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*Organ of the Central Committee*  
*CPI (ML)*

# New Democracy

**Protest Against Conviction of Prashant Bhushan**

**Land Struggle in Punjab**

**First Anniversary of Martyrdom of Com. Linganna**

**CC Statement on *Bhumi Pujan* at Ayodhya**

**Key to control Of Covid Pandemic**

**Women's Organizations' Reminder to Home Minister**

**Oppose the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020**

**Corona Pandemic and State Response**

**7<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Com. Paltu Sen**

*Organ of the Central Committee, CPI (ML)*

## **NEW DEMOCRACY**

**August - 2020**

### **CONTENT**

Editorial :

Protest Against Conviction of Prashant Bhushan	02
Land Struggle in Punjab	06
First Anniversary of Martyrdom of Com. Linganna	13
CC Statement on Bhumi Pujan at Ayodhya	17
Key to control Of Covid Pandemic	23
Land Struggle in Rohatas (Bihar)	34
Women's Organizations' Reminder to Home Minister	36
Oppose the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020	46
Corona Pandemic and State Response	56
7 <sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Com. Paltu Sen	68

# **Protest against Conviction of Senior Advocate Prashant Bhushan for contempt of Supreme Court**

**H**olding of Senior Advocate and Democratic Rights' Activist Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt by the Supreme Court marks yet another landmark in the slide of Indian state away from democratic rights to the extent these are enshrined in the Constitution of the country, as a part of the wholesome attack against the very Constitutional framework which was adopted by the ruling classes after transfer of power from British colonial rulers.

Supreme Court has taken *suo moto* cognizance of two tweets of Mr. Prashant Bhushan in July 2020. In one of the tweets Mr. Bhushan has expressed his anguish about the destruction of democracy over last six years i.e. under RSS-BJP rule and the role of Supreme Court in that. This tweet, as quoted in the Supreme Court order, reads, "When historians in the future look back at the last six years to see how democracy has been destroyed in India even without a formal Emergency, they will particularly mark the role of the SC in this destruction, and more particularly the role of the last four CJIs." The other tweet concerned the present CJI and lockdown of the Apex Court. Supreme Court has also revived an

earlier case of contempt of 2009 against Prashant Bhushan and Tehelka publisher Tarun Tejpal. That the case is being taken up at a time when the apex Court is conducting only virtual hearings shows that it is these tweets which have triggered taking up of that old case at the present time. From the order of the Court it is apparent that tweet concerning role of Supreme Court in destruction of existing democracy has irked their Lordships the most. Is it not because there is more than a grain of truth in this?

The SC Bench in its order in the case has held the Judiciary to be the “Central pillar” of democracy. Now according to the Bench, this central pillar is being threatened by these tweets. It only shows that the Central pillar must have undergone erosion to that degree that tweets alone also now can undermine it, as some commentators have observed. The Bench has observed, “There is no manner of doubt that the tweets tend to shake public confidence in the institution of judiciary.” This again begets the question that how is it that the public confidence in the institution of judiciary is so fragile that these tweets can shake it! The Bench has also observed, “The strong arm of the law must, in the name of public interest and public justice, strike a blow on Bhushan who challenges the supremacy of the rule of law by fouling the stream.” Why has the judicial ‘stream’ been rendered so dirty that tweets can foul it? The apex Court having come to this conclusion about the existing state of affairs, to the extent that such tweets could tarnish “the prestige in the comity of nations”, with this assessment, it was expected that the apex Court bench would have proceeded to enquire into the real reason for such a perilous situation. However, the Bench has refused to undertake this exercise for reasons which have not been given in the order. Its prestige should shine in its defense of democratic rights of the people and constitutional order.

The power of contempt is mainly accorded and accepted to overcome obstruction of justice. It may involve punishing those in authority who defy the Court's order; it may be exercised against those who attack judiciary to influence it or with ulterior motive. This power is in furtherance of judicial independence. It is a means to an end. It must not be made a *lese majeste* power criminalizing any criticism, like that of royalty under monarchies.

Mr. Bhushan's anguish against destruction of democracy under RSS-BJP rule and the failure of the judiciary especially of the apex Court to protect the constitutional rights of the people is shared by many. People have watched with dismay the wholesale abdication of judicial responsibility by the apex Court when millions upon millions of workers were forced to walk thousands of kilometers braving heat and hunger during the lockdown announced in March 2020. People have also watched with dismay the failure of SC to act when elementary rights of the people of J&K are being suppressed for over a year; even habeus corpus writ has not been entertained. People are also dismayed at the haste with which the matter of these tweets is being dealt, while so many critical issues pertaining to people's rights are kept pending. Mr. Bhushan is not alone. His conviction for contempt has aroused countrywide indignation because of widespread anguish against judicial paralysis in face of fascist onslaught against the people's rights.

When Supreme Court has accepted to consider the issue of criticism of judges in detail, Mr. Bhushan's conviction should be held in abeyance and sentencing should be postponed till after the whole issue is debated in open court and decided upon.

Judiciary has been a refuge for those seeking redressal from the actions of Executive. Executive in the country is all powerful

while people have less rights and even lesser in practice. And with courts of law meting out injustice, contempt becomes a weapon of oppression.

Organize and participate in protests against conviction of Mr. Prashant Bhushan. This attack is part of the general onslaught against people's rights. People must rise to defend their democratic rights. This struggle is part of the struggle against fascist onslaught. Opposing conviction of Prashant Bhushan is part of opposing attacks on democratic rights.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy

August 18, 2020

**Read and Subscribe**

## **CPI(ML) Organs**

**New Democracy**

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**Punjabi**

**Sangrami Ekta**

**Odia**

# **Land in Punjab, the Heart of India's Agriculture**

The wide wheat fields are a Dalit woman's workplace. Everyday, she criss-crosses through them, jumping over ditches, looking carefully for stray fodder growing for her buffaloes. She looks along bunds and edges of the big farms. When she finds what she needs, she gathers them stalk by stalk and puts them into a dupatta she has tied on her back. She then carries the bundle hastily to her bicycle, ties it to the back seat, and rides the mud track back home.

These open fields she visits everyday are also daunting. She often hurries through them, praying a zamindar doesn't spot her. If he does, she prays harder that he is having a good day so he doesn't call her names or assault her.

Punjab is one of India's most agriculturally prosperous states, where the green revolution and mechanization in agriculture became hugely successful. But this success did not trickle down to the state's Dalit communities. While 5 lakh hectares of Punjab are under agricultural cultivation, according to India's Agricultural Census 2015-16, Dalits, whose percentage in Punjab is the highest at 32 percent (the national average being 16 percent), own only 3.5 percent of private farmland. Vast swathes of land are owned by a single dominant caste of Jutt (or Jat) farmers across the Punjab-Haryana region of northwestern India. Historically marginalized and not allowed to own land, Dalit people continue to live a hand-to-mouth existence.

This landlessness has meant that Dalit women, whose lives and work depend directly on the land, are harassed and humiliated.

However, since 2014, a movement to reclaim land for Dalits, led by Dalit women, has swept through Punjab.

## **A movement led mainly by women**

Most Dalit men in the villages go out to work as daily wage labourers in construction, or have petty trades in towns nearby, and do not engage in caste occupations. It is women who bring fodder from the fields, work as harvesters, and do domestic chores. This regularly brings them in direct contact with upper caste people.

“Women would be in tears narrating their experiences of how upper caste men would feel entitled over lower caste women. Particularly when they go out to get fodder, being abused is not at all an extraordinary thing; it is part of everyday life,” said Paramjeet Kaur, a young activist with the Zameen Prapthi Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC).

The ZPSC has been the primary organization that has mobilized Dalits for land reclamation. They filed a Right to Information (RTI) application and found that there were 15 districts in Punjab and 123 villages in the district of Sangrur that had Nazul lands — lands formerly belonging to Punjabi families from the erstwhile Muslim majority state abandoned during the partition to go to Pakistan that, unbeknownst to a lot of Dalit people, can be allotted to Dalits for cultivation under The Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956.

Other than Nazul lands, the Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961, reserves 33 percent (1/3rd) of panchayat land for Dalits, who can acquire it on lease through a yearly auction. It is the reclamation of these lands that has become the main focus of the movement in Punjab. Upper-caste farmers continue to farm on these though only Dalits can participate in the auctions — proxy



or dummy Dalit candidates are often bribed to grab these lands and hand them over to zamindars to farm on. A well oiled nexus of police, officials and landlords had made this the routine.

The ZPSC, along with farmers' unions, actively disseminated information on land legally available to Dalits in several villages. The community began to organise, launching its first protest demanding that the zamindars return their lands in 2014. In this short span of six years, Dalits have reclaimed 2800 acres of land in 57 villages in Punjab.

“In the beginning, people did not even like hearing that Dalits could own land, especially in villages. They would laugh it off and ask us, ‘What law are you talking about?’,” said Kaur. “In Balladh Kalan [the first village where ZPSC helped reclaim land], they were more aware and a little better economically, so they began asserting themselves. From then, the news spread that Dalits had the right to 1/3rd of panchayat land and then there was a feeling that this was possible. The big thing was that women were leading.”

According to a study by Punjabi University's Dr Gian Singh on women rural labourers in Punjab, when asked about sexual harassment at the workplace, 70 percent of the respondents were quiet. “They are silent because they will not get labour work if they raise [their] voice. Sexual harassment hampers women's constitutional rights to equality and dignity,” Singh told the Indian Express.

Kaur explained that the women were pushed to the wall, “They were suffocated from within with the treatment they were receiving. The women felt if only they had their own land, why would they be sexually abused just to harvest some grass for their cattle?”

Kaur, who as a social worker tried to organize women for other causes such as inflation and hike in school fees, said women were meek and would not want to put themselves out there with the burden of managing their households and children. Many were victims of domestic abuse at the hands of alcoholic husbands as well. But in their struggle for land, these issues became secondary.

“They were earlier scared of the police, but now they didn’t bother,” Kaur said. “They have had legal cases slapped on them. Even with children, they have protested all night, even during summer nights when it was so hot. They would finish their work and then come to the agitation, all because they were determined to have their land.”

## **Facing violence**

But the demand for land has come at a cost, and has even been met with resistance and retaliation by upper-caste landowners.

“Some resist openly, some covertly, but everyone has tried to oppose it,” Kaur said. “They can call a Dalit for their work and underpay them. Even if dalits want to buy milk, the upper-castes want to barter work for it instead of money for milk. That way they can exploit them more, get them to mop and sweep their houses. “

ZPSC President Mukesh Malaudh recounted what Dalits endured in Baladh Kalan, the first village where ZPSC attempted to reclaim land in 2014. Of the 354 acres of common panchayat land, the Dalits could farm on 118 acres. But the land auctions were marred by a collusion between the officials and the zamindars, while simultaneously blocking Dalit participation.

When villagers protested, the police resorted to violence. They baton-charged the protestors, injuring many in the process.

41 protestors, including Malaudh, were arrested and remained in prison for 59 days. But Dalits who were free continued to protest in public places everyday until the officials finally relented. They struck a compromise — the Dalits would use the land for six months and the upper-castes for six months. This is a first, small victory, but an important one that set the momentum for future struggles.

There have been violent clashes between Jutts and Dalits in many other villages as well. As many as 300 active members of the ZPSC have cases filed against them. People have been injured and attacked with batons, bricks, scythes, and knives.

