

Volume - 27, No. 8-9

September - 2022



*Organ of the
Central Committee CPI(ML)*

NEW DEMOCRACY

Build Struggle Against FC Rules, 2022

On Forest Conservation Rules 2022

Dharna at Parliament Street against new FC Rules

50th Martyrdom Day of Com. Charu Mazumdar

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Manufactured Debate on 'Freebies'

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Editorial :

Build Struggle Against Forest Conservation Rules, 2022 Save Tribals, Forest & Environment from Corporate

RSS-BJP Govt. has unleashed a serious attack on Indian Tribals, other traditional forest dwellers (OTFD), Forests and Environment. This attack has been launched in the interest of foreign and domestic corporate. Handing over vast tracts of Forest land for mineral extraction is at the core of this most horrendous loot of tribal lands. Attracting imperialist capital is the most sacred task of the rulers of the day, selling not only the present but even the future of people of the country. The hurry and secrecy with which these Rules are being pushed show not only deepening crisis of Indian economy which is set to aggravate further, but also the orientation of present rulers of overcoming this crisis by aggrandizing foreign and domestic corporate. Despite setback in handing over Agriculture to corporate in one stroke (three black Acts), the rulers are at their work of increasing corporate stranglehold over Agriculture; of operationalizing four Labour codes to create favourable conditions for attracting FDI and through these Forest Conservation Rules, handing over the very natural resources of the country. They are not content with privatizing what people of India had built with labour but are selling off even what has been bestowed by nature. All Forests, scheduled or

otherwise, are up for sale by the new dalals (middlemen) ruling the country.

These new Rules seek to abridge the rights gained by Tribals and other traditional forest dwellers through their heroic struggles. As shown in an article published in this issue, the main purpose of bringing new Rules is to do away with whatever rights of Tribals and OTFDs over land and forest produce are recognized in Forest Rights Act 2006. Through these Rules the Central Govt. has done away with these rights and importantly with rights of Gram Sabhas which have been the instruments for exercising these rights. True to the art of hypocrisy mastered by the RSS-BJP, this objective i.e. sale, is sought to be achieved through sleight of hand, paying lip service to Forest Rights Act while rendering it meaningless in practice. According to Paragraph 9, sub-para 6 (b) (ii) “The State Government or Union territory Administration, as the case may be, after receiving the ‘Final’ approval of the Central Government under Section 2 of the Act, and after fulfilment and compliance of the provisions of all other Acts and rules made thereunder, as applicable including ensuring settlement of rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (No. 2 of 2007), shall issue order for diversion, assignment of lease or dereservation, as the case may be.” After ‘Final’ approval by the Central Govt. the task of forcibly displacing the Tribals has been entrusted to state govts. All rights to Central Govt. and dirty work left for state govts., though with proper greasing. In the scheme proposed in the new Rules the whole mechanism is laden with Administrative and Forest bureaucracy and there is no mention of any rights of Tribals, OTFDs and Forests. There is also no role of Gram Sabhas. The colonial attitude of treating them as encroachers and ‘criminals’

continues while they are forced into the lowest rung of menial labour, a large part of them reduced to begging.

These Rules are crude attack against Tribals, OTFDs, Forests and Environment. For Tribals they pose an existential threat. Tribals owe to these forests not only means of sustenance, but the very habitat, the source of their identity, culture and society. Out of these habitats they lose everything, their very existence as a Tribe. Even the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) recognizes this right; “their way of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources.” Paying lip service to this Declaration, Indian rulers have moved to attack all their basic rights, their very existence. Tribal communities living in forests are the most affected section of people, hence the most steadfast and stringent opponent of this attack on Forests.

There are many communities which traditionally live in Forests and depend for their livelihood on the Forests. These other traditional forest dwellers (OTFD) are threatened with the loss of their livelihood. According to Govt. estimates, nearly 400 million people depend wholly or partially on Forests for their livelihood. This is a huge number and it comprises the people living in Forests and border villages. People living outside forest villages or in villages in the area which may not have been designated as forest villages, also depend at least partially on Forests for their livelihood. When the Forests are handed over to corporate, they will also suffer loss of livelihood. It is clear that the people who depend on Forests and hence suffer loss due to handing over of the Forests to corporate are large in number and if mobilized can build a really powerful struggle.

The new Rules threaten the Forests of the country. As of now 18% of the land mass of the country is covered with Forests. But these are threatened by the axe of corporate profits. This poses a grave danger to the Environment whose protection is getting increasing recognition in light of increasing danger of Climate Change. To protect Forests is a vital task of Environmental movement and Tribals have been traditional protectors of Forests. It is the corporate who pose grave danger to Forests. Even historically it was colonial loot and plunder of timber and minerals which had been responsible for reduction of Forests in India. This loot and plunder by foreign and domestic big capital has continued even after 1947. Environmental groups must also step forth to oppose the new Rules whose main effect would be to destroy Forests and damage Environment.

While the present rulers have mounted this attack in the form of new Forest Conservation Rules, attitude of Indian rulers has been to treat Tribals as uncivilized, with scant regard shown for destruction of their means of livelihood. Their world has gradually been taken away from them. They have been at the receiving end of the stick of development in whose name they have not seen any new schools or hospitals, or increased or improved employment but only displacement and destitution; and to execute the last, a number of police stations or buildings for security forces. The whole emphasis has been to drive them out of their traditional abode and to that end hunting them down or incarcerating them in prisons. The colonial invaders robbed them of their resources and this has continued unabated. This robbery was put as law through Forest Acts to signal monopoly of colonial rulers over the Forests. After transfer of power in 1947, Indian rulers too continued these laws. Forest Conservation Act of 1980 had little to do with conservation of

Forests but was mostly to take over right to allocate forest land to big capitalists by the Central Govt. covering all areas. Continuing destruction of Forests has continued since then and what has been described as “the biggest loot of land since Columbus” speaks for itself.

RSS-BJP has been indebted to corporate for bringing them to power and sustaining them in power and RSS-BJP have been the most strident champions of the policies of unbridled corporate exploitation. Corporate feel that with its divisive agenda RSS-BJP can deliver the resources and wealth of India to them. RSS’s divisive agenda not only targets minorities and oppressed castes but also Tribals. It has taken a thorough and persistent drive to *Hinduize* Tribals, thus dividing them and depriving them of their traditional customs. With liberal use of money and state machinery, RSS is penetrating in the tribal areas to turn the Tribals away from defending their lands, livelihood, languages, traditions and culture. They belittle the glorious history of struggle of Tribals against colonial rule and exploitation by outsider oppressors; they aim to finish off their culture of equality among genders and people, undermining these good traditions. They have succeeded to an extent in winning over a section for this diabolical design to assimilate Tribals on the lowest rung of caste ridden Hindu society. Some elements among Tribals are being elicited with various allurements by front organizations of RSS-BJP. It is very important to preserve positive culture of Tribals and to highlight their sacrifices in the struggle against colonial rule as well as their contribution towards saving the Forests and safeguarding the Environment. Opposing this cultural offensive of RSS is an integral part of saving Tribals and Environment.

Saving Forests and mineral wealth from corporate loot and plunder has emerged an important task before the people of the country. By struggling for saving their lands and means of livelihood, Tribals and OTFDs are also struggling for saving the country and people, their present and future. It deserves the support of all democratic, patriotic, justice loving and future caring people. It is part of the struggles of Indian people against imperialist and Indian corporate and domestic reactionaries; it is a vital component of struggle of Indian peasantry against exploitation and oppression. It is also part of the world wide struggle to save the world from Environmental degradation and catastrophe. This struggle must be waged and won.



Forest Conservation Rules - 2022

A Conspiracy against Tribals, Forest and Environment

● **Bhalachandra Shadangi**

On June 28, 2022 the Department of Forest, Environment and Climate Change of RSS-BJP Central Government issued a notification to amend the Rules of 'Forest Conservation Act - 1980'. The amendment, known as 'Forest Conservation Rules - 2022', is likely to be introduced in the current monsoon session of Parliament and if it faces no opposition, it will be approved and will replace the existing Forest Conservation Rules which were framed after the amendments in 2004, 2014 and 2017. But though the Govt. has notified the new Rules, it has not yet laid them in the Parliament for final approval.

The new Rules are framed to clear the way for Indian and foreign corporate to take over our vast forest land and its resources for their various projects. For this reason the Govt. is planning to end the compliance of Forest Conservation Act-1980 to Forest Rights Act - 2006. So once these Rules are approved and operationalized, it will make FRA 2006 totally meaningless and will seriously endanger our Forest, Environment and the Forest rights of all its inhabitants including tribals. This is the reason why organizations of Tribals and individuals working for the cause of Tribals and forest dwellers are strongly opposing this anti people and pro-corporate move of the Govt.

Historic Injustice against Tribal and OTFD

In 1865, the first Forest Act was made in the country by the British colonial rulers to establish their monopoly over the country's Forest resources. The 1865 Act was a precursor to the Forest Act of 1878, which truncated the centuries-old traditional use by communities of their Forests and secured the colonial government's control over the Forests. After this Act, tribal and other traditional forest dwellers living in the Forests became illegal encroachers and were treated as criminals in their own forests. Although they are born in and are living inside the Forest for generations, they became right less over their forest land or its resources. They have been exploited, harassed and suppressed by the Forest department officials for generations. However, in 2006, the Govt. of India, for the first time, was forced to recognize this alienation of forest rights as a historical injustice and promised to undo this injustice by ensuring rights through the enactment of Forest Rights Act-2006.

It is worth mentioning here that in 2002, in the case of T.N. Godavarman vs Government of India, the Supreme Court of the country called millions of Tribal and traditional foresters living and cultivating inside the Forest as illegal encroachers and directed all the State governments and the Lieutenant Governors of the Union Territories to immediately evict them from the forest land. Soon after this order, the Forest department in Assam and various parts of the country started evicting Tribals and other traditional forest dwellers forcibly, using armed police and trained elephants for destroying their houses and standing crops. This created a severe discontent among the Tribals and OTFDs against this forcible eviction drives of various Govts. There were massive protests by Tribal and traditional forest dwellers across the country and even

the forcible eviction move was resisted in many places. This growing resentment among the people had forced many state Govts. to write to the Central Govt. to take some legal remedies to diffuse the situation. It was in this context that the Government decided to recognize the forest rights of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers as a legal means to quell public discontent. After so many deliberations with different stake holders, the then UPA Govt. enacted the Forest Rights Act in 2006.

