

# Mask of BJP's Honesty !

# Proletarian Era

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## Observe

### Death Centenary of Frederick Engels and 20th Death Anniversary of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh

*5th August is a memorial  
day to the World proletariat.*

On this day in 1895 the world proletariat lost Frederick Engels, the compatriot of Karl Marx, an outstanding exponent of scientific socialism and a great leader of the world proletariat, and 81 years later in 1976, on this very day Indian proletariat lost Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, a worthy continuer of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung and an eminent Marxist thinker of this era. Every year we observe this day with revolutionary solemnity. This year 5th August will be the culminating day of the death centenary of Frederick Engels and also the 20th death anniversary of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh.

In the present critical international and national situation marked by an unprecedented economic, political, social and moral crises owing to the moribund phase of the world capitalism-imperialism, and when the disarray in the world socialist movement is making the matter worst confounded, the urgent need of the hour is to awaken, mobilise and organise the exploited people for revolutionary battles, being imbued with revolutionary teachings of Marxism-Leninism-Shibdas Ghosh's thoughts. In the present situation it is the duty of the exploited masses to grasp the invaluable teachings of Marxism-Leninism-Shibdas Ghosh's thoughts through meticulous study of these thoughts, through realisation and application of them in their everyday life to remould themselves in order to be equal to the task for relentless struggle against capitalism imperialism. We can pay real homage to these departed leaders only by constantly engaging ourselves in the two-fold struggle, the struggle to mould ourselves by carrying out elevation and rectification struggle through criticism and self-criticism and in class and mass struggle, in the path as illuminated by them. This is the call of the 5th August.

#### Was the BJP really averse to horse-trading ?

The BJP is boasting that it did not go for horse trading. But what was the reality? The gap to attain majority was so large that any attempt to make up the gap by horse-trading would be a futile exercise. The BJP was after a split of its rivals in such a way so as to avoid the law on defection, but it failed in that direction. The compulsion of the situation prevented it from horse-trading, but it is trying to make maximum mileage out of it. But despite its claim of not attempting horse-trading why Sri Chandrababu Naidu, the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh had to take the extreme precautionary measure of confining the MPs belonging to his camp in a hotel in south India? We are not commenting here about the character of these MPs. But is this precautionary measure for nothing? Was it at all necessary had not the BJP's MP catchers been roaming near about?

Besides, did not the BJP leaders ask the "honest Congressmen" to come to their rescue? Had they not even attempted to keep some MPs of other parties absent on the day of voting on the confidence motion? Why did Sri Vajpayee dash to Sri P.V. Narasimha Rao just on the very next day of taking oath of office? Was it a mere courtesy call? Then why did Sri L.K. Advani accompany him? And why was it shrouded in so much secrecy? What prompted the short-lived BJP government to assure full statchood to Uttarakhand and Jharkhand? Are not all these desperate attempts of the BJP to retain somehow its *gaddi* at the Centre?

After its failure to garner enough support to prove majority on the floor of the house, the BJP has been most skillfully trying to justify its action by saying that it got the mandate of the people. But how can it claim of getting mandate, even according to bourgeois parliamentary norms, when its strength is far short of majority, and it and its allies got only 23 per cent of total votes polled?

#### Does the BJP lack interest in power and pelf ?

But the BJP's claim about its lack of interest in power and pelf did however receive a severe jolt by the conduct of its vice president, Mr. Sikandar Bakht who being extremely annoyed for not getting a portfolio to his liking remained at his residence even when the very stability of the ministry was at stake. His feeling could be assuaged only by arranging some additional portfolio for him. Does it not forebode what dimension the squabble within the BJP will take over power and pelf if it remains in power for a pretty long time? Compared to the Congress the squabbles within the BJP are less, but the more

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A hotchpotch United Front ministry has been installed at the Centre with the support of the Congress. The common people are in complete quandary by observing this opportunistic move of all these parties for some pragmatic consideration. By pointing to this opportunism of all these parties the BJP is trying to create an impression among the people that it is a principled party, it has something good to offer to the people and it is not after pelf and power.