In one violent confrontation in Jhaloor, when protestors gathered for a night rally, drunk and armed Jutts ambushed over 100 Dalit villagers, and even threatened them, saying, “We’ll teach your daughters a lesson for asking for land,” according to Kaur, who was in the rally.

Houses were vandalised; women, children, and animals were attacked. An elderly Dalit woman, Mata Gurudev Kaur, eventually died after her leg was almost severed with an axe.

## Boycotts by upper-castes

Landowning upper-castes have resisted the movement with various boycotts. Sanctions against Dalits are blared from a loudspeaker in the village gurudwara. These restrictions include people not being able to sell milk to Dalits, not providing employment opportunities for Dalits, and restricting Dalits from picking vegetables or fodder from the fields or using the water from the tubewells. Upper-castes who break these boycotts and interact with Dalits have to pay a fine.

“In 2017 the zamindars acquired land by installing a dummy candidate in our land auction,” said Jagtar Singh, a 48-year-old

electrician from Tolewal, who started farming in 2016 for the first time in his life. “Our protest was met with intense violence. My wife’s finger was broken and my aunt was attacked on her side.”

When Singh learnt that Dalits could access 1/3 panchayat land, he said that he felt cheated and betrayed that he hadn’t known it before. “What they detest is that we are now organised, they are afraid no one will do their work,” he said.

Some men who attacked protestors were booked under the SC/ST Act, but more arrests were made of Dalits who were targeted.

“When it was time for the land auction, we were asked to withdraw the SC/ST cases and negotiate with the accused to participate in the auction. We protested again and were finally able to gain lease for 1/3 land for a yearly sum of Rs. 90000,” he said.

## **Life after land**

In villages where Dalits have been successful in reclaiming land, their lives have been changing. In Balladh Kallan, Dalits have formed an 11-member committee that oversees sowing, harvesting, and marketing of surplus produce. Dalits farm collectively, and profits and expenses are shared by the community. More recently, they have also bought a tractor worth Rs.3.75 lakh. From earning Rs. 300 as daily wage for menial labour and some occasional MGNREGA work (a government scheme that ensures 100 days of wage employment), Dalits are now working for themselves for the first time. Each family receives five quintals of wheat per year and a trolley of fodder and makes a profit between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000 per year.

“Before 2014, we had nothing. Now we save because we don’t have to buy grains,” said Paramjit Kaur [different from ZPSC’s

Paramjeet Kaur], a retired anganwadi teacher who now farms along with her husband . Earlier, people had to depend on the zamindars, and standing up to them meant fear of extermination or that they couldn't borrow money from them.

According to a 2017 study, around 68 percent of agricultural labourers in rural Punjab borrow money from big farmers at high-interest rates. Being landless also means that they are usually unable to show assets as collateral to acquire bank loans.

“Things are changing. Now that we have land, we are filled with so much courage that we can take on anyone – we can fight anyone, we were afraid before. We work in our own fields, we don't have to go to anyone's fields. Our daughters and daughters-in-law are not afraid to go to the fields, they can go whenever they want, including night time. We are leading a life of self respect. We are equal to the Jutts now,” Kaur said.

The Dalits who have reclaimed lands, and begun farming, are even in a position to help others. During the COVID-19 lockdown, they donated surplus wheat to the homeless and those in need. Dalits who had sold off their cattle, because they could not maintain them, have now bought buffaloes and do not have to buy milk.

According to ZPSC's Paramjeet Kaur, Dalit women are more politically aware now. They know who the officials are, and can navigate the system better to get their work done. “They know what the government's job is and this awareness doesn't just come from reading, it comes from life experience. In villages such as Bharo, Bhatiwaal Kalan, Balladh Kalan, and Kular Khurd, women have also stood for the panchayat [village council] elections,” she said.

“Our granaries are full. We have wheat to eat, we are paid for the rice we cultivate,” said Singh.

“But more than the material changes, imagine that in this world we have a piece of land to call our own. Land is so vast, now there’s also a small portion for us. We will not let it be lost.”

(Courtesy *Blueprint.news* where this article was first published.)



## **1st Martyrdom Anniversary of Comrade Linganna**

**L**ast year on July 31, the communist revolutionary movement lost a valiant fighter when a leader of the Godavari Valley Resistance Movement, Com. Linganna, was killed by police in the forest near Rolgadda village in Gondala Mandal of Bhadadri-Kothagudem district of Telengana.

The cause for which Com. Linganna laid down his life, of liberating the people and making New Democratic Revolution in India, remains valid. He sacrificed his life in the course defending the lands and means of livelihood of Indian people, a cause which has gained urgency in view of the attacks against the tribal people by the Central and State govts.



In fact such attacks have been intensified as the Govts. intensify their attempts to forcibly displace tribal people from the forest areas in order to hand over these areas to foreign and domestic corporate. Forest Rights Act has not been implemented properly and Modi Govt. has diluted various provisions to facilitate corporate

exploitation of these areas.

Com. Linganna was a member of Telengana PC of CPI(ML)-New Democracy and one of the main leaders of Godavari Valley Resistance Struggle. He had made big contribution to the movement particularly its continuation under adverse circumstances.

Resistance Struggle is facing serious challenges. Central and State Govts. have made it a target of attack. They want to render tribal and other traditional forest dwellers defenseless. Hence they are intensifying their attacks – political as well as through security forces- against the movement. Present situation is challenging for the resistance struggle. Intensifying offensive of ruling fascist forces has made this task even more challenging as well as necessary. Govt. attempts to stifle all protest in the name of Corona pandemic have rendered the situation more complex. Present situation calls for renewed efforts to preserve and develop resistance struggle.

Learning from the experience of Com. Linganna and drawing inspiration from his life and sacrifice, we should be steadfast in our practice. Com. Linganna was totally devoted to the Party and its revolutionary orientation. We should all learn from his life and work to rededicate ourselves to make New Democratic Revolution victorious.

We are here publishing the homage paid by the Central Committee on the martyrdom of Com. Linganna.

**Red Salute to Com. Linganna !**

**CPI(ML)-New Democracy**

July 31, 2020

# **Long Live Martyr Com. Linganna**

**L**eaders of the Godavari Valley Resistance Movement and a member of Telengana State Committee & North East Telengana Regional Committee and Kothagudem District Secretary of CPI (ML)-New Democracy, Com. Linganna was martyred today, the 31st of July 2019. He was killed by police in the forest near village Rolagadda in Gondala mandal of Bhadadri-Kothagudem district.

Police in Telengana has launched a serious offensive against the revolutionary movement, CPI (ML)-New Democracy in particular. TRS State Govt. in conducting serious offensive against tribals to forcibly dispossess them from their podu lands which they have been cultivating for decades, even for generations. CPI (ML)-New Democracy is in the forefront of this struggle and hence, KCR Govt. is targeting CPI (ML)-New Democracy in its attack. Com. Linganna was one of the main organizers of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers and has been organizing their resistance against the Govt. offensive. Targeting of Com. Linganna and other CPI (ML)-ND cadres is a calculated move of the Govt. This is part of the fascist drive of the Govt. targeting tribals and the organizations defending their rights.

A large posse of police in four batches had launched an offensive against Party activists today. They surrounded a team of Party activists led by Com. Linganna.

Com. Linganna, one of the principal leaders of the resistance movement and of the Party, has been a consistent adherent of



revolutionary mass line. He has been an epitome of Party discipline and revolutionary commitment. He staunchly defended people's right to resist and fiercely opposed revisionist and rightist trends as well as ultra-left trend in the revolutionary movement. Consistent in practice of revolutionary struggle, he was very articulate in his opinions and clear in his vision about the revolutionary movement. His martyrdom is a glorious addition to those who offered supreme sacrifice in the course of revolutionary movement and a big loss to the Party and the revolutionary movement at present.

Born in a tribal family in Rolgadda village in Gundala mandal, Com. Linganna got associated with the revolutionary movement from an early age. He never hesitated to take difficult tasks demanding sacrifice, offering supreme sacrifice in the process. His life has been one of simplicity, commitment and sacrifice. He had revolutionary daring and astuteness in full measure. Whenever the revolutionary movement placed any arduous task before the Party, Com. Linganna had been among the first to offer himself for the same. He lived and ultimately died for the people and the revolutionary movement.

Com. Linganna lived all his life for the people and gave his life for the cause of the people. He has given the supreme sacrifice for the revolutionary movement. Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy pays its homage to the revolutionary memory of Com. Linganna and vows to carry revolutionary movement to victory, the unfinished task bequeathed to us by Com. Linganna. We grieve his loss and vow to convert this loss into strength.

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy calls upon all Party Committees to observe martyrdom of Com. Linganna, to pledge to devote themselves to the task of intensifying

revolutionary movement. CPI (ML)-New Democracy calls upon all Party Committees to build a strong protest movement against fascist repression being launched against the revolutionary leaders and cadres. CPI (ML)-New Democracy also calls upon the tribals and other traditional forest dwellers to intensify their struggle for the defense of their lands and means of livelihood which are being attacked by the Govt.

(Issued by the Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy on July 31, 2019)



## **CC Statement**

# **Bhumi Pujan for Ram Temple on 5th August is part of Fascist Agenda**

**W**hile the country is in various stages of lock down and overwhelming majority of people in dire distress due to govt. handling of Corona pandemic, RSS led Central Govt. has moved to celebrate *bhumi pujan* at Ayodhya for construction of Ram Temple. The decision shows the utter contempt the rulers have for the hardships faced by the people. Beside the heads of Centre and State Govts., the stage will have the RSS chief on the dias, publicly displaying that this Govt. and ruling party are controlled by the RSS.

The ruling dispensation is celebrating their 'victory', made possible by the Supreme Court which ended the seven decade old dispute created by majority communal forces. It is embracing the

primacy of majoritarianism undermining secularism even to the extent enshrined in the Constitution and dispensing with the rule of law. It has been a victory for the ruling fascist forces and their Hindu Rashtra agenda. It has increased challenges before the people of the country who are facing deteriorating conditions of life due to attacks of the Govt. and steady unraveling of 'welfare' measures even to the extent hitherto implemented by the earlier ruling dispensations. It has increased challenges before the progressive and democratic forces who are facing increasing attacks due to the suppression of the existing democratic rights of the people.

Ruling RSS-BJP are celebrating their success in undermining secularism and in sidetracking the basic issues of the people who are groaning under increased exploitation, oppression, repression and suppression; who are losing not only their means of livelihood but even the right to demand it. Uttar Pradesh has been the main arena of the communal forces for more than a century and these have successively increased their hold under the patronage of colonial rulers prior to 1947 and with the indulgence of the successive govts that came to govern after transfer of power.

Ayodhya dispute is a chronicle of this collusion between colonial rulers and the Indian elite. In the process, people's culture, which had taken shape over more than a millennium of joint efforts of the people of the region, was undermined. This has been a composite culture, also called Ganga-Jamuna culture. This undermining was utilized for larger aim of subverting the genuine struggles of the people of India and keeping the country safe for imperialist loot and for anti-people elite who had been increasingly used by the colonial rulers for their rule. Communalism had been

one of the main instruments to subvert the united will of the people of India against the yoke of colonial rule. It continued to be one of the main pillars of the rule since transfer of power to jettison the aspirations of the Indian people, in addition to time tested policies of repression and reforms.