However, in spite of promising to undo the historical injustice done to Tribal and OTFDs they have not been given their desired complete rights over forest land and resources in this Act. But still this new law for the first time had given at least some legal rights to Tribals and other traditional forest dwelling communities over the Forest. For the first time after 1878, the indigenous people and traditional forest dwellers living inside the Forests, instead of being called as encroachers, were recognized as the legitimate right holders of their forest lands. It is true that due to lack of sincerity and political will of the successive Governments and their administrative machinery, this law has not yet been properly implemented as per its declared purpose. But still in the last 16 years, millions of people particularly Tribals in various parts of the country, have been able to take advantage of this law to some extent. By using this Act, people have been able to stop the forest land grabbing by big companies in Niyamagiri and some other places.

Gram Sabhas is the main component of FRA

The most important aspect of this law is the role of the Gram Sabhas. Gram Sabhas are mandated to determine the rights of Tribals and other traditional foresters over forest land and its

resources. This right applies to all types of Forests in the country, including protected forests and even sanctuaries. Apart from this, there is also a provision that the approval of the Gram Sabha of the concerned area is mandatory before allowing any forest land for non-forest activities particularly for various projects of corporate and Govt. This has virtually stopped the Govt. from allowing the projects of big corporate on forest land according to their wishes, unlike what used to happen earlier.

The 18th April 2013 historic Vedanta judgment of the Supreme Court reaffirmed the right of these communities over forest land through Gram Sabha. It categorically said that FRA-2006 is applicable for all forest land and no forest land can be handed over for non-forestry purposes without the consent of Gram Sabha. In that judgment the Supreme Court allowed the Dongoria Kondh Tribals and traditional forest dwellers of Niyamgiri mountain range to exercise their rights over forest land through Gram Sabhas. Accordingly Gram Sabhas were convened in 12 villages and people unanimously said an emphatic No to the proposed mining project of Vedanta. At that time, despite all the efforts of the Odisha Govt., all the 12 Gram Sabhas held in Niyamagiri rejected the mining proposal of a large multinational company like Vedanta. People of Niyamagiri could save their Forest and livelihood by exercising the powers of Gram Sabhas given in the Forest Rights Act.

It is worth mentioning here that while millions of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers of the country consider the “Forest Rights Act-2006” as a safeguard for their rights over the Forest and its resources, big corporate have been considering it as a hindrance to their interests. Especially after the experience of Niyamagiri, their apprehension has increased many folds. These companies,

which are desperate to invest huge money for mines, factories, large river dams etc. in forest areas, want to get repealed or at least amended the Forest Rights Act-2006 and Forest Conservation Rules which empower the Gram Sabhas. This is the reason why Modi Govt. wants to make the Forest Rights Act-2006 and the rights of the Gram Sabhas weak or toothless. After coming to power in 2014, though it wanted to amend the Forest Rights Act-2006 in the interest of big corporate, but it could not dare do so due to the fear of tribal resistance. Therefore, it has started a conspiracy to make the Forest Rights Act weak and ineffective through the back door. The recently notified 'Forest Conservation Rules – 2022' is an outcome of this conspiracy.

Corporate Opposition to FRA

It is worth mentioning here that while millions of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers of the country consider the “Forest Rights Act-2006” as a safeguard for their rights over the forest and its resources, big corporate have been considering it as a hindrance to their business interests. Especially after the experience of Niyamagiri, their apprehension has increased many folds. These companies, which are desperate to reap huge profits by investing huge money in mines, factories, large river dams etc. in forest areas, want to repeal or at least amend the Forest Rights Act-2006 which empowers the Gram Sabhas. This is the reason why Modi Govt. wants to make the Forest Rights Act-2006 and the rights of the Gram Sabhas weak or toothless. After coming to power in 2014, though Modi Govt. wanted to amend the Forest Rights Act-2006 in the interest of big corporate, but could not dare do so due to the fear of tribal resistance. Therefore, it has started a conspiracy to make the Forest Rights Act ineffective and meaningless through the

backdoor. The recently notified ‘Forest Conservation Rules – 2022’ is the logical outcome of this conspiracy.

Govt.’s latest amendment of Forest Conservation Rules will nullify all the positive changes after the enactment of Forest Rights Act-2006. This recent amendment in Forest Conservation Rules, done under Section-4 of the Forest Conservation Act-1980 contains two dangerous provisions. First, the Central Government could directly acquire and hand over any forest land to private players for any non-forestry purpose without taking the permission of the Gram Sabhas and ignoring the forest rights of Tribal and other traditional forest dwellers. The second is that it can evict the people living and making a living in that forest land without any kind of compensation and also allow the complete destruction of the Forest in it. In other words, there is no need for any prior permission from the Gram Sabhas to carry out any private projects of corporate inside the Forest area. This can be said to be a flagrant violation of the Forest Rights of millions of Tribals and traditional forest dwellers of the country. This clearly shows that the BJP-RSS government at the Centre wants to take away the land and Forests from their owners who have been made most vulnerable groups of our society only to benefit the big companies.

Once the “Forest Conservation Rules - 2022” will come into effect, millions of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers who farm and live on forest land will be threatened with alienation of their Forest rights. It should be remembered that after the enactment of the Forest Rights Act in 2006, the then Government had amended the rules of the Forest Conservation Act- 1980. This was done to have a compliance with the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA). But this time, the Govt. has chosen to uproot whatever is left of compliance with the Forest Rights Act 2006 in forest diversion under the

Forest (Conservation) Act 1980. The Ministry has notified new rules named 'Forest Conservation Rules- 2022' under the Forest Conservation Act to repeal and replace the earlier 2003 Forest Conservation Rules and its amendments in 2004, 2014 and 2017. So after this amendment, due to lack of any need of compliance, the Gram Sabhas in FRA – 2006 will virtually have no power.

On August 3, 2009, the Union Ministry of Forests and Environment had clarified in a notification that to take land in the Forest area, the consent letter of the Gram Sabha is mandatory for the original approval. On 6 March 2017, the Forest and Environment Department of the RSS- BJP Govt., under corporate pressure, had amended the Forest Conservation Rules and converted them into Forest Permit Rules but still retained the need for Gram Sabha approval as before. But as per Section-6(b) (2) of the Forest Conservation Act, following this latest amendment in the Forest Conservation Rules, compliance with the Forest Rights Act-2006 is no longer required. As a result, the requirement of Gram Sabha's approval while allotting forest land for non-forest use has been completely abolished.

Gram Sabha is an integral part of "Forest Rights Act-2006". The PESA Act -1996 has empowered the Gram Sabha particularly in scheduled areas. So without the power of the Gram Sabha, the Forest Rights Act – 2006 will become meaningless. Therefore, through this latest amendment, the "Forest Rights Act-2006" will become ineffective and the Forest Conservation Act-1980 will revert to its previous status. Instead of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers, the Central government will once again have unlimited and absolute power over forest land. Central Govt. will allot thousands of hectares of forest land to Corporate and Tribal and forest dwellers living there will be mere spectators only. This

amendment, which is favorable to Corporate, will destroy the livelihood of about 40 crore Tribal and traditional forest dwellers living and farming in and around forest areas. The transfer of large amounts of Forests for various corporate projects will cause serious damage to our Environment, Forests and the wildlife living within them. Because of such fears many organizations working for Forest Rights of Tribal and traditional forest dwellers and Environmental protection, even many opposition parties, have opposed this latest amendment in the Forest Conservation Rules.

Forest Conservation Rules - 2022 states that the state government will assess the direct or indirect impact on the Forest, Wildlife and Environment in the approval of forest land for non-forest activities. But what kind of impact it will have on the Tribals living in the forest and on other traditional forest dwellers; there is no mention of this in these Rules. Nowhere in the Rules is there any mention of their right to express their opinion or to say 'yes' or 'no' in that regard. It has been mentioned that the Central government will be given the power to approve the handover of forest land and that the money will go to the Centre's exchequers for compensatory afforestation for the damaged Forests. The entire proposed Rules do not contain any provision for the Government to take responsibility for the protection of the rights of indigenous and other traditional forest dwellers living in that patch of forest land. There is no concern for the future of the Tribal and other traditional forest dwellers living and making a living in the forest land which will be transferred for any project. In such cases, if they are displaced from their land or their forest-based livelihood is lost, they will not get any form of compensation or resettlement. Therefore, through proposed Rules, the Central Government wants to take away the rights and livelihood of about 40 crore Tribal and

traditional forest dwellers of the country which depend on Forests and hand the latter over to local and foreign companies.

Clause-8 of this notification clearly states that for any forest land exceeding five hectares to be used for any other non-forest activities, the Government of India will no longer need to approach the Forest Advisory Committee constituted by the Department of Forests and Environment as before. Each state and union territory should create their own five-member project screening committee and send its recommendation to the Union Govt. for final approval. If this is implemented, the vast forest lands will be used for non-forest activities of private companies and the process of massive Forest destruction will begin. Of course, afforestation funds for this Forest destruction will go to the Central Govt. treasury. Based on the quality of the Forest, the Government will charge from Rs. 10.69 to Rs 15.95 lakh per hectare from the companies.

Although the Govt. is making this latest amendment in the rules of Forest Conservation Act-1980, its real target is Forest Rights Act-2006. Though the Govt. wants to benefit the Corporate by weakening the existing Forest Rights Act, but it cannot amend it directly. It cannot bear the political cost of bringing a new law in the place of FRA. And openly bringing the Bill for any amendment in the Forest Rights Act, will expose its pro corporate stand in front of the people and it is likely to be identified as anti-tribal. In such a situation, the Government wants to make the “Forest Rights Act-2006” weak and ineffective by only amending the Forest Conservation Rules through the back door.