#### How honest the BJP is !

But is this claim of the BJP based on reality? The United Front is no doubt a product of sheer opportunism. But the opportunism of the United Front does not *ipso facto* prove the honesty of the BJP. Had the BJP been really honest then why did it go to form the government even when it did not command the support of the majority in parliament? Before the elections the BJP leaders clearly stated that it would not try to form the government if they did not get more than 200 seats. But why did they form the government despite getting much less than 200 seats? Is this difference between their profession and practice due to their lack of interest in governmental seat of power?

Just after becoming the prime minister, Sri Vajpayee declared that he would prove his majority on the floor of the house within 15 days. The BJP also declared that it would not indulge in horse-trading. So what was the calculation of Sri Vajpayee in proving majority on the floor of the house? Sri L.K. Advani, the BJP president said in an interview to *The Asian Age* dated 7.6.96 that from the statement of Sri P. Chidambaram of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC), and of one leaders of the DMK they did count on the support of these parties for the BJP. According to Sri Advani the support of the AGP would have been forthcoming if the support of the TMC and DMK was received. So it is not for nothing that Sri Vajpayee was harping on more financial support to the states. This was a bait to these parties. Does it not demonstrate that the BJP was after an unprincipled alliance with the regional parties for clinging to power at the Centre?

Ultimately the BJP failed in its attempt to get the support of the regional parties. Being denied the support of these parties the BJP is now accusing them as opportunists. If these parties support the BJP, they are principled, and if they do not they are opportunists!

The BJP leaders admitted that they were in touch with the Congress and the Janata Dal even before the elections for assessing the possibility of forming a government with their support after the elections. Does it show its lack of interest in power and pelf by any means?

## This is No Leftism

The United Front (UF) ministry with Mr Deve Gowda of Janata Dal as the Prime Minister has taken oath of office in New Delhi. Everybody knows that the UF is a hotch-potch combination of disparate forces. Besides the NF-LF combine, the other constituents are the DMK, Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) and the AGP. The CPI, as a Front constituent, has joined the ministry while the CPI(M), after much dilly-dallying, has finally decided to stay

out but to support the ministry, being in the Front. And wonder of wonders, this ministry can in no way be sustained without the support of the hated Congress from outside!

#### CPI(M)'s political somersault

To say that the role of the parties led by the CPI(M) calling themselves leftists has raised eyebrows all round, would be an understatement. An utterly opportunistic political somersault would be a more apt description. For did not

these "Leftists" and especially the CPI(M) rend the sky with outcries against the hawala tainted corrupt Congress *raj* of Narasimha Rao only recently, during the election campaign? What was the CPI(M)'s assessment about the Congress at the election time? We quote from what the CPI(M) General Secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet wrote then: "The people have become fed up with the Congress regime. In the people's perception Congress is identified with price-rise, unemployment, institutionalised corruption and criminalisation, not to speak of aggravation of

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## Not "Mandir-Masjid"

# People must strengthen forces of democratic movement – the real alternative

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it is tasting power, the internecine fight over power and pelf is assuming larger and larger dimension. The ugly scene over distribution of tickets in the last mini general elections at the BJP headquarters, the Vaghela-Keshubhai Patel internecine fight over *gaddi* and more recently the stripping of a minister by a rival group in the meeting place of Sri Vajpayee at Ahmedabad, Gujarat, are some of the instances of bitter squabbles within the BJP over power and pelf.

### Misdeeds of the BJP during 13 day rule

The misdeeds of the BJP during its short 13 day rule are neither negligible. Despite their full knowledge that this government would not last, the BJP ministers were seen issuing policy statements one after another. Some BJP ministers are reported to have worked overtime to make copies of important documents from the government files. Sri Murlu Monohar Joshi was reported to be engaged in more despicable acts. In the *Aajkal*, a Bengali daily, dated 9.6.96, it is reported that he was trying to collect information about other parties and attempting suppression of important documents about his own party from the particular files of the Home Department. When the people were being killed in the riot in Kokrajhar in Assam, the home minister instead of rushing there was engaged in such unique service to the nation!