Ruling fascist forces have chosen August 5 for these celebrations to commemorate their doing away with Article 370 relating to relationship of J&K with the Indian Union and breaking up the very state of J&K. Over the last year, people of J&K are facing a complete lockdown- not only on physical movement but also on information flow; the forcible suppression of all political rights and total dislocation of economic life of the people; all to browbeat the people into accepting a demographic change in the state which is the underlying objective of the ruling fascist forces. Even after one year, the Govt. is continuing the total clampdown, which shows that the will of the people cannot so easily be undermined howsoever strong the rulers may think themselves to be. Even after a year they are continuing the clampdown, not even saying when they will be able to lift it. In fact, August 5 last year was the declaration by the RSS-BJP, who had returned to power nearly two months earlier and had extended their control over all the wings of the state, of their intent to trample over the existing constitutional framework in their march towards fascism. Since their return to power, ruling RSS-BJP have been in a hurry to do away with the five people's principles which had crystallized during Indian people's struggle against colonial rule, from which RSS had kept itself aloof, namely- anti-colonialism, secularism, democracy, social justice and federalism.

Since their return to power, RSS-BJP have moved to undermine whatever people of the country had gained through

struggles over a century. Workers are facing attacks on their hard won rights including those enshrined in labour laws, peasants are facing unprecedented attacks on agriculture and their livelihood with increased entry of foreign capital and their compradors- the corporate, and people are facing unprecedented unemployment, tribals loss of land and means of livelihood, Dalits increased physical violence and attacks on reservation, women attempts at imposition of code of Manusmriti. To pre-empt struggles against these intensifying economic and social attacks, ruling dispensation has moved to annihilate the democratic rights, arming itself with even more draconian laws and strengthening the machinery of repression. A witch-hunt has been launched against those who support democratic rights and oppose economic exploitation and social oppression.

RSS-BJP rulers are also trying to further take education away from the common people and bring up the new generation in unscientific and obscurantist mould, making them only fodder for the exploitative machinery of foreign capital and domestic reactionaries, big capitalists and landlords, suppressing all critical reasoning, scientific temper and inculcating subordination to those who wield economic, social and political power.

RSS-BJP rulers have cynically used the Corona pandemic to undermine rule of law and intensify attacks on the people. Rather than taking measures to control the pandemic, they have in fact further spread it; in place of giving relief to the people who are hit by medical and economic emergency, they have in fact launched further attacks on them while disregarding need to improve health facilities and take measures to counter economic contraction. And now to divert people's attention from their all round failure and service to the rich and powerful, they have embarked on *bhumi*

*pujan* at this very juncture. It is an attempt to pull wool over the eyes of the people.

Rulers are showing their construction of Ram Temple as fulfillment of the 'aspirations' of the majority community. It is rulers' attempt to show that poor people, at least from majority community, do not need food, clothes, shelter, education and health care. They are utilizing the notion of people's backwardness to further push them into backwardness, poverty and destitution. It is not the backwardness of the people; it is the drive of the rulers to keep them backward. It is not a question of religious feelings or even prejudices of the people, for that has never prevented Indian people from seeking advancement of their economic and social well being, never prevented them from striving for better life. It is a question of communalism which is a political and chauvinist mobilization on the basis of religion in the service of ruling classes, in the service of continuing rule of reactionaries. Secularism is need of the people in their common struggle against their enemies, in building a new democratic India of their common aspirations. Secularism is the need of the people to develop their struggle for an India of toiling people, self-reliant, playing its due role in the comity of countries.

RSS-BJP Govt.'s drive to build a Ram Temple at Ayodhya is part of their project to consolidate their fascist rule. This is meant for terrorizing the people, for brutally suppressing them. It shows the need of ruling classes to divert, subvert and suppress the struggles of people which are rising and must rise in the face of exploitation and oppression. It is the people's struggles which are rising and are bound to intensify to challenge all injustice- economic, social and political. This is a challenging situation pregnant with possibilities. There is a need of systematic and persistent efforts, of

the daring to challenge and basically to organize the people against economic hardships, social oppression and suppressions of democratic rights.

*Down with RSS-BJP Fascist Rule!*

*Fight for Secularism; Fight for Democracy!*

*Mobilize All Forces against Fascist Rule!*

*Rally the people against economic hardships, social oppression and for democratic rights!*

Central Committee

3rd August 2020

CPI (ML)-New Democracy

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# **Addressing sufferings of the people, rather than serving political convenience is the key to control Covid pandemic**

**Dr. Vikas Bajpai**

**D**isease is as much a social, economic, and political phenomenon, as it is biomedical. As such, understanding disease, and the ways to vanquish it would hardly make any sense if rendered bereft of the socioeconomic and political context in which disease plays itself out. It is the structural vectors of poverty, hunger and discrimination based on class, caste, gender, ethnicity, or religion, which enable a pathogen to pose any measurable threat to the society. The branch of science devoted to studying these relationships is called social epidemiology. Regrettably, a technocentric view of disease with blind reliance on biomedical tool has rendered social epidemiology to the margins in mainstream public health and policy making. This view is accorded a halo of 'scientificity' by the ruling elite to place it beyond reproach. But their purpose is not as much to pursue the cause of science, as much it is to brush aside the larger societal concerns of the people for their class interests demand perpetuation of the prevailing conditions. Treating disease this way paves way for simplistic interpretation of the situation, mechanistic solutions, and self-righteousness of infallibility, even if at the cost of peoples' welfare.



The ongoing pandemic has laid bare the pitfalls of this approach at the cost of huge suffering incurred by the people. The modelling-based predictions of impending catastrophic death literally precipitated the lockdown, the severity of which hardly proved to be a deterrent for the virus and its ravages. The country's leading medical research body, its top-most health planners and "experts" marshaled by the government have only been busy doing the bidding for thy political masters, most unashamedly, to the extent of bartering away their scientific credentials. Consistent denial of community transmission of the virus, selective presentation, and misrepresentation of data, and conducting the vaccine trial in violation of all scientific norms only to secure cheap political mileage are but a few consequences of this approach. This calls for extra caution in reading the lines and between the lines of the various proclamations made by the government regarding the current pandemic.

Recently, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the results of sero-prevalence survey for Covid that was conducted in Delhi. Almost as a matter of faith the government's frontmen proclaimed the results as a proof of successful handling of the pandemic by the government, and that there is no community transmission in existence in the country. It is puerile to even take note of these proclamations any longer. Nevertheless, the societal context mandates that the findings of this survey, if true, need be read with far greater care and nuance than what has been reflected in the available commentaries in this regard. The caveat of 'if true' is necessitated because the government is yet to come out with the full details of the methodology of the survey for these to be peer reviewed for scientific veracity. In fact, the methodology, and the full results of the earlier all India sero-prevalence study of Covid

conducted by ICMR are yet to be made public despite the results of that survey having attracted much circumspection.

For the understanding of all readers, it needs be explained briefly that a pathogenic organism (a virus, bacteria, or any other such entity) may enter the human body either in the form of droplets through airway i.e. breathing, as in case of Covid, or through alimentary canal upon taking contaminated food or fluids, or through the body surface.

The body's immune system recognizes the pathogen (specifically certain proteins characteristic of the pathogen) as a foreign element in the body which is potentially injurious to health. Such recognition triggers the body's immune system to mount an attack against the pathogen. This attack is mediated first through the formation of anti-bodies, which are specific kind of proteins capable of attaching to the characteristic proteins or other chemical markers on the surface of the pathogen and neutralize it in terms of rendering it incapable of entering human cells to multiply further and cause harm to the body.

If the immune system fails to mount an antibody response, as could also happen in malnourished persons or in old age when the immune system is weakened, the pathogen manages to gain entry into the normal cells in the body tissues and starts replicating in them. In such a situation the other form of immunity, what we call as cell mediated immunity comes into play. The immune system produces specific type of white blood cells known as T lymphocytes which attack the cells infected with the pathogen – a virus or a bacterium and kill the infected cells to eliminate the pathogen.

Malnourishment renders a person immune-compromised and hence liable to more severe forms of infection. On the contrary, in a well nourished person the immune system may form enough

antibodies not only to neutralize the present infection, but also future infections by the pathogen, and thereby affording a longer lasting immunity to the person against the specific pathogen, which in the instant case is the SarsCov2 virus (novel corona virus).

Once a significant proportion (this could vary between 60 percent to 90 percent individuals depending on the specific characteristics of the pathogen) of individuals in the population acquire such immunity, the population is said to have acquired a herd (i.e. the individuals with protective antibodies) immunity, which lends protection from infection even to persons not exposed to this infection hitherto by limiting the scope of transmission of the pathogen in the community / population.

Serum is amber-coloured, protein rich fluid that separates out from the blood once the blood is formed into a clot (coagulates). In the case of infection with Sars-Cov 2 virus, antibodies appear about two to three weeks after infection. Hence if we take a person's blood sample and test the serum for presence of antibodies against Sars-Cov2, then we can detect the presence of past infection in the person.

A sero-prevalence survey seeks to test the presence of such antibodies in a sample of persons drawn from the general population in a manner such that this sample is representative of the total population of an area / state / country. The proportion of persons in the sample who test positive for the presence of the antibodies can thus be projected to the entire population of the area / state / country to calculate the overall prevalence of infection in the population. A series of such surveys can thus help in monitoring the spread of the infection in the population.

This is a highly simplified version of a phenomenon which is complicated by many other factors which may undermine the effect

of such immunity such as presence or absence of other diseases (co-morbid conditions), age, genetic characteristics, environment etc. Nevertheless, this description suffices for the purpose of understanding what follows.

Delhi's population for 2020 is estimated at 3,02,91,000 (worldpopulationreview.com; populationstat.com). W.H.O Situation report No. 46 of March 2020, had stated that 80%, 15% and 5% of all Covid cases are expected to be mild / asymptomatic, severe infections, and critical infections, respectively. Given a prevalence of 23.48%, as revealed in the Delhi sero-prevalence survey, total number of Covid infections in Delhi would, according to that WHO report, work out to 71,12,327 (a little more than 7 million). The numbers of severe, and critical infections in the entire population would in that case be 10,66,849 (1.6 million) and 3,55,616 (.36 million) respectively. As against this, by 10 July (last day of sample collection for the study) the officially acknowledged count of Covid cases in Delhi as on was 1,09,140, (.1 million). It means that according to March report of WHO, for every confirmed Covid infection, 65 infections went undetected. The numbers of severe or critical infections, and deaths that may have been missed likewise. To add to the discomfiture, various subsequent reports have shown that the proportion of mild / asymptomatic cases to be around 40% to 50% only.

The sheer numbers would in earnest invoke disbelief– 'this situation is too bad to be deserving of credence.' After all, if the situation is indeed as precarious, would it not have shown up in the form of packed hospital beds and deaths? Implicit in this is the assumption that given the paranoia and the sense of alarm about the disease, anyone having symptoms akin to those of Covid would show up at the nearest designated Covid facility for medical

attention. A large number of Covid beds that are presently lying vacant do not seem to testify that, hence most if not all the 6.9 million missed cases would have been mild or asymptomatic cases. The next conclusion which follows is that a fourth of Delhi's population has already acquired immunity to the virus, taking us closer to developing herd immunity, howsoever inadvertently, and without incurring disconcerting forms of illness. Indeed, that is how some of the government experts have argued on television shows and newspaper columns.

