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CPIML Writes to ECI Highlighting Coercive Measures Used for Aadhaar-EPIC linkage

CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya in a letter to the Election Commission of India dated 05 September 2022, highlighted the alarming reports of coercive measures used by the election machinery for Aadhaar-EPIC linkage.

The ECI office in a reply to an earlier mail from CPIML demanding the rollback of Aadhaar linking process, had said that “the submission of Aadhaar Details by the existing electors (Form 6B and in Form 8) or new electors (Form 6) is purely voluntary.” Furthermore, it states that “that no existing entry on the ground of non-submission of Aadhaar details would be deleted and no new application on the ground of non-submission of Aadhaar details would be denied for registration and Electoral machinery has been suitably sensitized to not to insist on submission of Aadhaar details in any case.”

In recent days, CPIML has received several reports that the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are informing the voters/ new applicants that Aadhaar submission for EPIC linkage/ EPIC applications is mandatory and non-compliance would lead to deletion of name from Electoral roll/new applications. The same has been reported in various media outlets.

The reports of coercive measures deployed by the election machinery for Aadhaar linkage, despite the ECI assuring the process as voluntary, are highly alarming. In Telangana in 2015, the Aadhaar-Voter ID linkage led to large-scale deletion of names from the rolls and in process rendered thousands without voting rights. This is a clear threat to the exercise of universal adult franchise and electoral participation. Over the past several years, rampant errors and discrepancies in Aadhaar processes caused by technological failures, biometric changes etc. have resulted in loss of welfare benefits to vulnerable populations across the country. Moreover the genuine concerns around the privacy issues surrounding Aadhaar database are yet to be addressed.

Importantly, Section 9 of the Aadhaar Act notes that Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship, and hence all Aadhaar card holders are not voters. Not only this but since the Supreme Court judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (retd.) & Anr. v. Union Of India limits mandatory use of Aadhaar authentication to welfare programmes and for income tax purposes, not all voters have Aadhaar. Hence, the card-holders of Aadhaar and EPIC Voter IDs are entirely different, and no purpose appears to be served by linking the two.

CPIML demanded immediate rollback of Aadhaar-EPIC and Aadhaar Collection by the ECI as well as repeal of amendments to Form 6 and Form 6B of the Registration of Election Rules, 1960. ■

Comrade Arjun Lal Released



Comrade Arjun Lal was released from jail on 20 September. He was arrested last month in Hargaon, in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh for standing with the dalits demanding justice against atrocities committed by upper caste goons. When he went with the dalit families to the thana to lodge a first information report, the police in connivance with the perpetrators arrested him and many others. CPIML had launched a statewide campaign against this incident demanding punishment to the police and other administrative officials who are part of Yogi government protected caste atrocities as a systemic phenomenon in UP. Even as Yogi government continues to escalate an atrocious caste and communal divide in the state, the CPIML has reiterated its resolve to intensify struggle for the rights of dalits and tribals in the state. Comrade Arjun Lal and others are out from jail after a five weeks' ordeal, but the false cases imposed on them still exist. CPIML demands an unconditional withdrawal of all false cases imposed on many such activists in the state and speedy justice to all. ■



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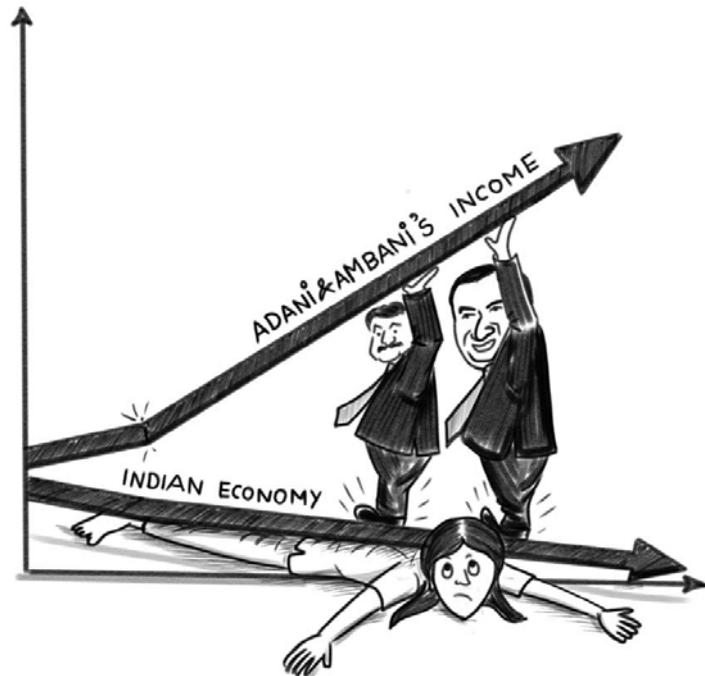
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The Modi-Adani Tango: Unprecedented Concentration of Power and Wealth



On 16 September, the day before the 72nd birth anniversary of Narendra Modi, his closest capitalist friend Gautam Adani had briefly become the world's second richest person according to Forbes' Real Time Billionaires List before being pushed back to the third position. With a net worth of \$152.2 billion, his closest global rivals are French business magnate Bernard Arnault and American entrepreneur and founder of e-commerce platform Amazon Jeff Bezos, while American entrepreneur and CEO of electric car manufacturer Tesla, Elon Musk stays put at the top of the list with a net worth of \$273.2 billion. Adani is now the richest Asian and within India he has left Mukesh Ambani way behind at the second spot trailing him by more than \$50 billion.

Starting as a commodity trading firm in 1988, the Adani group today has grown into India's biggest infrastructure conglomerate with interests ranging from ports, SEZ, roads and airports to energy, gas, agribusiness, warehousing and what not. This phenomenal rise in Adani's economic fortunes can only be compared to the rise in Narendra Modi's political fortunes and indeed the two have happened over the same period and in ever closer collaboration. Modi became Gujarat Chief Minister after the 2001 earthquake and Adani started growing big by grabbing assets and resources in the course of Gujarat's post-quake reconstruction. When after the 2002 Gujarat genocide Modi was criticised by CII leaders, and banned from entering the US and UK, Adani invested massively in the

Vibrant Gujarat Summit of 2003 in which corporates rehabilitated and lauded Modi as the potential ‘CEO of India’. This has been described as a key turning point for Adani, who started receiving huge and exclusive concessions from the Gujarat government. The Adani empire started growing exponentially around the Mundra port, now India’s largest commercial port.

In 2014 Modi used a fleet of Adani jets and helicopters for his election campaign and his arrival to Delhi from Ahmedabad as Prime Minister-designate in an Adani jet announced to the whole world that crony capitalism in India had reached an altogether new level. Since then banks have poured in money to fund Adani’s aggressive expansion while the government has done everything possible to promote Adani’s expansion not just within India but also abroad. Adani now mines Australian coal with Indian bank loans and sells that coal back to India. We now also know how the Adani group was awarded wind power projects in Sri Lanka. On March 30, 2014 before the advent of the Modi era, Adani’s wealth was \$4.5 billion, more than doubling to \$11 billion in January 2020 and jumping exponentially during the pandemic to \$76.7 billion in June 2021 and now at above \$150 billion in September 2022.

This thirty-fold growth in eight years is the result of the most brazen variety of crony capitalism where the state is unscrupulously transferring public assets and resources to the Adani group, enabling it to secure a huge monopoly over core infrastructure areas and a vicelike grip over India’s foreign trade thanks to the group’s growing exclusive control over



India’s ports, airports and road and rail communication. The Sangh-BJP camp would like to brush this under the carpet by projecting Adani as a great wealth creator and job generator, thereby presenting the Adani growth story as the India growth story under Modi. But every economic indicator from India’s plummeting GDP growth to the alarming rise in unemployment, poverty, hunger and malnutrition exposes that propaganda as a blatant lie and cruel insult to the people of India.

It is corporate growth which has come at huge social and environmental cost, and worldwide we now therefore see growing #StopAdani protests against the group’s plundering projects, grabbing of indigenous people’s land, and hypocritical attempts to greenwash its plunder by projecting itself as promoter of renewable energy and the art and culture of indigenous peoples. Increasingly it is also becoming clear that the miraculous growth of Adani is a debt-funded bubble and when the bubble bursts it may well trigger a massive financial crisis in India like the collapse of financial

giants in the US. The growth in Adani group’s net worth is primarily because of its aggressive debt-driven acquisitions in diverse sectors and the surge in the group’s share prices which does not have much direct relation with the group’s revenue earnings. A comparison between Amazon and the Adani group for example shows that while the net worth of the two is on the same level, around \$150 billion, the revenue of the two stands far apart at \$486 billion and \$29.2 billion.

The Modi regime today represents unbridled centralisation of power while the Adani empire epitomises unprecedented concentration of wealth. The popular description of crony capitalism as Adani-Ambani Company Raj aptly summarises the true character of the Modi government as the government of the super-rich, by the super-rich, for the super-rich. For democracy to survive, India will have to unseat the Modi regime and break this growing corporate stranglehold over the Indian economy and polity. ■

European Links of Early Indian Fascism

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

Fascism's Spatial Geographies

In October 1922, Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party staged a march on Rome. Through this march, Mussolini seized power in Italy and inaugurated the first self-proclaimed fascist government in the world. Its consequences were far-reaching. Italian fascism inspired Adolf Hitler and the two fascist leaders went on to wreak havoc in the world, waging war and particularly targeting Jews and Communists.

It has now been precisely one hundred years since that march and unfortunately, we do not find fascism dead and buried. On the contrary, fascistic tendencies dominate authoritarian populisms all over the world, while the latter's Indian chapter has a distinctly fascist character.¹ Standing at this juncture in Indian history, it is important to remember Italian and German fascism in order to draw historical lessons as well as to trace key genealogies. Indian fascism – represented today by the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliate organizations including the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) – was deeply inspired by the Italian and German models.²

Clear historical connections can be traced between the leaders and organizations espousing Hindu supremacist ideologies during the

first half of the twentieth century and their fascist counterparts in Europe. Most significantly, there are records of actual meetings between the Hindu Mahasabha leader Dr. B.S. Moonje and Benito Mussolini in 1931. In this article, we will go over the Moonje-Mussolini connection, and look at what transpired in Indian politics before and after these meetings. This will help us arrive at a clear sense of the European connections of Indian fascism.

In order to develop a thorough historical and theoretical understanding of Hindu supremacism, one needs to grapple with three sets of issues, I suggest. First, one needs to understand the factors that produced the section of Brahmins who pioneered Hindu supremacist politics in colonial India. Who were they, and what made them invest so deeply in developing this political tendency?

Second, one needs to trace the political, intellectual, and cultural currents – both Indian and global – during the late colonial period and situate the growth of fascist ideas within them. In other words, what were the ideas that the early Hindu supremacist leaders thought through in the process of arriving at their formulations? Thirdly, one needs to trace the ideological, strategic, and tactical shifts within Hindu supremacist politics since the 1947 to pin down the factors

that eventually allowed the Hindu supremacists to emerge as the dominant force in Indian politics. This article marks an attempt at grappling with the second question.

The Mussolini Connection³

Marzia Casolari rightly suggests that the interest of Indian Hindu nationalists in fascism and Mussolini can hardly be considered as dictated by an occasional curiosity, confined to a few individuals, rather, it should be considered as the culminating result of the attention that Hindu nationalists, especially in Maharashtra, focused on Italian dictatorship and its leader. To them, fascism appeared to be an example of conservative revolution. This concept was discussed at length by the Marathi press, right from the early phase of the Italian regime.

From 1924 to 1935 *Kesari* regularly published editorials and articles about Italy, fascism, and Mussolini. These Indian observers were convinced that fascism had restored order in a country previously upset by political tensions.

In a series of editorials, *Kesari* described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to an orderly situation, where social struggles had no more reason to exist. The Marathi newspaper gave considerable space to the political reforms carried out

[1] *There is a need to carefully distinguish between the different variants of authoritarian populism we see today. While they share several characteristics, and sometimes an emotional affinity, as evident in the Trump-worship of Modi supporters, their genealogies are deeply rooted in national, regional, and local histories which also define the distinctions between them. An understanding of specific characteristics helps us strategize resistance as well as solidarities at local and global levels. Theorizing on this point is however beyond the scope of the current article.*

[2] *Interestingly, the Indian National Congress had identified the fascist tendencies of the RSS quite early on. A confidential report circulated within the Congress, most probably at the time of the first ban of the RSS, after Gandhi's assassination, noted several similarities between the character of the RSS and that of fascist organisations. National Archives of India (NAI), Sardar Patel Correspondence, microfilm, reel no 3, 'A Note on the RSS', undated.*

[3] *This section and the following section draw significantly from the work of Marzia Casolari. Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 January 2000, pp. 218-229.*

by Mussolini, in particular the substitution of the election of the members of parliament with their nomination in 1928.

Kesari quoted at length from “The Recent Laws for the Defence of the State” which emphasised, on the importance of the National Militia, defined as “the bodyguard of the revolution”. The booklet continued with the description of the restrictive measures adopted by the regime: a ban on the “subversive parties”, limitations to the press, expulsion of “disaffected persons” from public posts, and, finally, the death sentence.

The first Hindu nationalist who came in contact with the fascist regime and its dictator was B S Moonje, a politician strictly related to the RSS. In fact, Moonje had been Hedgewar’s mentor, the two men were related by an intimate friendship. Moonje’s declared intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nationwide organisation is well known. Between February and March 1931, on his return from the round table conference in England, Moonje made a tour of Europe, which included a long stop-over in Italy.

Moonje in Italy

The Indian leader was in Rome during March 15 to 24, 1931. On March 19, in Rome, he visited, among others, the Military College, the Central Military School of Physical Education, the Fascist Academy of Physical Education, and, most important, the Balilla and Avanguardisti organisations. These two organisations, which he describes in more than two pages of his diary, were the keystone of the fascist system of indoctrination – rather than education – of the youths. Their structure is strikingly

similar to that of the RSS. They recruited boys from the age of six, up to 18: the youths had to attend weekly meetings, where they practised physical exercises, received paramilitary training, and performed drills and parades.

The deep impression left on Moonje by the vision of the fascist organisation is confirmed by his diary which recollects a meeting with Mussolini:

I shook hands with him saying that I am Dr Moonje. He knew everything about me and appeared to be closely following the events of the Indian struggle for freedom.... He asked me about Gandhi and his movement and pointedly asked me a question “If the Round Table Conference will bring about peace between India and England”. I said that if the British would honestly desire to give us equal status with other dominions of the Empire, we shall have no objection to remain peacefully and loyally within the Empire; otherwise, the struggle will be renewed and continued.... Signor Mussolini appeared impressed by this remark of mine. Then he asked me if I have visited the University.⁴

Back in India, he started to contact all those who could support his idea of militarising Hindu society. In 1934, Moonje started to work for the foundation of his own institution, the Bhonsla Military School. For this purpose, in the same year he began to work at the foundation of the Central Hindu Military Education Society, whose aim was to bring about military regeneration of the Hindus and to fit Hindu youths for undertaking the entire responsibility for the defence of their motherland, to educate them in the “Sanatan Dharma”, and to train them “in the science and art

of personal and national defence”.

Casolari writes that there is an explicit reference to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in a document that Moonje circulated among those influential personalities who were expected to support the foundation of the school. She also cites evidence of organizational links between such schools in India and Italy.⁵ She rightly suggests that these processes initiated by Moonje gradually became key elements of the RSS model.