In a Cabinet meeting which was held on the very day the motion on vote of confidence was moved, the BJP government endorsed the counter-guarantee of the central government on the Enron project. Does it set an example of any modicum of scruple on the part of the BJP which vaunts about its principle? Is it not on this very question that the BJP raised its accusing finger to the Congress? Incidentally it may be mentioned that many people at that time commented that the row over the Enron was due to the BJP-Shiv Sena combine not receiving the kickback from this US Company!

### BJP's rabid communal politics

The present spectacular rise of the BJP is due to its practice of rabid communalism. Many people of the country are deeply religious and their conviction and sentiment for religion are genuine. But the BJP is only trying to cunningly use this genuine sentiment and conviction of the people toward their religion for its narrow parliamentary interest. Religion is being used as an election plank to gain majority in parliament. The BJP is trying to create cleavage and disunity among the people on the basis of religion only to reap dividend in parliamentary politics. This politics of the BJP of dividing the people also serves the interest of the capitalist class which is mortally afraid of united mass movement at the present moment when capitalism is extremely crises ridden. So the BJP's attempt to intoxicate people with religious fanaticism and national jingoism on the basis of *Hindutva* helps in keeping the heavy burden of exploitation intact and leading the people away from the path of logic and science. The claim of the BJP that there are no communal riots in the states where the BJP is in government is ominous. Is it not a veiled threat to the minority community? Does

it not constitute a warning to the minority community about the danger if the BJP is kept out of the governmental power? Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena supremo threatened of a bloodbath if the BJP government at the Centre was voted out of power. What sort of utterance is this? In parliamentary democracy any government can be voted out of power by the opposition, and this is the rule of the game that the ruling party will graciously accept the outcome of that voting. But see the threat of the Shiv Sena supremo! Does it not show that the BJP and its allies can hold the entire country to ransom with the sole object of coming to the governmental power? The main thrust of the BJP politics is directed against the minority community. In case of those who cross the border from Bangladesh and elsewhere the Hindus are called *refugees* whereas the Muslims are termed *infiltrators*.

But despite its rabid communal politics to gain dividend in parliamentary politics, how after becoming the prime minister Sri Vajpayee wanted to project himself as a hero by directing the revival of Sri Krishna Commission in Maharashtra! Sri Krishna Commission was constituted to identify and punish the culprits associated with the riots in Bombay caused in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babari Masjid. After being enthroned in the governmental power in Maharashtra the BJP-Shiv Sena combine disbanded this enquiry commission as the rioters belonging to the BJP Shiv Sena were likely to be identified and the nexus between Dawood and the BJP was likely to be exposed. The High Court was moved against this decision of the government and the government was reprimanded by the Court. After realising the possibility of the revival of the Sri Krishna Commission through Court order, the BJP after being enthroned at the Centre decided to revive the Sri Krishna Commission, and this decision gave it an added advantage of presenting itself in a non-communal cloak.

### Misrule of BJP governments in States

A scan of the brief 13 day rule by the BJP government reveals the most opportunistic character of this party. And yet even after all these misdeeds the BJP is claiming itself to be honest! As regards the economic policy of the BJP it is basically same as that of the Congress, which is utterly anti-people and pro-monopolist. The policy of liberalisation and globalisation pursued by the Congress has brought about untold misery in the life of the people while the monopoly houses have been reaping fabulous profits. The BJP has endorsed this policy in its election manifesto and Sri Vajpayee after becoming prime minister declared to continue the same anti-people policy. This party's record of governance in the states it has ruled so far is marked by brutal suppression of the people's movement in the interest of the ruling capitalist class. The BJP government in MP was hand in glove with the capitalist in the murder of the trade union leader Sankar Guha Neogi and killed 13 persons in MP to suppress trade union movement. The BJP when in government in UP killed 16 persons to suppress democratic mass movement. The BJP government in MP was involved in multi-crore Kendu Leaf scam.

