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Privatisation of Banks — Related Questions

The Bill to amend Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act of 1970 and 1980 is scheduled to be placed at the current session of Parliament by the BJP-led NDA government. In a recent development, a Trinamul Congress spokesman told the press that the Bill would not be moved during this session. This is said to be based on indication or assurance from the government. The Bill in question however finds place in the list of new Bills to be placed in this session, in a bulletin, circulated to members of Parliament. On the floor of Parliament, pressed by opposition, the government spokesman Mr. Mahajan said that all that he had to say, was that the government had no plans to privatise banks.

The Bill, however, envisages reduction of government's stake in the equities of 26 public sector banks from the present 51 per cent to 33 per cent, implementing the recommendation of the second Narasingham Committee, contained in its report of 1998. The Bank employees at the call of UFBU (United Forum of Bank Unions) observed one day's strike in protest of this move on 15 November. The leadership declared that later on, the strike would be continuous if the government did not retrace its step.

Sensing opposition within Parliament and employees' agitation outside, the government assured that the Bill would be referred to Select Committee for 'threadbare' and wider discussions and for changes, if necessary. It has been reported in the press on 24 November that the government may send the Bill to a Parliamentary Committee before tabling it in Parliament.

Whatever may be the case, the employees must be firm in their stand to force the government to withdraw the Bill and for this be prepared to go in for indefinite strike. They must, however, link up the issues like the VRS, closure of banks, reduction in service age etc., hanging as swords

over their heads, or already under implementation. For this they require broadest possible unity, working people's cooperation and principled stand of leadership.

Game of parliamentary politics

The apparent democratic gesture of the government to wait for further discussions with parliamentary opposition to reach a consensus either through a committee or by bilateral talks does not in any way detract from the real motive. A news leaked out in the press is revealing. It is about a clause that was in the Bill, surely discussed and approved by the cabinet and not 'error' of a stenographer. The clause was explicit that after the government equity reduction to 33%, the public sector banks could very well relapse to the pre-nationalisation Banking Companies Act of 1956 when those were private companies. Hastily deleted though, for political reason, this clause speaks volumes about the government's mind.

It is well to remember that manipulation and manoeuvring are the usual techniques in the bourgeois parliamentary politics. Referring a

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US Presidential Election 'Heaven of Democracy' Turns Hell

The US presidential election has become a regular feature in the dailies for sometime. Usually an election is held and the results are known within a few days. But it cannot be so for the USA, the leader of the 'free world' — the world of imperialism-capitalism. It is still not known who is the victor, Mr. Al Gore, present Vice-President who is the Democratic candidate or Mr. George W. Bush, son of a former President, the Republican candidate. The matter is now at the Federal Court. Anyway, in the election in what was once Lincoln's land, the 'New World' at its inception, the once upheld celebrated dictum that the government is "of the people, for the people, by the people" has become a sad memory. About 50 per cent of Americans preferred holidaying at the election time. They are intelligent enough to know that whoever wins matters little. This election proves once more, in bourgeois democracy today 'people' or 'people's interest' are the most deceptive words. It is for the rich, of the rich and by the rich. And the means and methods used scorn all sense of values, morals and principles. Mr. Eisenhower, a former President of America commented in his farewell speech before retiring from Presidency that America long back had ceased to be a civil society, and it is the military-industrial-bureaucratic complex that reigns supreme. The present election, long after that statement of truth proves that in today's bourgeois democracies, more so in the so-called 'biggest' like India the 'greatest' as the USA no trace of 'democracy' is to be found because of the same reason. The dog-eats-dog presidential election in America found the country sharply divided between the titans of monopoly money powers. Millions of dollars flew; no holds barred manipulations, rigging, falsification, intimidation, bribery, and 'free-for-all' corruptions of worst variety mark this election in the highest post in American government.

This is quite in fitness with the standard set by Clinton, impeached by the Senate on the charge of adultery and now awaiting retirement on January 20, of the next year.

The monopolists, sharply divided, were in a mad scramble to grab the highest post in order to fashion the policies of the government to the favour of the respective groups. The gloomy picture in the world capitalist market is like a

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Protest Demonstration against missile attack on Palestinians by the US backed Israel, before the USIS, Calcutta on 21 November last. An effigy representing Israeli rulers is being burnt. (News on page 7)

Brutal attacks by the PWG on SUCI in Orissa

The present Malkangiri district was originally a subdivision of the undivided Koraput district of Orissa. In 1992, it split out of Koraput to form a separate district. Activities of our party, the SUCI, in Malkangiri were initiated in the first half of the 80s. Led by Comrade Sadashiva Das, mass activities of our party started in the Malkangiri area around 1990 and within just 5/6 years, our party activities expanded, in the blocks of Kalimela, Padia, Malkangiri and Korkunda. Our party single-handedly championed the cause of the common people, particularly the poor tribal people who constitute the overwhelming majority of the district population. These tribal people, subjected to ruthless capitalist exploitation abetted by the local vested interests, are extremely poor and backward. Our party organised series of mass movements on the burning issues in the lives of the poor people and the mass support of the party grew extensively within a short period. Our party contested the poll for Malkangiri Assembly constituency in 1995 and did well, the party candidate polling several thousand votes. After this election, the party's mass influence expanded further, particularly in the Kalimela and Padia blocks.

Malkangiri district is bordered by Andhra Pradesh in the south and areas of Madhya Pradesh, now Chattisgarh, on the western side. The district is widely covered by dense forest and hills and is a part of the 'Dandakaranya' zone extending from AP to a portion of Maharashtra including large areas of Orissa and Chattisgarh of undivided MP.

Activities of the CPI(ML)-People's War, commonly known as People's War Group (PWG) have been concentrated in the bordering districts of AP and undivided MP for the last 12/14 years. When the state government of AP, and subsequently that of undivided MP banned PWG activities, armed PWG people started infiltrating the southern districts of Orissa including Malkangiri. They developed some hideouts in forest and hills.

It is to be noted that the PWG has no ideology worth the name, does not believe in ideological struggle and seeks to secure the allegiance of the people through coercion and torture. Brute force is the only logic employed by it. PWG militants are armed with modern, sophisticated, costly weapons. They operate divided into 'Dalams', organised armed gangs of hooligans.