Forest Conservation Act was enacted in 1980 to protect Forests and Environment in our country. But since its enactment, Govts have been using it only as a tool to hand over lakhs of acres of

forest land to big traders and corporate every year in the name of development. No Govt. has ever even wanted to review this wrong policy in the interests of Forest conservation. Though the process of transfer of forest land is regulated to some extent after the Forest Rights Act - 2006 but still large scale Forest diversion is going on all these years. Since the Forest Rights Act-2006 was notified in 2008 and till 2019, a total of 2,53,179 hectares of forest land was handed over for non-forestry activities and another 47,500 hectares of forest land allocated in the name of compensatory afforestation. The latest amendment of Forest Conservation Rules will only accelerate this process of handing over in the name of development. It seems that the Forest Conservation Act, instead of conserving our Forest, is basically corporatizing it for the interest of corporate houses.

About 40 crore people, including 10.5 crore Tribals, are living in our forests which constitute about 18% of the country's land mass i.e. 3.2 crore hectares. Through the Forest Rights Act-2006, though the Govt. has given them some rights over the above forest land and the resources spread over it but the latest changes in the Forest Conservation rules will only bring dark days for them. It will benefit the big corporate at the cost of our Forest, Environment and people living there. This act of betrayal by the BJP-RSS Govt. of our Forests and Tribal people should be resisted at any cost.



Dharna at Parliament Street Against Attack on Tribals and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers

Tribals Declare a Determined Struggle

Adivasi peasants declared their plan to launch a huge struggle to oppose Modi govt's new Forest Conservation Rules 2022 which actually is a conspiracy by the ruling RSS – BJP Govt. to hand over India's vast forest wealth, land and mineral resources to the big Corporate and MNCs for easy exploitation and in the process uproot Adivasis and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers who have secured and protected these forests for thousands of years.

On August 3, 2022, led by the All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha, they held a 250 strong determined protest at the Jantar Mantar, New Delhi to oppose presentation of these new rules in the Parliament. The protest unequivocally articulated this attack as a War by the RSS – BJP against Tribals and an attempt to completely undermine the Rights granted under the Forest Rights Act 2006.

AIKMS has appealed for massive protests on International Day of World's Indigenous People, on August 9, in all areas, focussing the protests on the demand to withdraw these laws and the appeal has been sent to all organizations working amongst Tribal people and Non Tribal Forest Dwellers. Protest programs have been planned at local govt offices and District Head Quarters.



AIKMS has also announced that it shall soon be convening a National Convention of all Organizations against all Black Laws, including these rules, being used against security of livelihood and traditional Rights of Tribals people.

Addressing the protest at Jantar Mantar, various leaders explained that these new rules will completely undermine the rights of Forest Village Panchayats and open the gate way for entry of Corporate control over Forest wealth. They will strengthen the control of Forest department's bureaucracy and weaken the forest dwellers. Lamenting the slow implementation of Rights under the FRA 2006, the speakers highlighted that it had nevertheless made Land Acquisition more difficult. Present Rules, 2022 will remove these difficulties.

The FRA 2006, the speakers explained, mainly granted the tribal Gram Sabhas the first right to decide upon the use of the forest land and forest wealth. The new Rules of 2022, permit the Govt of India's advisory body, the Forest Advisory Committee to

directly decide upon “diversion” and “deregulation” of forest area for transfer and use by Corporate. All existing laws, rules and responsibilities of the state govts, of the Gram Sabhas under PESA Act (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas) to primarily decide upon such use shall be subordinated to these New Forest Conservation Rules 2022.

The protesters included several AIKMS tribal and peasant leaders from Telangana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal as well as leaders from other Tribal and peasant organizations. At the protest dharna Adivasi women and men folk from Kaimur in Bihar presented their problems through their traditional folk songs, dance and music.

Speaking at the protest site, leaders said that while the RSS-BJP govt is celebrating the elevation of a tribal Woman as the President of India, it is planning to finish off all granted rights of the Tribals and OTFD. These Forest Conservation Rules 2022 will ultimately completely finish off all rights granted under the Forest Rights Act 2006, which were won after a prolonged and difficult struggle.

The leaders also explained that the Govt of India is suffering a very heavy internal and external debt crisis and its Balance of Payments and the Forex Reserves are stressed. Hence to invite foreign investments and Foreign capital it is planning to offer Forest and mineral wealth on a platter for foreign and corporate investors. All these problems are mainly due to its pro Imperialist policies and it is planning to further intensify loot of Corporate and MNCs in the economy.

With stark clarity the speakers brought home the fact that all displaced Tribals and forest dwellers are being pushed into low paid jobs in cities and industrial areas and this is an important

feature of the policy to displace Tribals and peasants from their source of livelihood. Earlier this Govt. had tried to implement the 3 Black Farm Laws, which was also to facilitate the entry of big corporate into Agriculture, farming, fishing, animal husbandry and



a determined struggle for 13 months by the peasants forced it to retreat. Taking a leaf out of this struggle they appealed for launching another massive and determined struggle against the Central Govt's policy to hand over Jal, Jangal, Jameen to the corporate.

The speakers also explained at length the importance of massive mobilization and reclaiming the democratic space from this fascist gov. They highlighted that these pro corporate changes will have far reaching impact on the Forests, Environment, Tribal life, they are completely against the interest of the people of the country and they will further bring down the democratic space for peoples' protests. By depriving Tribal people and peasants of their life,

livelihood, natural habitat, cultural and education rights, they will push the poor people further into the abyss of poverty.

AIKMS President, Com V Venkatramaiah appealed for launching a serious campaign against these rules all over the country with participation of all Tribal, peasant and other democratic organizations. Saving the country's land, forest and water wealth from Corporate loot, he said, is in the interest of all sections of society. The gathering was also addressed by AIKMS National Secretary, Com. Bhalachandra Shadangi who pointed out the dangerous implications of the amendments being pushed by the Central Govt.

Leaders who addressed the protesters included Madhuri from Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan; Roma, General Secretary of AIFUWUP; AIKKMS President Satyavan; NTUI Vice President Ashok Choudhary; Sri Himanshu Kumar who works amongst Chhattisgarh tribals; Com. Raminder Patiala from KKU, Punjab; UP AIKMS President Com. Dharampal Singh and Bihar AIKMS President Com Rambriksh Ram. Tribal leaders from different states including Com. M. Satyam from Telengana and Com. Haribandhu Kadraka from Odisha addressed and called for determined struggle against the proposed changes in Forest Conservation Rules. Com. Notan from West Bengal also addressed the protestors.



Homage to Com. Charu Majumdar on 50th Anniversary of Martyrdom

FJuly 28, 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of Comrade Charu Majumdar, one of the leaders of the liberation struggle of the exploited and oppressed people of India, one of the prominent leaders of historic Naxalbari upsurge and one of the chief founders of the revolutionary party CPI(M-L) and its first general secretary. It is well known that during Congress rule when Siddhartha Shankar Roy was Chief Minister of West Bengal, Com. Charu Majumdar (CM) was picked up by police from a shelter at Kolkata on 16th July 1972 and after few days was found dead at Lalbazar police lock up of Kolkata on 28th July 1972. It was a planned cold blooded murder in police custody, for which there was no impartial enquiry or any trial to this day. It is a shame for so called Indian democracy.

Comrade Charu Majumdar was born in a progressive landlord family of Rajshahi District (now in Bangladesh) in the year 1919. His grandfather, along with his family, later shifted to Siliguri town of present Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

During his student days in British India CM became active in progressive student movement and joined Anushilan group led All Bengal Student Association (ABSA). During the Freedom movement he dropped out of college in 1938. After that he joined Communist Party of India (CPI) and started work primarily among peasantry. He became a whole timer and got party membership in 1942 and worked under Jalpaiguri District Committee of CPI.

During famine of 1943 he organized people in some areas in 'crop seizure' movement. In 1946 he joined the 'Tebhaga movement' in Jalpaiguri region and led many peasant movements with the demand of Tebhaga (2/3 rd share of produced crop for sharecroppers and 1/3 rd for landowner). Along with organizational work among peasantry Com. CM started work among tea garden workers in Darjeeling district. After start of Great Telengana Armed Struggle, Communist Party of India (CPI) was banned in 1948. Com. CM was imprisoned and was in jail for three years. Coming out of jail, he again started political activity and party work under CPI. In January 1953 he married a party comrade of Jalpaiguri District, Com. Lila Majumdar and both of them shifted to Siliguri Town and started party work with Siliguri as centre.

Com. CM became associated with the peasant movement in Terai region including Naxalbari. CM was dissatisfied with the reformist politics of CPI. During 1962 India-China war he opposed war and went to jail. In 1964 when CPI (M) was formed breaking away from revisionist CPI he sided with CPI (M). But soon he became dissatisfied with neo revisionist politics of CPI (M) leadership and started struggle against that politics, started struggle for establishing a revolutionary political line in Indian communist movement and for formation of a revolutionary party. And that was the most important part of his life from the perspective of Indian revolution and biggest contribution by him to Indian communist movement. Combined with struggle against revisionism by other comrades, the ideological political struggle by Com. CM helped in organizing the historical Naxalbari upsurge of 1967. Naxalbari upsurge was not only an upsurge against landlords; it confiscated their lands and property and distributed it among the peasantry particularly among landless and poor peasants, smashed

the authority of the landlords in the countryside and established the authority of the peasant association, carried out agrarian revolution but it also shook the semi colonial semi feudal set up of the country thus targeting Feudalism as well as Imperialism. In the political sphere, Naxalbari upsurge drew a line of demarcation between revisionism and Marxism in practice. The neo-revisionist CPI (M) leadership and revisionist CPI leadership stood with landlords against peasantry by siding with ruling United Front Government who sent police forces that tortured and fired upon struggling peasantry to suppress the upsurge.

