

CPI(ML) 9th Congress Documents

Resolutions

On

Working Class Movement

Agrarian and other Rural Struggles

Women's Movement

Student-Youth Movement

Intervention in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Urban Work

Environmental Protection and
People-centric Development

People's Progressive Culture
and Modern Media



Adopted by

CPI(ML) 9th Congress
Birsā Nagar (Ranchi)
2-6 April, 2013

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Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

Resolution on

Working Class Movement

Context, Tasks and Opportunities

1. All over the world, predatory capital on the neoliberal prowl has intensified its multipronged offensive on labour in the name of overcoming the global economic crisis. In our country this has assumed various shapes old and new: job cuts, retrenchment, forced retirement in the name of voluntary retirement schemes, wage freeze, increased workload and working hours, downsizing, outsourcing and casualization of jobs of permanent or perennial nature, union-busting and denial of industrial democracy – the list is endless.

2. The Indian state, the judiciary not excluded, facilitates the enhanced exploitation and oppression with a whole range of anti-labour laws and regulations, anti-worker judicial verdicts, creation of no-union zones in new industrial centres, high-handed repression on workers' struggles in government as well as private enterprises and so on – all in the name of economic reform and growth. The corporate media as a rule sings the tune of big business and religiously portrays strikes and trade unions as the biggest obstacles to national prosperity.

3. Workers and employees in India, their backs to the wall, are resisting such concerted attacks at the factory/workplace, industry and national levels with determination. Recent years have witnessed a new militant awakening among unorganized workers

and contract labourers, many of whom are women, who constitute the overwhelming majority of our labour force. The same period has also been marked by exemplary united struggles of permanent and contract workers in the auto industry, the showpiece of the emerging “India Inc” as well as highly successful industrial actions and political campaigns jointly organized by central trade unions. The Indian contingent of the world proletariat is taking steady strides along the path already being charted by workers in Greece, Spain, South Africa and other countries – a path full of tough challenges as well as big opportunities provided by the spreading crisis of neoliberalism.

4. The recent two-day all-India general strike on 20-21 February marked a new high in working class action against the neoliberal offensive of the Indian ruling classes. More than 10 crore workers participated in the strike cutting across states and sectors. The strike evoked a good response in almost all major industrial centres and the financial sector. Life in Delhi and Mumbai remained rather normal with the transport sector not joining the strike even as public transport remained off the roads across North India. Our Party and central trade union played an exemplary role in mobilising the working people in support of the strike – in Tamil Nadu, for example, a state-wide yatra was organised in the run-up to the strike to popularise the strike call and the agenda and demand a special session of the State Assembly to address and resolve workers' issues. In many areas, notably in Bihar and West Bengal and in parts of Jharkhand, the strike became total with broad-based popular support, but in a bid to crush the growing spirit of working class unrest and popular resistance in the National Capital Region, the state unleashed repression on general workers and TU activists in Noida, raiding TU and Party offices and arresting Comrade Shyam Kishore, member of the Party's Delhi State Committee, a CITU leader, and a group of workers and common people on framed-up charges. A transport worker leader belonging to the AITUC was also killed in the course of the strike in Ambala depot of Haryana. Weeks after the strike, the Noida comrades are still in jail and have been denied bail.

India's Growth Story: Gainers and Losers

5. The brief periods of high manufacturing growth in the mid-1990s and the 2000s that is now petering out were propelled by increased productivity of labour. But labour was denied the fruits of growth. Wages as a share of net value added in the manufacturing sector were close to 30% in the 1980s, declined to around 20% in the 1990s and dropped to an all time low of 10% by 2008-2009. Not surprisingly, we find that the share of profits in net value added, which was at around 20% throughout the 1980s, climbed above 30% in the 1990s, and rose to an incredible 60% by 2008. The same story is repeated in the service sector. Here the share of wages declined from more than 70% in the 1980s to less than 50% by 2009 while profit share increased from 30% in the 1990s to more than 50% after 2004-2005.

6. While real wages stagnated and declined, the top management in virtually every company pampered itself with hefty increases in salary and other accompanying privileges. Wages of managerial staff were roughly twice that of workers' wages until the 1990s, but increased thereafter at a faster rate to reach 4.3 times that of the workers' wages by 2008. The CEOs have been drawing obscenely high salaries – some to the tune of more than Rs. 10 lakh per day. In 2011-12, the Naveen Jindal drew a salary of Rs.73.42 Crore. Kalanidhi and Kaveri Kalanidhi of Sun network each drew salaries of Rs.57.1 crore. Pawan Munjal and Brij Mohan Munjal of Hero Motor Corporation drew salaries of Rs. 34.55 crore each and PR Raja of Madras cements got Rs.29.34 crore.

7. The skyrocketing profits have been further bolstered by huge tax concessions and other sops offered by central and state governments. The total quantum of corporate tax exemption in the last five years has been of the order of Rs 25 lakh crore. This is by far the biggest scam enacted openly and legally, even as more than 70% of Indians have to make do with a daily expenditure of less than Rs. 20. Along with hefty tax exemptions, the rich are also endowed with enough loopholes to enable them to accumulate and hold wealth illegally in foreign banks and launder black money white through multiple routes.

Working Class: Changing Composition

8. With the change in the country's GDP mix, the composition of the labour force is also undergoing a steady change, though not in the same proportion. Agriculture now contributes less than 15% of GDP, yet close to 60% of the population still depends on agriculture for their economic wherewithal. The service sector is now the dominant part of the Indian economy accounting for about 59 per cent of Gross National Product. Over the last 40 years, employment in this sector has grown at an average of about 3.5 per cent per annum, yet its share in total employment has risen from around 15 per cent in 1972-73 to only 26 per cent in 2009-10.

9. Employment in the primary or agricultural sector has been steadily declining, and in the secondary sector comprising mining, manufacturing, electricity, water and gas, and construction, it is only construction which has witnessed a significant growth in employment, while in the tertiary or service sector, employment growth has been concentrated primarily in three segments: financial services, trade and transport.

10. If we compare rural and urban areas, employment growth has been higher in urban areas than in the rural economy. The stagnation in rural employment is caused primarily by the decline in agricultural employment, and continues despite the steady growth in non-agricultural employment in rural areas. According to NSSO estimates rural non-farm activities employed 28.51 million workers in 1972-73, the number went up to 56.11 million by 1987-88 and to 93.53 million in 2004-05. According to the NSSO survey of 2009-10, the number stood at 107.51 million in that year.

11. From the point of view of overall employment generation, economic growth in India should be characterised as jobless growth. And this is especially true of the current phase of economic liberalisation. In the pre-liberalisation phase, when GDP grew at 4.7 per cent per annum during 1972-73 to 1983, employment growth was 2.4 per cent; between 1983-84 and 1993-94 GDP growth increased to 5 per cent, but employment growth declined to 2.0 per cent; over the next ten years GDP growth accelerated to 6.3 per cent, but employment growth further declined to 1.8 per cent, and between 2004-05 and 2009-10, when GDP growth was as high as 9 per cent,

employment growth virtually stopped, declining to an all-time low of 0.22 per cent!

12. Within this overall pattern of decelerating rate of employment growth, a few features stand out in bold relief. Firstly, agriculture, despite a sharp decline in its importance in gross domestic product, continues to be the largest employer, as the non-agricultural sectors have not generated enough employment to cause any major shift of workforce away from agriculture. Secondly, most of the employment growth has been contributed by the unorganised, informal sector which is characterised by poor incomes and conditions of work. And, thirdly, employment growth in the organised sector has been mostly in the categories of casual and contract labour. On the whole, an estimated 1.3 crore workers are joining the labour pool every year. While 8 million jobs are added to low paying unorganized sectors, 5 million remain either unemployed or join the contingent of casual workers.

Working Class under Intensified Attack

13. Intensified exploitation of wage labour takes place in several ways. While extraction of relative surplus value is enhanced by introducing latest high-speed plant and machinery, effective working hours are extended by various means - for example by cutting down and strictly monitoring recess periods available to workers - to squeeze more of absolute surplus value out of the workers' toil. Secondly, casual/contract labour is extensively used even for permanent jobs to reduce the wage bill. Though illegal, this is easily done thanks to the existence of a large and growing pool of industrial reserve army, which also serves to depress the general wage level. Thirdly, pay commissions and bipartite/tripartite wage agreements are being increasingly delayed, subverted and even scuttled to erode real wages or keep them stagnant.

14. Privatisation of PSUs and semi-government undertakings -piecemeal/backdoor, if not outright - has become more extensive and rapid than ever. It is not only pushing concerned workers and employees into an uncertain future, but leading to immediate job cuts as well as reduced pay packets and worse working conditions. The government of India has already closed down 7 PSUs and even as it talks of reviving other 'sick' PSUs, employees of eight PSUs

under the Department of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises have not received their salaries since October 2012. The state must be held accountable for payment of regular salaries and wages in all PSUs and for making sure that the Payment of Wages Act is not violated by any enterprise, public or private.

15. Apart from SEZs, new industrial zones like the Gurgaon-Manesar belt of Haryana, Rudrapur and other pockets of Uttarakhand, and Sriperumbudur belt in Chennai are being converted into “no-trade union zones”. Registration of trade unions is denied and workers are debarred from forming or joining trade unions. Even in the organised sector with long-established trade union culture, the management often refuses to recognise the popular militant union and grant recognition to pro-management pocket unions.

16. Curbing industrial democracy with special focus on denial of hard-won trade union rights has thus become a most widely used political weapon in the hands of capital for holding down its class adversary, so that the latter cannot rise in organised resistance. These issues and the associated question of dignity of labour have therefore emerged as most important concerns of the working class movement today.

Flashpoints in Workers' Resistance

17. Recent years have been witness to frequent joint national campaigns of central trade unions and federations. Even the TU centres owing allegiance to the Congress and the BJP have been compelled to join these campaigns under pressure of the masses of workers. The coming together of all trade unions whether centrally or on a sectoral basis in joint actions is a characteristic feature of the present phase. Such pan-union unity can and must be utilised not as an end in itself but as a favourable platform to sharpen and intensify class struggle and forcefully assert the united working class resolve to roll back the policies of liberalisation and privatisation.

18. Inseparably linked to each other, the auto and auto component industries have together emerged as the most dynamic flashpoint of class struggle in India. Mahindra (Nasik), Sun Beam Auto (Gurgaon), Bosch Chassis (Pune), Honda Motor Cyle

(Manesar), Rico Auto (Gurgaon), Pricol (Coimbatore), Volvo (Hoskote, Karnataka), MRF Tyres (Chennai), General Motors (Halol, Gujarat), Maruti Suzuki (Manesar), Bosch (Banglore), Dunlop (Hoogly, Chennai), Caparo, Hyundai (Sriperumbudur) – almost all the well-known auto industry units that witnessed labour unrest in the period from 2007 to 2012.

19. The automobile industry has recorded remarkable growth in gross production as well as per capita productivity of labour: from 8.5 million vehicles (of all types) in 2004-05, production has risen to 20.4 million in 2011-12. In both industries, cheap contract labour far outnumbers regular workers and real wages (after discounting for inflation) have been falling continuously, between 2000-01 and 2009-10 real wages actually fell by 18.9 per cent. In 2000-01 an auto worker spent 2 hours and twelve minutes in an eight hour shift for his/her own subsistence and that of his/her family. He/she spent the remaining 5 hours and forty eight minutes generating surplus for the capitalist (and the banks, land owners, management personnel and so on). By 2009-10, he/she spent just one hour and 12 minutes for his/her own subsistence and family and 6 hours 48 minutes for the capitalist.

20. In the Gurgaon-Manesar-Bawal zone outside Delhi, which accounts for about 60 per cent of auto production in India, 80 per cent of the estimated one million workers are hired on contract. Union busting, sacking, beating (recall the police brutality on absolutely peaceful Honda workers, who were invited for talks, at Gurgaon in 2006), foisting criminal cases and even murder are the order of the day. The German auto parts manufacturer Bosch for example managed to resist three attempts at formation of a union and the story is nearly the same in other factories too.

21. Naturally, recognition of genuine trade unions enjoying the confidence of the majority of workers and regularisation of contract labour and 'apprentices' engaged in regular jobs in violation of law and at unbelievably low rates have emerged as the basic demands of the twin industries. At the shop and plant levels, workers often resort to work stoppages and other forms of protest on the issues of dignity and victimisation of their militant comrades. The new features of class struggle – the MNC techniques of management, the emerging face of workers' resistance and the role of the state –

came out in vivid colours in a couple of representative movements in two of the most important 'modern' industrial centres of India.

Lessons of Maruti and Pricol Struggles

22. Situated in the conservative Hindi heartland dominated by the notorious Khap panchayats, the Maruti Suzuki factory at Manesar has been a forward post of industrial conflict for quite some time. Most of the workers are young and more or less educated, a good many of them coming from far-off places. Since the company – as is the norm nowadays unlike in the past – does not arrange for housing, workers live in small rooms in converted hostels run by local landlords. Following prolonged peaceful agitations for the right to unionise, the Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) – which embraces all categories of workers – was registered in March 2012. However, till date the management, in violation of the law, insists that the Union cannot be affiliated to any central Trade Union. There was a 13-day long strike in June 2012, which ended when the company agreed to take back 11 terminated workers.

23. Very significantly, the July 18, 2012 showdown was ignited by an incident in which a supervisor abused a Dalit worker in caste terms and the latter replied in a befitting manner. It is to be noted that such humiliation is no aberration: supervisors and managers are trained to do this as a matter of routine for breaking the morale of workers. In the ensuing violent clashes between workers on the one hand, and the management and bouncers on the other, many were injured on both sides while a human resources manager died. The management and state authorities immediately swung into action. Large-scale indiscriminate arrests were made and a reign of police-goonda terror was let loose on the entire area.

24. The kulak-landlord forces organised in Khap Panchayats resolved that the striking union must be suppressed. They forced their worker tenants to vacate, landing them in greater trouble. Meanwhile the whole factory was transformed into an iron curtained ghetto. An undeclared lockout was imposed in the form of demanding a written “good conduct” promise from every worker who intended to enter the factory.

25. Against this backdrop, the Society of Indian Automobile

Manufacturers (SIAM) and Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) started demanding 'flexi' labour laws and the right to lay off even permanent employees during slowdowns! 'Experts' on labour relations endorsed this position, ostensibly in the interest of workers themselves: it was argued that employers are compelled to use contract workers because India's 'archaic' labour laws do not allow regular workers to be fired even during slowdowns! Auto firms threatened shifting their operations to Gujarat, quite blatantly stating that they wished to "union-proof" their production (i.e., they hoped Narendra Modi would take care of such troublemakers).

26. Workers on their part staged a prolonged dharna, where university students from Delhi joined them, even as workers of Pricol in Coimbatore and Honda in Gurgaon staged demonstrations in solidarity. Eventually production was restored, but only under the watchful eyes of the police, ex-military persons, and a special action force patrolling the factory round the clock, and security cameras watching every movement of every worker.

27. A similar story turned out differently at the Pricol automobile component factory (Coimbatore). A determined struggle commenced here in March 2007 with a single demand: recognition of the newly formed union enjoying the confidence of overwhelming majority of workers. The permanent workers, the ancillary unit workers and the contract workers fought together. The union, affiliated to the AICCTU, was branded as Maoist. The management, with full support of the state government, resorted to punishments like denial of wage increase, deductions, stoppage of increment, break-in-service, foisting criminal cases. Unfazed, workers launched the March 2007 strike.

28. The violent death of the human resources vice president in September 2009 was used to the hilt in a bid to isolate and crush the workers. False cases were foisted on the entire union leadership and leading workers including women. Some of them had to spend more than 100 days in prisons. But they were never defensive; they were never apologetic about their struggle. The battle went on in court and out of court.

29. Our party and trade union worked extensively and intensively among workers, encouraging them to mobilise their families and the local people in support of the struggle. Continuous

and creative efforts were made to raise their political consciousness through various programmes and discussion sessions. The communist party was expanded in the district, with Pricol workers playing an active role. The combined effect of all this was that the management-government nexus failed to achieve what they often do in similar cases: tiring the workers out of the battle and ultimately forcing them into submission. Workers stood their ground. With the pilloried union winning recognition, they won their basic right.

30. In a situation where the system stubbornly refuses to uphold labour laws and allows open violations to be the norm; where avenues for redressal of grievances are denied and union functioning curbed; and where managements routinely introduce hired muscle, victimization, and corrupt means to deal with workers protesting against undemocratic, undignified, and exploitative work conditions, outbursts and violent clashes are inevitable. Previous incidents at Graziano (NOIDA) and Regency Ceramic (Puducherry) – in which managers lost their lives in industrial clashes – and at Rico factory (Gurgaon) where a worker was thrown into a furnace and burnt to death by company officials and hired musclemen (a case in which the killers are yet to be punished) bear ample proof of this. At the same time, the corporate sector and governments are using such incidents as pretext to demand 'reform' of labour laws. In other words, they are seeking the legalization of the ongoing violations – and the freedom to exploit the workers without any legal impediment.

31. In a situation like this, the working class must intensify the struggle for industrial democracy, equal pay for equal work, and workers' rights and dignity. It faces the challenge of developing a political resistance that can mobilize democratic sections of the people beyond the factories, and establish the working class as a political force to be reckoned with. It goes to the credit of Maruti workers that defying systematic assault and repression by the management and the state, they have kept up the banner of struggle and protests. Most of the 'recognised' central trade unions have mobilised little effective support and solidarity for the fighting Maruti workers and AICCTU must play a consistently active role in this regard.

Contract Workers

32. The two decades of neoliberal reform have been marked by changes in production processes (from labour-intensive to capital-intensive automated production for example) as well as in the composition of the working class (e.g., large-scale casualisation of labour). The relative importance of different industrial sectors and labour categories has also undergone some changes and so has the nature of problems in each sector. In this context the working class movement needs to restructure itself and evolve suitable ways and means to break the artificial barriers created by capitalism between the permanent workers and others like contract, casual, temporary workers and apprentices.

33. As noted earlier, the post-reform industrial growth in India has been powered by ill-paid contract, migrant and women workers. The share of contract workers in the total workforce in the factory sector increased from 20% in 1999-2000 to 32% in 2008-2009. More and more jobs in the organized public and private sectors are arbitrarily categorised as non-core and non-perennial and then handed over to contractors. In some cases in Mumbai it has been observed that leaders of pro-management unions have also turned into labour contractors. The 2001 Supreme Court verdict on SAIL has subverted the Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act 1970 by ruling out automatic absorption of contract workers by the principal employer even after abolition of contract labour by the appropriate governments. The trade union movement will have to fight hard for a stronger legislation and strict implementation to defend the interests of contract workers and check the rampant growth of the contract system.

34. The contract workers, who are employed mainly in hazardous jobs and paid a pittance, are of course not suffering silently. In addition to joint struggles with permanent workers, they are independently launching their own movement. A remarkable recent instance was the 44-day strike that began in April 2012 in the public sector Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC). This was the culmination of many years of struggle conducted by a few thousands of contract labourers to win wage parity with permanent workers and regularisation of their jobs. In the absence of any attempt on the part of TUs to mobilise the permanent workers in support of contract

workers, they were defeated once again, but not before demonstrating the great potential and staying power latent in contract workers. Thanks to our relentless struggle, more than a thousand contract workers of Calcutta Tramways Corporation, a state PSU, have succeeded in becoming permanent. In Assam, our comrades have succeeded in organising and uniting contractual workers in the oil sector. In Chandigarh PGI our union representing 1800 contract workers succeeded in forcing a formal agreement accepting the principle of equal pay for equal work but the management is dilly-dallying on implementing it.

35. Key sectors of public service like education and health remain an important source of employment, but the nature of jobs has turned increasingly insecure. From primary schools to colleges, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of contract-teachers with posts of permanent teachers being steadily abolished or lying vacant. The much-touted National Rural Health Mission which is now being extended to cover urban areas as well, runs primarily on the unrecognised contribution of Accredited Social Health Activists who get a pittance as honorarium and have no security or recognition associated with regular employment.

36. Contract teachers and honorarium-based employees like ASHA have shown great determination to get organised and fight for better wages and improved working conditions. Militant struggles of contract-teachers and ASHA have become an inspiring emerging feature of the working class movement across the country. The notion of 'honorarium' has been introduced to negate the very issue of employment and wages, and honorarium-based employees are rightly demanding recognition as employees and implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Migrant Workers

37. Migrant Workers work long hours for low wages in insecure and dangerous working conditions. The Interstate Migrant Workers Act is a law which is observed only in its breach. Away from home and community, they are victims of all sorts of humiliation and harassment, including chauvinistic prejudices and communal campaigns, as seen repeatedly and most glaringly in the vicious anti-migrant assaults unleashed competitively by the Shiv Sena and

its offshoot MNS. The sinister SMS-instigated rush to return home (in the wake of the Kokrajhar violence in Assam) among panic-stricken workers from Assam and other North-eastern states working in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai underscored the vulnerability and insecurity that define the daily existence of millions of migrant workers in India. We must fight for a law to deal with atrocities on migrant workers on the lines of the SC/ST Atrocities Act.

