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Dharna and Education Convention in Delhi Shine as a Beacon

The country is reeling under crisis; in every aspect of life is coming down on common people; perhaps the most appalling, the most shocking is the near-total decadence in the country's cultural-moral-ethical life. Spate of scams to the worth of hundreds of crores of rupees, corruptions reaching the bones and marrows of country's life, vices of any and every sort in public and private life, particularly at the top echelon of the society, in the sections of the society holding the rein of muscle and money power. — all these are on ever rise without any sign of respite or decline. It appears that humanity, human senses and morality, ethics and the like, all the finer qualities of human life and society are being planfully undermined and destroyed.

Amidst this gloom of decadence and despair all over the country, people of Delhi, the national capital, woke up in the morning of 24 November to have a unique experience. Thousands of people from different states of India with different languages, dresses and all apparent distinctions were streaming from Trinagar and other areas in northwest Delhi towards Ramlila Maidan. Around noon, there emerged from the Maidan a huge rally of several thousand people under the banner of the All India Save Education Committee. The very sight of the rally, the resounding voices of slogans raised from it, must have brought to the population of Delhi a note of resonance with key words that could be framed into a few sentences : So it wasn't the end yet; notwithstanding utter decadence and abject despair engulfing the

country, all these thousands of people have taken pain on them to come to Delhi to give vent to their feelings and voices on an issue like education; they have taken it to their shoulder to converge from remote corners of the country to the capital to register, on behalf of the common people of the soil, indignation at and condemnation of what is being done to education throughout the country, as well as the zeal and determination to assert the right to education of the people and to fight at all costs to preserve and uphold that right. There were students in numbers, from teenagers of schools to college-going youth; there were their guardians, well-wishers, their teachers, their professors, who now stood shoulder-to-shoulder with them on a common cause; there were

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A section of the gathering at the All India Education Convention held on 25 November at the auditorium of the Sad Bhabana Bhawan of the Daulatram College in New Delhi

Central Committee Condemns Provocative Statement of PM

The Central Committee of the SUCI, led by Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary of the party, at its meeting in Calcutta on 12th December, 2000, strongly deplored Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that construction of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiment, as being completely devoid of truth and reality.

Strongly asserting that nothing could be further from truth than this ill-motivated statement of the Prime Minister which simply brought to the fore the evil design of the BJP and its Sangh Parivar, the Central Committee noted with deep indignation that this statement came at a time when the country was yet to recover from the trauma and shock suffered since the criminal assault upon the religious sentiment of the minorities that resulted out of the barbaric demolition of the Babri Masjid carried out in 1992 by the BJP and its cohorts.

The Central Committee strongly felt that in fact, apart from being a diversionary tactic, it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Prime Minister on the one hand to cover up this heinous act of demolition of the Babri Masjid and on the other to manoeuvre to protect the three tainted and chargesheeted union ministers, demands for whose resignation have become vociferous and very

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SUCI Supports Postal Employees' Strike

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, has issued the following statement to the Press in support of the striking postal employees :

"We fully support the legitimate demands of lakhs of postal employees who have been rendering their full services since long as extra departmental employees but not yet been absorbed as regular ones. It is a shame for a country which boasts of "biggest democracy" but exploits these postal employees as cheap labour power in a most inhuman and uncivilised manner.

"We urge upon all democratic minded people not only to support this movement but to mount upon the government such pressure that compels the authorities to accept these legitimate demands.

Electricity Bill 2000

— A grave attack on people's life

The proposed Electricity Bill-2000 is a grave offence to democratic governance. It proposes most severe attack on the common people by robbing them of the right to consume electricity, an essential precondition to civilised life, by hiking the charges beyond their reach, as also the liberty of the citizen to move the court against violation of contractual obligation and fraudulent practices by the supplying agency.

Pursuant to the policy of globalisation-liberalisation-privatisation, the purpose of this Bill is to open the door of a vital sector like power for loot and plunder by foreign and national monopoly finance capitals. The plea for such a sweeping enactment by the BJP-led NDA government is, continuous heavy loss suffered by the State Electricity Boards, their default in paying off the dues of NTPC, diminishing rate of production, increasing wastage in transmission and distribution (T & D), growing theft of electricity, incapability of both central and state governments to provide subsidies to the boards etc. Government's 'solution' to all these is the proposed Bill that will bring disaster in economic and social life by steeply enhancing prices of electricity with cascading effect on all essential commodities and services.

Main Features

- 1) Power generation along with distribution is in the concurrent list of the Constitution. It means sharing of responsibility by both the central and state governments as regards production and supply of electricity, an essential component of modern life. The Bill seeks to concentrate the authority in the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), appointed by the Union Government. Under this central body will work the State Electricity Regulatory Commission (SERC).
- 2) The proposed Bill, when enacted, would repeal the previous Electricity Acts of 1910, 1948 and of 1998. This means, whatever little benefits, the consumers enjoyed as regards contractual obligation of the electricity supplying agency, the freedom to redress their justified grievances by moving the courts will no longer remain. Direct access to court has been sought to be replaced by the right to appeal to the Central or State Regulatory Commission. Democratic right of the people will be severely curtailed.
- 3) Power generation is to be "freed", from licensing by government, and thus government control will be removed. Generation and distribution will be separate. Any private company, national or foreign can apply to the CERC to be a licensee for either and the State Electricity Boards will be transformed into one or more companies within a year.
- 4) All the State Electricity Boards will be wound up. If any state government does not agree to dismantle the State Electricity Board then such Board will have to work as a profiteering concern based on commercialisation of this vital service without any subsidy from the government. Such Board will in effect be nothing more than a licensee of SERC as a supplying agency only.
- 5) The power policy as a whole is to be determined solely on the consideration of earning profit of a commercial venture having no social obligation to the people. And for that purpose 'profit zones' are to be demarcated.
- 6) All powers such as tariff rate, the location and establishment of power plants will vest in the CERC which, however will not be accountable to any legislature nor can be subjected to any public authority. The CERC will be liable only to the union government.
- 7) All subsidies including those in agricultural sector will cease.
- 8) Foreign investors whether in generation or in distribution will be allowed to have 100 p.c. equity participation.
- 9) For these investors of new plants, there will be tax holiday for first five years.
- 10) The employees working in Electricity Boards after being transferred to private companies shall not be entitled to any compensation or damage under the Act or any other central and state government laws. That is to say the workers will lose all the earnings and service conditions achieved through struggles and legal provisions.