It is another thing though that while presenting the results of the survey, the governments leading men of science first and foremost claimed the results to show that the government's steps to control the pandemic have borne fruit, and that there is no community transmission. Indeed, at the end of it all, the one original contribution of India may well turn out to be – 'The development of herd immunity, without community transmission of the virus.'

Scientific prudence apart, the desirability of such an outcome is hardly contestable. But that we in India are well on our way to acquire 'herd immunity' ought not to be a matter of loose conjecture or an assumption of convenience. Claims of 'herd immunity' cannot do without standards of scientific plausibility and probity.

It need be stressed here that the estimates of total infections, severe and critical cases given above are not a matter of our insistence, but follow as a consequence of the condition that if the results of the survey are true then this is the expected picture. Our only assertion is that its denial or confirmation ought to be scientifically investigated. Besides, the government ought to be made to account for something that is the culmination of its own findings. It cannot be allowed to use data and statistics as per its

convenience - use them when it suits its convenience, and rubbish them when it does not.

Secondly, unlike other natural sciences, biological science and epidemiology are not precise sciences. Conclusions drawn from their application always operate within a range of probability. In the instant case, it could well be that the numbers of cases, severe cases, critical cases or deaths may not be that high, or that the number of cases could be high but their severity or deaths may not be so. It could also be that the cases may have been very high, but their consequences in the immediate sense may have been moderate, without ruling out the possibility of quiescent changes in the body whose effects may show up only in days or months to come. These are questions which need to be investigated for answers now, and not when we will have time.

There are other reasons deserving emphasis to bring home the crucial importance of investigating the epidemiological picture as obtains from this survey.

While we may expect the people suffering from an illness to seek medical advice for regaining health to carry on with life as normally as possible, the fact remains that the health seeking behaviour of people does not always lend itself to biomedical rationality. Rather, the social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of peoples' lives, as determined by the social vectors mentioned earlier, exercise overbearing influence. The behaviour of health institutions is also an integral part of this vexed equation.

Unfortunately, training of our healthcare personnel does not equip them with the much-needed grasp of these real-world concerns. 'Comprehensive Rural Health Services Project (CRHSP) located in Ballabhgarh district of Haryana is the rural field practice area under the department of Community Medicine of AIIMS, New

Delhi. As scholars of public health, we went visiting the place eleven years back. During introductory briefing, a doctor of the department, waxed eloquent on the above average health outcomes in their area backed by meticulously computerized data of every resident of their area, on a variety of socioeconomic and health parameters. This prompted a query regarding health outcomes segregated by caste and class. The immediate retort was – we do not discriminate between our patients based on caste. Eleven years since, the analysis remains wanting.

The self-righteousness of the doctor's statement could be eminently aggregable, except that the society does discriminate between people on basis of their identity and class status, a fact amply borne out by outcomes in the national health surveys. Health institutions are societal institutions and reflect society's biases and prejudices in their institutional behaviour.

More recently, the author along with a senior professor of AIIMS, New Delhi submitted a project on accessibility of patients to medical facilities during the period of lockdown, in response to a call for intramural grants for Covid projects issued by the institute. Among other outcomes, the experience of the patients was to be studied disaggregated by caste and class. The ethics committee of the institute, rather than raising any point of ethics with respect to the proposed research, rejected the project by raising an unethical reason of its own – 'it has never been a tradition in the institute to do research on the basis of caste.' Obviously, in the opinion of these men and women of learning, the ability of people to access proper medical facilities is irrespective of their social standing.

The moot point here is – has the social blindness of our health institutions cost us the suffering of so many people going unregistered ?

50 percent of Delhites live in slums. Another 13% in regularized unauthorized colonies. Deprivations of poverty, under-nutrition, and hunger in face of the unsanitary conditions renders them most vulnerable to Covid-19. Judgement regarding their acquiring immunity need take this in account. Poor can ill-afford any illness that deprives them of their daily bread incumbent upon daily earning. NSSO data shows that the poorest 20% of the population is about half as likely to report an illness, and about half as likely to seek hospitalized treatment as the top 20% of the population does.

Does it then suffice to have created 10 or 15 thousand Covid beds, or to have capped the cost of Covid care in private hospitals (*for whosoever can afford such cost*), and that anyone having the symptoms is welcome there? In times of deepening insecurities of even the better cared sections of society, how many of the poor would feel readily emboldened to seek care from institutions which increasingly appear like monuments to disease than institutions for rejuvenating life?

For answers, we need step in the shoes of the lonely migrant labourer, an ordinary Muslim worker, a hawker or petty trades people, a domestic help banished from gated complexes (almost all of whom were treated as nothing short of human vectors responsible for spreading the disease far and wide), an elderly couple or women headed households with little support, and so many others who have faced depredation at the hands of state's agencies during this pandemic. The very thought of an intimidating hospital environment, of the expenses to be incurred, of the wages foregone, of who will look after children at home, and then the stigma – this weight has never been easy to bear even at the best of



time. It is pertinent to note here that barely a week back nearly 3000 Covid positive cases went missing in the city of Bangalore; while another 40 were reported to have gone missing in district Gazipur of U.P.

The progression of an epidemic/pandemic depends on a balance that is attained between the agent (the virus), the host (humans) and the environment (which would include poverty, malnutrition, hunger, housing, hygiene, sanitation, specific tools of medicine that are available against the disease, and the functionality of our health services etc.). If answering these questions is left to mere conjecture then the dynamics of the epidemic triad of agent, host and environment shall be what it will be, and we'd be left high and dry bearing the blow back of the disease time and again. Is our anti-Covid policy addressing these issues? The manner of exertions of our highest medical research bodies in this regard is only too well known to bear elaboration over here. But it need be said that it inspires confidence in the least.

There is another overriding reason against cursory dismissal of the picture that obtains consequent to the results of sero-prevalence survey. As a guiding principle, to be unfailing of registering the agony of the poorest of the poor, and be perceptive of it, insistence need be placed for a measure of willingness to err on the side of caution. The well to do shall always manage to have their troubles taken note of and cared for.

It's worth pondering, how many of us would have been convinced of the possibility of the prevailing mayhem had there been its premonition say sometime in December 2019 or January 2020. Would we have believed in January 2020 that India shall stand witness to migration of hungry, penniless, and harassed men,

women and children, beaten by the police, and treated as human vectors, in numbers far in excess of the mass migration that ensued in the wake of India's partition in 1947; that we could be staring at unemployment rates of 40 to 45 percent; or that India's economy shall contract by almost 9 percent? We may perhaps have not believed this even during the initial phase of the pandemic; yet all of this has come to pass.

May not be in lakhs, but say if the number of deaths missed were triple or quadruple the number officially acknowledged, would that be any less scary? Even otherwise, should our health services not be reaching out to the people where they are, when we know for sure that a large proportion of our people find the physical and economic access to health services difficult even in the best of times? We also need to keep in mind that when a large proportion of our people have been so marginalized that they have little to expect from the system, then their protestations, or rather the lack of it could be very misleading.

All this has been conveniently ignored, expecting that resultant absence of evidence would translate into evidence of absence of a more worrisome picture. Rather than rest on the laurels of having created Covid beds, and putting *illusionary price caps* on corporate healthcare, the take home message of the sero-prevalence survey is that the government's anti-Covid policy should build in robust measures of reaching out to the indigent if alleviating peoples' suffering is its objective.

This entails building a publicly funded healthcare devoted to *serving the people* rather than wasting precious public resources for strengthening corporate healthcare. The first steps in that direction need be taken now.



## **Bihar**

# **Land Struggles in Nauhatta (Sasaram)**

**O**ver last two weeks of July 2020, landless have waged struggles for land in Sone river- Kaimur Terai in Rohtas district of Bihar. This has broken silence of past several years in the struggles of rural poor in this belt.

Police and administration had been unleashing a reign of repression over the people under the pretext of combating extremism. But with the rise of the struggle of rural poor under the banner of AIKMS, administration is shaken. AIKMS is an organization well known for waging struggles of poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Facing repression, AIKMS started organizing the peasants and agricultural labourers on their just demands. In this area, the condition of tribals, dalits and backward classes who constitute bulk of rural poor is very bad. Nitish Govt.'s announcement of giving 3 decimal land to landless without houses has not been implemented. Nor has the ceiling surplus, *benami*, *bhoodan*, *cachar* or Bihar govt. land been distributed among landless. Even provisions of Forest Rights Act 2006 have not been implemented and rights of tribals over their land and forest produce have not been recognized. On the other hand, under Nitish Govt. attacks of nexus of landlords-police-forest officials against tribals, dalits and backwards have increased resulting in growing disaffection among them.

On June 27, forest officials reached Nawadih village under Nauhatta police station for plantation of over 40 acres of land under

cultivation of tribals, dalits and backwards, calling it forest land. Poor people belonging to these sections, who have been cultivating this land, stopped the plantation. It resulted in skirmish between the two in which a youth, Chandan Kumar, was injured. The angry villages forced the team of forest officials to flee.

Another incident took place on July 1, 2020 in the tribal majority village Chafla under Nauhatta police station. Here 58 families of Oraon tribals resisted to protect 60 acre land under their possession. A proposal to distribute this 60 acre land among these 58 families has been sent by Gram Sabha to District Welfare Officer. But forest officials are openly violating provisions of FRA, 2006. JD (U)-BJP Govt. is directing this open violation.

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, hundreds of landless villagers of village Bhadara and Daranagar occupied 55 acre 47 dismil Bihar govt. land under illegal occupation of landlords of village Bhadara under Nauhatta police station in Sone-Kaimur terai. Nearly 800 people from the area were present on the occasion under the leadership of Dist. Secretary of AIKMS, Com. Ayodhya Ram and other leaders of AIKMS- Coms. Surendra Singh, Ravi Thakur, Imtiaz and Budhan Ram. On the call of landlords, Nauhatta police incharge reached the site with a big police force but seeing the number of people, left the place after talking to AIKMS leaders.

Landlords of Bhadara like Ramvilas Singh have been claiming this 55 acre 47 dismil land but they cannot have any legal claim over it and the land is fit for distribution among landless. For last three years, AIKMS has been raising issue of this land before Mandal chief and higher officials. When officials turned deaf, landless were forced to occupy this land.

In Sone-Kaimur terai, thousands of acres of land is under the illegal occupation of landlords. In some cases, landlords have got

fake papers of their ownership prepared. AIKMS has decided to free such lands from the occupation of landlords. Land struggle in Bhadara on July 7 has lifted the fear of police-landlord terror and has ignited hopes among landless poor peasants.

These struggles continue braving the state repression and attacks of the landlords backed by the police forces.



## **Women's Organizations & Intellectuals' Reminder to Home Minister**

(The following letter is the sixth reminder sent by over 350 women activists to the Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, in the context of North East Delhi violence. The move was spearheaded by several women's organizations in Delhi including Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan. - *Editor*)

### **Memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs**

**T**his is to bring to your attention the repeated appeals we have been making to the Ministry to conduct a public Judicial Enquiry and release all the FIRs in public. Since April, we have written five times to you on behalf of over 350 lawyers, women's collectives, students, civil society representatives and the citizens of

the country. This memorandum is our reminder to you regarding the objection we have to the ongoing investigation of the violence that destroyed North East Delhi and shook the country in February. This comes at a time when international disgrace is being brought about by an investigation that is opaque, biased and aims to crush democracy. Even the UN observers have expressed dismay at the manner in which the police investigation is linking the NE Delhi violence of February 2020 with anti-CAA protests. The violence of the pro-CAA agitators is not mentioned at all in the entire narrative built around the investigation.

