao addressed the convention.

TAMIL NADU

Protests by AISA

ON DECEMBER 7, the Chennai police entered the Law College hostel and brutally beat up the



students causing multiple fractures to several of them. This sparked of a wave of protests by students in Madras and other cities in Tamil Nadu against the police and the AIADMK government. The AISA activists in the Law College, who were part of the struggle committee and the Chennai AISA unit played a major role in organising the struggles and solidarity movements. The struggles are being continued demanding dismissal of the guilty police officers.

– Bharati

New Struggles by Organised Sector Workers

THE WORKERS of road transport corporations and the civil supply corporation launched vigorous struggles recently defying the hardening attitude of the AIADMK government. AICCTU, which leads the dominant union among civil supplies workers played a prominent role in the joint struggles and solidarity platforms. AICCTU Working President, Comrade Kumarasamy addressed a 10000-strong rally organised by the joint struggle committee and other AICCTU leaders participated in various other joint moves and courted arrest in the course of the struggle. Despite the political realignments in the state, it is not possible for the left to join hands with DMK but the coming together of unions led by the DMK and the Left signifies the emergence of a formidable combination of organised labour mounting a serious challenge to the AIADMK government. Rattled by this development, the AIADMK, which has embarked upon a major reforms drive, rushed to buy peace with the Centre by unilaterally offering issue based support to the Vajpayee government.

– Bhuvana



Coal workers' historic nationwide strike against privatisation

THE NDA government announced that Coal Mines Nationalisation (Amendment) Bill will be presented in the winter session of Parliament, and the workers responded by organising a nationwide strike on 3-5 December. Withdrawal of the proposed privatisation bill for coal industry was the main issue, and the workers demanded that a single company be formed taking in all the subsidiary units of Coal India Ltd. Moreover, all arrears under National Coal Wage Agreement-6 must be cleared immediately. The government agreed to postpone the presentation of the bill, but dithered on all other issues. So the situation precipitated a strike. Among the five trade unions in the JBCCI, the INTUC washed its hands off the strike. It held that the strike was illegal and even tried to sabotage and break it. It did not participate in the meeting held at Nagpur on 7-8 November. The AICCTU-affiliated CMWU was not called in the meeting but it decided on its own to participate in the strike. The union has its network in ECL, BCCL and CCL. A notice was given to the government on 19 November. On 25 November, the last round of negotiations was over and with its failure, the strike became an inevitability. The strike that took place on 3-5 December was a grand success. Work in underground and open cast mines

and coal washeries came to a total halt, even loading was stopped. Although in the main offices employees registered their attendance, they had to face resistance by the workers here and there. Red flags were put up on the way leading to coalmines, as a symbol of strike. Though a brazen INTUC claimed that the strike was a flop, the management itself admitted that the success rate was 65%. At several places the INTUC leaders tried to resume work with the help of contractors, but this could not hold in the face of workers' resistance. INTUC leaders were beaten up in a number of places. Besides INTUC, the unions under HMKP led by George Fernandes opposed the strike. In Jharkhand, unions associated with Shibu Soren and Suraj Mandal factions of JMM supported it while the union led by Teklal Mahato's JMM opposed it, because of their hobnobbing with the BJP Chief Minister. Despite being kept at bay even while the strike steering committee was formed, CMWU participated in the strike with all its strength and vigour.

It is worth noting that workers of the five subsidiaries where the government had promised full payment of arrears by December also participated in the strike with the same vigour as displayed by workers of the rest three loss-making subsidiaries, where workers were to get only 40% of the arrears by December. This fact alone proves the political nature of the strike. □

Sri Lanka elections: a vote for peace but will it be enough?

Sundaram from Colombo

ONCE AGAIN another general election in the troubled island of Sri Lanka has produced an overwhelming vote for peace from both the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamil communities. While after a total domination of power by President Chandrika Bandaranaike's People's Alliance (PA) for the past seven years, the opposition UNP was expected to win on the strength of an anti-incumbency wave, few expected the extent of their victory.

As the final tally came in after the December 5 polls the UNP and its electoral allies had garnered 114 seats in the 225-seat parliament. Members of the United National Front (UNF) alliance included renegades from the People's Alliance, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and two plantation-based organisations, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and Upcountry People's Front (UPF).

