

Review of the Last Panchayat Polls in West Bengal

Panchayat Election in West Bengal was held on 4th June. From the results declared it appears that CPI(M) in all the three tiers e.g. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samity and Jila Parishad has commanded vast majority. It is a land slide victory for the party. The other partners of the 'Left Front' like RSP and Forward Bloc did not fare well, rather their results were very insignificant compared to the gains of their big partner.

Commenting on the electoral victories, the CPI(M) leadership has claimed that their victory indicates the wide popularity the party now enjoys and the influence of the party now vastly increased among the rural people after one year's rule in the state. Before going into the details of the factors that contributed to CPI(M)'s 'victory', it would be worthwhile to have a brief examination of this claim of CPI(M)'s leadership.

The first point that strikes one's mind—whether it is a fact or not that people's life in this state is being tormented severely by so many problems since this government came into being? Leaving aside the various problems bedeviling city life, the problems in rural life have been multiplied many times due to non-left opportunist policies of this government. In the light of this concrete fact will it be logical to presume that there was surge of spontaneous support from the people in favour of the ruling parties in the last poll? Is it not a fact too that barring a few party cadres and supporters, common people in the villages did not get a modicum of relief due to anti-people and sectarian policies pursued by the partners of the 'Left-Front'? On the contrary, poor people's movable and immovable properties suffered legal attachments due to their failure to pay off rents to the government, although only a portion of those properties had to be released by the government faced with

mounting protests. Besides, most of the power-driven tubewells did not work in absence of regular power supply and as a result agricultural activities remained suspended throwing thousands of agricultural workers and poor peasants out of employment. These are the concrete instances of how the rural poor lived their lives in the regime of the 'Left Front' for the last one year. On the other hand, who have suffered most from the harvesting policy of this government? Did it touch

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STRIKE OF 28th JUNE CALLED OFF

UTUC (Lenin Sarani) Strongly Condemns CITU's gross unethical and undemocratic conduct

Condemning outright the act of the Central Government and the leaderships of Six Central Trade Unions led by CITU in arriving at a secret deal through week-long confabulations and hectic parleys on 26th, for imposing the decision of withdrawal of the proposed strike in the public sector enterprises on the workers and employees, without any tangible improvement in the situation, Comrade Pritish Chanda, General Secretary, UTUC (Lenin Sarani) has raised several very important questions in a statement released to the Press. Protest statements are coming from different states also. Comrades Tapas Dutta and B.Jena, President and General Secretary, UTUC (Lenin Sarani) of Orissa State Committee have issued a joint statement protesting against this withdrawal decision.

In his statement, workers and employees of Comrade Chanda has drawn the attention of the public sector bodies to the fact that: ".....The

Central Labour Minister very carefully preferred to meet the leaders of only six selected central trade unions avoiding other central trade unions (like-ourselves) who also called the strike. These leaders also have called off the strike only on the basis of some vague verbal assurances not even covering all the issues of the strike and such an important decision affecting the entire working class has been taken without consulting the other organisations. We find nothing tangible in these vague verbal assurances and no valid ground for calling off the token strike on 28th in all the public sector enterprises."

The very vital issues related to the entire episode of calling off the strike just giving the time for communication of this decision to the workers and employees over the heads of some of the central trade unions and the all-national federal trade union bodies of employees and workers of different sectors call for serious consideration and probing. Comrade Chanda have listed them in his statement.

First, why did the Central Government backed out from the norm set down in the last National Convention of treating the central trade unions on equal footing in matters of vital or major policy decisions as also on issues where all are equally involved?

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CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S CALL

Observe 5th August MEMORIAL DAY of our beloved departed Leader, Teacher and Guide Comrade Shibdas Ghosh in a Solemn and Befitting Manner

The Central Committee of our Party has decided to observe 5TH AUGUST, 1978 as the "MEMORIAL DAY" of the Second Death Anniversary of our Great Departed Leader, Teacher, Guide, the Founder General Secretary of our Party and one of the Outstanding Thinkers of the era **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** in a most befitting manner with all dignity and solemnity it deserves.

The Central Committee cannot but note with satisfaction the growing appreciation among the people of the Thoughts and Teachings of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** throughout the length and breadth of the country. In fact, the more we carry the Teachings of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** to the people, the more people come forward to mobilise themselves under the banner of our Party.

Events of the last one year have proved beyond doubt the correctness of the analysis of our Party in the line as shown by **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** as to the motive of the Indian bourgeoisie in installing the Two-party Parliamentary System in the country just to arrest the legitimate democratic mass movements within the bounds of Parliamentarism-reformism in order to save this crisis-ridden capitalism and also to the capitulationist role played by the different social-democratic parties. Our warning about the possibility of the pseudo-Marxist parties' attempt to appear as the third alternative in the very same mechanism of the Two-party System at the peril of democratic mass movements has also come true.

Comrades, history has bestowed on us the great responsibility of carrying the Great Teachings of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** to the toiling people,

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CPI(M)'s claim of popular support is ridiculous in the light of their anti-people, Pro-jotedar Pro-vested interest politics and attitude

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in anyway the vested interest of jotedar, wholesalers? Is it not a fact that as usual, this time also the support price for paddy remained on paper only, the poor and lower middle peasants having been forced to make distress sale of their crops at throw away prices?

The government did not lift its little finger even to save the poor and distressed peasants from the machinations of the unscrupulous traders and wholesalers. As a result, the poor and distressed peasants have been doubly robbed—they got lower price than the government fixed floor price for their crops while the inflationary price spirals for all the essential commodities are making their position precarious. Did the 'Left Front' think even of removing this gross injustice? Not to speak of any other thing, twenty six share-croppers and poor peasants were murdered by the armed attacks of the jotedars last year. The 'Left Front' Government instead of bringing to book the miscreants and meting out exemplary punishments, advertised this event as their achievement meaning thereby that the number was probably less than what was expected! This is not all. This government has surpassed all records of previous governments in pampering the jotedars and rural vested interest in as much as allowing them to go scot free without paying levy on the surplus of crops under their possession. The collection of levy rice is abysmally low this year which means almost the entire stock of rice both from surplus crop as also from distress sale of the poor and destitute peasants is now at the possession of the jotedars-wholesalers combine who will hold the people at ransom for supply of this essential item of consumption. Surely, not even the previous Congress Government could touch this record!