Who Heiled Hitler?⁶

The sharpest pronouncements in defence of Hitler’s fascism came from VD Savarkar who was active at the same time as Moonje. With Savarkar’s coming on the political scene, from the late 1930s to the Second World War, there was an attempt by the Hindu Mahasabha / RSS to search for newer contacts with the fascist regimes – Germany in particular. Savarkar went public with his admiration for Germany, for example in a speech on ‘India’s foreign policy’ which he gave to about 20,000 people in Pune on August 1, 1938.

In his speech he observed India’s foreign policy must not depend on “isms”. Germany had every right to resort to Nazism and Italy to Fascism and events had justified that those isms and forms of governments were imperative and beneficial to them under the conditions that obtained there. Casolari rightly suggests that Savarkar thought political systems corresponded to the nature of the respective population; a theory that was clearly inspired by a deterministic conception of race, similar to the conception of race then dominant in Europe.

Starting a controversy with Nehru,

[4] *Ibid*, p.220.

[5] *Ibid*, p.221.

[6] *Ibid*, p.222-225.

Savarkar openly defended the authoritarian powers of the day, particularly Italy and, even more so, Germany:

Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of government simply because we woo it out of academical attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany different allies among the foreign powers.⁷

Savarkar asserted in a speech in the presence of some 4,000 people at Pune on October 11, 1938, if a plebiscite had taken place in India, Muslims would have chosen to unite with Muslims and Hindus with Hindus. During Savarkar's presidentship the anti-Muslim rhetoric became more and more radical, and distinctly unpleasant. It was a rhetoric that made continuous reference to the way Germany was managing the Jewish question. Indeed, speech after speech, Savarkar supported Hitler's anti-Jewish policy, and, on October 14, 1938, he suggested the following solution for the "Muslim problem" in India: A Nation is formed by a majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in minority were driven out from Germany.⁸

Then, towards the end of the year in Thane, in front of RSS militants and local sympathisers, right at the time when the Congress expressed its resolution against Germany, Savarkar stated that in Germany the movement of the Germans is the national movement but that of the Jews is a communal one. And again, the next year, on July 29, in Pune, he said: Nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

1922 Massacre of Workers in Turin, Italy

Soon after the March to Rome and Mussolini's coming to power, Italian fascists waged war against the trade unions and communists to eliminate resistance to the rising fascist tendencies. Turin, an industrial town was a major centre of anti-fascist trade union activity and also the home to Communist newspaper L'Ordine Nuovo, headed by Antonio Gramsci. On 18 December 1922, the fascist militias called Squadristo launched an attack on trade union offices, communist centre of office of L'Ordine Nuovo. The fascist group rounded up communists and trade unionists in the city and executed a number of them in gruesome manners. More than 22 trade unionists and workers were killed in the massacre. ■

reason, the Germans and the Jews could not be regarded as a nation.

Situating the RSS

The histories of these Indo-European connections and affinities help us situate the RSS within Indian and global politics.

The Hindu supremacists of India drew ideological inspiration from the European fascists. The Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS at the time of Indian freedom struggle espoused an exclusive, xenophobic nationalism, hesitated in their commitment to winning national sovereignty, and upheld Brahminical principles. When India was emerging as a nation through anti-colonial struggle where people from all cultural, religious and linguistic identity united to end the rule of Britishers, the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha were on the other side of the fence, with their idea of a nation based on one religion that would rather be subservient to colonial rulers than unite and fight against oppression. It is this idea of nation based on exclusivity and supremacism of one religious identity over the other (Hindu vs Muslim) that connects the early

days of Indian fascism with that of Europe.

Globally, today the RSS and the BJP have pitched themselves as champions of Indian national interests. Their rhetoric has gained legitimacy even in societies which have a rich history of anti-fascist struggle. The Hindu supremacists are gradually showing their true colours on foreign soil too. The recent aggressive march of Hindutva enthusiasts on the streets of Leicester in England is a good example. But we are still quite far from convincing global audiences about the fascist nature of the current regime and from forging powerful anti-fascist alliances that can upstage global Hindutva. Highlighting the lineages of Hindu supremacism even more strongly than before may enable such alliances.

Fascism and Socialism

Last but not the least, revisiting the histories of fascism in Italy and Germany brings to light its direct confrontation with socialism. In a note 'For a Renewal of the Socialist Party' written in 1920, Antonio



ANTONIO GRAMSCI, the leader of the Italian Communist Party who wrote his Prison Notebooks and other essays incarcerated in Mussolini's jails, was a remarkable communist leader who could anticipate the rise of fascism in Italy. At the time of the March on Rome, he was in Moscow as a Comintern delegate and wrote a small piece in the fifth November Revolution Anniversary issue of Pravda. Gramsci of course did not initially expect the Italian bourgeoisie to completely rally around Mussolini and let him destroy democracy with

such ferocity, but he clearly alerted the communist movement to the enormity and urgency of the challenge of defeating fascism.

“ IF IN THIS NEW PHASE the Communist Party's Central Committee proves capable (as it probably will, taking into account the experience of the international communist movement) of developing a tactic adequate to the reality of Italian society and driving open the contradictions created by the Fascist coup d'état, the proletariat will, soon enough, again occupy its historic position, lost after the failure of the factory-occupation campaign in September 1920.

- Antonio Gramsci, *Pravda*, November 7, 1922

Gramsci warned about the rise of reactionary forces that emerged as Italian fascism in 1922, in a situation where the Socialist Party fails to lead the proletariat to power. He noted:

The present phase of the class struggle in Italy is the phase that precedes: either the conquest of political power by the revolutionary proletariat, through the transition to new modes of production and distribution that allow a recovery in productivity, or else to a tremendous reaction by the propertied class and the governing caste. All kinds of violence will be used to subject the industrial and agricultural proletariat to servile labor; the attempt will be made to inexorably break the working class's organizations for political struggle (Socialist Party)

and incorporate the organizations of economic resistance (the unions and cooperatives) into the mechanisms of the bourgeois State.

Indeed, the rise of fascism in Europe was a response of national elites to the threat of socialism. So powerful were the socialist currents in inter-war Europe that fascism took on the garb of socialism to appeal to the masses, before brutally crushing workers' unions, socialists, and communist forces. This confrontation took place in the context of a decadent classical liberal order. Notwithstanding the defeats in Italy and Germany the Left forces emerged as the most powerful opponents of fascism in Europe. No wonder the defeat of European fascism paved the way for a wave of Left victories during the decade following the second world war.

In India, Hindu supremacism

emerged in the colonial period – under circumstances in which the Left was yet to emerge as a powerful force in its own right. The former's rise to prominence in the last few decades has been at the cost of the Indian National Congress more than the Left.

But it is remarkable that despite the Left not being socially and electorally powerful to match the BJP/RSS at this juncture, the latter are ever aware of the Left's ideological threat. The current regime has been eager to crush Left voices of dissent wherever they exist and made a huge deal of its electoral victory over the Left in Tripura a few years ago. As the Left tries to strengthen a democratic opposition against the current regime, the histories of confrontation between fascism and socialism contain important lessons for us. ■

On the Current Juncture in India and the International Context

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

More and more people in India and concerned observers of the Indian political scene from across the world increasingly agree that parliamentary democracy in India is faced with a real and growing threat of a complete fascist subversion. True, the term fascism is not used by all, several writers prefer terms like rightwing populism, authoritarianism, electoral autocracy, ethnic democracy and so on to describe the current Indian situation. For conceptual clarity, CPI(ML) prefers to use the generic term fascism. With the exception of a period of Internal Emergency in the mid 1970s when autocracy had eclipsed democracy, India has had an uninterrupted run of parliamentary democracy for seven decades, but the present situation is widely being perceived as a state of undeclared but more pervasive and permanent Emergency. But while the Emergency of the 1970s basically meant an aggressive overreach of the state vis-a-vis the political opposition and suspension of fundamental rights of citizens, the current phase subjects India's diversity and multi-religious multi-lingual social fabric to severe and sustained assaults.

Intensifying Fascist Offensive

We have seen this situation build up particularly since the days of the Ayodhya campaign three decades ago. We identified the demolition of the Babri Masjid as a definitive sign or early warning of the rise of communal fascism, a term that gained wider currency in the wake of the 2002 Gujarat genocide. The corporate clamour for making Narendra Modi the Prime Minister of India revealed

another unmistakable sign of fascism - loyal corporate backing for the supreme leader. Since 2014 other characteristic features of Indian fascism have been surfacing with alarming rapidity and intensity.

Fascism in India is about the executive undermining and overturning the institutional separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial wings to establish absolute executive domination, combined with the unleashing of state-backed non-state actors going on the rampage with targeted anti-Muslim attacks, intensified caste and gender violence and vandalism on India's streets. It is about absolute centralisation of power bulldozing the federal rights of states combined with alarming concentration of wealth in a few hands and unmitigated state-backed corporate plunder. It is about manufacturing consent on an industrial scale by using every possible weapon of mass disinformation and distraction, using both the Sangh brigade's own IT cell and transforming the mainstream media into a veritable lapdog network, popularly known as Godi media. It is about using draconian laws and destroying the basic tenets of justice and rule of law to silence and persecute dissent and create an overwhelming atmosphere of terror and intimidation to disempower citizens and turn them into subjects in a monarchy or colonial dispensation.

RSS as the Driving Force of Indian Fascism

At the heart of what makes the Modi regime not simply an authoritarian regime but a fascist one is the role played by the RSS in bringing about and orchestrating this new order.

And we must remember that the RSS was born in 1925 drawing inspiration from the first flush of fascism in the world, from the first fascist regime witnessed by the world under Mussolini in Italy and subsequently from the full-blown fascist project in Hitler's Nazi Germany. It fused this imported ideology with the most regressive social and cultural inheritance from India's past, especially the Brahminical caste system and patriarchy and virulent anti-Muslim hate to define India as a Hindu nation on the basis of what Savarkar termed Hindu nationalism or Hindutva.

While Mussolini and Hitler had an early ascent to power and perished in World War II, the fascists in India have had to wait for long to rise to power at the Centre. Armed with the lessons learnt from the Hitler-era hyper nationalist ideology, mobilisation techniques and genocidal blueprint together with digital era techniques of control and surveillance, Indian fascism today is perhaps the most experienced fascist regime, which is trying to secure domestic support and global approval by combining its Hindu supremacist hyper-nationalism with its pro-US foreign policy that leverages the global attraction for the Indian market, corporate India's growing integration with global capital and India's strategic role as a close ally of the US and Israel.

Of course, India is also part of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation where it shares a platform with Russia and China to maintain a measure of autonomy and distance from the US-led West. But it is Modi's personal hobnobbing with

leaders like Trump, Netanyahu and Boris Johnson - incidentally, all these three leaders are now out of power - that expresses the real direction and thrust of Modi government's foreign policy. For a long period after the 2002 Gujarat genocide, Modi as Gujarat CM was denied a visa by several countries in the Western world including the US and UK. But with the growing ascendance of right-wing authoritarianism in global politics, Modi as PM has received strong support from the US-led Western world, which has outlasted the Trump presidency and Modi's special rapport with Trump.

The aggressive role of RSS and its vast network in realising its long-term fascist design of Hindu Rashtra, subversion of state institutions and orchestrated use of genocidal non-state actors with state patronage and impunity, loyal corporate support and strategic imperialist backing are the four key props on which the Modi regime is advancing the fascist agenda of the Sangh with escalating rapidity. The BJP had come to power in 2014 with the slogan of 'Congress-mukt Bharat' or Congress-free India and now it is systematically seeking to turn India into a dissent-free democracy. The BJP president says soon BJP will be the only party left in the country while Home Minister Amit Shah keeps bragging that BJP is here to rule India for the next fifty years.

Communist Role in the Anti-fascist Resistance

India is surely waking up to the fascist danger. Recent years have seen remarkable movements of different sections of Indian people. From the student movement in the wake of the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula, renewed Dalit awakening following the atrocities in Gujarat's Una to the massive Shaheen Bagh protests led by Muslim women against the discriminatory and divisive

amendments to the citizenship laws and the year-long historic movement of India's farmers that compelled the Modi government to repeal the three farm laws designed to promote an outright corporate takeover of Indian agriculture, we have witnessed a series of powerful and determined protests defying hate, fear and tremendous repression. The protests of the people and the fascist steam rolling of federalism and all-out attack on opposition have begun to energise a greater degree of opposition unity and dynamism. **But significant sections of the opposition are hesitant to take a firm stand against the RSS and its vicious campaign of hate and violence and prefer to limit their opposition to the Modi government.** Here too, questions of state repression and political liberty of citizens and the need for a reversal of policy direction away from privatisation to people's welfare remain largely neglected.

This is where revolutionary communists will have to play their role to wage the most determined, comprehensive and sustained resistance and defeat fascism through a protracted battle. Communists will have to help build and sustain movements on the ground and mobilise that energy to promote unity and dynamism in the parliamentary opposition camp to dethrone the fascist forces. Given the strength the fascist forces have already acquired and the damage they have already done to the cause of democracy and advancement of India, it is clear that democratic forces are in for a long haul. Using Ambedkar's analogy, if we see Hindu Rashtra as the greatest calamity on India, our response cannot be limited to the immediate disaster management approach of rescue and relief, it has to go the whole hog and accept the challenge of reconstruction.

With profound insight, Ambedkar had pointed to the contradictions of India's constitutional journey -

the growing unsustainability and irrelevance of electoral equality in the face of mounting social and economic inequality, and the antithesis between the top dressing of constitutional democracy and the underlying undemocratic soil. The answer to fascism lies in the strengthening and deepening of democracy, in making it more thorough-going and consistent to rid it of its internal contradictions and expanding it to every sphere of social life. Historically, this was the promise of socialism, and fascism arose a hundred years ago in Italy precisely to combat and crush the socialist dream. Making the constitutional vision and the proclamation which termed India a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic into a genuine reality provides the real answer to the growing fascist offensive in India today.

International Context: Deepening Crisis, Authoritarianism and War

As already noted, this fascist offensive in India is intensifying in a conducive global environment of rise of rabid right-wing forces across the world. Aiding this rise of the right is the current phase of prolonged and deep economic decline of global capitalism compounded by the massive disruption caused by the Covid19 pandemic. **Since February 2022 we are also witnessing a serious escalation of war in Europe following the Russian invasion of Ukraine even as Yemen and Palestine continue to be ravaged by Saudi Arabia and Israel respectively and the US continues to explore ever newer ways to encircle and target China.** CPI(ML) has categorically condemned Russia for the invasion of Ukraine insisting on cessation of war and restoration of peace guaranteeing the sovereignty of Ukraine. We have

also condemned Russian chauvinism and its expansionist Eurasianism that sees Ukraine essentially as an integral part of Russian territory and culture and attributes the sovereign existence of Ukraine to Lenin's 'mistake' that needs to be undone.

We do not accept the Russian narrative that invokes NATO's eastward expansion as a justification for the ongoing war. However, there can be no mistaking the fact that while both Ukraine and Russia bleed in the war and much of the world has to pay a heavy price, the US benefits the most without any direct involvement in the war.