Naxalbari struggle put forward a line of agrarian revolution against the line of parliamentary cretinism, a line of social revolution against the line of social reform. The credit that goes to CM is that he not only played a leading role in placing the line of agrarian revolution and strongly fought against the parliamentarism of neo revisionist CPI (M) before the upsurge, but also that during the upsurge, while some of the important leaders of the movement were vacillating towards compromise with United Front Government, Com. CM stood strongly against any compromise with government or revisionists. This stand of Com. CM helped in drawing demarcation with revisionism and establishing a new line, Naxalbari line, that paved the way for setting up a new revolutionary party and starting a new revolutionary practice on the basis of Marxism- Leninism- Mao Zedong thought. Thus Com. CM played a historical role in anti neo revisionist struggle. It is a fact that revolutionaries under his leadership committed serious mistakes of left deviation, left adventurism, anarchism, individual annihilation line in politics and sectarianism and close-doorism in organization particularly during later phase of coordination period and after the formation of CPI(ML), due to which party and

revolutionary movement faced great losses. It is also a fact that though many other leading comrades also bear the responsibility for the development of this 'left ' deviation inside the organization and movement but Com. CM had bigger responsibility for those mistakes as he was the main leader and general secretary of the party. But despite these shortcomings, the contribution of CM outweighs his mistakes and limitations. So people remember him even today. Ruling classes physically removed Com. CM, but Revolution for which he lived and died, continues to resonate.

Today, when the country and people are being constantly crushed by exploitation and rule of Imperialism Feudalism and Comprador bureaucratic capitalism, when the RSS-BJP leadership is suppressing the people under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi, when the country is rapidly moving towards the establishment of fascist state, when minorities specially Muslims are being physically attacked especially in states ruled by them, when the government has started all out attack on the people to hand over land, industry, mineral wealth and other resources to the corporate, the need for a strong revolutionary movement is being felt.

On the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of Com. Charu Majumdar, let us pay homage to and honour this communist revolutionary leader - highlight the tradition of Naxalbari and armed revolution.

Long Live Com. Charu Majumdar!

Long Live Marxism-Leninism- Mao Zedong Thought!

Long live Indian Revolution!

Delhi: What the Working Women Said...

(A Report of a PMS Survey into the conditions of Women Factory workers of Delhi.)

TIn July and August 2022 an Interaction spread over six weeks was conducted by the activists of Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan (PMS) Delhi with the women working in factories of Delhi. These factories are located in private sector industrial areas, which may be small (having around 100 units) or very large like the Okhla Industrial Area. These are areas of private mainly micro and small scale industries with some having medium sized factories thrown in. Factories with more than 500 workers are few, though an owner may have more than one establishment.

The Interaction was conducted at the entry points of one industrial area and in a big Jhuggi basti draining mainly Haiderpur industrial area but also Shalimar Bagh industrial area. The facts which emerged from the Interaction are presented here. Though the Interaction was primarily confined to two areas viz. Mangolpuri Industrial area and Haiderpur, the situation of women factory workers is almost similar in all the industrial areas of Delhi.

Through this Interaction and documentation, the idea was not just to record the situation of these working women. Rather it was the first proposed step in a process to mobilize these women to

build struggle for their concrete rights as women working in factories of Delhi. During the Interaction in the Basti, the survey teams ran into women working on impermanent posts in hospitals and schools and also recorded their testimonies.

The Central government is celebrating “Azadi ka Amrit mahotsav” this year. A “Har Ghar Tiranga”, campaign was taken up to mark 15th August. Not to be outdone, Mr. Arvind Kejriwal, the CM of Delhi has also got the tricolour hoisted with great pomp and show at every nook and corner of the Capital city.

But what is the condition of women workers in this city even after so many years? Activists of Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan have released a Report documenting their findings and commenting on them too. The gist is presented here.

Interaction in Mongolpuri Industrial Areas

The PMS team moved around the entrances of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Mongolpuri Industrial area on separate days in the evening when the women were returning from work. These women are working either as helpers or skilled workers in factories engaged in various manufacturing activities. On speaking to these women it was learnt that they are getting on an average between Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 per month for 8 hours of duty. An exception was a company paying Rs 10000 per month for 8 hrs and also giving ESI and PF. Another exception was an automobile company in which interviewed women had been working for past 14 years, where the women got Rs 14000 for 8 hrs work. There are also companies which pay Rs 8000 to Rs 10000 for 12 hours of work. Apart from the first unit mentioned, these women are not getting any ESI or PF facilities and nor do they have any document as proof of employment. This is true for every woman irrespective of whether

she is a new entrant or has been working for more than 5 years or even for 10 years. While shoe manufacturing units are prominent here, factories manufacturing jeans, electronic chargers, mobile chargers, paper coins etc. also run here. While 5 skilled women working on machines said that they are paid equal to male workers though all workers are paid far below minimum wages, the paper coin manufacturing women complained of gender discrimination and said that male workers there get better wages than women for similar work.

The average house rent in Mangolpuri for a one room floor is between Rs 3500 to Rs 4500 per month. Electricity charges are taken at the rate of Rs. 6 or Rs. 7 per unit from the tenants, while a minimum of Rs 200 per month is being charged for water supply. The Delhi government has no system of extending relief to tenants in this regard, while to house owners it gives subsidies which result in zero water and electricity bills.

Overall the PMS team spoke to over 100 women workers of which around ten were from a factory which “functioned out of 4 to 5 floors” (so may be around 300 workers) and another group was from a factory which employed 250 workers. The other women also spoke not only about themselves but about the situation of women in their establishment so in this manner information of a wider number of women was gathered.

Haiderpur JJ camp, is situated adjacent to a small industrial area of the same name and also proximal to the Shalimar Industrial area. Here the PMS team went to the basti rather than to the industrial area to meet the women workers. An interesting aspect was that of the women they met, hardly any owned the jhuggis they lived in. The tenants pay a monthly rent of Rs 1800 to

3000 for a single roomed jhuggi. Washroom facilities are mostly in the common sulabhs made for the basti.

The women workers recorded here work in factories making wooden toys (60 workers employed of which 30 are women), jeans manufacturing (Shalimar Bagh), call centre employee (at Azadpur. This employs 60 women), manufacture of steel, of steel spoons, of steel utensils, of iron door hinges, steel pipes (50 workers), tube lights, plastic taps and laptop switches.

Several of the women the team met are migrants from Bihar (Begusarai, Darbhanga) and UP (Jaunpur, Etah). Many have tales of desertions by husbands or young widowhood. Women were deserted while staying in this jhuggi camp or came to Delhi because they were thrown out of the village home. Many have children in senior secondary classes. Single mothers who can't produce aadhar cards of the husband say their children are not given admission into the local govt. school without the aadhar card of both parents. Women who stay with their husbands said their spouses too work in factories and face similar issues.

Women working for over 10 years as machine operators get Rs 6500 for an eight hour day. Several of the women spoken to here are skilled- they work on machines, 6 women are polishers in a steel factory with 150 workers, they work in Call centres. These skills don't impact their wages; at best they get some Rs 500 more a month.

None of the women spoken to had ration cards. Monthly wages were the similar Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 per month, irrespective of nature of work and the workday is mostly 8 hours. However in this area there are examples of 9 hour and 10 hour workday; though no one reported 12 hours. Not one has ESI or PF facilities.

Hardly any woman in either area (Haiderpur or Mongolpuri) was able to name the establishment she works in or its owner; many only recognize the person (?contractor) who pays them. Each identifies her workplace by concretely describing the location or by gesturing in a specific direction and has NO documentary proof of working in the same. ESI and PF implementation to women workers in this small scale manufacturing sector seem to be in single digit percentage. And zero women get Minimum Wage.

Contractual work in Private Schools and Govt. Hospitals

While moving in the jhuggi basti of Haiderpur, the team members met women working in other sectors. They curiously asked why only women who worked in the industrial areas were being interviewed and they wanted that their own situation be noted down as well. Though the team clearly said it was from a women's organization and not from the Government, there seemed

Read and Subscribe

CPI(ML) Organs

New Democracy	English
Pratirodh Ka Swar	Hindi
Voice of New Democracy	Telugu
Biplabi Ganaline	Bengali
Inquilabi Sada Rah	Punjabi
Sangrami Ekta	Odia

to be the vain hope that just the act of someone writing down the awful situation might cause the wheels of Justice to start grinding! So the team recorded the voices of these sundry workers of hospitals and schools; each with their story of exploitative work conditions and deliberate ignoring of the situation by the Delhi Govt.

One of the women so met works through SMC Company, an Outsourcing agency, as a contract worker along with 600 others in Housekeeping in Safdurjung one of the biggest Central Govt. Hospitals in Delhi. She lives in this basti while her native place is Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. All 600 are at a monthly wage of Rs 15,000 after deductions for ESI and PF.

The employees engaged in housekeeping on permanent basis are, of course, getting more than Rs. 40,000 per month for the same type of work. Contractual workers have greater workload. That however is not the sum of the woes of workers like her. When the contractor / Outsourcing Agencies are changed, and infact now this is happening almost yearly, the jobs of these workers come under threat. This is despite several court orders that jobs should be continued in the same institution by the establishment even if the Outsourcing Agencies change. There are also women in the basti working through outsourcing agencies at various branches of big private hospitals like Max. (The women in this basti go through Sai Agency) The wage is similar to those posted through outsourcing in govt. hospitals along with access to PF and ESI facilities.

All these contractual/outsourced workers are haunted by impermanence. There is no assurance of getting duty every day; apart from the general insecurity of what will happen if the contractor's term is over. Those who work in private hospitals also

might get assigned for “patient duty” in homes of patients, for which they have to arrange their own travel.

The PMS Team also spoke to around 10 women working in a main ESI Hospital in Delhi in housekeeping work and employed through a Contractor. The number of such women workers is more than the male workers. Out of a total of 80 workers, 60 are women. They are paid Rs 10,000 for 8 hours of duty and their wages are being deposited into their bank accounts. They say they have been told that ESI and PF deductions are being made from their wages, but they don’t know at what rate the ESI and PF is being deducted or how much is being deducted as they don’t have salary slips. The number of workers hired is not as per the volume of work and the workers engaged to do the work are not getting wages as per the workload, which they feel is arbitrary and high.

