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

NEW DEMOCRACY

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Expose, Oppose and Resist Fascist Designs of RSS- BJP behind January 22

RSS-BJP are orchestrating opening of Ram Janmbhoomi Temple at Ayodhya on January 22, 2024 in a Govt. sponsored ceremony to further their fascist agenda. This is being celebrated by them as part of fulfillment of their agenda of making India into a Hindu Rashtra. Their Hindu Rashtra means reducing minorities to the status of second class citizens and keeping Dalits, other oppressed castes, tribals and women at a lower status in society. Hindutva's two facets are that this country belongs to only Hindus and therefore minorities have no rights in it, and Hindus are to follow the prescriptions of Manusmriti degrading the status of labouring castes and women. Questioning these precepts is termed anti-national if not de jure at least de facto.

The whole Govt. machinery is pressed into service to make this an unprecedented event. Offices are closed, govt. hospitals are shut down fully or partially, whole country is supposed to come to a halt. RSS-BJP obviously plan to unleash hysteria for coming Parliamentary elections to return to power. For this, as some claim, they had no time to wait even for completion of the construction of the temple.

Most of the parliamentary opposition parties have refused to attend the ceremony smelling RSS-BJP's political motive in it.

Many of the Govts. of opposition ruling class parties in North India on the other hand are holding events on their own on this occasion. The issue is much larger.

Ram Mandir is coming where once stood Babri Masjid demolished by fascist hordes on December 6, 1992. Since the night of December 22, 1949 when idol was placed in Babri Masjid and its doors closed to Muslims for offering of Namaz, this issue has followed the trajectory of the strengthening of majority communalism in India. This trajectory is marked by hypocrisy, cynicism and downright chicanery by the political representatives of the ruling classes. On November 9, 2019 Supreme Court put the seal of judicial approval over demolition of Babri Masjid in an order based on faith and not law of the land. Apex Court, while standing for some individual cases involving personal liberty, has not stood against majoritarianism's attacks. However, the issue remains a test case for secularism in the country which is not and cannot be just a question of judicial interpretation.

Now the issue is being used by RSS-BJP in its drive to impose fascism in the country. People face the challenge of fascism based on majoritarianism. It is definitely a blow against secularism but the import of this attack is much wider. It seeks to undermine whatever people's rights are enshrined in the Constitution including rights of the states and oppressed social groups. Till now minorities especially Muslims have been at the receiving end, but the fascist rulers have designs to undermine rights of all toilers and trample over vast masses of the people.

People of the country must comprehend that this march towards fascist dictatorship is taking place to serve the interests of the foreign and domestic corporate and other domestic reactionaries. It is with this support of the large sections of big

capitalists and big landlords that RSS-BJP are able to realize their dream project of Hindu Rashtra. The mainstream media especially the electronic media have mostly become 'Asta' channels. It must be noted that while fascists rely on presenting myths as facts and mythology as history, their real strength lies in the support of large section of ruling classes in present. It is the battle that is being fought in the present with past as a backdrop.

RSS-BJP march towards fascism must be and will be resisted by all progressive and democratic forces and even a section of ruling classes being attacked by the ruling fascist forces. While defeating RSS-BJP electorally is necessary it is not enough. The challenge posed by these forces calls for building of anti-fascist people's resistance from below i.e., in cities, towns and vast rural areas. Furthermore, ruling classes are taking this fascist turn for intensifying exploitation and oppression of labouring masses. Revolutionary forces must try utmost to play a leading role in uniting broad sections of the toiling masses to resist these attacks and realize their class/sectional demands. These struggles will play an important role in creating blocks in the road to fascism and build up forces for resistance. All varieties of sectarianism and tailism must be combated to unleash broad and united struggles of the toiling people. This broad people's unity against attacks by the ruling classes and against communal fascist rulers will be the fort against advent of and struggle against fascism. Hindutva must be countered by genuine secularism, a secularism based on the unity of the people based on common interests and common aspirations of people.

On this January 22 when ruling RSS-BJP are celebrating their triumph let struggling people's forces vow to counter their march by mobilizing the people against their designs against the

people, people's rights and constitutional rights and genuine secularism.

CPI(ML)-New Democracy

January 21, 2024



8th March International Women's Day

- **Women of India - Let Us Fight For Freedom Of Choice For Women !**
- **Let Us Oppose Strengthening of Patriarchal Ideology by Modi Govt !**
- **Let us fightback, by our Own Struggles and in Solidarity Struggles, Policies which further restrict Women's Freedom of Choice and of Decision Making !**

Dear Friends,

8th March this year comes in a milieu of the Modi Govt. vigorously reinforcing patriarchal ideology at all India level. This is by a highest level all-out campaign to equate the country's very identity with veneration of symbols which present patriarchy

positively. The Central Govt. and the different states ruled by BJP, which follow Manuwadi ideology, are also taking practical steps to strengthen patriarchal chains on women's right to make choices about their lives. Under this overall drive, the right of women - and actually all youth- to choose friendships and relationships is being systematically attacked by various provisions enacted in name of Uniform Civil Code and already passed in one BJP ruled state. The diktats of "bahu beti izzat" have been enshrined in law.

Secondly, in the very presence of state's forces, attack on tribals of Manipur has included mass sexual assaults with impunity; non lodging of FIRs in cases of so much sexual violence and all is unpunished till date. Even FIRs were registered after countrywide outcry. Thirdly, MP Brij Bhushan Singh symbolizes how open protection is given to influential persons of the BJP who are accused of sexual harassment at workplace. As this case has made clear, the Govt. upholds this right of its goons to exploit women even when the accusers are the top, internationally acclaimed women wrestlers of the country. He is one more in the line of many BJP MLAs and MPs protected for such acts. In this situation the situation of sexual exploitation faced by women working under contractors, supervisors, for pitiful amounts in urban areas and those working similarly or even working on other's fields in rural areas, can just be imagined.

Throughout the country, what women wear, what education they can pursue, whom they can befriend and who they will marry are all being dictated more and more by the Central Govt's manuvadi ideology getting enacted into policies. Laws against "conversion" and "love jihad", laws and orders which say what women can wear and also what they can't, are all weapons to snatch the right of choice from women.

Women are more and more marginalized economically too and this further impacts their right to decide for themselves. Firstly, the women's participation in workforce shows their fallen presence in organized section. The percentage of women in workforce in rural areas has risen but analysis shows that this is in self employed sections which is actually informal marginalized work. Women getting wages have decreased across the board. Women get unequal wage for same work as men across sectors and are usually in contractual employment. Lakhs of women working as AASHAs, Mid day meal workers and Anganwadis are just denied the very status of workers and insulted by labeling their day's work 'honorary' or 'voluntary' while denying even subsistence level wages. Tribal women's land is being snatched across the country for big business houses- not only does this displace them physically but it tears away their very identity.

The Central Govt. tried to fool women by passing the 33% reservation in parliament and assemblies bill. Not only it has no reservation for OBCs, not only is it merely 33% and not 50% reservation but actually it is only an empty Act!. - it is to be implemented in a vague future.

Girls of different sections tried to study, go for higher education, get jobs and get empowered to make life choices independently. But Modi Govt. is commercializing education especially higher education and professional education, closing local govt. schools and closing for ordinary women many doors they had forced open in the fight to take some control over their lives in a patriarchal society. High rates of malnutrition and anemia prevail and commercialization of hospitals along with high prices denies women right to seek medical facilities. PF is restricted to organized sector and thus are working women denied financial empowerment

to make choices. Right to ESI is denied, robbing women of maternity leave and benefits and easy to access free medical care for themselves.