38. The pattern of migration of workers is not confined to inter-state migration, but increasingly workers are also migrating abroad in search of higher wages and better opportunities. While Indian professionals settled abroad – doctors, teachers, IT workers and the like – have secured their rights through decades of struggle and have acquired a visible presence in North America, parts of Europe and Australia, blue-collar Indian workers working abroad have to face a very harsh reality marked by racist discrimination and assaults and at times even conditions of semi-bondage. The remittances sent by Indian workers working abroad constitute a much bigger sum than foreign investment, yet the Government of India remains largely apathetic to the insecurity faced by Indian workers abroad even as it goes out of its way to woo foreign investment.

Construction Workers

39. Thanks to the real estate boom all over the country, the construction sector is now the second largest employment provider after agriculture. There is a Central Welfare Act for workers but its implementation is very tardy, half-hearted and partial. We have achieved some progress in unionisation in several states. On that basis we have floated an all India federation of construction workers and are trying to incorporate allied categories like workers engaged in brick-kiln and stone crusher units in the same union. But there is an inevitable risk in this sector that workers tend to view the trade union activists simply as welfare agents. The larger issue of how to approach the workers not as mere beneficiaries but as potential fighters remains to be clinched. Despite a few negative experiences of TU leaders themselves turning into contractors or getting mired in economism and pragmatism, our experience of organising construction workers has generally been quite encouraging with

large numbers of unionised workers taking an active role in trade union struggles as well as political actions.

40. Mostly unorganised or weakly organised workers engaged in labour-intensive manufacturing/assembling – such as apparel and footwear, diamond cutting and polishing, making safety matches (where child labour is extensively used), ready-made garment assembly – operate in actual sweatshop conditions. To take the garments sector as a typical example, intensified international competition following the demise of the International Multi-Fibre Arrangement in 2004 has led to further deterioration in working conditions and terms of employment – e.g., lower wages and greater insecurity. The Indian industry has to face tough competition from Bangladesh and other Asian countries including China and the entire burden is passed on to the workers.

Tea Plantation Workers

41. Workers in tea plantations work with low wages and in an environment of systematic violation of trade union rights. The recent assassination of Comrade Gangaram Kol, General Secretary of Asom Sangrami Chah Shramik Sangh and a leader of the CPI(ML) with decades of dedicated work for the welfare and rights of the deprived tea community of Assam, has once again brought to the fore the unholy nexus of tea companies, the state government and the pro-management pro-government trade union. Comrade Gangaram Kol had been spearheading a popular agitation against corruption in the public distribution system, for improvement in the conditions of tea workers and for recognition of the tea community of Assam as a Scheduled Tribe to enable the community to avail of the benefits available to the STs. In the Dooars region of North Bengal, several tea gardens remain closed and tea garden workers and their family members continue to die of starvation. In August 2011 tea garden workers went on a powerful two-day strike and secured some partial redressal of their grievances. Our comrades are waging a sustained struggle for increase in wages, payment of variable dearness allowance and bonus on the basis of total wages received after taking into account the money value of the customary food and fuel benefits and on various issues of community and local development.

Women Workers

42. In addition to women-only sectors like ASHA and Anganwadi, women predominate in sectors such as domestic work, beedi, mid-day meal scheme in schools etc., and constitute a sizeable section in many other fields including garments, health, education, IT and media and communication. In many sectors, the search for 'cheaper and more docile' labour often leads to greater feminisation of employment, with a good many women forming part of on-going 'distress-driven' migration from rural areas.

43. Patriarchal bias and malice, and often outright sexual harassment, combined with class exploitation make life doubly difficult for women workers and that is precisely why they are rising in struggles everywhere from the Anganwadis to various Airlines. Both AIPWA and AICCTU must pay special attention – jointly wherever possible – to encourage and assist in every possible way the emerging contingent of women workers to organise and fight for their rights. The government must be compelled to set up a committee to carry out a census of women workers and make a comprehensive study of the conditions of women workers and implement its recommendations in a time-bound manner.

Downsizing in Organised Sector

44. The organised sector employs less than 5 per cent – less than 3 crore in numerical terms – of the work-force in India, but in terms of degree of unionisation, experience of struggles and rights won in the process, the organised sector workers constitute the core of the Indian working class. Neo-liberal reforms have unleashed a sustained attack on the workers in key segments of the organised sector who find themselves faced with the twin pressures of downsizing and outsourcing. Whereas the revolutionary trade union movement has been trying to organise the unorganised sector workers, the neoliberal offensive seeks to disorganise the organised sector. The process can be best understood if we look at important pillars of the organised sector like railways, telecommunication, steel, coal, banking and insurance.

45. The wheels of the railways are riding roughshod over the lives of the railway workers. The more than 2-million-strong

workforce in the railways today stands reduced to a little over one million, with relentless privatisation and outsourcing of processes like sanitation, catering, signalling, maintenance of tracks and coaches, production of equipments and so on. As many as 2.4 lakh posts are lying vacant and a four-phased reduction in permanent workforce to the level of 4 lakhs has been proposed. But the number of trains has been increased manifold and the average speed has been doubled. This puts tremendous strain on the system and the workers, resulting in more and more accidents as well as deterioration in service.

46. Comparable conditions prevail in sectors like coal, steel and telecommunications. In 1973, when the coal sector was nationalised, 7.2 lakh workers were engaged in producing 60 million tons of coal. Now 3.5 lakh workers produce 434 million tons. Of course, 52% of this is produced by contract workers hired by various contractors to whom the work has been outsourced. In Bhilai steel plant, per capita annual output has increased from 116 tonnes in 1993 to 347 tonnes in 2012 even as the 'incentive' paid to workers has dwindled over the same period from 47% of basic pay and dearness allowance to 5.44% of basic + DA! The story of telecommunication is quite similar. The state-run BSNL today caters to 65 million wireless subscribers and 27.9 million fixed-line users, but the size of the workforce has come down to less than 300,000. The implication is, while the staff to line ratio was 50 to 1000 in 1983, it came down to 10 to 1000 in 2003, and today it stands at 3 to 1000!

47. The employees of the financial sector – banking and insurance – successfully resisted the drive to privatise and open up this key sector of the Indian economy for the best part of the last two decades of neoliberal reforms. But with the entry of powerful foreign banks and insurance companies, nationalised banks and insurance corporations are steadily losing out and the privatisation offensive has gathered stronger momentum with the passage of Insurance Law (Amendment) Bill, 2008 and Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2011. And now there is also the Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority (PFRDA) Bill, 2011, which seeks to allow 49% FDI in the pension-PF sector. This move will give free hand to the fund managers to invest wherever they want amounting virtually to 'reverse FDI' where corporates and multinationals would merrily play with thousands of crores of rupees of hard-earned money of the

Indian working people to reap huge profits through share market speculations.

48. The defence industry in India had developed almost exclusively in the public sector. But the trend of privatisation and globalisation has not spared this industry either. Growing reliance on imports – for the last three years India has been the world's largest importer of arms – has affected the process of indigenisation of defence production. The defence sector – comprising primarily the ordnance factories, Defence Research and Development Organisation and Military Engineering services – still continues to employ a sizable contingent of workers including growing numbers of contractual workers. While guiding our comrades employed in the defence sector, the working class department of the Party and the central trade union organisation must explore possibilities of intervening more effectively in the ongoing efforts of defence employees including contract workers to organise and fight for improved conditions and greater rights. The struggle of the defence, railways and central government employees and some state government employees against a reduced discriminatory pension for new recruits should be vigorously supported by all central trade unions.

49. Our work among Public Sector and Government workers still remains quite limited. In the railways we have floated our unions in three railway zones and one production unit while continuing to work within mainstream unions in other places. In the coal and steel sectors we have our unions, but despite exhibiting great potential in struggles from time to time, the unions still remain confined to a few units and the potential of rapid expansion and greater role is yet to be realised. In banking, insurance, and telecommunication sectors, our comrades work within other Left-led unions. We have a leading presence in the struggles of state government employees in Bihar and Jharkhand and also enjoy significant support in Uttarakhand, apart from having pockets of influence in several other states, but the idea of developing a national coordination on this front has not made much progress. While fighting for the economic demands and political rights of government employees, we must try and establish linkages with the common people to make common cause in the struggle against privatisation and growing cost and deteriorating quality of public services.

50. Our work in the public sector must pay utmost attention to the contract workers who now account for more than half of the workforce in PSUs. Despite their growing numbers and important role in running the core operations, they have been kept out of the purview of bipartite committees and are being denied the right to vote for recognition of unions in the industry, apart from facing daily attacks by the management-contractor nexus. While defending the immediate interests of both permanent and contract workers, we must fight determinedly against privatisation and public-private collusion and boldly raise the workers' voice against corruption, injustice and infringement of workers' democratic rights.

Sick and Closed Industries

51. Few industries actually fall sick, most have sickness thrust upon them by cunning industrialists and colluding governments. Also, sickness need not be a chronic or irreversible phenomenon. Thanks to increased global economic integration the recession in one part of the world is being felt in another part and many rising industries suddenly go into a decline. Likewise many so-called sunset industries can also get back into life. An expert committee set up by the central government has for example categorically rejected the perception that jute is a sick industry pointing to the actual profit being earned and the prospects ahead. Yet the industry deliberately 'nurtures' sickness by neglecting necessary modernisation and technological upgradation.

52. With closed factories densely dotting India's industrial landscape, workers and ex-workers of sick and closed factories have come to constitute a category by themselves. Their sufferings know no bounds but they are rediscovering their militant role in sunset industries like textile, jute and engineering by launching struggles on new issues such as claims on land and PF/gratuity dues. A large number of public transport workers in West Bengal are not getting their wages and other dues; a few have even committed suicide even as the fight is on to get what is legally due to them. In Assam, sustained initiatives taken by AICCTU and the Coordination Committee of Trade Unions, Assam have succeeded in securing benefits worth Rs 350 crore for workers of 13 closed PSUs between 2007 and 2010.

53. Experience shows that with determined struggle even ex-workers of closed mills can secure at least some of their dues. The textile workers of Mumbai for example have reclaimed land they had lost in the wake of the historic strike of 1982, i.e., after three decades. They got organized and resorted to various forms of struggle including court battles. The Government of Maharashtra was ultimately forced to promise rehabilitation to workers. Some 6948 of these workers have got subsidised flats built on mill land (going back on the promise of free flats the government is charging the workers at the rate of Rs 7.5 lakh per flat) but another 140,000 workers are still fighting for their rehabilitation. Similarly, workers in Gouripur jute mill (North 24 Parganas, West Bengal) have been able to get part of their PF and pension dues through years of relentless struggle – court battles as well as propaganda and agitation in the mill area. Now the struggle is continuing on other demands like gratuity, inclusion of all workers in the BPL scheme and so on.

Hazardous Industries, Degrading Jobs

54. From fireworks factories to illegal mining and risky construction, the problem of hazardous industries is huge. There are frequent reports of factory fire killing children and women workers or construction workers suffering fatal injuries in construction sites. Hundreds of workers died during the construction of Delhi Metro, the showpiece of modern urban transport in the national capital. Then there are industries like asbestos plants and various chemical factories that continue to spread killer diseases and toxic fumes. The revolutionary working class movement must take up the issue of industrial safety and security and the health and hygiene of workers as seriously as the question of employment and wages.

55. While fighting for dignity of labour, the revolutionary working class movement must also fight for abolition of degrading work and suitable rehabilitation of workers who remain trapped in degrading work. Despite tall official claims, manual scavenging still remains a harsh reality in many parts of India and we must press for immediate and total abolition of this degrading practice and adequate rehabilitation of the liberated manual scavengers. Likewise, hand-pulled rickshaws continue to persist in Kolkata in the absence

of schemes of alternative employment and proper rehabilitation. Abolition of all sorts of degrading work and all forms of bondage is central to the agenda of the revolutionary working class movement.

Workers in Emerging Sectors

56. The IT sector, various IT-enabled services, BPO, call centres, financial services, sales and media and communication have emerged as a new and significant source of employment for the educated youth. These new sectors have thrown up all kinds of jobs but most of these jobs are highly exploitative and insecure. There is no regulation of working hours and many workers often end up working for as many as 12 hours and even more a day. The trade union rights in these sectors are usually sought to be curbed by bringing them under the 'essential services' category, but despite such stifling conditions IT workers are exhibiting encouraging signs of organising and fighting for their rights. The entry of such highly skilled and intellectually advanced work force in the arena of working class movement is an exciting prospect and revolutionary communists must do all they can to realise this possibility.

Tasks of the Proletariat and the Communist Vision

57. In the struggle against its class adversary and the state, workers are not alone. All other sections of working people, peasants and adivasis especially but the youth, the middle classes, and the intelligentsia and other strata as well, are rising in arms to defend their rights, their land, their livelihood and their freedom against growing corporate-state offensive. Where the big bourgeoisie leads the anti-people nexus of corporate, feudal and imperialist powers, the proletariat must lead the fighting alliance of all working masses, extending one hand to the fighting peasantry and the other to the democratic struggles of every section of the people.

58. But this cannot be done without challenging the defensive outlook spread by reformist and reactionary trade unions as well as other organisations in the name of "difficult situation" and "period of defensive struggle". Dialectically there is an element of offence in every defence, and vice versa. The working masses should be enlightened on the fact that the new onslaughts by capital actually

stem from capital's weakness, its grave problems, not its strength, and therefore now is the time to strike hard. Now is the time when a broad, militant unity of toilers can generate a heroic resistance, mobilise new allies from the non-proletarian strata and bring the day of ultimate victory nearer – to instill this confidence among the masses is a foremost duty of the most advanced class.

59. To raise the working class to this higher political consciousness and role is the duty of its advanced revolutionary detachment, the Communist Party. But developing political consciousness does not consist in trying to artificially impose some sort of activism from above or impart political education in an abstract way. It demands above all that we should help the working class, in course of meeting its real life challenges, gradually raise its self consciousness – the consciousness of the historic mission of overthrowing the rule of capital. To this end our trade union centre must expand its political role – e.g., solidarity action in support of workers', peasants', women's struggles – and the party committees in industrial areas must move beyond *phrases* like 'politicisation of working class' and develop *in practice* a down-to-earth work style combining factory/industry-based and area-wise political activities and party building, with all our mass organisations also pressed into service.

60. In terms of ideological thrust the party should, while guiding and strengthening trade union work, resolutely combat the tendency, well entrenched in the left movement, of reducing the working class movement to mere trade union struggle. “Trade unionist politics of the working class are precisely *bourgeois politics of the working class*”, wrote Lenin in a chapter significantly titled “*The working class as vanguard fighter for democracy*” in the classic “What Is to Be Done?”. What he stressed was *the conscious element* – revolutionary politics and party building. The more widespread the spontaneity of mass movement, he asserted, the greater must be the conscious role of communists in theoretical, political and organisational terms. In the increasingly turbulent national and international situation, the revolutionary party of the working class must uphold this Leninist teaching in real earnest.

Resolution on Agrarian and other Rural Struggles

1. The agrarian crisis continues to spread and deepen. Instead of addressing any of the structural dimensions of the crisis, whether by way of increasing public investment in agriculture or making better infrastructural facilities and cheap and easy credit available to the agricultural population or carrying out progressive reforms in land and other agrarian relations that could improve the lot of actual producers, the central and state governments continue to push the neo-liberal policy package in the agrarian arena, resulting in further aggravation of the crisis of Indian agriculture and the plight of the real producers including rural labourers.

2. Token government measures like occasional loan-waivers announced usually as a vote-catching tactic during elections have failed to provide any relief to the debt-ridden peasantry and the shame of peasant suicides continues unabated. The figure of peasant suicides since 1995 has exceeded 300,000 and despite government assurances of stopping suicides, at least one suicide is being recorded every thirty minutes, as pointed out in the shocking study “Every thirty minutes: Farmer suicides, human rights, and the agrarian crisis in India” carried out by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice of the New York University School of Law. The number will go up considerably if one includes cases of suicides of members of peasant families. Starvation deaths too continue unabated. While the state is afraid of admitting starvation deaths, it is an established fact

that chronic hunger and malnutrition is the biggest cause of death in India, accounting annually for more than two million deaths.

3. Massive acquisition – often by forcible and fraudulent means – and relentless diversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural use has begun to pose a serious threat to food security. The availability of net cultivable land is further declining because of problems like soil erosion, desertification and increase in salinity, and lack of planned and effective measures to ensure soil improvement and land reclamation. The boastful claims of self-sufficiency in production of food grains are giving way to growing dependence on food imports. According to a study of land-deals worldwide since 2000, India figures among the top 10 countries accounting for a loss of 4.6 million hectares of agricultural land (out of an estimated global diversion of 70.2 million hectares).

4. In the face of stiff resistance by peasants and adivasis across the country, central and state governments have had to abandon or defer some of the most scandalous land acquisition projects, Nandigram in West Bengal, Niyamgiri (Vedanta) in Odisha, and Raigad (Reliance) in Maharashtra being the most notable examples. More recently, the government of Maharashtra has been forced to scrap four major proposed SEZ projects that would have entailed land acquisition of the order of about 9,000 acres. In many cases land-losers have managed to secure improved rates or packages of compensation. But there are also many cases of land remaining locked in litigation even though the projects for which the land had been acquired have not materialized, Singur being the most notable instance.

5. Yet even as peasants and adivasis succeed in halting or stopping acquisition in some pockets the onslaught continues in other areas. Defying widespread protests, the Odisha government has unleashed police repression to forcibly acquire land for POSCO, and in the north-western part of the country central and state governments are busy pushing through a massive land acquisition drive for the 1,483-km-long Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor project. Large-scale land acquisition and eviction is going on in the name of construction of power projects and development of nature parks and eco-tourism zones. In the hill state of Uttarakhand where agricultural land is as little as 10% as many as 558 hydel power

projects are being constructed with the Tehri dam alone resulting in the submergence of 1.5% agricultural land and eviction of an equal proportion of the state's population. In coastal Tamil Nadu, more than 84,000 acres of land are being acquired by thermal power plants and petro-chemical complexes. And across the country, land acquisition is going on in the name of widening of roads and setting up of power plants or private universities and colleges.

6. In many places – Karbi Anglong in Assam, Sunderban in Bengal, and West Champaran in Bihar to take only three examples – people are also being evicted in the name of wildlife conservation, tiger projects and promotion of tourism (even as the number of tigers is steadily coming down, Valmiki Nagar in West Champaran had 54 tigers in 1997 and only 7 in 2010!).

7. Given the prohibitive political cost of state-led land acquisition, as exemplified most strikingly in the emphatic defeat of the CPI(M)-led Left Front government in West Bengal in the wake of the peasant resistance and popular outburst triggered by the events in Singur and Nandigram, the ruling classes have however become wary of the state playing a direct role in forcible land acquisition. The amended Land Acquisition Bill that has been approved by the UPA cabinet seeks to assign the main role in land acquisition directly to the corporate sector with the state playing the role of the facilitator with promises of better compensation. Instead of scrapping the infamous 1894 Land Acquisition Act and the SEZ Act 2005, the two Acts that have declared a veritable war on Indian agriculture and the land-dependent population, the government wants to promote corporate land-grab by giving a free hand to the land mafia, real estate barons and other corporate interests. The Robert Vadra-DLF deals in Haryana and Rajasthan and the land deals made in Maharashtra by the companies run by former BJP President Nitin Gadkari clearly indicate the extent of political patronage behind the ongoing 'land rush' at a time when capital is facing a deep and prolonged crisis in many key sectors of production.

8. To resist this 'land rush' and save agricultural land from the clutches of the corporate sector has emerged as a key agenda of the peasant movement across the country. Peasants are however not alone in this resistance – experience shows that struggles against land acquisition almost always tend to acquire a broad-based militant

character. The Adivasi communities are also playing a heroic role in this resistance. In mineral-rich areas which are home to large sections of India's adivasi population, land acquisition and mining loot have emerged as two sides of the same ugly coin of corporate plunder and predatory accumulation resulting in systematic displacement of adivasis from their hearth and home. The struggle for protection of agricultural land must therefore be waged in close collaboration with the anti-eviction struggles of the adivasi people with the land and mining mafia as the twin targets and the call for legal protection of agricultural land and forest land and nationalization of all mineral resources as the strategic demand to rally large sections of the working people in united struggles.