The new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wikeremesinghe can also count on the support of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a coalition of four Tamil parties, which won 15 seats. Significantly in the run up to the elections the TNA openly supported the LTTE as the 'only true representative of the Tamil people', and in turn, received explicit backing from the LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The vote is being widely seen as a rejection by the Sri Lankan public of the PA's deeply unpopular economic policies as also its total inability to end the country's two-decade-old civil war over the demands for a separate Tamil homeland. The PA's

total proportion of votes dwindled from 49 per cent in 1994, when it first came to power, to 45 per cent in the 2000 elections, and just 39 per cent in the latest poll. It won a majority in just one district – down from 13 districts last time.

Ironically, in 1994, people had voted to end the UNP's 17-year rule for the same reasons – the party began the brutal war in 1983 and initiated the free market policies that led to cutbacks to jobs and living standards. Both then and now the Sri Lankan voters have also rejected attempts by the UNP and PA to play the sectarian racial card while attempting to hold onto power.

The 1994 PA government, after raising high hopes of solving the ethnic conflict however only ended up intensifying the civil war. Peace has eluded this island nation so far mainly due to the very rigid stand taken by the LTTE on the issue of independence for the Tamil minority and the unwillingness of successive governments to consider even limited autonomy for the Tamils. The LTTE, which initially welcomed the Chandrika government, turned its wrath upon her by restarting the war with government forces and even attempting to assassinate the President.

Much of Sri Lanka's electoral politics since independence from colonial rule has been dominated by a few feudal clans like the Bandaranaike family who have been jostling with other clan-based politicians for power. All the parties in this circus, in a typical feudal fashion, follow a very top down approach to everything – expecting the masses to 'take or leave' whatever they have

to offer or use naked force to have their way – a stratagem which has miserably failed in the case of the Tamil separatist movement.

The new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wikremasinghe is expected to take a more 'pragmatic' approach to the civil conflict. Ranil is believed by many observers to be open to the idea of the Tamils achieving some kind of self-government in the north and east of the country without necessarily breaking off from Sri Lanka. The Tamil forces, significantly including the LTTE, also seem to be willing to dilute their demand for Eelam and a separate homeland for the time being – provided they are given a constitutional assurance of their 'right to self-determination' at a future stage. In the post-September 11 scenario, with major Western powers cracking the whip on 'terrorist' groups around the globe, the LTTE is in danger of losing whatever little overseas support it has both within expatriate Tamil communities as well as other sympathisers.

"Both sides hope to compromise on the issue of separatism without publicly giving an impression of a sellout" says an analyst here. Both the government and the LTTE, having staged a bloody war and staked so much all these years, need a face saving formula to get out of the impasse they are at, point out some observers.

Raising hopes of such a pragmatic solution to the two-decade-long conflict is a unilateral one-month ceasefire declared recently by the LTTE over the Christmas and New Year period. The new government is expected to reciprocate with a ceasefire of its own and also by lifting the embargo on movement of goods and people in and out of the Tamil areas in northern Sri Lanka, thereby setting the stage for a resumption of negotiations with the LTTE.

Another important factor weighing upon the two sides to go in for a negotiated settlement is, of course, the tremendous pressure brought upon them by both domestic and international business groups who feel that the civil war has gone on too long and hurt their economic interests badly. Ceylon Chamber of Commerce chairman Chandra Jayaratna has called on Chandrika Kumaratunga, Ranil Wickremesinghe and other party leaders to “get together and deliver political stability in the medium to long run through network partnership and a government of unity.” Both he and the IMF representative in Colombo, Nadeem Ul Haq, have in the same breath, asked the next government to implement the IMF’s economic restructuring package, including privatisations, cuts to government spending, and “labour market reform”. This is the flip side of the situation that might lead to further deterioration of the economic conditions of the people and fuel a fresh wave of chauvinism all over again. As an editorial writer in *The Island* newspaper says, ““For those who believe we are sovereign, just consider this: our agricultural policy is written by USAID, our budget designed by the IMF, our development strategy drawn from World Bank blueprints, we are policed by the WTO and regionally bullied by India.”

In the quagmire of Sri Lanka’s deeply chauvinist politics and given the history of greed of the country’s Tamil and Sinhalese elites for power, however, there are no guarantees that the change of government will lead to peace of any kind. In the long run the only lasting solution to the civil conflict may be for the people to take power into their own hands along class-lines instead of oscillating between the dreams of peace sold by one set of political elites or the other.



Argentina Aflame

ARGENTINA HAS been witnessing an insurrection of sorts. The crisis here brought about by neo-liberalism is worse than anything witnessed so far in East Asia, Mexico or Brazil. It all began on December 14. The week that shook the country witnessed the resignation of the minister in charge of the economy, the imposition of emergency, its withdrawal in the face of a defiant popular uprising and the ouster of the president. One is only reminded of Comrade Charu Mazumdar’s words that the development of a revolutionary crisis is revolutionary and not evolutionary. The Argentinean story is very instructive for those students of capitalist crisis in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism.