In areas of Malkangiri district, the PWG, with hideouts in jungles have been harassing and torturing the common people of tribal villages. For the past few years, they have sought to create a reign of terror in parts of the district by threatening and even assaulting the common people severely if they do not concede their unjust and forcible demands. They compel the villagers at gun point, to contribute to them, whenever demanded, both in cash and kind. They snatched away cattle, goat, hen, etc., of the tribal people at will. In the name of the so-called 'praja court', they impose fine on common people and even assault them brutally if they dare not to oblige them. They threaten the innocent villagers with dire consequences if they report their criminal activities to the police or elsewhere. On the other hand, the PWG vehemently opposes whatever developmental work is undertaken in the district

like construction of roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, etc., as it views these to be hindrances to its criminal 'guerrilla' activities.

As our party grew in strength in the Malkangiri district through championing the people's cause and organising movements on the burning problems in their lives, many common villagers dared not to concede the unjust PWG demands as they had been forced to do in the past. Thus arose the contradiction between our party, the SUCI and the PWG. Further, the PWG took exception to the demands of our party for developmental projects in the district. The background for PWG hostility directed against our party was thus created. Hostility developed further as villagers who were harassed, tortured, fined or assaulted by the PWG Dalams or Sanghams (mass organisation bodies) came to our party workers for protection and shelter. Our party activists condemned the PWG misdeeds and encouraged the people to resist. The situation was tense and a confrontation developing when the PWG leader of the Kalimela Dalam, Naganna, sent a message to comrade Sadashiva Das, the SUCI district party in-charge, in July 1998 suggesting a discussion. Comrade Das, along with 15 other comrades, met Naganna in a jungle area in Tantiguda village in Kalimela block and had a dialogue with him. Both the sides agreed to resolve any difference, dispute or controversy through discussion avoiding hostility.

But the situation worsened as the PWG started launching attacks on our party. The first incident took place at midnight on 1st November 1998 when armed PWG men raided our party office in Tantiguda village, broke open the door, ransacked and looted the office and attacked the party activists sleeping inside. They chained 8 of our activists and forcibly carried them inside jungle, severely beat them for an hour with lathis, chains, boots and gun-butts and left them there with severe injuries, bleeding and senseless. The PWG also took away the party documents and money collected for struggle fund for a block level demonstration by our party scheduled for the next day.

Three months after this incident, armed PWG men attacked two SUCI activists in the same village on 4 February, 1999.

Within just three days, at dead of night on the 7th February, armed PWG men attacked Comrade Biswanath Madhi and his family members in the Kandaguda village of Padia block. They opened fire indiscriminately, severely injuring Comrade Madhi, his wife, elder son and a daughter. Suffering from bullet injuries, their lives could be saved only after prolonged treatment at the Berhampore and Cuttack hospitals.

Following this incident, the PWG started a slander campaign against Comrade Madhi, distributing a leaflet that openly declared, he would be "taught a lesson".

At dead of night on the 7th June 2000, a PWG armed group led by Ramanna, who was now said to be heading the Kalimela Dalam, again attacked Comrade Madhi's house and set fire to it. Comrade Madhi escaped as he was not in the house but his family members were brutally beaten up and injured. All their household belongings were either looted or completely destroyed.

Eventually, on 12 October last, Comrade

Biswanath Madhi was again attacked by 25/30 armed PWG men and Sangham activists led by Ramanna and dastardly murdered him. On that day, at about 8.30 in the morning, Comrade Madhi and his family members were working in the field when they were attacked. Comrade Madhi and his family members fought back heroically. He and his elder son Rama snatched away a gun from a PWG man but before they could fight back, another PWG man struck a heavy blow on Comrade Madhi's head from behind. Comrade Madhi fell down on the ground and Ramanna fired upon him at point blank range and killed him. Rama was also shot at, but he ran away and escaped. Other family members were beaten up mercilessly and threatened with dire consequences if they reported the incident to the police and continued to be in the SUCI. Comrade Biswanath Madhi joined our party, the SUCI, in 1991 and was actively and intimately associated with the party work till his last breath. Moving from village to village, he enthused and organised poor people under the banner of the SUCI. Enthused by him, his family members too became staunch supporters of the party. Despite the repeated murderous attacks, loss of life and property, they remain with the party. Comrade Madhi, in life as well as in death, and his family have set a glorious example worthy of emulation.

Following ghastly murder of Comrade Madhi, party organised the protest dharna in front of Malkangiri Collectorate on 14th October. A protest demonstration was held on the 19th and a *rasta roko* on the 20th at Malkangiri. In the face of the terror campaign by the PWG, these protests symbolise people's strong condemnation of the gruesome murder.

The attacks on the SUCI culminating in Comrade Madhi's murder are not isolated incidents. The PWG calls itself communist, but its people's war is in reality directed against the people, against the SUCI, the genuine revolutionary party of the people. Its activities are nothing but organised gangsterism of criminals engaged in extortion, loot and murder. The PWG is acting like an instrument in the hands of the business and other vested interest circles of the locality, of the bourgeois parties and even the police and administration of the region which are alarmed at the rapid growth of the SUCI and seek to destroy it in unison, making use of the PWG. This is borne out by many facts. Even after repeated appeals to the police and the administration and submissions made to the DG police, Orissa, they have not taken any steps against the PWG. The BJP-BJD government's Chief Minister of Orissa refused to meet an SUCI deputation on the issue. The newspaper Pragati-badi reported in its issue dated 15.10.2000 that PWG men used to stay and dine with the police in a local police camp. It is also remarkable that the PWG has no enmity with the bourgeois parties like the Congress, BJP or BJD in Malkangiri region, rather it coexists peacefully with them.

Their conspiracy and machinations will not succeed. The supreme sacrifice of Comrade Biswanath Madhi will not go in vain. Wide sections of the people have already condemned the barbarous attacks on the SUCI culminating in the murder of Comrade Madhi.

Broadest Possible Unity and Protracted Movement Needed to Resist Privatisation of Banks

(Contd. from page 1)

contentious issue to a committee or commission, has been the usual practice since the days of imperialist rule. It helps to shelve an issue, cool down the heat, and dampen public agitation. The time bought is used to ensure mutual understanding between the ruling party and the parties in opposition in Parliament. The acrobatics and fire works on the floor of Parliament are resolved into changes which are cosmetic in nature, not affecting the essence in any way. This is more certain when a consensus has really been at work. The BJP that leads the coalition government knows it perfectly well. It knows that privatisation is an integral part of the policy of globalisation that was the cornerstone of the New Economic Policy adopted by the Congress government in 1991. And the UF Government, supported from within the cabinet by the CPI and outside by the CPI(M), the Congress and others continued this policy and the constituents and supporters of that UF government still stand committed to this policy.