Muslim women have been especially targeted in the name of implementing age of marriage as in Assam, in the name of defending them against triple talaq and other steps. But it is the UCC passed by BJP Govt. of Uttarakhand should make clear to ALL women the patriarchal values which are planned to be enforced by state intervention.

The right to expression, to democratic dissent is being muzzled. Women students protesting sexual harassment or even against discriminatory hostel rules, activists, face repression and women and girl students are in jails for long in UAPA cases as trials drag for years and years.

On this 8th March we call on women throughout the country, let us speak up against patriarchy, let us build big joint movements of women against policies which curb our freedom of choice. Many of these policies also are anti people, anti national and pro corporate. Let us extend solidarity to and strengthen all such mass movements being fought against such policies.

POW Telengana

POW Andhra Pradesh

PMS Delhi

Istri Jagriti Manch (Punjab)



WB : Shahjahan of Sandeshkhali

● **Ranjit Mishra**

The history of coercion is not simply the story of one individual becoming a ‘king’, but rather a fluid social relationship. Uneven development, associated with time and geographical location, manifests itself in different ways. Sometimes in the form of land loot, sometimes by syndicates, smuggling, and by usurping the right to free expression. It acts like a transformer that enables every intangible right to become a tangible one.

Thus, it leads us to the historical process of so-called ‘primitive accumulation’, which was previously distinguished as a special temporal phenomenon, like a bridge between two periods of history. Some learned scholars of the time challenged the narrowness of primitive accumulation and reinterpreted its aspects as the constitutive formulation of accumulations across different stages of capitalist development. Like a methodological way out of dire straits, allegedly imposed by the pre-capitalist state and its tributaries.

According to the word ‘displacement’, we see the image of the state’s use of force in the name of development; eviction of residents from their waterways and forests. Yes, examples of this are not few in neo-liberal India. From SEZ to land bank, from industrial enterprises to real estate, from horizontal slums to vertical ones, coercive acquisition of land is observed in various

forms. In particular, mass resistance, organized protests, or even state retreats are also evident. But this doesn't stand alone or set aside itself as the only image of displacement in rural India. Other weapons are organized coercion parallel to the use of force through the legal apparatus of the state. Those are pretty powerful tools for ongoing dispossessions. In the available commentary on politics and social policies, it seems that outside the so-called state machinery, the coercion happening in the villages is just a story of some people becoming 'kings'. But if we simplify the matter so much, 'it will be wrong to carry out its proper analysis and consequences.' They are indeed not the shallow art of the poor individuals in isolation, but rather a reflection of the social relations in flux. Its seeds rooted deep into very feudal and weak pre-capitalist socio-economic foundations. Particularly with time, place, and subject, the regime of oppressors in rural India is a combined dubious nexus of feudal lords, police, paramilitary chiefs, bureaucratic administrators, moneylenders, artidars, big cultivators, and so on.

When the condensed form of this circle culminates and manifests itself through a person, the so-called coronation of Shahjahan, Anubrata, Lala, Sawkat, Akunzi, and Arabul appears to have successfully been organized. However, there are differences in their empires and expansions based on geographical conditions, variations in natural resources, and, of course, some personal skills, technically, which are no more than quantitative differences. Feudalism, the regime of bureaucratic administrations, the capital, and the great labouring peasantry, in contrast, is the functional criterion of the semi-feudal backdrop in rural India. The particularity of Sandeshkhali and its 'Betaj-Badshah' Shahjahan's alchemy are the withstanding general prototype of social relations. We must pursue our analysis on this basis.

Recently, ‘Shahjahan—the ‘Betaj badshah of Sandeshkhali’—has notoriously been shouted all over the place since the attacks on ED officers, a few Central Defense Force jawans, and photojournalists. An overwhelming debate on the discourse between the Centre and the State has intensified. On the whole, the countrymen are becoming familiar with Sandeshkhali, and a galloping attention has already gained momentum. However, the rise of Shahjahan is not a recent phenomenon. By 2016–17, when Shahjahan was the head of the Sarberia Gramme Panchayat, his influence was wide. Many Pattadars of the region, due to the lack of permanent settlement on their lands as Bargadars too, were subjected to forceful coercion and were evicted from their means of production. He (Shahjahan) forcefully registered those lands in his own account. He raised ‘jalkar’ (aliasing fishery by the locals). His imperial expansion began by taking control of the local markets, temporary shops, raising water taxes, and many more. As Sandeshkhali bordered Bangladesh, Shahjahan had a checkered past of smuggling. He smuggled, allegedly from cattle to clothes, illegal firearms to gold biscuits, and illicit drugs; he had his hands full of those affairs. It goes without saying that border guard officers, customs officials, police, and bureaucrats are all subject to their monthly settlements.

This Shahjahan Babu also received the certificate from the Central Panchayat Ministry to be one of the best Gramme Panchayats in India by 20–21. He used to be praised by the executives of local socio-religious institutions. Eventually he belongs to a universally reputed “apolitical” organization. Such “apolitical” conduct, therefore, must make a separate and dedicated attempt to be analyzed further, at least for its own justifications. How could it even possibly be otherwise? Whatever, we are leaving

it for next time. Hence, of course, huge sums of money helped him make himself indispensable to the top leaders of his party. As he established himself in this way, the size and absolute dominance of his civilian military force grew exponentially. The clumsy bureaucracy looks for such philanthropic geniuses to complete their philanthropic projects on paper. So more means more expansions. Also the loyalty of the poor who have to rely on these schemes thoroughly. Consequently, he acquired new feathers in the crown. He secured the top posts of Panchayat Samiti, North 24 Parganas District Govt. Fishermen's Association, and several others as well. Fishery in the two 24 Parganas is also an important issue that demands at least a few sentences of further analysis. Subsequently, its origin and expansion are not at all new phenomena. Its very origin rests on a striking methodological apparatus of dispossession without accumulation. Conversion of large tracts of agricultural land into fisheries by adding saline water forcibly was introduced in the early 1990s on a large scale. Jalkar is not a matter of paddy cultivation on five-katha land. It involves quite a large amount of capital, largely concentrated land, and an organized process. Fisheries have less than eighty percent of the labour-intensive capacity of conventional agriculture. Hence, surplus labour and similar intentions reoccupy. If there were accurate statistics, it would be seen that only Sandeshkhali, Canning and Kultali receive the most migrant workers per year; the combined number of the remaining blocks of the North and South 24 Parganas is less than half of that.

Along with the Indian government's adopted neoliberal policies that attenuate public investments substantially through the continuous removal of subsidies from agriculture, things have turned worse. The increase in the cost of seeds and fertilizers,

difficulties in getting small loans at low interest rates from state-owned and cooperative banks, the intensive capitalization of the new means of production, which remained a family monopoly of the means by the wealthy feudal lords of the villages, and, of course, the lack of proper value of the agricultural products intensified the crisis manifolds. On one hand, the concentration of land is possible at an impossibly fast speed without any organized resistance, while on the other, it has gradually converted the agricultural fields of small and medium farmers into wastelands. As a result, the concentration of land was possible at an impossibly fast speed without any organized resistance and witnessed a constant stranglehold over the course of a tiny expenditure of external forces. I have heard many times from regular visits to these areas that in some places, the ownership of agricultural land has been concentrated by more than ninety percent in the past few years.