Would anybody say that these are the concrete records of achievements which have contributed to the enormous increase in the popularity of the 'Left Front' Government among the rural poor and middle class people?

Then again, by the positive obstructions set before the movement of the poor peasants for recovery of benam lands and their distribution, closing down of thousands of hitherto unapproved schools mostly in rural areas and thereby throwing the students and teachers to uncertainties, the 'Left Front' Government has laid bare its anti-people attitude and bias. No sane man will hold that all this can be contributory factor for their popularity with the common masses in the countryside.

Moreover, it is an incontrovertible fact that the vicious chain of jotedar-police-administrative officers which is the concrete expression of rural vested interest, so long patronised and strengthened by the political backings of the Congress, instead of being weakened and curbed during the 'Left Front' regime is further consolidating its position by mere shift in its allegiance to CPI(M) under whose protecting arms, it is carrying on depredations on the poor and toiling rural people with no let or hindrance. The rural people are now from frying pan to fire and suffer a suffocating situation. Can all this be the basis for the electoral success of the 'Left Front'? Judged from all aspects there can hardly be any scope for doubt that the 'Left Front's' success at the poll was due to anything other than for having a popular mass base.

There is other aspect too. What about the picture of internal cohesion among the constituents of the 'Left Front' and more especially within CPI(M) itself? The bickerings and disunity over the question of nomination of

candidates as can be seen in the bourgeois parties were not only present within the 'Front' and more especially CPI(M) but they were much more acute. In many places, the local branch committees of the constituent parties set up candidates against the 'Front' nominees and they were engaged in open statements - counter-statements, circulated leaflets, organised mass meetings and came to open bitter conflicts among themselves. This is no figment of imagination of those opposed to the 'Front' but is a fact conceded even by the front leaders. Situation came to such a pass that even the bourgeois dailies were reporting without being contradicted that at one corner of the corridor of Writers' Buildings, one RSP leader was openly complaining that CPI(M) had picked up its nominees mostly from among the notorious Congress men so much so that Congress was hard put in selecting its own candidates while in another corner the CPI(M) leader was threatening the RSP people that they had no organisational base but could win the assembly seats only with the help of CPI(M) but this time they would be taught a 'good lesson' because of their treachery! After the poll results were out, the different leaders of the 'Front' admitted that there was no overall unity among the 'Front' partners and because of this, the results were not that good as could be achieved otherwise. This is about unity among the 'Front' partners. What about unity even within the ranks of CPI(M)—was there any semblance of unity there? Even before the poll, dissensions and squabbles within that party became an open secret and we gave, in our Bengali organ 'Ganadabi' numerous instances citing from local sources as also newspaper reports where the dissident cadres of CPI(M) being dissatisfied with the party

nominees as independent candidates. Many veteran and local committee leaders of CPI(M) were such independent candidates. Local people were witnesses to most filthy and bitter fights between these candidates and their party nominees. Having failed to bring minimum discipline and control over these in-fightings of the cadres, the top leaders had even to confess that "Jalpaiguri is a free district" that is to say party mandate does not reach there. They had to declare also in desperation that whoever among their candidates, officially nominated or not would win belonged to the 'Front'! People know that not only Jalpaiguri district but different regions and places of Hooghly, Nadia, 24 Parganas, Bankura and almost all other districts became 'autonomous' so far as working of party control and mandate over nomination of candidates was concerned. In the concrete background of this situation the party leadership had to come out with this declaration of a 'free for all' fight. In the light of this state of organisational unity and cohesion of the party which was an open secret would the CPI(M) leadership ask the people to believe that it was on the strength of organisation this party scored such success in the poll? The same CPI(M) leadership ascribed the reason for the results of RSP and Forward Bloc of not being up to expectation in the absence of overall unity among the 'Front' parties. From this the natural question would be, if for want of overall unity among the 'Front' partners, RSP and FB could not fare well in the poll then for the same reason, the results of CPI(M) should have been equally so. Moreover, over and above the absence of unity and cohesion among 'Front' partners, the infights of CPI(M) cadres came into open bitter fights which must have the over all impact on the poll results

so far as the party's position was concerned. But how is it that all this had no impact on the election results of CPI(M)? What magic was there? How can one explain this standing contradiction?

The CPI(M) leadership was quite aware of common people's reaction to their pro-jotedar, pro-vested interest, anti-left, opportunist steps and measures. They were not in a happy position either so far as inner party unity and cohesion was concerned in as much as in almost all the districts, local party leadership or influential sections rose in open revolt over the nomination of candidates. Situation was thus definitely unfavourable for the leadership and here hangs the question as to why and how could the leadership dare facing the people at the hustings? When they had neither the popular support nor the organisational unity and strength to rely on what else was there that prompted them to face the electorate and make the confident declaration before the poll that they would win hands down? And with their popularity at such a low ebb with the organisational unity both among the 'Front' partners, as also within their own party in shambles, CPI(M) scored a landslide victory in the polls. The question that comes uppermost in ones mind is the same—what was the source of their strength when neither popular support nor Party organisation could help them?

The answer to all these questions or the heart of the mystery can only be traced to concrete facts and events in different phases of just concluded Panchayat election.

The fundamental question to be judged as to whether the attitude and methods adopted right from the framing of electoral rules, their subsequent

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amendments and in conduction of election could at all make possible an election free and fair.

The first point to be noted is that the 'Left Front' Government started conducting the whole process of this election leaving many defects and lacuna unremoved. Say for example—the election rules were not sent for circulation to the opposition parties and the people at large even after declaration of the election date. The opposition party MLAs even after enquiries could not get the copies of these rules. The delimitation of constituencies, that is to say the electoral constituencies were not timely intimated to the candidates and the voters; they came to know of this much later. Voter's lists were not available to many candidates and they had to face much difficulties in filing their nomination papers. The lists later supplied were old and unrectified, full of mistakes and discrepancies. From the very initial stage of election campaign all this raised the question as to whether they were all due to administrative incompetence or a deliberate thing calculated to place the candidates other than those of the ruling parties in difficulties. Whether this kind of deliberate mismanagement to cause inconvenience to opposition parties and candidates was to ensure a free and fair election with equal opportunities to all or smacks of a manipulative tactics to conduct the election in a partial manner is anybody's guess.