9. The task of protecting agricultural land and safeguarding the rights of the agricultural and adivasi population must be taken up as an essential and integral part of the larger battle for a pro-people development strategy in opposition to the ongoing disastrous course of pro-corporate development that considers agriculture in general and small-peasant agriculture in particular as a dispensable liability. While developing active resistance to every case of forcible land acquisition in our areas of work, we must make all-out efforts to broaden and deepen our intervention in anti-acquisition struggles and forge close ties with the fighting people. In forests and adivasi-inhabited areas we must stand by the adivasis in resisting illegal land transfer and for strict enforcement of land-protection laws (for example the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act in Jharkhand) and the provisions of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 and the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

10. The state has virtually abandoned the agenda of redistributive land reforms. To pay lip-service to the agenda, the central and state governments occasionally set up commissions, but the reports of the commissions are soon consigned to the waste paper basket. The National Council for Land Reforms set up in January 2008 under the leadership of the Prime Minister held not a single meeting till late 2012 and the recommendations made by the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task in Land Reforms continue to gather dust. In Bihar, the Nitish Kumar government shied away from implementing even the minimal recommendations made by the Bandyopadhyaya Commission. The much trumpeted

Forest Rights Act 2006 is not really a piece of land reform legislation; it only extends legal recognition to land held by tribals and other forest dwellers settled for at least 75 years. But even this Act is being more violated than implemented.

11. While redistributive land reforms remain abandoned, a veritable campaign is on to reverse whatever land reforms had actually taken place whether officially or through decades of land struggle and rob poor peasants of whatever gains they had made. The revolutionary peasant movement must boldly defend the gains of land struggle and advance the agenda of land reforms by pressing for strict implementation of all existing land reform laws, redistribution of all ceiling-surplus, benami and illegally occupied land, lowering of land ceiling, abolition of absentee landlordism and usurpation and concentration of land in the name of temples and trusts, and the securing of homestead land rights.

12. The question of tenancy reform and tenancy rights must figure high on the agenda of the revolutionary peasant movement. Instead of granting ownership rights to tenants, the official model of tenancy reform limited the agenda to the issue of security and improvement of terms of tenancy. But the governments have even failed to ensure minimum rights for tenants like mandatory registration, inheritable cultivation right and subsidies and facilities that are granted to the owners of land.

13. Forms and practices of tenancy have undergone considerable changes in the last few decades. The system of share-cropping is increasingly giving way to money rents and the tenure of lease is also becoming increasingly seasonal. Tenants, often dependent on land-owners for not only land but also credit and other inputs, end up getting trapped in various forms and degrees of bondage. Managers of temples and religious trusts often behave like cruel landlords and treat tenants as their 'subjects'. In Bihar and many other states where tenancy laws remain virtually unimplemented tenancy remains oral and concealed. There is no system of regulation of rent and tenants are denied access to credit, subsidies, sale of their crops at rates fixed by the government, or benefits like crop insurance and compensation in case of any major crop failure.

14. The feudal forces in Bihar succeeded in stalling the Bandyopadhyay Commission's recommendations regarding tenancy

registration and reform by creating a scare among small landowners while tenants were also not organized and confident enough to beat back the feudal offensive. Tenants must be organized systematically around every issue affecting their interests and pressure mounted on the government to fulfill their demands and recognize their rights. If we can inspire confidence among tenants through sustained and painstaking propaganda and agitation, tenants display great enthusiasm and tenacity in struggles. The revolutionary peasant movement must make it a point to beat back feudal offensives and state indifference by effective mobilization of tenants in determined struggles.

15. The formation of the All India Kisan Mahasabha in May 2010 marked an important step towards reinvigorating the peasant movement on a countrywide scale to defend small-peasant agriculture in the face of the all-pervasive agrarian crisis and growing corporate-imperialist invasion of agriculture. The AIKM has begun to respond to various dimensions of the agrarian crisis, propagating and agitating against forcible land acquisition and for securing land rights for forest-dwellers and the landless and on issues like irrigation, electricity, diesel, seeds, fertiliser and procurement of crops and milk from direct producers at remunerative prices and free from the clutches of middlemen.

16. While launching periodic campaigns on a national level, we must pay the greatest attention to the task of building powerful and vibrant local struggles involving the broad masses of the aggrieved peasantry and organizing poor and middle peasants and tenants around their specific demands. Whether it is the issue of timely availability of inputs like fertilizer, water and power, fixation of crop prices or sale of crops at minimum support price fixed by the government, peasants are erupting in protest all over the country and we must intervene effectively and promptly to compel the administration to settle their demands. We must make sure that AIKM emerges as a popular platform of peasant resistance backed by organized pockets or belts of sustained and powerful peasant movement.

17. The agrarian crisis and growing trends of corporatization and mechanization of agriculture have meant a decline in agricultural employment. The first decade of the 21st century

has seen employment in agriculture decline annually by 0.13%. The decline has been more pronounced in the second half of the decade: 1.63%. Thanks to the relative expansion of the non-farm rural economy, overall rural employment has however grown in this same period (2004-05/2009-10) by 2.8% per annum. The changing pattern is reflected in the composition of rural NDP (where the share of agriculture has dropped steadily and that of the non-farm sector has increased from 28% in 1970-71 to 62% in 2004-05) and also in the structure of rural employment (employment in non-farm activities increased from 28.51 million or 15% in 1972-73 to 107.51 million or 32% in 2009-10). The key non-farm rural sectors are trade, construction, transport and financial services and the semi- or para-government agencies in healthcare, education and other social sectors.

18. But the non-farm rural economy is still in no position to absorb the growing rural workforce leading to increases in unemployment and out-migration. Activities allied with agriculture like fisheries, dairy, poultry, horticulture, floriculture etc. are also in crisis, and small entrepreneurs are forced to compete in an unequal battle for survival with big corporate players. While focusing on agricultural labourers, increasing attention must also be paid to the task of organizing non-agricultural rural labourers and employees around their immediate demands. A good beginning has been made in the rural construction and sand extraction sector (in Bihar), among workers of rice mills (in Karnataka) and cold-storage workers (West Bengal), and among women workers in social sectors like ASHA, Anganwadi and mid-day meal schemes in several states.

19. Wages of agricultural labourers continue to be very low in most parts of the country and given the relentless rise in prices of all basic goods and services, there has been little growth, if not a steady erosion, in the real wages or the purchasing power of agricultural labourers. In most states, wages also continue to lag behind the officially stipulated minimum wages. Gender disparity in agricultural wages remains a bitter reality with wages received by women varying from 90% to even 50% of that of their male counterparts, even as agricultural wage-labour becomes increasingly feminized in many regions with out-migration of men. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS)

has shown that more than 95% of female agricultural wage workers received wages lower than the minimum wage (NCEUS 2007).

20. Wage struggle of agricultural labourers therefore remains crucially important, but such struggles still remain highly localized and spontaneous. The first ever all-India agricultural labour strike called by AIALA on 7 July 2010 evoked quite an enthusiastic response. The struggle for jobs, better wages and for improvement in living conditions and social security must be taken up more regularly and on a bigger scale.

21. The UPA government had introduced MGNREGA as the answer to rural poverty and unemployment. A study done by the NSSO for the period July 2009-June 2010 (NSSO 66th Round) shows that only 24% of rural households got any employment under MGNREGA (as low as 4% in Maharashtra, 5% in Punjab and Haryana, 8% in Karnataka, 10% in Bihar, 11% in Kerala and 16% in UP and Jharkhand) and the average persondays of employment for these households during this period is only 37 (17 for West Bengal, 23 for Jharkhand, 24 for Bihar and 31 for UP). The actual wages have been found to be almost uniformly lower than the notified wages, payment has been delayed as a rule and unemployment allowance has been utterly negligible, even though 193 out of every 1000 households having job cards claimed to have got no employment (the figure is 344 for Bihar). The same study also found that only 347 out of every 1000 rural households had job cards (the figure for Bihar is as low as 172 even though the official BPL percentage for Bihar is as high as 55.3). MGNREGA, though touted as the world's biggest employment guarantee programme, has clearly failed to make any major dent in rural poverty and unemployment, let alone create any positive push to raise the low level of rural wages.

22. AIALA had taken impressive initiatives in the initial phase when NREGA was being launched, and it is important to sustain the momentum with planned and systematic intervention to take up NREGA-related struggles. While sections of the ruling classes are trying hard to subvert, if not stop, MGNREGA we must fight for its extension to agriculture to help the crisis-ridden peasantry, for greater availability of employment and better wages and against gross violation of various provisions of the law by panchayats as well as state and central governments.

23. Food security is another UPA promise that has turned into a long and bitter story of betrayal. It is only now with the 2014 elections getting nearer that the Congress once again seems desperate to turn food security into a poll plank. Going by the recommendations made by the concerned parliamentary standing committee headed by Vilas Muttemwar, the proposal is to cover 75% of rural and 50% of urban population with provisions of only 5 kg of rice and wheat at a price of Rs. 3 and Rs. 2 per kg respectively. This works out to 25 kg of subsidized foodgrain for a family of five – half of what the people have long been demanding and lower than even the 35 kg level being currently supplied. The struggle must be intensified for a universal PDS covering all essential articles of mass consumption in opposition to the government's current proposals of a truncated food security framework.

24. Closely related to the issue of food security is the question of procurement of crops and storage of food grains. In the absence of effective tenancy rights and prompt system of assured procurement large sections of small producers are denied the benefit of the minimum support prices announced by the governments and they are forced to sell crops to intermediaries at considerably reduced rates who in turn earn a profit by reselling it to the state or in the open market. Likewise, in the absence of sufficient and appropriate storage facilities, we have the paradox of foodgrains rotting in the open or being eaten up by rats in ill-maintained godowns even as the poor are left to die of starvation and hunger. The apex court had rightly called for free distribution of surplus foodgrains among the poor, but the government refused to heed the voice of reason or remedy the situation and the problem continues. The battle for assured procurement, improved and adequate storage and a fair system of distribution must therefore be taken up as a key agenda of popular mobilization.

25. Most of the centrally sponsored schemes are meant exclusively for BPL beneficiaries, and it is on the issue of fixing the poverty line that the government and the Planning Commission headed by the Prime Minister are playing cruel jokes on the poor of the country. Even as the absurd Planning Commission BPL benchmarks of Rs 26 in rural areas and Rs 32 in urban areas drew widespread flak from all quarters including the Supreme Court, the PC further reduced the benchmarks in 2012 to Rs 22.40 and 28.65

respectively, thereby claiming a fall in poverty from 37.2% in 2004-05 to 29.8% in 2009-10!

26. The poor are thus being deprived right at the point of fixation of the poverty line, apart from the administrative errors of exclusion which are often quite deliberate. Now a third dimension is proposed to be added, in the name of better targeting, in the form of the so-called direct-benefit-transfer or cash-transfer method. This method, being introduced now in a limited way, is intended to cover gradually almost all welfare schemes and even food security may come under it at a later stage. The schemes will require the beneficiaries to have mandatory UID (aadhaar) cards and bank accounts, thereby further enlarging the scope of exclusion. The battle against exclusion and for assured universal entitlement of the poor to welfare and social security is an important agenda for the movement of the rural poor.

27. Rural struggles must also pay adequate attention to issues like rural roads, electrification, sanitation, health and education. The infrastructure being built by the government is not only woefully inadequate but also corruption-ridden and controlled by the feudal-kulak-bureaucratic nexus. The National Rural Health Mission became a byname for mega-corruption in UP under BSP rule leading to mysterious murders of top health officials and scams are being exposed in Bihar, Jharkhand and several other states as well. Various central and state schemes announced in the name of welfare of minority communities and oppressed and backward castes are also soaked in shallow tokenism and corruption. The rightful beneficiaries of such schemes who are being deceived and deprived in the process must be organized to fight against this deception and to secure their due benefits. While failing to provide basic amenities, almost all state governments are bent upon promoting the liquor business, with legal licences often operating as a front for illicit distillation. As a result there are growing liquor deaths even as governments boast of increased revenue and the parties of the ruling classes collaborate with the liquor mafia. Building a powerful anti-liquor movement must therefore become an integral part of our agenda.

28. Along with the rural administrative network of the central and state governments, the panchayats are playing an increasingly

pivotal role in the economics and politics of rural development and various public services and welfare schemes. The network of cooperatives as well as self-help groups also plays an important role in rural life. But thanks to feudal-kulak control, corrupt bureaucratic stranglehold and exorbitant rates of interest, the cooperatives and micro-finance agencies are often spelling greater misery for the rural poor rather than giving them any relief. The fight against corruption and against feudal-kulak-bureaucratic control and for transparency and accountability in these institutions is an important component in the battle for democracy in rural areas. Leading Party committees in rural areas and the entire network of mass organizations – AIALA and AIKM in particular – must work concertedly in this direction.

29. Rural India continues to witness brutal forms of caste and gender-based oppression and violence. Communal forces are also active in rural areas to propagate communal prejudices and fan communal hatred. The questions of human dignity and human rights of the oppressed sections of the society, dalits and women in particular, must therefore be understood as a core agenda of communist rural work. Some crude forms of oppression and violence may have become a thing of the past thanks to sustained and determined resistance, but there can certainly be no room for complacency on this score as brutalities continue to resurface in various spheres of social life. The battle for democracy, dignity and social progress can only be carried forward by relentlessly challenging the feudal-kulak patriarchal hegemony in the countryside.

30. Militant agrarian struggles have been the main source of our mass strength and revolutionary identity. Almost everywhere such struggles have invariably had to face feudal-kulak violence and state repression. In Bihar, feudal-kulak forces formed private armies using caste networks and political patronage and such armies have often enjoyed a high degree of impunity, a veritable immunity from the machinery of law enforcement. This has been borne out by the entire trajectory of the Ranveer Sena right from its inception and the serial perpetration of barbaric massacres to the disbanding of the Amir Das Commission, acquittal of the massacre convicts, and surrender of the state to the fury of Ranveer Sena supporters following the elimination of the Sena chief. In spite of this collusion between the state and the Ranveer Sena, the Party and the revolutionary peasant movement succeeded in overcoming the challenge, by weakening

and isolating the Sena and reviving agrarian struggles and broad-based rural mobilisation. The experience of breaking the feudal stranglehold, combating the private armies, the Ranveer Sena in particular, and sustaining broad peasant unity and militant peasant struggles is an invaluable vindication of the inherent strength of the agrarian programme and practice of revolutionary communists.

31. Military challenges apart, agrarian and rural struggles are also facing powerful political challenges from different quarters. The agrarian and rural development strategy of the state has spawned a feudal-kulak nexus with a strong grip on rural administration and the network of panchayati raj institutions. The militant peasant-rural poor unity forged through years of anti-feudal struggle today finds itself pitted against the machinations of this feudal-kulak-bureaucratic nexus, and vulnerable to the competition and division triggered by the ruling class politics of doles.

32. The growing corporate-imperialist invasion of agriculture and the rural economy has also brought about major changes in the rural scene with a mushrooming network of NGOs and an army of agents and middlemen making money from land and various other resources. Faced with such challenges, the revolutionary peasant movement must renew and rejuvenate itself. Any prolonged spell of stagnation can make the movement especially vulnerable to the perils of economism and the rise of vested interests. It is important to maintain the flow of struggles and not get confined to any single issue, even if it is the basic issue of land. The gains of a struggle can be preserved, consolidated and expanded only by upholding the live and dynamic political perspective of building the counter-hegemony of the people against feudal-kulak domination and corporate-imperialist invasion.

Women's Movement: Challenges and Tasks

1. In India today, women's growing assertion and enhanced aspirations for equality, challenging entrenched patriarchy, can be seen and felt in virtually every sphere. In glaring contrast to this assertion and growing public participation of women, we in India are simultaneously witnessing unabated and intensified sexual and patriarchal violence on women; open and organized patriarchal offensives (both physical and ideological) on women's hard-won rights and freedoms; and the worst instances of women's malnutrition, hunger, and maternal mortality in the world. This contradiction or paradox has emerged as a defining characteristic of modern India.

2. It is true that capital, and state-institutions like panchayats, and a network of NGOs closely linked to both global capital and the Indian state, have increased their penetration in rural areas, bringing a sizeable section of women out of their homes, into the workforce, and into the political arena. But forces of class, caste and gender domination are coming together to arrest this assertion, using all, including the most barbaric, means; even as the state and capital, in the course of drawing women into the labour force, actually exploit, strengthen, and perpetuate existing patriarchal structures and ideologies responsible for women's sexual and domestic servitude and social subordination. Indian women thus

face the worst of both worlds – feudal oppression as well as modern capitalist exploitation and dehumanisation, especially because the neoliberal model of growth preserves, profits from and in some cases reproduces in modified forms many vestiges of feudalism in socio-economic structures, customs and value systems.

3. Even in the face of feudal-patriarchal opposition, women are trying to utilise the new opportunities – school education, various job openings and the provision of 50% reservation in panchayati raj institutions for example – for playing more active social and political roles. The new opportunities and experiences are equipping women with greater self confidence and a keener political awareness. Women's increased mobility and public role (in employment as well as political life) are also destabilising traditional patriarchal arrangements and attitudes within households and society, resulting in progressive changes in gender roles and ideology, but also in fresh patriarchal anxieties, tensions, and violence.

4. In the face of these changes, the forces of traditional caste patriarchy are asserting themselves with renewed aggression, seeking to retain control over women's sexuality, mobility, and reproductive power, and to defend patriarchal and feudal arrangements of land and property that are threatened by women's new-found rights and assertion. These forces are not just a throwback to a feudal past: they are refashioning themselves in modern times, often with political patronage across the spectrum of ruling class parties. It is notable that these forces of patriarchal reaction have found their most organized and aggressive expression in some of the regions where the Green Revolution and capitalist development in agriculture have been most pronounced: Punjab, Haryana, and Western UP.

5. It must also be noted that patriarchal tendencies, often accompanied by caste and communal revivalism, are strong even in the urban context, including among the professional middle class. An outright patriarchal backlash to women's assertion can also be seen in the 'Save Family' type of organizations that target the laws against violence on women. Such widespread and virulent patriarchal assertion in urban centres, among the professional middle class, cannot be hidden by the superficial gloss of modernity. The corporate media and entertainment industry in globalised India also seeks to define modernity in terms of increased sexualisation

and commodification of women. The neoliberal market seeks to shape women's aspirations in terms of their role as consumers or objects of consumption, rather than in terms of their autonomy and assertion against patriarchy.

6. Women's assertion and resistance to patriarchy as it manifests itself within the family, household, community, work, public institutions and the State is a key arena for the battle for democracy and revolutionary social transformation in India today, and must be grasped as a key revolutionary task for the communist movement as a whole.

Violence Against Women

7. The popular upsurge in Delhi and all over the country in the wake of the brutal gang-rape of a young woman student on a moving bus in the national capital on December 16, 2012 has underlined how the question of sexual violence and women's autonomy is indeed a crucial question of democracy and social transformation. Apart from the mass popular dimension of the movement, what was significant was the centrality that the slogan for women's 'azaadi' (freedom) acquired, and the unleashing of popular protest against the pervasive tendency by public figures – police, politicians, 'god-men, 'administrative authorities and judges – to justify such violence by blaming the victim, invoking patriarchal codes of dress, behaviour, and 'moral' values. Our student, youth, women's and cultural organizations played a significant role in sustaining the movement, keeping the issues of women's autonomy and anti-patriarchal resistance at its core, and forcefully raising the issues of rapes committed during communal violence or dalit massacres, by the Army in the North East and Kashmir and against AFSPA that confers impunity on guilty Army personnel, custodial rapes like that of Soni Sori, rapes of women like Tapasi Malik during movements against land grab, and victimization and sexual violence against sexual minorities.

8. The Justice Verma committee constituted by the Government as a response to this movement came out with a comprehensive set of path-breaking recommendations that reflected the spirit of the movement by calling for changes in laws, policies and accountable governance that could safeguard women's autonomy and freedom

from violence. The movement managed to wrest from a reluctant Government and Parliament, some noteworthy and long-pending amendments in the laws on rape and sexual violence. Certain blatantly anti-women provisions that the Government tried to introduce – such as making the accused in the rape law 'gender-neutral,' and introducing a provision against 'false complaints' in the sexual violence laws – were successfully defeated. Among the notable changes achieved in the law are: fixing a minimum mandatory sentence for dereliction of duty by police officers in complaints of sexual violence; clarification that public servants charged with rape and sexual assault will not enjoy the protection of 'prior sanction' by the Government for prosecution; expanded definitions of rape and recognition of stalking, disrobing, voyeurism, and acid attacks as crimes, harsher punishment for rapes during communal and casteist violence and custodial rape, and mandatory free, prompt treatment of survivors of acid attacks and sexual violence. However, the age of consent was raised from 16 to 18, criminalizing consensual sexual contact between young people between the ages of 16-18. The protection of 'prior consent' has been retained for armed forces; the principle of command responsibility and amendment to AFSPA, and the recognition of marital rape, and the definition of the victim of rape as gender neutral as recommended by the Verma Committee, have been rejected.