These sum up in brief, the salient features of the proposed Bill.

Implications and Impact on Common People's Life

It is very clear that the BJP-led government is translating into practice more vigorously the policy of globalisation-liberalisation-privatisation. We have shown in our previous writings that globalisation the latest prescription of world capitalism has behind it a concrete background. The world capitalist market is in dire crisis. Severe instability and uncertainty due to drastic squeeze in purchasing power of the people have given birth to the severe problem to 'excess capital'. This 'excess' relates to the growing severity of the problem of minting super profit from high cost products due to continual hi-tech based productive methods. Capital has grown 'speculative' and 'usurious' in character.

So there is a hunt for investment in essential service sectors having a secured market free from uncertainty as regards minting fabulous profits. Among those fields fall the services like banks,

insurance, power, telecommunication, health, education etc. Naturally, monopoly finance capitals both national and foreign who apprehend that the overheated stock markets run the risk of a crash far more severe than that of 1929 are exerting influence on the governments to hand over the lucrative field like public sector undertakings in essential services. The governments cannot but oblige as instead of a civil society what goes in the name of bourgeois democracy is nothing but a brutal rule of military-industrial-bureaucratic complex.

So, it is no wonder that a vital service sector like power is proposed to be freed from government control and obligation to be the happy hunting ground of monopoly finance capitals. It is the common people already groaning under grinding exploitation and oppression who will be pushed to far more severe condition.

The increase in power tariff has been going on. It has already been raised to Rs. 5.95 per unit in Maharashtra as the Board there was forced to purchase power from the US multinational Enron controlled Dhabol Power Corporation at that rate against its own rate of Rs. 1.25 per unit. In Andhra, the hike shot to Rs 7.20 per unit against which vented its resentment in the recent movement. In West Bengal, fraudulent claims, hike in tariff at regular intervals and denial of justified claim for refund of excess collections, by the monopolist Goenka controlled CESC under State Government's patronage, face serious opposition from All Bengal Electricity Consumers' Association. In Uttar Pradesh, the engineers and workers of power plants fought for 11 days defying ESMA, against division of services into generation and distribution.

So, the people are to realise that increase in power tariff is bound to cause further spiralling of prices of all essential commodities and services from food articles to manufactured goods and essential services.

In this background, Comrade Sankar Saha, Secretary, UTUC-Lenin Sarani, on behalf of All India Powermen's Federation, an affiliate, while speaking at the Delhi rally of All Electricity Workers Unions on 9 August 2000, pointed out that electricity will cease to be an essential necessity of life for the common people and to be confined as privilege for the elites only, because of systematic and drastic increase in power tariff. It is to be taken as a challenge by the common people. So also, severe uncertainty in job security and denial of trade union rights will haunt the electricity workers. As the attack is against both the electricity consumers and workers, they must unite in an all-out struggle against the heinous attempt of the government to implement globalisation policy in power sector. If the vital interests of common people and the country's economy are to be guarded and protected, this united struggle is to be taken up with all seriousness.

World Meeting of Friendship and Solidarity with Cuba

From 10-14 November, 2000 the 2nd World Meeting of Friendship and Solidarity with Cuba, was held at the Karl Marx Theatre in Havana, Cuba. Convened by Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, it comprised 4264 delegates, representing 118 countries. The first World Meeting was held in November 1994. There, too, our party had participated, invited by the India Cuba Friendship Association. This time our party has been directly invited by Cuba, and Comrade Manik Mukherjee, Deputy International Affairs, SUCI, participated as delegate.

For more than 40 years the USA has imposed an inhuman blockade against Cuba in order to pressurise it to give up the socialist path of development. But this US aggression, intensified manifold after the collapse of socialism in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe, has failed to cow down the Cuban people and achieve its aim. The imperialist forces are getting isolated and world opinion is mobilising in support of Cuba. The huge number of participants in this World Meeting in itself bears eloquent testimony of this. They came to reaffirm and proclaim their conviction that the Cuban people have the unquestionable right to construct their own model of economic, political and social development, to decide their future without interference, threats or foreign aggression, and to defend their sovereignty and independence. During the 5-day deliberations and exchanges, the delegates, in one voice condemned

the inhuman US blockade against Cuba and expressed their solidarity with the cause of the Cuban people. The 10-point programme of the General Agreements, arrived at, at this Meeting, among others, includes the following: Declare the year 2001 as the "Year of International Solidarity against the Blockade, the Law of Cuban Adjustment and all Imperialist Maneuvres against Cuba"; Organise in the week of the 15th-22nd of April 2001 a World Conference of Solidarity with Cuba in homage to the 40 anniversary of the Declaration of the Socialist Character of the Cuban Revolution and the Victory of the Bay of Pigs. ... Promote the sending of messages to the President of the U.S. whoever this may be and to the Congress of that country, condemning the imperialist policy towards Cuba and especially the economic war imposed more than 40 years ago. And many more.

In the concluding session, Comrade Fidel Castro delivered a rousing 4-hour long speech, after which he invited questions from the participants. It was after a lively exchange held in a most cordial atmosphere that the World Meeting came to an end.

The Final Declaration, adopted at the World Meeting, paying tribute to the heroic struggle of the Cuban people, condemning US aggression and reaffirming solidarity, fraternity and friendship with the Cuban people — states inter alia: "After 10 years of economic crisis, aggravated by the

blockade and successive laws of the U.S. government that intensified it, we appreciate with great admiration the fact that Cubans maintain their fighting spirit; they face the problems with intelligence, unity and determination and are victorious. Not only do they persevere in the construction of the society they have chosen, but they also offer a generous and growing solidarity to the poor countries of various continents. ... The U.S. government lacks political, historical and moral reasons to try and subjugate Cuba, imposing suffering and sacrifice on its people as it's done for the last 40 years. The economic blockade is an illegal act of war and it should be totally and unconditionally eliminated." ... The declaration affirms: "The constant mobilization of solidarity will be our reply to this intolerable situation!"