Secondly, the 'Left Front' Government brought some amendments to the Panchayat Act which was framed during the Congress rule. But in those amendments they did not incorporate the proposals put forward by our Party like the right to recall the elected candidates and freeing the Panchayats from the bureaucratic control of the administration. These were the proposals which could

If lack of overall unity adversely affected the poll results of the other constituents of the 'Left Front' then this together with the internal dissensions and squabbles should have their reflection on CPI(M)'s poll results

have advanced the people's cause by upholding democratic norms and principles. These the 'Left Front' did not accept but they made such amendments like nomination in different bodies etc. whose sole object was to get extra edge over the election results in order to maintain their party dominations over the bodies. This was patently undemocratic in character and meant for guarding petty party sectarian interests. Moreover, some of these amended rules were contrary to constitutional provisions and the Calcutta High Court also held them to be so in its ruling. If the Government had slightest respect for democratic principles and norms then it would have certainly removed these defects and deficiencies even at this stage so as to make the election free from any legal defects or blemishes. Why did not the 'Left Front' Government take this natural course? Why, on the contrary, they stood firmly on their ground of conducting the election even on faulty rules and showed their unseemly haste in anyhow holding the election?

Thirdly, the most serious problem was posed in the matter of allotment of symbols. The state Government took the responsibility of conducting the Panchayat election and sought the permission from the election commission for using the reserved symbols for the recognised parties. They however did not seek the permission for allowing the same facility which the registered parties enjoy in the matter of selecting one from among the free symbols as in the assembly and Parliament elections. As a result, the parties like CPI (M), F B, R S P, CPI, even Janata Party and both wings of Congress got the opportunity of

having one symbol for all the three-tier constituencies. Whereas our Party SUCI which has a long tradition of playing a leading role in the legitimate democratic movement of the oppressed people, has a wide-spread mass base and is a significant factor in the political field of the state was denied this opportunity of having one symbol to contest in all the three tier constituencies just like the above-mentioned parties on the so-called plea of not being a 'recognised' party. But as a registered party we were given the opportunity of choosing one common symbol from the free symbols in the last Parliament and Assembly polls or even in the Arsha Assembly Bi-election held just a few months back. Our Party was thus deliberately put to very much inconvenience far worse than that of even independent candidates. For, our Party had to put up candidates for all the three tiers but each one of them, not only in different tiers but even in the same tier where seats were more than one, had different symbols. In other words five candidates of our party in all the three tiers of a particular constituency had five different symbols!

In the rural side where the vast multitude of poor people are still illiterate and who usually vote memorising the symbol, how very difficult it was for them to cast their votes in favour of our party although with best of intentions—can very well be appreciated. It was therefore nothing but a deliberate act of the 'Left Front' to put our party in such a most inconvenient situation by resorting to gross discrimination in the matter of allotment of symbols. That is why, at the very initial stage of election campaign

our party declared in a Press Conference that the election was not going to be a free and fair one in as much as all the unfairness, discrimination, illegalities, and deficiencies attended with the process and method of conduction of the election amount to nothing but a "legalised rigging". The motive behind all these deliberate acts and measures can be nothing other than to wipe out our party in the election and this will be admitted by all other than the inveterate fanatics of CPI(M).

Fourthly, the gross mismanagement the 'Left Front' has shown in the matter of printing of ballots practically ruled out the least chance for the election being free and fair. Lakhs of ballot papers were printed in the district printing presses which are even unfit to print question papers for school examinations and this was done with the least guard and caution against probable misuse. Naturally, there is much doubt whether secrecy was at all observed to the desired extent in such a vital aspect like printing of ballot papers. Who does not know that those who secured contract for printing of ballot papers did so through 'channels' usually associated with the departmental high officials or the leaders of the ruling parties? There is therefore, always a mutual obligation of satisfying each other.

In the concrete background of printing of duplicate ballots in the West Bengal Government Press itself before the last parliamentary poll about which, these leaders of the 'Left Front' who are now in government were so much vociferous and the fact which was even admitted by the Central Law Minister on the floor of the Parliament on the basis of reports of the

Returning Officers and as such a political scandal of high order, but never probed into by all these parties when they came to governmental power, it was really a wonder of wonders as to why the 'Left Front' Government chose to print the ballot papers in the district presses without least guards, secrecy and caution which are the very primary conditions for holding a free and fair election. Not only this, even before the election, newspapers reported about burning of truck loads of ballot papers even in open places. In whose presence such burning was done is not known. Besides, it has been the common experience of the voters that other than the symbols of the 'Front' constituents all the symbols, particularly the free-symbols were not distinctly printed. This was even pointed out by some of the officers of the government so far the newspaper report goes. The symbols were hazy and were not clearly distinguishable. This was therefore an extra disadvantage for our voters in casting their votes. The ingenuity does not exhaust here. In case of our candidates' symbols—after they were finally allotted by the government—were withdrawn at a much later stage when it was next to impossible to print the new one. In at least one case, our candidate had to seek the intervention of the Calcutta High Court to retain the symbol originally allotted to him. In many cases, for want of time, this could not be done.

Will anybody say that the 'Left Front' Government did all this to guard against unfair means or to make the election a free and fair one?

This is one aspect regarding the technical arrangement but there is other aspect which is no less important. This relates to influencing the electorate by illegitimate means through the government administrative machinery. In the past, during the Congress rule people experienced how

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Janata Government's Budget in Assam shows no break from the anti-people policies and attitude of Congress

[We publish here the translated text of the speech in brief delivered by Comrade Jainal Abedin, Our MLA in the Assam Assembly while participating in the Budget discussion—Ed. P. Era]

All the budgets prepared by the Congress Governments in the past reflected anti-people, pro-capitalist outlook. Each of those budgets brought greater miseries, more privations in the life of the common people and more benefit to the top industrialists, traders, the rich peasants, the mahajans, the vested interest.

Let us see what are the provisions of this present budget and whom it aims to serve. We all know that so long as the exploitative capitalist state machine obtains in our country no budget, claiming pro-people, can ameliorate the basic miseries of people's life. But that does not mean that the governments in different states and at the Centre have nothing to do, even within this framework, to give some relief to the people and their only business is to act as subservient to the interest of the big business and the monopolists. Judged from this view-point it is clear that the present budget has failed completely to act up to the expectation of the people.