The Haiderpur jhuggi basti is close to a number of big private schools. Some of the housekeeping women workers employed in these live in this basti. If they lose their jobs, the industrial area is an alternative. There are women working for years in these, who suddenly find that somewhere down the years they have become a contract employee. They were denied wages in lockdown; one has not been recalled for work post pandemic and she waits hopefully, having given her prime years to this job. Another has also not been recalled but she has gone to the labour court.

Observations

The Survey team observed, “Through our interactions it is revealed that women working in the factories of Delhi are facing acute lack of basic essentials in terms of minimum wages, ESI and PF. Delhi government is not ensuring that even the minimum wages

announced by the government itself reach the women workers in the Capital city. Delhi government has no data (at least none in public domain) as to what is the number of women working in the factories of Delhi.”

The Team questioned the women extensively on other necessary facilities. They have recorded, “Women informed us that generally bathrooms are available in the factory premises and drinking water is also available and both are satisfactorily accessible.”

Creches, of course, are unknown and the women have no idea that it is their legal right. They would be unlikely to raise the demand anyway, as private owners would just bring down the number of women workers by dismissals. Labour is on the concurrent list, but neither Modi Govt. nor Kejriwal Govt. want to do anything on this issue though the possibilities are multiple. Instead of individual owners, govts can co-fund creches with owners’ associations to encourage women to work.

The second aspect is that in the industrial areas, in private schools, in outsourced services in Govt. hospitals, the experiences of the women workforce is that hire and fire and arbitrary wages is happily and unobstructedly prevalent. Governance, Labour laws, minimum wages etc. etc. are all marked by their absence. Apart from the dire poverty in which the hard working women find themselves simply because of total failed minimum wage implementation by Kejriwal Govt., there are other effects which these women are not articulating, but which is taking its toll on both the city and the country. “No ESI” should be read synonymous with no paid maternity leave and no paid Mother and Child care. Is the result not obvious? If one does not report for work, one is kicked out

of it; there is no leave, paid or unpaid, in most of these jobs. Govt. hospitals' OPDs function in the morning; don't work on Sundays and are marked by huge queues. One can easily guess what type of pre natal or post natal care these women even try to access! Is it impossible to estimate the impact on birth weights of newborns, or mother and child morbidity? Does it not impact the city's health levels? Women without ESI cards are wholly unlikely to visit even a free clinic to get treatment if they fall ill themselves, unless they just have to hit the bed. Whom does a healthy workforce help? All these questions of course will not be asked by govts; to them these women's lives or their well being is unimportant.

To the sceptics and apologists who insist that devotion of Govts to 'nari shakti' is serious or that the Delhi govt. is a true friend of women, the question of PF has to posed. It is well known that the PF deposit in the working woman's name is a great empowerer. It is money which is hers alone; she can name a nominee, she can take a loan for which her family does not have to give sanction. The upsurge in Bengaluru city of women textile workers when this Central Govt. tried to change PF withdrawal rules carried the message clearly. Those women, working for low wages and for unregulated hours, simply took over the streets to assert that it was the PF fund which allowed them to educate daughters, fund a mother's treatment and undertake tasks important to them. Do govts who speak of empowering women, not know these truths?

The PMS Report has recommended that Delhi government undertake Registration of each and every woman working in the factories of Delhi. This can be done by organizing camps at the gates of industrial areas and in adjacent Residential colonies where the women are living in either jhuggis or colonies, in accomodation

which is either rented or owned. Women working in factories must be issued I Cards after registration. All registered Women must be given the minimum wages announced by the government. ESI and PF facilities must be ensured by the Delhi government itself. Government must provide creche facility in all the industrial areas, colonies and jhuggi bastis where women workers are living.

The importance of such recording can hardly be overemphasized, especially when one remembers the Mundka factory fire in Delhi this year. It was established that 27 people were burnt to death there, maximally women workers. There was no list of workers. Many women lived all alone and identification was difficult. In one case, a landlady was the only one to realize that her lady tenant was missing as the woman's family was in the village and did not know the name or location of her factory. No bodies remained for people to identify; only ashes to match DNA with. The dead young girl's ashes must only have been identified after tracing her village address from amongst her belongings. Only by RTIs might it be possible to establish what has finally happened.

Central government is hell bent on implementing the anti workers 4 Labour Codes and it is asking States to formulate rules for this purpose. The Delhi Govt. is obliging.

The Codes are being brought by Modi government on the pretext of "Ease of doing business" and they will ensure neither safety of job nor safety in job for women workers.

Women face dual exploitation. In the first place, an immense struggle has to be waged within family and in local social circle for the right to come out for jobs. Women mostly remain defensive about going out to work, "If our husband would have been earning better, there is no need for me to go out" and "My husband's

earning is not this much” etc. are oft repeated, even if unsought, explanations. Or they are optionless- ‘My husband went away when my second daughter was born”, “He threw me out of our home in Darbhanga”, “ He went away four years ago” etc., so the way out is to earn a living for oneself, one’s children and sometimes even for a destitute or chronically sick parent. The Central Government, which on one hand talks about “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” and “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas” and on the other is bringing anti women worker Codes, is finishing off labour law implementation machinery, has to answer -

When women have no security of job, no minimum wages, how will the daughters study? How will the women be self dependent? How will half the population get essential nutrition, when all essential items such as cooking gas, edible oils, milk, vegetables, groceries etc are touching new heights of Price hike everyday whereas workers, both women and men, do not get even minimum wages? Many families have no Ration card, most women who live singly in the city have none either and even if the Ration card is there pulses provided are insufficient. Women are facing hunger. 56% of the women are anaemic; these are the regrettable statistics which describe us.

After 75 years, the least the Capital city’s government must ensure is that the women working in the factories of Delhi get Proof of employment. Governments must at least recognize this section of women and their contribution to the manufacturing activities of Delhi by registering them.

Women are also working through Outsourcing Agencies at Hospitals, Schools, Institutions etc and insecurity of job is rampant here too. “Will I be given Duty today?” is the fear women workers

are grappling with everyday when they leave their homes for duty. It is a nagging anxiety underlying their existence. The contractors of the Outsourcing Agencies are arbitrary and have to be kept in good humour, changes in contractors results in loss of jobs. For women workers working since long in the any given institution or establishment there is no peace of mind or dignity; leave alone right to equal pay or other legal rights.

Every other woman worker spoken to in the Interaction would explain how tense she was because the low wages was making it difficult to make ends meet; women under contractors worried whether they would get duty one more day, and worried this way everyday..... the underlying anxieties of these thousands upon thousands of women workers running the wheels of the Capital city, the corrosive, malevolent effects of that on mental well being, are all due to totally ILLEGAL labour practices in the Capital of India. These are practices deliberately allowed to flourish by Governments and Courts. Minimum wage is a right; women workers should not have to ask for it. Govts are also out to rob labour of all dignity by totally denying job security through 4 Labour codes. Women will have to recognize that governments are with the exploiters; all Workers will have to recognize this and fight this together.

The survey team also tried to know the versions of the factories owners on the low wages being given to women workers. For this the team went to industrial area of Mangolpuri. They saw that the Office bearers of Industrial area Owners Association have put up boards of being office bearers outside their factories but no phone number or email was given and entry inside the factory was not allowed.

In Haiderpur industrial area, after a lot of effort, one of the members of the Owners Association, Mr. Pappuvir Singh could be contacted. He said there are around 200 to 250 factories functioning in the area and wages were being paid as per rule to the workers. He assured that he would arrange for the PMS survey team to speak to the President of the Association but till date neither the number nor the version of President has been provided.

It is strange that all these Associations are registered under the Societies Act but details of their office bearers with the latest phone numbers and addresses are not in public domain.

PMS is beginning a campaign now among the women workers to build a collective fight for forcing Delhi government to Register the women working in factories of Delhi and issuing I cards to this effect and for ensuring that minimum wages as declared by the government along with PF and ESI facilities reach all women workers.

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Farmers hold huge protest in Lakhimpur

Anger Vented Against Criminal Minister of Home being Protected by RSS-BJP Govt.

When thousands of farmers began assembling in large numbers on 18th August morning in the Rajapur Galla Mandi in Lakhimpur, there was a sense of surprise amongst the people of Lakhimpur city. No one had expected such big numbers to collect and raise their voice openly demanding dismissal of their local MP and strongman, Ajay Misra ‘Teni’ from position of Union Minister of State for Home and his arrest for being the main conspirator in the massacre of farmers on October 3, 2021.

The 3 day SKM dharna from 18 to 20 August and the 75 hour protest to mark ‘No reason for farmers of India’ to celebrate ‘Azadi ka Amrit Utsav’ had been announced and propagated, but no one expected huge crowds. In fact it was revealed that as low a figure as 1500 had been quoted. While the Sikh peasantry had been holding meetings to rally the farmers, the RSS/ BJP cadres had actively campaigned in the main city markets and nearby towns and villages to warn people against participation. While the Govt. of UP, having won the recent assembly elections in a tough campaign only 5 months back, was busy and focused on carving out and deepening its anti-Muslim communal plank, they had planned not to disturb the gathering inside the mandi. But the District officials had warned

all democratic forces and mass organizations against participation. As reported to us, some Sikh leaders too had been warned, while some others, who have been on the side of the Govt., had been making covert allegations that the SKM leadership had betrayed the farmers and it was wavering in the protest. Why only for 3 days? How can this achieve anything? The SKM is obviously not serious. They want to make a nuisance here so that local Sikhs will face the wrath of Yogi Govt. later on. It was clear to everybody that Teni's writ runs wide and deep, both amongst organizations locally and within the administration. It was also clear that the local people fear Teni's strong arms.

So when crowds from mainly Punjab, and they were in pretty large numbers, began arriving in Sitapur through the night of 17th/18th both the media and the administration understood that their estimates had gone wrong. Farmers from Punjab also arrived by road in large numbers and it is estimated that they were closer to 10,000 in all. The rest of UP too had mobilized, but their numbers were humble. Yet the impact of farmers' organization flags and banners, people marching and demanding Teni's ouster and arrest was unexpected and a bit of a shock for the locals. People mostly observed, silently. They knew the issue well and also who was on the just side. It was also obvious from all discussions that their sympathies were with farmers.