9. The open display of rampant sexism and misogyny in Parliament during the debate on the anti-rape Bill, resulting in the dilution of several provisions, indicates how every advance in India's sexual violence laws has been made in spite of, rather than as a result of, the ruling political forces. It is significant that a large percentage of MPs and MLAs are accused of rape and other crimes against women. The Verma Committee's recommendation that anyone charge-sheeted for rape should be disbarred from contesting elections was relevant in this context, but Parliament predictably rejected this recommendation. The movement had also taken up the question of establishing fresh norms for medical examination and care for rape survivors. Specifically, the struggle continues to end sexist medico-legal practices that legitimize the focus on the past sexual history of the rape survivor.

10. The recently enacted law against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace undermines the pathbreaking and legally binding

Vishakha guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997. A blatantly anti-women provision in the new law is punishment for 'false' complaints which will deter women from filing complaints. The law also fails to ensure the effective autonomy of the complaints committees against sexual harassment from employers; and fails to guarantee the continued autonomy of existing and successfully functioning bodies.

11. The refusal of the law to recognize marital rape is based on the idea of the wife as property of the husband – and the adultery law is based on the same assumption. The UPA Government's move, some years back, to amend the adultery law was not motivated by any will to correct gender bias. The adultery law allows the 'aggrieved' husband to file a criminal complaint against his wife's lover (if the husband has an affair, the wife has no legal remedy). The Government had, in 2008, sought suggestions from all states in favour of amending the law to allow for criminalizing the wife who has an extra-marital affair! The Government has ignored the suggestion by the NCW and by the women's movement, that the criminal law against adultery be deleted, and infidelity be treated as a civil wrong by one spouse against another rather than a criminal offence.

12. Abuse and rape of children, very often by family members, is rampant in India. This crime is also closely linked with patriarchal culture, whereby children are denied autonomy and taught unquestioning obedience and subservience to adults, and sex education is frowned upon. Moreover, it cannot be seen in isolation from the custom of child marriage (abolished less than a century ago but still rampant in many parts of India). The rape of children inside protection homes and hostels (as seen in Haryana and Chhattisgarh recently) is a heinous crime. This crime underlines the fact that power and authority, whether inside the family or in such institutions, is at the root of sexual violence against children. While the Prevention of Child Sexual Offences Act enacted in 2012 is a welcome step, much more needs to be done to challenge the culture that facilitates child abuse and child rape.

13. The Government is yet to back up the laws against sexual violence and domestic violence with effective budgetary allocations for safe shelter homes, free medical care, and rehabilitation for

survivors of acid attacks and rape. Moreover, Governments have shown their willingness to capitulate to pressure from organised anti-women forces in many instances. For example, currently the Central Government is responding to the orchestrated campaign against the dowry laws by proposing amendment to Section 498-A (relating to severe domestic violence and dowry-related torture).

14. The assertion of women, especially young women, for education, jobs, share in property, and greater autonomy in their private lives, including choice of partners, threatens the caste order and patriarchal norms of transfer of property, and is being met with open patriarchal offensives. In several cases, this offensive takes the form of a 'benign' display of patriarchal and familial authority, which appeals to filial 'loyalty' on the part of women, and to 'the sacred duties and virtues' of Indian mothers and wives. In other cases it takes the form of 'honour' crimes within the family. And increasingly, 'honour' crimes and moral policing are taking on an organized socio-political form, with Sangh Parivar outfits, khap panchayats, and other reactionary outfits of all religions unleashing organized attacks to enforce casteist, communal, and patriarchal diktats. Governments show little will to fight such organized forces indulging in moral policing and 'honour' crimes, rather there is a high degree of collusion on part of political forces and state machinery. In many instances of 'honour' crimes, it is the dominant castes that unleash violence on women from their own caste, as well as oppressed castes, for breaching caste boundaries in marriage. But 'honour' crimes are not the exclusive preserve of dominant castes. The oppressed castes and adivasi communities, branded as undeserving of 'honour' by the dominant castes, have also begun to lay a claim to Brahminical patriarchal 'honour' by controlling the sexuality and freedom of women within their own communities.

15. Domestic violence against women is rampant across castes and classes. It is a brutal indicator of the fundamental lack of democracy and inequality that underwrites relationships between men and women and the institution of marriage and family in patriarchal society. Insecure jobs and lack of employment for women make women in abusive marriages all the more vulnerable. The home and family are 'private' spheres in name only. In reality, these institutions are crucial to the structure of patriarchal, caste, and class oppression, and the subordination of women and control

of their sexuality and reproduction within the home is crucial to maintaining property relations and caste hierarchy, extraction of dowry and subsidizing capitalism through domestic labour. In spite of legislation banning dowry, dowry torture, often culminating in killings, continue to be rampant. Domestic violence and the practice of dowry cannot then be seen as a 'private' matter to be settled within the family, they are means of women's subordination and we should mobilise powerful public campaigns and movements against them.

16. Sex-selective abortion and female infanticide continue to flourish both in rural areas and in urban areas, especially among the well-off that have greater access to technologies of pre-natal sex-determination. The latest census figures show that the number of girls in the 0-6 age-group has fallen to the lowest level since Independence – a mere 914 girls for every 1000 boys. Governments at the State and Centre have been deliberately lax in implementation of the PC & PNDT Act (Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994), allowing the unethical medical industry of pre-natal sex-determination and sex-selective abortions to flourish unchecked. In states like Haryana, the skewed sex ratio is also creating a situation where brides are being 'bought' from Kerala, Karnataka etc. The position of these women in such marriages is extremely vulnerable. Along with the implementation of the PC&PNDT Act, it is clear that son-preference and sex-selective abortions can be resisted only in tandem with a whole host of other measures that confront patriarchy and enhance the worth and dignity of women in society.

17. The social and political assertion of Dalits and backward castes is being met with violent feudal reaction all over the country. Women from these oppressed communities, in particular, bear the brunt of instances of public humiliation and sexual violence by feudal forces. Dalit women in particular face severe sexual violence, as well as humiliation and degradation at the hands of feudal forces and assertive middle castes. In most of these cases, the SC/ST Atrocities Act is not invoked. Adivasi women who are at the forefront of struggles against land grab are often subjected to rapes by police and security forces, during raids and in custody.

The widespread practice of branding women as 'witches' (dayan or tonhi) and killing or publicly humiliating them, is linked to

the targeting of single women or widows, often in order to grab their property. The sexual exploitation and abuse of women inside religious institutions or by so-called god-men is also a common phenomenon.

18. Women in the North East and Kashmir have fought heroically against state repression. The hunger fast of Irom Sharmila of Manipur and the nude protest of Manipur's women against the rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama have emerged as iconic protests against the AFSPA.

Women of the Muslim minority community are targeted by fascist forces for sexual violence during communal pogroms. Deprived of access to basic rights of education and employment, majoritarian communal campaigns have increased the ghettoisation of Muslim women, rendering them more vulnerable to discrimination and violence by fundamentalist forces from within the minority community.

The struggles of dalit, adivasi and Muslim women for their rights and dignity, and struggles of women of the North East and Kashmir against State repression are crucial concerns for the women's movement in India.

19. A powerful, multi-layered resistance to violence must be built, with the women's organisation, student-youth organisations, and cultural organisations at the forefront, encompassing campaigns for pro-women legislation; protests against governments and political forces that fail to defend women's rights and safety; and social initiatives such as women's neighbourhood watches, creative campaigns against victim-blaming, son-preference, domestic violence, 'honour' crimes and in support of women's right to make independent decisions in all spheres of life including education, love, marriage, clothes and life-style.

Women, Work, and Patriarchy

20. Economic liberalization has resulted in women being drawn into work in larger numbers – but in the more vulnerable and insecure sectors. The exploitation in these sectors is seldom purely 'economic' – gender is a crucial tool in this exploitation. For instance, young women textile workers in TN are made to

work in highly undemocratic and exploitative conditions – but it is made possible under the Sumangali scheme, which is promoted in the name of young women earning their dowry, and which taps into the widespread anxiety in society about dowry and marriage of young women. The central Government's ASHA, mid-day meals (at schools) and anganwadi schemes, too, exploit the patriarchal notion of women's selfless and unpaid 'service' to family and society, in order to justify paying the workers a mere 'honorarium' instead of the full pay and benefits due to government servants.

21. As women enter the workforce, they are confronted by gender discrimination at the workplace. Women continue to be paid less than men for the same work. Even in the MNREGA scheme, they are paid less than men, and their work is measured in discriminatory ways: for instance, they are paid according to the volume of earth moved rather than the hours of work! They are also subjected to discriminatory regulations (such as imposition of dress codes, sexist norms regarding appearance, and so on). Even in prestigious and upscale jobs, gender discrimination is rampant. Women cabin crew in Air India have recently won a long legal battle for the right to be appointed In-Flight Supervisors; and in the Army, women are denied the right to be appointed officers, on the grounds that jawans cannot be expected to take orders from women. Oppressive norms about female appearance not only discriminate against women in general, but also specifically against Dalit and adivasi women. Not long ago, adivasi women trained as cabin crew in Maharashtra were rejected jobs in the aviation industry because they were deemed 'physically unattractive' by the patriarchal standards of the market and of Brahminism.

22. Women constitute the bulk of the workforce in sectors such as domestic work, beedi, mid-day meal schemes, and are a considerable section of the workforce in sectors such as agricultural labour and tea garden labour. The conditions of work in these sectors are insecure and exploitative, with inherent gender discrimination, violence, and denial of dignity. In the case of women among the dalit agricultural workers and sanitation workers, and adivasi tea garden workers, caste and gender oppression combine to create severely exploitative conditions. We must pursue the demand for the government to set up a Committee to comprehensively study the conditions of women workers, and implement the recommendations

of the Committee in a time-bound manner. In the case of domestic workers, it is urgent to pressurize the Government to ratify, without delay, the ILO Convention of 2011 which has set out International Labour Standards for domestic workers, stipulating decent working conditions including duty hours, weekly rest for 24 hours, leaves, timely payment, right to associations and collective bargaining like other industrial workers.

23. Women's labour inside the home and family continues to be kept 'invisible'. Its character as labour is cloaked in ideological disguises, as the 'natural' or 'primary' role of women. Even the Census survey deems women involved with “cooking, cleaning of utensils, looking after children, fetching water, collecting firewood” to be unproductive “non-workers”. At the same time, terming women's labour inside the home to be their 'primary' function in society is often an excuse to pay women less at the workplace, on the pretext that their work is merely 'supplementary' to the income earned by men. Neoliberal policies and the resulting withdrawal of the State from social responsibilities, such as the provision of education, healthcare and sanitation has increased women's burden of unpaid work in households and communities.

24. In the wake of Supreme Court's criticism over classification of housework as non-work, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has proposed an honorarium to be paid by husbands to housewives, based on government's calculations of the economic value of housework. This proposal is highly misplaced and flawed. The fact is that women's unpaid work in the home subsidises capitalism by helping to depress the wages of workers. There is no point in payment by husbands for housework, because such payment does not add to the overall income of the household. Moreover, there is the danger that such 'payment' by the husband would in fact legitimise the sexual division of labour and absolve the husband of the obligation to share household work. It could also legitimise unequal control over finances within the household, by negating the right of women to have an equal control over household finances as a whole and instead implying that women will only have a right over the 'honorarium.' The recognition of the social and economic contribution of women's domestic labour within the household can be meaningful only if it facilitates women's freedom from the stultifying drudgery of housework. And this can happen only if the

State provides free care for children and the elderly; free health care; and other forms of social support such as crèches, community kitchens and laundries, along with secure and dignified jobs for women.

25. There has been much hype about the 'feminisation of labour' thanks to globalization. But it is significant that a recent international study ranks India at 131st place among 134 countries, on the question of women's 'economic participation and opportunity.' Only 35% of women in the country above the age of 15 participate in economic activity (i.e either work or seek work), compared to 85% of men. Unemployment rates are very high for women – in some cases, even higher than that for men. For instance, according to the NSSO 61st round, the unemployment rate (of those seeking but not getting work) in 2004-05 in the 20-24 age-group was 12% for rural men and 15% for rural women; while it was 16% for urban men and 27% for urban women.

26. In certain sectors, however, women's labour is, indeed, preferred – because they are viewed as 'supplementary' workers who can be paid less than men, and because of patriarchal ideas which view women as more 'suited' to certain kinds of work. Women are therefore, disproportionately represented in the informal sector, in what are called the '3D' (dirty, dangerous, demeaning) jobs. Women are also sometimes preferred because they are perceived as less likely to unionise or engage in struggles, (despite the many examples to the contrary) and more vulnerable to coercion as a result of unequal gender relations. As a result, women are most vulnerable to violations of labour laws and exploitative labour practices. The government must be compelled to set up a committee to make a comprehensive study of the conditions of women workers, especially in the unorganized sector, and implement its recommendations in a time-bound manner.

27. SHGs are peddled as the main vehicles for 'women's empowerment' by the Government. But microfinance institutions (MFIs) too exploit and reinforce patriarchal structures: women are seen as 'better borrowers' because they are less mobile and more vulnerable to social 'shame'. In the name of 'shaming tactics' to ensure loan recovery, women are deployed against one another. Far from empowering women, MFIs take advantage of women's lack of

access to institutional credit, and charge exploitative interest rates, which combined with coercive loan recovery methods, have been found to push women into prostitution or the clutches of rapacious moneylenders to repay debts. More than 50 suicide cases have been recorded recently in Andhra Pradesh among MFI-linked women. Instead of ensuring women's access to bank loans, governments focus only on microcredit for women, and have recently mooted the tokenist gesture of an all-women's bank. Increasingly too, banks and corporates are using MFI networks to draw rural poor women into global circuits of exploitation and profit. We should not only intensify our struggle to make loans available to women through government banks, but also bring the MFIs under strict supervision and fixing of strict caps on the rate of interest they charge.

Political parties also try to use SHGs as vote-banks, doling out money to them at the time of elections, and using them to consolidate communal and caste-based mobilization. We need to campaign to alert the SHG women against being used to further such political agendas.

28. The global economic crisis has had an especially negative impact on women's employment and lives in developing Asian countries like India. This is because women have a large share of jobs in the sectors that are worst hit by the crisis: textiles, garments, footwear and leather, electronics, hotels and restaurants, fisheries, and construction. When the global crisis happened in 2008, 700,000 clothing and textile workers in India lost their jobs, most of them women.

29. The entry of corporate retail has also hit women's employment. Women who fail to find jobs in other sectors have usually found 'refuge' in petty retail trade (i.e small shops or street vending). But women's share of employment in this sector has fallen sharply with the entry of big corporate players, and urban development policies of evicting informal vendors. With FDI in multi-brand retail, no doubt women in petty retail trade in both rural and urban India will be hit even harder, while women employees of global corporate retailers will bear the brunt of exploitative labour conditions.

30. As the economic crisis deepens, more and more women are compelled to enter into sex work as a means of survival in the absence

of secure and properly paid work. As long as poor women remain deprived of secure, properly paid employment, many of them will have no other choice but to seek refuge in exploitative and dangerous sex work. A large number of sex workers in India are brought into sex work by force, kidnapping and violence. Women of some oppressed castes are also forced into sex work as a form of bondage; in the case of the devadasi system, this kind of sexual bondage is promoted by religious institutions. We must struggle for an end to forced sex work and to sexual bondage in the name of caste and religious traditions; for measures to protect women already engaged in sex work from coercion, exploitation, violence, and harassment; for social services and fullest citizenship rights (including the right to organize) for sex workers and their dependents; as well as secure, dignified employment for women to safeguard them from being compelled by circumstance to enter sex work, and equally, to make it genuinely viable for women to leave sex work.

31. While recognizing sex work as a key manifestation of the patriarchal relations which we are fighting to abolish, and as a particularly exploitative and demeaning form of work which emerges from unequal and distorted social relations rather than being in any way socially necessary, we must also recognise the demands for basic rights, respect and freedom from stigma which are currently being articulated by sex workers themselves. Clearly, the fact that sex workers are criminalized greatly increases the scope for their harassment and abuse.

We should also be aware however that full-scale decriminalization of the sex industry (as opposed to removing the liability for prosecution of sex workers themselves) in the Indian context is likely to lead to greater involvement of global capital, the growth of racist sex tourism, and even servicing US military bases in the region, as has been the experience in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. More generally, it reinforces the idea of sex work as an employment 'choice' for women, allowing the state to further disown any responsibility for the survival of poor women.

32. Women in India have also become even more vulnerable to sex trafficking in the context of neoliberal globalization and the development of global markets in women's bodies, particularly women from 'Third World' countries. Luring and trafficking of

women both within the country and abroad, under the ruse of love or offer of jobs has become rampant. Trafficking of women for domestic work is also rampant, with women from adivasi and other oppressed communities being especially vulnerable. We must struggle against all forms of trafficking including sex trafficking, in ways which respect the rights and dignity of those who are trafficked, in contrast to the paternalistic and dehumanizing approach of NGOs engaged in 'rescuing' women from trafficking.

Discrimination in the Political Sphere

33. Women continue to be abysmally under-represented in the Parliament and Assemblies. Fanning up a phobia against women's freedom and assertion is increasingly coming into its own as a means of reaping political capital. The case of 33% reservation for women is telling. The opposition to the bill claimed to rest on the demand for reservation for OBC women. But increasingly, that demand has taken a back seat – and opponents of the bill are openly indulging in gender-biased rhetoric against women's entry into Parliament! And the ruling coalitions of UPA (and earlier NDA), have shown their true colours by allowing such openly gender biased forces to carry the day and prevent the passage of the bill. The demand for a quota for OBCs and minorities must not become a pretext to stall or dilute the Bill, and can be incorporated within the ambit of 33% seats for women, as long as the Bill is passed without further delay.

34. In panchayats, 50% of the seats are reserved for women, and elected women representatives are challenging patriarchal forces. However, discrimination against elected women representatives, continues – for instance, in the 'panch pati' syndrome where the husband acts on behalf of the elected woman, and in various forms of caste and gender discrimination. Women in politics and public life at all levels – from panchayats to Parliament to people's movements – face sexist and gendered abuse by opponents. Activists of the KNCA associated with the AIPWA have been active in demanding 50% reservation for women in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, on the lines of the reservation in panchayats.

35. Vibrant and powerful women's participation and assertion in the political arena beyond parliament and panchayats is essential

to take reservation beyond tokenism, and to create a political and socio-cultural climate in favour of women's needs and concerns.

Women's Movement and Liberalisation: Some Concerns

36. Liberalisation has posed new challenges for the women's movement, and has also led to some disturbing trends in the women's movement. The widespread NGO-isation of women's groups, and a spurt in funding for such groups by government and funding agencies has seriously crippled the autonomy of the women's movement. Governments have, in many cases, succeeded in securing legitimacy by outsourcing their responsibilities to NGOs. NGO involvement in formulation and implementation of policies is peddled as 'participatory development.' Project-based funding has led to fragmentation of the women's organisation in the name of single-issue organisations, and has allowed funders to set the agenda for the groups they fund. Funding and NGO-isation effectively restricts and discourages the ability of women's groups to confront the State and the neoliberal economic policies.

Women's Rights as Rights of Free Citizens

37. The Indian State tends to frame women, not as citizens in their own right, but in terms of their familial and reproductive roles. It has tended to adopt a paternalistic attitude towards women, rather than recognize its obligation to safeguard women's inalienable rights. This tendency can be seen when state governments conduct 'group marriages' or 'marriage schemes for girls' or distributes money for mangalsutras/thalis. Ostensibly, these schemes offer support to poor families to relieve them of the burden of marriage expenses, but they often have an openly patriarchal subtext. These schemes often demean women by upholding the premium on female 'virginity', as has been seen in the 'virginity' and pregnancy 'tests' conducted for brides by the Madhya Pradesh Government. Instead of adopting policies that enable women to achieve social and economic autonomy, such schemes instead project marriage, as arranged by the state on behalf of parents or community, as sufficient to ensure security and welfare of women. Other examples are schemes (like the Delhi Government's Ladli scheme or the West Bengal Government's

Kanyashree scheme) ostensibly meant to protect the girl child, by promising a certain cash amount when the girl attains maturity. By providing the amount when the girl attains marriageable age, the government is actually subsidizing dowry in a disguised way!

38. Women have to struggle for a range of rights as citizens: for PDS rations, for health, and for education. Even though women's rights to ancestral property have been legally recognized, women are seldom able to claim their rightful share without prolonged legal battles, which few women can afford. Women are especially active in struggles for homestead plots in rural areas, since they are the worst affected by the semi-bondage of living on land belonging to employers. Women are also very active in struggles for urban housing; against eviction and corporate land grab; against price rise; and against nuclear and other environmentally destructive projects. While strengthening women's participation in all these struggles, we must also lay greater emphasis on mobilizing young women around the whole set of demands that are central for women to secure guaranteed access to education, employment, and healthcare (for example, hostels for women students and working women; crèche facilities for women in organized and unorganized sectors; free education for schoolgirls as well as aids to education like books, laptops and bicycles; and longer maternity leave, functional and properly equipped primary health centres providing free, specialized medical care for women, and district and subdivisional level hospitals with women's wards with adequate seats).