What is even more appalling for the country is the stifling of the first women led democratic protest movement, by vilifying it as anti-national or seditious. The world witnessed one of the largest protest movements that went on for months without harming anyone or damaging any property. The misogynistic investigation is targeting educated women who stand for peace and equality. Their opposition to a law that discriminates on grounds that go against the ethos of the constitution of the country should be imbibed in the democratic processes. Instead, we have a police claiming that activists of Pinjra Tod are trying to run a media campaign against them!!

1. The idea of conducting an investigation at the time of a pandemic, when the accused do not have an access to a regular judicial system is unjust. What is worse is the fact that the under-trials are being jailed. At a time when the WHO, UN and other agencies are asking for a release of political prisoners, India is seen as increasing their numbers. The jails are centres that have the potential to be Corona hotspots. By keeping political prisoners as under-trials in prisons is a threat to their lives. It would seem as if

the police and the investigating agencies are planning to physically eliminate any opposition.

If Delhi police thinks it sounds credible when it tells the court that women deliver children in jails and are safe. They need to give themselves a reality check. If after reading the news of Akhil Gogoi being tested positive for Covid19 after 200 days in prison the police wants us to believe that incarcerated under-trials are safe in jails, they are sadly mistaken. The developments are alarming.

2. Month after month the opaqueness of the investigation is indicative of the travesty of justice that is happening. As women's collective conducting a campaign for the release of all detainees being charged under UAPA in the North East Delhi pogrom investigation, we are saddened by the government's lack of response to the demand for justice. Week after week, we are witnessing a rise in vilification of the arrested students, civil society activists and unarmed democratic opponents of a bad legislation. What is even more tragic is that the society is learning the truth about the pogrom from the media rather than from official investigative agencies.

3. In what seems to be an attempt to deflect the attention of the civil society, about 16 members of the RSS too have been booked for rioting. The one creditable move has however failed to take the focus away from the glaring inconsistencies of the investigation. The accused RSS members have been randomly picked from some of the eye witness testimonies. The absence of names and identities of the criminals who have been named in the GD, are absent from the charge-sheet. Also absent are the names and identities of the WhatsApp group members (125 till they left the group after the violence was over), whose records are in public. The

open call for arms, violence, looting and murder during the WhasApp chat, at public places, on FB live, and other such evidences have been totally overlooked by the investigative agencies.

4. In an apparent move to shield the actual criminals, named BJP councilors/MLAs/MPs, are being left out of the investigation and students, activists who were carrying out peaceful protests against an unjust law are being branded as political prisoners and tortured in prisons. The arrest of boys and men of the Sikh community who operated a *langar* to feed the protestors at Shaheen Bagh are being charge-sheeted for running an open kitchen! This move of the investigative agency is bringing international shame to the democratic and just credentials that India was hailed for. If political pressure can make the investigators overlook the perpetuation of violence that has been recorded by national and international media, plus it has been flaunted on social media by a Hindutva brigade that has been gloating over its ability to kill, loot, rape, plunder and get away with it, the investigation needs to be taken away from the investigators.

5. We would like bring to your attention the misuse of the UAPA and the archaic Sedition Acts to keep students and CAA opponents in custody. Despite being bailed students are being kept in custody for an indefinite period of time under sections of the UAPA. We are opposed to indefinite periods of police/judicial custody in lockups to give time to investigation agencies to frame charges. This implies that those in custody are guilty till proven otherwise, when by law everyone is innocent till proven guilty. The indefinite arrests, incarceration and torture are a violation of the human rights of the accused and a violation of their fundamental constitutional right to access the justice system at no personal cost.



6. Another deflection was created when Safoora Zargar was granted bail. The act was advertized as an act of charity and goodness by the judge, and the media did not stop gushing over the fact that the government was humane enough to grant bail to a pregnant girl. It does not take away from reality, which is that the girl was incarcerated on arbitrary and abstract grounds. There was no case, and the extensions of her incarceration were to give the police time to fabricate stories to keep her in prison. The AG's statement that her pregnancy should not be used as an excuse to seek her release as pregnant women give birth regularly in jails, was inhuman and crass to say the least. The AG was right to say that pregnancy should not be the only reason to seek bail. It has been months since she has been accused of crimes that have never been proven. *She deserves not bail, but an acquittal.* It is not her fault that the police or an investigating agency is taking months to frame credible charges. It is not her fault that the court or the prosecutor fails to tell her why she is being held in custody for an indefinite period of time as under-trial.

Not just Safoora, all those charged under clauses of the UAPA need to be released immediately. If the police or any other investigating agency is able to prove charges in a court of law, the accused can be jailed under the supervision of the court to serve their punishment. Not till then. We are re-submitting our findings and demands for your consideration. We would like to re-iterate that we stand with all the victimized in prison, who are being kept in coerced custody as under-trials while the police carries on a shoddy investigation.

We stand with all the students, activists and victims who are being accused of fomenting violence and destroying a part of the

city, as they oppose an unjust law and seek justice from prosecution by a biased police force. As the UN observers note, the violence advocated and conducted by the pro-CAA lobby is being totally blanked out, while the opponents using democratic means are now being persecuted. Reports of torture of those in custody are also rampant.

The police has been given a free hand to frame opponents of the CAA in sections of Acts without complying the due procedure even under the current criminal law, was an observation made by the Honorable Judge of the TN High Court. We respect the judgment and seek an end to arbitrary vilification of CAA opponents.

We are opposed to the CAA/NPR/NRC.

We are opposed to the UAPA and the system whereby thousands are getting arrested during a pandemic when their access to the judicial system is extremely limited. For the citizens of the country access to justice is a fundamental right.

The arresting and charging of victims demonstrates a new level of incompetence of handling such a sensitive investigation. Eyewitnesses and complainants are being charge-sheeted and threatened, especially if the court gives a direction in their favour. Intimidation is not a component of democracy, and we will be opposed to state machinery trying to subdue the demands for justice from the aggrieved.

Excesses during pandemic cannot be brushed under the carpet. We will keep demanding our right to a Public Judicial Enquiry.

Regards

Poonam Kaushik, General Secretary,

Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan Delhi

Dipti Bharti, General Secretary NFIW, Delhi Unit

Maya John, Centre for Struggling Women

Kusum lata Sehgal , Swastik Mahila Sangathan

Enclosed :

The Letter which has been signed by more than 350 Woman Collectives/ organisations/ Activists/ Academicians/ Lawyers  
*(Being published here.)*



## **Draconian Laws, Inaccessible Judiciary and the Suppression of Democracy**

The lockdown and its extension has brought to the fore the economic, social and political pandemics that are totally engineered by mal-administration and a communal fascist ideology. We would like to draw attention to the manner in which civil society and the democracy that it safeguards is being killed by framing, misusing and abusing the legal framework.

The level to which communalism has permeated the police and the legal system is visible in the rise and growth of vigilante forces. If we analyze the pogrom of North East Delhi in March 2020, the curtain raiser to the violence came in the form of speeches by

BJP leaders who stood with Delhi police openly declaring that they will unleash violence in a matter of time. The police dismissed the threat as un-important. Over the next four days, as targeted killings, rapes and plunder started haunting colonies in North East Delhi, Indian as well as foreign media houses clearly showed the hand in glove camaraderie of the police with the RSS terrorists. The pogrom of Northeast Delhi led to the death of over 53 people, many injured, 19 mosques gutted, houses and shops of Muslims were burned down. The economic damage alone has been estimated to be close to a billion US dollars. The result of hate speech and propaganda by BJP leaders, the violence has been the worst witnessed in decades in Indian history.

The lockdown has given the BJP government, an opportunity to use draconian laws and crush any form of opposition to its power and show a blamelessness of the BJP/RSS or other Hindutva goons. The lockdown has provided the police with a perfect cover to arrest and detain opponents of the government. The limited access of the detainees to courts and judicial systems during the lockdown has provided the prosecution and the investigative agencies a perfect cover to slap various charges on students and file uncontested FIRs. Delhi Police has taken no action against BJP leaders, but has booked for sedition, murder, attempt to murder, promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and rioting Jamia Students, women who read the constitution or poetry at the anti-CAA protest sites and citizens who came out in support of the opponents of the unjust CAA/NPR/NRC.

*What we found most appalling in the entire process of management of the Lockdown, was the pushing through of the Hindutva agenda of eliminating minorities, particularly Muslims.*

From the beginning of the Janata Curfew, one of the main task of the political parties across the board should have been to educate their constituencies about the virus. However, they chose to openly defy Article 14 of the constitution that ensures equality of all persons in the country irrespective of religion, race caste or gender. In open defiance, we saw the Delhi government listing Markaz cases separately and highlighting them as the main reason why the city's cases saw a spike. Calls to shoot the Tablighis and Muslims have been dominating social media platforms.

Since January, while mapping the ecosystem of violence, its abettors and enablers, we saw how the dissent was being crushed through administrative and policing techniques. Violations of fundamental rights are rampant. The police have been working with armed thugs and political mobs to suppress resistance and dissent. Their use of arbitrary and extrajudicial violence is unchecked without any remedial action.

On the orders of the MHA, Delhi Police continue investigating the pogrom undeterred by the pandemic lockdown. The limited access of the detainees to courts and judicial systems during the lockdown has provided the prosecution and the investigative agencies a perfect cover to slap various charges on students and file uncontested FIRs.

*In our investigations we found that student activists, including pregnant women, have been charged with rioting in NE Delhi. We could lay our hands on around 45 FIRs, but the number of FIR as per various credible media reports, could exceed 800. **NONE OF THE FIRs HAVE BEEN PUT UP FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY.** Students, activists and those associated with the anti-CAA protests have been issued notices under preventive violence sections 107/51CrPC.*

Police has said it is arresting scientifically and on basis of evidence, but fail to clearly state their findings. Officially there are 53 dead, of which 2/3<sup>rd</sup> are Muslims. **Their MLCs are FIRs in themselves.** Who has been arrested for those killings? This is not been made clear by the Delhi police. Who has been arrested for the killing of Faizan, who was beaten to death by police after being made to sing national anthem, in a video that went viral on social media?

We would like to highlight the fact that the issue of suppression of human rights is affecting women most severely. When husbands, brothers, sons and now even women of the household are being picked on abstract charges, it makes the fight against patriarchy even more gruesome. As activists/collectives/organizations, we disprove of the idea of the use of the pandemic to file FIRs and not put them up in public domain. This travesty of justice will not go down well in history.

***We demand:***

- Release of all arrested during the time of the pandemic. There should be no hounding of activists, particularly after being labelled Naxal, Jihadi or Urban Naxal.
- All FIRs, particularly against those accused of being anti-CAA and implicated in the Delhi pogrom, need to be put up in the public domain.
- We demand a **Public Judicial Enquiry** to establish sequence and facts that led to the pogrom in North East Delhi. The enquiry needs to examine facts and the FIRs.
- We seek answers from Delhi Police, NIA and other investigative agencies regarding the basis of surge of FIRs against the Muslim students and activists.