### Myth of integrity and honesty nakedly exposed

The myth of integrity and honesty of this party was nakedly exposed when the topmost leaders like the BJP president Sri L. K. Advani, Sri Madanlal Khurana and Sri Yashwant Singh were implicated in the notorious Hawala case. The BJP run state governments are also rocked by charges of corruption. Despite getting limited scope in a short period the BJP governments are embroiled in corruption for having a greater share of the spoil. In those states the BJP tried to reorient education in order to propagate obscurantist ideas, by introducing Vedic mathematics and distorting history. But its record of service to the capitalists has been well appreciated by the ruling class. So, when the BJP government was installed at the Centre, all the Chambers of Commerce and Industries, monopoly houses of the country and even international financial capital, particularly of the US, welcomed this government.

### BJP's criminalisation of politics

As regards the criminalization of politics the record of the BJP is also no different from other parliamentary parties. In UP 28 out of 85 members sent to the Lok Sabha have criminal records. Out of these 28 criminals-turned-MPs from UP 15 belong to the BJP! *India Today*, dated 30th April last reported that in UP though IADA accused Brij Bhushan Sharma Singh, a close associate of dreaded Dawood Ibrahim and an MP of the BJP of the previous Lok Sabha was denied a ticket, his wife was fielded instead from his seat. The Congress also distributed tickets to the wives and sons of the Hawala tainted leaders.

The ultimate and the only goal of the BJP is to secure the governmental power at the Centre by any means, fair or foul. Its tall talk of ideology, honesty, discipline or secularism is absolutely hollow. Given the party's track record, especially in view of the way it violated the assurance given to the Supreme Court and to the people by inciting its followers to demolish the Babari Masjid at Ayodhya in December 1992, the most opportunistic manner it extended support to the Mayabati government in UP, the way the state governments run by the BJP suppressed legitimate democratic mass movements and pursued out and out anti-people policies, the most opportunistic way it tried to form government at the Centre despite not commanding absolute majority in Parliament and above all the way it whips up and pampers communalism of the majority community in the sole interest of parliamentary politics, there is no question of this party being relied upon. With the sole aim of getting dividend in parliamentary politics this party has been shifting its stand over the years. The present thrust on *Hindutva* has given BJP the maximum dividend in terms of parliamentary politics. As a matter of fact the sole aim of the peddlers of communal politics whether they represent the majority or the minority community is to derive maximum dividend in parliamentary politics by dividing and misleading the people and diverting their attention from the basic problems of life.

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# Now Congress is Democratic and Secular to CPI(M)!

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the communal situation and the increased threat to national unity and integrity." (Signed article in the CPI(M) organ *People's Democracy*, issue dated 31.3.96) And the veteran CPI(M) leader EMS Namboodiripad observed: "... The thrust of its (the CPI(M)'s - Ed. *P.Era*) manifesto is the knocking together of a Third Front directed against the two degenerate bourgeois parties - the Congress(I) and the BJP. The fire is directed against the two parties because they are the very negation of the true ideas of democracy, secularism and a castelessness. ... while the BJP sometimes indulges in hypocritical talk of Swadeshi, it also stands by Narasimha Rao's principles of a globalised, liberalised and privatised economy. On the other hand, the Congress(I) which claims to be a secular party is compromising with the communal Hindutva policies of the BJP. The two are thus supporting and supplementing each other." (Signed article in the above mentioned issue of the *People's Democracy*).

And now, in order to justify their unprincipled *volte face*, the CPI(M) is projecting the Congress as a democratic and secular force, eating all their recent utterances in the process! In a special interview given to the CPI(M)'s Bengali daily *Ganashakti*, Surjeet has said: "... The mandate for forming government at the Centre has gone against communalism. ... The BJP has secured the support of 23% of Indian voters whereas 77% of the votes polled have gone against communalism and in favour of secular forces.... Considering the gravity of the present situation, the United Front will avoid unnecessary clash and confrontation with the Congress(I) without compromising the people's interest anyway ... In the context of the present international and national situation, the economic reforms are unavoidable. But it is to be seen that the multinational companies do not get the unfettered right to loot. ... Who is the main enemy is determined by the situation. At this moment, the Congress stands defeated and shattered, BJP-Shiv Sena has appeared as the greatest danger. To face this challenge is the main task of the present time." (*Ganashakti*, dated 3.6.96 : Free translation from Bengali to English ours - Ed. *P.Era*.)