We will globalize respect, fraternity and friendship with the heroic Cuban People! ...

We redouble our fight to definitively eliminate the killer blockade against Cuba!"

On 15th November, on behalf of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, Comrades Oscar Martinez Cordoves, and Lic. Abelardo Cueto Sosa, in charge of Indian affairs, held party to party discussions with Comrade Manik Mukherjee, on the issues of anti-imperialist movement, Indian political situation and international communist movement, where they emphasized on close political relation.

US Telecom Strike Attains Victory

In our country the development of high technology is being projected as if it could provide a solution to joblessness and people's ills. In this connection a look at the situation in America may be instructive. There is no denying the fact that no matter how great the advancement in high tech may be, under capitalism the people do not benefit from it. In the hands of giant corporations, growing ever more powerful through constant merger, the development of high-tech has become merely a means to more and more ruthlessly exploit the people to squeeze out unprecedented astronomical profits. Neither in the sphere of information technology, nor in the service sector, is there any job security. The threat of lay off due to restructuring and downsizing remains ever present. One by one the rights of workers and employees, earned through many decades of struggle, are being snatched away, while the giant corporations leave no stone unturned to break or prevent any attempt by the workers to resist by depriving them of the right to union. Working conditions are becoming ever more stressful, as dwindling workforce has to cope with ever greater load and increasing speed up of work. How inhuman is the pressure exerted on the workers or employees, can also be gleaned from the fact that the employers, even of the silicon valley, consider families as mere "drag units" because they cut down on the time the employees

can be at work — as commented by *The Statesman* 28.11.00) in its editorial in connection with a different issue. Hence, it is not the development of high-tech, but alone the united and organized struggle of workers and employees that can provide or lead towards a solution of problems. In this connection, the recent movement and strike of US telecom workers provides a glorious example of the power of militant and united workers' struggle.

Ever worsening working conditions, growing stress from increasing speedup of work and forced overtime, and most of all the looming threat of restructuring, lay off and downsizing, had impelled 87000 workers at Verizon, the largest US telecommunications corporation, to take to the path of movement, of strike. When the strike began on August 6, Verizon company assured its 27 million customers, spread over 12 states, that they would not be inconvenienced as its management would provide service. But in reality after a few days, services broke down and complaints began to pour in. In less than 2 weeks Verizon faced a backlog of more than 90000 orders for repair and had to cancel 70000 orders for installation of new phone and internet service. In the first five days alone the corporation suffered a loss to the tune of 300 million dollars. Verizon stock fell by more than 10 per cent over the course of the strike.

Under these conditions, when the 87000 workers, owing alliance to the Communications Workers and the Electrical Workers unions, presented Verizon with an ultimatum that they would intensify their struggle in absence of an acceptable offer, the company, sat down to negotiate and settled for an agreement with the unions. In that agreement, it provided, in words, for some relief from speedup and stress from overwork. In particular the company had to shelve its plans, at least for the moment to break the organisation of workers by transferring unionised workers to non-union locations. The agreement also included a 12 per cent wage rise over 3 years. But the greatest victory the workers extracted is the right for 32000 workers in the wireless division to a union. So long, along with many other rights, they had been deprived by the corporation of this right too.

That this victory constitutes a breakthrough not only for the workers of Verizon but for workers through the telecommunications industry was highlighted by union leaders at a victory meeting of 50000 telecommunication workers. It is bound to deeply influence the largely non-union telecommunication industry, esp. long distance, wireless and Internet industries. Thus an organiser of workers in high-tech firms said: "Now we can hold up this example that says, "Your voice can be heard".

Resolve to Preserve And Uphold Right to Education

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frontranking intellectuals and professionals from all over the country, many of them even in their eighties with failing health, but marching in right earnestness with the strongest grit of mind that responded to a call to save education from ruination. All these people, from all the major states of India, like Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh in the south, West Bengal, Tripura, Orissa, Bihar with Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh with Chhattisgarh in the central and east, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan of the west and Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana from around and alongwith Delhi itself — cutting across all differences of languages, caste, creed, social status stepped attuned along the roads of the capital. The rally passed by the Modern School Flyover, Tolstoy Marg, and Jantar Mantar only to be stopped by the police at the Parliament Street. It was led by veteran leading intellectuals and professionals of the land, the all India leaders of the Committee; it beamed with purposive enthusiasm, yet disciplined and ordered, of the streams of younger participants. Colourful banners, festoons and posters more than decorated the rally; they brightly focussed the organisation, the purpose and the demands; the thundering voice of thousands threw slogans into the air of the capital flowing along its streets and demanding 'stop commercialisation of education', 'down with communalisation of education', 'allocate 10% of Union budget for education' and so on and so forth. Leave aside ignoring it, the Delhi people rather stepped forward to ask the volunteers who they were, wherefrom they had come, whereto they were moving and what their demands were. Not for a single occasion, the pedestrians and the drivers, allegedly always fast and single-minded in the capital, thought of breaking into the rally and disrupting it. Rather the discipline and solemnity of the huge stream of humanity induced them to wait patiently for the rally to pass by. On being stopped at the Parliament Street, the demonstrators staged the Dharna, as announced earlier. A make-shift dais was immediately built; a number of speakers then addressed the rally and