- We demand a reply from the Police about the killers of the 53 accounted and listed dead. What steps have been taken to arrest their perpetrators?
- The violence saw a lot of loss of damage to property and real estate. We demand that the investigating agencies publicly declare who it has held responsible for the targeted burning of the houses and properties of Muslims? Properties that suffered damage will need to be compensated too.



# **Oppose Electricity Ammendment Bill 2020**

**Rajinder Singh Deepsinghwala**

Modi government has launched another major attack on the rights of the states and the people through the Electricity Bill 2020. Modi government is using corona period like a boon and striving hard to fulfill all dreams of his corporate masters. Amendment of labour laws, privatization of railway, Electricity bill 2020 and Ordinances relating to proposed Electricity bill and its consequences.

Modi Govt. has proposed a new amendment in Electricity Act 2003 which is presented in the name of Electricity bill 2020. Government stated that in the large part of rural areas there are agricultural tube wells having no meters and lack of detailed information of power consumption is causing a major problem for

power sector. State governments have been shouldering economic burden of 80 thousand crore rupees. It has impacted heavily on states' development it also causing serious economic challenges for the distribution companies because state govts. do not pay on time. Cross subsidies are implemented to reduce the burden of subsidy on govt.s and are becoming extra economic burden upon industry. Due to this, poor economic techniques and equipment could not be updated and resulted in electricity being wasted during transmission from generation centres to consumers. It is also a major reason for economic deficit of power sector. These are the grounds of proposed Electricity bill 2020. Aim to bring this amendment is also mentioned in statement of objects and reasons to Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 "The 2003 act have brought in huge direct investment, public private partnership, market development, transparent tariff mechanism etc. which have enabled several reforms, laws and regulations, multifarious contracts and disputes. But the electricity sector is seized with few critical issues which have weakened the commercial and investment activities in the electricity sector that needs to be addressed immediately to ensure sustainable growth of the country. It has been felt that the few provisions of the act are unable to cope with the rapid development of the electricity.

These are the proposed amendments. Prices of electricity would be based on generation and distribution cost. While determining cost of electricity subsidy will not be included. The farmers have to pay the bills and government would reimburse it through direct benefit transfer scheme.

The proposed amendment regarding the states' and Centre's Regulator Commission has changed the existing provision to elect the election committee for the selection of members. Now states



and Centre's Regulator and other members would be nominated by Centre's committee. This also proposes an amendment in section 142 and 143 of the electricity act to impose more fines as punishment.

Most important part of this bill is to establish electrical contract enforcement authority. Ex High court judge would be chairperson of this authority, the civil courts power will be vested in enforcement authority to implement all contracts with company regarding generation, distribution and transmission of electricity. This authority has also the power to arrest and to send to jail under Code of criminal procedure 1973's section 145 and 146. It could attach property of individuals/companies. In fact there would be a special court for electricity contract and omnipotent authority in electricity sector.

Now the question arises that civil courts already having the authority to implement the electricity contracts. Secondly, electricity sector falls in concurrent list of Indian aCentre both have regulatory commissions determining electricity prices and enforcing agreements. To settle the disputes, appellant authorities also exist separately, both at state and central level. Thereafter Supreme court also has disposed off such cases. Then why is a separate electrical contract enforcement authority required?

To know and understand this reality in detail we need to look back a little. Power sector was established as a welfare department through Electricity Act 1948. It barred the penetration of private profiteers. When it emerged as a profit making department world's and India's profiteers started pressurizing Indian government to open it for private investment. The Indian government did so and Electricity Act 1948 was replaced by Electricity Act 2003 which

removed impediments in the way of private investment. It was not the last wish of profiteers rather it was the beginning. Because once the law is enacted the lust of private capitalists has increased, then the pre determined law hinders this increased lust. The need to further amend the existing law is to satisfy the increased lust for profit. In such a situation anti people government has come up with amendments under various pretexts. In this way many private generation companies have entered generation sphere. Secondly due to Centre's and states' direct control and equal authority in power sector, private companies had to travel a long way to make decisions based on their personal needs for profit. It was an uncomfortable and complicated situation for them. It was must for them to have a single power sector authority at the central level which they could use as their puppet and through it every decision should be made in the interest of profit.

Thirdly, the Indian government is acting at the behest of corporate houses. The power sector falls under the concurrent scope of the Indian constitution which gives control of the power sector to the centre and state government equally. If the Modi government succeeds in converting this amendment bill into a law, it will achieve many objectives at the same time. In the first place it will set up an electrical contract enforcement authority and pave the way for private companies to take decisions in the interest of their profit and Modi government will gain more confidence of the corporate. It is also part of Hindu Rashtra project which has been opposed to federalism i.e. rights of the states.

## **Subsidies and cross subsidies will be discontinued**

The introduction of the Electricity Bill states that the subsidies and cross subsidies have detrimental effect on the economic

conditions of government and industrialists. The aim of the Bill is to stop subsidies and cross subsidies although the bill states that the subsidy will not be included in setting electricity prices. The amendment bill states that power distribution companies will charge the full price of electricity from the consumers as per the prices. The government will deposit the benefit of subsidies to the consumers in their bank accounts through direct fund transfers scheme. The question arises that if the government agrees to provide the benefit of subsidies then why would it bother to deposit the benefit in the accounts of lakhs of peasants and labourers instead of crediting it directly to the company?

The second issue is cross subsidy. It is decided on the basis that all electricity consumers have different purposes. A section uses 90 per cent of the total production for profit needs. At the same time huge sections of society consume electricity for life's basic needs. Therefore the prices of electricity which is used for profit needs should be charged more in principle and that is happening. This higher cost is in turn spent on providing low cost electricity to the poor. This section is provided electricity at a relatively low cost so that they too get net benefit of minimum facility. How is it wrong at the level of justice? The government which nurtures the interest of corporate profit is willing to stop cross subsidies and charging high prices from poor laborers and farmers. It will impose more economic burden on the already financially burdened people. On the other hand it will provide electricity to profit corporate at forty percent less price than before.

## **How much impact on Peasants and Workers**

Peasants and labourers would be hit hard in many states by this law. We can take two examples, first from Madhya Pradesh

where 84 percent of residents are paying less than Rs 400 as their monthly power bill. They are covered under 'smart subsidy' scheme that encourages low power consumption. Would it be possible after the enactment of this law? Let's take one more examples related to peasants. In Telangana a typical farmers pump set consumes 8747 units per year. Rs.6.87 per unit annual cost of electricity would be Rs 59917 or Rs 5000 per month. In addition to the farmers the discoms spend about Rs70,000 per pumpset. Telangana discoms have invested Rs.21146 crores for creating infrastructure for farmers. Two questions arise 1. Could the former pay this money in advance and wait for the direct benefit transfer at some later date 2. Would private distributors invest such amounts without assured returns?

In Punjab the ground waters are very deep. 86 percent of ground water has been depleted. Now farmers have to implant ten to twenty horsepower motors to suck deep waters. In such situation Punjab's farmers could not pay heavy bills and you can imagine the tragedy of these farmers.

## **Renewable energy and hydropower**

The central government has said that renewable energy and hydropower sources need to be boosted to generate more electricity .Therefore the government has proposed to formulate a national renewable energy policy. According to this policy distribution companies will be bound to purchase power from renewable energy and hydro power sources as determined by electrical contract enforcement authority. Failure to do so will result in heavy fines for distribution companies. This policy of the government is already in force in few states including Punjab. As per the agreements in case of less requirement of power the

government distribution companies have to pay the required capacity charges to the private generation companies. For example despite the closure of all industrial units due to lock downs and declining demand for electricity in the agriculture sector distribution companies have to pay an additional ten crore daily capacity charge to private generation companies. The private companies have been making double profit by recovering the full costs due to low power generation as per the reduced demand from the state distribution companies. Distribution companies in turn succeed in shifting the burden to the toiling masses by raising electricity prices. If the government succeeds in passing this bill the heavy increase in electricity prices is certain and electricity will be out of the reach of the poor.

There will be further increase in the cost of electricity:-Eighty percent of the electricity bill is the cost of generation. This cost is so high because of the high cost power purchase agreements between private generator and NTPC on the one hand and the state owned distribution companies on the other. The remaining twenty percent of the electricity bill consists of cost components that are highly regulated. It is obvious that unless the costly power purchase agreements are renegotiated the cost of electricity can not be brought down. Now consider the following:-

a) The current cost of solar energy is 2.44/unit but old power purchase agreements force discoms to buy solar power at rates ranging from Rs 15/unit in Gujarat to Rs 4.60/unit in Andhra Pradesh.

b) As on March 25th 2019 around three lakh crore of debt of nationalised banks for renewable energy projects are likely to become non performing assets.

c) About six lakh crore of the total NPAs of public sector banks are from the power sector particularly relating to thermal power plants. The 37th parliamentary standing committee on energy stated that the reasons for the same are: a) inability of the promoter to infuse the equity and working capital, .b)delay in project implementation leading to cost overrun, non availability of fuel and lack of power purchase agreements. It is disingenuous that these private power generators will now be bailed out by taxpayers while the discoms are blamed for mismanagement.

d) The two part tariff that discoms have to pay two generators who have long terms power purchasing agreements if they don't draw power from these further increases costs to consumers by benefiting the generators at the cost of the discoms. Further this bill also proposes the removal of different slabs of electricity rates. The highest rate of electricity would be charged from first unit. For example in Punjab consumption of first two hundred units charged 6 rupees and few paise per unit and the highest rate above 10 rupees per units for domestic use.

In addition cross border trade in electricity is inconsistent with the public interest as one of the key objectives of private companies operating in the manufacturing sector is to make a profit. The sale of electricity will be negotiated with the governments which will pay the maximum price on the basis of recovery of maximum price of electricity. The situation lays the basis for the recovery of maximum electricity prices, the economic burden of which falls on the people in case of violation of rules laid down by the electrical contract enforcement authority in the power sector. The burden of increased fines will be borne by the poor working people. If the electricity bill is not paid in time, it will result in disconnection and resumption would be very costly.

Although power companies in some states of the country are already outsourcing the distribution of electricity in a particular area or city to a franchisee or sub distributor license, there was a lack of clarity due to which private companies were less interested in the distribution sector. The Electricity bill 2020 also makes it very clear. Now distribution companies can enter distribution sector also with comfort. If they wish to have a franchisee or distributor to distribute electricity on their behalf in a particular area in their supply area, according to this point proposed in the electricity amendment bill, a number of wholesale and retail power centres will be set up across the country. This reform has paved the way for complete privatization of the distribution sector. With the enactment of this bill into law not only the rights of the states will be lost, but also the right to demand reconsideration of any decision taken on electricity.

Privatizing distribution has been a failure in the past and it will be failure again:-In electricity distribution experience with privatization has so far been a total failure. In almost all the cities where privatization have was attempted Gaya, Samastipur and Bhagalpur in Bihar, Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Gwalior, Sagar and Ujjain in Madhya pradesh, Aurangabad and Jalgaon in Maharashtra, Ranchi and Jamshedpur in Jharkhand to name a few, the regulatory commissions were compelled to cancel the franchise. In the case of Odisha the state government is now in charge of the sector once again after not one but three failed attempts at privatization. In Mumbai where TATA and Reliance and now Adani have licences, there have been increases in tariff, protests by consumers and string of litigations. Mumbai has the highest tariff amongst all the metropolitan cities. Delhi has low tariff but very sizable regulatory assets- this means that since it was not possible

in force the increase the tariff, the effect of the increase will be made into an asset that will have to be paid when it is possible to pay. A large majority of consumers in the country cannot afford to pay the full cost of electricity, more so in flat costs charged by private generators. It is also more expensive to supply electricity to rural consumers. Privatization therefore has happened only in select regions and that too has failed. Pushing it again through the bill is likely to have the same results as conditions on the ground remain unchanged.