39. Women have also been at the forefront of anti-liquor struggles in many states (most notably Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and quite recently, Bihar). Alcoholism in men has a grievous impact on the lives of poor women: causing scarce income to be squandered on liquor; deaths due to toxic illegal liquor; and contributing to domestic violence against women and children. In such movements, women have targeted the governments' policy of promoting alcohol out of consideration for revenues, at the cost of the well-being of women and their families. The consequences for women are similar in the case of drug abuse in states like Punjab, where there is a covert policy of promoting drug dependence among labouring youth in order to extract longer hours of heavy manual labour.

40. One international study shows that when it comes to women's health and survival, India's performance is at rock-bottom (at 134th place among 135 countries). India has one of the worst maternal mortality rates in the world. 57.9% pregnant women and 56.2% married women suffer from anaemia: clearly pointing to poverty, chronic malnutrition, and gender biases that affect the vast majority of Indian women.

41. In the name of family planning, sterilisation campaigns, often funded by foreign institutions, target women and put their bodies at risk. Recently there have been multiple instances of hasty sterilisation operations performed under insanitary conditions against women's will in Bihar, funded by the UK's DfID, resulting in a large number of deaths and mutilation of women.

42. The Government and pharmaceutical companies promote dubious and dangerous injectable contraceptives like Depo-Provera and Net-en, playing with women's health in the process. India's poor women are used as guinea pigs for a variety of pharmaceutical experiments, and women, especially those from vulnerable poor and dalit/advasi backgrounds, are being subjected to vaccine research and clinical trials without informed consent. For instance, recently, in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, 7 advasi girls between 10-14 years old, died after being injected with the trial vaccine for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

43. Alarming, India has emerged as a destination for commercial surrogate motherhood – whereby poor Indian women rent out their wombs to rich Indian and foreign parents for payment. 'Commissioning' parents often demand surrogate mothers of fair skin and 'high' caste. The surrogate mothers in question, at present, find their lives and health at great risk, in service of an industry that exploits their poverty and desperation. Rather than putting a stop to this practice until a wider debate on the ethical dimensions of surrogacy can be conducted with the participation of women's groups, the Indian Government is promoting the practice and has proposed a Bill to legalise and 'regulate' it.

44. Struggles of homosexuals and sexual minorities for rights and dignity and against discrimination, have asserted themselves in recent times. In spite of a landmark verdict by the Delhi High Court in 2009 decriminalising homosexuality, the Government has

yet to take any steps to do away with Section 377 that discriminates against same-sex relationships. Scrapping of Section 377 will open the avenues for these groups (such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and including hijras) to demand greater protection, rights, and dignity.

45. Women's Commissions in states as well as the National Women's Commission have come into being thanks to women's struggles. But, stacked with political appointees and strapped for funds, hands, and powers, they are far from fulfilling their purpose. It is urgent that the NCW and State Women's Commissions be given statutory powers, and heads and members of women's commissions be selected based on their experience in the women's movement, and in consultation with women's organisations, rather than based on political patronage. Women's commissions should also be made accountable to the women's movement: they should be obligated to hold regular consultative meetings with women's organisations.

Initiatives and Tasks of the Party and the Women's Organisation

46. Historically, struggle against oppression, discrimination and humiliation, for equality, freedom and dignity has been the main plank of our party and our women's organisation, with its main base among rural and urban poor. This movement has mobilised thousands of poor peasant and labouring women (overwhelmingly from the oppressed castes) in militant struggles against feudal oppression and exploitation and raised this struggle to the level of a political movement, dealing body blows to structures of feudal-kulak power both as part of revolutionary peasant movement and in its own right as communist women's movement. Party leaders like Manju Devi have been killed by the Ranveer Sena for their role in mobilizing women against the feudal-patriarchal forces. This remains its great distinctive feature among women's organizations in India and we must maintain and further develop this emphasis.

47. Today, too, struggles of rural and urban peasant and working class women against all kinds of violence and exploitation remains the mainstay of AIPWA's work. It has also been active in struggles against state repression and custodial violence, especially against AFSPA and Operation Green Hunt, and has spearheaded

struggles for women's equal wages and rights, mobilizing women MNREGA workers and agricultural labourers.

48. In several recent instances, AIPWA's intervention has proved to be politically crucial. In the movement following the December 16 gang rape in Delhi, AIPWA played a central role in orienting and leading the movement, establishing the slogan of 'Fearless Freedom (Bekhauf Azaadi)' as the definitive slogan of the movement. Another significant instance was the Rupam Pathak case in Bihar, where the JD(U)-BJP Government, the ruling class Opposition and the media had initially united in virulent patriarchal denunciation of the schoolteacher accused of killing a BJP MLA. AIPWA's bold and timely intervention exposed the fact that Rupam had filed charges of sexual assault against the MLA and his PA, which the police had failed to act upon. Very soon, AIPWA turned the tide of public opinion in favour of a struggle for justice for Rupam Pathak and against the patriarchal pronouncements of senior Bihar Government leaders, defending the tainted MLA. The jail sentence for Rupam Pathak has exposed the patriarchal biases of the CBI and the judiciary, and the women's movement for justice for Rupam Pathak continues. More recently, a popular struggle led by the party and AIPWA against the gang-rape of a schoolgirl by feudal lumpens in Gaya (Bihar) was met with police firing and severe repression. This struggle was among the major incidents that sparked off a state-wide bandh in which state repression and sexual violence were major issues. In the case of the rape and murder of a 14-year old Muslim girl by policemen inside a police station in Nighasan, Uttar Pradesh in June 2011, AIPWA and CPI(ML) were at the forefront of a prolonged struggle that eventually forced the Government to order a CBI enquiry. In Punjab, dalit women agricultural labour associated with AIALA were arrested en masse when they agitated for homestead land. This demand had special significance for women, who, in the absence of their own homestead land, were forced to undergo humiliation as a consequence of dependence on the land-owner's land, for their homes as well as for defecation.

49. Women factory workers, plantation labourers, construction workers, *beedi* workers, brick kiln workers, bank and office employees etc constitute an important segment of our general TU base. Wherever possible the women's organisation should work regularly among them so as to develop an important auxiliary

base. Such work can only be carried on in cooperation with the concerned TUs, just as the work among the rural poor is conducted in coordination with local units of AIALA and AIKM.

50. But there are areas where the AIPWA itself takes a direct role in organising labouring women: those residing in *jhuggi jhopris* for example, who provide the bulk of our urban mass base among women. AIPWA comrades have also built up local organisations of domestic workers in some cities and towns, in West Bengal for instance.

51. Then there are women from poor and middle peasant background who, thanks to steady diversification of the rural economy, are joining other occupations in large numbers. Most important among them are the honorarium- and incentive-based workers, numbering around 30 lakh nationally, and still growing. Victims of a whole range of neoliberal labour policies like casualisation of permanent jobs, extremely exploitative feminisation of low-paid work and denial of even minimum wages, not to speak of government employee status, to those engaged in hundred percent public projects, they have shown a great urge to get organised and fight for economic justice and social dignity. As members of peasant families they retain the organic links with the life and struggle of the peasantry and at the same time actively fight against economic deprivation as workers as well as humiliation and harassment as women.

52. Given this real-life interpenetration of class and gender characteristics and aspirations, it is but natural that both the TUs Centre and the women's organisation have contributed to an appreciable expansion of our work in this sector. Our main achievement so far has been the formation of an all India federation of ASHA unions, which organised an impressive *dharna* at the national capital in September 2011. Since its main demands are targeted at the union government and to an extent also at the state governments, the federation can cope with competition from its counterparts and achieve something only by moving beyond a localised existence and rapidly expanding itself. State and district level organisations of mid-day meal cooks have also been formed. In UP, AIPWA has organised mid-day meal cooks at the district-level in Deoria and led successful struggles that forced the District

Magistrate to put a stop to attempts to sack them. There is a great potential to expand such organisations and struggles on a wider scale.

53. When cadres of the women's organisation organise these working women, mainly on their urgent, i.e. economic demands, they do not deviate from the cause of women's movement to economic struggles or economism. On the contrary, they are providing AIPWA with its own independent base, and a growing, dynamic base at that, which can, given proper orientation, serve as an organised contingent of the broader women's movement. This practice should therefore be encouraged so as to tap the huge potential inherent in this mobile, socially dynamic, relatively educated (in the cases of ASHAs and Anganwadi workers) and militant contingent of working women in a more planned way. Naturally, this requires close political understanding and organisational coordination between the women's organisation and the TU centre.

54. To develop a broad-based women's movement it is absolutely necessary to expand our reach among college students and teachers, media women and intellectuals in general. For an organisation like ours, with its main social base among the rural poor, this is a real challenge. The women's magazines published by us in Hindi, English, Assamese and Bengali should be put to better use for this purpose.

55. In addition to these classes and strata, another section merits our special attention: women people's representatives in panchayats. Socially and politically active at the grassroots, they can be a very good medium for reaching out to the masses and gathering feedback from the masses. The women's organisation can hold village level mass meetings and invite all women representatives and candidates to discuss problems routinely faced by women – relating to potable water and health services, for example – as well as political topics like, say, expected and actual roles of women representatives following 50% reservation, panchayats. Post elections, it should encourage and assist women representatives to fight against hidebound traditions as well as caste and gender discrimination, act independently of male 'guardians' and forcefully raise women's issues among general issues of common people.

56. The party has, for long, been concerned about substantially increasing the number of women party members and promoting

their ideological-political development to ensure an increase in the number of women cadres and leaders. We must continue to address this challenge with a variety of organisational and educational measures. We need to accord greater emphasis *as a communist party* (not our women's organisation alone) to anti-patriarchal struggles. We must also recognise that patriarchal common sense tends to have a stubborn grip on society – and therefore on our rank and file and even our political leadership. Therefore, our political practice needs to be accompanied by relentless and ruthless introspection and conscious efforts to analyse and challenge patriarchal ideology and practices. Only then can we breathe life into progressive and democratic anti-patriarchal ideas and make them a material force that energises our entire movement as well as society at large.

The Tasks and Orientation of the Student-Youth Movement

1. In the face of a deepening economic and social crisis and rapidly declining credibility and legitimacy of the ruling elite, we are once again witnessing very encouraging signs of a powerful student-youth movement across the country. The wind that started blowing in 2011 against corruption, corporate loot and growing collusion between big corporations and the ruling elite became a veritable storm by December 2012, erupting right in the national capital over the issue of justice for the 23-year-old paramedical student who was gang-raped and brutalised in a moving bus in Delhi and who died subsequently in a Singapore hospital. AISA and RYA, the flagship platforms of revolutionary democracy in the student-youth movement, have been playing a key role in mobilising the student-youth community in the ongoing struggles against corporate plunder and sexual violence and for the freedom of women.

2. The youth upsurge in Delhi (which soon spread to other parts of the country) which saw equal participation of both young women and men was the first instance of its kind when the issue of gender violence occupied the centre-stage of a massive and sustained campaign braving water cannons, tear gas and barbaric lathicharge. At a time when the ruling elite is waxing eloquent about the youth and its aspirations and reactionary political forces are desperately seeking to use the youth to serve their sectarian and anti-democratic political agenda, the independent assertion of youth power around

key questions of democracy is a development of great revolutionary significance.

3. From Latin America to Europe, and from the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring, from Tahrir Square to the Shahabag protests, there is a powerful imprint of the youth on what can be termed a global awakening against neo-liberalism, imperialism and tyranny. Viewed against this international backdrop, the growing democratic assertion of the youth in India has delivered a big blow to the imperialist lie that the days of youth revolt were over and that bourgeois consumerism was the ultimate answer to the aspirations and dreams of the youth.

4. Naxalbari marked the first youth revolt in independent India rising in support of the peasant rebellion and propelled by the revolutionary dream of building a new democratic India. Just when the ruling classes thought they had crushed it, there came the second wave of youth upsurge in the form of the 1974 movement against corruption and autocracy. The ongoing student-youth awakening may well be termed the third major milestone in this series. Even though it may not yet have any explicit agenda of radical social transformation or political change, it certainly has the potential to grow into a powerful upsurge against feudal-patriarchal fetters, corporate-imperialist plunder and authoritarianism and state repression.

5. All these youth revolts highlight the essential features of any vibrant youth movement – (i) the sensitivity of the youth to larger social and political questions, especially to the key agenda of democracy, freedom, justice and social transformation, (ii) the ability of the youth to forge a fighting unity transcending the barriers of caste, creed, language, culture and social status or background, and (iii) the indomitable spirit of resistance and refusal to bow to any unreasonable and repressive authority. While recognising the specific conditions and needs and aspirations of the youth faced with vastly different circumstances, we must never lose sight of the broader character of the youth movement.

6. In India's official discourse the youth is invoked only as a demographic category. There is enough empty talk about India reaping demographic dividends thanks to her growing contingent of young people without ever really recognising the basic needs,

aspirations and rights of the youth. The fact that half of India's population is below 25 years of age and two-thirds of Indian people are less than 35 years and that consequently India has the world's biggest contingent of youth cannot be treated as a statistical record to marvel at. The real question is how much is the country investing in its youth and what kind of opportunities are the youth getting to explore, express and develop their talent and enormous capacity.

7. The agenda of education, health, employment, adequate availability of opportunities in diverse fields of life, affirmative action for students and youth from remote areas and disadvantaged social, cultural and economic backgrounds, and freedom of choice and freedom from fear is central to the healthy and balanced development of India's children and young people. Yet these are the most neglected aspects in India's corporate-driven imperialist-dictated development strategy. The result is a huge reserve army of unemployed people, abundant supply of cheap labour in the Indian labour market and constant assured flow of skilled labour and professionals to foreign countries to fulfil the needs of global capital (brain drain).

8. Instead of ensuring universal quality education for all, and using education as a tool for rapid and comprehensive human development, the ruling classes are using education as a tool to reinforce and reproduce inequality in the society by all possible means. Whether we talk of quality primary education or higher education, especially in specialised areas like medical sciences and various avenues of technology, commercialisation and privatisation of education is the order of the day. While anarchy is allowed to prevail in most government-run educational institutions where teachers and educational facilities are always in short supply, private coaching centres are mushrooming across the country. The entry of foreign universities in India will further strengthen this trend of commercialisation and privatisation, turning higher education into an elitist preserve.

9. The so-called Right to Education Act passed by the UPA Government has in fact institutionalized the trend of privatization of education that makes good quality schooling unaffordable for poor students. In higher education also, the UPA Government has introduced a set of Bills that attempt to facilitate corporate takeover

of higher education, freeing private and foreign players of regulatory frameworks and any obligations towards social justice. State governments have also begun to legislate laws for the setting up of private universities. The Four Year Undergraduate Programme being imposed in Delhi University in the face of resistance by educators and students alike, is another indicator of the ruling class agenda of integrating India's higher education with the American model, while institutionalising the tendency of economically and socially deprived students to drop-out of higher education.

The student-youth movement will have to fight hard for the reversal of the policy of privatisation and to secure universal right to affordable quality education through a common school system and to keep higher education within the reach of students from rural, working class or lower-middle class backgrounds. Parents and general people should also be involved in struggles against hikes in fees of private schools and highly inadequate quota for poor students. In colleges and universities, struggles should be intensified against fee hikes and for facilities like hostels, libraries and laboratories.

10. The systematic policy of communalising and saffronising education poses a serious challenge to the student movement, especially in BJP-NDA ruled states. Moreover, even in universities in the metropolises, the communal outfits have, through violent protests, succeeded in censoring the syllabus, thanks to the shameful surrender by educational establishments and non-BJP Governments. Prominent instances include the withdrawal of Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* from the Mumbai University syllabus and withdrawal of AK Ramanujam's seminal essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas* from the Delhi University syllabus following violence by the Shiv Sena's youth wing and the ABVP. The student movement must offer robust resistance to every attempt at saffronisation and censorship, whether by Governments or communal outfits. In addition, the student movement must also struggle to ensure that syllabi and pedagogic practices, as well as the ethos of schools and higher education institutions, are socio-culturally and linguistically inclusive. The student movement must also strive to uproot deeply-entrenched class, caste, and gender discrimination in the educational structures.

11. While trying to keep large numbers of students away from

higher education, the ruling classes are also trying their best to curb campus democracy and deny students their basic democratic right to elect their unions and have their say. Regular elections are not held in many universities – for example, elections were held recently in Patna University after a gap of nearly three decades. Even in a campus like Jawaharlal Nehru University known for its democratic environment, elections could not be held for four years thanks to the unreasonable and undemocratic restrictions imposed by the Lyngdoh Committee. AISA has been in the forefront of the student movement for restoration and expansion of campus democracy.

12. The right to work remains conspicuously absent in our constitutional charter of fundamental rights. The much trumpeted MNREGA, touted as the world's biggest employment guarantee programme, makes a mockery of the concept of employment guarantee. Unemployment allowance is used as a paltry occasional dole to win elections in a state or two, and the growing army of the unemployed has absolutely no provision of social security. The fight for securing the fundamental right to dignified employment and adequate unemployment allowance for periods without employment therefore remains a key task of the youth movement.

13. With higher education or professional training courses becoming increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible, millions of young people have to go in for whatever jobs are available. These jobs are mostly contractual, involving heavy work-loads and long hours of work in lieu of extremely insufficient income. Regularisation of employment and improvement in wages and working conditions remains the central concern for these young workers. The youth movement must address this central concern in close cooperation with concerned trade unions.

14. Issues like mass education, public health and sanitation, civic amenities, energy, public transport, environmental justice and disaster management must also figure prominently as important concerns of the student-youth movement. We are passing through a paradoxical situation in which urbanisation is going on in an unplanned manner without adequate and appropriate infrastructure or minimal civic amenities. Instead of taking responsibility for filling these gaps, the neo-liberal state is busy privatising every essential service. Rural areas are of course far more neglected in

terms of infrastructure, basic services and civic amenities. The fight for basic amenities, affordable housing and functional services has therefore assumed paramount importance and the youth movement must respond accordingly.

15. The student-youth movement inspired by the Naxalbari tradition has always been driven by the dream of radical social transformation. Integration with the working people and their struggles, especially with the rural poor, has therefore been a cardinal principle for revolutionary youth vanguards. While taking up the whole range of immediate and key issues concerning the overwhelming majority of students and youth, and trying to broaden the base of the movement, vanguard activists must continue to uphold and practise this basic revolutionary principle. In the present phase, the student-youth movement must boldly stand by the peasant-*adivasi* resistance to corporate land-grab and mining loot and the working class movement for industrial democracy and trade union rights.

16. Afraid of the huge potential of united assertion of the youth, the ruling classes constantly try to divide the youth along caste, communal, linguistic and regional lines. Maharashtra has seen the ugliest kind of chauvinistic politics systematically targeting and attacking young job-seekers and migrant workers from Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The sinister SMS-campaign in the wake of the Kokrajhar violence in Assam and the resultant panic has revealed the vulnerability and insecurity experienced by students and young migrant workers from the North-eastern region.

17. In many parts of the country students and youth from oppressed castes continue to face feudal violence and social discrimination and humiliation. The miserable conditions prevailing in hostels meant for dalit and *adivasi* students, shocking reports of systematic sexual exploitation of young tribal girls in some states, the inhuman ragging often faced by dalit-*adivasi* students in engineering colleges, and the recent attacks on dalit student hostels in Bihar in the wake of the killing of the Ranveer Sena chief give us an idea of the kind of plight and prejudices that students from disadvantaged social background have to experience within the education system and the larger society. Young people, especially Dalit youth, who

marry in defiance of caste norms, have been at the receiving end of violence at the hands of khap panchayats and regressive forces. The freedom of young people, especially young women, has been under attack from the Sangh Parivar and various fundamentalist outfits. The revolutionary student-youth movement must stand up boldly against feudal, casteist, communal, chauvinistic, patriarchal and sectarian violence in any part of the country.

18. SC/ST reservations in jobs often routinely go unfulfilled; and in the era of liberalisation, there are systematic attempts to undermine SC/ST and OBC reservations in jobs and education. AISA has led some significant and successful struggles against such attempts. AISA's movement which led to a landmark verdict against the subversion of OBC quotas in universities was of national significance. The student movement must defend SC/ST and OBC reservations against the ideological assaults in the name of 'merit' as well as against the attempts to subvert such quotas.

19. In many parts of the country, Muslim and tribal youth find themselves at the receiving end of a relentless state-led witch-hunt campaign. Branded respectively as terrorists and Maoists, many innocent Muslim and adivasi youth have been implicated in false cases and are languishing in jail, while some have fallen prey to staged encounter killings or even custodial death. In Kashmir, Manipur and certain other areas where the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act is in operation, or in areas under the repressive Operation Greenhunt, large sections of the youth face a veritable war-like situation. The long arm of state repression also seeks to crush fundamental rights of citizens by slapping sedition charges or various clauses of the criminal law as has been seen in several recent cases. Students at the forefront of mass movements – such as for a separate Telangana and for justice for the Tamil victims of genocide in Sri Lanka - have been met with state repression. The question of defending liberty and democracy must therefore continue to be high on the agenda of the student-youth movement.