Historically, it has been using NATO as a weapon to sustain its geopolitical and military domination throughout the Cold War and post-Soviet periods. There was no justification for NATO to continue after the collapse and disintegration of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. But instead of dismantling NATO, the US went about expanding NATO, raising the number of NATO member countries from the founding 12 to 30 at present. This expansion is not just to contain Russia and its growing cooperation with China, it is also to retard the rise of Europe as a parallel power. Even now while claiming to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty, the US and corporate capital is busy effectively colonising the Ukrainian economy with vast swathes of land, state owned enterprises and industries transferred to corporates, accompanied by deregulation and slashing of labour laws. President Zelensky launched this massive selloff campaign which he calls 'Advantage Ukraine' at the New York Stock Exchange.

After the Islamophobic 'Operation Enduring Freedom' or the so-called global war on terror, the US is now trying to recreate the Cold War era environment while sections of pro-US ideologues and propagandists have begun to identify the Russia-China

partnership as the Germany-Italy-Japan axis of World War II, advocating a US-led global alliance against this renewed fascist danger in the world. A crisis-ridden declining US is trying to whitewash its litany of continuing imperialist crimes and reinforce its design of exclusive domination in a unipolar world by presenting itself as the self-styled global champion of democracy as though the world has forgotten its bloody and sinister history of 'export of democracy'.

A Multipolar World over American Unipolarity

Regardless of the internal character of competing global powers, a multipolar world is certainly more advantageous to progressive forces and movements worldwide in their quest for reversal of neoliberal policies, social transformation and political advance. The inter-imperialist rivalry of the early 20th century produced not just World War I but also facilitated the November revolution which snapped the imperialist chain at its weakest link. Despite its severe internal distortions and degeneration, it was the Soviet Union which succeeded in overpowering fascism and concluding World War II on a victorious note for anti-colonial struggles and revolutionary movements. In subsequent decades even as the Soviet Union stagnated internally and got trapped in an unsustainable arms race and superpower rivalry with the US, its existence as a countervailing force against American domination helped many countries and movements in the third world to pursue their own course with a considerable degree of relative autonomy from imperialist control. The liberation of Bangladesh was a key example in our own neighbourhood.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, the US remained the sole superpower and for a period the world did appear to have turned unipolar. In terms of right-wing

theorists, Fukuyama characterised this phase as the universal reign of liberal democracy as the ultimate state form with his triumphalist book 'The End of History and the Last Man'. Samuel Huntington on the other hand acknowledged the US's need for a new 'enemy' and described the new era as one of a 'Clash of Civilizations' in place of the Cold War reality of clash of ideologies. While Huntington was drawing his fault lines keeping the US and a US-led West at the centre, Russian political philosopher and analyst Aleksandr Dugin was visualising a future with Russia at the centre and Eurasia as the ultimate answer to western domination.

Today, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even as Fukuyama calls it 'the end of the end of history' American historians like Timothy Snyder and Anne Applebaum are urging the liberal democracies of the world to unite under US leadership and defeat autocracies or totalitarian regimes by any means necessary including military. But is this not precisely what the US has claimed to be doing all along, especially in the post-war world, and has it not only meant endless wars, brutal occupations and toppling of regimes, including elected ones, through US-sponsored coups and even direct wars of invasion and occupation, to install puppet rulers or pave the way for dictators and regressive, repressive regimes. From Indonesia and Chile to more recent cases like Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, we have seen the violence and devastation of US intervention across the world in the name of 'export or defence of democracy'.

The history of imperialism therefore cannot be reduced to a linear global narrative or a simple democracy-versus-autocracy binary. We want Ukraine to successfully defend its sovereignty, the people of Russia to overcome

the oligarchy and brutal repression of the Putin regime and the people of China, including its beleaguered minorities, to have far greater domestic democracy and liberties. But we also have to recognize that the US strategy of containment of Russia and China is aimed not at these goals, but at securing global hegemony of US imperialism and stopping the world from becoming multipolar. Ukraine is not the only war going on in the world today even though in the global media it has eclipsed and erased other conflicts and wars. Solution to one war will not lead to the establishment of peace and justice in another conflict, for all wars have their own causes and contexts. The forces of peace, justice and democracy will have to speak up against every unjust war of invasion and occupation and every suppression and denial of democracy.

Combining National Priority and Internationalist Commitment

This brings us, communists or more generally democrats of all schools/streams in India, back to the primary and compelling question of fighting fascism in India. Communism being an internationalist ideology and movement, we communists of course have to constantly combine our international response in which we hold high the banner of proletarian internationalism, with our national role. This combination is easier said than done and the history of communist movement in India over the last hundred years has been witness to several instances where the movement has erred or faltered on this score.

To understand this challenge requires going back to the foundational basics of the international communist movement. The Communist Manifesto of course ended with the clarion call urging workers to unite

worldwide and fight and defeat capital internationally. The Manifesto underlined the inherent tendency of capital to disregard national borders and expand through every pore and turn everything, every aspect of life, into a commodity. **The working class too should therefore think and act on a global scale. At the same time, the Manifesto is very categorical that in every nation-state, the proletariat should dethrone capital and strip it of its power to define the interests and identity of the nation and declare itself the nation. The other important point is the assertion of proletarian independence against one's own ruling class within the nation.** The possibility of building socialism within national boundaries actualized first through the victory of the November Revolution followed from this core premise of the Communist Manifesto.

The international organisations of the working class faced the pulls and pressures of this challenge of combining the national and international dimensions and tasks of the socialist/communist movement. The First international spread the message and spirit of international working class solidarity and led to the first major ideological demarcation between anarchists and socialists. The Second international called the socialist International collapsed under the pressure of competing nationalisms and the first inter-imperialist war. The Third international called the Communist International disseminated the spirit of the victorious socialist revolution, helped the fledgling communist movement to grow and take shape in diverse contexts ranging from national liberation struggles in colonies and semi-colonies to parliamentary struggles in liberal democracies and the encounter with extreme reaction in the form of fascism.

The contrasting experiences of the communist movement in China and India however also exposed the limitations and problems of prioritizing the international at the expense of the national situation. While the Chinese movement succeeded in charting its own course in opposition to the central guideline, the movement in India faltered at different junctures in reconciling the demands of the national movement and complexities of the national reality with the direction of the international context. The problem became most apparent when the communist approach to World War II changed dramatically from imperialist war to people's war following Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. The tactical error committed by the Indian communist movement in failing to prioritise the advancement of India's own anti-colonial struggle caused a temporary setback to the movement. In our own CPIML movement while rightly trying to draw inspiration from the victory of the Chinese revolution in a predominantly agrarian and backward society we erred in coining slogans that projected the party and the movement as a loyal imitation of China and undermined our independent response to the Indian reality.

Today the communist movement in India faces the historic responsibility of contributing its best to defeat the fascist offensive. The international context too demands a concerted powerful response from all progressive forces in the face of deep and prolonged economic recession, rise of authoritarian regimes and the havoc of climate change. Progressive forces worldwide will have to unite against all imperialist aggression and warmongering, resist authoritarian forces in their respective contexts and intensify the battle for socialism in the twenty first century. ■

Savarkar to Hedgewar

NEP's Saffron Coat on Kannada Textbooks

▲ ARATRIKA DEY

"In the room where Savarkar was jailed, there was not even a small keyhole. However, bulbul birds would visit the room from somewhere, on whose wings Savarkar would sit and fly out to visit the motherland every day."

The above is a translated excerpt from a chapter in the Class 8 textbook of Kannada language on the Hindutva ideologue and British collaborator "Veer" Savarkar. Although the excerpt is being projected as a 'metaphor' by Sangh affiliates in-charge of textbooks, the efforts to project Savarkar as a nationalist icon, despite his many mercy petitions, remains obvious. This excerpt is no stray piece of text, many more such regressive changes lurk in every nook and corner of the state-syllabus school textbooks recently revised under the aegis of a committee setup by the Karnataka Government.

The State of Karnataka has long been serving the Sangh Parivaar as a saffron laboratory. Expectedly, Karnataka became the first state to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 last year. The implementation started at the college-level with extensive syllabus changes, introduction of multiple entry-exit systems, credit-based choice systems, and four-year undergraduate programme, leaving lakhs of students and teachers clueless. This year, the implementation has been extended to school education. Many steps have already been taken by the State Government to implement these changes. The one that caused the most public outcry was the slew of changes incorporated into the textbooks of the state-syllabus for the academic year 2022-23. The changes were made by a textbook revision committee

constituted in September last year, headed by Rohith Chakrathirtha – a known right-wing writer and orator. Chakrathirtha has been accused of posting defamatory remarks against Rashtrakavi Kuvempu, revered as a Kannada poet and playwright, and distorting the state anthem written by him. Instead of ensuring school education to get back to pre-COVID pandemic normalcy, the State Government has been spending its efforts on revising textbooks to propagate right-wing ideology.

Before delving into the specific changes brought about by this committee, it is important to understand its connection with the NEP 2020. NEP 2020 is a marriage of neoliberalism and Hindutva ideology, in the sense that on one hand, it attempts to completely privatise and commercialise education by promoting a 'public-philanthropic-partnership' model; and on the other hand, it paves the way for saffronisation of school curriculum. At the very introduction, the NEP document states, "The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy." At another place, it talks about promoting the ideals of 'dharma' and 'karma' that form the ideological basis of the caste system. Evidently, the recent textbook revision drive is staying true to these diktats.

However, the root of NEP can be traced back to around the period of implementation of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) in India. In 1994, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was formed out of the last round of the GATT (General Agreement on Trade



and Tariffs), and India became its member in 1995. In 1996, it was proposed by the body, that education be brought under the ambit of GATT. Thus, binding the member countries to turn education, along with 12 other services, like health, as a tradeable commodity, thereby allowing unrestricted access to the education market by foreign and domestic capital. Since then, there has been increasing privatisation of education causing education to get costlier day-by-day. NEP 2020 should be seen as an accelerated and consolidated form of this policy with saffronization as an added component.

Coming to the list of changes, some of the glaring ones are given here. A poem on Dr. BR Ambedkar has been removed from the Class 6 textbook. A lesson in which details of Ambedkar's early days, his native village, his parents, the Mahad Satyagraha, Dalit entry into Kalaram temple that was led by him, etc., which were elaborated, has been deleted from the textbooks.

In the chapter 'Namma Samvidhaana' (Our Constitution), the line calling Ambedkar as the architect of the Indian Constitution has been removed and instead, BN Rau has been credited with playing a key part in drafting the Constitution. Examples of Tipu Sultan, Sangolli Rayanna, etc., have been replaced by examples from Vedas and Mahabharata in the Class 10 social science textbook. The Akhand Bharat map has been introduced in the Class 6 social science textbook, by replacing a map of India's political divisions. From Class 10 Social Science textbook, lessons on Narayana Guru's Dharma Paripalana Yogam, Theosophical Society, Young Bengal Movement and Periyar, have been completely removed. An article by left-leaning author Dr. GD Ramakrishna on Bhagat Singh was removed by this committee though later re-introduced after massive public outcry. From Class 10 Social Science textbook, lessons on movements to eradicate untouchability, gender discrimination, child marriage, child trafficking have been completely removed. False information on the 12th Century anti-caste reformer Basavanna was also included. In total,

around works of 27 Dalit writers were dropped and mostly replaced with texts by Brahmin writers, including writers with open RSS affiliations. The most noteworthy change is the introduction of a speech by RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar titled "Nijavada Adarsha Purusha Yaaragabeku?" (Who Should be The Real Role Model?) translated into Kannada. The textbook revision committee has very slyly replaced the mentions of RSS's 'bhagwa dhwaja' with only 'dhwaja' in this speech by Hedgewar.

These changes induced much hue and cry. Many authors like Devanuru Mahadeva, Roopa Hassan, etc., withdrew permissions to include their texts in the school curriculum. From left student groups, civil society organisations, Dalit and minority groups to Lingayat practitioners, Kannada regionalists etc., - most diverse people came together to protest the textbook revisions. The All India Students' Association in Karnataka along with other left student groups, was at the forefront of all these protests. Devanuru's book 'Depth and Breadth of RSS' became a bestseller under the impact of the anti-revision agitation. Under pressure

from all sides, Chief Minister Bommai was forced to disband the textbook revision committee under the pretext that their 'work was done' and modify the parts about Basavanna. Most other changes were kept. Although by that time, more than 90% of the textbooks were printed and the majority of them were distributed across schools in Karnataka.

Fascists have different weapons to unleash assault on different sections of the society. The farm laws, labour codes, and NEP constitute a three-pronged attack on the farmers, workers, and student-youth of our country. It aims to sell the youth of our country to corporates as cheap labour or turn into RSS foot-soldiers with saffronised minds. The farmers unitedly resisted the neoliberal assault on them by standing strong against it for more than a year with 700 martyrs. This should act as an inspiration for the students of our country, whose majority also comes from farmer families, to boldly stand against NEP. The movement against NEP must be an integral part of the broader anti-fascist struggle that the progressive student-youth organisations should build today as a primary task. ■

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A Lost Page from the 1857 Revolution: Bihar's First Dalit (Rajwar) Rebellion

▲ KUMAR PARWEZ

The participation of the common people, especially the lowest sections, in the 1857 revolution against oppression, loot and slavery is gradually starting to unfold, but some pages remain yet unread. The most important of these is the Rajwar rebellion in Bihar which has so far appeared only as a footnote in history books. This was the first dalit revolt in Bihar and possibly the biggest till date. The rebellion which

started in 1857 continued for the next ten years. By 1859, the struggle of 1857 in other parts of the country had either run out of steam or suffered defeat, but the Rajwar rebellion continued relentlessly. This struggle was fought in former Gaya District's Nawada and the hills of Nalanda. At one time, the Rajwars had even succeeded in wiping out the British from the region. Rajauli was the main centre of the struggle, where not only the British, but also the

zamindars were given a tough fight. Basically, this was a revolt launched against the 'kamia' system (a kind of loan system by which agrarian workers were turned into bonded labour), and other castes are also mentioned as participating in the revolt. It took the British all of 10 years to suppress this rebellion. Later, they wreaked vengeance on the Rajwars for this and stopped appointing them to the post of Chowkidars. The British placed many

such castes in the category of 'criminal castes'. The Rajwars call themselves 'Rajvanshi' (descendent from royalty). They have a dense population in what is known as Nawada District today (earlier, Gaya District). This area has a few castes like Rajwar, Ramani and Chauhan which come under the Dalit category, but it cannot be denied that at one time they could have been among the ruling castes. Until the ascendancy of Pushyamitra Shunga, the rulers in Magadh used to come from the lower castes. This region was known as Keekat Pradesh and Vedic traditions have generally been weak here. Brahminism had to work hard to establish roots here. Possibly, after Pushyamitra Shunga's counter-revolution and the demolition of Buddhist culture, these castes were made into slaves, by removing from ruling positions.

This armed revolt extended from Nawada, Nalanda, Kauvakol, Hazaribagh and the hills of Govindpur, up to Bhagalpur. The Dalit identity was not an issue here. It was, rather, an explosion of the long-simmering anger against the 'kamia' system. Therefore, the local zamindars were also the target, along with the British. The rebel Rajwars attacked the 'kutchcheris' of the zamindars and looted their property. They even killed many zamindars. There was a time when fear of the rebels was so great that Thana officials left their jobs and ran away. Jawahir Rajwar was the chief organizer of the rebellion. Among other prominent leaders were Etwa and Karu Rajwar. The Rajwars believe that the descendants of Magadh King Bimbisara had found their leader in Jawahir Rajwar after thousands of years.