Government's assurances are fit for outright rejection

The government has come out with very many assurances to mollify the agitating employees and the people. The so-called assurances contain disinformation and utter falsehood to hoodwink the people. For example, it says that the 'public sector' banks will continue to remain so, not changing their character in any way, even though 67 p.c. of their equities go to private hands or investors. Any amount of assurances that the voting right would be restricted or that the chairman and Board Directors would be appointed by the government can in no way be the guarantee against privatisation. Anybody can understand this.

The government's 'argument' about its power to appoint the Chairman and the Board of Directors, would assure nobody. The knowledgeable know who are the persons the government appoints as chairman and members of Board of Directors in banks. They also know who are the persons determining the policies and measures of this government on economic and financial matters. They are either the leading lights or trusted representatives of chambers of commerce or retired bureaucrats and chief executive officers of big industrial houses who uphold the interests of monopoly capital. And it is also a stark reality that the government stands for privatisation of banks in the name of reforms. The government's further assurance of flexibility and autonomy of these boards actually means that there would be no difference with private companies. The number of such members increasing will mean absolute sway of these trusted persons of monopoly houses. They will determine the policies and steps. Will there be any difference from private companies?

Omission Provision — its implication

Nothing has been heard from the leaders of established bank unions (UFBU) about a dangerous provision in the Bill. The Bill allows setting up of a financial restructuring authority for

weak and potentially weak banks. Its dangerous implication, must, by now, be known to the employees, particularly of those banks marked 'weak' or likely to be marked so. The RBI appointed Verma Committee made this prescription and the UFBU leadership accepted it though it made a show of protest.

Earlier the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) had advised the government to wind up three banks — the United Commercial Bank (UCO), United Bank of India (UBI) and Indian Bank. There was public protest at that time and even

pay-scales decided by the 7th bipartite agreement immediately with others but subsequently due to pressure from below. Still they have not received the arrear amounts due to rise in pay. The employees are under pressure to accept restructuring, proposed by Verma Committee, the motive of which does not remain concealed. It means 25% reduction in staff and wage freeze for five years and reduction in pay-scale, if that is not accepted by the employees. The established bank union leadership accepted all these after making a show of verbal protest. There is no doubt that, in the name of financial restructuring, 25% staff will be retrenched from the weak and potentially weak banks, to be extended to all the 26 banks. The SBI, though excluded from the immediate plan of privatisation, has declared closure of 180 branches, depriving common people of banking service as also increasing the number of surplus staff.

History of privatisation in banks — a brief account.

We remind our readers that close on the heels of declaration of the New Economic Policy, the main plank of which was acceptance of the policy of globalisation-liberalisation-privatisation by the Congress government, the Narasingham Committee Report was first set up. The committee was appointed by the said government. The same committee was later reappointed by the UF government. It was, as we have said earlier, supported from within the cabinet by the CPI and by the CPI(M), Congress from outside.

In the first set of recommendation was the clause enjoining Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) determined by RBI to be maintained by the banks in the name of upgrading the accounting standard of Indian banks to be on a par with global standard. The clause imposes financial compulsion to maintain a ratio of liquid capital, as determined by the RBI against advances.

It did not speak a single word regarding the strengthening of laws for quick recovery of bank loans piled up as NPA.

With the NPA mounting up and increasing provision for that in the balance-sheet, the banks were forced to go to market to secure financial resources to maintain CAR. This policy of privatisation by backdoor was set in motion. Besides, the first set of recommendation prescribed entry of private banks, national and foreign, on the plea of technical efficiency. As a result 10 such banks made their entry for which the Narasingham Committee, while making its second set of recommendations in 1998, praised highly the cooperative attitude of established bank union leaderships.

In the second set of recommendations of this committee came the proposal for reduction of government holding in shares of these banks from 51 p.c. to 33 p.c. The present Bill seeks to formalise this prescription on the pretext of raising money to meet the galloping fiscal deficits. So, it can be expected that after a lapse of time, there would be no difficulty in reaching a consensus on the issue between all these parties, ruling and in

UTUC-Lenin Sarani Condemns Bank Privatisation

Comrade Tapas Dutta, General Secretary, UTUC-Lenin Sarani, while strongly condemning the government move for privatisation of banks issued the following statement to the press on 22.11.2000 :

We reiterate our consistent opposition to the move for privatisation of banks in public sector. It should be known to all that the BJP led NDA government has brought the amendment bill of existing Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer) Act of 1970 and 1980 before the current session of Parliament. The obvious intension is to formalise the recommendation of the Narasingham Committee (second set) report of 1998 for reduction of government's equity participation in these banks from 51% to 33%. The process of privatisation of banks started long before without opposition from established leadership. It has also been leaked out in the press that the Bill had a clause allowing the banks in the post-government equity reduction to relapse in the pre-nationalisation Companies Act 1956 when banks were private companies. Hastily deleted though, for political reasons, it speaks volume of the government's real intention.

In the above perspective, all the assurances given by whichever side cannot save banks with huge public money and the employees threatened with loss of service on a massive scale from the tentacles of the policy of globalisation of which privatisation is an integral part. While, therefore, we wholeheartedly support the struggle of bank employees and progressive section of people, we warn them at the same time to be alert against any move to dilute it by those who are adherents of globalisation."

chambers of commerce were divided. It was challenged by the UCO's top executive by exposing that some among those prescribing this were themselves guilty as defaulters regarding repayment of banks' legal dues and thus contributors to NPAs that now stand at the staggering figure of more than one lakh crore of rupees (inclusive of interests accrued). Later, RBI appointed Verma Committee marked these three banks as 'weak' and gave a clear hint about six other banks being potentially weak. The employees of the three 'weak' banks had the shocking experience of not receiving the rise in

(Contd. on page 3)

All India Save Education Committee

Save Education Seminar in Bangalore

The Karnataka State Organising Committee of the All India Save Education Committee, organised a SAVE EDUCATION SEMINAR at UVCE Alumni Hall, Bangalore on 18 November last. The Seminar was organised to shape up public opinion centring round the ill effects of education policies being pursued in the country.

Sri H.S. Doreswamy, in his presidential address regretted that education which was the product of struggle by men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar had been reduced to a commodity in the present day. Commoditisation of education was keeping the people out of the orbit of education. Education was to be funded by the Government and education policies had to be framed by the people and not by a select group of people handpicked by the government. He expressed his concern over the distortion of history that was being resorted to, and could poison the young minds. He recalled the contribution of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who had fought for the introduction of science, logic and maths instead of Sanskrit in colleges. Education should be man making process and the recent moves of the government need to be debated across the country, he said.