We understand the urgent necessity of the CPI(M) leadership to rationalise and justify its conduct in the eyes of the people, but does it really think that this kind of argument can convince anyone?

## **CPI(M) arguments do not stand to reason**

On the question of people's mandate, if the parties participating in or supporting the Deve Gowda government including the Congress had fought the election unitedly and received 77% of the votes polled, then that could perhaps be called a people's mandate in the bourgeois democratic sense. But the fact is, many of these parties fought against one another bitterly with mutual mud-slinging and calling of names during the polls. Their joining hands now in the post-poll scenario just for the purpose of forming a government cannot be called carrying out the people's mandate by any stretch of imagination.

The CPI(M)'s main argument is two-fold. First, those who are supporting the Deve Gowda government against the BJP and its as-

sociates, are the secular democratic forces. Secondly, since the Congress has been defeated at the polls, the BJP has suddenly appeared as the main danger, main enemy, before the people.

Is the splinter group Tamil Maanila Congress, which broke away from the parent body Congress just before the election, a democratic force? Does the regionalism practised by the DMK make it a democratic force? Is the parochial, separatist AGP of Assam a progressive, democratic force? And what about the Congress? Is it progressive? Is it democratic? Is it a secular force?

The Congress that was held responsible for all the misery and evils in the people's life, for aggravation of communal situation and threat to national unity and integrity, was considered to be a degenerate bourgeois party, the very negation of democracy and secularism playing a supporting and supplementing role to the communal policies of the BJP - in short identified as the main enemy till only other day, has now suddenly become secular and democratic to the CPI(M)!

Is the fight against communalism dependent on whether one is able to form a government or not? The CPI(M)-led Left Front has been in power in West Bengal for about two decades at a stretch. Even so, why there are communal riots in that state time and again? Has the character of the different parties suddenly changed just because there has been a hung Parliament? Should not the characterization or evaluation of the other parties and forces spring from some basic principle? If such characterization changes overnight, does it not show that that party does not really mean anything ideologically - it has to have some declared principles and programmes for public consumption but its actual political moves do not follow from these but are fashioned from time to time on other considerations?

The argument that the BJP has become the main danger just because it has emerged as the largest single party in the Lok Sabha, is ridiculous. Only those whose total politics are confined within bourgeois parliamentarianism even though they may call themselves Leftist or even communist, can think like this. Has the Congress been obliterated because of its poor showing at the hustings? This party had been electorally swept away in the 1977 Lok Sabha polls following the Emergency, but did it not stage a come back subsequently? The Congress has now issued an appeal to the leaders who left the party in recent years to rejoin the party. If they come back and the strengthened Congress makes a bid tomorrow to form a ministry on its own with the help of some of the parties in the UF, will they suddenly regain the status of the main enemy in the eyes of the CPI(M)? It may be recalled that the strength of the BJP was reduced to a meagre two in the Lok Sabha through the election a few years back. Did that politically finish off the BJP or obliterate its dangerous potential?

## **CPI(M)'s opportunistic politics**

To a Marxist, the main enemy or the main danger is determined on the basis of social and political disposition of forces, through class analysis. Such evaluation does not change with twists and turns of parliamentary politics, nor can the labels of main enemy or main danger be

taken off from one party and affixed to another at will. We know that the Congress, as the most trusted political agent of the ruling Indian capitalist class, has been implementing anti-people policies in the aggregate interest of the ruling class that has resulted in the handful of rich getting richer and richer while the people groan under sky-rocketing price rise and inflation, resultant erosion of real wage, massive and accelerating unemployment, poverty and destitution. Over the years, the Congress has been the main enemy of the people. BJP is a menace because of its rabid communal politics and is trying to curry favour with the ruling class for attaining power. But it has been in government in only a few states for limited period and has not yet been in power at the Centre, if we ignore the recent 13-day stint. The BJP is aspiring to be a trumpeted political agent of the ruling class on an all-India scale whereas the Congress has been the most trusted political agent for decades. Has the damaging potential of the Congress reduced just because it fared worse than the BJP at the last poll? Has the Congress now suddenly ceased to be the chief political agent of the capitalist class and the main enemy of the people, and become a secular and democratic force? How can it be an ally in fighting BJP's communalism?