Jawahir Rajwar was born in 1832 in Pasai village in old Gaya District. He was adept at wrestling and wielding the sword and other weapons. It was under his leadership that the rebellion began. The British had to launch campaign after campaign in order to crush the Rajwar rebellion. The local zamindars



Commemoration of Rajawar Revolt of 1857 in Nawada

During 1857 war of independence the Rajawar revolt in the hills of Nawada in Bihar continued for almost ten years. In commemoration of the heroes of this historic battle – Jawahir Rajawar, Aetawa Rajawar and Karu Rajawar – and for constructing their memorial a mass meeting was organised on 21 Sep. 22 in Sitamarhi of Nawada district. The meeting was addressed by CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya and attended by thousands of people from nearby villages and towns. A pledge was taken to preserve the memory of those martyrs by erecting a national memorial at Sitamarhi (Nawada), by including life sketches of the heroes of this war of independence in school text books, to increase awareness about our history of freedom struggles and to commit ourselves for today's struggle to fulfil the yet unfulfilled dreams of the martyrs. Comrade Dipankar said that real tributes can be paid to the martyrs by carrying forward their ideas, dreams and struggles forward.

Those in the seat of power in India today are the people who never were part of India's freedom movement and are now trying to subvert equality, freedom and fraternity which had been the fundamental tenets of freedom struggle. Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh had warned us of brown Angrez, and we have to struggle against such forces now for an India of martyrs' dreams, for freedom and equality for all. The commemoration event was also addressed by CPIML Bihar secretary Kunal, senior leaders Amar, Rambali Yadav, Arwal MLA Mahanand Singh, and more than a dozen activists and leaders from the Ranjvanshi community.

The speakers pledged to carry forward the spirit of Freedom75 campaign and dreams of the martyrs. Nawada District panchayat president Pushpa Rajavanshi, Vijay Rajvanshi, Pradeep Rajavanshi and others also spoke at the meetings which was presided by CPIML leader Mevalal Rajavanshi and conducted by Bhola Ram. ■

stood firmly with the British. Many battles took place between the rebels and the British on the banks of River Sakri at Khargobigha, Khurarnath, Pusai and other places. From the start of the rebellion Jawahir Rajwar's name in every incident associated with the revolt, but he was killed on September 29th, 1857. After Jawahir was martyred, brutal and horrifying actions were taken against the rebels. About 600 villages were burnt by the British, but the rebellion did not cease. It continued under the leadership of

Etwa Rajwar. The biggest campaign against the Rajwars started in 1863. War was waged against them with an army 10,000 strong, comprising police personnel as well as zamindars who launched a three-pronged attack against the Rajwars. But, even this huge campaign could not succeed. The rebellion continued and the British were unable to arrest Etwa Rajwar. It was only after 1867, that the rebellion could be put down.

The rebellion was put down, but the issues raised by the Rajwars were yet

to be resolved. The British officials had realized that it was necessary to end the bonded labour system. Albeit after 70 years, the British had to pass a law ending the 'kamia' system in Bengal Presidency. The law was passed, but in reality the bonded labour system in this region continued till after the Independence and labourers were forced to work for very low wages. On the other hand, the British regime passed an amendment to the Criminal Act in 1871, to bring these 'rebel castes' under control. A list of many castes was prepared. Castes of the warlike kind were placed under these hard laws. The list of 'criminal' castes included the Rajbhar, Bhar, Rajwar, Musahar, Pasi, Dusadh, Khatak, Nat, Chamar and other castes. Astonishingly, the savarna and OBC castes were not placed in this list, and neither was the Muslim community. Only the

Dalits were targeted. The tendency to associate the Dalit castes with crime was probably institutionalized from this time onward.

Jawahir Rajwar, Bhokta Rajwar, Fagu Rajwar, Daood Miyan and Ganauri Khalifa were among the chief organizers of the rebellion who were martyred. Etna Rajwar could not be arrested, but what became of him was never known. Ugrasen, Jitan, Dina Rajwar, Mohan and Govind were among the rebels whose properties were confiscated. There is evidence that women also participated in the rebellion. Other prominent names are Sohan Dusadh, Suraj Manjhi, Jodhan Musahar, Ghanshyam Dusadh, Dina Rajwar, Ugrasen Rajwar and Bandhu Dhobi. Many of these were martyred and others were sentenced to 'kalapani'.

Prominent in the suppression of the

rebellion were Worseley, Campbell, Nazir Ali Husseini, Daroga Ram, Baksh Singh, Malik Inayat Ali, Zamindar Babu Nandkishore Singh, Mahadev Singh, Faful Singh, Thakur Kripal Singh Raja Mehendi Ali Khan and Leela Singh.

A mass program will be organized at Rajauli on September 21st, 2022 to commemorate this glorious struggle. An Azadi (freedom) march will be organized on that day from Sitamarhi to Rajauli. CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, as well as renowned historians and intellectuals, will participate in the program. Friends, let us lift this historic struggle out of the footnotes and bring it where it belongs – into the mainstream! The historic Rajwar rebellion and the brave martyrs are a source of inspiration for us that is found only rarely in history. ■

Celebrating Freedom 75 in Mumbai

▲ AJIT PATIL

A yearback, after the sad demise of Comrade Gail Omvedt, a delegation from our party led by Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya, went to Kasegaon in the Satara district of Maharashtra to pay our respects share the grief with her partner Com. Bharat Patankar and her daughter Prachi. Bharat narrated her political and social journey with a communist family who was a part of the freedom struggle and the 'Prati Sarkar' in western Maharashtra.

Com. Bharat Patankar played a key role in bringing together left parties, young activists and artists for a week-long celebration under the banner of 'People's Freedom 75' which took place in Mumbai. The programme was based on the concept of the dream of the toiling masses to oust the British colonialist's rule from India as also to end class, caste, gender and religious exploitation

and oppression. These masses continued their fight to achieve their remaining dreams even after independence. Our celebration of 'People's Freedom 75' was to be inspired by all the struggles to achieve our dreams. At the same time, the basis of celebration was not limited to the Constitution, but was mainly focussed on the dream of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who envisaged a "proposal of constitution for United States of India", which was going beyond attaining equality in terms of 'one individual – one vote', but encompassed the realization of social and economic equality for all.

The week-long program started with an art exhibition at Bhupesh Gupta Bhavan on August 7th which continued till August 13th, and displayed paintings, photographs, sculptures and installations of 70 artists from across the country. It was

interspersed with a 'Kavi Sammelan', story-reading, rap performances, revolutionary songs, cultural programme, etc. Young women rappers left everyone spell bound, and a group of rappers who are also environmental activists agitating to save Aarey, also performed with special percussion instruments of the Adivasis. Com. Anupam participated on behalf of our party. Whereas, on August 9th – on the occasion of the Quit India Movement – a silent march was organised to the August Kranti Maidan and homage was paid to the martyrs of the freedom struggle. On August 13th, a programme was organised at the Shivaji Mandir Auditorium which included cultural performances, speeches by various political parties and other progressive organisations, including the Dalit groups and women's groups. ■



**FREE ALL
POLITICAL
PRISONERS**



Prisoners of Conscience Under Modi Regime

After spending 711 days in detention, Siddique Kappan was granted interim bail on 9th September. He is still in jail, for there is another criminal case pending against him, in which he is yet to get bail. A journalist by profession, Kappan, was arrested by the police when he was en-route to cover the rape and murder of a young Dalit woman at Hathras, Uttar Pradesh. Slapped with unsubstantiated charges by the police, labelled an anti-national and vilified by the right wing for speaking truth to power, Kapan reflects a story arch familiar to many, who like him are a part of a growing community of political prisoners in India.

Since the BJP's rise to power in 2014, the list of people -ranging from human rights activists to lawyers, and journalists to students - being persecuted for their identity and their fidelity to fighting for democratic and progressive rights, has grown rapidly. Starting from the arrests related to Bhima Koregaon in 2018 and protests against CAA in 2020 to the recent arrests of activist Teesta Setalvad and journalist Mohammad Zubair, the current regime is bent on imprisoning any person who speaks uncomfortable truths and exposes their lies. Whether it is the arrests of Umar Khalid and scores of other anti-CAA activists in cooked-up criminal charges of the Delhi riots, or Anand Teltumbde, Prof. Hany Babu, Gautham Navlakha and others in the Bhima Koregaon case, the one common feature is the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, (UAPA) 1967 under which bail is a rare possibility. Just a few days ago, the Bombay High Court rejected the bail petition of Prof. Hany Babu. Ofcourse Varavara Rao was given medical bail by the Supreme Court, but only after the same was refused to Fr. Stand Swamy leading to his death in custody. Importantly, the acquittal rate under the UAPA is 97.2%, and a recent PUCL report relies on NCRB data to show that of 8,371 persons arrested under UAPA, only 235 were convicted between 2015-2020.

For long it has been said that the worst of Indian state excesses is tried, tested and perfected in Kashmir, and then executed across the rest of the country. It is the same with political arrests. Over 5000 Kashmiris were arrested following the Modi government's decision to abrogate

Article 370. Politicians, lawyers, businesspeople, activists and journalists across the valley were thrown in far flung jails or kept under house arrest. In November 2021, noted human rights activist, Khurram Parvez from Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), a group based in Srinagar which publishes regular reports on the human rights violations and excesses committed by security forces in the Valley, was arrested on accusations of "terror-funding". The National Investigation Agency (NIA) took charge and he was arrested under the draconian anti-terrorism law, making it impossible for him to get bail. Earlier this year, Kashmiri journalist Fahad Shah was detained under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) on the grounds that he had been "misguiding common masses by circulating fake news against the government and its policies."

The pro-corporate neo-liberal policies of the state has given a free hand to the big corporate houses to loot natural resources dispossessing and displacing Adivasis and other vulnerable communities. The resistance of these communities is viewed as a threat, which the state persecutes and silences through state repression and criminalisation of democratic protest. The concerted struggle of the Adivasis of Jharknad against this corporate loot and dispossession, in the form of the Pathalgadhi movement was met with collective punishment where more than 10,000 Adivasis were accused of sedition. Earlier this year, scores of villagers and activists were arrested for protesting against JSW's mega steel plant in Dhinkia village, Jagatsinghpur district Odisha. This has become the norm today, and the full force of the criminal law is used to quell democratic protests.

The pattern is clear. What is being criminalized are not mere actions but any belief opposing the government. The State cynically instrumentalises investigations and weaponises an already unjust criminal justice system to lock up anyone standing up against its unjust policies. Thus, the so-called investigations into the Delhi Riots, translates into targeting of anti-CAA activists and Bhima Koregaon becomes the avenue to target Dalit intellectuals to human right activists and lawyers. The extent to which



this regime would go is perhaps revealed in the arrest of Jignesh Mevani from Gujarat by the Assam police and the Delhi Police's action of flying journalist Zubair to Bangalore to recover his laptop for the mere act of publishing a public tweet.

Draconian laws and an increasingly pliant judiciary have served as the regime's best friends in executing its political vendetta. Given that all cases that have been foisted have scant or false evidence, and will in all probability not withstand legal scrutiny, the rule book of the State has been to make the process the punishment. The success for the state here lies not in proving their case in Court but in entangling prisoners in a long-winded and cruel criminal process. This is nowhere as clear as in the case of Bhima Koregaon where despite overwhelming evidence by international security organizations that the Pune Police planted fake evidence in the devices of two political prisoners, no steps have been taken to either hold the police account, or release those falsely accused.

With trials yet to begin in most cases, political prisoners - many of whom are aged - are suffering from growing mistreatment at the hands of jail authorities who are refusing access to even the most basic of amenities like mosquito nets and telephones. Last year, Stan Swamy, one among the BK-16, was a victim of institutional murder, after being denied timely medical treatment in jail. Today, others like Vernon Gonsalves, GN Saibaba and Gautam Navlakha find themselves similarly struggling with their health, with no signs of respite from the State.

It is said that democracy is not an empty dream, and it is a meaningful concept whose essential attributes are recited in the preamble itself: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, and Equality of status and opportunity. This regime has learnt that it does not have to abrogate democracy, rather democracy can be hollowed out most effectively by a total denial of social, economic and political justice to the people, by emasculating liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and by abjuring commitment to the ideal of a society of equals.

This vindictive quelling of any voice of democracy and dissent is an essential feature of the Indian brand of fascism and those jailed can only be called "political prisoners". Indeed, democracy, right to dissent and the fundamental right to free speech are hollowed out by the present regime flexing its muscles by using the criminal justice system and draconian laws to strike terror against those opposing its fascist policies.

In this context, it is necessary to remember that historically, political prisoners have sought recognition of their separate identity as political prisoners vis-à-vis other prison inmates not for seeking privileged treatment, but

more to assert the legitimacy of the struggle or beliefs while delegitimising the state power behind their incarceration. As during the freedom struggle when Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries demanded that they be recognised as political prisoners going to the extent of undertaking hunger fasts in prison for this purpose, today too, those incarcerated for their political beliefs and activism indeed are "political prisoners".

We must fight back. We must fight for the spirit and the values that these prisoners embody, and most importantly must fight for their release. A society that imprisons its dissenters is a society that imprisons progress. And through this long drawn fight for release of all political prisoners, we must constantly affirm and reaffirm our solidarity with them and give them hope that there is a community of people outside prison rooting and fighting for them.

To this end, we must strive to keep up the fight for political prisoners and for their families continuous and on-going.

As a start, AILAJ, AISA RYA jointly proposes to have an event in Delhi, inviting family, friends and comrades of political prisoners and their lawyers to share their experience of having loved ones in prison, and fighting for them in Court.

We are looking at this event as a first of many, and as a springboard for a wider campaign with the following demands:

- Release all political prisoners immediately.
- Scrap the UAPA, NSA, AFSPA and all state security laws
- Provide immediate and quality medical care to all political prisoners including Vernon Gonsalves, GN Saibaba and Gautam Navlakha. ■





GAUTAM NAVLAKHA

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



SURENDRA GADLING

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



SUDHIR DHAWALE

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



SHOMA SEN

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



RONA WILSON

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



MAHESH RAUT

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



ARUN FERREIRA

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



VERNON GONSALVES

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



DR. ANAND TELTUMBDE

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



SAGAR GORKHE

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



RAMESH GAICHOR

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



JYOTI JAGTAP

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Bhima Koregaon
Charges: UAPA



GULFISHA FATIMA

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: UAPA



MEERAN HAIDER

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: UAPA



SHIFA UR REHMAN

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: UAPA



ATIKUR RAHMAN

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Hathras
Charges: UAPA, Sedition



UMAR KHALID

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: UAPA



SHARJEEL IMAM

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: UAPA, Sedition



SIDDIQUE KAPPAN

Incarcerated Since 2020
Case: Hathras
Charges: UAPA, Sedition



AASIF SULTAN

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Kashmir/ Journalism
Charges: UAPA, PSA



SAJAD GUL

Incarcerated Since Jan 2022
Case: Kashmir/ Journalism
Charges: PSA



FAHAD SHAH

Incarcerated Since Feb 2022
Case: Kashmir/ Journalism
Charges: UAPA, Sedition, PSA



KHURRAM PARVEZ

Incarcerated Since 2021
Case: Kashmir/ Human Rights
Charges: UAPA



MANAN GULZAR DAR

Incarcerated Since 2021
Case: Kashmir/ Journalism
Charges: UAPA



MOHAMMAD JAVED

Incarcerated Since Jun 2022
Case: Protest Against CAA-NRC
Charges: NSA



GN SAIBABA

Incarcerated Since 2014
Case: Human Rights Activist
Charges: UAPA



SANJIV BHATT

Incarcerated Since 2018
Case: Human Rights Activist
Charges: UAPA



HIDME MARKAM

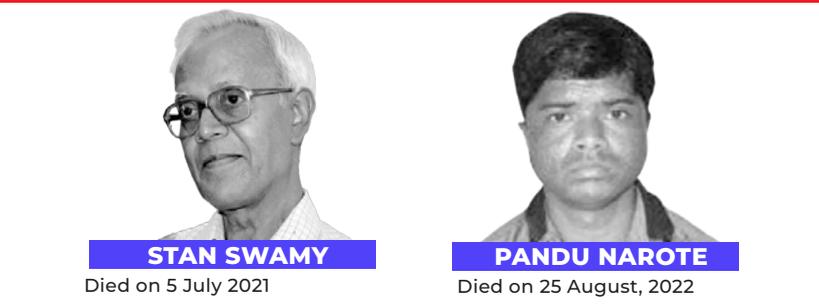
Incarcerated Since 2021
Case: Human Rights Activist
Charges: UAPA



RB SREEKUMAR

Incarcerated Since Jun 2022
Case: Human Rights Activist
Charges: IPC Sec. 120 B & others.