the people of the offices around who had chosen to come out in numbers to listen. They dealt on what severe kind of onslaught is coming down on education; how the Save Education Committees of different states were waging sustained propaganda and struggles against these in their own states. They expressed resolve to stand unquestionably by the programme of the All India Committee, that was to be chalked out from the All India Education Convention to be held next day, 25 speakers included Dr. Mahesh Bhai Dave (Gujarat), Dipankar Roy (Secretary, All India Save Education Committee), Members of the Secretariat, AISEC Pratap Shamal (Delhi), Arun Kumar Singh (Bihar), Debasis Roy (West Bengal), Member of the Presidium, AISEC Dr. Ashoke Ganguly (Madhya Pradesh); members of the AISEC BK Rajagopal (Kerala), Chhabi Mohanty (Orissa), B. Prashant (Educationist, Bihar), Hartar Singh Malik (President, Haryana Teachers' Union), Mahesh (Editor, *Educational Tribune*, MP), Pramod Kamble (Maharashtra). Later, a delegation comprising HS Doraiswamy, Prof N A Karim, Prof Narendra Sharma and Arun Kumar Singh went to meet the HRD Minister and submit a memorandum. It was really painful to see, that in spite of having been intimated earlier, the Minister did not have the courtesy to meet the delegation, which included eminent personalities from over the country, who had come all the way to Delhi on the issue of education. The memorandum could only be handed over to concerned bureaucrats. The assembly at the Dharna did not fail to express its indignation at this conduct of an important office of the Union government. It revealed clearly the attitude of the government towards such a vital issue of nation's life as education, and towards the movement at the helm of which were such persons like Justice VR Krishna Iyer, Prof. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, H S Doraiswamy, Prof N A Karim and others.

The two-day long November programme of

the AISEC came in sequel of a series of programmes adopted by the Committee and its state bodies, during the last one year. They, in turn, were parts of the education movement that the Committee had launched against the recent onslaught on education perpetrated by the BJP-led Union government in particular, more so the BJP-



Prof Sushil Kumar Mukherjee delivering his presidential address

Sangh Parivar combine.

People of the country are well aware that since independence, education of common people has turned out to be one of the worst victims, in spite of all resounding phrases and all glittering glamorous institutions and measures. However, the present phase of onslaught was unleashed with the NPE'86 during Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government at the Centre. With the BJP assuming power at the Centre, all the aspects contained in the NPE'86 have been strengthened and invigorated manifold and menacingly. So much so that, it has become incumbent upon every education-loving democratic-minded person of the country to rise against and resist them.

Since introduction of the NPE'86, the AISEC initiated the movement on behalf of all such people who may feel some concern. Thus it brought out booklets laying bare the measures and designs behind the attacks in the NPE'86 and later by the BJP-Sangh Parivar, started a massive



Dais of All India Education Convention held in New Delhi on November 25 last. Seated on the dais are Prof. Sukomal Dasgupta, Prof. Sumanda Sanyal, Dr. N. A. Karim, Sri H. S. Doraiswamy, Prof. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee and other educationists



Resist Communalisation, Privatisation and Saffronisation of Education

signature campaign throughout the land and observed important commemorative dates in remembrance of stalwart educationists of the past, such as the "Save Education Day" on the birth anniversary of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar on 26 September. The Committee also set for building up rock-solid organization for sustained movement by forming committees at all levels of states, districts and localities or educational institutions. In July 2000, the All India Committee met at Chennai, to discuss on a new development which emerged with the publication of a *Discussion Document* in January 2000 by the NCERT, in the mean time reshuffled and manned by the BJP-Sangh Parivar. The *Document*, in a way, marks a culmination of the BJP-Sangh Parivar policy; it tolls the death knell of school-education in particular. The AISEC had published an initial booklet highlighting the salient points of the *NCERT Document*. The Chennai Meet also decided to intensify the campaign and the movement, and as part of it, to publish a more extensive document exposing all the designs of the education policy of the BJP-Sangh Parivar, embodied particularly in the NCERT Document. The publication has already seen light under the title "*Resist Commoditisation and Communalisation of Education: Thwart the Impending Catastrophe*". The Committee further scheduled to organise a central national programme in Delhi to launch protest by and exchange views among the education-loving people of the country. The Dharma and the All India Education Convention in Delhi were those programmes respectively.

The Memorandum placed from the 24 November Dharma to the HRD Ministry, was addressed to the Prime Minister, himself. It dealt briefly on what the AISEC considered about the present onslaughts, as also about the movement against them. We quote a few words from it to drive home the points to our readers.

"Realising the importance of education...social reformers of the Indian renaissance... stressed the importance of establishing free and compulsory education for all...But in the 52 years after independence, we have witnessed a systematic process of curtailment of education rather than expansion of educational opportunities... Educational institutions are perpetually short of

funds, equipment, infrastructure and teachers. Regular fee hikes have resulted in education becoming a privilege for the better-off rather than being accessible to all. The number of seats in institutions has been curtailed leading to an admissions crisis every year... The National Policy of Education in 1986 openly declared that education could not be seen as the responsibility of the government alone, it would have to be privatised and commercialised... If education becomes expensive, it further loses its independent, truth-seeking character. Instead of being a means of applying knowledge for the welfare of society, it increasingly becomes a means of livelihood, or worse, an investment to recover and earn profit from.

This policy of commercialisation and privatisation of education and reducing government funding is being continued by the NDA government as well. While all the important Education Commissions set up in the past have recommended an allocation of 10% of the Union Budget for education, the last two budgets of your Government have allotted a mere 2.5%, and that too, to Education, Sports and Youth Affairs (Revenue + Capital) put together... Your HRD Minister, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi has reduced the budgetary allocation to higher education by Rs.138 crore this year... the condition of elementary education is no better... The Saikia Committee Report had recommended an average of Rs.14,000 crore per year for ten years to achieve universal elementary education. Continuing the tradition of previous governments, the NDA Government too has provided far less than this figure... At the same time, the already high military budget of Rs.45,000 crore has been

enhanced by Rs.13,000 crore in a single year. Where is the NDA Government's sense of priority?

... Your Government is inviting international development agencies and private capital... The World Bank-funded District Primary Education Programme(DPEP) is expanding... The concept behind DPEP is that education should finally be seen as the responsibility of students and their guardians, and not of the State... The DPEP is discarding time-tested educational theories and methods... The emphasis is supposedly on child-centred learning, but is in fact leading to continuous play and entertainment in class rooms. The content of language and logic in syllabi is being diluted.