## **Oppose the electricity amendment bill 2020**

We must strongly oppose this bill because privatized electricity supply would increase its cost. This bill is also striking at the “federal” structure and turned state governments into mere spectators by taking away all their control, eliminating all cross subsidy and subsidies.

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# **Corona Pandemic and The Bourgeois State's Response**

**Sujon Bose**

**C**orona pandemic has spread around the globe like a rapid-fire since the first case was detected in China last December. The policy of lockdown and social distancing along with extensive community testing for contact tracing which has been formulated to control the spread of virus, has failed. But leaving aside the health-related problems, this policy has also brought the world economy to a standstill. This is a nightmare for the Capitalist States which doesn't have the means to feed the entire population which is supposed to stay back home ensuring complete lockdown. The net outcome is a varied global response ranging from some rich countries announcing trillions of dollars as bail-out package, while the rest has left to fate and wishful thinking of developing herd immunity as a measure to control the virus spread. But such disparity in approach is not entirely related to the issue of 'affordability', but also about 'intent'. That is why countries with high GDP per capita like US have not only failed to control the spread of virus and provide adequate healthcare resources, but also have failed to provide economic relief to the majority. Overall, the majority population of the world continues to suffer because of such half-hearted approach to provide necessary source of livelihood for bare-minimum survival.

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**CAPITALIST STATE'S BANKRUPTCY**

Capitalist State can afford such public expenses including bail-outs by means of either tax or debt. Taxes on income (personal or corporate) and property are supposed to be more equitable and democratic i.e. taxing the rich more and poor less. But blanket sales and import duties puts higher burden on poor. To bridge any budget deficit, States adopt debt-financing i.e. the State continue to borrow from either other countries, or from various domestic resources like retirement trust funds and can sell bonds and public assets to people who are Super-rich. But the natural outcome of tax policies since 1980s, including giving tax-cuts to the Super-rich (top 0.01%) individuals and the Big-MNCs to incentivize private investment, led to speculative expansion of wealth in the main.

Meanwhile, the same evade tax by hoarding trillions of dollars in tax havens and minimize liability of any welfare in return of the capital earned in production or consumption services rendered by the working class of that country. This results in a loss of an estimated \$500 to 600 billion a year as corporate tax revenues worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Out of which some \$200 billion comes from low-income economies. This is a sum larger than \$150 billion received by such countries each year as foreign aid. The Super-rich individuals have also stashed another \$8.7 trillion<sup>2</sup> (while some estimates suggest much higher figure of \$36 trillion) adding-up to another \$200 billion a year individual tax losses to the corporate total of \$500 to \$600 billion.<sup>3</sup> Part of such money even to incentivize the political cronyism to secure favorable tax policies and even fund the public-debt itself (due to diminishing tax-returns) by buying debt-bonds of countries. This has resulted in gradual tax deficit and transfer of almost all public wealth into private hands, especially in rich

countries, leaving behind the State with a huge burden of public debt, thus in effect, shifting the major part of the public-debt liability on the shoulders of the rest who are anyhow paying taxes on income.

These so-called ‘neutral’ tax-havens are in fact, the real power-centers of finance capital, controlling world market dynamics by acting as a conduit to divert the surplus capital from poor countries to rich ones. Such round-about financial arrangement not only made the poor countries further dependent on IMF regulated foreign aid from rich countries in return of free-trade access facilitating extraction of Global S-N imperial rent, but in turn actively funded the vicious cycle of ‘financialization’, thus expediting the monopolization of ‘finance capital’. This was a win-win situation for the Global North which promoted the mushrooming of such tax-havens since 1980s. These tax havens were the escape route which keeps the finance capital driven capitalist engine running during each financial crisis. This capital owned by the few Super-rich has no patriotic affiliation to any specific country i.e. capital jumping from one country to other, bargaining the best possible deal from the States. Central Banks in sync continue to bail-out the financial sector again and again, maintaining the monopoly of such handful of oligarchs worldwide at the expense of the rest.

Overall, the global debt burden (public + private) led by G7 countries and China touched an all-time high of \$257 trillion in January 2020, leaving behind the Capitalist States with very little resources to maneuver in this sort of humanitarian crises. Japan with a gross debt of 235% of GDP in 2018 lead the pack, followed by 132% in Italy, 104% in US, 98% in France, 90% in Canada and 87% in UK. That means countries are rich, very rich, but almost all of the

wealth is private. The public capital is in fact running a negative balance in rich countries like US and Japan (i.e. public debt over 100% of national income) and 10-20% positive balance in EU countries like Germany, France.

## **Post- 2008 Financial Crises**

Central Banks of US and Europe, in sync are forced to buy majority of the debt bond issued by the State, to bridge the State budget deficit and bail-out the economy once again since the 2008 financial crises. That means, Super-rich investors and foreign lenders are losing confidence on State potential to prop-up the financial market again and are not buying such State issued debt-bonds. This process of creating credit out of thin air (i.e. like printing new money) is called debt-monetization. Such debt-monetization has kept the US benchmark interest rates near zero while Europe and Japan are trading at negative interest rates (i.e. return would be less than the principal) since the 2008 financial crises; this rate reflects the base rate of return on capital investment. That means, taking into account the public-debt, population growth and inflation, the GDP growth rate is close to zero since mid-1990s i.e. 'permanent stagnation'. That means this is like borrowing from future wealth that should be created by our next generations. The higher base rate in India is just a reflection of their still prevailing backward market relation in terms of capitalist development. But the nature of such growth is very much dependent on US driven financial world order, which stands still.

The central idea was to convert such public-debt into private debt by providing easy credit through private banks. But due to such stagnation in real-production, big corporations are avoiding the laborious process of actually creating share-value in real-production with this borrowed money, and instead manipulating

the profits in their favour through own share buybacks. Higher equity prices pushed for more collateral and still more borrowing, pushing the stock prices higher, and so forth. So, in due time, excessive credit not backed by actual wealth creation in stagnating real-production results in mass-default on debts, often referred as 'credit crunch'. The rich who own majority of private capital actually initiate this bubble by financing the part of the debt itself. US debt and asset valuation data for the quarter 3, 2019 suggests that richest 1% own more than half of stocks (54.2%) and 4.6% debt, next 9% own 33.9% stocks and 20% debt, and bottom 90% own 11.9% stocks and own 75.3% debt.<sup>4</sup> Bottom 90% in fact, have negative wealth (i.e. debt exceeds asset value) because of huge rise of mortgage debt since 1998, a reminder of *dot.com* bubble.

During credit crunch, the Super-rich (top 0.01%) in the main begins to sell-off their stocks in a hurry before they become toxic as the 'real' value of stocks (actual money lured into speculation) gets redistributed in their hands. Financial crises sets-in as stock market crashes and all of the 'virtual' money vanishes in an instant, while 'real' money had exchanged hands. Thus, the credit system becomes the major modern lever for the finance capital to extract wealth from the masses, escalating the social and economic disparity between rich and poor to a level never seen before. To sum-up, stagnation of investment in real-production punctuated by Central Bank sponsored virtual-credit fuelled repeated financial boom-bust cycles has just managed to keep the world economy afloat.

Real wealth (value) can only be created when money is invested in real-production, which completes the cycle of debt repayment and results in more equitable distribution of wealth in terms of labor wages. But 'speculative capital' just leads to

redistribution of circulating wealth as no 'real' value is added to the society. Thus, this debt will never be paid back in future by taxations since the money is not trickling down to common man in terms of wages and employment by means of real-production. Meanwhile, most of this tax-payer wealth will further depreciate, as Super-rich will become Super-super-rich during the next financial crises, with this money belonging to the future generation. Between 2009 and 2018 itself, the number of billionaires it took to equal the wealth of the world's poorest 50% fell from 380 to 26. US heads the list on such disparity as top 1% hold 42.5% of US national wealth. This is while 40% of the total 330 million population lives below poverty line in the richest in the world.

### **Post-Covid Response**

Since 1970s, at least 15 such incidents of financial crises had taken place due to non-payment of debts. The last one coincided with Covid-19 pandemic as it created the perfect smokescreen to cover-up this credit bubble which was anyways due to go bust since 2017-18 as market cap to GDP ratio had exceeded 150 since then. The stock markets collapsed as tax-payers' trillions of dollars were again siphoned-off by the Super-rich to off-shore accounts. Central Banks of US and Europe, in sync have started to buy majority of the debt bond issued by the State to bail-out the financial banks once again, as start of 2020 saw the overall global debt per capita climb to at around \$32,500 i.e. 3.2 times that of annual world output.

Based on such debt-monetization, G7 countries have announced the biggest bail-out packages as the global debt continues to climb higher during this Covid pandemic scenario like never before.<sup>5</sup> Trump has announced the biggest stimulus package of over \$2.8 trillion (13% of the GDP). Out of which 25% of the

money is going to bail-out the big MNCs and 19% for small businesses. That means 44% of the total tax-payer future generation money is used to bail-out business houses. This money is again diverted towards speculative expansion of wealth as a huge gap is opening-up again between actual corporate earnings and their equity values. This is in desperation to keep the US financialization process afloat, and start another boom-bust cycle so as to save US dollar from imminent collapse. Meanwhile, the same corporate continue to lay-off millions of workers leading to unprecedented unemployment rate as direct account transfer accounts for just 30% of the total bail-out money and is grossly inadequate to sustain a decent living.

## **INDIA**

Modi Government had also announced a Rs 20 lakh crore (10% of the GDP) bail-out package. Out of just Rs 1.7 lakh crore is kept aside to make provisions for free food grains and cash to poor and elderly. Meanwhile, the rest of the money is supposed to make way for easy cheap business loans as RBI continues to slash interest rate. This is in sync with the global policy of bailing the Super-rich business interests (i.e. the finance capital) with the tax-payer's money and leaving the rest majority at the mercy of free-market dynamics.

But debt-ridden Indian State (like US) cannot print money to fund the budget deficit (unlike US). Taxing the Super-rich is the only way-out to reduce the fiscal deficit since taxes don't add to the debt-burden i.e. no need to repay. But instead State is selling profitable public assets (including natural resources) to the big private sector at dirt-cheap prices and reducing social expenses to bridge the fiscal deficit, and make-up for the fall in tax revenues.

Public-wealth ratio to national wealth has hence gone-down to 100% in 2012, and continues to depreciate at a faster rate. That means, the same distressed bottom 90% are getting deprived of social subsidies in all fonts including education, health, rural development, and social welfare, to accommodate the large tax-cuts given to the Super-rich, who are meanwhile busy indulging in self-speculative expansion of existing wealth due to lack of potential foreign and domestic market purchasing capacity. Recent State social subsidies in fact have either faced restriction and disruption (e.g. due to Aadhar linkage)<sup>6</sup> or have got diluted including the National Food Security Act.