CUSTODIAL KILLINGS - DEATH DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL CARE IN JAIL



STAN SWAMY

Died on 5 July 2021



PANDU NAROTE

Died on 25 August, 2022



Convention for Release of Political Prisoners

Press Club of India, New Delhi | 8th October 2022 | 3-6 PM

AISA-AILAJ-RYA

Addressing Climate Change: Environmental Justice through Economic and Social Justice

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

In the first two weeks of September, Bengaluru experienced torrential rains that left several thousand working-class families in the lurch due to submergence of their houses. While television channels were filled with news of how CEO's were taken out of their homes in boats, and the manner in which water had stagnated in IT parks. However, what most missed was the utter devastation caused to thousands of working class families whose homes were inundated in rain water, resulting in them losing all their belongings, save the clothes on their backs.

Ignored in the news these working class families also found themselves ignored by the Government, until trade unions highlighted their conditions and compelled the government to step in with relief.

The workers who were affected are powrakarmikas, auto drivers/helpers, waste pickers, construction workers, domestic workers and daily wage workers who build the city and who ensure the health of the city. Those most affected belong to Dalit

communities – those most vulnerable and belonging to historically oppresses sections of society.

While the CEO's who had to be brought out on boat, and the IT companies suffered losses, the working class families effectively lost their entire lives – all their ration, clothes and belongings were lost, children lost their clothes, uniforms, books, bags and all that they required to go to school, and families had to reconstruct their homes itself.

The rains and the devastation of lives has brought to the forefront two crucial issues – One, the inequitable distribution of resources that result in lakhs of people today living in tin sheds in a state of utter vulnerability and, two the manner in which the effect of climate change affects most seriously and disproportionately those from the working class.

Studies¹ have traced the flooding in Bangalore to the manner in which real estate capitalism came together with historical agrarian caste and class relations and corruption to convert public land, farmland and wetland

into urban real estate whereby lakes, waterways, storm drains that were meant to manage waterflow were all converted into real estate.

In response to the floods, the BBMP announced an encroachment drive. What is to be seen is how the BBMP will go about such drive, and which encroachments will be identified. Quick to identify “slums” as encroachments, it is seen that the real encroachments made by the rich and the powerful are often turned a blind eye too. “Slums” that has become a way of referring to any area where urban deprived communities live are treated as encroachments, when in fact they represent the failure of the State in performing its fundamental obligation of ensuring the provision of decent housing – A constitutional obligation that the Supreme Court has made clear vests on the State. While the list of encroachers identified by BBMP includes Wipro, Prestige, Eco Space, Bagmane Tech Park, Columbia Asia Hospital and Divyashree Villas, the demolition of encroachments is limited to small homes, and these companies are yet to be touched.



[1] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/09/09/flooding-pakistan-india-development/>

Addressing Climate Change

The crisis that we saw with excess rainfall and the flooding is indicative of the larger ecological crisis that the world faces today. The floods in Pakistan, the worst in recent history has killed over 1000 people and displaced over 320 million. Earlier this year, Northeast India, especially Assam and Meghalaya, faced one of its worst floods, with thousands of villages were inundated, and hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes.

We can't reduce Climate change to an increase in temperature. Effectively it is about all material conditions - It is about how production takes place, increased consumption patterns, the inequitable distribution of resources, how we live, eat, move and what we do.

There can be no two ways about the fact that climate change has far-reaching adverse impacts on natural resources and ecological patterns. Rainfall patterns have gotten more skewed; forests and water bodies are dwindling, and what is understood as 'atypical' climate events are increasingly becoming the norm.

These shifts and changes are the result of several factors, including the nature of 'development' models adopted, the capitalistic mode of production, increasing consumerism, inequitable distribution of resources, the lack of proper governance and regulation, and misplaced policy priorities. This crisis has only been exacerbated by rising demands put on the environment, driven by a neoliberal policy framework that undermines regulations.

Since the causes of this crisis are systemic, rooted in economic and political structures, the solution too has to be systemic. Climate change cannot be addressed by appealing to the 'moral', 'ethical' conscience of

the individual, and in exhortations to change individual consumption and lifestyle patterns.

Large global corporations bear a disproportionate role in causing climate change. A Carbon Majors Database report of 2017 found that just 100 companies have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988; and more than half of global industrial emissions since 1988 can be traced to just 25 corporate and state-owned entities.

It is necessary to recognize that capitalism and the demands of capitalism itself results in climate change, and unless the capitalistic mode of production is addressed, it is not possible to address climate change.

As we saw in the floods and as we see in any climate crisis, it is the vulnerable, the historically oppressed and the marginalised – working class, fisherpeople, landless agrarian labour, adivasis dependent on land, rural women, slum dwellers in increasingly congested cities – who bear a disproportionate share of the burden caused by these shifts in ecological balance. On one hand the inequitable distribution of resources and the denial of basic rights places them in a situation of extreme precarity, and it is this situation of precarity, which places them in a situation where they are disproportionately impacted.

Social, political and economic justice is intrinsically and organically connected to environmental justice. It is necessary that any response to the issue of climate change is political, and address social and economic inequities.

The struggle in the Amazon: Environmentalism and Class Struggle

“Environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening” Chico Mendes famously said. A radical unionist and environmentalist, Chico Mendes was assassinated on 22nd December, 1988, by landowners who were looking to deforest an area of forest in the Amazon.

The struggle of the rubber tappers' union movement of the Amazon in the late 1980s and the contribution of Chico Mendes shows how environmental issues, issues of class struggle and struggles against imperialism must necessarily be fought together.

The rubber tappers are a highly exploited group of workers, whose job is to “tap” liquid rubber from trees in the Amazon rainforest. Rubber became increasingly important in the world economy from the end of the 19th century, especially after the invention of the pneumatic tyre.

The traditional rubber estates operated a system of debt bondage, tying the workers to the company. The rubber trappers' trade union movement and Chico Mendes emerged as an important challenge to this, with environmental issues, workers' rights and broader political goals being central to the struggle waged by them.

They recognized that the Amazon could not be completely cut off and that private exploitation of the land was resulting in its destruction. To this, Chico Mendes said:

“We realised that in order to guarantee the future of the Amazon we had to find a way to preserve the forest while at the same time developing the region's economy... We accepted that the Amazon could not be turned into some kind of sanctuary that nobody

could touch. On the other hand, we knew it was important to stop the deforestation that is threatening the Amazon and all human life on the planet... So we came up with the idea of extractive reserves... We mean the land [should be] under public ownership, but the rubber tappers and other workers... should have the right to live and work there..."

They also built alliance with the indigenous people's movement to push for the public control over the amazon and to create extractive reserves across the Amazon.

The struggle of the rubber tappers movement shows the necessity to look at environmental justice holistically.

Growing inequality, concentration of wealth and natural resources and the capitalistic mode of production itself will have to be addressed.

Demand for economic, social and environmental justice

The World Inequality Report 2022 shows that the top 10 per cent holds 57 per cent of the total national income while the bottom 50 per cent's share is just 13 per

cent in 2021. Research on inequality also shows that dominant castes have the highest levels of land ownership, consumption expenditure, and income, followed by Other Backward Classes and Dalits.

Those who are forced to live lives of precarity are compelled to suffer disproportionately the effects of climate change. They are the historically marginalized classes and castes.

We cannot speak about environmental justice without speaking about economic and social justice – without dealing with growing income inequality and the manner in which caste hierarchies are perpetuated. Addressing climate change cannot be divorced from the larger question of democratic control over resources and democratic decision-making. Labour, economic and environmental policies of the neo-liberal state that push people into such precarious living will have to be challenged. The struggle against climate change is a political struggle, one that would necessarily have to encompass in it class struggle, the struggle for the annihilation of caste and a struggle against imperialism. ■



Platform Launched against Environmental Crisis in WB

▲ **MADHURIMA BAKSHI**

In January 2022, various environmental, human rights and socio-political activists of West Bengal came together to form a platform called 'Poribesh Odhikar Andolon'. The immediate context of forming the platform is the need to forge larger solidarity with the people's movement against proposed Deocha Pachami coal mining project posing serious threats to the environment, lives and livelihoods of the people of Birbhum. Amidst ever increasing exploitation of natural resources and

challenges of climate crisis, there are many resistance struggles going on in our country which are closely related to environmental issues. This platform aims to build coordination among such environmental and rights movements spread across the state. After organizing few public meetings, marches and publishing a booklet, a mass convention was organized in solidarity with ongoing environmental movements in order to raise the political questions behind the present climate crisis. Representatives from

Flood Relief by AICCTU and AISA in Bengaluru

While the media largely ignored the devastation caused to the working class, AICCTU highlighted and brought it to the attention of the Government.

AICCTU raised complaints with the state authorities such as BBMP, Safai Karamchari Commission, Department of Labour, Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board compelling them to start distribution of flood relief including ration, blankets and other basic necessities to pourakarmikas.

The AICCTU and AISA also initiated a fundraiser for relief efforts in the affected areas for distribution of ration and education kits. Over 500 education kits and about 200 ration kits were distributed.

AICCTU will continue its struggle demanding for the provision of proper housing facilities for the working class.

various movements participated in the convention held on 27 August at the Mahabodhi Society hall in Kolkata to learn about each other, discuss various government policies and outline the course for climate justice. The convention hall decorated with banners, photographs and paintings by Anupam, Tanmay and Laboni reverberated with vibrant cultural performances by young artists Agniwrik, Saptak, Sanjay, Subhankar, Rocky, Arju, Achintya and others. Cultural groups such as Gachhedar Jonyo Gaan & Onyo Rokom also performed at the convention. The entire convention was moderated by Mohit Randeep and Madhurima Bakshi.

In the beginning, Shubha Pratim Roy Chowdhury delivered the welcome address and briefly introduced the background and need for the inception of this platform. The draft resolution presented by Malay Tewari focused on aspects of climate change, corporate plunder of natural resources resulting into immense pollution and waste generation as well as various government policies destroying the nature and biodiversity. The draft pointed out some basic direction of action against the profit based capitalist model of development that is the root cause of the environmental as well as eco-social crisis. The conflict between our lives-livelihood-environment with the current model of development is evident and environmental justice cannot be sought without challenging this destructive model. There is a need to repair the damages done so far and compensate the environmental victims and climate refugees, and to withdraw all such policies that exacerbate the crisis. Governments and administration at every level must be held responsible for environmental accountability. Political parties and mass organizations must include environmental questions in the agenda of daily activism.

Noted economist and activist Subhendu Dasgupta, river expert Supratim Karmakar and activist Ashish Kusum Ghosh were among the invited speakers in the convention. Shubhendu Dasgupta in his speech emphasized on the importance of Gram Sabha, PESA Act and CRZ Notification. Supratim Karmakar discussed the historical and geographical significance of rivers and highlighted traditional knowledge of the local communities by referring simple proverbs, rhymes and folklore stories. Ashish Kusum Ghosh acclaimed the convention by saying that access to clean environment has truly emerged as a right through such multifaceted and dynamic deliberations in the house.

The convention hall witnessed representation of a wide range of activists from environmental and mass movements coming from different corners. Budhi Hansda, on behalf of 'Birbhum Jami Jeevan Jeevika O Prakriti Bachao Mahasabha', made it clear that they do not want Deocha-Pachami coal mining project under any condition. Local tribal people already face serious health issues due to surrounding stone crusher industries, the proposed open cast coal project would further destroy the environment and evict thousands of people from their land, livelihood and culture, he said. The latest IPCC report and the COP26 in Glasgow highlighted the dangers of temperature rise and the need to minimize burning of fossil fuel. While India along with other countries have agreed to 'phase down' the use of coal and gradually move towards renewable energy sources in international platform, introduction of a new open cast coal project domestically is absolutely contradictory to that. Subhash Hembram and Mary Hansda shared experiences of their struggle against Adani thermal power plant in Godda, Jharkhand. From this power plant Adani group will sell electricity to

Bangladesh that will go through high tension transmission towers built in Bengal's Murshidabad and Malda before connecting to Bangladesh. People in Farakka, Murshidabad have built a resistance against these towers which are forcefully built destroying cultivation of fruit and crops. Jobayer Ali from the Peoples Committee in Farakka told about the mass resistance against corporate plunder and the state atrocities on them. Ayodhya Hills in Purulia located in the easternmost part of the Chhotanagpur Plateau; with a total forest cover of 10,000 sq km. is the traditional and cultural center for local tribal communities and home for thousands of sacred grooves. They are actively resisting the proposed Thurga hydro power project on this hill that would destroy the forests, elephants and their lives. Tilabani hill in Purulia known for its natural beauty is the first choice of the mountaineers for practice and training. Sanjay Das shared the struggle of 'Tilaboni Pahar Banchao Committee' against the selling off of Tilaboni Hills to stone traders. Dr. Madan Chandra Karan, a long-time activist of the 'Sundarban Banchao Committee' highlighted the real problems of the Sundarban, the largest single block mangrove forest and the people living there who are in extremely vulnerable condition under the threat of climate change.

The convention had a significant presence of many river, canal and wetland activists. Debanjan Bagchi of 'Jalangi Nadi Samaj' and Kallol Roy of 'Nadi Bachao Jeevan Bachao Andolan' explained that rivers represent biodiversity, livelihood, culture, fertile sediments, water security, climate balance and many more. The natural flow of river is being obstructed by unplanned construction of dams here and there leading to damage of the lives and livelihoods of river dependent communities. He raised demands such as immediate halting of construction of check dams on river Atreyi in South

Dinajpur district in order to allow the river to come back to its old form. He also emphasized that international legal measures need to be taken to prevent trans-boundary pollution in the Mathabhanga- Churni river to protect the livelihood of fishermen. The Central River Linking Project is another devastating plan which aims to completely transform our river system. This will take away the rights of river water from millions of ordinary people only in corporate interests. The flow of water in the rivers and estuaries will be greatly reduced resulting in further rise of salt water during high tide. Rajeev Dutta explained the need for restoration of Charial Canal which plays very crucial role in canal network of Kolkata. One part of the canal is planned to be passed through microtunnels constructed in an ADB financed project of KEIIP which is slowly causing death of a living aquatic ecosystem. Mujibur Rahman, on behalf of Save Rajapur Canal Movement, said that Rajapur Canal is one of the lifelines of Howrah district, on which about 20 lakh people

depend. The river Kana Damodar and numerous small canals connected to it are endangered today. The lives and livelihoods of many villages have been perpetually affected by the pollution caused by the Ambuja cement factory in Sankrail, Howrah. Laxmikant Ari said that despite of the intervention of the Green Tribunal, no one has received any compensation.