The Sundarbans and the entire sub-region are inhabited by a large number of fishermen. Many of them are preoccupied with deep-sea fishing traditions. It is surprising to think that even in the so-called left era, the organizational structure of the fishermen's union remained very ridiculous and annoying. Let's say a fishermen's union, whose constituents are widely spread across boat owners and boat workers simultaneously. When today's ruling party writes on huge hoardings and cutouts all over the cities and openly advocates "representing all classes and castes," then it is not hard to understand how this ideology can be cultivated and preponderated without facing counterarguments. In fact, this trend has been studied and practiced for a long time. Anyway, back to our Sandeshkhali, its king Shahjahan, and displacement. Along the banks of rivers like Vidyadhari, Ichamati, and Matla in the south and their numerous tributaries, there is lots of brickwork

happening. Pre-capitalist exploitation is very strong in these sectors. In Sandeshkhali, it is associated with and multiplied by forced labour or forced labour exploitation. And all these remain unhindered under the nose of the administration, openly issuing a kind of fatwa. Earlier, we used to see bricklayers mainly coming from places like Bihar, Jharkhand, etc. Now that workers are being supplied from the neighbouring villages, a group of labourers, along with their wives and families, came up to the brick mason's shack for consecutive 5-6-7 months. This way, yesterday's traditional peasant family became today's wage laborers. The history of these transformations is the epitome of Sandeshkhali, Canning, Meenkhan, Basirhat, and the cries of countless peasants buried beneath the thrones of Shahjahans. The bricklayer's trade union is very similar to the fishermen's organization in its very structure; the wealthy contractors and wage labourers all share the same set of demands. God knows what the prevalent class basis of those demands is.

So, enough description had already been made of the course of feudalism, particularly at Sandeshkhali. But what is the opposite side of it? For a long time, the so-called left-wing parties, various labour and peasant organizations worked in these places, but gradually their leadership went to the hands of feudal families, large farmers, large fishermen, or contractors providing cheap laborer. Ideologically, in those organizations it resulted in an increased reliance on economic determination instead of class struggle. As if neo-liberalism would overthrow semi-feudalism of its own accord. Instead of intensifying the class struggle against these brute-king attacks, the methods of protest have mostly remained superficial. Sometimes from being completely dependent on the courts, sometimes on administrations, from being limited to symbolic

demonstrations or throwing donations. In other words, economism prevails against the dole as a legitimate alternative adopted and practiced by the so-called left-wing labour organizations, which is perhaps the mere NGO'ization instead of proper class struggle. If the labour force is not mobilized in the direction of radical land reform by developing the agrarian revolution, if the class struggle is not intensified, if even the revolutionary left parties or organizations do not leave their symbolic positions and oppose these with immediate efforts and actions as a real struggling organization, the fate of countless workers will continue to be determined by such misdeeds even year after year. No matter how many Shahjahans will be replaced by Akunzis or viz. Not only that, the area will soon have some strong communal divisions and even riots beforehand.

There are no available alternatives to crossing this fate except the revolutionary mass line, which is the sole requirement of today and tomorrow. Although nowadays, some Marxist revolutionary parties are identifying India as a capitalist country in terms of its political and economic character. Among them, one would like to call such forces, isolated and shadow-state operatives, but in reality it is an oversimplification to think of them as isolated or parallel to the state apparatus. And such extra-economic coercion is never part of expanded reproduction, but rather must be characterized as part of a continuous accumulation of the periods of capitalist crisis. However, it's not the shadow state, instead, the semi-feudal functionalities of the amalgamation of landlords, bureaucratic administrators, capitalist and the political muscle of the ruling class and those social succumbs that prevails in the form of pre-capitalist exploitation. Even it may not be the de facto exaggeration that our political economy reflects the practical conflict of two conceptual operators in analyzing the stages of

capitalism in rural India. The extra economic coercive forces, which play a constitutive role in capitalism's long period of crisis, and the classical process of expanded reproduction. The small and petty capitalists are unable to possess the extra economic coercive means and return part of the profits to the production according to the traditional method of expanded reproduction, where as the big capitals are able to concentrate the capital by displacing the workers from all kinds of rights through the forces of extra economic means. The aspirations of the petty producers must be therefore analyzed within this framework.

However, before we finally conclude, we must admit, to being the sword, the scalpel should be burned until it becomes a flaming crimson that emanates from the hot lava of class struggle where one cannot reach without climbing the mountain of self-sacrifice and iron determination.

Being directed to that, the revolutionary party must take bold steps, at least to initialize or to lay the foundation of the class struggle alone is the prime question amongst these juxtapositions.



Press Statement

**Women's Organizations
Demand Stern Action Against
the Accused in IIT-BHU
Gangrape Case**

The outrageous case of the gangrape the BHU student two months ago and the delayed arrests of the accused has once again exposed the anti-women face of the manuwadi BJP government.

On 1st November, 2023, a student of IIT-BHU was accosted by three men while she was out on a walk with her friend. The men disrobed and raped her, and filmed the entire incident. The video of the gangrape was made viral by the accused. The next day, 2 November 2023, the victim filed an FIR with the police against the accused, but the police took no action. The accused men were identified as important members of the BJP's IT Cell who campaigned in the Madhya Pradesh elections, even after they had gang raped the victim in a drunken state.

It is obvious that no action was taken against the accused of this heinous crime for almost two months because of political protection accorded to them. They were only arrested 60 days after the incident, due to wide protests and public pressure. Varanasi is the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has kept complete silence, not condemned the incident and nor did he intervene to ensure that timely action was taken against the

accused. The PM continues to shield the accused, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and justice eludes the women wrestlers till today.

Women's organizations will hold protests all over the country to demand that the accused be brought to justice at the earliest and the chargesheet must be filed urgently after time bound, free, fair and scientific investigation. The case must be tried in a fast track court.

Recently it is revealed that Uttar Pradesh is number one in violence against women. This is the condition of women in double engine sarkar. We also demand, that given their political connections and influence, the UP Police and Administration, should oppose any attempts to grant bail and get them released. The victim must be provided support and security to pursue her studies further. Action must be taken against the police officers, who neglected this serious case for the last two months for dereliction of duty.

[This Press Statement was issued by All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), All India Co-ordination of POW-PMS-IJM, All India Mahila Sanskritik Sanghatan (AIMSS) and All India Agragami Mahila Samiti (AIAMS)]

January 4, 2024

□ □ □

Enforce the ICJ Ruling Against Israel's Genocide, Hold the U.S. Accountable and Complicit

**(This statement was issued by Len Cooper, ILPS
Chairperson on 31 January 2024)**

Together with the Palestine people, the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) welcomes the January 26 interim ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the emergency measures on its genocide case against Israel over its war in the Gaza Strip. South Africa brought the case to the ICJ last December 2023 under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

While the ruling fell short of calling for an immediate ceasefire, it ordered six provisional measures including for Israel to refrain from acts under the Genocide Convention, prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide, and take immediate and effective measures to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. The Court also ordered Israel to preserve evidence of genocide and to submit a report to the Court, within one month, of all measures taken in line with its order.

Israel called the decision a "disgrace" and insists on continuing its war escalated from decades of occupation, apartheid,

persecution and mass slaughter of Palestinians. The United States, who has been supporting Israel economically, politically, diplomatically and militarily, providing at least \$3.8bn in military aid to Israel annually, washed its hands off the charges of genocide and dismissed it as “unfounded”.

In reality, the US is complicit in Israel’s genocide. It has used its veto power several times in the UN Security Council to oppose a ceasefire and uses its influence on countries in the General Assembly to refrain from calling the mass atrocities of Israel as “genocide”. The US used its agencies, the White House, State Department, Defense Department, National Security Agency, and mass media to spread lies and cover up Israel’s crimes like the bombing of hospitals. It is a crime of complicity in the genocide.