20. The massive participation of young men alongside young women in the recent upsurge against the Delhi gang-rape case has highlighted the need to recognise the question of resisting sexual assault and patriarchal violence as a key agenda of the youth movement. The point is not to merely seek exemplary punishment

for a few rapists or to inculcate the spirit of chivalry among young men to protect the dignity of women, but to reject the patriarchal baggage lock, stock and barrel. This calls for a veritable revolt against the feudal-patriarchal order that continues to dominate the mass mindscape and mainstream social values and a major attitudinal change that can enable men to treat women as equal human beings in every sphere. The struggle between the rotten old system and our cherished values and dreams of democracy, freedom and equality manifests itself most sharply and with great intensity on the whole set of issues that are often loosely described as the women's question. The student-youth movement must treat the question of women's freedom and rights as a central part of the youth agenda, boldly uphold progressive democratic values, reject retrograde views and practices and resist moral policing or caste/community threats in matters of individual freedom.

21. A powerful student-youth movement necessarily calls for powerful mass-based revolutionary organisations among students and youths. In this regard, both AISA and RYA have achieved a degree of stable and organised expansion in recent years, but if we are to do real justice to the potential of the present situation we need a much bigger breakthrough. The student-youth awakening and assertion we are currently witnessing in the country is a much larger, truly national, phenomenon. Our own experience also highlights the huge potential and there is need to spread the organisational network of AISA and RYA to smaller towns and semi-urban panchayat areas.

22. To conclude, let us recall the clarion call of Comrade Vinod Mishra that is particularly relevant for today's youth movement: "Key questions of social and political importance are never settled within the four walls of State Assemblies or Parliament. All such major questions are always clinched through the movement on the street, beyond the boundaries of parliament, and at times even bombarding the unresponsive institutions. This is the way every major movement has advanced in history. The power of the student-youth movement must make every corrupt minister and official (and, we may add, those who are guilty of feudal-communal atrocities and violence against women) shiver in terror."

Resolution on Intervention in Panchayati Raj Institutions

1. The panchayati raj institutions acquired constitutional status through the 73rd Amendment, 1993 and the subsequent Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), 1996. In official discourse, the panchayats are celebrated as a model of democratic decentralisation or decentralisation of power. The 'power' in the case of panchayats does not however refer to any kind of policy-making or plan-formulating function; it essentially denotes only power to implement schemes and policies that are decided by the central and state governments. Within this limited framework, the panchayats deal with 29 subjects covering a broad spectrum of basic services. Decentralisation of power or democracy should therefore be understood only in the sense of delegation of responsibilities and devolution of funds.

2. The Gram Sabhas under PESA are of course supposed to enjoy considerably greater power including the right to be consulted in matters of land acquisition and rehabilitation and resettlement and mandatory power of recommendation before any mining licence is granted within its jurisdiction. But in real life the Gram Sabhas whether under PESA or under PRIs governed by the 73rd Amendment remain the most neglected and violated aspect of the panchayati raj. The ongoing massive mining loot in tribal-inhabited mineral-rich areas and the countrywide corporate land-grab

campaign tell the true story of the mockery of the powers of Gram Sabhas and panchayati raj institutions. More powers to panchayats must first of all mean more powers to and respect for Gram Sabhas and the latter must have a direct say in the implementation of every scheme concerning the rural poor.

3. While the claim of panchayats providing a platform of direct or participatory democracy at the grassroots is utterly untrue, there has clearly been a huge expansion in terms of elected representation. With 50% reservation of seats for women, apart from reservation for SC/ST and OBCs, the ambit of representation has also clearly expanded. The panchayats have thus definitely facilitated the entry of large numbers of common people, especially women, in public life and ignited democratic aspirations among the masses.

4. But the mobilisation and assertion of the people within the panchayats cannot happen spontaneously – it has to be organised consciously and herein lies the great role of class struggle and of the Communist Party. The ruling classes on the other hand try to obfuscate and obstruct this process in the name of partyless panchayats and by extending their own class network through a corrupt nexus of officials, panchayat functionaries and middlemen, contractors and dealers. The panchayats have been a key instrument in the hands of the ruling classes in deepening their penetration and strengthening their network. Even Gram Sabhas, idealised by many as village republics, are very much subjected to the forces and processes of caste, class and gender hierarchy and domination. Any non-class or supra-class illusion about panchayats will therefore prove suicidal for the revolutionary movement – the revolutionary class line must be practised in real earnest to turn the panchayats into a platform of counter-mobilisation of the masses to defeat the dominant powers.

5. The rise of panchayats as the centre of rural political life has brought in its wake a whole set of new contradictions and issues. The contradiction between the common people and the nexus that usually controls the panchayat and often misappropriates much of the funds is a most common feature in most panchayats. In many places, the district and block administration tries to bypass or overrule elected panchayat representatives. More often than not women representatives are sought to be used as figureheads or

pawns by powerful male family members, while the feudal-kulak lobby seeks to coerce or co-opt representatives from dalits and extremely backward castes by exercising their power and influence. And then every scheme administered through the panchayats, even if implemented honestly, invariably generates mass grievances because of the sheer mismatch of demand and supply. Unless these contradictions are properly grasped and handled by relying on the people and keeping revolutionary communist politics in command, even long-standing leaders of people's struggles run the risk of being corrupted by and assimilated in the ruling class scheme of panchayat politics.

6. For years there was no panchayat system in Bihar and Jharkhand. The system was introduced in Bihar only in 2001 and Jharkhand had its first panchayat elections only in 2011. Our performance in panchayat elections has been better in Jharkhand than in Bihar. In Bihar we have been winning in the range of 15-20 Zila Parishad seats, 100-125 Mukhiya (directly elected panchayat president) seats, and 100-150 panchayat samiti members. In Jharkhand we won 20 ZP seats, 144 PS seats and 120 Mukhiya seats. Subsequently, we could win the chairperson post in Garhwa district while losing the chairperson post in Koderma in a tie and finishing third in Chairperson post and second in vice-chairperson post in Giridih district where we have a powerful opposition group of 8 ZP members. In Jharkhand we also won the Block Pramukh (president of panchayat samiti) post in 5 blocks. In other states our scale of success in panchayat elections is still very low.

7. More than winning elections, the main challenge in the panchayat arena is how we use these victories in the interest of the movement. Our Party line clearly enjoins us to use the panchayats as a platform of class struggle, as organs of service to the people, of struggle for people's rights and resistance to the dominant feudal-kulak power and the state led by the big bourgeoisie. Party members elected in various levels of Panchayats must strictly implement the Party line and subordinate themselves to committee discipline and mass supervision. Following the serious discussion initiated in the Bardhaman convention (2006) and subsequently in the 8th Congress (2007) and the July 28 call of 2010, there has been some improvement on this score, but much remains to be done.

8. The whole Party, especially the state and district committees of the Party must pay much greater attention to our panchayat practice and guide and help the block and panchayat-level committees in integrating our panchayat practice with extra-panchayat mass action and the Party's overall political line. There have been a few recent instances of combining our representation and intervention in panchayats with successful mass political mobilisation. In Garwah district, our chairperson Com. Sushma Mehta was abducted by an armed group of Maoists while the police wrongfully arrested one of our Mukhiyas charging him with complicity with the Maoists. In the face of a powerful mass protest Maoists had to free Com. Sushma and other abductees even though the arrested Mukhiya is still in jail. All parties of the ruling classes including the Congress and the BJP have conspired to topple the district council by bringing in no-confidence motion, but such moves have so far been successfully foiled. In Birni block of Giridih district, elected panchayat representatives led a powerful mass agitation for restoration of electricity supply. In a panchayat in Sandesh block in Bhojpur, panchayat representatives successfully forced the block and district administration to delete non-deserving names from the BPL list. In a couple of panchayats in Patna district, our Mukhiyas successfully defied feudal resistance and administrative pressure to distribute diesel subsidy among tenants, eventually forcing the state government to change its policy and extend subsidies to all tenants.

9. The best experiences of intervention in and utilisation of panchayat have come from areas where there is a strong Party organisation and a live environment of struggles and popular assertion. The moot question is how to integrate the panchayat work with the perspective and priorities of class struggle in the area. Only by subordinating the panchayat work to the extra-panchayat perspective and priorities of struggle can we strengthen the movement and make sure that the people can prevail and defeat the feudal-kulak design to subordinate the panchayat to its interests. Where we lose this perspective, Party committees are reduced to panchayat managing agencies and the schemes of the panchayat begin to overshadow the agenda of class struggle.

10. It must also be clearly grasped that the task of using the panchayats as platforms of struggle cannot be accomplished just by concerned Party committees. The key question is to subject the

panchayat to the constant assertion and supervision of the people. Party committees and the network of mass organisations must work in tandem to exert constant mass pressure on panchayats. The Gram Sabha could be a particularly useful forum for this purpose. Also, we must not remain preoccupied only with panchayats run by our comrades, but focus our attention on the panchayat system as a whole. Unlike the Parliament and State Assemblies, the people have much closer and more organic ties with panchayats. To highlight key demands and press for resolution of mass grievances we can and should frequently also make panchayats the centre of state-wide or district-wide mobilisation.

11. We must also lay emphasis on securing greater powers for panchayats and for a system of adequate allowances for panchayat representatives as are provided for MLAs and MPs. For all practical purposes, powers are still concentrated in the hands of the state government and district administration. Panchayats challenging the institutionalised system of corruption have to face nothing short of an administrative embargo. We must always rally the people against every instance of bureaucratic vendetta or administrative highhandedness. It is only through such bold political confrontation with higher authorities that democracy in the panchayats can be defended and expanded.

Resolution on Urban Work

1. Urbanization is progressing in an uneven manner in India. According to the 2011 census, more than 31% people now live in urban areas. Almost a quarter of this urban population is concentrated in the nine cities recognized as metropolitan cities (each having a population of more than 4 million). But there has also been a significant increase in areas designated as census towns (having a population of more than 5,000, with more than 75% male workers involved in non-agricultural pursuits and a minimum population density of 400 per sq. km.) which are not yet recognized as statutory towns with municipal structures. Between 2001 and 2011, while the number of statutory towns increased marginally from 3,799 to 4,041, the number of census towns almost trebled from 1,362 to 3,894.

2. With 54.4% urban population, Tamil Nadu is the most urbanized among India's states followed by Maharashtra (46.2%) and Gujarat (40.3%), but in terms of overall size of urban population Maharashtra tops the list followed by Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The extent of urbanization in Tamil Nadu is clearly linked to the depth of the manufacturing sector in the state – it has the highest number of factories in the country and also the biggest contingent of industrial workers.

3. Metropolitan cities are the biggest centres of accumulation of wealth and operation of capital. But given the increasingly

capital- and technology-intensive nature of production in both manufacturing and service sectors, jobs are becoming increasingly scarce. In fact many urban areas and townships that were once known mainly as industrial centres have now been taken over by high finance and real estate. The new jobs being generated are almost invariably contractual and require multiskilling and the working people migrating from rural and semi-urban areas find it extremely hard to eke out a living in this difficult and unfamiliar urban setting.

4. There have been two major reform measures in urban development and governance in the last two decades. The first was the 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India which brought about a uniformity and regularity in urban local bodies and the second was the launching of the high-profile Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in 2005. Launched with the express purpose of making Indian cities investor-friendly, JNNURM has actually subverted the democracy promised in the 74th Amendment by linking funds to reforms like repeal of urban land ceiling act and promotion of public-private partnership. Formally the mission had two sub-missions – one for infrastructure and the other for provision of basic services to the poor, but it is the former which has got all funds and priority while the latter has been utterly neglected. And now the government has planned a more ambitious JNNURM-II to unleash a still more aggressive drive to privatize and commercialize every aspect of urban governance.

5. Another major project launched recently by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation is the Rajiv Awas Yojana with the lofty goal of making India slum-free. In the name of bringing all existing slums within the formal system, the government has actually stepped up the slum demolition drive, even as slums are being handed over to developers for what the government calls affordable housing projects. There are also reports of widespread irregularities with the affordable houses passing into non-deserving hands while slum-dwellers are evicted without any rehabilitation. A quarter of India's urban population is estimated to be living in slums and the state is desperate to clear this land and hand it over to real estate barons.

6. Land titles and related issues are a major area of neoliberal reform. The urban land ceiling has already been removed, and the

government further seeks to introduce 'comprehensive urban land reform' by amending the related Acts. In the name of completing the process of land titling and registration, the bid is to dispossess the urban poor of lands on which they have settled. Another route to dispossession is the governments' bid to delink the provision of basic water and sanitation from land tenure and legal status, thereby refusing slum dwellers, urban poor and low income groups the right to stake a claim to land based on water, electricity and sanitation related documents. We must fight for restoration and strict enforcement of urban land ceiling.

7. With increasing concentration of capital in urban India, the working people are being systematically driven out to the peripheries and outskirts. The battle against eviction and for securing residential plots and housing rights for the homeless people is therefore assuming growing importance in the communist agenda of urban work. The experience of recent anti-eviction struggles at Nonadanga in Kolkata, Khar-Golibar in Mumbai and Ejipura in Bengaluru clearly shows that municipal corporations and state governments are working hand in glove with real estate barons and the builder-promoter mafia to carry on eviction drives defying protests from all quarters. Powerful and sustained anti-eviction struggles have however succeeded in stalling eviction plans in some cases. In Puducherry, our sustained struggle for shelter for the roofless has forced the government to build houses and increase housing grants for homeless families.

8. Apart from being operational centres of capital, urban areas are also centres of opinion-making – the manufacture of consent – as well as expressions of dissent and eruptions of mass protests. With the rise of the internet-based social media and proliferation of TV channels, the urban middle class has acquired a stronger voice and worldwide we have seen powerful and imaginative eruptions of urban protests. It is therefore important for revolutionary communists to work more systematically and comprehensively in urban areas.

9. Traditionally communist parties have been handicapped by a weak urban mass base. It is all the more true for us and the mass support that we enjoy is primarily among sections of people who have to fight constantly for their survival in an increasingly hostile urban setting. Many of our members and supporters among urban

unorganised workers have to fight hard to secure a place of residence and get a ration card or a voter I-card. This relative weakness in terms of mass strength is very much a structural limitation and cannot be overcome overnight by any magic means. But this must not be allowed to restrict the vision or initiative of revolutionary communists working in the urban citadels of political reaction. The Party can and must take timely and courageous mass political initiatives in the urban arena even as it makes serious effort to enhance its urban mass base.

10. Typically in urban areas we have work among unorganized workers, whether organized in trade unions or in some umbrella organization of the urban poor. While it is important to organize them in occupational terms and in their places of work, such trade unions must consciously play a social role and take up the issues the workers have to face in their social existence in urban life. The marginalized urban poor form the backbone of our urban mass support and we must lead their battle for survival and dignity through every possible avenue. While retaining our emphasis on unorganized workers and the urban poor we must however make every effort to establish close contacts and build up Party network among the salaried urban middle/working class (teachers, employees in financial sector and so on). These are organized segments of the urban middle class who often follow Left-led trade unions or associations in their professional sphere but have little social role or political voice in the overall context of urban politics. We must try and bridge this gap. With growing corporate invasion of the retail sector, we must also pay greater attention to the task of defending the interests of small traders and shopkeepers.

11. We also have campus-based or hostel-based work among students in several cities and towns but very limited work among the youth. Here again it is the area/social dimension that is neglected, if not entirely missing, in our work. Party work among students/youth must emphasise the aspect of integration with and involvement in the broader democratic movement, taking up of people's issues in areas of Party work, and even developing new areas of Party work.

12. Young women, students or working women, are a growing presence in urban India. But the increased visibility, mobility and relative freedom of women is often met with a patriarchal

backlash, an aggressive assertion of reactionary patriarchal norms and prejudices. As the recent countrywide spread of the women's movement clearly showed, the women's movement has already emerged as a most powerful strand of popular awakening and the Party organization in urban areas must take up work on the women's front in real earnest, rather than leaving it to the available women comrades alone. Special efforts must be made to organize various sections of working women from the most vulnerable sections like construction workers and domestic helps to women engaged in the wide-ranging service sector.

13. Party organisations in urban areas, especially in metropolitan cities and major urban centres, must also maintain close ties with the progressive intelligentsia, cultural and media circles, lawyers with a positive approach to human rights and various issues of public interest, and activists of various movements.

14. In most cities, communal prejudice fanned up by right-wing outfits, and reinforced by the state-machinery's witch-hunt of minorities in the name of counter-terrorism, has made minorities especially vulnerable. Enforced ghettoisation is common, with minorities often denied housing except in certain designated 'minority' settlements. While remaining ever vigilant against communal politics and for the rights of minority communities, we must treat the anti-communal agenda as an integral part of the broader democratic concerns facing the minorities, issues concerning livelihood and equal access and opportunities for development with dignity. Chauvinistic targeting of migrant workers and students too is rampant in many cities. We must stand by the beleaguered regional/ethnic migrants in resisting such profiling and violence. Likewise, we must also defend dalits, minorities and women against casteist, communal and patriarchal violence.

15. With growing privatization and commercialization, the issue of basic amenities has acquired greater importance in urban work. While power-cuts and water shortage are a common feature in most cities and towns, the rates are going up continuously and bills often show hugely inflated amounts. Healthcare, education, public transport and water are also equally important concerns for all urban poor and middle class households. The urban poor are increasingly being priced out of the basic amenities. We tend to

take up all these issues when some crisis erupts, but we need to lay stress on planned and sustained efforts to build up campaigns and struggles on these sensitive issues of urban life.

16. Party organizations in urban areas must pay greater attention to ensuring effective intervention in municipal affairs and elections. Because of our generally weak base in urban areas and lack of focused attention to developing area-based work, our participation in municipal elections remains rather low-key. Only in the corporations of Patna and Ara in Bihar have we been able to win some victories in municipal elections thanks to our round-the-year work and overall profile. The Party must raise the level of its urban work and influence so as to acquire a greater profile in municipal elections in all our major urban centres of work.

17. Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) have emerged as a major feature of urban reforms. While being used as a 'participatory' facade, RWAs are also being pitted against the interests of other social groups, such as slum dwellers and street vendors. The National Policy for Street Vendors provides for the role of RWAs in the eviction of vendors, that too in the name of democratic participation. In general, the poor and slum-dwelling populations remain structurally excluded, and often in conflict with the RWAs, which are usually dominated by the relatively more privileged middle classes. Wherever possible, we should make efforts for a democratic intervention in the RWAs, keeping in mind their potential to emerge as platforms for struggles against corruption and for local amenities, and resist the anti-poor trends both in the policy framework and the functioning of the RWAs.

18. To conclude, Party organizations in urban areas must develop a wider vision and comprehensive agenda of urban work and follow an integrated approach in translating it into reality. Faced with the ongoing urban restructuring and the ruling class drive to turn Indian cities into investor-friendly elitist enclaves, the battle for reclaiming the urban space has acquired a new intensity and we must fight it wholeheartedly with the battle-cry of citizens' rights, dignity and democracy.

Environmental Protection and People-centric Development

1. Destruction of livelihood, grab of land and resources, eviction from land, pollution that endangers health and safety, and devastation of environment, is all being justified by the ruling classes in the name of 'development.' At the same time, people are being deprived of basic rights of education, health, housing, and other kinds of social welfare, which ought to be the fundamental parameters of development in any country.

2. Asserting a people's agenda of development calls for firm measures to reverse corporate-led 'development', and counter the rampant privatisation of resources, assets, and services; and for placing people's own concerns and local, participatory democratic decision-making at the centre of development. The basic principle of development must be redefined as ensuring people's control over resources; and use of revenue generated from such resources for social welfare as a priority.

3. Over the past few decades, the growing damage to ecosystems and living environments, and the diminishing access to resources that sustain human lives have brought to the fore serious concerns about environmental degradation and ecological imbalance. The fallout of the damage to ecosystems and environment has to be borne mainly by the most deprived and vulnerable sections of society – fisher people, communities who depend on forests and common pastures for their livelihoods, the urban poor who live in slums that dot our cities, small farmers and landless agrarian labourers and so

on. Moreover, even within these deprived communities, it is often women who shoulder a far greater burden of the damage.

4. 'Solutions' offered by the ruling classes for a host of environmental problems – from global warming, to industrial pollution and depletion of water and forests resources – inevitably fall within the *same* market and profit-based framework which exacerbated the problems in the first place. Moreover, these 'solutions' often end up forcing the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised people – who are usually also the *victims* of environmental degradation and ecological damage – to bear the whole burden of environmental 'protection'. It is the responsibility of the revolutionary movement to oppose and reject this framework and forcefully articulate environmental and ecological concerns from a completely different framework rooted in the interests of the most vulnerable and deprived sections of society. We have to articulate a vision of development that does not destroy the *source* of peoples' livelihoods, a model of development that is safe, as well as sensitive to the real needs of the rural and urban poor.