There have been many discrepancies in implementation of the Forest Rights Act in West Bengal and present government is very much reluctant in ensuring individual or collective forest land rights to the tribal communities. The central Government has left no stone unturned to manipulate environmental regulations and delegitimize Forest Rights Act by diluting EIA process and introducing new Forest (Conservation) Bill 2022. Swaroop Saha, on behalf of ‘Uttarbanga Banjan Shramjeevi Manch’, said that they are continuing their legal battle over the Forest Rights Act and have recently managed to get some rights after prolonged struggle. Arindam from ‘Jessore Road Gachh

Bachao’ movement shared their long struggle against cutting of thousands of centuries old trees in the name of ‘development’. Recently, massive tree felling is also going on in Tarkeswar Chakdighi road widening project. On behalf of the local resistance, Kalyan Adak told that an alternative plan to widen the road while retaining the large trees should be devised which is very much feasible. Rupam Chatterjee of ‘Uttarpara Gano Udyog’, Tapas Chakraborty of Association for Protection of Democratic Rights, Pradeep Basu of ‘Gano Bigyan Samanway’ also addressed the convention. Mrinal Jana presented the resolutions taken from the Convention. The declaration and resolutions of the convention were unanimously adopted with all proposed additions. The convention also pledged to keep a living coordination among various environmental movements and organize workshops on environmental rights on the ground level. The convention was concluded with the closing speech of Tapas Das. ■



Decoding Labour Ministers’ Conference

The Government of India organised a Labour Ministers’ conference at Tirupati on 25-26 August 2022 without any representatives of any central trade unions. The conference was virtually inaugurated by the Prime Minister Modi.

The conference was based on four themes : 1. Integrating e-shram portal with others so as to make it a single portal for any social security scheme by the union and state governments. 2. Swasthya se Samridhhi for improving medical care and services through ESI hospitals run by State Governments and integration with PMJAY (Prime Minister Jan Arogya Yojana). 3. On framing rules under Labour Codes and modalities for its

implementation. 4. Vision “Shramev Jayate@2047” or Vision 2047.

Scripting Modern Slavery

The Prime Minister Modi said that the labour laws are from the period of slavery under British and creates slave mentality. He cited that as a reason for scrapping existing labour laws and for introducing Labour Codes. But, the fact is that the Labour Codes are meant to create new slavery for the new digital era dominated by the corporate. The proposed Codes blur the employer – employee relationship and is aimed at informalising the labour and the industrial sector to its hilt. The British enacted labour laws not out of any love for workers but to pacify workers’ militant outbursts

and for streamlining labour relations so as to maintain industrial harmony to help the business and the industry. Moreover, for enactment of such labour laws the working class in the country has sacrificed their sweat, blood and lives. Only because of countless sacrifices of the working class, the British was forced to enact labour laws to streamline the industrial relations to establish peace in the industry. What the Modi led BJP government is trying to do now is to throw the working class to suffer under the vagaries of the labour market in the period of neo-liberal policies. In the period of Amrit Kaal, Modi is only disempowering workers by scrapping laws that were enacted thro militant workers struggles and by introducing pro-corporate, anti-labour laws in its

place. Labour Codes are nothing but scripting modern slavery in the digital era and industry 4.0. Rather, the Prime Minister is lying that the Codes are meant to meet new changes in nature of employment and the changes in the industrial scenario.

Denial of Minimum Wages

Modi is saying that the Codes will ensure minimum wages, job security and health security. On the contrary, by introducing the concept of floor wages, it is being conspired to deny workers the mandatory minimum wages. Minimum wages based on the industry schedules are being given a go by while geography and demography-based floor wages are being replaced in its place. Even the method of calculation of minimum wages is being altered to reduce the wages. It is nothing but a tactic to depress present wages of workers which are actually starvation wages. The floor wages are not even a full compensation to the fall in real wages because of inflation and price rise and it is expected to be much lesser than minimum wages today. Modi is only shedding crocodile tears to protect his corporate masters while denying minimum wages to the working class.

Robbing off Job Security

With the introduction of the concept of FTE (“Fixed Term Employment”), indiscriminate contractualisation and informalisation of the workforce, the worst victim is the job security but Modi is coming up with a Goebbelsian argument of protecting job security. The FTE is nothing but a euphemism for individual work contracts that cruelly robs off the job security that workers hitherto enjoyed. It is true that the government is introducing Codes to informalise the workforce and to blur the distinction between formal and informal workers. It is being blurred by pushing formal and organised workers into a pathetic status of informal and irregular workers and not otherwise.

A Prescription for Women Enslavement

In fact, in the same speech, PM has also indicated strengthening the growing trend of flexi-work places, flexi-working hours and work from home. Flexi-workplaces, flexi-working conditions, etc., are nothing but legalising and institutionalising the corporate demand and policy of “hire and fire”. Conspiratorially, it is being done in the name of empowering women and increasing women participation in the workforce. Advocating work from home for women by the Prime Minister himself is nothing but advocating Manu Smriti, of confining women into four walls, in the modern era. It is a cunning prescription for women enslavement. The Code as well as Modi are proud that they are introducing women to work in all shifts and occupations without any care for their safety and security. Modi is not advocating any sexual harassment cells at work places as suggested by the Supreme Court to ensure the safety of women. These measures will actually mean legalisation of hire and fire and informalisation which will decrease discourage women participation in the workforce.

Health Insecurity

The so-called health security is nothing but offering health insurance schemes to workers which anyway is available for a premium in the insurance market today. The government is not spending for the health expenses of workers and the people, rather the government is only offering insurance schemes for which workers have to pay out of their pockets. The benefits offered through health insurance is directly proportional to the premium to be paid by the poor and downtrodden workers. Modi’s claim that he is offering health security to workers is a sham.

International Labour Supply

Modi also said that the country should become a global leader by supplying skilled and quality manpower to the world. For that purpose, the government is signing Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreements with other countries in the world. In fact, most Indians work in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, etc., but the government has not signed any agreement with those countries till now. The government has not done anything to protect Indian workers abroad. The government has its eyes set on lakhs of crores of workers’ money lying with the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). It also dreams of making EPFO, a global leader in social security, in other words, in insurance business in 2047.

e-shram and Migrants

Even in India, the union government has not done anything for migrant workers but for e-shram portal to develop a database of migrant workers. The migrant workers walking for thousands of miles and dying on roads during the Lockdown has not yet been erased from the memories of the people. According to various studies, even fifty percent of migrants who lost jobs during Covid are not able to get them back. Most of them are still in their villages and suffering without any job while NREGA allocations are being drastically slashed down.

In such a backdrop, the address by the Prime Minister in the conference of Labour Ministers was only a bundle of lies and does not reflect the truth behind Labour Codes, privatisation, informalisation of workforce, women disempowerment, etc.

The deliberations took place on all four themes in the Labour Ministers conference have actually proved the suspicions being raised of the Modi led BJP government’s escalating onslaughts on the working class in favour of the corporate capital.

e-shram and the Dwindling Social Security

As apprehended by the observers of the labour movement, the conference has revealed its hidden intention of almost closing down all welfare boards and slashing down the benefits under various welfare acts by introducing e-shram in its place or by 'integrating' e-shram with all such portals. The conference documents claim that there are about 52 crores of workers in the country out of which 28 crores, under 400 occupations, have already enrolled under e-shram portal while the target is to reach 38 crores of workers. It also says that all workers enrolled under e-shram portal should be verified physically by the states. In that process, one does not know how many registrations will actually stand the scrutiny. Already, online registrations have become the most restrictive condition that disables workers from enrolling in welfare boards.

Modi was concerned at the 38,000 crores lying unspent with Building workers Welfare Board. There is every possibility that the funds will be swindled very soon. Already, the building workers funds are being diverted, against the Supreme Court's direction, to purposes other than the welfare of building workers. It says that all welfare boards will be integrated under e-shram so as to make it a single window for all social security for workers. If such a thing happens, it will be one of the most retrogressive steps in the workers struggles for social security in the country. Workers should be made aware of such a retrograde step and should be organised to fight against it.

In the Name of Improving Medical Care and Services

In the name of improving medical care and services to unorganised and informal sector workers, the union government has promised

to bring all districts in the country under the purview of ESI coverage. The state government services are being mustered to run ESI hospitals in the state and for allocation of land for hospitals, etc. The government has not yet revealed its intention of private participation in health services including management of ESI hospitals. Already, ESIC is being transformed into only a regulatory mechanism with enlisting empanelled hospitals, etc. Despite increasing number of hospitals, the government appears to be relying more on private participation in health services, including ESI.

Effectively, the BJP's vision 2047 is nothing but getting rid of all securities – from job, wage and social security - in workers lives, embedded in the laws today. It is nothing but a prescription for a world of work that is dominated by insecurity and without any concept of rights and in turn, without any organisations like trade unions to represent their rights.

As was already mentioned, ESI is not a benefit being offered to workers but it is workers' own contributory scheme which is fundamentally altering the role of the state and the ESIC from being a service provider to an insurance company.

On Framing Rules Under Labour Codes

Only three states such as Nagaland, Meghalaya and West Bengal and union territories such as Daman & Diu, Nagar & Haveli and Lakshadweep have not notified rules necessary to implement the Labour Codes. Enforcing Labour Codes are being delayed precisely for this reason. Now, the government is also contemplating an idea to enact a central legislation to force the states for implementation irrespective of formulating rules, as the subject falls under concurrent list.

In order to justify the Labour Codes, the government has circulated an interim report, prepared by the VV Giri National Labour Institute and the IIPA (Indian Institute of Public Administration), on the Impact Assessment Study of the Labour Reforms undertaken by the states. The report has compared various parameters, convenient to the government to justify its own arguments, in the pre-reform and post-reform period in some states for which the data of 2011-12 (pre-reform) and 2017-18 (post-reform) are compared. The interim report consciously omitted comparing data after 2020 because it cannot substantiate its argument as the factual data are completely against the argument of the government in the post-Covid period. Moreover, the report also has considered studies related to organised and formal sector only which cannot be considered to be representative models to understand Indian realities.

According to the interim report, the economic survey report 2018-19, "concludes that substantive labour and product market reforms undertaken by Rajasthan has resulted in an acceleration of economic growth by providing adequate incentives to the firms." The report claims that according to the survey, "... there is higher growth rates of number of factories with more than 100 employees, number of workers, workers per factory, output, output per factory, total wages and wages per factory in two post reform years as compared to two pre-reform years in Rajasthan."

The interim report is citing studies by Fallon and Lucas (1991) and Besley and Burgess (2004), which examined effects of labour regulation on employment outcomes in India. These studies suggest that "states with inflexible labour laws and costly dispute resolution mechanisms experienced lower levels of output and employment growth, than states with flexible labour laws and less costly dispute resolution

mechanisms.” The said studies are countered with alternative facts and analysis by Sudipta Dutta Roy (1998) and Bhattacharjee (2006), according to the same report. Still, the interim report relied mainly on studies that favour the government arguments and not the studies that disputed them.

The same report also says that “the growth of employment in the state is not just a function of how rigid or flexible labour laws are. Instead, there are larger issues concerning the size of market, capital formation, credit availability, infrastructure, and government policies, which determine the pace and composition of industrial growth. The absence of the necessary pre-requisites a priori in a state may well be the reason for no significant impact of legislative amendments in the state. Therefore, the role of labour regulations may be more modest than the intensity of the debate suggests.” Still, the government is not willing to look at such arguments while insisting on expediting rapid anti-labour reforms.

The interim report also says that regular salaried workers share has increased in the said pre-and post-reform period marking an improvement in the quality of employment. It also says that increase in regular salaried workforce without access to social security also increased. It essentially meant increase in informal workers in formal sector. The report is trying to justify its arguments saying, “absence of any significant results cannot be interpreted as a negative impact of the amendments.”

In its conclusion, the report says “it needs to be seen that labour reforms are just one element in the overall policy mix determining the economic growth and making jobs decent.” Still, it concludes saying that “the impact of the four major legislative reforms and the four major administrative reforms have had their own significant positive impact on different sectors of the industry and businesses ecosystems in terms of ease of doing business; employment generation, etc.”

Vision 2047

Vision 2047 is about a vision for 25 years @ 100 years of our freedom. It says the purpose is to improve the lives of citizens by lessening the divide between villages and cities, reducing government interference in people’s lives and by welcoming new technology.

Informalisation, Piece Work and Hourly Wages

Even though it talks about so many points including gender equality at work to comprehensive social security, what it actually offers is flexi-work place and work from home for women. In the world of work, it says that formalisation may increase but the workers would only prefer piece work and pay according to quantum and nature of work against fixed monthly salary. Effectively, the BJP’s vision 2047 is nothing but getting rid of all securities – right from job, wage and social security – in workers lives, embedded in the laws today. Formalisation is alleged to increase but the vision says the workers would prefer only informalisation(?), piece work and hourly wages. Actually, it is nothing but a prescription for a world of work that is dominated by insecurity and without any concept of rights and in turn, without any organisations like trade unions to represent their rights. Workers may have to fight among themselves as individuals to get a decent job with decent pay and security. Self-employment, individual contracts, blurring of employer – employee relationship which are basically advocating industrial anarchy are perceived to be the nature of relations in the future work in the future of 25 years.

Flexi-Work and Flexi-Space: Corporate Jungle Raj is the Dream of Modi

It also says that the concept of formalisation may undergo changes with flexibility in working conditions and prevalence of gig and platforms

workers. All existing traditional work can become obsolete and new jobs resembling gig and platform workers can grow. The number of gig and platform workers can increase from the present 77 lakhs to 2.35 crores. Gig and platform work can transcend the limitation of work time and work space, will increase occupational mobility with low entry barrier. Modi government is considering gig and platform work, without an iota of any security, as the model of work for 2047 while the demand of trade unions and workers in the country is to provide legal protection to these emerging sections of workers. Artificial Intelligence and Robotics can change not only the nature of work but also the lives of the people. No interference of the state in workers lives is nothing but a jungle raj of corporate capital, where workers would be pushed to survive at the mercy of capital. Unfortunately, this is the dream of our Prime Minister.

The government claims to facilitate transition from informal to formal sector in 2047. So, sector may become formal but labour will become cruelly informalised like gig and platform workers. What the Modi government fails to recognise is the emergence of unions even in Amazon and Starbucks operating in virtual mode.

As the old age population is expected to grow upto 31.6 percent in 2047 from the present 13.9 percent, social security is being repeated only as a mantra while the same is being replaced by concepts like life-long employability by upskilling, re-skilling, etc., occupational mobility and portability of social security. You do not even get an old age protection and no retired, peaceful life is perceived. Modi is dreaming an inhuman, cruel world of work where the survival of the fittest is the only rule.