More than 26,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed in Israel’s obliteration of Gaza with some 10,000 believed to be still missing under the rubble. At least 1.8 million Palestinians have been displaced and are deprived of access to adequate food, water, shelter, sanitation, and medical assistance. The population of Gaza is starving. More than 300 have been killed and mass arrests of thousands continue in the West Bank and persecution continues in East Jerusalem, all occupied by Israel.

The ICJ ruling is a legal victory stemming from the millions of protesters throughout the world. The UN Security Council has failed. The UN General Assembly has failed. Our only hope is on the militant social movements in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Pressure must be made to bear on the 153 governments who ratified the Genocide Convention to fulfill their obligations and enforce the ICJ ruling. We must press our own governments to call for a ceasefire and thoroughly end Israel’s Zionist occupation, stop

the arms sales and military deals with Israel, and cut off all economic and diplomatic ties with the genocidal regime. The boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel must be expanded and other social movements informed, organized and mobilized to support Palestine.

As we demand our own governments to cease their support for the Israeli genocide, we must continue to support the just armed Palestinian resistance which is necessary to defend their land, people and self-determination from the Zionist occupation. Without armed resistance accompanied by people's global support, the liberation of Palestine will not be possible. Armed struggle is legal in international law in resisting occupation.

The voice of the Palestinian resistance and fight for liberation against the US-Israel war is heard now more than ever before. We express our solidarity with them as we intensify our own struggles against imperialism and local reaction.

The ICJ ruling is one victory. Let us build on this and gain more meaningful victories ahead until Palestine is truly free, from the river to the sea.



AP Anganwadis' 42 days strike

**(Abridged version of a report by Com. P. Prasad, IFTU
AP State President and All India Vice-President is being
published in this issue of New Democracy.)**

Strike becomes an instrument to give self-confidence to the striking workers. It unites the working class. Strike shows a way to the working class to overcome their hurdles and hardships which they face and to go ahead in path of struggle. It was so in practice in the strike of AP Anganwadi Workers.

Each and every strike may not be successful. But each strike gives experience and lessons, either big or small. No strike in which Working class participates based on its consciousness, is in vain. The recent AP Anganwadi strike is also a small step.

In general, the immediate economic gains achieved through strikes enthuse striking workers. In case of strikes which could not gain immediate economic benefits, they may lead to disappointment. But in the AP Anganwadi strike there has been no such disappointment.

Economism exists as a dominant trend at present in Trade Union movement. As per this trend, economic gains are to be treated as an index to measure the victory of working class. The AP Anganwadi strike has not succeeded in that respect though it got a few economic gains. Their main demand of wage increase was not

conceded despite prolonged strike. But the mood of the AP Anganwadi workers is full of enthusiasm.

The strike was started by Anganwadis on many demands but main demand which acted as a driving force was of wage increase. During the strike, ESMA was imposed by AP Govt. It forced the workers to fight mainly for job security. So demand for wage increase was pushed back whereas political demand to fight against ESMA came into front. The mood of Anganwadis qualitatively changed. Protecting their job security and preserving their broad unity came to the fore. Due to this they felt that they got a big victory. So the scale to measure gains and benefits also changed during the strike. From this angle, this Anganwadis strike has given valuable lessons.

Let us go into how this strike was started and also how it was concluded. Let us know the lessons to be learnt from it.

More than one lakh Anganwadi women workers of AP had gone on indefinite strike on 12-12-2023. They were on strike for 42 days ending on 21-1-2024 through an Agreement between AP Govt. and JAC of 3 unions.

The central and state govts. are running this ICDS scheme. No wage system is there, only honorarium is paid. There is no job security. But there is full scope to increase workload indiscriminately. It is equal to modern slavery.

The CITU is the main functioning Trade Union among Anganwadi workers for around 3 decades in AP as well as in National arena also. The CITU affiliated Anganwadi Union had led some struggles in AP, and also got some initial gains helping them to extend and consolidate their union in early days. But those struggles are not enough to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of

anganwadis. It led to considerable sections leaving their union to form new unions.

All the workers who left CITU union were not walking in alternate path of struggle. Some of them had illusions on ruling class organizations. But some of them had been searching for new and correct alternative way. In 2018, in united Chittoor district with Tirupati as main base, foundation of IFTU affiliated Anganwadi union was laid. Then it was limited to only Chittoor (CTR) District.

The IFTU AP State committee later initiated to extend the Anganwadi union as state wide union. A few initial steps were taken prior to covid with the help of CTR Dist. IFTU and Anganwadi leadership. A team from CTR district had visited few other districts. But due to covid, those were stalled. IFTU AP Committee restarted efforts from 2021.

In erstwhile united AP and also in newly formed AP, the AP IFTU state committee could build and run significant struggles in many sectors, mainly in Jute sector. It had built heroic militant struggle in Nellimarla. But AP IFTU leadership had no experience in Anganwadi sector and had to learn. It visited several districts and conducted group meetings with Anganwadis who are close to IFTU. Then it convened a State wide meeting on 14-11-2021 in Eluru. It was attended by delegates from 7 districts and a co-ordination body was formed. AP IFTU committee planned to hold a founding state conference in Vijayawada on 24-4-2022. The big propaganda against IFTU was done among Anganwadi women that IFTU is an extremist organization. Further, those propagating threatened that police would put cases, jobs of those Anganwadis who joined IFTU affiliated union would be terminated.

The founding Anganwadi state conference was held successfully. It was attended by around one thousand people.

Nearly 800 attended from CTR district. Around hundred activists from POW and IFTU also attended from various districts. Nearly 40 Anganwadis attended from 7 districts other than united CTR district. This number may be small but it was significant in the then situation. Some who were willing to attend were unable to come due to pressure by officials and also other trade unions. Police machinery was used by to foil IFTU conference. Some buses with delegates were stopped at various places by police. But women workers refused police instruction to return to homes and sat on roads at places their buses were stopped. It foiled Govt. attempt. After 14 hours sitting on roads, finally they were released and reached Vijaywada towards end of the Conference. It inspired delegates of the conference.

Com. Aparna, IFTU All India president attended the Conference. THE AP PROGRESSIVE ANGANWADI WORKERS AND HELPERS UNION (APPAWHU) was formed and its new body was elected. Gangavathi was elected as president and V.R. Jyothi as GS.

IFTU All India conference was held in Tirupati in April 2023. That work was mainly shouldered by Anganwadi ranks. After Tirupati All Indian Conference was over, they concentrated again on Anganwadis problems.

IFTU AP Committee met in 2023 June 1, 2 and decided to take concrete steps to form united platform with unions working in Anganwadi sector. IFTU leadership was aware that it was not an easy task. In AP Anganwadi sector, no joint activities had been there so far. Though AITUC etc. unions existed in this sector, CITU as a big union was never for united actions. AITUC tried for it but their appeal for united action was refused by CITU. The Newly formed IFTU Anganwadi union also tried for it repeatedly in CTR

dist. but in vain. In these conditions, the IFTU state committee decided to hold a joint state convention with AITUC on Anganwadi problems to workout united struggle. In this light, APPAWHU leadership initiated. In fact, IFTU Anganwadi ranks had left AITUC in CTR Dist. in 2018. AITUC leadership responded positively. IFTU AP committee also discussed with AITUC state leadership. State Anganwadi convention was held successfully with nearly one thousand people attending. Share of IFTU was 60% or more. AP POW participation was also considerable. Representatives from AP CITU and its affiliated AP Anganwadi union also attended and gave solidarity messages. It was a breakthrough for united struggle in this sector.