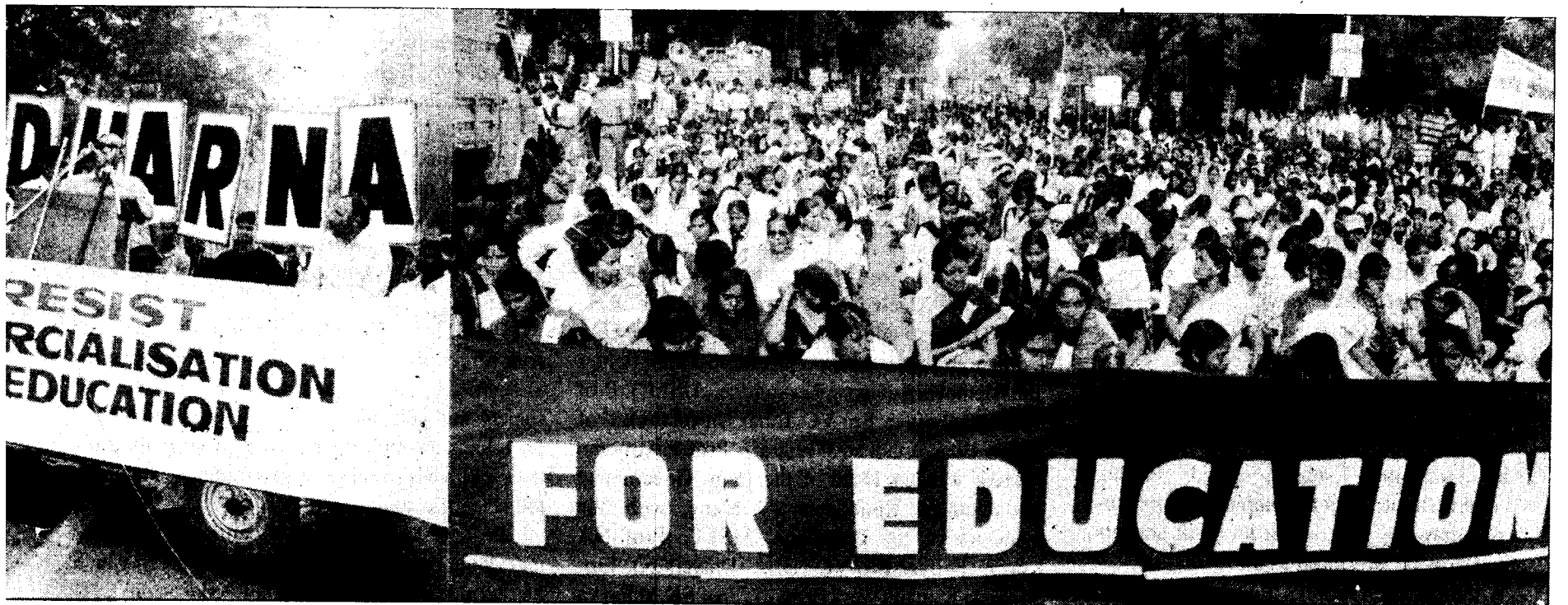
Dipankar Roy, Secretary,
All India Save Education Committee



Sri H. S. Doraiswamy, Veteran
Freedom Fighter

Not only is access to education being curtailed, its content is being tampered with the purpose to dilute its revolutionary truth-seeking character. Language, the vehicle of thought and medium of expression, is being undervalued and neglected, especially in higher education. The technical aspects of knowledge are being stressed, to the detriment of pure science and the humanities. This is very evident in the *Discussion Document 2000 on the National Curriculum Framework for School Education* prepared by the NCERT. The *Document* openly proposes a dual stream of education for the haves and the have-nots. For the latter, English language,

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All India Dharna at the Parliament Street in New Delhi on November 24 last

Attack on Education to Destroy Scientific Bent of Mind, Morality and Ethics

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mathematics and science learning are to be truncated and substituted with vocational courses, for they are destined to drop out after class X and join the workforce...

At the same time, we observe with great concern that there is a planned effort to introduce religious instruction in course curricula under the guise of "value education". In its *Discussion Document*, the NCERT has proposed, from the elementary stage itself, religious education, religious group singing, lives and teachings of prophets and saints of different religions, etc. The experience of independent India has shown us that "Sarvadharmā Samābhava" cannot but degenerate into hegemony of the majority religion. When religious characters, along with the myths about supernatural powers associated with them, are placed before immature minds of elementary and secondary school children, it will only foster an unquestioning belief-oriented mindset...

Equally reprehensible are the moves to distort history and to place individuals sympathetic to the Sangh Parivar in high positions in academic institutions. The latter has emerged as a clear trend judging from appointments made to the ICHR, ICSSR, NCERT, IAS, Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies and the Gandhian Institute of Studies...

The UGC, for its part, is promoting certificate course in Vedic rituals, Vedic astrology... This is happening in the context of declining grants to universities for science and humanities courses. In short, bigoted, communal and obscurantist ideas, which have nothing to do even with Hindu culture and philosophy, are finding their way into education.

We also note with concern that, for all the tall talk of promoting Indian culture, your Government has done nothing to arrest the propagation of obscenity and vulgarity through magazines, cinema, cable TV and the Internet. On the other hand, the situation is going to worsen with the advent of DTH (Direct to Home) broadcasting that your Government has recently allowed.

... The All India Save Education Committee has examined these trends and has concluded that the net result of such tampering with the content of education, accompanied by the spread of obscenity and vulgarity through the media, is to destroy the power of systematic thought and reasoning, and instead to promote regimentation of thought among youth. If this continues, the educational system will churn out human robots able to do technical work, completely self-centred, unquestioningly obedient to the State and devoid of human values and emotions. In short, this will enhance the danger of fascism, the enemy of democracy and civilisation.

We therefore urge you to act upon the following demands immediately.