Inside the Mandi, most of the decoration was limited to one main shed with a holding capacity of around 4 to 5000. Arrangement, particularly of water supply, mobile toilets and cleanliness by the administration was sparse while the Gurudwara networks were busy providing food, water and tea. Very soon, as soon as the announcements began, the atmosphere once again

turned enthusiastic, most participants reminiscing their 13 month stay at the borders, greeting and hugging each other.

Almost all Punjab organizations were present, except the few, mostly right wing, who had left SKM in the process of July 3rd meeting which restored the membership of 16 Punjab organizations. From UP the participation of organizations, even at leadership level was low, but still many forces came. The farmers' organizations linked to left wing parliamentary parties from UP were conspicuous with their very low participation, as were those BKU outfits who do not see eye to eye with BKU Tikait. It was obvious that the Western belt of UP, the main centre of mobilizations from UP during 13 months had not been mobilized. But leaders were present.

The organization of this protest also has an important aspect in its background. While forcing the Central Govt. to relent on repression and compensations, after the Nov 19 announcement of withdrawal of 3 farm laws by the Prime Minister, the issue of Lakhimpur massacre remained unspecified in the final outcome, the letter given by the Govt. on December 9,2021. As a result it had been decided that for the specific issues arising from this incident, the SKM would take up a separate effort to mobilize protests in Lakhimpur. The sit in had been declared for January, but none took place. With election mood intervening, the decision got postponed till July 3, when during the SKM meeting this became an emotive issue and the mood of the house precipitated the decision of the 3 day sit in.

The leaders began addressing the gathering on Day 1, explaining the demands. Several media persons had raised the very objections which had been propagated by the RSS/ BJP during past

days. All were answered by the speakers. It was explained that Ajay Misra Teni's name, unlike the propaganda to the contrary, finds mention at 3 places in the original FIR and specifically as a conspirator; that the SC monitored SIT too has concluded that the incident occurred as per a planned conspiracy; that those accused of killing the marauders in the vehicles used for the massacre, should be given the benefit of having attacked under 'grave and sudden provocation' and should be let off, as had also been promised by the UP govt. on Oct 4, 2021 that they will be charged only under Section



304A of IPC. Justifying the farmers demands the speakers explained how the new Committee on MSP declared by the Ministry of Agriculture has many representatives from those sections of farmers who were openly opposed to the demand for MSP of all Crops as per Swaminathan Formula and that the committee's agenda has been expanded to include diversification of crops and ZBNF, which are recipes of undermining farmers and farming, rather than of strengthening of food crops, food security and granting procurement of all crops at C2+50%.

It was also explained that while the Central Govt. had in writing promised to consult the farmers before introducing the Electricity Bill (EB), it had already done so in Parliament. In UP, even before the Bill has become law, tariff for agriculture has been raised, there is no free electricity for farming or 300 units free domestic supply as per the promises made during elections. The demands to withdraw the EB from parliament and to stop forceful disconnections in bastis of the poor were raised. Detailed Charter of Demands too was drafted in order that the people are clear of what is being argued and the Central Govt. and RSS/ BJP are unable to spread any canards.

With this the SKM met and demanded of the local administration, which was posted almost in attendance on and at the beck and call of leaders for 3 days, that they allow SKM leaders to meet the 4 jailed farmers accused of killing Teni's henchmen in the October 3 massacre. This had been barred for nearly 8 months. Under pressure of the mass mobilization this was allowed. The meeting inside the jail was cordial. The spirit of the 4 young men rose as the meeting proceeded and apart from informing about some problems they were facing, they committed themselves to reading and learning about social movements while in jail.

Day 2, i.e. August 19th, witnessed a different spectacle, considering the fear that had been spread by RSS/ BJP and its Govt. and meeting the accused in jail became just a side issue. There was massive outpouring of protestors from the local and surrounding districts. The crowds swelled to more than double of the first day and almost the entire increase was local. They had come in organized fashion, carrying flags and banners, as well as spontaneously. This response was both a result of inspiration from the mobilization from Punjab as well as the fact that, apprehensive

of the Govt.'s response, local people had deliberately been mobilized to come on day 2.

Teni was on target and demand for his arrest was on peoples' lips. MSP and Govt. support to farmers' income was another common thread in their motivation, as was the Electricity Bill. There was tussle on stage for an opportunity to speak and the crowd response to the demands was full of life.

SKM announced on Day 2 that it seeks an appointment with the Chief Minister to solve the state level problems as the local administration was unable and unwilling to solve them. Apart from a memo for the Central Govt. on central demands, a detailed Charter was prepared for the State govt. outlining its failures on the Teni issue, highlighting the specific facts in the complaints justifying his being charged for conspiracy, release of the 4 accused farmers, compensations and the state demands for cane dues, against eviction threats from land in the name of Forest lands, on prepaid electricity meters, failure to provide free electricity to farmers and 300 units for domestic users as promised during elections, stray animals and drought compensations, etc. The SKM openly threatened to march to the District Collectorate in case the meeting did not get fixed.

While preparations were on for Day 3 protest, the entire night was spent by the administration in holding parleys in order to prevent the protest. Ultimately, they prevailed, but not without promising a meeting with state officials in the first week of September to solve the pending issues. Also, they spent a lot of energy to create an atmosphere of fear of the rally being attacked while it was moving in market areas. The highlight of this also was that though the rally was called off on the announcement of the

meeting with state officials, the spirit in Lakhimpur was undented. The farmers felt this was their victory on their ground. The administration was attempting to isolate the Sikhs, as they are few in numbers in the entire Terai region, less than 2 % of the population. But they had been enthused by the massive turn out, both from Punjab as well as the local mobilization. Teni's den had been dented and they had stood up on this occasion to pick up the fight in its right spirit on another day.



Sri Lankan crisis: what was wished, what arrived, and what shall be

(We are publishing here an abridged version of a comment by Com. Sivanandan Sivasegaram. Parts which had been published in his earlier article published in ND (May 2022) are not been included in this part. This comment deals with assessment of Argalaya, developments since resignation of Gotabaya Rajapakse and specifically about the prospects of Argalaya and the struggle in general. –Editor)

Aragalaya : The Roots

TWhen the mass protests dubbed ‘the Aragalaya’ started in Colombo in February, not many suspected a foreign hand, for public disaffection with the government was strong because its

mishandling of the economy had led to shortages of food, fuel and many essential items including patent medicines. Prices were on the rise amid shortages marked by kilometres long queues for fuel for cooking and transport. The government was at a loss to address the problems, which would have been eased somewhat had there been planned procurement and distribution of essentials.

Much of the state's inability to meet emergencies was inherited. Road transport of goods was almost fully private by late last century. The state owned railway, once the main island-wide bulk transporter of liquid fuel was undermined decades ago in the interest of private road transporters. Streamlined collection and milling of paddy by the Paddy Marketing Board was wrecked to serve rice milling monopolies. Most services under state control were left to rot by mismanagement under political appointees. The economy itself rapidly changed from a mainly farming and plantation crop economy struggling to industrialize to one exposed to predatory foreign investment and unhindered inflow of foreign goods, paid for by the export of labour on a large scale. (Over 2 million of a population of 21.6 million work abroad, mostly in the Middle East.)

An earlier comment in Marxist Leninist New Democracy has noted that economic trouble was to be expected owing to the global economic impact of the COVID-19 'pandemic'. Among other serious mistakes, unduly harsh steps by the government to control infection further hurt the economy. Many fail to see the current problem as the outcome of opening up the economy in 1978, the resultant ruin of the national economy, and the tendency to borrow to feed an uncontrolled consumerism. Even as a financial crunch approached, non-essential goods including luxury motor vehicles were imported.

The Crisis and the Components of the Protest

Leaving out the oft repeated details, the crisis can be summed up as the outcome of a combination of global trends starting with the slowing down of the Western economy since 2018, aggravated by the impact of the (even deliberate) mishandling of COVID-19 by lockdowns that reversed global economic growth (notable exceptions being the pharmaceutical and private health care businesses). The collapse of tourism income and fall in foreign remittances hurt foreign currency earnings to rapidly drain foreign currency reserves. Erroneous government policies compounded the problem to cause shortages, which were the main basis for the ‘Aragalaya’ protest.

The pain of shortages and price hikes was worsened by poor distribution owing to poor planning and domination of transport, storage, processing and distribution dominated by the private sector. An ill-advised devaluation of the rupee worsened the crisis with little benefit for foreign currency reserves. Shortages and ceaseless long queues gave birth to the Aragalaya. But the Aragalaya was not entirely spontaneous. There was organization and media support, with protesters persuaded that Rajapaksa family’s corruption was the main cause of the crisis. The President was the focus of attack, as paraphrased by the slogan ‘Gota go home’, with demands built around the dictatorial ways of the President, corruption of the Rajapaksa family, mismanagement of the economy, cronyism and breach of law and justice. But little went beyond ‘Gota go home’ and its corollaries like ‘Mahinda go home’ and ‘Bring back the loot’.

Aragalaya, however, had a strong spontaneous component comprising members of middle class, very literate in English.

Absence of the poorer classes was not by design. The working classes, although supportive, kept a distance. Left and progressive circles noticed foreign hands and a hidden agenda, but considered it inappropriate to censure a campaign with growing popular support, and the only public protest that persistently stood up to a repressive government. Meanwhile, the government – on a week wicket amid shortages and rising prices and fearful of unforeseen consequences – held back on use of force to suppress the protest.

Moves by NGOs and other donors to visibly transform the protest into evenings of merriment manifested in providing protesters with holiday camping tents, gas cookers and cylinders of gas, bottled water, portable toilets and accessories, and packets of semi-luxury food. Some who were unimpressed nostalgically quoted Mao: “A revolution is not a dinner party” – a strong reminder of which was badly needed.