The explosion comes in the wake of a four-year long recession that is estimated to have impoverished a third of the population. None of the neo-liberal prescriptions peddled by the IMF and international aid packages put together by G-7 could prevent the explosion.

The country is desperately struggling to avoid a default. The Argentinean currency has been pegged to the dollar one-to-one since 1991 so as to have exchange rate stability

and prevent a sudden run on it. But it only served to conceal the gradual maturing payments crisis. In the past few weeks, anticipating a meltdown the people rushed to convert their pesos into dollars. To prevent a capital flight bank deposits were frozen and cash withdrawals were restricted, affecting ordinary people.

The country’s official debt was \$132 billion. To avoid defaulting on the loans, the ousted president offered to convert several loans into long-term bonds of higher yield. But there were no takers. In any case, this debt swap is nothing but swapping the present debt crisis for a future one.

The financial crisis is only a symptom of an underlying deeper crisis of the economy. It cannot be managed by innovative financial management. That is why firms are restructuring and downsizing if they are not going under, throwing out workers. The official unemployment rate is 16%. But this is not a true measure as 40% of the country’s economy and a greater share of its employment are in the informal sector. The austerity package introduced by the ousted president included 13% wage cut for government employees. The President,

for a brighter world

during the two years he held office, imposed six spending cuts and heavily slashed the budget. However, a series of tax cuts to stimulate the consumer spending didn't work.

Some have even expressed the doubt as to whether the current is being utilised for a forced dollarisation of the economy through banking restrictions and making the position of peso precarious.

The general strikes had become so frequent. De la Rúa faced eight general strikes in two years. During the recent upsurge that began on December 14, there were widespread riots in the country. The workers fought pitched battles with the police. A section of the rioters also looted the shops. The international media sensationalised the supermarket looting but downplayed the organised working class action as 'riots'.

The Harvard-trained Economy Minister (sic) Domingo Cavallo, the Argentinean version of Manmohan Singh or Chidambaram, who stabilised the Argentinean economy in the early 1990s was brought back only in March this year with the hope that he would perform some miracle. He was made a scapegoat and was given the marching orders by the President Fernando de la Rúa on December 15. The same day the embattled President also declared a state of siege and assumed emergency powers. These desperate measures failed to put out the flames of popular insurrection. Day after day the entire people were virtually on the streets. Everyday there were police firings. But protesters would accept nothing short of his resignation and rollback of the austerity measures and neo-liberal policies. The state of emergency however had no effect on the insurrectionary masses, which he revoked hours before he was forced to step down.

Despite full-scale deployment of the riot police and imposition of

emergency the violent mass upsurge continued unabated. Tens of thousands of protesters laid a siege around the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. The beleaguered President finally quit on 20 December, 2001. He had to be taken away to safety in a helicopter. The same day the police shot dead at least 5 protesters bringing the toll in the current wave of protests to more than 20.

The new caretaker president, Ramon Puerta, the Senate majority leader from the Peronist opposition who has taken over from Rúa, has partially reestablished the state of siege. The popular demands for a policy rollback have not been met. The cash withdrawal restrictions are still in place. The peso continues to remain artificially propped up and it is bound to be devalued sparking off greater protests. Both the Argentinean establishment as well as the working class and popular masses are bracing themselves for a bigger confrontation.

Argentina is not alone in this crisis. The recession in Peru has also been on for a similarly long period. The financial markets are shivering. The global recession is about to cause synchronised explosions in Latin America. The conditions in many other LA countries are equally precarious. The US has to stretch itself hard to pull up Mexico so as to save NAFTA. September 11 threatens to bring some more tottering economies crashing down. The emerging markets have become submerging markets. The Argentinean crisis has also made the authorities in Brazil nervous. These countries which simply survive by rolling over old debts with new cannot withstand a 'high-risk' financial environment. They fear that the contagion might spread to Brazil at any moment pushing it to default. Wait for the domino to fall.

—B.S.



A new phase in Palestinian resistance

FOURTEEN MONTHS back there was a faint hope of an early agreement on East Jerusalem, the issue that had blocked the way to the elusive agreement between Israel and Palestine. Madeleine Albright was troubleshooting between Barak and Arafat, and later, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had played host to both. And just before the next round of violence broke out, Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat had even visited each other's houses.