1. Provide opportunities for education up to the highest level for all aspirant students. Solve the admission crisis at all levels of education by opening schools and colleges commensurate with the number of applicants.
2. Withdraw fee hikes at all levels of education and provide education to all.
3. Withdraw the National Policy on Education 1986 and commercialisation, privatisation and

communalisation of education. Promote secular, democratic and scientific education. Support the development of all our languages so that instruction in the mother tongue may be possible up to the highest levels of education, simultaneously providing for English language teaching from Class I.

4. Provide full Government funding for schools, colleges and universities, starting with the allocation of at least 10% of the Union Budget for education.
5. Withdraw the scheme of commercialised and decentralised autonomous colleges.
6. Stop political and bureaucratic interference in the functioning of schools, colleges, universities and academic bodies. Bring school and higher education under autonomous boards with a democratic set-up.
7. Stop propagation of obscenity and vulgarity through the media which is corrupting the minds of students and youth.

The All India Education Convention on the next day, 25 November, was held at the big auditorium of the Sad-Bhabana Bhawan of the Daulatram College, near the Delhi University Campus. Thousands of all-India delegates not only filled the hall to the brim; many of them had to throng in the foyer or even outside to listen to the proceedings. From morning 11, the whole-day convention took place in a solemn atmosphere with a house, overwhelmingly dominated by teenagers and youths and keenly attentive and enthusiastically responsive to the emotions and calls in deliberations of the speakers. The long list of speakers included octogenarians and other veterans, leading intellectuals of the country here invited to place their valued opinions, as also the leaders of the all India Committee. There were also young and old organisers of the Committee who had been bearing the standard of education movement launched by the Committee in different states of the country. Since the President of the All India Committee, Justice VR Krishna Iyer could not attend on medical grounds, the Convention was presided over by Prof. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, the octogenarian renowned scientist and former Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. The distinguished speakers included H S Doraiswamy (Karnataka; veteran freedom fighter and Member, Advisory Committee, AISEC), Prof SK Bose (Former Pro VC, Bihar University), Prof Nalini Bhai Anadkad (Gujarat), Prof Fakiruddin (Orissa; Former Head of the Dept. Government Art College Bhubaneswar) along with the members of the Presidium AISEC: Prof NA Karim (Former Pro-VC Kerala University), Prof Sunanda Sanyal (West Bengal), Prof SK Malavya (Uttar Pradesh), Prof Sukomal Dasgupta (West

Bengal, Former member Senate, Calcutta University), Prof Narendra Sharma (Delhi), Sri Amindar Pal Singh (Punjab), Dr Ashoke Ganguly (Madhya Pradesh) and other members of the all India committee Prof Chandralekha Das (Assam), Prof Krishnamurthy (Tamilnadu); Dr. JC Verma (Chandigarh), Prof TK Naskar (West Bengal), V Nandakumar (Tamilnadu), Ramesh Patnaik (Andhra Pradesh), K Uma (Karnataka), Dr V Venugopal (Member, Secretariat, Kerala) and, Nageswar Prasad Singh (Bihar).

At the onset of the proceedings, the President, Prof. Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, himself placed a



Prof. N. A. Karim,
Former Pro-VC, Kerala University.



Prof. S. K. Bose,
Former Pro-VC, Bihar University.

condolence resolution in memory of the deceased Committee members and led the House to observe a 2-minute silence. Thereafter, a brief and inclusive, resolution was placed by Dipankar Roy, the Secretary of the All India Committee; it was supported by Arun Kumar Singh from Bihar. They were followed by the speakers who deliberated in tune with the spirit of the Resolution and supported it.

Sri Doraiswamy, the veteran freedom fighter from Karnataka congratulated the participants for their zeal even in spite of odds in journey and logistics. Condemning the Minister's attitude reflected in his not meeting the delegation from the Dharna, he added that even the Britishers were much better in these respects. He recalled the contributions of the freedom fighters and the then youth towards spread of education in the country and urged the present day youth to take up the cudgel in their turn.

Prof NA Karim described the situation as a siege on education system. He called the DPEP "Destruction of Primary Education Programme" and maintained that the Sangh Parivar is pursuing 'revivalism' negating the fruits of our 'renaissance'. In the name of 'indianisation, nationalisation and spiritualisation' they are destroying the country, propagating communalism, casteism and such others.

Prof. S K Bose dwelled on the evils of commercialisation and privatisation and called for a fight for secular and rational character of society and education. He condemned the efforts on television and other media programmes for their emphasis of religious programmes, shunning the scientific ones.

Prof. Anadkad also cautioned at the increasing privatisation and slide in quality, which he termed 'lumpenisation of education'. He

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Sangh Parivar Pursuing Revivalism Negating Fruits of Renaissance

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sounded alarm that this would cause further rise in illiteracy already highest in India. He spoke strongly against making education a commodity.

Prof. Fakiruddin urged the policy makers to look ahead towards the future generation and to give them the best. He designated NCERT and UGC as white elephants and condemned NCERT's proposal to devalue teaching of language in general and English in particular.

Prof. Krishnamurthy saluted the Committee, its volunteers and organisers. He drew attention to the fact that even with huge production of food grains, people starve. They are denied of food as well as health and education by the rulers. The latter also try to divide people on communal lines. He denounced the NCERT proposals towards devaluation of teaching of languages, mathematics

and science.

Prof. Sanyal also spoke strongly against devaluation of teaching of English- a gateway to the world of knowledge. He warned against the danger of abolishing examination system, as proposed by the NCERT. He emphatically maintained that these policies will only help the have-s to have more access to better education, while have-nots denied that.

Shri Aminder Pal Singh decried the fact that students have to pay exorbitant sums in order to avail a proper education and development.

Prof. Chandrakha Das said: In Assam the ruling parties have been creating communal disharmony among different communities with the help of their education policy.