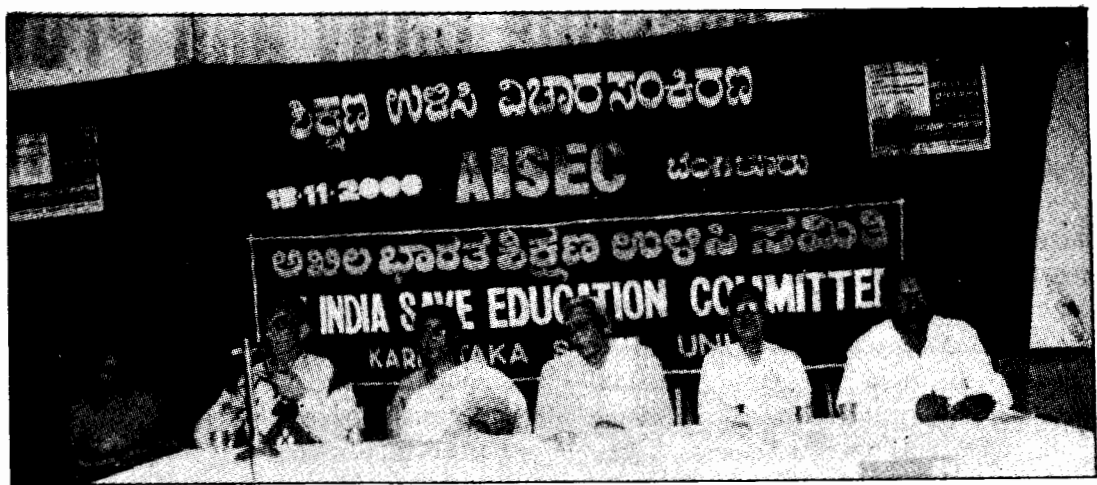
Prof. M.A. Sethu Rao opined that secularism should be the basis of a scientific education. He criticised the attempt of the RSS-BJP combine to introduce courses in Astrology and Palmistry at the University level. He stressed the need for developing a scientific temper, reasoning mind through education.

Comrade K. Uma, Convenor of the Karnataka State Unit, gave a brief background of the Save Education movement since 1986. She called upon the people to raise a united voice against the NCERT recommendations to make maths and science optional, and limit language learning for purpose of communication.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof. G.K. Govinda

Rally by AP Save Education Committee

A large number of academicians, intellectuals, teachers and students rallied against commercialization and communalization of education on 10 November last in Hyderabad. The rally was organized by the Save Education Committee as part of its all India movement against these. Throughout the rally which started from Baghlingampally Park and finally reached Indira park, slogans were shouted against commercialization and communalization of education, removal of social sciences from the curriculum, as well as against contract system of appointing lecturers and education volunteers system. The participants of the rally demanded both the central and state governments to allot 10% and 30% of its budgets for education respectively. Prof. G. Haragopal, Prof. K. Chakradhara Rao, Secretary and Vice President of Save Education Committee, Andhra Pradesh and the leaders of teacher organizations led the rally.



Save Education Seminar in Bangalore on November 18.

(Above) Prominent educationists and organisers of All India Save Education Committee on the dais
(Below) A section of the gathering at the seminar

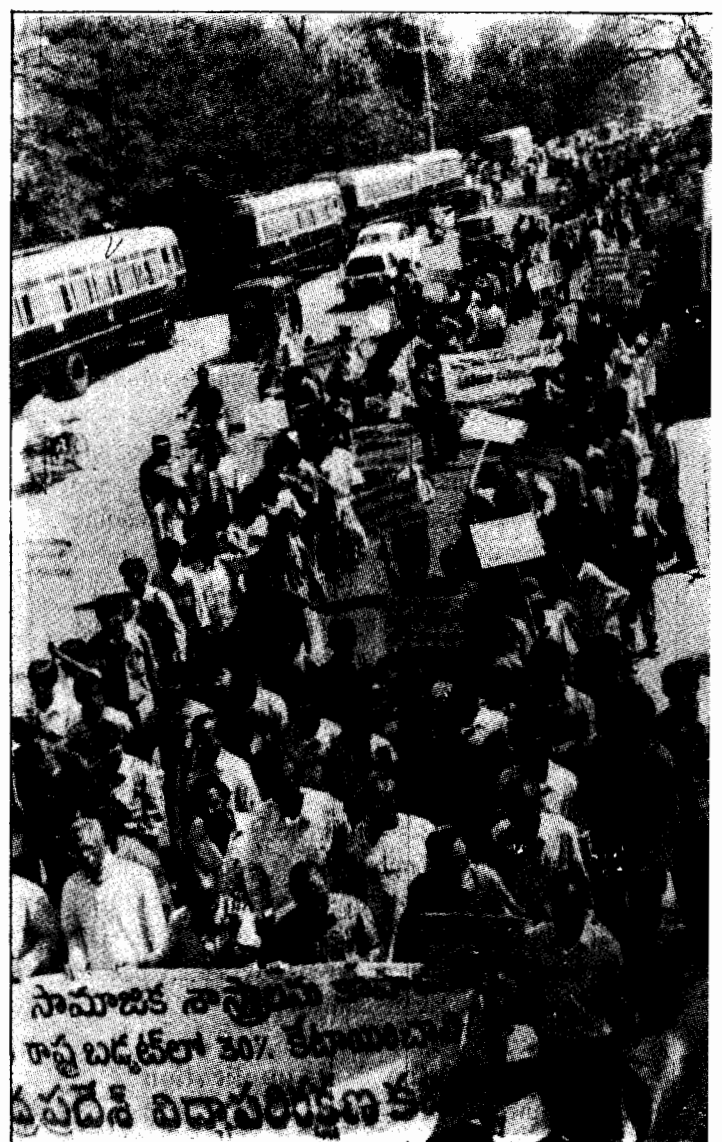
Rao asserted that religion should be kept out of education.

Sri Ramzan Darga said that the legacy of 5,000 years of history in India belongs to the people and it has a pluralist content. Values in education should come from the struggle of great men in history.

Comrade Venugopal, member, All India Save Education Committee briefed the gathering about the massive dharna and All India Save Education Convention on 24, 25 November 2000 in Delhi, against the commoditisation and communalisation of education.

After the rally a massive Dharna was held at Indira Park. The Dharna was presided over by Prof. G. Hara Gopal. Speaking on the occasion he said the commercialization and communalization of education had its disastrous effects on society. The commercialization of not only higher education but also primary education is a phenomenon which can be found no where in the world except in India. He told that the Save Education Committee has unleashed a historic movement to save our education system. He appealed to the teachers and students to join in the movement in the interest of posterity.