Joint Action Committee (JAC) of three Anganwadi unions affiliated to the IFTU, CITU, AITUC was formed on 18-9-2023. It gave **Chalo Vijayawada** call for 25-9-2023. IFTU and its affiliated Anganwadi committees worked to make this call a success. AP govt. imposed prohibitory orders. The police forces were mobilized and Vijayawada was converted into police city. The Railway Stations and Bus complexes were filled with police forces. Same happened in all districts. But JAC and 3 TUs had worked out to make it a success. It was held very successfully defying prohibited orders. IFTU played a key role in Chalo Vijayawada and got high political prestige. Even mainstream Media recognized IFTU's role. IFTU mobilized more than 200 Anganwadis from CTR district a day earlier and kept them in another place. Demonstration was started by IFTU members with IFTU banners and Flags. CITU mobilized much more but could not make them participate in main demonstration that defied prohibitory orders. It was third phase that IFTU completed successfully.

After repeated representations, the JAC gave strike notice

on 16.11.2023 with charter of demands on minimum wage of Rs. 26,000, on work load, upgrading of mini centers to main centers, payment of Gratuity, other Retirement benefits, extension of retirement age from 60 to 62, extension of age limit of helpers to promote as teachers from 45 to 50 years, and betterment of Food stuffs to the beneficiaries etc. JAC decided to start indefinite strike from 12-12-2023. It started successfully with above 95% participation.

The mass participation in strike was high. Regular Dharna centers were run in all districts. Few calls were given like Rasta Rokos, Chalo collectorates, mass representations to the Ministers and MLAs etc. All these calls were held successfully.

Soon after strike started AP Govt. threatened the striking workers to join duties immediately warning them of termination in case they continue the strike. It tried to unlock the 9 Anganwadi centres and to make them functional. But rural people did not cooperate with Govt., mainly parents of children using this scheme. Govt.'s disruptive activities failed.

Finally, AP Govt. imposed ESMA on 6-1-2024. It threatened again showing ESMA. But striking workers were strong to continue strike. Moreover, the imposition of ESMA had drawn solidarity from the political parties, TUs, mass organizations and rights unions who condemned ESMA. It became an additional strength to the strike.

The AP Govt. employed two tactics- on the one hand, it conducted eye wash talks and on the other hand it threatened striking workers with punitive actions like termination notices and to take up new recruitment process.



AP POW General Secretary Com. Laxmi addressing a large assembly of Anganwadi workers at Vijayawada

The period from 6-1-2024 i.e., day of imposition of ESMA to 12-1-2024 i.e., day of talks between JAC and Group of Ministers was a crucial sub-phase in strike. After talks failed on 12-1-2024, this crucial phase became more crucial. Second sub phase of ESMA period was different. Moreover, it was Sankranthi Festival period. Naturally the Govt.'s actions and termination notices had created fear in minds of ordinary striking workers. At that juncture, the JAC decided to start indefinite fast on 17-1-2024. It was started in Vijayawada with huge gathering. 15 comrades participated in indefinite fast- 7 from CITU, 4 from AITUC, 3 from IFTU. From IFTU APPAWHU leaders V.R. Jyothi, G. Bharathi and J. Ganga Devi participated. All these 3 comrades are IFTU AP leaders and G. Bharathi is IFTU NC member also.

The Govt. did not resort to either preventing indefinite fast or to lifting the Dharna centre forcefully. But it took measures to speedup termination and new recruitment process. On the other

hand, Govt. conducted talks with JAC to create illusions among workers.

Indefinite fast period forced both parties i.e., JAC and AP Govt. The AP Govt. was going ahead with its aggressive policy openly but was apprehensive of elections being near. At the same time JAC heading the strike felt that termination process may liquidate strike. Indefinite fast had forced the state Govt. on defensive while termination and new-recruitment process placed JAC into defensive position. At this juncture the JAC gave call to **Chalo Vijayawada** on 21-1-2024 and planned to mobilize large number of Anganwadi workers. AP Govt. mobilized huge police forces, mainly in Vijayawada. The preventive arrests were made in all districts in big number. Thousands of Anganwadis were prevented in various places. Still more than 3 thousand Anganwadis could reach the indefinite fast centre at Vijayawada at night on 20-1-2024. Tense situation prevailed on that night. The IFTU state GS Com. Polari and Ravichandra were there. POW state Gen. Secretary Com. Laxmi, Secretary Padma were also there. All of a sudden in early hours i.e., at 3.30 A.M. on 21-1-2024, 12 hundred special police force raided. They blocked power. Police indiscriminately arrested including those on indefinite fast and inhumanly dragged them. POW leaders Laxmi and Padma were along with Anganwadis and tried to motivate the Anganwadis to resist police forces and finally they were also arrested along with Anganwadis.

It is pertinent to mention here that there were around three thousand Anganwadi women at that centre in that night. They were full of fighting mood. The leadership of JAC was well aware that police may raid at any time. But it made no concrete plan. If JAC had planned and prepared to resist the police in democratic way,

the situation would have been entirely different. JAC could have put the Govt at more defensive and secured more favourable terms for the striking workers. But that opportunity was missed though it must have been utilized. The main mobiliser, CITU, was not prepared for it. Proper lesson should be taken from this in the interest of working class.



**(Anganwadi workers at State Mahadharna on
September 25, 2023)**

Around 75 buses were used to transport the arrested women to the distant places like Machilipatnam, Nuzved, Eluru etc. towns. Nearly 1500 arrested were there and 3000 more were arrested in Vijayawada Railway station and bus stand.

The next day on 21-1-2024 the agitation continued. Some other TUs also joined along with IFTU, CITU, AITUC. The leaders were also arrested on 21-1-2024 when they had resorted to Rasta Roko. P.Prasad IFTU State President, C.H.Narasimharao CITU State GS and Ravindranadh AITUC State president etc. were

transported to Peddavegi police training centre 15 km beyond Eluru. It became the main centre to spearheading the agitation. This leadership team after discussion with all concerned gave State Band Call on 24-1-2024. At that time the Govt. was forced to hold talks with JAC.

Talks were held between JAC and Group of Ministers on 21-1-2024 night and reached an agreement. The wage increase demand was not conceded. It was agreed to consider wage increase from July 2024. **The reasonable wage which would be decided between both parties will be implemented** is the agreement. It will need one more struggle. Only reference was to wage increase to be decided mutually.

The Govt. agreed to convert mini Anganwadi centres into main centres. There are 6837 minicentres in AP. Therefore 6837 helpers must be recruited in due course. It agreed to increase retirement age from 60 years to 62 years. The age limit for eligibility to promote as Anganwadi teachers from helpers to be extended to 50 years from existing 45 years. One of main demands on workload regarding multi-Apps was settled. Govt. agreed to club all apps as one App. The retirement benefit will be increased to the Teacher to Rs. 1,20,000 from existing Rs. 50,000 and to Rs. 60,000 from existing Rs. 20,000 for helper. The Govt. had agreed to recommend to Central Govt. to implement statutory Gratuity as per Supreme Court direction. It agreed to pay TA bills on occasion of periodical sector and project meetings and tours. It agreed formally to provide job opportunity to one family member in case of death. It agreed to pay Rs. 20,000 for funeral expenses in case death takes place in service. It agreed to apply Govt.'s insurance policy as per PMJJBY & PMSBY policies. It agreed to pay wages for the strike period.