While middle class supporters at home and abroad made fancy comparisons with the Arab Spring and Colour Revolutions (mindless of their eventual outcome), NGOs acted to depoliticize the struggle and narrow its scope to a demand for the resignation of the President while keeping all political parties out, in the name of unity of the struggle. The role of economic liberalization and imperialist meddling received minimal attention unlike the corruption of the Rajapaksas. Little thought was given to the post-crisis economic future.

With support for Aragalaya growing from left leaning trade unions and student bodies, NGOs began to lose grip. Calls emerged

for more than resignations. While Aragalaya was content with parliamentary government, political discourse within Aragalaya led to calls for radically changing the constitution and a truer form of democracy.

Attack on the protesters by the Prime Minister's goons was followed by his resignation, and well-coordinated arson attacks on properties of key ruling party personalities and a few killings. This orgy of violence helped the embattled President to regain composure and offer two leaders from the opposition SJB the post of Prime Minister, which they turned down so that Ranil Wickremesinghe became Prime Minister. His appointment was promptly welcomed by both the US and India.

The massive protest of 9th July expedited the President's resignation that was over the horizon. The occupation of the President's House, Presidential Secretariat and Prime Minister's official residence intimidated the President to flee the country, resign his post, and name the Prime Minister as interim president as per constitutional provisions. The unforeseen election of Ranil as President by parliament was in fact a coup by the Rajapaksa family that marked Aragalaya's change of fortune.

The lack of a clear plan, poor organization and uncertain aims led to serious tactical errors. Protesters at every level were blissfully unaware of the nature of the state. Some interpreted the rather restrained (but least of all supportive) posture of the police and the army as signs of weakness.

Ranil used occupation of state residences and offices as a pretext to unleash avoidable violence on the protesters. It was only a sign of things to come. The Army's attack, that carefully avoided use of firearms, was designed as a warning to Aragalaya protesters.

That intimidated a sizeable section of the comfortable middle class protesters and their supporters, who later found comfort in the gradual restoration of distribution of petroleum fuels and its benefits.

The US found itself in an awkward situation. This is although the net outcome was to its pleasure with a very much pro-US politician as President, who is amenable to reactivating the bid to impose the Millennium Challenge Corporation project that has been rejected several times besides projects like the Status of Forces Agreement that fell by the wayside in the past several years. President Wickremasinghe is perhaps the keenest to oblige the IMF to secure a loan to tide over the debt problems by inflicting any harsh condition that the IMF may impose. He has already set in motion price increases of food, electricity and water supply based on the devaluation of the rupee early this year and the global rise in prices. Despite the heavy increase in price of food and fuel, urban public anger is yet to boil over, as the middle class tends to compare the Wickremasinghe regime with what immediately preceded him.

Observations on the Aragalaya

Aragalaya started as a middle-class protest movement, deluded into imagining that an apolitical urban protest could put the country on track to economic recovery.

Its identification of abuse of power, corruption and mismanagement by government leaders as things that hurt the economy, is valid. But that is an incomplete picture, as the country owes its present plight to the open economic policy since 1978 that destroyed the national economy, wasteful consumerism, and heavy borrowing for non-productive purposes, including an avoidable war.

Aragalaya's notable omission of imperialism as a source of the economic woes points to the say the US-funded NGOs had in it

It had faith in the parliamentary system, and blamed the failure of the economy on the corruption of a handful. Even at the stage when it suggested that all MPs should resign, it did not reject the parliamentary system. Realization that the parliamentary system as it exists cannot address the problems of the country, however, began to sprout within the Aragalaya, but needed time to mature into a policy alternative. But Aragalaya was derailed well before that could happen.

The Aragalaya was commendable for its secular and inclusive stand, call for rule of law free of state intervention, fair elections, freeing of political prisoners, defiance of threat by the arms of the state as well as by pro-government forces. But it was naïve to believe that transformation was attainable through a bourgeois parliament.

Discussion of the national question was eschewed by inadequate political debate. That became an excuse for Tamil nationalists to persuade Tamils to keep a distance. Only the Tamil left, especially the NDMLP, saw potential in the Aragalaya to address core issues.

Aragalaya ignored the class nature of the state (thanks to NGO activism), and mistook the tactical reserve shown by the armed forces and the police as fear of public wrath and hoped that they could be neutralized.

Political Attitudes

Parliamentary political parties that backed the Aragalaya saw in it a ladder for electoral uplift in what may follow the collapse

of the government. Some explicitly desired that Aragalaya stopped with getting the President and at most the cabinet to resign. They saw in the crowds that gathered votes for themselves besides campaigners in the elections to come.

Those once associated with the SLPP-led government but had parted company recently had less hope in the Aragalaya, and were thus critical supporters.

There were hard right wingers, including Ranil, whose endorsement of Aragalaya was nominal and limited to a democratic right to protest.

The collapse of the Aragalaya in the face of violence unleashed by Ranil exposed the vacillating nature of the urban middle class, of whom many quickly distanced themselves from the Aragalaya on pretext of undemocratic and unlawful conduct that let down the side. The NGOs are embarrassed, and at best denounce Ranil but stop short of mobilization against the oppressive state.

The US and its allies too were embarrassed as they had to retreat from their endorsement of the protest through secret funding for the NGOs. Some have yet to reconcile to the turn of events that to their surprise if not shock brought Ranil to ‘power’.

The Future following the Great Reversal

The Ranil Wickremesinghe presidency has to be understood as a presidency with its executive power trimmed to suit the Rajapaksas. Ranil’s posturing as a tough leader maintaining law and order, cannot dare hurt the Rajapaksas or their cronies.

The President’s measures to address fuel shortage by a fuel rationing scheme was well received, although users of hiring vehicles are forced to buy most of their fuel in the black market,

including petrol stations. Prices of all food items have soared and the level of child malnutrition is likely to escalate. Removal of subsidy for small scale consumers of electricity has delivered a blow to the poor and lower middle class households. Removal of subsidies seems to be in anticipation of the grant of an IMF relief.

Enthusiasts for IMF credit seldom reveal that IMF loans are designed to keep the country indebted but able to service loans by burdening the toiling masses. It will take some months after the IMF deal for the pain to be felt.

Foreign policy will be tailored to suit US imperialist and Indian expansionist regional interests, but are likely to avoid offending China, as the economy is likely to rely on the Colombo Port City to boost foreign investment.

Early economic recovery is unlikely, and even if shortages are eliminated, rising prices will deny access of goods, including essentials, to a large section of the population. While the state apparatus is being readied for a confrontation in the event of mass protests, legislation has been enacted to limit the scope of public protest and could be widened in scope in the face of growing mass agitation.

It is too soon to forecast a fascistic rule by an alliance of pro-Western imperialist forces and local reactionaries. But the danger drifts closer to realization, with no parliamentary political party showing the will, desire or capability to act against it.

The Response to be

- In an immediate sense, the residual Aragalaya offers the most hopeful rallying point for the revival of resistance to state oppression.

While building a democratic anti-imperialist movement for national unity and social justice is the challenge facing the genuine left and progressive forces, defence of democratic and legal rights of all citizens will need to be the immediate and central battle cry against state repression.

Economic demands and call for social justice will inevitably enter the campaign as the Aragalaya evolves into a mass-based progressive anti-imperialist movement.

- There is a great need to learn from the experiences of the seven months of struggle.

Dangers of adventurism are manifold, and the very persons who hailed some of the ill-conceived actions as heroic were quick to denounce them as lawless after the protest collapsed.

Caution is important against infiltration by vested interests through agencies such as NGOs.

- Political education is urgently needed in:

Understanding imperialism and the importance of struggle against imperialism, its hegemonic allies and local partners.

Redefining development in ways that it will free the country from the imperialist economic grip.

Appreciating that delivery of economic liberation demands the resolution of the national and democratic crises facing the country.

- The genuine Left needs to take a realistic and flexible attitude towards Aragalaya to avert its being hijacked by narrow, opportunist interests. Reactionary thought and deed can be overcome only through a democratic process.

- Freeing the country from the Western Credit Trap is central to economic recovery and that has to be accompanied by directing economic activity away from consumerism, rationalizing the service sector and reindustrializing the country based on a national economic policy.
- The struggle has to transcend protest to activation of the masses in social and economic work towards devolution of political and economic power.
- Resolution of the national question needs recognition as one concerning four nationalities with steps to eliminate hostility between nationalities as well as religions.
- Liberation is also liberation from dominant reactionary ideology, and a proactive approach is essential towards gender and caste equality to eliminate hierarchy.
- Most importantly, the struggle, to advance towards mobilization of the masses for national economic recovery and social justice, has to be firm in an anti-imperialist, anti-hegemonic stand. In short the struggle in the process of growth should undergo an educational process to remould itself as a revolutionary vanguard.



Punjab : Three Day Protest by Rural Poor

After the failure of the promise delivered by the newly elected Government of Punjab, led by CM Bhagwant Mann, seven agricultural labor unions of Punjab announced a three-day sit-in peaceful protest outside the Sangrur residence of CM Bhagwant Mann.

Fearing the strength of the people, as was seen in the preparation and mobilization process for the protest, the District administration imposed section 144 of the Indian Penal Code to prevent the protest. The betrayal felt by the agricultural labourers ensured that Sec.144 of IPC could not break the spirit of the people;



instead, the protesters broke the IPC 144 and strongly protested at the said venue.

Thousands of rural and farm labourers gathered outside the Sangrur residence of Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann on 12, 13, and 14th September 2022. Labourers gathered there under the leadership of “Sanjha Mocha - an alliance of seven agricultural labour unions” to protest against Punjab Govt. on various issues. It is noteworthy that these issues are directly linked with the Punjab Govt. The leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party had promised to solve these issues when they were in opposition and were asking for ‘ikk mauka/ one chance.’”

The issues raised during this protest were:

1. There should be a rational increase in agricultural labour’s wages for farm and non-farm work.
2. There should be an employment guarantee under MGNREGA for all adult family members, and daily minimum wages should be Rs. 700.
3. Dalits are worst affected by discriminatory landholding patterns. So, proper and just land distribution should be effected so that the Dalits and other landless can avail of this.
4. Farm labourers are worst affected by the debt trap as well. It is forcing them to commit suicide. Labourers demand that the loans should be waived off.
5. The State government should take strict actions against caste-based atrocities.