Prof. Chakradhara Rao came down heavily on the state government for commercializing the University education in the name of financial crunch. Sri Narayana Veny of Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation (APTF-257) strongly criticised the successive governments both at the Centre and in the state for their criminal negligence towards school education.



A view of the rally organised by AP Save Education Committee in Hyderabad on 10 November, 2000

November Revolution Day Observed in Bangalore

The Bangalore District Committee of the SUCI organised the 83rd anniversary of the great November revolution at Gandhi Sahitya Sangha at Malleswaram, Bangalore on 14 November, 2000.

Addressing as the main speaker on the occasion Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, member, Central Committee, SUCI, discussed elaborately on the importance of and lessons to be taken from the great November revolution led by the great leader of the proletariat, Lenin. He said: November revolution is very much relevant to India today which is reeling under poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic problems. Marxism-Leninism is a science, which throws light on the development of human society

and its growth universally applicable though no revolution can be copied.

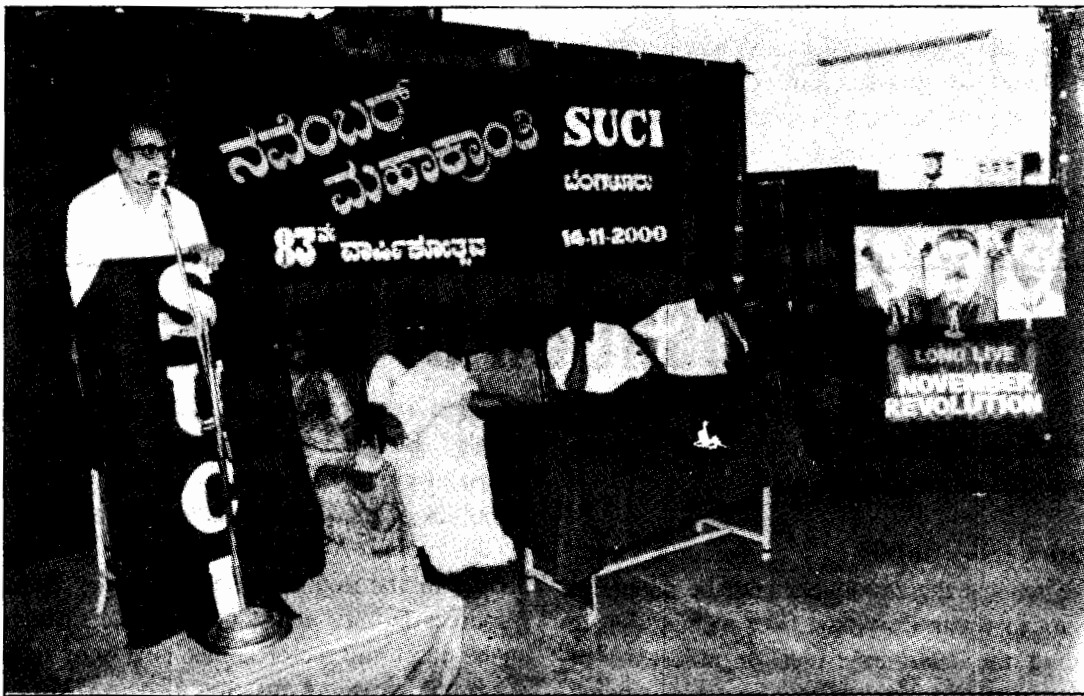
Coming down heavily on Marxism baiters he continued: Marxism-Leninism is a living ideology and not a dogma, developed, elaborated and enriched by Stalin, Mao Zedong and Shibdas Ghosh, founder of SUCI. The setback in some of the erstwhile socialist countries is only a temporary phenomenon and it has again proved Marxism right, which emphasised the need to continue class struggle even in socialism. Since the counter-revolutionary renegade clique Khrshchevites and Brezhnevites usurped power in the post-Stalin period and tread a revisionist line which is alien to Marxism-Leninism, socialist

state collapsed.

In this era of imperialism and proletarian revolution with imperialism growing more blood thirsty for market, wars are breaking out, poor countries are more pauperised, economic crisis is intensifying and the conditions objectively ripe for revolution. It only requires strengthening of party and people's revolutionary organisation.

He called upon the working class of India to take pledge on this great occasion to dedicate themselves more for the cause of Indian revolution.

Comrade Uma, member, Karnataka State Committee, SUCI, presided over the programme.



(Above) Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, member, Central Committee of SUCI addressing the November Revolution Day Rally in Bangalore on November 14 last. (Below) A section of the gathering



Protest demonstration by SUCI activists against Busfare hike on November 10, 2000 in Calcutta

November Day at Sagar, MP

Under the auspices of the Sagar District Organising Committee of the SUCI the Great November Revolution Day was observed on 17th November last at the Chetna Sanchayan Kendra (Jadav Colony).

Comrade Ramavatar Sharma, District Secretary, paid floral tribute to the portrait of Lenin, the architect of November Revolution and analysed the importance of the November Revolution. He appealed to the audience to take lesson from the Great November Revolution for applying the same in the anti-capitalist revolutionary movement in our country as taught by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the great leader of the proletariat.

Protest Meeting Against US-backed Israeli Attack on Palestinians

A large number of people assembled today, 27 November in a meeting at Students' Hall, Calcutta under the auspices of the West Bengal State Committee of the AIAIF to protest against the latest Israeli attack on Palestinian people. Dr. Bishnu Mukherjee, Vice-President of the Committee, and a noted physician, presided. Prof. Gouri Shankar Ghatak, Secretary of the Committee, placed a resolution in the meeting, condemning the Israeli genocide. It called upon the Government of India to sever diplomatic ties with Israeli state. It pledged its support to the cause for which the Palestinian people are fighting over decades and also called people to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle all over India.

Sri Gopal Kundu, Vice-President of the Committee, main speaker of the meeting, analyzed imperialist design through which Israel was foisted upon Palestine and the long battle of the Palestinians to realize their demand for a sovereign state in their own fatherland, freeing it from illegal Israeli occupation.

Dr. B. Mukherjee traced the history of creation of the Israeli state and condemned the BJP-led Indian Government's silence on the genocide, inspired perhaps by its communal bias against the religion of the majority Palestine people.

US Design Against Columbia

Report Prepared by Mid-Hudson National People's Campaign

Is the U.S. government about to create "another Vietnam" in Colombia, the Latin American country of 40 million inhabitants where a people's war has been raging for decades?