The main economic demand was not met. But in this strike, when political attack took place by AP Govt. with weapon of ESMA this demand took second place in minds of striking workers. Job security came first. The broad unity also became important. Hence, striking workers felt that they got victory. In this, payment of salary for the strike period also had some impact.

In this strike, there were a total of 33 lakh strike days leaving out holidays. Out of these 12 lakh strike days were during ESMA period. Resisting ESMA has been one of the crowning features of this strike being more important measure of fighting capability of working class. Moreover, this high fighting capability was demonstrated by women workers.

This united activity had its share of problems but IFTU AP state committee acted maturely prioritizing interests of workers' struggle. IFTU acted in words and deeds to maintain this unity in struggle always mentioning it at all levels as a united struggle. At the same time, IFTU maintained its independence. IFTU had taken more initiative to implement joint calls like Chalo Vijayawada on 15-9-2023, maintaining Dharna centre at state headquarter in December 2023. POW and PDSU leadership also actively participated. IFTU Auto Union played an important role in Chalo Vijaywada. In fact, IFTU was against indefinite fast and proposed in JAC militant mass mobilization but IFTU went with the opinion of other two unions in JAC and actively implemented it.

AP CITU Gen. Secretary wrote recently that AP Anganwadi strike is unique compared to other struggles in this sector in the country. CITU is working for more than three decades in this sector then why it was unique? IFTU can claim its role in this. At every juncture and phase in the strike, IFTU's role was the key to make it a unique strike.

The Anganwadis are most un-organized section in even unorganized working class. For example, even Auto, BOC, Rice mills, Dal mills, Oil mills and Shopping Malls etc. workers are working in their work places in dozens or more. The Industrial working class works in their work place i.e. factories or industries in bigger collective forms. But Anganwadis are mostly only 2 members in each centre. They meet at project level or sector level very rarely for official review meetings. But they were well organized well. It is a lesson to proletarian revolutionary forces that they can organize even un-organized working class, which is more than 90% of the Indian working class.

The imposition of ESMA is not new. In 1998 it was imposed against Safdarjung hospital workers struggle in Delhi led by IFTU affiliated Union. It was resisted and defeated with brave struggle of workers under the banner of IFTU. In Tamil Nadu, UP, Delhi etc. Govts imposed ESMA on strikes of various sections. However, in this strike there were features like 100% women workers, work force of more than one lakh, united struggle led by JAC with IFTU participation. Let us take these lessons to broad working class.

Prior to this strike, the IFTU's organizational influence was mainly limited to CTR District and few pockets of W.G. Dist. IFTU got new contacts in some other districts during the strike. Prestige of IFTU in AP Anganwadi sector is high after the strike. We should protect the unity of anganwadis and workers in general in the interest of intensifying their struggle. We should propagate the spirit of struggle and forging unity for struggle especially at this time of intensifying attacks of fascist rulers.



Delhi : February 3, 2024

ALL India Protest Against NEP 2020, NCF 2023, Communalization and Commercialization Of Education

The All-India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) held a protest demonstration at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on February 3, 2024, to draw attention to the issue of equitable education. Main demands were- rollback of NEP 2020 and NCF 2023 as well as the elimination of all forms of commercialization, contractualization, communalization, centralization, casteist, patriarchal, and other prejudices and discrimination in education. Participating in the initiative were over 100 student organizations, teacher organizations, social justice organizations, rights groups, and parent organizations from throughout the nation.

A well-decorated gathering of about 1500 participants including students, teachers, and other social activists across the country assembled in Delhi. People from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

Assam, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka etc. participated in the same.

The programme started with cultural performances. Prof Jagmohan Singh (Chairperson AIFTRE) welcomed the participants and said - The results of these policies are evident all around us. Salutations to everyone assembled here today with the message that education is a fundamental right that is essential to the advancement of society. Through education, the governing classes hope to exert influence over society. The progressive and



(A view of the Protest Demonstration on February 3, 2024)

revolutionary factions hope to use it to further society's advancement. Ambedkar used to discuss education for the lower classes, and Periyar in Tamil Nadu also brought up these points. The budget for education is being drastically cut these days, which affects everyone's access to education. We must fight for enacting

policies that promote society; we cannot expect the government to do so.

It was addressed by leaders of various participating organizations. It included Bhaskar (PDSU AP), Ranbir (PSU Punjab), Rajib (PYL WB), Niranjan (AIRSO), Prasenjeet (AISA), Ramesh Pattnaik (APSEC), Nandita Narain (JFME), Sanjeev Kumar (DYFI), Priyamvada (Disha), Gurkirat (BSCEM), Aman (Pachhas), Rizwan (Khudai Khidmatgar), Dinesh Abrol (All India Peoples Science Network), Indranee Dutta (Secretariat member form Assam), Prem Chand (Indian Public Service Employees Association), P Prakash (Bhagat Singh Chatra Yuva Morcha), Shubham (BAPSA), Shambhavi (Collective), Sanjad (Kargil Political Activist), Abhishek (Chatra Ekta Manch Haryana), Aishe Ghosh (SFI), Santosh Kumar (Samajwadi Jan Parishad), Sujeet (DSU Delhi), T. Lingareddy (DTF Telangana), Abha Dev Habib (DTF, Delhi), Antharam (Jagrat Adivasi Dalit Sangathan), Ram (Inqalabi Chhatra Morcha UP), Prof. Hargopal among others.

Vikram Dev of DTF, Punjab said all of those parts were eliminated from the curriculum framework by the RSS BJP which ran counter to their saffron ideology. After altering the syllabus, they went one step further and established committees to implement more significant changes at all educational levels and in all fields. We oppose both NEP and NCF. Committees were not established when sensible portions of the syllabus were deleted; but, to promote more RSS propaganda, committees of RSS's own ideology are now being established. Today, myth and fact are on equal footing, and both will be covered in our curriculum in the future. We must also work to reinstate education on the state list. The Central Govt set the date of January 22nd in opposition to January 26th, and on February 16th, we will respond to the RSS-

BJP during the strike.

Ranbir of PSU said that in its first term, the Modi government installed supporters in all positions of authority. In its second term, it unveiled all the policies that served its interests. Today, on January 22, it has revealed a preview of what is ahead. There are two trends for the future. First, some believe that our fight against Modi should take place in the 2024 elections. However, we must stress that the RSS is the source of Modi's power; without the RSS being combatted ideologically, Modi cannot be defeated politically.

Other speakers pointed out that we know there is a close relationship between the nation's labour market and education policy, which is why NEP and the new labour rules were introduced during lockdown. Fighting the established NEP categorization, which virtually ensures caste- and class-based discrimination against the underprivileged, is a battle that needs to be waged alongside the nation's working class. The fight against NEP is a component of Savitri Bai's larger effort to create the sort of society which was later also affirmed by Bhagat Singh.

The fight for the right to Education is not only about education; it is also about advancing and defending democracy, fighting fascism and securing a compassionate future and participatory democracy. We are engaged in combat for a new human and a new society. Recall Bhagat Singh's battle, as he gave his life in pursuit of a comparable ideal.

Given the speed at which schools are closing, how will children manage to travel great distances for an education? While new schools are not being built, existing ones are being closed. We would like to know how most of this country will be able to access

education under the new system.