This year's budget provided an enhancement of expenditure in the general services as well as different administrative services. A total of Rs. 20.27 crores has been allocated towards general administration excepting the police—an increase of Rs. 2.01 crores from the last year's budget. All told an increase of 16.5%. The unpaid amount of Rs. 48.09 crores of the Dearness Allowance of the government employees and the workers has not been taken into account here.

Janata Government's budget like the previous Congress Government has not failed to serve the capitalist state machine by increasing the Police Budget. Whereas, last year Rs. 18.44 crores were allocated towards police administration, this year it has been raised to Rs. 20.46 crores—an increase of Rs. 2.02 crores which

means an increase of 5.2% of the total budget.

But we notice that this budget has made practically no enhanced allocation in those heads which are associated with public utility services and economic development of the state like Education, Health, Industry, Electricity, Communication etc. In the last year's budget Rs. 7.46 crores was allocated towards industrial development whereas Rs. 8.63 crores has been allocated this year which means allocation of only 2.2% of total budget. Had the present government a pro-people attitude and prepared it from an outlook of providing relief to the toiling people then it should have instead of enhancing allocations towards police and general administration curtailed those and enhanced allocations towards Education, Public Health, Industrial Development, Electricity, Communication, etc.

We all know that 91% of the total population of Assam live in the villages. During the last 31 years of uninterrupted Congress rule, acute economic crisis has befallen in the life of the downtrodden millions of the village as a result of ruthless capitalist exploitation.

The poor and the middle peasants are becoming poorer everyday under the burden of ruthless capitalist exploitation—getting evicted of their land by the rich peasants and the money-lenders and thus swelling the ranks of the landless peasants. In each and every village the problem of unemployment, educated as well as uneducated, is becoming more and more

acute with days passing. The landless peasants who work as day labourers do not get job all the year round. Though formally there is a minimum wage law still in vogue in the state but the rich peasants who employ the agricultural labourers deprive them of their legal due even. The sharecroppers are also being deprived of their due share.

The poor and the middle peasants who own small lands, as because there is no irrigation facility in most of the areas of the state and even if there is such facility in a very few areas it is too costly and as because the fertilisers, all essential for high yield, is sold at high prices—they cannot afford those to increase production and naturally they are unable to increase their income. Not only that; due to the conspiracies of the rich peasants, money lenders, hoarders, black-marketeers and police they do not get reasonable price for their produce. In his budget speech the Finance Minister has not said anything as to how his government proposes to solve this problem to provide relief to the people.

When such is the picture on the one side, on the reverse, prices of all essential commodities are ever on the increase. The minister has not said anything as to how he would effectively check this.

We all know that the question of the increasing agricultural production is inseparably linked with land reforms. But as because the erstwhile ruling Congress Party had all along been in political alliance with the rich peasants, money-lenders, jotedars and the vested interest, excepting some verbal assurances of radical land reforms and a few laws in writing nothing worthwhile was done so far. The miseries of the poor and middle peasants went on aggravating.

The Finance Minister of

the present government too declared his government's decision on Integral Rural Development Scheme but I am sorry to say that he failed to throw any light as to how his government would implement the scheme and how the basic problems of the rural population will be solved.

In this budget peasants owning up to ten bighas of land have been exempted from the purview of land taxes. But if the policies of recording the names and the distribution of land vested with the government is not made easier, the rich peasant-money-lender-police-bureaucrat chain is not broken, which can only be done under the pressure of mass movements—the benefit of this declaration will not come to the common people.

Who does not know that every year devastating flood and erosion of rivers bring tremendous calamities in the lives of lakhs and lakhs of people of this state—crores of rupees worth of dwelling houses, crops, agricultural fields, cattle etc. are destroyed every year. Even according to government's estimate only crops worth Rs. 26 crores were destroyed in the last year's flood. These bring further miseries—these further accentuate the acute economic crisis of the common people. But excepting some verbal assurances to build dams on the Subanshiri, Dihang and the Barak river no worthwhile plan has yet been adopted to resist this menace. The honourable finance minister has not even said anything as to what solution, both short term and long term, his government proposes to make on the question of rehabilitation of the lakhs and lakhs of people who lose all their belongings as a result of river erosion every year.

A vast section of the Assam population work in the tea gardens of Assam and their contribution to the economy of the state is enormous. During the last 31 years lakhs and

lakhs of tea garden workers have been allowed to be retrenched by the Congress Governments to offer scope to the native and foreign capitalists to earn more profit. We were not enlightened by the Finance Minister as to what his government proposes to do to stop such illegal and illegitimate retrenchments and reinstatement of the retrenched workers.

The standard of living of the urban people is also fast coming down. There are unemployed in every urban household. New factories have not been installed but wide scale retrenchments, lay-offs, lock-outs are going on. Quite a number of factories have even been totally closed down. And this is further adding to the miseries of the people in ever greater magnitude. The honourable finance minister did not say anything as to what steps his government proposes to take to solve this problem.

The big industrialists, traders, rich peasants evade payment of taxes and revenues; the corrupt bureaucrats misappropriate crores and crores of rupees; the police and the civil administration have been widened further and further—and who have to shoulder the burden of all this? Certainly, the over-taxed, over burdened down-trodden toiling millions more than 70 percent of whom now live below poverty line. And when this fund collected by overtaxing the poor too proved insufficient, representatives of the previous Congress Governments used to rush to the Centre with begging bowls and everytime came back with further burdens of overdraft. And thus a relatively self-sufficient economy was reduced to a bankrupt one—a surplus state in agricultural production was reduced to a deficit state—and this within the last 31 years—by following a policy that has given unbridled scope

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Unethical and Undemocratic Conduct of CITU

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The norm was set down as a counter measure against the policy of forming a coterie of trade unions so as to make an unholy alliance with it by the government as was done through the so-called 'Apex Body' during the Emergency. Does not this government show its inclination to the same undemocratic and unethical means of setting up pampered unions with whose help it thinks it can pursue its anti-labour and anti-movement policies and measures? If not, then why it chose six central trade unions when other unions like UTUC (Lenin Sarani) were party to the strike decision adopted on 15th May convention? Did it only seek the help of those unions who were eager to help it from the first organised challenge from the workers and employees in public sector bodies and institutions against the various anti-labour policies pursued by the government? If so, then it must state so in public.