Environmental Concerns in Agriculture

5. Over and above perpetual neglect of agriculture, the excessive and indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, promoted by the state in the interest of their manufacturers and to try and temporarily manage the agrarian crisis, is causing long-term damage to soil fertility in this country known for its fertility over the ages. Moreover the exposure to chemicals and the slow seepage of dangerous and hazardous chemicals into soil and water is resulting in the alarming rise of all sorts of diseases, including cancer, amongst farmers in areas with a long history of heavy pesticide and fertilizer usage. The extraordinarily high incidence of cancer in such regions – far above the national average – is a telling confirmation of this dark side of 'development'.

6. The issue of the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has also brought to the fore the blatant double standards being followed by imperialist forces led by the US. To begin with, on the one hand, these powers coerced countries like India to adopt a model of chemical-intensive agriculture in order to protect the interests of agri-business back home. On the other hand, they are now rejecting

Indian products on the ground that they are 'unhealthy' and contain unacceptable level of pesticides. Also, super-rich multinational corporations follow very different food safety standards in countries like the US and UK and in third world countries like India. The pesticide contents in the very same products sold by the same company are different in different countries, in a classic indication of double standards and the lack of concern for the health and safety of people in the third world. It is therefore important to raise the demand that the Indian government scientifically regulate the use of chemicals and promote alternative agricultural techniques and the use of organic pesticides and fertilizers.

7. Rather than addressing the structural problems of agriculture, the ruling classes in India have been trying to promote genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Already Bt Cotton has been used on a substantial scale and the experience is highly alarming. In many cases the initial high yields stagnated pretty soon and pesticide use actually *increased* in the long run, contrary to the advertised benefits. Above all, the continuing spate of farmers' suicide in areas of Bt Cotton cultivation suggests that at least in the current Indian conditions this is a curse on our agriculture and agriculturists.

8. Moreover, there are several serious ecological concerns related to the use of GMOs, such as the adverse impact they have on biodiversity and the culture of mixed cropping. The use of GMOs kills weeds as well as other plants in their vicinity. In our country weeds are not considered entirely 'useless' plants; in many areas they are used as leafy green vegetables for human consumption or as fodder for livestock. Similarly, medicinal plants which GMOs destroy are valuable for health and veterinary care. For all these reasons we must demand immediate ban/moratorium on the use of these deadly organisms in both cash and food crops.

9. The case of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that devastated Mexico's environment and farmers is a warning about the impact of corporate agribusiness backed by imperialist forces. While opposing all such corporate-dictated technocratic 'solutions' imposed on us at the behest of international agri-business, we demand adoption of alternative strategies of agrarian development suitable for peculiar Indian conditions with state planning, funding and encouragement. It is entirely possible

to advance along this way by properly utilising the indigenous seeds, manures and other inputs and by mobilising the knowledge of Indian peasants accumulated over millennia as well as patriotic agricultural scientists who are not agents of MNCs. We must bring the pressure of mass movement to bear on the government and force it to stop such conspiracies and change over to a pro-peasant pro-people strategy of agrarian development based on thoroughgoing agrarian reform.

Industrial pollution and environmental concerns

10. Industrial pollution – pollution of the air by routine release of gases and pollutants, the pollution of water sources by discharge of hazardous effluents, and the solid industrial wastes dumped by industries – is yet another serious environmental concern. This problem is growing more acute by the day, what with the so-called Pollution Control Boards seeped in corruption and deeply committed to protect the interests of big business. Of particular concern are (a) occupational health and safety concerns of workers in the polluting factories and (b) the industrial effluents released into rivers and lakes without proper treatment, which are making the water practically unusable by local communities. The problem of polluted water resources is further aggravated by the massive intake of fresh water by industry but the government remains as unconcerned as ever.

11. The shameful case of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy reminds us of the tricks global corporations play to evade liability, and how the Indian ruling class and even the Courts collude with such criminal corporations, protecting the latter from facing punishment or bearing the costs of the devastation and death they cause.

12. While demanding that industries should be forced to meet existing environmental standards and be penalised for violations, we should also demand better and stricter regulations. Moreover, there is a need to try and go beyond the 'end-of-pipe' solutions for tackling industrial pollution, by demanding that industries install technologies and processes which are more environment-friendly and *generate less pollution*.

Issues Concerning Nuclear Energy

13. Especially in the wake of the Indo-US Nuclear Deal signed by the UPA Government and the subsequent nuclear overdrive, there is an urgent need to confront the use of nuclear energy even for so-called 'peaceful' purposes of generating energy. The government is pushing for a massive increase in India's installed nuclear capacity from the current 4,120 MWe to a whopping 63,000 MWe by 2032. And this road-map was not changed even after the Fukushima disaster, which happened in one of the so-called 'safest' and most 'technologically-advanced' plants in the world, raising concerns about what would happen in case of an accident in a backward country like ours!

14. Accidents apart, the entire process of energy generation from nuclear fission routinely exposes people to harmful radiations on a continuous basis. Moreover, as opposed to false claims routinely made by nuclear establishment across the world, nuclear power plants are most often more expensive than other sources of energy; far from being 'renewable' and 'perennial', the existing supplies of uranium will last us a maximum of 80 more years after which there will be no nuclear fuel to run our plants; and taking into account the entire process of generating nuclear energy, from mining to storage of wastes, it is no less harmful in greenhouse gas emissions as compared to coal or gas based electricity generation. The proposed plant at Jaitapur (with the European Pressurised Reactor technology) for instance will cost Rs 19.5 crore/MWe as compared to Rs 5 crore/MWe for a coal-based plant. Moreover, the cost of nuclear power has been increasing, as opposed to the falling costs of solar and wind power.

15. It is precisely for these reasons that globally, the dependence on nuclear energy has been falling; the number of nuclear reactors nuclear power stations in operation worldwide is likely to decrease by 22% by the year 2020, and by about 29% by the year 2030. Germany for instance has announced that it will close down all its nuclear power plants and become nuclear free by 2022. But the ruling elite in India is shamelessly going the opposite way to please the US imperialism in utter disregard of people's interest and national sovereignty.

16. We must therefore expose and resist the US-sponsored

nuclear overdrive, and run campaigns bolstered by facts and logic to support and strengthen the ongoing anti-nuclear plant movements in Jaitapur, Koodankulam, Haripur, Fatehabad and elsewhere. The UPA along with the Nitish government has recently proposed two new plants in Katihar and Nawada districts of Bihar, and here too, the projects will have to be robustly opposed.

Environment and Health:

Asbestos, Dumping of Toxic Wastes

17. On 13 May 2011, the Supreme Court banned the use, sale, production and export of endosulfan throughout the country, citing its harmful effects, till the time a joint committee (formed under the aegis of the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Agriculture Commissioner) submits its report to the court about the harmful effects of this widely used killer pesticide. The verdict came as a major boost to the protracted, two-decade long movement against endosulfan – a movement that exposed the unholy nexus between government institutions and profit-hungry corporations. This battle needs to be continued till a country-wide ban is imposed.

18. There is also a need to intensify struggles against other potential killers like asbestos. All forms of asbestos pose completely unacceptable hazards to workers who mine it or work with it, and also to anyone who is exposed to asbestos for substantial periods of time. However, in a repeat of the tragic story of endosulfan, despite well-documented information, governments at the central and state levels are hell-bent on promoting the asbestos industry. While fifty-five countries in the world have already banned asbestos, new asbestos plants are being set up in India. In Bihar, new plants are proposed in Bhojpur, West Champaran, Muzzafarpur, Vaishali and Madhubani, and the Bihar government has even passed the Bihar Agricultural Land Conversion for Non-agricultural Use Act in 2012 to facilitate the construction of these plants. This promotion of asbestos continues despite the fact that alternatives to asbestos exist. Moreover, the central government has allowed countries like Russia and Canada to dump huge quantities of this toxic material in India.

19. The ship-breaking industry in Alang (Gujarat) and some

other ports constitute yet another area of concern. In these ports hazardous substances are imported and handled by workers – mostly migrants from Bihar, UP, Orissa and Jharkhand – often in a clandestine and non-transparent manner in order to hide blatant violations of a host of laws. We oppose all such anti-people policies and practices and extend our fullest support to various campaigns against these.

Wildlife Conservation and Human-animal Conflicts

20. In different parts of the country, we continue to witness human-animal conflicts: whether is the almost daily struggle of villagers against elephants in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh or tigers in Uttarakhand, Sunderbans, Rajasthan or West Champaran, for instance, or the state-sponsored eviction of people in these areas in the name of wildlife conservation. These issues definitely pose a challenge of achieving a balance between the need to ensure human sustenance and the equally important need to protect natural ecosystems and the various species dependent on them. This challenge is rendered all the more difficult by the efforts of the ruling classes to portray the victims as the real 'problem'. Thus the tribal living in forests, who has a long history of coexistence with the tiger, who has no real desire to poach and kill tigers simply to hang their skins as wall decoration, suddenly becomes the 'intruder', the poacher, the prime enemy of the wildlife conservation project.

21. Two major issues need to inform our positions on the human-animal conflict. *Firstly*, if steps are not taken to maintain at least a minimum forest cover and if this basic survival need of various species is not addressed, the conflict will increase. *Secondly*, poaching of animals is driven *not* by the local population but by the *market* consisting of upper class customers in far-away cities and countries. When forest cover is destroyed, it is mostly to cater to the needs of industry, real-estate and middle-class and upper class interests, while the villagers physically closest to the forest bear the brunt of animal attacks. It is they who understand the conflict best, and also have no interest in destroying ecological balance and exacerbating the conflict, so they are the best placed to find appropriate solutions. It is therefore necessary to actively

involve local communities and villagers living in close proximity to animals in the process of conservation.

22. The tourism industry is resulting in unsustainable burdens on the ecosystem, unregulated constructions that block animal corridors, and even exploitation of the tribal people in some remote forest areas. Instead of recklessly promoting an unregulated tourism industry, the Indian Government must introduce a 'no carbon footprints' tourism policy and strictly uphold it.

On Climate Change and Water Scarcity

23. Global warming and climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions have already assumed alarming proportions, with concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere being *way beyond* the safe limits demarcated by scientists, and continuously increasing. While there is a crying need to address this issue *globally* in a holistic manner, any possible solution has routinely been stymied by the arrogance and bullying tactics of imperialist forces led by the US.

24. The poor and developing countries of the world have always maintained that different countries should have *differentiated* responsibilities towards tackling the problem of climate change based on (a) the historic or accumulated contribution of different countries in generating greenhouse gas emissions and (b) current per capita emissions. Historically, it is the heavily industrialised, super-rich 'developed' nations which have been responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. The US for instance is responsible for 25% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in the world. The per capita emissions in the US are also by far the highest in the world: 20.1 tonnes of CO₂ - compared to India's 0.9 tonnes, and China's 2.3 tonnes per person per year. Therefore, the US should have the greatest responsibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

25. By contrast, the US has always demanded that developing economies with huge populations like India and China should also submit to legally binding emission reductions, even if their per capita emissions are no way comparable. India and China have finally capitulated to this bullying: according to the dubious deal reached at the Durban Climate Change conference

(November-December 2011), global climate change negotiations will *not* be based on the question of equity any more. We find this unacceptable and demand of the Government of India to continue the fight for a just and effective policy framework in tackling climate change. It is particularly necessary to ensure that the issue of climate change does not become yet another mechanism for the rich corporations (suppliers of techniques and instruments of pollution control for example) and nations to make more profits at the expense of poorer nations, that poor and developing countries receive adequate global funds for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and that these funds are efficiently used.

26. We must oppose population control policies being promoted by imperialist institutions like the World Bank, UNFPA, DfID etc in the name of tackling climate change and environmental degradation, and which are being implemented by the Indian State, in the form of forced sterilisation, and the dumping and testing of dangerous contraceptives. Population control is another way of shifting the blame for the destruction of the environment by corporate onto the poor, who are bearing the brunt of its effects. We must also resist increasing attempts to promote such coercive policies in the name of women's reproductive rights, and instead demand genuine reproductive choices for women in the form of free access to safe contraceptives, within a framework of comprehensive health services.

27. It is the poor who bears the brunt of climate change – whether from the unpredictable monsoon patterns, the growing reduction in water availability in our snow- and monsoon-fed rivers, or from the diseases like malaria and dengue whose prevalence is linked to climate change.

Our country has 20% of the world's population but only 4% of the world's fresh water. That too is rapidly depleting owing to fast urbanisation, increased use of water in post-green revolution agriculture and by reckless industrialists and sundry other factors. Meanwhile, urban areas are reeling under regular water shortages while inter-state conflicts over river water (e.g., between Karnataka and Tamilnadu over Kaveri water) has become a recurring phenomenon. Even as ground water is getting depleted from the aquifers, surface water is often highly polluted. The many rules

and regulations on the books are regularly flouted by industry or remain on paper simply because there are no adequate sewage treatment facilities. Simultaneously with improving such facilities and other measures like regularly cleaning up the rivers, lakes, canals and other water resources, it is necessary to develop a new scientific approach to water conservation and utilisation.

Ever since independence, various Indian governments have unfortunately followed the colonial water management strategies heavily tilted on the construction of large dams. Despite the history of disastrous consequences of this water management strategy, and opposition from common affected people, environmental groups as well as some engineers and technocrats, this strategy has unfortunately continued over the years. From large-scale displacement to massive destruction of local eco-systems, the consequences of large-scale hydel power projects have been well-documented, and several struggles have been waged and continue to be waged across the country, The Narmada Bachao Andolan for instance remains one of the longest and best known struggles against the politics of large dams. In Uttarakhand, our comrades have led significant struggles against hydel power projects that jeopardise the environment, evict people, and increase the threat of natural disasters.

The desperate need of the hour is to shift the focus from massive projects to small and less dramatic attempts to recharge depleted aquifers and ensure adequate water for agricultural and home use in villages by (a) reconstructing traditional village tanks, (b) building a series of small check dams to collect rainwater during the monsoon season, (c) replant deforested areas to address the real water needs, and similar other measures have proved much more successful. In urban centres such rain water harvesting projects can and must be pressed into service.

28. Increasingly, there is a move towards privatizing water in India, as has happened in several other parts of the world. Such moves towards water privatization must be resisted resolutely, while also fighting for more egalitarian distribution of water resources.

Defending Coastal Ecology and Livelihood

29. India's 5700 kms long coastline and its fishing population of 3.5 million are threatened by the ruling class development paradigm. Chemical complexes, thermal power stations, harbours and fishing harbours are swallowing up the coastline. Industrial fishing is being promoted in both in coastal and lake areas, pushing poor fishing communities out of their livelihood. Nearly 61 per cent fisher families live below poverty line. While more than 65 per cent of fisherpeople are engaged in small-scale or artisanal fishing, 70 per cent of the total fish catch is brought in by mechanised boats, which provide employment to only 34 per cent fisherpeople. The recent struggles against fishing mafias' gherries in the Chilika Lake [led by CPI(ML)] and against the Jaitapur nuclear project are notable.

We must demand a policy to safeguard the coast and marine resources from corporate plunder, oppose all anti-people development projects, and defend the rights and livelihood of fishing communities.

Forest Rights and Development

30. Struggles against land acquisition and mining projects and for forest rights have emerged as a key area of militant mass movement in India today, one that has thrown up a tough challenge to the use of state power to expropriate natural resources in the interests of big capital, indigenous and foreign.

31. While supporting these struggles against accumulation of capital by dispossession of the labouring people, we demand that all natural resources must be brought under democratic, collective control. We therefore propose the following basic principles as the foundation for all laws relating to forests, land and minerals:

a. All community and individual rights under the Forest Rights Act must be recognised and respected. Similar procedures should be put in place to recognise individual and community rights over revenue lands.

b. The powers of the gram sabha under Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) must be respected. All forest diversion in violation of the FRA and

done without the consent of gram sabhas must be immediately stopped. State governments – like those in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh – which have framed Rules contrary to PESA must be made to withdraw them. All tribal areas should be brought under the Fifth or Sixth Schedules.

32. Samata, a group working in the Scheduled Tribes areas of Andhra Pradesh, filed a case against the state government for leasing out tribal lands to private mining companies in such areas. The SLP filed in the Supreme Court led to a historic judgment in July 1997 by a three judge-bench. Known popularly as the Samata judgment, it nullified all mining leases granted by the State government in the Scheduled areas and asked it to stop all mining operations. Only the State Mineral Development Corporation or a cooperative of the tribal people, it ruled, could take up mining activity and that too in compliance with the Forest Conservation Act and the Environment Protection Act. It also recognised the Constitution (73rd) Amendment and the PESA, under which gram sabhas are competent to preserve and safeguard community resources, and reiterated the right of self-governance of adivasis. This judgment must be followed in letter and spirit in all relevant cases for safeguarding the lives and livelihood of the marginalized people.

a. Land use plans should be made in a democratic process, involving local elected bodies.

b. All projects that involve acquisition of land or expropriation of natural resources must require the informed consent of the gram sabhas of the affected villages, all the more so in tribal and forest areas.

c. Any change in land use above the land ceiling should be treated as an acquisition and therefore subjected to requirements for consent of the community and provisions for rehabilitation.

d. State subsidies and projects should be awarded to local people for running a project on a cooperative basis or utilising the natural resources collectively. Subsidies and tax incentives for corporate expropriation of resources should be halted. In place of forced acquisition, land and other resources needed for mining and industries may be leased from local communities through democratic consultations.

e. All pro-corporate legislations like the SEZ Act 2005 and the present Land Acquisition Bill must be strongly opposed. Where large projects are voluntarily agreed to by communities, ownership of share equity in the project should be provided to the community as per the Bhuria Committee recommendations of 1996; there should also be provision of complete rehabilitation in tribal areas with land for land and land to landless people. Further, a white paper should be brought out by the government about the total displacement, rehabilitation and resource expropriation that has taken place since independence. Further expropriation for large projects should be halted until this is completed.

33. In the past two decades of liberalisation, there has been a relentless drive towards privatisation of natural resources – as exemplified by the successive changes to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR Act) that open up minerals for private/corporate control, and also by moves to open up forests, rivers, and land for corporate use. This corporate grab of resources and land has led to intensified displacement and eviction, backed, as a rule, by intense state repression. It has also heralded massive corruption and threatens the country's food security and forest cover. The only beneficiaries of this policy have been the mega corporations that have amassed huge profits from private expropriation and export of precious national wealth, and corrupt politicians that have facilitated the plunder. Protection of natural resources by all means, including nationalisation of mineral resources, must be an urgent priority.

At the behest of agencies like the World Bank, large tracts of forest land in Himalayas and elsewhere is now being brought under corporate control through various schemes related to the so-called 'green bond/green bonus' – all this under the dubious garb of 'sustainability'. Such schemes have to be vigorously resisted and their larger corporate agenda exposed. Moreover, yet another dubious practice of systematically undermining the impact of massive deforestation due to so-called 'development' projects and pushing through projects with clauses for 'compensatory afforestation' should be resisted. It is a well-known fact that efforts at compensatory afforestation exists only on paper most of the time and do not even come close to compensating for the loss of precious mixed forests and ecologies formed over years.

People's Welfare and People's Rights

34. On the one hand, natural resources which are a national asset are being indiscriminately plundered to benefit a handful of Indian and foreign corporations, with no benefits, in fact huge losses for the national exchequer. On the other hand, 'fund crunch' becomes the plea for privatisation, which puts basic health, education, housing and other essentials for dignified survival, out of reach for the poor.

35. India's abysmal social indicators in the matter of nutrition, and maternal and child mortality point to the disastrous impact of crumbling public health infrastructure. Vast areas of rural India, more so the forest areas, are devoid of the most basic healthcare. Preventable diseases routinely spiral into epidemics, claiming thousands of lives every year. With the privatisation of health care, the poor denied access to hospitals and left at the mercy of exorbitant private hospitals. Diagnostics and medical investigation are increasingly privatised and expensive, and preventive healthcare (for e.g prevention of communicable diseases and epidemics) is completely and criminally neglected. In the name of a promise of free healthcare to BPL card-holders, corporate hospitals get public land at throwaway prices, but subsequently, the poor are denied care and subjected to indignities.

36. We must strive to build popular struggles for people's right to public health; demanding well-equipped health centres in every village; preventive health campaigns to end epidemics; well-equipped public hospitals modelled on AIIMS in every state with all facilities for diagnostics and research; and free prosthetics, educational and other aids to ensure a dignified life for all differently-abled people. Public places and facilities must all be made fully wheelchair accessible and friendly for the differently-abled.