Modi’s vision and dreams for India at 2047 are really frightening and is becoming a nightmare for workers and the people at large. ■

Indian Ports Bill 2022 : Towards Privatization

▲ AVANI CHOKSHI

The Union Government has recently come out with a 4th draft of the Indian Ports Bill, which seeks to replace the 1908 Indian Ports Act. Previous versions of the Bill have faced strong opposition from Coastal states, which have all raised issues around the strong powers given to the Union in the new drafts, resulting in a violation of the federal structure of governance. This comes in the backdrop of the Major Ports Authorities Act, 2021 being pushed through, repealing the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.

In India, Ports have traditionally been divided into Major and Minor ports, with 12 Major ports and over 200 minor ports. Under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India, Major Ports fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of Union Government to legislate, whereas minor ports fall under concurrent jurisdiction, meaning that both Union and State governments may legislate on the topic, with primacy being granted to union government legislation. Till now, the Union retained power in respect of major ports, whereas the governance and regulation of minor ports was left to the discretion of the respective State Governments.

Like previous versions, the 2022 Bill vests vast control in the hands of the Union Government through the Maritime State Development Council [MSDC]. This body was created as an advisory body in 1997, but has only met 17 times in the 25 years since then. Now, the Bill makes the MSDC a permanent statutory body, with a Centre heavy composition, with its own staff, fund, and broad functions, including the making of a national plan and issuance of guidelines. Importantly, the MSDC will also perform “such other functions including such administrative and financial functions as may be entrusted to it by the Central Government.”

For the first time, the Bill covers all ports, and not just scheduled ports, as in the 1908 Act. It also has a very wide definition of ‘port’, which includes “any terminal, offshore terminal, shipyard, repair yard, bunkering station, captive jetties or roadstead or port facility or single buoy mooring which is normally used for the fuelling, re-fuelling, loading, unloading, warehousing, building or repair or anchoring of vessels, or any other place at which a vessel can call, or any part of a river or channel”. Hence, the regulations being brought in by the MSDC would cover even small fishing ports or single buoy mooring.

A very peculiar balance is created in the 2022 Bill to depict a situation where the State governments still have somewhat of a say in the regulation. In fact, the third version of the Bill in 2021 made the national plan a binding plan, with drastic consequences for contravention. In view of the massive opposition to the same by, the 2022 Bill not only makes the national plan recommendatory in nature, but also prescribes that the functions of the MSDC are to be discharged in consultation with the Central Government and State Governments. Not only this but Section 83 of the Bill requires to State and Union governments to “endeavour to adhere to the national plan and guidelines issued by the Council, as it may deem fit, in all developmental works of major ports or non-major ports within the State, as the case may be.”

The 2022 Bill also mandates the creation of State Maritime Boards [while protecting those Boards already created by certain States under state law], One of the functions of the State Board will now be to ensure compliance to “any guidelines, directions, notifications or instructions issued by the Central

Government, from time to time”

The government has also been given broad powers to shut down any port for any reason. Just read Section 18 below:

“18. The Government, shall take necessary action in order to make a port or part thereof non-operational, — (a) if such port or part thereof has been non-operational for ten years from the date of issuance of the notification in respect of such port or from the date of its inclusion in the First Schedule of the Indian Ports Act, 1908 (15 of 1908), as the case may be; or (b) if such port or part thereof is to be made non-operational in the interest of national security; or (c) for any other reason, as the Government may deem fit.”

Interestingly though, the term ‘Government’ has been defined to be the Union in respect of Major ports and the State in respect of non-Major ports. Effectively, the State Government retains the power to close down ports.

The Union Government’s agenda of centralisation and violation of federal principles is nothing new. It has been seen in various sectors across the board from environmental regulation to labour laws. However, the development of the 2022 Bill reveals an interesting trend of the Union government being forced to back down to some extent on blatantly violative provisions. On the other hand, a close perusal of the Bill shows that State interests will continue to be adversely effected, while most clauses that protect state involvement appear to be more in the nature of creating an aura of benevolent federalism rather than any real commitment to state authority.

A last interesting aspect to consider is on the impact of the Bill on privatisation of ports. Several

commentators have argued that the Major Ports under the centre have underperformed, whereas the performance of the non-major ports has been much better. In fact, one critic notes that “Between 1993-94 and 2020-21, the cargo traffic of Non-Major Ports increased from 14 MT to 575 MT while that of Major Ports increased from 179 MT to 673 MT (MT- million tonnes)”. It is argued

that the States have been willing to adopt free-market privatisation methods, which have resulted in better commercial performance, and the Bill will deter private players. In fact, it must be remembered that the Union Government has repeatedly displayed its crony –corporate privatisation agenda in respect of a number of industries / sectors of national significance. It is far-fetched

that the Union is now seeking to establish dominance to protect the port sector from private influence. It seems far more likely that the Union is seeking to assert primacy to be the prime player in the privatisation game, even in smaller, non-Major ports. States must continue to challenge the bringing into force of the 2022 Bill, and must protect their valuable Constitutional rights in respect of minor ports. ■

Let Our Flag Fly High Against The Symbol of Colonialism and Slavery

CPIML statement issued on 10 September 2022

On Thursday September 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at the newly inaugurated Kartavya Path at India Gate said that “Rajpath” [translated from the English Kingsway] was a symbol of slavery. Similarly, last week during the commissioning of INS Vikrant, Modi unveiled a new Indian Navy flag in which the old St George’s Cross was dropped and a new insignia was added. Again, the PM’s office said that this change was an attempt to move away from India’s colonial past.

The very day after changing the name of Rajpath to Kartavya Path, the Modi government has already shed its Kartavya (duty) to stand against symbols of colonialism and slavery. In an official statement, the government announced that the National Flag will fly at half-mast on September 11 as a mark of “respect to the departed dignitary.” Here the departed dignitary is Queen Elizabeth II of Britain and Northern Ireland, whose position is a symbol of hundreds of years of colonial exploitation, slavery and plunder across the world.

Elizabeth II, who was crowned in 1953, was Britain’s longest-reigning

monarch. She is not a mere remnant of the colonial era, but was an active participant in colonialism as Britain attempted to brutally suppress anti-colonial struggles across the world in the 1950s and 1960s.

In India, the massacre of 1857 revolutionaries, the Bengal famine, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the hanging of Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries, the repression against the Quit India movement and the whole freedom struggle are just a few of the major colonial crimes committed under the royal insignia of the British monarchy. Economist Utsa Patnaik has estimated that Britain stole \$45 trillion from India between 1765 and 1938.

This is the very monarchy which was carried forward by Queen Elizabeth II without any remorse, reparation or apology. How can we lower our national flag, symbol of the freedom struggle, at half-mast as a mark of respect to this central institution of colonialism?

While India freed itself from the clutches of British colonialism, countries across the world had to continue the struggle for another five decades, facing violence and massacres at the hands of British forces enforcing the rule of Queen Elizabeth II. During her reign, she

oversaw the brutal suppression of the Mau Mau freedom movement in Kenya during the 1950s, leading to the massacre of tens of thousands of people. More than 20,000 Mau Mau members were summarily executed and a large number of people were sent to concentration camps by British colonial authorities. Veteran survivors of the rapes and horrific torture in these camps are today still seeking justice.

There are consistent attempts to ‘whitewash’ and dissociate the Queen from these colonial crimes by portraying her as the ‘rock’ of modern Britain. But the blood on the throne of the British monarchy (no matter who sits on it), can’t be washed off, representing as it does hundreds of years of colonial atrocities across the globe.

Today, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of freedom (‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’) as a mark of respect to the glorious freedom struggle against colonialism. Lowering our national flag at half-mast, as the Modi government wants to do, will be an insult to the sacrifice of our freedom fighters who gave their blood to break the colonial shackles. By doing this, the Modi government is only proving itself once again to be the loyal legatee of the colonial rulers, the brown sahibs or ‘bhure angrez’ Bhagat Singh had famously warned us against. ■

The Sri Lankan Crisis

NIRMALA RAJASINGAM is an organiser with the Movement for People's Struggle Sri Lanka (UK) which has been organising protests in London in solidarity with the Sri Lankan people, and a long-term activist with South Asia Solidarity Group.

Can you give a very brief overview of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, its causes and the kinds of effects it has had on different sections of working people?

The Sri Lankan Government declared the country bankrupt in April 2022, and defaulted on its external debt payments as it ran out of dollar reserves. The acute shortage of food, fuel and medicines brought the desperate Sri Lankan people to the streets in their millions and they drove the President Gotabaya Rajapakse and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse from office. There is no abatement of miles-long fuel queues; prices of food items have tripled and quadrupled. Unprecedented levels of starvation and malnutrition are beginning to be experienced by the people. According to UN agencies 6 million people are already starving; 40,000 people are receiving saline daily from hospitals because of malnutrition. Millions more will join their ranks as prices are set to soar even further as food inflation, which is at 90% already, will increase.

The Rajapakse dynastic regime's profligacy, corruption and mismanagement of the economy are what precipitated this economic collapse, but this is a story that has evolved over four decades when Sri Lanka became the first South Asian nation to liberalise trade and open up the economy to foreign direct investment. The pursuit of neo-liberal economic reforms increased indebtedness, and encouraged neglect of domestic production in agriculture, fisheries and the plantation sector, eventually nearly doubling imports over exports, creating a balance of

payments crisis. Under the Rajapakses, Sri Lanka went on a borrowing spree, incurring sovereign bond debts on the global financial markets. The borrowings were to fund large infrastructure and vanity projects that returned no dividends for the people. While Sri Lanka owes 10% of its debts each to China, India and Japan, 47% of its debts are to private creditors in the global financial markets. An IMF bailout is perceived by liberal economists as the only solution to deal with the \$55 billion debt. The IMF's sole concern is debt sustainability, and debt-restructuring in the interests of Sri Lanka's private creditors. Under a staff level agreement, the IMF is offering a meagre 2.9 billion dollars over the next 48 months starting from 2023, to render Sri Lanka credit worthy. In order to attract this agreement, a tough regime of austerity, deepening privatisation and selling off of public assets has already begun. Sri Lanka now will have no option but to borrow more from the international financial markets which will keep the debt cycle rolling and indebtedness growing. The working people who are largely reliant on the informal economy, are now unable to earn an income as the economy is fast shrinking, an effect of austerity. Many have lost their jobs already and small businesses are shutting down. Civic life has slowed down drastically with schools and offices functioning for far fewer days or not at all, because of lack of transport and fuel. Farmers experiencing bankruptcy due to the sudden fertiliser ban, may never return to farming. Many working in the plantation sector and other informal economies are fast migrating out, in search of unsafe, precarious, and low-waged jobs abroad.

What has been happening since the government forces attacked the massive Gota Go Gama protests? Are the arrests and repression continuing?

The Gota Go Gama protestors achieved major victories, forcing the resignation of the Rajapakses. However it is widely

accepted that current President Ranil Wickremesinghe came to power on a deal with the Rajapakses. The SLPP, the Rajapakse's party, is the guarantor of Wickremesinghe's power in office.

A new wave of repression hit the protest movement from the very first day Ranil Wickremesinghe became President. A brutal assault on 22 July was followed by bringing in emergency powers which facilitate arbitrary arrests. The dreaded Prevention of Terrorism Act is now being used against lead activists of this peaceful, non-violent protest movement. Left activists, students, trade unionists, human rights defenders, journalists, community leaders and progressive clergy are being hunted down daily, with numbers of arrests varying from two to fifty and hundred. Many have been abducted, interrogated and then thrown out of vans. Since the May 9th attack by security forces on the Galle Face GotaGoGama site, over 3500 persons have been arrested and over 1200 persons are still in custody. At present the possible enactment of a 'National Security Act' is on the cards, which will be a permanent statute unlike the emergency regulations.

How is the movement dealing with these new challenges and what are the main demands being made?

All indications are that the GotaGoGama protest phase is now complete, and the movement will journey to a new phase and expand countrywide. Satyagraha style sit-ins, smaller marches and spontaneous protests are still happening in the capital and regional towns demanding the release of remanded protestors.

The protest movement's composition was politically very eclectic until now, with even centrist, urban middle and upper middle classes joining in, to oust the Rajapakses. When Wickremesinghe took office these forces left the scene saying that he has to be given a chance. There are two main parties of the left, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP). The JVP, which now has three members

in parliament, is focused on winning the next elections, as both majoritarian parties that have alternately governed are thoroughly discredited. But this is no easy matter. The JVP has moved significantly to the right, seeking to be perceived as a viable electoral force, and has not sufficiently dealt with its past in terms of its ethno-nationalist biases, and has moved away from a transformative agenda for the country. The FSP is increasingly being identified as the force behind this 'Aragalaya-Poraattam- the Struggle', but trade unions, civil society activists, and various social movements also are very much the backbone of this movement.

When the protest movement demanded a 'system change', abolishing the Executive Presidency was seen as an urgent and essential first step along with the release of all protestors and political prisoners. The Executive Presidency with excessive powers, introduced in 1978 to push through neo-liberal economic reforms, has wreaked havoc on the political landscape of Sri Lanka by degrading parliament, politicising the judiciary and all administrative structures, and militarising the country to prosecute the war against the minorities, which have all led to the crowning of an authoritarian regime. The repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act is also high on the list of demands, along with immediate economic relief for the people.

What do you think are the next steps for the movement to succeed and do you think it's likely they will be able to?

Parliament is increasingly seen as a self-indulgent body, largely irrelevant to the deteriorating lives of the people. The Government has not taken any steps to organise economic relief, or distribute food and essentials since the crisis began. People see politicians only jockeying for power and horse trading in parliament.

The protest movement is envisaging new structures of 'People's Power' beyond parliament, and are calling for People's Councils, which maybe local, regional and national. When the crisis hit and parliament was unprepared, the

people marched to the capital, and put forward the radical demand that they are the true repositories of the nation's sovereignty, and not the corrupt rulers, and demanded the resignation of the Rajapakses. Work has begun amidst this repression to discuss the shape and parameters of People's Councils, and some are already being set up. People's Councils can discuss national issues such as a new constitution, the economy, development, devolution, the environment, but also discuss local issues of development, challenge local hegemonies of ethnicity, caste, class and gender, and resolve conflicts between peoples.

How is the majoritarianism of the ruling elite being addressed, how are these questions discussed and what kinds of changes have come about among people from the majority community in how they understand them, as a result of the movement?

For the first time, an open discussion about the character of the ethno-nationalist state, and majoritarianism, have been put on the agenda openly, in the (Sinhala majority) South. Earlier it was the preserve of small progressive circles. For the first time, the 1983 pogroms against the Tamils, and the end of the civil war in Mullivaikkal in 2009 were commemorated publicly, in the South, by the protest movement, at Galle Face. This is only an opening. But unlike before, significant numbers of Tamils and Muslims living in the East, Hill Country and the South are participating in these discussions. These discussions will definitely be taken forward in the People's Councils.

What role are the Indian government and Indian corporates playing, and what kinds of solidarity needs to be built between progressive forces in the two countries?

It is often said that Sri Lanka is not just caught in a debt trap, but also a geo-political trap between its powerful neighbours, India and China. In recent months India has extended much-needed help in the form of credit lines, obviously in order to reduce Sri Lanka's dependence on China, so that Sri Lanka now owes more to India than China.

India is recognised by the US and other western nations as the pre-eminent regional power in the sub-continent and as such has always had a say on how Sri Lanka's geo-political interests are shaped, especially vis-à-vis China. When the Rajapakse regime got very close to China, received assistance for mega infrastructure projects, defaulted on debt repayments and was forced to cede territory on long lease, India and the west began to be perturbed by China's growing influence over Sri Lanka. India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner, and has always tried to ensure that it does not stray of its sphere of influence. India's anger over the docking of the Chinese 'spyship' at Hambantota port is a case in point. Sri Lanka cannot do without the assistance of either country, such is its dire need.