This was the topic addressed at the Nov. 5 public meeting in Highland, N.Y., by journalist, CUNY professor, and International Action Center activist Andy McNerney. His answer, in essence: **it certainly seems headed in that direction, despite disclaimers from Washington.**

"In 1960, there were less than 1,000 U.S. military 'advisors' in Vietnam," he began, noting that the multi-millions Washington was spending to support the corrupt South Vietnamese government at the time was small change compared to the multi-billions budgeted in later years. And of course, the Pentagon was saying that the "advisors" were to be kept out of combat. Within five years the U.S. was sinking into the quagmire of a widespread protracted war.

"The American people didn't know anything about Vietnam in 1960, even though there were warning signs," McNerney added. These same warning signs are showing up once again 40 years later in Colombia."

"U.S. military aid skyrocketed to \$90 million in 1998. A year later it increased to \$300 million. This year Congress approved \$1.3 billion. Colombia is now the Pentagon's third largest recipient of free military aid."

The 200 U.S. military 'advisors' in counter-insurgency war already sent to Colombia will be bolstered by 200-300 more, according to the latest Clinton administration plans. The latest allocation will include sending 60 combat helicopters to Colombia.

"Washington claims that all of this is part of a war on drugs, McNerney scoffed. "This is just a sham—a cover for a counter-insurgency war, as in Vietnam."

McNerney explained that the U.S. is getting deeply involved now in the decades-long guerrilla struggle waged by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) because "the success of the people's struggle has reached the point where there is a serious contest for state power." The territory of Colombia is larger than the combined area of France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium—and the rebel forces occupy almost half of it. As in Vietnam, if the U.S. "loses" Colombia it fears a domino effect might result in "losing" other countries it presently dominates in Latin America.

To this end, the U.S. and the Colombian government of President Andres Pastrana have recently cooked up a major counter-insurgency scheme (backed by a projected \$7.5 billion budget) called "Plan Colombia," the purpose of which is the eventual defeat of the guerrilla forces although it is supposedly aimed at Colombia's export of drugs. Speaking of the drug war, McNerney noted that the U.S. is the largest importer of drugs in the world and that "if Washington really wanted to end the drug problem in America it would take these billions and invest them at home in drug rehabilitation programs, in job training and job creation, and in vast improvements in educational services. Investing

this money in the brutal Colombian army to fight the FARC and ELN won't have any impact on America's dependence on Colombian drugs."

McNerney characterized as propaganda the notion that there is a "three-sided war going on in Colombia" composed of (1) the government and its armed forces, (2) the right-wing paramilitary armies and (3) the revolutionary forces. He said the paramilitaries—which he termed "death squads" responsible for the bulk of killings in Colombia—worked in collaboration with the armed forces, often doing its dirty work.

There are only two sides in the conflict, McNerney said, "the government, which is backed by the wealthy ruling class and the death squads, and the people's forces" composed of military and civilian components struggling to create a democratic Colombia free from control by the oligarchy, the drug lords, the military elite, global corporations and imperialism.

The speaker also disputed the "blame-both-sides" argument that the struggle is being waged between the government and the rebel forces with the masses of people squeezed between them. "Colombia is a nation of heroes, not of innocent people caught in the middle," he said, noting the activism of the country's strong labor movement and other insurgent forces fighting against International Monetary Fund demands for belt-tightening by the poor and privatization of national resources.

McNerney ended his nearly two-hour talk and Q&A with an appeal to progressive forces in the United States "to become active in the struggle against expanding U.S. intervention in Colombia." He urged antiwar forces participating in the demonstration against the School of the Americas in Ft. Benning, Ga., this month to raise the question of Colombia "because it's probably had more officers trained at the SOA than any other Latin country." He also noted that the International Action Center has just formed a U.S. Out of Colombia Committee that planned to organize a nationwide movement to oppose U. S. intervention plans. *(Internet)*

Privatisation of Banks

(Contd. from page 3)

parliamentary opposition, after certain changes which would be inconsequential.

Private versus public

We request the employees and the people at large not to waste their time over a sham debate regarding the relative virtues or otherwise of private and public sector managements as is being raised in the media and by leaderships of some political parties and trade unions. The present economic crisis, including ill health of banks is being sought to be explained as the evil effects of pursuing wrong policy of 'mixed economy' (public as well as private sectors) of Nehruvian model.

We have repeatedly explained earlier that within the framework of capitalist economy, 'public' or 'private' are only the difference in forms, altering in no way the relation of production, motive force of production. The real objective remains the same which is nothing other than development of capitalism and consolidation of capitalist rule. A particular form suits a particular purpose at a definite stage of capitalist development or is due to difference in the condition of capitalist economy. In the early phase of strengthening capitalist industrial base and infrastructure after the Indian bourgeoisie came into state power, 'nationalisation' of industry was adopted as a means to strengthen the capitalist base, using people's money, working on people's sentiment. It is the capitalists, the monopolists, the rural bourgeoisie who actually gained at the expense of untold miseries and destitution of common people. The people, even today, remain denied of the basic minimum amenities of civilized life — food, shelter, drinking water, education and medicare.

That is why our party has always shown to the people that the measure of 'nationalisation' of banks has consolidated the capitalist rule over the years. Whatever benefits accrued to the people have been very little or marginal in comparison with those of the monopolists.

The banks, since being nationalised, mopped

up huge resources from small savings of the people. Before nationalisation, there were few thousand crores of rupees as aggregate financial resources of banks which have now reached Rs. 8 lakh crore. And the contribution of ordinary people in the augmentation of banks' financial resources is very high, about 80 p.c., while that of the corporate sector is just 11 p.c. or so.

By the de-nationalisation of banks, the ruling class and their government are now going to do away with even the marginal benefits to the people, like security to small savings, getting loans from the banks, etc. The monopoly houses who defrauded the people through their private banks before nationalisation and subsequently extracted the maximum benefits from the nationalised banks, now want the banks to be handed back to them so that they can swindle on a larger scale. And the party or parties in government comply with their demands because they have come to governmental power through the help and support of the monopolists and remain in power so long as they satisfy the monopolists.

Appeal

We appeal to the bank employees and the working people in general to bear in mind that 'nationalisation' of banks brought 13 lakh bank employees in one battle-line against the government face to face. The coercive instruments of capitalist rule had also been there when the management of the banks was private, concealed behind the individual bank owners. The employees were set against one another to obstruct their unity by the bankers i.e. monopoly houses with the government backing them up.