On the whole, Government is placing the entire public capital (by selling profitable public assets at dirt-cheap prices) and the surplus private capital (in the form of cheap bank loans) into the hands of the big corporate and begging them to start production. But without effective demand in the market, major part of the capital is getting diverted into speculative expansion of stock values i.e. share buy-backs, and then handing huge payouts as dividend to share-holders. This in effect, results in net transfer of such public and private capital to the top 0.01%, even without rolling a dice. Part of this surplus capital (i.e. profits) is siphoned-off to tax havens. IMF estimates that more money has left developing countries since the 1970s, than has received in foreign direct investment and foreign aid combined. Taxes earned from such illicit money since 1970s could have paid all the debt of the developing world. This is while bottom 99.9% end-up shouldering the resultant public debt-burden as RBI continue to slash bank interest rates to accommodate the loss (and is inching towards zero, just like US, Japan, and EU), while confronting mass layoffs or wage reductions



due to stagnation in real production in the face of declining State social expenses.

## **THE SOCIAL AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

The GDP per capita of the world in 2019 was projected around \$11,464 in nominal terms (per capita income in terms of purchasing-power parity is 1.64 times greater than nominal).<sup>7</sup> That means enough surplus money to feed all the population. Still people are starving to death worldwide, not due to population over-growth, but due to gross unequal distribution of such income, making this data look absurd. This economic disparity in capitalism takes the shape of a pyramid with less and less people at the top (i.e. concentration of capital in fewer hands) and more and more people sliding towards the bottom. Overall, net private capital growth in developed countries went-up from 200-350% to 550-800% of the national income between 1970-2015 period. This is the natural outcome of the financialization mediated speculative expansion of wealth since 1980s which hastened the skewed distribution of wealth in the last 40 years to such an extent that at present, 40% of all private wealth is held-up in the hands of top 1%. Out of which, the top 0.01% and 0.1% wealth rises faster than the rest top 1%. This continues to get polarized further as in 2019, it took just 26 Super-rich people to match the wealth of the poorest half of the world, down from 43 in 2017.

This all have taken place at the expense of super-exploitation of bottom 90% population and environmental destruction. That is to sustain such over-consumption of top 10%, whereas poorest of poor at the rock bottom of the pyramid end-up empty stomach, not due to food scarcity caused by over-population, but due to their inability to afford. World Bank estimates that out of the total 7

billion people living worldwide, the bottom 40% are left with less than 5% natural resources and bottom 20% are left with less than 2% natural resources to consume. In contrast the top 10% consume 59% of natural resources. Moreover, the top 1% are left with so much surplus (even after over-consumption) that over \$100 trillion dollar is just sitting idle in bank accounts worldwide, evading taxes and doing nothing due to low 'rate of return' in real-production, triggering higher risk in speculation.<sup>8</sup>

Such capitalist exploitative relation with labour and nature is not an anomaly but a byproduct of the competitive drive of accumulation driven by the constant need to overcome the 'tendency of falling rate of profit' caused by such large-scale anarchy of production. This endless expansion of production driven by technological growth and media enhanced massive sales effort to stimulate human over-consumption of top 10%, independent of basic human needs (e.g. need to replace old functioning mobile with a new one every year) has now come into direct conflict with the limitations of nature. It is manifesting as either shortage of 'sources' of raw materials or natural resources such as groundwater, fossil fuels, minerals, etc. or as lack of 'sink' to absorb industrial waste causing pollution, global warming, ocean acidification, etc., both inter-related. Constant conflicts surrounding oil rich areas in Middle-East and South China Sea are a gentle reminder of such impending scarcity of natural resources. The global warming caused by such environmental destruction has also begun to take toll in the form of natural calamities (e.g. floods, cyclones, tsunamis) coming at much frequent intervals. Current Covid-19 pandemic is a gentle reminder of such man-made excesses toward nature.

## **SUMMARY**

The shadow fight between the large trading nations continues on a global scale within the ambits of US imposed economic sanctions and trade-war to survive at the expense of the rest. The capitalists are in fact waiting for large scale destruction of means of production once again like the WW-II which helped capitalism overcome the 'crises of relative over-production' for some time. But until then, left with no other option, the States are still not taxing the top 1%, but debt-funding to stimulate consumption by creating credit out of thin air, and in turn reducing social expenses at expense of rising austerity of rest 99% living on this planet.

### **Marx believed that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction.**

This failure to address the real issue of deprivation of masses in causing such lack of sufficient market for the surplus value to realize profit has reaffirmed this fact. Keynesian fallacies over the last 40 years have only led to growing debt and such huge claim on future production and has exposed the contradictions arising out of such inevitable 'crises of relative over-production' once and for all, pushing the world economy into a no-exit mode. Corona virus pandemic has in fact, just given an insight to what actual stagnation will look like in future. Super-rich in turn, seek to seclude themselves from the masses in their own islands of power and privilege as the world becomes a much poorer place for the working class. Public expenses (food, health, education) and social welfare funds (e.g. pension funds) will become non-essential for the State. The world will suffer further deterioration of living standard including that of US and Europe. Overall life expectancy continues to decline as the question of food security and starvation engulfs our

very existence of life on this planet. This has given rise to fertile grounds of dissent and clamor for more equitable distribution of income is growing worldwide so as to restart the world consumption-engine in general (and not over-consumption of select few). But in the end, it is the political discourse of world working class which can decide on such future action caused by such inhuman consequences of capitalism.

1 Crivelli, de Mooij, and Keen, 2015; Cobham and Jansky, 2018

2 Estimated by Gabriel Zucman, 2017, an economist at the University of California at Berkley

3 Economist and lawyer James S. Henry, 2016

4 Federal reserve distributional financial accounts,

5 Institute of International Finance (IIF) data based on Bank for International Settlements and International Monetary Fund figures

6 Khera, 2017; Muralidharan, et al., 2019

7 Data taken from IMF, 2019 published report

8 World Bank, 2008 *World Development Index*, 4, <http://data.worldbank.org>.

**Note:** *World Bank staff combined measures of inequality within countries with measures of inequality between countries (using producer price parities) to derive estimates of the share of consumption by world income deciles.*

## **7th Death Anniversary of Comrade Paltu Sen**

Seven years ago on this day i.e. on July 30, 2013 communist revolutionary movement and revolutionary trade union movement had lost a valuable and leading fighter. Com. Paltu Sen, President of the National Committee of IFTU and a member of the Central Committee of CPI(ML)-New Democracy had breathed his last.

For nearly half a century, Com. Paltu Sen had wholeheartedly worked for New Democratic Revolution in India; from student days to the end of his life. His life has been a shining example of total devotion to the cause of revolution. On his death anniversary let us pledge to devote our lives for the unfinished work of making New Democratic Revolution in India victorious. That will be the real homage to his revolutionary memory.

Com. Paltu Sen led many workers' struggles and worked tirelessly to build revolutionary trade union movement. He was President of IFTU for nearly three decades i.e. from 1984 to 2013. At a time when workers in India are facing unprecedented attacks from the Govt. utilizing the conditions of Corona pandemic; when workers are facing unprecedented job losses, threats to life and livelihood; when unemployment, destitution and starvation stares them in face, it is absolutely essential to rally them in struggle. We should follow Com. Paltu Sen's example of developing workers' movement and articulate their needs in the language of struggle.

We are re-publishing here homage paid to Com. Paltu Sen by the National Committee of IFTU.

CPI(ML)-New Democracy

July 30, 2020

# **Red Salute**

## **Comrade Paltu Sen !**

Com. Paltu Sen (Amar Sen), President of the National Committee of IFTU died of a massive heart attack on July 30, 2013. Although suffering from severe diabetes, serious visual handicap and damaged kidneys, Com. Paltu Sen did not allow these to come in



the way of his leadership of the revolutionary trade union movement and was actively engaged in this work till the end. Com. Paltu Sen was a member of the Central Committee of CPI(ML)-New Democracy. Com. Paltu Sen leaves behind his wife and two sons.

Born on 10th March 1950, Com. Paltu Sen a resident of Uttarpara, Dist. Hoogly, West Bengal became active in revolutionary student movement and actively participated in food movement in West Bengal in 1966. He was a very popular student leader at the time. He was a student of B.Sc. Physics (Hons) when inspired by the Naxalbari armed peasant movement he left his studies and plunged into revolutionary communist movement and joined communist revolutionaries and subsequently CPI(ML) when it was formed in 1969. He went to organize tribal poor peasants in Odisha from where he was arrested in 1970. He was charged with conspiracy to overthrow the Govt. (Section 120B IPC), convicted and sentenced to seven years prison term. After the end of Emergency rule he was released from jail in 1978.

On release from jail he immediately resumed active revolutionary political work and took up the responsibility of organizing the revolutionary trade union movement in Hoogly dist. Industrial belt and soon became a popular revolutionary leader of workers. The unions organized and led by Com. Paltu Sen were among the unions who gave a call for the formation of a revolutionary trade union centre culminating in the founding conference of Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) in Guwahati in 1978 where Com. Paltu Sen was elected a member of the first national committee of IFTU. Com. Paltu Sen's pioneering role in building of the revolutionary trade union movement and his leadership qualities were soon in evidence and he became President of the National Committee of IFTU in 1984 and was re-elected in 1987, 1993, 1998 and 2005 IFTU conferences.

On resuming political activities after release from jail, Com. Paltu Sen became a member of the West Bengal state committee of the CPI(ML) and later also became its secretary, He was elected as Central Committee member of CPI(ML)-New Democracy in 2004. Under Com. Paltu Sen's leadership IFTU became a force to reckon with in the Hoogly industrial belt and broke the stranglehold of reformist and reactionary trade unions in the big industries in the belt and in the jute industry in West Bengal. He directly led many notable militant struggles in Jayshree Textiles, Hindustan Motors, India Jute Mill etc. While Com. Paltu Sen was actively involved in the workers struggles in big industries, he also paid attention to work among unorganized sections. He organized brick kiln workers and recently Com. Paltu Sen was instrumental in getting minimum wages with the provision of VDA notified for the biscuit industry in West Bengal which employs over 40,000 workers.

Com. Paltu Sen was a powerful and effective orator who roused workers to militant agitations. He had an excellent grasp of all the intricacies of the trade union movement enabling him to repeatedly foil the machinations of the employers as well as reformist and reactionary trade unions against the workers' struggles. Com. Paltu Sen had mastered all the aspects of TU struggles, particularly initiation, conduction and conclusion of workers' strikes.

Com. Paltu Sen withstood many attacks by the goons of employers and CPM and went many times to jail in course of struggles. Com. Paltu Sen as severely beaten and arrested during a rally in Delhi on May 10, 2002 against imperialist globalization. Under his leadership IFTU played a significant role in the anti-displacement struggle of peasants in Singur. The newly formed Mamata Govt. got Com. Paltu Sen arrested on totally false charges and kept him in jail for over a month and a half although he was severely ill in an attempt to break the IFTU's organization among the workers. In earlier years CITU goons with CPM led Govt. connivance had made physical attacks and attempts to eliminate Com. Paltu Sen apart from foisting various cases against him.

Com. Paltu Sen's death is a great loss to the communist revolutionary movement in the country, particularly revolutionary trade union movement. IFTU NC while paying homage to its dear departed leader calls upon the working class to strengthen the revolutionary trade union movement and intensify struggles against attacks by the employers and Govt. We call upon workers to intensify struggle against exploitation and oppression of the Indian people by imperialism and comprador ruling classes.

National Council, IFTU (July 31, 2013)



Organ of the Central Committee, CPI(ML)

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