Dr. V. Venugopal decrying the disastrous DPEP policy, stressed that it would dispense with

teaching altogether, and penalise teachers for trying to even teach the children the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Prof Sukomal Dasgupta pointed out that the Convention was being held at a time, when countrywide efforts are afoot to destroy whatever lofty ideals, values and thoughts are there, to destroy scientific bent of mind, morality and ethics. With 52 years of independence, the situation has only worsened; in every walk of people's life, the plight, the wretchedness have continuously been increasing. The question that arises : Are not all these law-governed? The answer is an emphatic yes. In a class-divided society as ours, just as in any other walk of life, in education, too, there cannot be one single uniform approach to the problem. The ruling class have the goal of maintaining their rule; they need a few well-equipped to run different parts of their state-machinery in the best way. The ruled classes, on the contrary, must have education that builds up character, imparts strength to fight injustice and leads to the pursuit of knowledge and search for truth about society, life and mankind.

In the field of education too, we find that there have been changes in party-in-power, but the problems have remained the same; rather they have aggravated, since the class behind the curtain continues its rule safe and sound, unabated with changes in ruling parties.

Thus all the facets of attacks such as privatisation-commercialisation-commoditisation and so on and so forth were there, particularly since the NPE'86. True, they have assumed menacing forms these days under the BJP rule. But what is more dangerous and sinister in the schemes and designs of the BJP-Sangh Parivar is the way they want to change the mind-set of the population, destroying the kernel of education as well. With all-out commoditisation and vocationalisation of education, they want to change the goal of education from man-making, character-building to money-earning, self-seeking, career-building one. At the same time, with communalisation, rather saffronisation of education, and devaluation of language, mathematics and science teaching — they push the younger and future generations to develop blind faith, fatalism and such others in place of a scientific, rational, secular and democratic frame of mind. This is the road that leads man to fascism; this is fascisation of education. Thus the HRD Minister, Joshi, himself a Physics professor, does not hesitate to introduce *Purohitvidya* and astrology in the university courses, knowing full well that astrology is not the same as astronomy, the latter being an age-old well-founded science dealing with celestial and other bodies of the universe and that a subject like *Purohitvidya* may add fillip to the career of some purohiths of the country as also NRI, but will, in turn, only foster obscurantism to its height. Prof Dasgupta thus emphasized the direction, the save education movement of the AISEC must be led to. He also added a vital amendment to the resolution, remaining however perfectly tuned with the main theme and spirit of the Resolution. His amendment along with a few others were accepted unanimously by the house.

At the close of the speeches, Tapan Roy

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Message from Prof. R.S. Sharma for the All India Rally to Save Education in Delhi on 24 November 2000

No other party or government in modern times tried to impose any religion on the Indian people. Even the British Government did not forcibly push up the cause of Christianity. But the present rulers of India are determined to thrust their brand of Hindutva on the common people. They distort the education system to mould the mind of the young generation on communal lines. Their latest attempt is to start education in spiritualism and make Sanskrit compulsory from the primary stage onwards. Even the Brahmanical texts emphasize the role of spiritualism only at the third and fourth stages of life. Similarly they set four objectives for attainment. Out of these Artha, Dharma and Kama are concerned with material life, and only Moksha represents spiritual life. Spiritualism was considered typical of India by the colonial rulers and their intellectual supporters. They tried to show that Indians were only interested in the problems of the next world. The implication was that the problems of this world such as administration and economic management would be justifiably dealt with by the colonial masters. It is curious that on the one hand the ideologues of Hindutva denounce the advent of the Indo-Aryans in India as colonial fabrication and on the other they wholeheartedly adopted the theory of spiritualism which was the contribution of the colonialist Indologists. Since the dominant theory of spiritualism presented a very distorted view of India, Indian scholars opposed it on the basis of the ancient texts. It was exploded by the great Sanskritist Shama Sastri who brought to light the contents of the Arthashastra of Kautilya for the first time in 1909. It shows how the ancient Indians gave serious thought to the problems of polity, economy and other aspects of the material world.

The great Sanskritist Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, who played an active role in the development of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, laid emphasis on the modernisation of education and also of Sanskrit studies. He recommended that modern Mathematics should be taught to students who read Sanskrit. The value of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and old Tamil cannot be denied. But the provision for their teaching will depend on the needs of students and institutions. They cannot be made compulsory. The whole idea of teaching spiritualism through the medium of Sanskrit right from the primary stage is derived from blind faith, superstition, and strong belief in supernatural forces. If this is done it will kill the spirit of critical inquiry and questioning without which education and knowledge cannot grow. If we want to make progress we will have to adopt a scientific attitude based on logic, reason and rationalism.

Prof. M. Mohiuddin, former Vice Chancellor, Patna University, in his message said, inter alia :

All right thinking persons must be grateful to you for having launched the movement against commoditisation and saffronisation of education.

... The second issue — saffronisation of education — is far more serious. It is not only unconstitutional but also extremely dangerous. The discussion on religious education has been going on right from the early days of the British government in India, but it was never thought prudent to allow it. Even Mahatma Gandhi did not allow it in his Wardha scheme of education. Our constitution has expressly forbidden it in educational institutions maintained by the State. However there is no bar to moral education. Morality without religion is desirable and quite common these days. Saffronisation of education is deadlier than religious education as it promotes a particular religion and culture and is fascist in character. Hitler's fascism led to World War II, BJP's fascism may lead to World War III. This is contrary to our fundamental duties and must be opposed vigorously and systematically in do-or-die spirit. In addition to this opposition, I think, there should be a parallel organisation to promote secular education. I have drawn up a draft of "The Secular Education Society of India" for your kind consideration ... I draw your special attention to clause 4 (8) under Functions which envisages a chain of schools throughout India somewhat like the ICSE schools.

Comrade Tanmay Mukherjee murdered : Police compelled to arrest one killer

Our apprehension came true. Comrade Tanmay Mukherjee (32) the tea plantation workers' leader in North Bengal, had been brutally murdered. Among the murderers, maintained by the tea garden owners and land mafia, Surath Roy was arrested who confessed that they choked Comrade Tanmay to death while ducking him in Teesta Canal repeatedly, all the time severely beating him. The dead body remains untraced yet.

Even though the culprits' names as also their whereabouts were given after Comrade Tanmay's abduction, police were reluctant to arrest them. Rather, to save the murderers, they arrested Comrade Sukhlal Roy, the only eye-witness, who was also grievously assaulted along with Comrade Tanmay.