So, their protest against privatisation is to guard and protect their unity against the onslaughts coming down heavily on them backed by the government. The protest cannot be effective unless based on broadest possible unity and a protracted movement till the onslaughts are resisted. We urge them to be steadfast in determination.

Citizens' Convention in Calcutta to Resist Flood and Drought

A citizens' convention was held in Calcutta on 19th November last to resist erosion, flood and drought that bring annual disaster in the state — attended by a few thousand people of Calcutta and those districts where such calamities wreak havoc in the life of the people. The Convention was held at the University Institute Hall in Calcutta. Prominent scientists, well known river experts and engineers and many intellectuals participated in this convention, which was organised under the auspices of the *Banya-Bhangan Protirodh Committee* of Murshidabad, *Uttar Chabbis Pargana Banya O Nadi Bhagan Protirodh Committee*, *Khara Protirodh Committee* of Purulia and Bankura, *Breakthrough Science Society* and *Krishak O Khet Majoor Sangathan*.

The convention was held in a solemn and disciplined manner. Many people participating in the Convention had lost their dear and near ones besides all their personal belongings including their shelters. But they came here with a firm determination to seek solution to this annual problem of flood, erosion and drought. *The Hindustan Times* dated November 20, last, reported about this Convention thus: "There was pin-drop silence at the University Institute Hall this afternoon. The thousands who had gathered there fought back tears as a few among them recounted their sad tales."

The Convention was presided over by Dr Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, the former Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University and prominent scientist. The Convention started with a resolution expressing profound grief at the demise of thousands of people in the last devastating flood, and silence for one minute was observed in memory of them.

Comrade Swapan Ghosal, a leading organiser of Murshidabad moved a resolution demanding effective steps to control flood and erosion of soil. Comrade Shankar Ghosh, the Vice President of *Uttar Chabbis Pargana Banya O Nadi Bhangan Protirodh Committee* spoke in support of the resolution.

The resolution proposes the formation of a Committee for organising public opinion, placing charter of demands to the government and initiating movement to force the government to concede to these demands in a democratic process. Drawing up of a master plan to control flood and drought has also been proposed in the resolution.

Comrade Pranati Bhattacharya, Secretary, *Purulia Zilla Khara Protirodh Committee* moved the resolution demanding steps to resist drought, and Comrade Bidyut Sheet, Secretary, *Bankura Khara Protirodh Committee* spoke in support of this resolution.

Dr. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee in his presidential address said: Flood and drought can be resisted. The people of Calcutta did not face the havoc; but they have profound sympathy for the affected people. They are of opinion that these calamities are caused by the lust of the vested interest. The parties controlling the governments both at the Centre and in the state want to remain in power, and they indulge in corruption. Their responsibility was to save the people, but they did nothing to save them. The Committee that will be formed from this Convention will not be like the official committee. This will be a people's committee. I get confidence from this Convention and I hope that its purpose will be successful. I don't know how long I shall live, but as long as I live I shall remain with you.

Prominent persons like Mahasweta Devi, a well-known litterateur, Prof. N. Vishanathan and Uday Bhanu Ghosh, the President of *Bankura Zilla Khara Protirodh Committee* sent messages wishing success of the Convention.

Those who spoke in support of the resolutions were Rafiqul Haq of Birbhum, Shibu Sanyal of Murshidabad, Prof. Tarun Sanyal, Mahammad Zakaria of Burdwan and others.

Dr. Bignan Bera, the Secretary of the Medical Service Centre, proposed the formation of a Committee from the Convention to arrange a deputation to the Chief Minister with the charter of demands raised from the Convention. This proposal was supported by Dr. Soumitra Banerjee, the Secretary of the *Breakthrough Science Society*.

Others who spoke were Dr. Bishnu Mukherjee, a prominent physician, Nilratan Halder of South 24-Parganas and Prof. Gouri Shankar Ghatak, the former head of the department of Geology, Presidency College.

Two main resolutions were unanimously adopted with certain amendments in the Convention.

Comrade Biplab Chakraborty proposed the name of the Committee as "*Sara Bangla Banya, Bhangan O Khara Protirodh Committee*". He also proposed the names of the members of the Committee. Comrade Panchanan Pradhan

seconded the proposal. Thus this Committee was formed with Dr. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee as Chairman of the Advisory Committee, Dr. Bimalendu Sen as President and Comrade Swapan Ghoshal as Secretary.

In the resolution demanding steps to resist flood and drought certain long term and some short term demands were raised.

Demonstration in Calcutta Against US-Zionist Clique

Under the auspices of the Calcutta District Committee of the SUCI a demonstration was organised before the USIS in Calcutta on 21st November last to protest against the Israeli missile attack on Palestine. The demonstration started from the Raja Subodh Mullick Square and went through the S.N. Banerjee Road, Jawaharlal Nehru Road and reached the USIS where a heavy contingent of police obstructed the demonstrators. An effigy of the Israeli rulers was burnt there. Comrades Bidhan Chatterjee and Kalika Mukherjee led the demonstration. (Photo on page 1)

US Presidential Election

(Contd. from page 1)

tunnel of darkness having no prospect of light. In such a situation the rivalries between the giants of money power could produce only what is nasty, brutal and obnoxious, yet, this is the 'paradise' of democracy! There are many people, particularly among the intellectuals in our country, to whom USA is the model, a paragon of democracy! Should they not take lesson from what has happened and try to realise that in the present-day condition of imperialism and moribund capitalism not even a vestige of democracy can be at work in any country?

There is always a comical side to anything sordid. The Chief Election Commissioner of our country, Mr. M.S. Gill pitied the American election managers for not being able to declare the results of election quickly. For rigging, bribery, intimidation, and corruption of all varieties are not uncommon in India. But Mr. Gill must have the 'reasonable' pride that those could not delay the announcement of results in Indian elections.

Mr. Gill must be a sad man when mechanical voting system has been disputed in the 'dreamland' of democracy. For, he has been assuring the citizens of this country all the time that introduction of push-button method will remove fraud in the name of elections. In America, machines were pressed to service precisely for this reason. Experience shows that machine or no machine, rigging, fraudulent practices, omnipotence of money power and corruptions of never ending ingenuinities have become the usual features in the election process of the bourgeois democracies, the world over.

Given all these, the bourgeois protagonists will still say, it is free and fair election! True, the socialist states couldn't provide such specimens of election which the Americans along with their Indian brothers are used to, on occasion of 'celebration of democracy', the ritual of election!