This protest was one of the biggest gatherings of rural and farm labourers in contemporary times. This dharna outside the

residence of Punjab CM stretched around one kilometer, and both lanes of the Bathinda-Sangrur-Patiala-Chandigarh main highway were blocked. Another important thing about this protest was that the District administration had imposed section 144 of IPC to prevent the protest. Still, people gathered in such large numbers that the police and administration did not have any chance to disturb the protest.

The unions involved in this protest are Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee, Pendu Mazdoor Union Punjab, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, Pendu Khet Mazdoor Union, Dehati Mazdoor Sabha and Krantikari Pendu Mazdoor Union.

There were more than 15 langars at the protest sites, most of which were managed by these farm labourers' unions.

This protest marked an important step in the struggle of rural poor and agricultural labourers. They have confidence in their struggle. This struggle deserves and is getting support from all struggling sections and democratic organizations and individuals.



Comment

**Distracting Discussion on
'Freebies': Insulting the People
Fascist Rulers' Campaign in
the Period of Deepening
Economic Crisis**

On July 16th while addressing a meeting at Jalaun in UP while inaugurating Bundelkhand Expressway, Prime Minister Narendra Modi railed against the culture of freebies (called *Revadi* by Modi), calling for its end. Almost at the same time former spokesperson of ruling BJP, Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, filed a petition in the Supreme Court that political parties should be prohibited from making such promises in state assembly elections which concern free distribution of any material (goods or services). Taking cognizance of this petition the Supreme Court issued notice. Members of the Niti Ayog also issued statements that a political party making election promises would have to tell how they will raise resources to fulfill their election promises. Statements were issued on behalf of the Election Commission as well. The so-called experts, Govt. economists and apologists, and Editors too weighed in newspapers against freebies. Essentially, on the whole, an attempt has been and is being made to create an atmosphere against economic electoral promises by the political parties during state elections.

While this is a wholly meaningless debate meant as a distraction from the real conditions faced by the people, some things are clear. First, the rulers of the country, RSS-BJP and the people manning top echelons of power are well aware that the country is facing a deep economic crisis, a crisis which is deepening further. Secondly, this meaningless debate also demonstrates the worry of the ruling party and top echelons of power that probable impact of the people's anger against their deteriorating conditions due to this deepening economic crisis may become an obstacle in the path of their campaign to impose Fascism over the country. Hence the rulers are trying to create an atmosphere so that the adverse effects of this crisis over the people do not influence outcome of coming elections; an atmosphere is being created so that no political party is able to make promises of "free distribution" of anything among the people. This debate also demonstrates worries of the corporate who consider Govt. income and public money as their monopoly and 'birth right', who consider any relief to the people from public money as an attack on their 'rights'; who play their role in bringing a set of ruling class politicians to power so that they hand over all resources of the country and the people to them.

Fascist inspiration of this debate is also clear from the fact that the whole debate is centred on elections to state assemblies. In the petition before the Supreme Court it has been averred, "freebies may create a situation wherein the state government cannot provide basic amenities due to lack of funds and the State is pushed towards imminent bankruptcy." This situation may happen at the level of the Union also but the whole emphasis of debate is confined to states. And the reason for the same is also quite easy to understand. Fascist rulers are apprehensive of the defeat in coming elections to the state assemblies due to the increasing burden being

heaped on the people owing to deepening economic crisis. They also apprehend that results of these state elections may influence parliamentary elections due in 2024. Their said “*Amritkal*” may turn sour. Hence this debate has been thrust as a deliberate and thought out ploy.

The Supreme Court has also played an important role in bringing this issue into public discourse. It is noteworthy that the apex Court had held in 2013 in *S. Subramaian Balaji vs Tamilnadu* judgment “Election promises in election manifestos do not amount to a ‘corrupt practice’ under Section 123 of the Representation of People Act.” If the apex Court considered that the said judgment is not correct it should have embarked on reviewing it. Without doing so, but terming this as a “very serious matter”, Supreme Court has lent credence in this meaningless debate. After 2013 judgment of the Supreme Court, Election Commission of India had convened a meeting of the representatives of the recognized parties in which representatives of participating parties had opposed the proposals of the Election Commission. Later the Election Commission formed an empowered commission to oversee the credibility of the proposals of the political parties on raising resources.

In essence, this whole issue in a blatant attack on the democratic rights of the people. It is a nefarious design to take the economic issues away from the purview of people’s opinion to whatever extent these find expression under the present electoral system. Such an attempt was made in the aftermath of effects of the explosion of world financial economic crisis from 2008 onwards in 2011-’13 and a similar debate was sought to be initiated. Such views were kept in the Mumbai Conference on the “Agenda for Renewal” in November 2011. Then Governor of Reserve Bank, D. Subbarao had openly talked of the dangers of “populism” of political parties

and advocated that economic policies should be kept out of the purview of electoral politics. It is abundantly clear that this debate is related to safeguarding and serving the interests of foreign and domestic corporate in the period of deepening economic crisis.

It is important that this debate has come at a time when conditions of the people of the country are deteriorating. Unemployment is all embracing and prices of essential commodities are touching the roof.

In India, such a debate is all the more meaningless as expenditure on the people in the country- on the social sectors- is abysmally low. Union Govt. cut the expenditure on Health services even during corona period. During the period of RSS-BJP Govt. expenditure of social sectors, which was any way quite low, has dipped further and expenditure on Education, Food Security, Electricity, Drinking Water and on Employment generation has been cut further. The scheme of free distribution of cooking gas to certain sections which was launched with much fanfare has been shelved without a whimper.

In this year's Union Budget only Rs.243 crore have been earmarked under this head while earlier years Rs. 35 to 40 thousand crores were spent on this scheme. In our country, any reference to freebies culture in reference to people is meaningless given the low level of expenditure on people. On the other hand, concessions given to favoured corporate houses definitely come under the ambit of freebies. If we see the share of subsidies in the total revenue of states in was only 8.2% of the total in 2021-22 while it was almost the same in 2019-20 (7.8%). In fact the rulers of the country treat the people as subjects and not citizens hence they do not understand any talk of the rights of the people.

Otherwise also, what are being described as freebies by the corporate funded economists and RSS-BJP leaders are in fact what have become articles of necessity in every society. That Indian people do not have even such necessities speak volumes of the conditions of the people. Here one example will suffice. Everyone knows that crores of the children from poor families were deprived of Education itself during Corona period for the want of smart phones leave alone laptops or computers.

This whole debate is an attempt to hide the deepening economic crisis and to keep the pretense of advancing toward becoming a 'superpower'. But the rulers are aware of the reality and the growing people's anger in Sri Lanka and Pakistan has unnerved the rulers. This crisis has been further aggravated due to export led and foreign capital investment based model of development being followed by the rulers of most of the backward countries including India. India imports petroleum especially crude oil, chemicals, fertilizer, edible oils, pulses, electronic equipments and defence related machinery. Major part of the imports is of essential items.

First due to pandemic linked lockdowns and restrictions and now due to economic sanctions by western countries against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, world trade has been hampered. Due to these not only prices of essential items have gone up, the trade of other items has been much restricted. Owing to these factors monthly trade deficit of India has gone up to US\$ 32 in the month of June, 2022. Trade deficit is a major part of current account deficit. Foreign currency reserves have declined to US \$ 553 billion in the beginning of September 2022 while these were US\$ 633 billion in January 2022. Gold reserves of India too have declined. While their value was 70.4 billion US\$ earlier it is now only US\$ 39.9 billion.

There is further pressure on foreign exchange reserves owing to interest and installments due in the coming period.

Whatever the pretensions of the rulers, the impact of the crisis is being felt in many ways. An example has been “Agnipath” scheme for recruitment in armed forces. This was sought to be justified in the name of the heavy cut in expenditure on armed forces personnel to get money for procuring military equipments. Besides, sharp rise in the interest rates by central banks in western countries especially USA, has had a very significant impact on the economies of countries like India which is being expressed as the fear that foreign funds may leave these markets.

RSS-BJP fascist rulers and persons at the top of power echelons being well aware of this crisis, at this time this artificial debate of freebies has been manufactured to intensify exploitation and oppression of the people and to further consolidate their fascist rule. This debate has been manufactured to serve the interests of ruling classes despite the deepening economic crisis. Though this debate, the country’s rulers are mocking at the poverty and destitution of the overwhelming majority of the people and insulting their aspirations for better life.

This whole debate is also meant to pre-empt a meaningful question regarding election promises which can and must be addressed. And that is to compel the political parties to fulfill their elections promises. It is not the making of a promise but not fulfilling it that should be acted against. There is need to evolve such mechanism so that fake promises should be treated as ‘corrupt practice’ under the Representation of People Act. Votes secured from the people on false promises should and do come under the ambit of corrupt practice. Those indulging in *Jumlas* or making false

promises should be derecognized and membership of their representatives (*Jumlebaaz*) should be annulled. A petition to this effect had been presented before the Supreme Court but the apex Court declined to take cognizance of the matter. A similar petition was filed in the Supreme Court of Pakistan and that Court even issued notice on it but it has been junked into cold storage.

It is obvious that a system based on the exploitation and oppression of the people cannot be maintained without false promises to the people. False promises (*Jumle*) are necessary to put democratic polish on the exploitation and oppression.

(English translation of the editorial of Hindi Organ, Pratirodh Ka Swar, September 2022)

Organ of the Central Committee, CPI(ML)

September - 2022

NEW DEMOCRACY

Price : Rs.20

Editor : Com. Y. S. Rao

Published, printed and owned by Dr. V. K. Patole from Balmukand Khand, Giri Nagar, New Delhi - 110019 and printed at Star Offset Printers. 1-215/8-A-2 New Patel Nagar. New Delhi - 8

cpimlnd@hotmail.com

<http://www.cpimlnd.org>