Secondly, what is the basic norm of ethics and conduct in a joint movement? The leaders of the six central trade unions and particularly of CITU will have to explain it to us and the workers and employees. Mr. Ramamurthy the General

Secretary of CITU wrote to us that no single trade union should enter into separate dialogue even if the government calls it in a discussion. Yes, that is what it should be as that forms the very basis of a joint movement or joint struggle. But why did Mr. Ramamurthy forget this basic principle and engaged himself body and soul in hectic parleys and confabulations with central ministers over the head of others? What is the meaning of sending advice on principle only to trample upon it later?

Thirdly, these leaders and more particularly, the CITU General Secretary will have to explain why did they advise the workers and employees in a written statement to the press just on the neck of time for withdrawal of the strike on the basis of so-called assurances of the government which are not unfamiliar and without clinching a single concrete issue? They might have taken for granted the opinions of other trade unions but surely not of ours. Rather they were well aware of our stand and deliberately avoided us. The decision for withdrawal of strike was virtually imposed by exercise of organisational authority. Could they not do otherwise when they were

having rounds of discussions with the Central Labour Minister jointly or separately for a week or more according to the very admission of the Labour Minister himself?

Fourthly, what is the worth of the so-called assurances said to have been given by the Government? The background of the sitting was set by the Union Labour Minister who while inviting the six central trade unions' leaders for discussion came out with the open threat that the government was thinking in terms of sending the dispute over the merger of the DA with basic pay, restoration of the cut in the allowance since the Emergency and change in the DA formula to arbitration. In the background of this threat of the government what were the concrete achievements that prompted CITU General Secretary to take the initiative in favour of withdrawing the proposed strike on 28th? One of the main demands was to stop the interference of the Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE). The government has not accepted the demand but has said that the trade union leadership shall have the opportunity to discuss with it. This is one of the so-called assurances of the government.

But the most dangerous

thing is that the government has assured "to associate the trade unions in laying down flexible guidelines for wages and DA." So, not only the principal points of dispute between the trade unions and the government on those issues have been shelved but what is more the 'design of curbing collective bargaining' through set 'guidelines' as suggested by the Boothlingam Committee has been smuggled in with the co-operation of these leaders.

So is the case with bonus issue. The government informed that they were bringing shortly a bill on bonus but what would be its quantum and basis were deliberately not spelt out. Nor has it declared its intention to withdraw all the restrictions put on the original Bonus Act during the Emergency. Besides, no reference on withdrawal of Boothlingam Committee recommendations and the Industrial Relations Bill has been made. Mr. Ramamurthy has said that the strike had nothing to do with Boothlingam Committee's recommendations. Did he forget that one of the seven demands was scrapping of Boothlingam recommendations? Besides, the government spokesmen still say that in the proposed bonus bill Boothlingam Committee's recommendations will be the

basis and the ministry of finance is seized with its formulations. Again to put curb on collective bargaining the so-called 'guideline' in association with trade union leadership has been brought all in tune with Boothlingam Committee's recommendations. After all this, Ramamurthy's utterance can have only one meaning that he like Mr. Farnandes thinks that Boothlingam Committee's recommendations deserve considerations or at least they are bargainable. Is it their position? If not then why does he back out from one of the major demands of the workers and employees?

Comrade Chanda has urged upon the workers and employees of the Public Sector enterprises to draw appropriate political education from this episode which smacks of a conspiratorial activity on the part of CITU in defiance of minimum democratic norms and code of joint movement with the sole object of saving the government and its various anti-working class policies and measures from the challenge of the workers and employees organised for the first time after many years. Objective situation is that the workers and employees will have to fight not merely the government and its coercive apparatus but the opportunist leaderships that play as forces of compromise between them and the government.

'Left Front' Government brings down para-military attack on Santaldih workers

Com. Fatick Ghosh, General Secretary, West Bengal State Committee, UTUC (Lenin Sarani) issued the following statement to the Press: on 20th June '78 condemning the para-military onslaughts of the 'Left Front' Government against the Santaldih plant workers:

"The patently anti-working class, anti-movement attitude, steps and measures, now being resorted to by the 'Left Front' Government in terrorising and victimising the Santaldih Thermal Plant workers under the smoke screen of preventing

'sabotage' and 'indiscipline' have come as a severe blow against legitimate trade union movement.

"Applauded by the bourgeoisie and vested interest, the **Government has sent big armed forces in the area under the charge of high police officials. Workers are being forced to work and issued with dismissal and transfer notices at gun points by the armed police forces stationed in the departments. The top bureaucrat who has been entrusted by the**

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Central Committee's Call

(Contd. from Page 1)

organising them along the correct base political line of anti-capitalist Socialist Revolution based on higher moral values, ethics and proletarian culture, mobilising them in Peoples' Committees to build up mass movements as a prelude to developing political power of the people.

In order to attain the objective of carrying the Teachings of COMRADE G. S. to every nook and corner of the country, the Central Committee has decided to observe a fortnight from **5th August to 20th August, 1978** on this occasion in the following manner;

- A Central Rally will be held on 5TH AUGUST at Saheed Minar Maidan, Calcutta where thousands of organised people must be mobilised from different centres;
- All States, excepting West Bengal, must organise State Level mass meetings after 6th but before 20th August, 1978;
- All States, must organise as many meetings of workers, supporters, sympathisers as possible from District down to village levels to educate them on the Teachings of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh**.
- Mass meetings, indoor-meetings, group-sittings, street corner meetings to be arranged as far as possible;
- Red Flag must be hoisted in every party office on 5TH AUGUST and Garlanding of Portrait of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** must be made. All Comrades must wear COMRADE G. S.'s BADGE on 5TH AUGUST, 1978;
- Extensive literary campaign, postering, walling and poster-exhibition carrying the Thoughts of **Comrade Shibdas Ghosh** should be made.

From the very start of framing of rules and election arrangements to polling and counting of votes, CPI(M) led Government pursued all through illegitimate and unfair means and a very partisan outlook making impossible a free and fair election

(Contd. from Page 3)
that party used the government machinery to influence the poor village voters particularly by distributing reliefs or doles on the eve of election, and thus exploited the abject miseries of the poor people for petty party interests. They also freely used the hired hooligans and anti-socials to influence illegally the election results. Was there any break in the use of these unethical means in election this time when those who clamoured most about 'restoration of democracy' were themselves in charge of conduction of the election of Panchayat? Facts tell a different thing. Not only the 'tradition' of use of unethical means in election was kept up but to be fair with CPI(M) it must be admitted that they went much further in this direction so much so that what the Congress used to do paled to insignificance!