Intellectuals and scientists seated on dais at the Citizens' Convention on November 19 at University Institute Hall, Calcutta

Criminals who abducted labour leader in West Bengal remain scotfree

Our 15th September issue carried the news of the disappearance of Comrade Tanmay Mukherjee, the young tea plantation workers' leader. Since 28th August he still remains untraced. Tea barons and land mafia of North Bengal are behind his disappearance. The armed kidnappers' name were given to the police-administration. Some of the criminals have gone underground, some roaming in the open. More than 3 months have passed, yet none is arrested. Police-administration cannot even say whether Tanmay is alive or dead. Our apprehension is that he has been murdered.

The abductors' names were given by Comrade Sukhlal Roy, who was also brutally attacked along with Comrade Tanmay Mukherjee on 28th August. They are known mercenaries of that area and surrounding places. Some hoodlums are known to be the hired forces of tea barons. The tea barons are assisted by land mafia, who by cheating or by force grab poor peasants' land and hand over to tea estate owners and get money. Tanmay stood for the poor plantation workers and poor peasantry which angered the vested interests. The vested interests include defeated Congress Panchayat member, some are now under Trinamul Congress; and cliques nurtured by the tea barons whose object is to contain workers' movement. Moreover, Comrade Jyotsna Roy, wife of Comrade Sukhlal Roy, has been elected as Panchayat member defeating the Congress candidate, who was the Panchayat member for a long time.

These forces are the conspirators behind Tanmay's disappearance.

Whatever organisation Comrade Tanmay built up might not be enough to uproot this powerful circle. But the owning class found in this small force their danger. Tanmay could not be bought, could not be threatened away, for he was the symbol of an ideology, he was the activist of a party which is the real enemy of the vested interests. So they struck before the danger could become a very big threat.

Let us refer that some time back at Raninagar in Jalpaiguri district Comrade Sambhu Roy, leader of the UTUC-Leinin Sarani affiliated union, was murdered. Comrade Sambhu Roy led the movements of workers of pineapple gardens and as a result workers' wage increased there. Then, one day to keep an appointment with the manager Comrade Roy went to meet him and disappeared. After a few days the mutilated body of the workers' leader was found in the river Balason in Siliguri.

The role of police-administration regarding the disappearance of Comrade Tanmay is mysterious. Comrade Sukhlal Roy, the only eyewitness of the kidnapping of Comrade Tanmay, himself brutally assaulted and who was the first to go to the police station along with the party leaders and lodged diary and gave the police the names of the kidnappers as also their whereabouts, was surprisingly arrested by police as accused and was sent to jail. More surprising, police ignored the accusation submitted by Comrade Sukhlal Roy. The police did not pay attention even to the accusation submitted by the district SUCI. Such conduct proves only that the police is trying to weaken the case either under pressure of some influential circle or some other considerations.

The kidnappers, named by Comrade Sukhlal, were known anti-socials often acting as hired criminals, according to police record. Even after 28th August, for a long time — a month almost — the criminals did not leave home or stayed around. Villagers repeatedly informed police about their whereabouts. But police did not arrest them. Under pressure from the villagers the police conducted a few false raids. Even though the villagers had identified the real criminals moving about in open daylight, the police did not even attempt to arrest them. That the police does not intend to do so, also became clear from an inadvertent confession of a police officer during a heated argument when all trade unions of Darjeeling district had met him in this connection. In the heat of the moment he blurted out: "Look, we won't arrest them, or else it will cause trouble." Now even after all this, is it difficult to understand what role the police is playing? At times police officers even admitted: "We are under political pressure." But what is that political pressure? People want to know it.

A few weeks back at Rangdhamali under Jalpaiguri Sadar thana (headquarters) a tea plantation owner was kidnapped and at Phansidewa under Darjeeling district another owner, a member of the CPI(M) zonal Committee, was shot to death. In both incidents police jumped into action and the CPI(M) Chief Minister immediately issued statement, while on question of searching out the workers' leader Comrade Tanmay and arresting the criminals the state government is not at all worried. Why this? After the murder of an owner the government got hold of a conspirator within a few days. But 3 months have passed since the kidnapping of the workers' leader, the criminals involved could not be touched. The murderers of the said plantation owner were initially unknown, but they were identified swiftly. But the criminals who kidnapped Tanmay were known criminals and police too, have acknowledged it. Their homes, shelters have been identified and they moved about openly for a long time, yet the police did not arrest them. Why does the CPI(M)-led Left Front take swift action when an owner is attacked and remains silent when a workers' leader disappears?

In a letter to Jalpaiguri district police-administration, the party District Secretary

Comrade Tapan Bhowmik expressed his apprehension that this inordinate delay will only give scope of tampering evidence. He categorically asked for investigation no more by the police, but the CID. In reply to this demand SP (Jalpaiguri) informed our leaders that he himself has recommended for investigation by CID. Yet, police inaction is continuing. Knowledgeable section considers this conduct as a conspiracy to shield the circle, responsible for Tanmay's disappearance.

Mass signature campaign demanding of the Chief Minister immediate resolution of the crisis already is going on in entire North Bengal. Since September till today movement is on the rise. On 8th September at Siliguri and on 11th September at Toofanganj in two huge mass meetings Comrade Protiva Mukherjee, SUCI WB State Secretariat member, called upon the people to build up movements. On 13th September police severely lathicharged on a road blockade by SUCI activists at Hill Cart Road, Siliguri and arrested many comrades. On 15th, Fulbari national highway was blockaded. On 19th September a procession with over 3000 participants marched to District Magistrate. 45 local clubs of Siliguri have demanded to the authority immediate arrest of the culprits and tracing Comrade Tanmay Mukherjee. Local trade unions led a deputation to the Circle Inspector on 19th September.

On 25th September day-long dharna was held at Fulbari. Speakers belonging to the SUCI, AIDYO, CPI(ML)-Liberation, AITU addressed there. On 26th September at Red Cross Hall, Siliguri a Citizen's Convention was held, attended by professors, freedom fighters, physicians, headmasters, social workers and others.

The State Committee of the UTUC-LS, HMS, CITU, UTUC, INTUC, AICCTU, AITUC issued joint statement.

The eminent intellectuals of different fields issued statement on the demands.

On 15,16,17 November 3-day long dharna was held at Siliguri and on 21 November tea garden workers held dharna at the Jalpaiguri Police Station.

With time passing the movement is getting intensified. Movement is now spreading in other parts of North Bengal. It will continue till Tanmay is traced and criminals brought to book.



On 15th November at Baharampur Comrade Debaprasad Sarkar, MLA of West Bengal is handing over relief materials to the relatives of those who died in last devastating flood

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