One speaker said, “We are witnessing the NEP’s consequences countrywide as it develops. I want to talk about how things are in the Northeast. Our state has suffered from centralization; the academic year has been moved, and the curriculum has been synchronized with the CBSE. Our academic schedule used to correspond with the seasons, the climate, and cultural events, but that has since changed. The population base of small states has not been considered by NEP. Overall, Assam has introduced many NEP measures erratically and haphazardly. We need to take language seriously. Teachers in Hindi are teaching the alphabet of Assam. We oppose NEP and NCF and push for their elimination.”

Another said, “Along with our state-level demands, we are opposing NEP 2020. We also insist on scholarships for SC/ST. Maharashtra is closing a lot of its regional schools, and our state does not have a central university. We want Maharashtra to have a central university. Corporate interests now have complete control over education policy because of privatization. We struggle against these governing regime practices.”

A contingent from Telangana could not attend the programme due to a delay of their train. A separate meeting at Ambedkar Bhawan was arranged in the night where many students’ organizations were staying. It was addressed by Presidium members of AIFRTE Dr. Vikas Gupta, Dr. Mrigank, Dr. Prasad, and Prof. Laxminarayana apart from students’ leaders including Mahesh from PDSU Telangana.



Indian Farmers Bracing for Another Round of Struggle

● **Aditya Prakash**

Refusing to honour commitments made by the Govt. to the farmers, increasing agrarian distress and worsening conditions of peasants have once again propelled farmers onto the road of agitation. SKM along with Trade Unions called for a countrywide Grameen Bandh and Industrial Strike on February 16. Some farmers' organizations had given a Call for Delhi Chalo on February 13 and are being stopped at Punjab Haryana border at Shambhu and Khanauri since then by the police and paramilitary forces.

In December 2021, Union Govt. has made promises in writing to Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) after repealing three Agricultural Acts that led to farmers lifting their sit-in at Delhi borders. These promises related to, in particular, granting of MSP to peasants for which a Committee was sought to be formed to ensure that peasants can avail this. Besides this, commitments made by the Govt. included withdrawal of all cases and action against accused Ajay Mishra in Lakhimpur Khiri killing of farmers. Since then Govt. has backtracked on the promises made to farmers' organizations. The Govt. showed its dishonesty towards its commitments from the beginning. While it had committed to take farmers' representatives in the said committee on the

recommendation of SKM, it packed it with the representatives who were supporting the Govt. position. Further the Govt. refused to spell out terms of reference of the said Committee which they were obliged to define if they were sincere. SKM obviously refused to be part of such a show. SKM kept up their agitation with a series of protest programmes over last two years, also joining hands with Trade Unions for some of the Calls.

SKM is an umbrella organization of farmers bodies set up to coordinate Delhi March in November 2020. It had farmers' organizations with different ideological and political backgrounds which had come together to fight the attacks against farmers and agriculture. SKM kept politically partisan agenda out of its purview and did not permit leaders of political parties on its stage. This helped to unify the peasantry against the pro-corporate agenda of fascist rulers. Union Govt. had used Corona pandemic to impose inhuman lockdown and squeezed democratic space for protests. But this did not and could not stop the farmers who came marching to Delhi to save their land from corporate defying fascist rulers. Stopped from entering Delhi and refusing to be put in an open jail at Burari in Delhi, farmers staged over a year long sit-in at Delhi borders. They scripted history. They forced the Govt. to repeal the black laws. They united the peasantry and forced agrarian questions on the agenda. Such was the united resolve of farmers that they implemented all decisions of SKM even while SKM leaders showed vacillation. SKM enjoyed total loyalty of farmers especially in the North India which was epi-centre of the agitation. It was a reflection of the commitment to the farmers to their cause.

However, as SKM changed the form of its agitation by lifting sit-ins, SKM faced pulls and pressures owing to differences among farmer organizations till then held in check by over-riding

commitment of farmers to get the black laws repealed. Some fancied their chances in state assembly elections in Punjab and parted company from SKM to fight elections as peasant organizations. Some organizations left SKM to set up their parallel SKM christened as Apolitical. However, SKM continued its protests on the demands of peasantry even including more demands relating to agrarian distress and peasant problems in its agenda. SKM also faced pressures from some organizations from within to align with opposition parties' block I.N.D.I.A. Struggle against these fissiparous trends continued while farmers' impatience with Govt.'s ignoring agrarian distress grew especially in the regions where farmers' agitation had been strong.



***(16th February 2024 : Large Assembly at Sangrur
(Punjab) during Grameen Bandh)***

This time movement is centred around the demand for MSP which is related to farmers' incomes. PM Modi had promised to double the farmers' income by 2022 but that turned out to be a

mirage while farmers' incomes have remained stagnant or even declined. Rates of agricultural labour wages too have remained stagnant only increasing by 0.9% (inflation adjusted) over the period between 2014-15 and 2022-23. On the other hand, prices of other commodities have gone up. Besides cost of other essential social needs like health and education has gone up many fold. This has sharply increased burden on farmers whose children do not find proper or rather any employment in the country. It is natural that peasantry's patience is wearing thin with the resultant urge for intensification of the movement. However, while farmers especially those of Punjab strongly favour movement, they are also clear that only a united struggle under auspices of a platform like SKM can succeed. Any attempt to either hold back the movement or to hijack it for sectarian purpose will not succeed as it will find no support among large masses of farming community.



(26th January, 2024 : A view of Tractor Parade at Bihar's Sasaram)

The question of well being of peasants and agriculture should be the main content of the strategy of any pro-people development of the country. It is not just a question of well being of a large section of Indian people, which is any way important, but is also a question of the very path of development of the country. As per last census (2011) 68.9% of population of the country lives in villages and nearly 51.5% of the workforce is engaged in agriculture. Well being of the major part of the rural population, not directly engaged in agriculture is linked to the state of agriculture and peasantry. Disregard of the issues related to agrarian distress is therefore disregard of the path of the real development in the country. The imperialist dependent and corporate centric path of development is road to destitution of the large majority of the people and destruction of vast forces of production of the country. Path of development of India still runs through its villages and the course taken by ruling classes has resulted in stunting the growth potential of this immensely endowed country. Economic growth touted by the ruling classes in general and ruling party in particular, is based on ruining the vast majority of the people. Not only overwhelming section of peasantry but bulk of workers too is employed in unorganized sector, without assured minimum wages and other legal rights with absolutely no job security. With no significant increase in people's purchasing power, the myth of poverty reduction is built on the lack of any data and based solely on Govt. claims.

Agrarian distress in India rests on two pillars- first the large mass of rural people having no land and very irregular and low paid employment. MNREGS meant to address the rural distress of this vast section has only given some relief but lack of adequate work days, low payment and rampant corruption has meant that it has

been of only marginal utility. Land question remains a burning issue in large parts of the country with just 4% of landowners owning nearly a third of the agricultural land and over 5% owning two fifth of the agricultural land. With land reforms been practically taken off the agenda, ruling classes have no real solution to their problems except to dole out pittances. Gross unemployment and underemployment remains a burning problem of rural masses. With little scope of absorption into govt. jobs and industrial jobs whose generation is hampered by growth model followed by ruling class parties which is dependent on imperialism, land remains their only hope to economic, social and political empowerment. With no jobs available to this vast multitude, and deepening agrarian distress further bringing down wages and employment, they are stuck in rural areas in a dark well without land and rights.