Take for example, just four days before the election, on 31st May, the 'Left Front' Committee, after its sitting announced that soon the government would initiate a land reform programme to the effect that repayment of agricultural loans would be waived, displaced persons living in government and private lands would be given legal possession of those lands as homestead, so on and so forth. Why this announcement of concessions just four days before the election? Was it fortuitous or with deliberate motive of influencing the electorate? Not only this, this announcement printed in leaflet from the government press out of public exchequer was circulated to the voters in a massive scale. This is not all. The CPI(M) workers were giving bait of employment to the voters by distributing forms for unemployment allowance and service in primary

schools as the principal means of wooing the unemployed youths.

The 'Left Front' leaders campaigned to the electorate that if it was voted to power, the government would vest more powers in the Panchayats. But CPI(M)'s partners in the 'Front' made this open accusation that CPI(M) campaigned for voting it to power otherwise the villages would get no financial assistance from the government for their developments. What are these if not palpable instances of exerting illegitimate and most unethical influences over the electorate, who are mostly poor people, to bring the election results in favour of the ruling party, taking advantage of its position in the government? Besides all these political baits, it was the common experience of the rural people how the village vested interest, the jotedars profiteers lavishly spent money and food to poor people to buy their votes in favour of CPI(M) candidates most of whom were drawn from the same class.

Over and above all this, from the government sources news was circulated that the decision with regard to enhancement of DA. on an adhoc basis for the government employees ranging from Rs. 25 to Rs. 60 would be finalised on 6th June. Important point here to remember is that it is the government employees who constituted the election machinery under whose control and supervision, the election was held. And a bigger section of the employees is either members or supporters of the Co-ordination Committee led by CPI(M). To dangle the carrot of DA increase to those under whose direct control and supervision the election was going to be held—what else it is if not a glaring

instance of 'political bribing'?

It is not to question the justifiability of enhancement of pay and allowances of the government employees but to bring home the point that in the past, sensing public opinion not in their favour the Congress Government used to announce such concessions either in pay or in allowances of the government employees just on the eve of election in order to artificially influence the results in their favour. On such occasions of pre-election bonanza, along with other leftist parties CPI(M) also made natural protest against this sort of unethical means of the party in power in order to rouse the indignation of the people. But when they are now in power how is it that CPI(M) chose exactly the same means which Congress did in the past? By this act have they not utilised their position in the government in an unethical manner? If so then can this be termed otherwise than rigging the election results by corrupting the administrative machinery? Does it signify a victory on the basis of people's support as is being claimed by CPI(M) leadership?

The second point to be noted is about the selection of candidates by CPI(M). Whom they have given nominations? Not only the dailies but in our Bengali organ 'Ganadabi' we gave many instances wherefrom nobody can be in doubt that CPI(M) chose for its party candidates in many cases—notorious jotedars former Congressites and even the antisocials in the villages. Promode Babu, the state secretary of CPI(M) had, himself admitted that his party had not that much organisational strength to set up party candidates for thousands of seats in hundreds of blocks. Not

only in these areas but also in areas where the Party has been working for long, the leadership of this party followed the same policy as regard nomination of candidates. Before the election, Promode Babu held that the criteria for selection of his Party candidates were the merits and qualities of the individual candidates and from the list of party candidates even their sworn enemies would not deny how much preference was given to merits and qualities of the candidates! Would it be then wrong to presume that CPI(M) leadership being sure that no amount of allurements and concessions could turn poor people's votes in their favour wanted to utilise the influence and command of the rural vested interest by selecting their candidates from among them under whose subjugation and dependence bulk of the rural poor still remain?

Added to all this were the notorious anti-socials who were hired or recruited from industrial and city areas to be despatched to rural areas to act as an auxiliary force and intimidate the workers and supporters of opposition parties. Physical assaults on the opponents, particularly in the areas where our Party has strong organisations, were plenty in number. They had no other recourse than this. Murderous assaults were organised by CPI(M) on our workers both in Baghmundi P. S. Purulia district and Domkal in Murshidabad district where our workers suffered serious knife injuries. The printing houses who got printing orders from our party candidates for election purpose, were threatened that they would meet dire consequences if they dare print leaflets for SUCI.

This in short, was the atmosphere for Panchayat

election, this time. Besides resorting to all these means before the election, the manipulations and corrupt practices taken on the day of polling have no parallel and almost border on imponderables. Really, so far as mean tactics are concerned, CPI(M) may lay claim of its veritable superiority in skill over Congress.

The most reprehensible act to mention is the issue of big bunches of slips signed by the Presiding Officers which were distributed in the polling booths by CPI(M) workers. By showing this slip, persons mostly outsiders could get easy entry into the booth much after the time fixed for polling and cast votes in favour of CPI(M). This was the most important and common feature of corrupt practices in all the districts.

The polling hours were fixed between 7 AM and 3 PM. The usual practice is to allow those persons already within the booth area after the expiry of the fixed time to cast their votes by showing the slip distributed to them by the Presiding Officer. But this time the Presiding Officers had already abdicated the responsibility of issuing their signed slips to the workers of CPI(M) and other front constituents before the election started. That is why while the rate of polling varied from 20% to 40-45% within the polling time fixed, it swelled to 80-85% and even 90% in some places with the help of outsiders brought by CPI(M) with slips already supplied to them. Polling continued till midnight and even till 6th June i.e. for 48 hours in Anara booth of Purulia district. It was a novel method of rigging invented by CPI(M). In Toonda booth of Beldi anchal under Arsha Block, Purulia district, the Presiding Officer refused to issue slips, although requested.

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In matters of manipulative skill and corrupt practices to rig the Panchayat Election CPI(M) outbid Congress and other branded bourgeois parties

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by our Party comrades, to the voters standing in the queue but this job was being done by a Forward Bloc worker. When he was chased, he managed to pass on the bunch of slips signed by the Presiding Officer to Congress(I) camp whereupon CPI(M) came in the picture to make an on-the-spot understanding for dividing the spoils. Accordingly Congress(I) got the share for Gram and Panchayat Samity tiers while CPI(M) got for it the seat in Zila Parishad. The results also corroborated this pattern of distribution of spoils.