The violence was triggered by a villain called Ariel Sharon, at that time leader of the opposition party Likud. The reason had more to do with the messy internal politics of Israel. He had marched on September 28, 2000, to Haram al-Sharif, reportedly Islam's third holiest place (Israeli Jews normally do not visit this place as their religion forbids it). The next day an inflammatory sermon from him from Al Aqsa mosque, exploded the pent up frustrations of Palestinians, and a new wave of intifada began. For a state ostensibly seeking a peaceful solution to the dispute, Israel, used force to an astonishing degree. Unarmed demonstrators were attacked by anti-tank missiles and helicopter gunships while Israeli tanks ringed the towns. This one-sided war left some 60 people dead – 57 of them Palestinians. It left an indelible image (captured by a French television crew) of a tiny 12-year-old boy cowering in terror under his father's arm while Israeli soldiers fired heartlessly for 45 minutes in his direction, eventually killing him.

With his provocative act, Mr. Sharon thus ensured an end to the 7-year-old Oslo peace process. Mr. Arafat, already hamstrung by accusations of 'compromise' and 'betrayal', slowly found his authority eroding as the attitude to his people hardened. In Israel, too, Mr. Barak found the going tough as the Israelis were constantly reminded that the one million Palestinians living among them could not be trusted.

Eventually, in the Feb. 2001 elections, Mr. Barak had to make way for Mr. Sharon. Mr. Sharon immediately went about pursuing his vision of an Israel retaining large stretches of the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians with a truncated and cantonized 'state' dotted with Israeli settlements. Mr. Sharon's barely concealed his intention of breaching ceasefires and thus putting the peace process into a freeze. His succeeded admirably and before the current round of bloody violence began on Dec 2, the carnage of the past 14 months had left 725 Palestinians (and 192 Israelis) dead with their land and economy devastated.

His Government adopted the policy of assassinating the Palestinian leaders. On July 31, Jamal Mansour, Hamas's most prominent leader in the West Bank, was killed when three helicopter-launched missiles smashed through the windows of his third-floor office. On August 27, Israeli helicopters killed Mustafa Zibri, the leader Popular Front

for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a constituent of PLO. On November 23, another Hamas leader, Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, was assassinated.

This targeting both Hamas and Fatah leaders encouraged the formation of cross-factional groups, binding together the national and the Islamic resistance. The National and Islamic Forces is one of them. Both the nationalist and the Islamist Palestinians realized that the armed struggle is the only way to resist the occupation. The current Intifada, where Hamas has been joined nationalist groups, has a solid backing of common people. And it is not just the violent resistance alone, but also the social work by the resistance groups in places like Gaza, where one in three workers is now without a job and one in two families is impoverished, that has been greatly appreciated by a much despaired populace.

Current violence

The current spate of violence was triggered off when on Dec 2 and 3, in retaliation of Nov 23 massacre of Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, two Palestinian suicide-bombers blew themselves up killing 10 Israeli teenage boys. A little later, a car-bomb went off nearby. The next day, a suicide-bomber sent 15 fellow-passengers to their death. Ariel Sharon was in Washington at the time. President Bush, encouraged probably by the relative ease of victory over the Taliban, gave a nod to the worst retaliation that was to follow. Israeli bulldozers have since ploughed up the runway at the Palestinians' sole airport; aircrafts have bombed offices and police stations in several West Bank cities, including a site next door to Mr. Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah.

It seems now Ariel Sharon believes that the time has come forcibly dismantle the Palestinian Authority and deport Arafat and his entire leadership back to Tunisia. The White House spokesman, observed in support of current terror campaign, "Obviously Israel has the right to defend itself and the President understands that clearly." Ariel Sharon is busy equating Palestinian Authority with Taliban, as harbours of terrorists. The US-Israeli game is clear. It was Israel that originally promoted Hamas much the same way the Americans promoted the Taliban. Now they want to destroy the PLO, holding it responsible for violence by militant groups. Thereby they have made political solution impossible and left Palestinian resistance without any other option than to continue the war against occupation. With this the Palestinian resistance enters a new phase. Or, will it be more appropriate to say that it has been thrown back to the pre-Oslo days?

– Girish Ghildiyal

Two, three, many more...



BUENOS AIRES

Argentinian President's house put under siege by thousands protesting against imposition of an emergency

BRUSSELS

“Good for the rich, bad for the poor. We don't want your capitalist war”
– Anti-capitalist protesters during the EU Summit



GAZA

The real explosion after Israel rained bombs and missiles on Palestinian Authority