The second important pillar is land owning peasantry especially small and medium peasants. Nearly 86% of these farmers own less than 2 hectares of land. This section is sizable in the villages and along with first section represent overwhelming majority of the rural population. This section has been hit hard by the Govt. policies and is frustrated by ruling class parties' false promises. They are made to toil on their fields but most of them cannot make two ends meet. In fact according to NSSO data, for a majority of them income from labour outweighs income from agricultural produce. This section prizes its land dear to their lives and it is this fear of losing land or control over land to corporate that had resulted in the massive protest against three Agri laws. This section was backbone of that movement though rich peasants had also participated and even a section of landlords too had supported that movement. This section is faced with increasing squeeze on the agriculture placed by ruling classes to help the corporate. On the one hand, while prices of

inputs have risen high, the prices of agricultural produce have not kept pace. Besides the agricultural practices being promoted in the name of so-called Green Revolution have spoiled the soil, poisoned the water and polluted the air increasing health problems in rural India making villagers in whole belts suffer from cancer and other serious ailments. Further their children have no real employment opportunities and their economic status and social life is in real serious jeopardy. They sell their only means of livelihood – land, take loans to send their children just to eke out a tolerable life. Every ruling class party flaunts promises but discard them after coming to power. And the cycle repeats itself in every election.

Serious unrest is brewing in this section over need to increase their incomes. For this legal guarantee of MSP has emerged a rallying war cry. It has two aspects. One aspect is MSP coverage to cover all areas and regions and all crops. Currently MSP is declared only for 23 crops and effective measures for procurement are in place are there only for three crops – wheat, paddy and sugar cane. The latter is covered under SAP (State Assured Prices). This coverage is also limited to some provinces and regions. Peasantry demands that all crops be brought under MSP regime and in all states and regions effective procurement machinery for these crops is put in place. Declaration of MSP has meaning when effective procurement machinery is there and every peasant can avail it. It must cover the whole peasantry. Govt. is dithering on this undoubtedly justified demand. If all crops are covered and effective machinery of procurement is put in place, India may not have to import oil seeds, pulses and the like. It will not only save foreign exchange but help farmers diversify production. But Govt. of India is totally deaf to this immensely sensible demand which will go a long way in helping the peasants

and improving the economy. This network of procurement machinery and power the peasant masses must exercise over the procurement to ensure that they are not fleeced. Further MSP should be declared for all the crops cultivated by peasants in the country. These twin aspects are crucial to ensuring coverage extended to all peasants throughout the country who sell their agricultural produce.

Second and a very important aspect is how this MSP is to be calculated. Govt. claims that it is giving MSP for at least some crops. But their calculation does not take into full account value of the labour invested by the peasants and risks run by them in the cultivation. Among peasants, demand for calculating MSP according to recommendation of Swaminathan Committee i.e., C2 plus 50% has become a rallying point.

Ramesh Chand Committee has further improved calculation of MSP taking some additional heads into account. These include post-harvest costs, interest on capital invested to be calculated at prevalent rates covering the full crop season and rent of land calculated on actual basis i.e., land rents prevalent in the area. Recommendation of Ramesh Chand Committee which had submitted its report in 2015, are gathering dust just like those of Swaminathan Committee which had submitted its final report in October 2006. But the Govt. is refusing to implement this formula. Swaminathan Committee had given its recommendation during UPA I Govt. but the then UPA Govt. had expressed its inability to implement this recommendation on MSP. In 2014 in the run up to Parliamentary polls, RSS-BJP and their then Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi had committed to implement Swaminathan Committee recommendation on MSP. But having come to power they went back on this promise and their Govt. said,

like their predecessor Congress led UPA Govt., that it was not possible to implement Swaminathan Committee recommendation on MSP.

The present struggle on MSP thereby covers two main aspects – coverage, both in terms of crops and all states & regions and prices of agricultural produce. Govt. declares MSP saying that they are already implementing Swaminathan formula but they refuse to let their claim be scrutinized. Before elections ruling class parties are forced to offer increase in procurement prices. Recently in Chhattisgarh there was some increase. But the ruling class parties refuse to commit that they would implement the recommendation. This refusal is their admission that they would not implement it. In fact ruling party is moving to implement “one nation one election” so that they can reduce the occasions when they have to woo the peasant masses, generally all the people. So they can implement their pro-corporate and anti-farmer (generally anti-people) policies for full five years without having to go to the people in different states. This is also one reason behind their clamour for this slogan “One Nation One Election.”

Farmers in the country demand legal guarantee covering these two points. They want the Govt. to enact a law for this guarantee. If the law is made they can approach Courts to enforce the law. The struggle will not be over but it will be on new ground to force the Govt. to implement its provisions. Hence, the legal guarantee has become a rallying slogan.

Govt. talks about diversification of crops but it is wholly insincere about it. Recently it made a proposal to guarantee purchase of five crops from the farmers who take to cultivation of these five crops – pulses and oil seeds. Govt.’s proposal was to make the farmers bonded to govt. just like indigo farmers of the colonial

period. The Govt. proposal only covered purchase from only those farmers and to the extent that they cultivated these crops abandoning what they used to cultivate earlier. The proposal did not even all the produce of these crops i.e. did not cover farmers and produce which was being harvested from earlier. The whole proposal was a mockery of the farmers who are agitating for their survival and long to lead a decent life.

The way to go about diversification of crops, specifically of growing pulses and oil seeds which India imports in large quantities, is not to make the farmers bonded but create conditions that the farmers take to cultivation of such crops. Govt. must declare MSP in accordance with demands of farmers (articulated by SKM) and guarantee full purchase at that rate of what is brought for sale by the farmers anywhere in India. Govt. should also provide inputs at prices affordable for farmers. Further Govt. should declare a bonus on purchase of these crops. This bonus should be calculated to cover the difference between what peasants get when they cultivate other crops. For this calculation, the main crop prevalent in an area may be taken as a reference for example paddy and wheat whichever is commonly cultivated in the particular state/region. Bonus to be given should be higher than this difference to act as incentive for the farmers. That these crops may have less investment in terms of inputs or labour, makes no difference because that will be covered in the calculation of MSP provided it is calculated scientifically and objectively taking all the factors into account. Govt. is focused on helping corporate in the name of “ease of doing business” but securing to farmers “ease of doing agriculture” does not cross their mind. In fact the model being pursued by them is to fleece peasants and help the corporate with rural elite being given a share to facilitate this fleecing.

Govt. is not taking such an obvious and sensible course. Rather Govt. wishes to put the economic burden of diversification on to the shoulders of farmers whose shoulders are anyway drawn down under the existing burden. Govt. wishes to save the foreign exchange not to help our peasants or develop agriculture but to shower more benefits on the corporate.

Indian farmers today are at the forefront of the struggle which farmers in many countries are waging to save their livelihood and ward off the additional burdens that the Govts. are seeking to place on their shoulders. Farmers in many countries are taking to march on their tractors and trolleys and stay put at city centres or at highways to make their demands heard. Farmers in Europe are in ferment though their number as proportion of the population is much smaller as compared to our country as these are developed capitalist countries. Still farmers are being subjected to increasing burdens. Issues being raised by them relate to increasing cost of input like increasing prices of diesel and cheaper imports from Ukraine which European countries are permitting / encouraging as part of the strategic choice of the rulers of these countries. But the burden of this choice is being thrown onto farmers. For their refusal to take on this burden their struggle is being branded as pro-Russia and the like. But the Govts. are refusing to take upon themselves this burden. In fact, big capitalists of these countries wish to benefit from lower prices of food grains to increase their profits. Another important point raised by them relates to increasing pressure from environmental protection. Here also, Govts. should taken this burden and not transfer it to the farmers. Protection of environment is absolutely necessary but it should be task of whole society especially the corporate who corner most of the profits. By making corporate accountable is actually society taking the burden

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