The interesting part of this method is that whereas liberal extension of time even up to 48 hours was done in places where CPI(M) and its partners could mobilise bus loads of outsiders but where it could not be done as in the organised belts of our Party, no extension of time was allowed even to the voters who were within the booth area already standing in the queue. Despite protests from the voters and our Party comrades and supporters the Presiding Officer announced the polling closed with the help of armed forces cordoning off the booth. When the Presiding Officers had to keep open the booths at the pressure of public demand, communication was sent to higher officials and they e.g. higher police officials or S. D. O. came with armed police force and took away with them ballot boxes.

It was the common experience of the rural people that Presiding Officers generally arrived at the polling areas on the day preceding the election date and usually put up in houses of CPI(M) leaders or in places arranged on their behalf by CPI(M) workers. The most intimate relation the polling

officials developed with the CPI(M) workers because of the good entertainments they received continued all through the polling hours so much so that persons standing in the queue were found to have ballot papers already in their possession! Generally speaking the presiding officers and polling staff were all eager to cooperate with CPI(M) workers in all sorts of nasty manoeuvres and shady means applied to extract votes from the simple rural people in favour of CPI(M). In the organised areas of our party, they stooped to such mean tactics as to tear the portion of the ballot paper where the name and symbol of our candidate were printed. They deliberately misled the voters by issuing wrong ballot papers, say, the ballot paper for the panchayat samity i.e. the intermediary tier, was given when the ballot paper for Gram Panchayat was to be given and vice versa. The ballot paper for Zila Parishad was tried to be held out from the voters. Everytime these tactics were detected and challenged the officials pleaded inadvertance or mistake. The extra ballot papers thus collected through manipulation were handed over to party loyalists or hired hands for insertion within the boxes. The case of tearing a portion of ballot paper was caught in Hasempur booth under Joynagar police station. Besides, after polling, in many booths the presiding officers refused to issue certified copies of voting accounts. In fact, their ingenuity for corrupt practices was bound by no limit and showed much thinking, planning and training beforehand.

In counting of votes, they also displayed this ingenuity. First, whereas it was officially declared that counting would start immediately after polling, the polling officials on the pretext of taking rest, drove out the election or

counting agents from the room and shut its door and windows for two or three hours and in places for more. What happened during this period of absolute seclusion of the polling staff with ballot boxes in their possession did not remain secret after counting of ballots. Secondly, when countings of ballots for all the three tiers were done simultaneously, only the results of Gram Panchayat were officially given, the results for the remaining two were not officially announced nor certified copies of the results were given to the polling agents perhaps to take caution that no discrepancy should arise and the manipulation in results detected. Not only this, on the plea of disturbances, whenever there was any protest against fraudulent practices, ballot boxes were taken away by the polling officers, escorted by armed police. Again, at the time of counting, ballot papers were most arbitrarily declared invalid. In case of repeated challenges and protests some of those were declared valid but bulk were declared invalid. A wonderful experience was in store for our comrades and the people of Chaklata booth of Lalpur-Manguria anchal of Hura Block in Purulia district. Here CPI(M) cadres distributed slips in place of the presiding officer and polling continued till late in the midnight. It was thereafter announced that counting would start in the morning and most of the polling agents left the booth. To the surprise of them all, they came to know, the next morning that counting of ballots had already been completed. Our Comrades demanded in writing, recounting of votes but the presiding officer had no hesitation to tear the letter before all, backed by CPI(M) cadres and armed police.

So, if the different experiences in all the stages of the panchayat election

INDIAN CAPITAL ABROAD

For sometime past the Indian monopolists were pressing upon the government for allowing cash remittances for contribution to equity participation in various joint ventures gone on steam or in hands abroad. The previous government was encouraging capital goods and even manufacturing units in lieu of hard cash or capital outflow for equity participation in such joint ventures by the Indian capitalists. The new government has however decided to allow on merits direct cash or capital outflow for participation in equity capital in joint ventures or tie up abroad. Mr. Arif Baig Minister of State for Commerce told the Rajya Sabha this development on 2nd May last. However, the financial oligarchy of India which has developed after a long process of merger of industrial capital with bank capital as also the fusion of private monopoly capital with state monopoly capital making the state subservient to its interest hardly requires this formal sanction of the government.

This truth will be obvious from concrete facts as to how the Indian capital is revealing more and more imperialist characteristic features by exporting capital through various means to exploit the foreign markets—their raw materials and cheap labours. We give here only some of the instances, selected at random, from such facts which are pouring in in the bourgeois

starting from the preparatory stage of arrangements to the stage of counting and announcement of results, be summed up then it would not be difficult for anybody to realise that the very aim and objective of CPI(M) was anyhow to win the election, no matter the meanest of tactics and manoeuvres, to be resorted to. For this, they did every thing under their command—changing of electoral rules as also constituencies according to their convenience, influencing the entire election machinery to work in their favour in league with police and anti-socials. In short, it was an all out attempt with total mobilisation of all kinds of resources both of the party and of the government to bring the so-called success in the election in favour of CPI(M). The election, to say the least, was a grand farce at the colossal expenditure of Rs. 9 crores, to be borne by the same poor people who have been deprived of their most vital democratic right—a free and fair poll.

dailies so often.

Giving a report as to the development of Indian banking abroad and how it has been serving the Indian capital by financing the different projects it has been undertaking in overseas markets, Dr. K.S. Krishnaswamy, Deputy Governor of RBI was telling the meeting of the Chairmen and Chief Executives of nine nationalised banks on 20th August last year, "In 1947 Indian banks had only six offices abroad.....As of today, there are 94 offices of Indian banks abroad spread over 22 countries. Besides, banks are holding 39 offices/ allotments for opening 39 offices / subsidiaries.....and applications for more offices / subsidiaries are under consideration" (RBI News letters—August 31, '77).

In the same speech he gave a brief report about substantial increase in business of these overseas branches of Indian banks: "Between December 1974 and December 1976 their total working funds have gone up from Rs. 506 crores to Rs. 1,137 crores. Total advances have increased from Rs. 253 crores to Rs. 485 crores. The *remitable Profits* for the year 1976 amounted to Rs. 9.02 crores against Rs. 7.37 crores for 1975 and Rs. 5.38 crores for 1974.....they (foreign branches) have also undertaken financing of Projects in third countries where they have not a branch". (Ibid).