A determined protest movement developed in the entire North Bengal for the last three months with the demand to arrest the culprits. Countless people of North Bengal, leading intellectuals, all mass organisations, all trade unions, 43 clubs and particularly workers of the tea gardens, have been building the movement in a protracted way. Numerous processions, meetings, deputations, street blockades, braving police lathi-charge, etc., were organised and signature campaign is going on. At last, under pressure of people's movement police arrested one murderer.

Comrade Provash Ghosh, Secretary, West Bengal State Committee, SUCI, has called upon the people of the State to observe 15 December as Protest Day and, inter alia, said: The news of his death is heart-rending. Comrade Tanmay hailed from a middle class family. On coming in contact with the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the great leader of the proletariat, he organised the

students and then the youths, and finally dedicated himself to the cause of the exploited tea plantation workers. Within a short period he became one among the workers with his honesty, dedication and struggling character. He refused jobs offered and left his home at Siliguri to stay at the party centre to struggle for collective life. With his sweetness of character he won over poor people, people of other strata, students, youths and mothers and sisters. Even knowing death was inevitable and very close, on that fateful day, he appealed to the criminals to spare Comrade Sukhlal Roy. From

all these, Comrade Provash Ghosh said, leaders and cadres at all levels have a lot to learn and acquire, through which our brave young comrade will live amidst us.

On 15 December, at Siliguri, the foundation stone of a permanent martyr's column will be laid in Comrade Tanmay's memory and condolence meeting will be held there. On that day in all districts, in villages, at important spots of cities and towns, at factory gates martyr's column will be installed, Comrade Tanmay's portrait garlanded, black badge worn and meetings will be held.

Dharna and Education Convention

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Chowdhury, Secretary of the All Bengal Save Education Committee read out the messages from different eminent intellectuals from different parts of the country, in which they wished the Convention all success and expressed their support and solidarity with the education movement and its cause. These included messages from Dr. R S Sharma (noted Historian), Prof. M Mahiuddin (former Vice-Chancellor, Patna University), Prof. Santan Mohanty (Orissa), Sri Sudhanshu Sekhar Ray (Sahitya Bharati, Orissa), N G R Prasad (Advocate, Tamilnadu), Dr. Indira Parthasarathy (Writer, Sahitya Academy Awardee, Tamilnadu), Prof D N Pathak (Ahmedabad) and others. Some of the messages are given separately. In his Vote of Thanks Prof Narendra Sharma of Delhi informed the House how professors and intellectuals of the city had been impressed with the gathering and the Dharna programmes and were talking about them.

The whole day-long Convention did not only critically analyse the different aspects of the present onslaughts on education, including the grave danger they posed before the nation, the speakers also narrated the courses the Save Education movement in different states had taken in the recent past even attaining some historic victories. This created fresh waves of enthusiasm and determination in the audience. Thus the two-decade long historic language and education movement of West Bengal, a number of movements against capitation fee, fee-hike or privatisation-commercialisation in Karnataka —

did prove once more that organised sustained mass movement remains as the only course left to the oppressed masses. This truth resonating in speeches of different speakers were greeted with vibrant slogans of pledges from the audience to wage and continue more determined and organised movements. The Convention presented a rare phenomenon of these days: frontranking intellectuals imbued the younger generation in the audience with their example, their participation ignoring age and failing health and their analysis, experience and inspiration; thousands of teenagers and youth present in that huge auditorium, in turn, left indelible mark of satisfaction and inspiration on the veteran speakers by the deep attention and purposiveness with which they listened to the deliberations. This must have prompted Prof Sushil Kumar Mukherjee to add in his Presidential address: **Education saves the country, but we have come here to save education itself... I am not sure how long will I be able to be with you. My age and health stand on the way. But seeing you I am sure that you, and definitely you, will be able to carry the mission forward, to advance the movement further and to thwart the impending catastrophe that casts its shadow on education.**

The Convention drew to the close with such words of inspiration from the elders and enthusiasm and resolve of the younger: the country will eagerly look ahead towards how the All India Save Education Committee builds up its future movements to save education and with that, to save the generations to come.

Central Committee Condemns Provocative Statement of PM

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powerful in the meantime.

Taking a serious note of the fact that in the wake of this statement communal clashes had already begun to break out in different places of the country, the Central Committee emphatically stated that apart from severely hurting religious minorities' sentiments, this statement was sure to further threaten their safety and security. Warning the countrymen about the disastrous consequences of this statement, the Central Committee firmly held that in the face of ensuing general election in different states, this statement was also intended to whip up communal passions and boost up the sagging morale of the communal forces represented by the Sangh Parivar.

Hailing countrywide people's protest against this mischievous statement, the Central Committee urged the Prime Minister to at once retrace this disastrous statement and to assure the countrymen that under no circumstances would the government yield to communal forces and permit them to build up Ram Mandir at the site of the Babri Masjid. At the same time, the Central Committee, calling upon the countrymen to remain ever vigilant against such vile moves of communal forces and the government, urged them to zealously guard secular democratic principles, people's unity and communal harmony.

Postal strike declared illegal

UTUC-LS Condemns

Comrade Tapas Dutta, General Secretary, UTUC-Lenins Sarani issued the following statement to the Press in protest against Central Government's declaration of the Postal Strike as illegal followed by the Delhi High Court's recent retrograde judgement on this Strike on 14.12.2000:

"The Central Government in keeping with its anti-working class character has today come down on the 6 lakh postal strikers to demoralise the striking workers, in particular, and working class

of the country, in general, by declaring the strike illegal. It is obvious that the Government will invoke ESMA, etc. to disintegrate and punish the striking workers by taking due advantage of the retrograde judgement of Delhi High Court.

We, in the circumstances, call upon the working class of India to forge unity capable of fighting back this onslaught and particularly call upon the striking employees to continue their struggle unitedly, defying all odds till victory is won."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF : NIHAR MUKHERJEE