37. The right to education must also be a rallying point for popular struggles. Privatised schooling and higher education, exorbitant fees, a permanent divide between good quality schools for the rich and poor quality schools for the poor, have all emerged as features of the Indian education system. Struggles against arbitrary fee structures and exploitative school and college managements, by parents and students alike, are being witnessed.

We must strive to build popular struggles for the right to equitable schooling through a neighbourhood common school system, and the universal right to public-funded school and higher education.

38. The right to universal food security and housing must also be an essential part of a people's agenda for development and dignity. The country urgently needs a pro-people policy shift to protect resources and uphold people's rights, dignity and autonomy, and the party shall work relentlessly to that end.

Resolution on

People's Progressive Culture and Modern Media

1. In India today, in the wake of a neoliberal policy regime, we witness the outright commercialisation of 'culture' and alienation of human beings projected as isolated 'consumers' rather than social and creative beings; and in tandem with this, we see the intensified and aggressive promotion of feudal, casteist, and patriarchal values in the name of 'Indian culture.' The capitalist market and modern corporations which create extreme alienation in human beings, themselves promote the most regressive social values in the name of 'spiritual' or 'cultural' solace for that alienation.

2. Political power inevitably seeks to promote a culture that can sustain its legitimacy – and such culture therefore tends to be relatively static and homogenised. People's culture, in contrast, in its widest popular sense, draws its sustenance from the dynamic ideas and values corresponding to ever changing times. 'Power' therefore seeks to accommodate and tame culture, whereas 'culture' perpetually seeks to create new values of life and in that sense always strives for autonomy from 'power'. Therefore the first and foremost challenge before people's 'culture' is to maintain its autonomy vis-à-vis state power. The efforts of the ruling class – including the State as well as corporate capital – are to accommodate, appropriate and assimilate cultural forms and personalities through awards, privileges and other enticements. This is effectively a policy of carrot and stick:

which recognizes and rewards creativity to a certain extent, while retaining the right to regulate, control and repress creative freedom if it poses enough of a challenge to state power.

3. The values promoted by the market and even the State as 'Indian culture' are as a rule marked by religious majoritarianism, casteism and patriarchy – it is a culture of exclusion of and discrimination against religious, ethnic, national, linguistic and ideological minorities, dalits and women. The fact that this discriminatory and exclusionist culture passes off as 'Indian culture' in the 'common sense' promoted by the ruling class, creates fertile ground for communal fascist forces. These forces masquerade as self-appointed custodians of 'Indian culture' in order to justify violence against women, dalits, and minorities.

4. Organised attacks on freedom of expression and dissenting voices – both by communal fascist outfits and the by the State, often in tacit mutual collusion and cooperation – frequently pass themselves off as a defence of 'Indian culture' and 'nationalism.' Sedition charges against young cartoonist Aseem Trivedi as well as activists like Dr. Binayak Sen and Seema Azad, the arrest of Kabeer Kala Manch activists branded as 'Maoists', conviction of cultural activists such as Jeetan Marandi on the basis of fabricated charges, the censorship of the paintings of a young artist Anirudh Sainath Krishnamani at a Bangalore gallery, preventing of screening of documentaries on Kashmir in some campuses (such as Sanjay Kak's *Jashn-e-Azaadi*) at the behest of Hindutva goons, and arrest of two young women for a Facebook post criticising the Shiv Sena-imposed bandh following Bal Thackeray's death, are all recent instances of the 'cultural terrorism' of our times. We can also see competing fundamentalisms at work: forcing a painter of M.F. Husain's stature to leave India and adopt citizenship of Qatar on the one hand, and refusing Taslima Nasreen an extension of her stay in India, on the other. In Kashmir recently, a rock band of young girls was forced to stop performing following death threats in the name of 'Islamic' culture.

5. In the context of such censorship and cultural terrorism against freedom of expression and the right to dissent, the revolutionary cultural movement has received wide acceptance and support for its call for a 'Culture of Resistance'. Resisting assaults on

freedom of expression and defying all attempts at accommodation, regulation and control of culture through awards, privileges and enticements, the people's cultural movement and especially its platform in the Hindi-Urdu belt, the Jan Sanskriti Manch, have been forthright in launching creative initiatives and building protests against imperialist wars, state repression, draconian laws like the sedition law and AFSPA, sexual violence and moral policing, and cases like arrests of Binayak Sen, Seema Azad, Sheetal Sathe and Jiten Marandi, and the hanging of Afzal Guru.

6. Communitarian and identity-based solidarities of pre-capitalist origins are systematically invoked by the ruling classes to obfuscate class consciousness and fracture protest-based solidarities of the victims of feudal-capitalist exploitation. Commercialisation of culture has restricted the cultural choices of the masses to films, videos, TV serials, music albums and so on, which mostly promote the values of market economy, individualism, as well as violence, casteism and sexism. This tendency has made deep inroads into traditional religious and folk festivals too. Of late, corporate-sponsored literary festivals are being held with great fanfare. The autonomous and semi-autonomous government-aided cultural institutions that came up in the era of freedom struggle and those created during the early post-independence years are facing manifold crises and many of them have developed close links with corporate houses.

7. Crucial to the resurgence of people's progressive culture are cultural performance teams and forms that can integrate with and establish close dialogue with the masses of people. Developing such teams is the key to making cultural work in the countryside and in urban areas a continuous practice, and to organise cultural resistance from the grassroots as bulwark against all forces of reaction. While we have a number of teams in states like Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, the full potential for more such teams is yet to be tapped. Possibilities of building functional cultural teams exist in several other states like Assam, Punjab, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Party organisations in these states must pay necessary attention in this regard.

8. Apart from songs – especially new songs reflecting the new agenda of today's struggles such as the song 'Gaon Chhodab Nahi'

written by cultural activists of Jharkhand which has virtually become the anthem of struggles against land acquisition and corporate plunder – street plays remain the other most powerful means of cultural communication. In the course of recent movements, such as the one against sexual violence, young students were seen performing street plays with great enthusiasm. This is a form we must make efforts to tap even more effectively, both as a means of involving new forces and reaching out to mass audiences. In the past few years, we have seen progressive theatre artists perform powerful solo theatre performances based on themes like Irom Sharmila's life and struggle against AFSPA; and sexual violence and women's autonomy, to reach out to very large sections of people very effectively. Along with closer interaction with such artists, revolutionary cultural organisers can also explore such forms.

9. It is important for left cultural activists to develop closer solidarity with the peoples' struggles in their rich diversity. In this regard, the experience of the film group of Jan Sanskriti Manch (JSM) called 'The Group' has been quite encouraging. It acted as a platform for creating awareness and support for all such movements through a series of film festivals (a total of 30 till date), attracting many pro-people filmmakers, artists and poets, social activists, left intellectuals and social scientists to its initiatives. 'The Group' has also embarked upon documentary film-making and publications. Significantly enough, all the initiatives of The Group are running successfully without corporate or government sponsorship, entirely depending on people's support, a feature which has distinguished all fields of activity of JSM. The revolutionary cultural movement should not only give moral support to mass movements, but must harness the mobilising potentials of art and culture to integrate with them.

10. Despite many obstacles there are many active left cultural platforms and individuals who practise progressive culture in diverse ways on a sustained basis. Platforms such as Jan Sanskriti Manch (JSM), Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), Janwadi Lekhak Sangh (JLS), SAHMAT and several other organisations and individuals, as well as many magazines and journals published locally, regionally and nationally representing different shades of left opinion do articulate a general progressive and secular world-

view. There have been successful efforts in uniting all such major organisations on specific issues of cultural and political import.

11. While uniting with all progressive cultural platforms and individuals, we must take the culture of protest/resistance as the mainstay of left cultural movement. During the recent movement against the heinous gang rape in Delhi, many artists and writers took to the streets at different places, with JSM playing the leading role in the Hindi-Urdu belt. 'Hirawal', the theatre wing of JSM, has organised several shows of its street play 'Bekhauf Azadi', based on the same incident, at different places in Delhi, Patna and other cities. The film group of JSM called 'The Group' has dedicated all its film festivals this year to the theme of 'freedom without fear' of women. Many independent artists as well as those belonging to diverse left groups organised cultural nights in solidarity with the movement not only in Delhi, but in other places too.

12. The revolutionary cultural movement must experiment with all cultural forms in order to build a new progressive consciousness and emancipatory aesthetics; enlarge its network to schools, academic institutions, workplaces and all institutions of social intercourse; devise policies and find ways to intervene in autonomous cultural institutions established by governments; intervene in all contemporary cultural discourses from a revolutionary left position; uphold and develop diverse progressive cultural creations in folk art traditions, popular languages and dialects threatened by the homogenising impulse of cultural globalisation; and initiate movements for popular science and cultural literacy, as also against caste discrimination, various manifestations of patriarchal culture, superstitions and social evils.

13. The pressing task of robust cultural resistance to revivalist tendencies promoted by the market, and stubborn and widespread feudal and patriarchal culture cannot be left to the 'cultural organisation' alone. Rather the party as a whole must undertake the task of combating, within communist party ranks, mass base, and wider society, cultural values and practices that are alien to revolutionary values, and building a powerful movement for progressive cultural values. The communist party must take the lead in building powerful social movements against caste discrimination and caste-based marriage, against crimes in the name of 'honour' and

sexual violence, and in favour of women's and people's autonomy in all matters including the choice of partners, against all forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender or sexual orientation; against denial of property to daughters, against taking and giving dowry; against son preference and sex-selective abortion, and so on.

14. The turbulent times our country is now passing through gives us ample scope for putting into practice our cherished motto "culture of creation, culture of resistance, culture of the people!" Let us develop the cultural front in closer and more creative integration with the political tasks of the moment and move forward shoulder to shoulder with the fighting millions.

The Media as an Arena of Class Struggle

15. "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. ...Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class ...hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch." These lines from *The German Ideology* written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels way back in 1845-46, bring out the essential hegemonic role of bourgeois media and "culture industry" in our age too. However, the exact manner in which today's owners of "means of mental production" actually "regulate the production and distribution" of ideas is determined by the specific features of ownership, control and modus operandi of media establishments as well as by the general trends of the current neoliberal phase of capitalism.

16. Media, defined as human communications through designed channels which store, process and transmit information, data, views and knowledge, have assumed enormous importance in our economic, political and socio-cultural life in the in the era of 'digital/virtual capitalism' ushered in by the information technology revolution. The contribution of the "infotainment industry" as a whole to GDP and job creation has grown noticeably

in recent decades all over the world, especially in the West but increasingly also in our country. Transforming sports into televised entertainment products has created new genres of sports such as T-20 cricket involving big money, scams and corruption of the game itself. Electronic media has also commoditised religion, superstitions, and quackery in a huge way with a large number of electronic channels dedicated solely to such pursuits.

17. The function of media apparatuses as a legitimising force of the rule of finance capital in shaping the "new world order" has become extremely important. The private corporate media were instrumental in the attempted coup to overthrow President Chavez in Venezuela in April 2002. The political manoeuvres of Berlusconi in Italy and Murdoch in the UK are well-known. For us, however, even more crucial is the significance of media as a site of major social conflicts, including those among ruling classes and between the rulers and the ruled, and therefore as a contested space for ideological-political hegemony.

18. All segments of media have experienced rapid corporate-driven growth in India over the last two decades. As of 2011, there were 146 million television households viewing a total of over 6232 channels, 82,000 newspapers with a readership of 181.91 million and approximately 132 million Indian internet users (taking into account multiple users for a single wire line connection). Our country is now the third largest TV market after USA and China but television penetration is still at approximately 60 percent of total households and 45% of total population, which means a lot of scope for further development. In 2011 the television, newspaper and magazine industries were estimated at Rs 329 billion, Rs 197 billion and Rs 13 billion respectively. Mobile Internet through smart phones, laptops and tablets has emerged as the latest and a fast growing segment of Internet use.

19. In our country as well as internationally, both the print and electronic media are increasingly coming under monopoly ownership and control. A major boost to the process comes from the ongoing privatisation of electromagnetic spectrum the world over, symptomatic of the corporate appropriation of the IT revolution. Western, predominantly US, conglomerates like Comcast/NBC Universal, Walt Disney and Time Warner have as their counterparts

the likes of Star TV India, TV 18, NDTV, Sony, Zee Group etc. Other major players who dominate the electronic and print media are the Times of India Group, Hindustan Times Group, Indian Express Group, The Hindu Group, Anand Bazar Patrika Group, Malayala Manorama Group, Sahara Group, Sun Group, Bhaskar Group and Jagaran Group. Tatas, Goenkas, Birlas, Ambanis have invested heavily in media groups which act as the political arm of corporate power, propagating the virtues of further liberalisation of Indian economy – FDI in retail trade for example – and going soft on corporate crimes their patrons are accused of.

20. We oppose concentration of all forms of media in the hands of a few houses and cross-media holdings (where television, radio channels and newspapers in different languages have a common owner, who sometimes also owns the means of distribution such as a cable or internet network) because democracy is inconceivable in the absence of plurality and diversity of opinions. We therefore demand progressive legislation as well as appropriate rules to be framed for the purpose by statutory bodies responsible for regulating media in the country. At the same time we oppose the recent decision to allow up to 74 percent FDI in the broadcast sector.

21. Also rampant is the phenomenon of politicians owning and/or controlling electronic or print media companies. Since all forms of mainstream media rest upon advertising revenue (some newspapers allocating up to 80% of print space to advertising), the “advertorial route” to bribe and influence media is fairly common among politicians and corporations alike. Several Chief Ministers have been in the news in recent years for doling out large sums of public money in media management. As the Radia tapes controversy clearly showed, business-politics connections are sometimes forged through influential media personalities, giving rise to a veritable media-corporate-politician nexus. In a situation like this, it is only natural that corporate and political crimes and corruption often spill over to the media sector or translates into media abuse in multiple ways. To take one instance, the 1.86 thousand crore Coalgate scam exposed by the CAG of India involved such companies as DB corp. Ltd. which runs Dainik Bhaskar, Usha Martin Ltd. which owns Prabhat Khabar, and so on. However, no nexus is free from internal tussles, and at times mutual blackmailing and extortion are also reported, as in the recent case involving the Zee group and Jindals.

22. The preponderant corporate and political influence over print and electronic media naturally result in paid news, manipulated stories, distorted information and half-truths as well as suppression of important news items. In 2010, the Press Council released a report on the phenomenon of paid news, and in 2013 a Press Council team indicted the Bihar Government of muzzling and arm-twisting the press. The pro-saffron press played by no means a minor role in fomenting anti-Muslim and anti-Christian pogroms in Gujarat and Kandhamal (Odisha). With their coverage of anti-terror investigations and arrests, most of the dominant media act as partners of the police and investigative agencies in conducting a witch-hunt of large numbers of innocent Muslim and Kashmiri youth. Almost the entire corporate media routinely betray dominant class, caste and gender biases in reporting and news analysis. They also act as vehicles of national chauvinism, no longer against immediate neighbours alone but also against weaker nations. A small yet perhaps trendsetting instance of the latter was noticed in the jingoist/chauvinist outbursts in a section of the national press against the Maldivian government (some comments even suggested strong punitive measures against it) on its very reasonable cancellation of a contract with the Indian company GMR for construction of an airport in Malé. Such subservience to the politics of the ruling classes finds glaring expression also in subtle political propaganda against working class strikes and organised mass movements – especially those led by revolutionary forces – as well as in a conspiracy of silence, which blacks out even major popular campaigns even as anarcho-militarist activities are deliberately sensationalised.

23. Apart from political motives and biases, sheer commercial interests too lure a section of media into all kinds of unfair practices. The TRP-driven electronic media in particular betrays a tendency to make news sensational with high doses of detailed crime-reporting and violent scenes. There have been instances of media abuse where sensational stories are created from nowhere by the media. In July 2012 a couple of atrocious sexual attacks were engineered or utilised by TRP-crazy journalists/channels. In Guwahati, reporters of News Live channel in Assam video-graphed the molestation of a girl by a crowd rather than helping her; according to some accounts they actually incited the gruesome crime in search of sensational news.

A few days later a TV journalist of a local channel in Mangalore arranged an attack on a birthday party by Hindu Jagaran Vedike to promote ratings of his channel. TV reporter Naveen Soorinje who covered the incident was falsely charged for abetting it and remains in prison; we demand his immediate release. We also plead for the Press Council of India to take suitable measures to promote media ethics and ensure that journalists behave more responsibly.

24. Like news channels, the General Entertainment Channels (GECs) of the rapidly expanding television networks contribute their share of cultural pollution in more ways than one. Probably the most pernicious is the manner in which serials in Hindi and various regional languages sell 'new patriarchy' in glossy packages in a neoliberal milieu, recycling the older versions of feudal values and customs by adapting them to newer imperatives of a market-society. The non-fiction serials cash upon the speculative desires and fantasies of a growing consumerist middle class, even as advertisement campaigns instil strong desires for buying things that might be useless or unaffordable, often on credit.

25. However, even in the mainstream media there are contradictory pulls and pressures which create fissures and make spaces for ethical, committed and militant journalism and create opportunities for radical views and for critique of the powers that be. Despite corporatisation and subjugation of editorial teams to managerial authority, no amount of managerial strategies and political pressures can totally suppress the voluntary element, the consciousness of the people in charge of the news desks, newsrooms and live broadcast. So there always remains an area of subversion, of bold investigative journalism. Whether it was the Gujarat massacre or different scams, there always existed such spaces which were exploited by conscientious media persons who brought the truth into open, often at personal risk.

26. The role of the print and electronic media in coverage of movements such as the anti-corruption movement or the one erupting in the wake of the Delhi rape case was considerable. Such movements got a generally sympathetic coverage in the print media as well as in live telecasts and panel discussions. But barring a few honourable exceptions, the coverage generally sought to keep the focus confined narrowly to certain slogans (such as the Janlokal in

the case of corruption, and 'death penalty' in the case of the anti-rape movement), limiting the possibility of highlighting corporate plunder or the various aspects of rape culture. To a large extent, the media coverage of such movements was governed by the effort to keep the whole upsurge confined to a temporary, single-issue movement unsoiled by 'politics'. In the case of anti-rape legislation, the media largely played a very damaging role by falsely projecting a myth that the age of consent was being 'lowered', in order to build a climate of opinion in favour of the Government's move to raise the age of consent.

27. Moreover, modern media can vastly enrich our knowledge and make us more equipped to respond to emerging situations almost instantaneously. The interactive social networks like Facebook and Twitter have been put to extensive use in exposing wrong-doers and major movements from Seattle to the Arab Spring and the Occupy have relied increasingly on them for rapid mobilisation of protesters. The Open Source Movement, Wikipedia and Wikileaks have made available to individuals and organisations considerable free space for political discourse and for developing a democratic people's media. We still find ourselves at a primary stage in utilising such spaces through the party website, blogs created by mass organisations and individual comrades using their pages/accounts on social networks. While paying urgent attention to improve the quality of the party website, we must make concerted efforts to use the entire range of social media avenues in a more planned and purposeful manner.

28. Governments across the globe are doing everything they can to destroy the democratic potential and strike power of social networks and the internet generally. They are particularly worried that their excessive dependence on information networks have opened up a new field of subversion thanks to the "hactivists" i.e., social and political activists who use their hacking skills for anti-establishment and pro-people objectives, such as the US-based group Anonymous (one of the initiators of the Occupy Wall Street movement).

29. In our country the union and State governments are arbitrarily using Section 66A of the IT Act – the recent cases in West Bengal (where a university professor was beaten up and arrested for just forwarding a witty, innocuous cartoon) and Maharashtra

(where two girls were arrested under this clause as well as section 505(2) of the IPC in Mumbai for posting and “liking” a perfectly reasonable comment after the death of Bal Thackeray) are telling – to curb freedom of expression. We support the popular demand of immediate scrapping of this authoritarian Section 66A and oppose every attempt to curb internet freedom. On the international plane, we condemn the US-led witch-hunt of fighters like Julian Assange, the leading light of Wikileaks, who have taken asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Wikileaks whistleblower Bradley Manning who is bravely exposing the war crimes and other misdeeds of the US state from the dock, and Aaron Swartz, a tireless campaigner for free access to information who apparently committed suicide under pressure of the US police.

30. In spite of the corporate-controlled character of the dominant media, greater intervention in this sphere is certainly possible and necessary. To make organised, systematic, and sustained efforts to intervene in all spheres of the media, it is necessary to build/activate the party's media cells in the national and state capitals as well as other prospective centres. Improving the Party's own network of organs and publications and systematic intervention in the dominant media must be seen as two sides of the Party's integrated approach towards better utilisation of the modern media for effective communication and dissemination regarding the Party's ideological-political positions and the whole gamut of struggles led by our comrades.

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CPI(ML)

By Prabhat Kumar

CHARU BHAWAN

U-90 Shakarpur, Delhi - 110092

Phone: 91-11-22521067

Fax: 91-11-22442790

e-mail: mail@cpiml.org

Web-site: <http://www.cpiml.org/>