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Indian Capital Abroad

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The RBI Deputy Governor was also proposing, among other things, setting up of consortium of *Indian and foreign banks abroad*, obviously to meet the resources gap the Indian capital is facing in overseas markets.

How the Indian monopoly houses including the giant public sector undertakings are breaking new grounds in foreign markets and its international impact and reaction will be obvious from the following report. "Indian companies like Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL), Engineering Projects of India Ltd (EPI) and the Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) have bagged Middle East contracts against fierce competition from some of the biggest Western firms". To this development, the reaction of the Chase Manhattan Bank of the USA has been according to the report, is that, "Indian companies may prove to be giant killers in competing for business in Middle East against the biggest and most pretigious Western firms."

(Economic Times, Sept. 29, '77)

These monopoly companies both private and government "are building a new town in Kuwait, an asbestos cement pipe plant in Abu Dhabi, a power station and an airport in Libiya and a fibre board factory in Iraque". This definitely does not exhaust the list of such ventures. Returning from his Middle East tour Mr. George Farnandes, the Union Industry Minister disclosed: "India has made a major dent in the Middle East countries having bagged multi-billion dollar contracts on bilateral basis for participating in a host of projects ranging from exploration, setting up steel plants, hotels, commercial vehicle projects, minerals and supply of plants and equipments". Giving some details about these projects.

Mr. Farnandes informed: "India was already undertaking a Rs. 239 crore

construction projects in Kuwait and was now expected to bag the second phase of Rs. 150 crores soon".

(Economic Times, 3.11.77)

In another report Economic Times disclosed on 21.1.78: "India to bag a colossal Rs. 200 crore turnkey project in Latin America. Three large houses—Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), Tata Exports and Kamanis have joined hands to form a consortium for undertaking this massive transmission line projects in Venezuela, it is learnt". The same paper reported in the same edition that the Indian investors were penetrating at a massive scale the Latin American markets by undertaking the projects to set up "basic industries like steel, power, heavy and medium engineering like hydro-electric generating plants, machine tools, pipelines, sugar plants, bicycles in Peru, Venezuela and Colombia".

Do all these concrete facts suggest that the Indian Capital is still to be characterised as "compradore" or that Indian economy as "semi-feudal"? Do all these characterisations bear any relevance to the scientific teachings of Marxism-Leninism? Only the politically naive argue like this that had Indian capitalism been developed then certainly Indian agriculture would have been developed and that the conditions of the Indian masses—the workers and peasants would have been improved. This is sheer trash and suffers from bourgeois illusion in the present phase of moribund capitalism to which all that Lenin had to point out is the truth:

"... If capitalism could develop agriculture, which today lags far behind industry everywhere, if it could raise the standard of living of the masses which are still poverty-stricken and half starved everywhere inspite of the amazing advance in technical knowledge,

ASSAM BUDGET

(Contd. from Page 4)

of exploitation to the capitalist class—urban as well as rural. But who is suffering—not the rich, not the social high ups but the down trodden millions whose bare existence even is at stake.

The new Janata Government has not imposed any new taxation but it has neither withdrawn nor proposed to reconstruct the very many Regressive Taxes imposed by the former Congress Governments—but any government which is serious about common people's interest would have done so.

If the government introduced all out state trading, both wholesale and retail, of food grains and

JUST OUT

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(in Urdu)

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then there could be no talk of surplus of capital. And the petty bourgeois critics of capitalism advance this "argument" on every occasion. But then capitalism would not be capitalism, for unevenness of development and semi-starvation of the masses are fundamental, inevitable conditions and prerequisites of this method of production. As long as capitalism remains capitalism, surplus capital will never be used for purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses; for this would mean a decrease in profits for the capitalists; instead it will be used to increase profits by exporting capital abroad, to backward countries".

(Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism chapter IV, pp 139—40; People's Publishing House 1944 Edition).

essential commodities banning all private trade, forced the employers to reinstate all the retrenched workers, acquired the benam lands and redistributed the same among the landless peasants, saw that the share-croppers were not deprived of their legitimate share of crop, forced the employers to abide by the Minimum Wage Act, made arrangements to open all the closed factories—then all those could bring some relief in the life of the people. But these, the government could not enforce depending upon the police and the bureaucrats. Only consciously organised mass movements can make all these attempts successful. The government, if it is pro-people, would help mass movements to develop by not allowing the police to interfere in the legitimate democratic movements. It is regrettable that the present government has not approached these problems from this perspective. This proves unmistakably that this government too aims at looking after the interest of the minority, the rich, to the detriment

of the interest of the common people.

The finance minister has given many high sounding assurances and made many tall promises of creating a prosperous future for the toiling people of Assam but have not made any scientific explanation as to how his government would achieve those. On the contrary, I have very clearly shown the way he has prepared his government's budget, the outlook that is reflected in it as a whole reveals without leaving an iota of doubt that the present government too is following the footsteps of its predecessor, the Congress Government. There is no new approach, no pro-people attitude in this budget. This budget too like all other bourgeois budgets aims at strengthening and perpetuating the interest of capitalist exploitation, interest of capitalism to the detriment of the interest of the people. The only thing the common people can expect of this budget is privation, misery, hunger, starvation more and more.

Attack on Santaldih Workers

(Contd. from Page 5)

Chief Minister to conduct the whole operation is trying to give a so-called justification to this paramilitary action by holding that there is no protest from the workers against this action when fact is that the workers have been silenced on gun point. This is really a very dangerous situation before the trade union movement.

"We are of the firm opinion that the problem of power supply is surely an urgent issue and is to be solved but when even CITU, the trade union wing of CPI(M) could not deny the fact that it is the administration and not the workers which is behind the real cause of disruption in power supply the Government, strangely

enough has chosen the workers as the scape goat.

"While therefore, supporting the just cause of the plant workers and their proposed protest action on 21st June, we hope that yet at this stage, the Government will desist from pursuing gross autocratic and vindictive methods by withdrawing notices of dismissal and transfers on the workers as also the police forces etc.

"We call upon the working people of the state to take note of the serious danger now posed before the working class movement in the state and organise themselves at all levels to stop this unprecedented naked police attack against the working class movement so as to defend their legitimate movements and democratic rights".

Editor-in-Chief—NIHAR MUKHERJEE