India has invested heavily in real estate, oil and coal refinement, and is probably biggest supplier of food items to Sri Lanka. India has in 2021 pressurised Sri Lanka to hand over a lease of an international container terminal at Colombo Port to Adani, and a few months ago, while Sri Lanka is in the middle of a fuel supply crisis, Modi himself had forced the hand of the then president, Gotabaya Rajapakse, to give a contract for the development of 'green energy' in Sri Lanka to Adani. Meanwhile India which has in the past protected Sri Lanka at the Human Rights Council sessions, has this time made critical comments. This is all part of a broader plan to hold Sri Lanka to account over its relationship with China, by India and the western nations. Also, India wants a politically stable Sri Lanka, so long term protests and a movement for a 'system change' will not be looked on kindly by India. In terms of solidarity, the Indian left is facing many similar challenges to those faced in Sri Lanka – including around resisting ethno-nationalism and majoritarianism - and building and deepening links of solidarity is very much needed by Sri Lankan progressive forces. ■

Leicester Violence Signals the Beginning of a New Phase of RSS Activity in the UK

▲ AMRIT WILSON

On 17 September, hundreds of masked and hooded men, some with weapons, marched through a largely Muslim area of Leicester, UK, shouting the slogan of 'Jai Shri Ram!' which, as everyone in the UK's South Asian communities knows, is used in India by the RSS foot soldiers as they attack Muslims. There are reports that the march was planned in advance and that men were brought to Leicester from Birmingham, Wembley and Harrow in London, and elsewhere in coaches, and that in the days prior to the demonstration Hindutva activists from these other cities had been giving street-fighting training to Hindus from Leicester.

There is evidence too that Islamophobic, far-right UK groups, among them Britain First, the English Defence League and the Progressive Alliance, also took part in Saturday's march. This was the latest of a series of attacks on Muslims in Leicester which predate the violence following the India-Pakistan cricket match at the end of August.

Earlier in the same week following a vigorous campaign by human rights organisations the notorious hate preacher Sadhvi Rithambara, had been forced to cancel her speaking tour to temples in various cities in the UK. She had claimed 'ill health' but this had come in the wake of US campaigners getting her de-invited by a Church in New Jersey where she was due to speak.

The events in Leicester have not happened out of the blue either, but are inextricably linked with the history and growing strength of global Hindutva. Back in 1947, possibly in pursuit of Akhand Bharat, the RSS set up one of its earliest, and in hindsight, most fruitful overseas wings, the HSS, in the heart of the Hindu immigrant community in Nairobi, Kenya. The Nairobi branch

launched Shakhnas to teach the RSS version of Indian culture and history, provided physical training and organised Satsanghs. The Gujarati community, who were mainly from a rural background, were easily influenced, eager as they were, like many immigrants, to set in stone the deeply conservative traditions they had brought with them.

In 1966, under instructions from M.S. Golwalkar himself, an HSS office was also set up in London. HSS records tell us that the new branch struggled for members until the arrival of East African Asians expelled from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi as a result of Africanisation policies in those countries. By the end of the 1960s Shakhnas had sprung up in cities like Leicester, Birmingham, Bradford and in Harrow and Brent in London where the refugees had settled.

The new communities had brought with them the RSS view of the world with all its deep rooted casteism and Islamophobia, alongside an intense racism against people of African origin, which came from their intermediate position in the rigid racial hierarchy of Britain's East African colonies. When they entered Britain, however, they faced blatant racism. Their passports were at first not considered sufficient for entry into the UK and some were rendered stateless. Stripped of their wealth and status, the men tried, often unsuccessfully, to get white collar work, while the women, who had rarely worked outside their homes and communities, were forced to take up the lowest paid, most unpleasant jobs in small factories and sweatshops simply to make ends meet.

Outraged at their exploitation as low-paid workers in Britain, they fought back, their anger sparking and sustaining a number of historic strikes often led by women.

Through this whole period, however, these self-identifying workers were in no way left wing, but Hindutva ideologies

remained rife in their communities. Many of them had never lived in India but had fallen in love with the image of India being projected by the HSS and its cohorts.

In the 1980s and 90s, the Hindutva groups were further strengthened by the British state's strategies of multiculturalism and later of promoting 'faith communities'. These strategies of social control, which provided state funding to the most reactionary and conservative self-styled 'community leaders' within racialised minority communities, brought them recognition and resources from local councils, and they flourished as never before.

They systematically set up, or took over, a host of organisations in the UK, including the Hindu Council UK; the National Hindu Students Federation; the National Council of Hindu Temples; and the charity Sewa International, which was exposed in 2002 for channelling funds to organisations which carried out violent communal attacks in Gujarat.

As years passed a new generation of East African Gujaratis born in Britain emerged. Today, many are suave business people and financial analysts, essentially the hyper-neoliberal face of Hindutva in Britain – less well-known Priti Patel and Rishi Sunak-type figures.

Against a background of Modi's deepening relationship with Israel, these members of the Hindu right have been urging the Indian Government to copy Israel's strategies – and not only militarily in Kashmir but globally. In the UK, just as Israel and its partisans have made it impossible to criticise Zionism or Israel without being dubbed antisemitic, the Hindutva brigade have been trying, for some years, to establish the notion that all criticisms of Hindutva are 'Hinduphobia'. Back in 2014, for example, hedge fund manager Alpesh Shah wrote an open letter to Modi, urging him to make it the business of India's

Government to look at how Hindus are treated worldwide. "This doctrine is not novel in international relations," he said. "The people of Israel provide protection for Jews wherever they are in the world, of whichever nationality. We shall extend no less protection to Hindus."

The assumption central to Shah's letter is, of course, that Hindus are under attack.

Meanwhile, the communities themselves have undergone change. While the descendants of the Indian migrants from East Africa have become largely affluent Conservative voters, there are now a new generation of people migrating directly from India to meet the needs of the UK's exploitative gig economy and work in its small unregulated factories. Leicester has seen an influx of mainly Hindu immigrants from Daman,

who, by virtue of their dual Indian and Portuguese citizenship, have come to the UK via the EU.

Whilst some of these immigrants from Daman may well have been influenced by Hindutva propaganda in India, they are often extremely poor. As new immigrants, they face intense racism, violence from far-right groups, and are looked down upon by the earlier immigrants who faced similar racism on coming from East Africa some fifty years ago. In the present situation they are clearly being used as cannon-fodder by the RSS in their project of creating communal violence in the UK and in the process 'proving' the existence of Hinduphobia to strengthen Hindutva in India and internationally.

As many in Leicester note, despite the earlier activities of the pro-Hindutva groups, the city remained peaceful

with day-to-day interactions between Muslims and Hindus being harmonious. They say that what is happening now is a new phase of RSS activity. While old activities like fundraising, building and strengthening Shakhnas, influencing both Conservative and Labour parties and making online threats against anyone who does not agree with them continues, the new aim of provoking communal conflict may well take centre stage if the trial balloon in Leicester works according to plan.

Currently Leicester is on a knife edge with progressive Hindu and Muslim organisations calling for peace, and a peace and unity protest being organised outside the Indian High Commission in London on 22 September, demanding an end to BJP/RSS hate-mongering and interference in South Asian communities. ■

OBITUARY

Adieu Comrade Kripal Singh Bir!

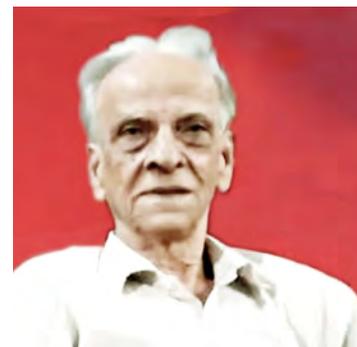
Comrade Kripal Singh Bir, who had participated in two historic farmers' struggles, passed away on 12 September 2022 at the age of 94. He was the last of the farmer warriors who had participated in the historic Pepsu Mujara (sharecroppers') struggle that lasted from 1942 to 1951 during which more than 18 lakh acres of land were confiscated from rich landlords and royal families in Punjab and distributed among the Mujaras. In this context the Mujaras faced the Patiala royal army and canons for 3 continuous days at Kishangarh village in Mansa. In 1952 the Mujara reprehensive won the Assembly election and Mujaras succeeded in securing legal possession rights to these lands.



Comrade Kripal Singh's journey through Lal Communist Party, CPI and CPIM brought him to the CPIML in 1995. A resident of Bir Khurd village in Mansa, Comrade Kripal Singh was active in the party till his last breath. At one period he was Mansa District Secretary of the party. He was the only leader to have participated in the Mujara movement as well as the historic Delhi border farmers' movement last year. Comrade Bir was honoured on the dais at Tikri border. Comrade Kripal Singh Bir will always remain an inspiration for the coming generations. ■

Adieu Comrade Amal Kumar Bhattacharya!

Veteran CPI(ML) member Comrade Amal Kumar Bhattacharya, popularly known as Kaltuda, passed away on 1st September 2022. He was 89 years old at the time of his death. During the formation of CPI(ML) in 1968-69, he played a crucial role in building the organization in Bhawanipur region in West Bengal. He was forced to leave the area during the state terror of 1970-72. Later, in the changed circumstances, he started the work of reorganizing the party in the area and carried forward the mass work. In 1991, he also contested in the Calcutta Corporation election.



Later on, he was associated with party work in Maheshtala-Budgebudge and Jadavpur area. He played a leading role in an environmental movement demanding conservation of a waterbody in Jadavpur Dhakuria region. He was associated with the left movement for more than six decades and worked as a dedicated party worker throughout. Kolkata party organization and state leaders have expressed deep grief over his death. ■

Jean Luc – Godard

AGNITRA GHOSH

Jean Luc – Godard is no more! We have lost the rebellious icon of French Cinema who has left an astounding legacy of seven decades of filmmaking. It is probably not going to be a hyperbole if we theorize film history into two epochs – cinema before Godard and cinema after Godard. As the master filmmaker once famously said, “Let’s do what has not been done”.

French New Wave, Godard and Breaking the Rules

One of the most prominent film-loving communities in the history of cinema emerged in the newly liberated France after the Second World War. The audiences were enthralled by many Hollywood and foreign films, which previously the German-occupation in France had banned during the war. A group of young French film critics like Godard and his friends François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette emerged, who went on to enthusiastically watch, discuss and write about films from diverse cinemas of the world. They also thoroughly criticized the then mainstream, studio-bound and literary French cinema, standardized by the established filmmakers, scriptwriters and technicians.

From the late 1950s, Godard and others went on to make films, pioneering one of the most iconic film movements in cinematic history, the French New Wave. In their encounters with the rich and varied history of world cinema, the French critics explored the possibilities of experimentations and innovations in the film language. Their critical eye, mastered through passionate and obsessive film viewings and a deep engagement with cinema discourses, found its way into the cinematic creations of the French New Wave. François Truffaut’s debut film *Les 400 coups* (The 400 Blows), which narrates the story of a young runaway vagabond, Antoine Doinel, won the prize for direction at the Cannes Film Festival. Jean-Luc Godard’s famed provocative work *A Bout de Soufflé* (Breathless), the story of a petty criminal, was released in 1960.

The most important characteristic of Godard’s films is the deconstruction of conventional film language. He disrupted all standardized systems of pleasure and anticipation associated with mainstream cinema. For instance, film scholar Jim Hiller wrote about Godard’s *Breathless*: “Godard’s first feature, *A Bout de Soufflé* (Breathless) helped announce the definitive arrival of the nouvelle vague (new wave), provoking both exhilaration and consternation by its wayward story and its cinematic treatment — fragmented narrative, long, often handheld, mobile takes; jump-cut editing. Godard rapidly became the enfant terrible of the French New Wave, committed to formal experimentation and rejecting script-based



filmmaking. He often began a day’s shooting with a few notes and ideas and improvised both script and camera work... radically questioning conventions about style and meaning, sound and image.”

In cinematic history, the French New Wave remains a movement that significantly questioned the conventional cinematic language and wielded substantial influence on the landscape of global cinema, especially in inspiring various other subsequent new waves — from Germany, Brazil to India. In India, directors like Mrinal Sen were significantly inspired by the cinematic experimentations of the French New Wave in his early works. French New Wave filmmakers like Godard and Truffaut redefined the grammar of cinema. They explored diverse possibilities of the cinematic medium to break the conventions of standardized filmmaking practices. Their works offered significant spaces of resistance against the Hollywood domination and inspirations for furthering future cinematic innovations and experimentations.

Godard and Political Commentaries

Just after the death of Godard, a screenshot of his brief speech during 1968 Cannes Film Festival went viral on social media platforms. Godard and Truffaut led protests that shut down the Film Festival in solidarity with students’ and workers’ agitations in 1968. In the screenshot, we can see an angry Godard saying it bluntly to the reporters: “We are talking about solidarity with students and workers and you are talking tracking shots and close ups! You are idiots!”

Godard not only redefined the grammar of cinema, but also his films were never afraid to make piercing political commentaries. Godard’s *Contempt* (1963) presents a scathing critique of monetary philosophy of the mainstream film industry, his *Alphaville* (1965) depicts the horrors of the technocratic dictatorship in a machine run future city, and he takes political position against United States military aggression in Vietnam in his *Pierrot le Fu* (Pierrot the fool, 1965). Godard’s suspicion and hatred for the capitalistic system always remained pungent as he once remarked, “Every film is the result of the society that produced it. That’s why the American cinema is so bad now. It reflects an unhealthy society.”■



Protests in Iran: Struggle for Women's Right to Choice

Massive protests have erupted in Iran against the custodial death of 22 year old women Mahsa Amini. Masha was detained by Iran's "morality police" enforcing strict hijab rules on September 13th 2022 while she was on her way to Tehran. She was beaten up brutally and was taken to notorious 'Vozara' detention centre for schooling over the 'justification and education' about hijab. She died on 16th September 2022. According to her brother she was swollen and bruised, but police version is that she died of sudden heart attack in custody.

Thousands of people have hit the streets in protest against the custodial death of Masha in a number of cities across the country, including in Tehran, Isfahan, Karaj, Mashhad, Rasht, Saqqes and Sanandaj. According to reports, at least two people have been killed and several injured as security forces launched crackdown on the protesters. The protesters are demanding justice for Maha Amini and scrapping for strict dress law that is in effect in Iran.

The demonstrators have been calling for the state to respect women's right to choice and noted that laws that make dress codes mandatory are a violation of human rights. Strict 'Dress Code' is in effect since 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Women have been protesting against the Iranian dress code of wearing hijab and similar protests were witnessed in 2018 and 2019 also.

In India, we have seen attempts by right wing forces and governments to impose mandatory dress codes, especially targeting young Muslim school going girls. In Karnataka, Muslim girl students were stopped from entering in colleges because of Hijab or headscarf.

Such regressive and patriarchal policies forced by the society and government must be vehemently rejected. There is no place for state control over women's right to choice in any democratic society. Whether or not a woman will wear hijab or headscarf is an arena of choice for her, not for the state, society or any other authority.

Iranian government must respect women's freedom to dress as they please and immediately stop the repressive action against the protesters. The Iranian government must launch fair investigation into the death of Mahsa Amini and punish the guilty.

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