Who are the friends and who are the enemies? In Left and Democratic movement, those who are the forces of movement are considered the friends and the force that is the main obstacle to the movement through serving best the ruling capitalist class, the main enemy. But the CPI(M)-led lefts who think only in terms of pelf and power in parliamentary politics and not mass movement, have reduced the concept to mean that only those who are helpful in forming their government are friends and the rest are enemies.

So we see that the parties that have clubbed together to form and support the Deve Gowda government whom the CPI(M) calls secular and democratic, are neither secular nor democratic. The theory that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the main enemy is bunkum and the idea that the Deve Gowda government is for fighting communalism is a ruse. The fact is that the CPI(M)-led lefts have for the first time come to a position of wielding power at the Centre, directly or indirectly. They have clutched at this opportunity like any other parliamentary party but at the same time, they must project this necessity to be near the centre of power as a virtue to preserve the "leftist" image that is their capital in election politics. The present verbiage of the CPI(M) leadership is for serving this purpose.

## **CPI(M)'s sham fight against BJP**

Can communalism be thwarted by just anyhow preventing the BJP from forming a government? Rather, the present exercise in ministry-making has set a considerable section of the people thinking. They have seen how a hotchpotch combination was rigged up to form a ministry with the support of even the hated, corrupt and discredited Congress as if with the sole purpose of denying the BJP access to power. The feeling is gaining ground that perhaps the BJP really has something good to offer to the country and should have been given a chance instead

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## Defeat opportunism and build up united Left Democratic Movement

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of being arbitrarily shut out from power by the others ganged up just for this purpose. Is this not objectively having the effect of strengthening the BJP and its communal politics ?

The danger of communalism is real and growing. It cannot be tackled through election politics for its social basis lies in the obscurantism, religious orthodoxy and blind religious sentiment ingrained in the people's mind which are exploited to the full by the communalists. Only a protracted and painstaking movement at the grass roots level encompassing the political, ideological, social and cultural spheres can provide an effective counter-current against communalism in the society. It is only the true leftists, true communists who can today combat communalism ideologically and organisationally by integrating the struggle against communalism with the class and mass struggles for democratic rights and on the burning problems of people's life, directed against the bourgeois state power. We are constrained to observe that the CPI(M)-led leftists have never viewed the struggle against communalism as a steadfast movement, nor have they ever conducted sustained movement on people's demands. Whenever they made a show of movement against the BJP, they have done so to gain in parliamentary politics. Again, for the same purpose, they have not hesitated to move closer to the BJP on occasions. Only one or two recent examples will suffice. When the Janata Dal Government of V. P. Singh was installed in Delhi after 1989 election, it was supported by both the CPI(M) and the BJP. Just as the Congress is now clasping one hand of Deve Gowda and the CPI(M) the other, at that time the BJP and the CPI(M) clasped the two hands of V. P. Singh from two sides. Has one forgotten the spectacle of Atal Behari Vajpayee and Jyoti Basu, hand in hand, enjoying the ovation of the people at the victory celebration meeting in Calcutta at that time ? One is also reminded that after the 1990 election to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation when the CPI(M)-led Left Front failed to secure an absolute majority, it did not hesitate to take the help of the two BJP councillors in order to keep the city municipality under its control.

### CPI(M) opportunism helping Congress

Again, to gain in parliamentary politics, the CPI(M) has now termed the Congress secular and democratic force precisely at a time when that party is electorally at a disadvantage and stands discredited through scam after scam including the Hawala one. Does this not help the Congress to refurbish its image somewhat and help to create illusion about it in mass mind anew ? Cannot the CPI(M) see this potential danger, or must it gain in parliamentary politics at the cost of the people ?

History has it that whenever the Congress was in trouble or in great need, the undivided CPI and subsequently the CPI and the CPI(M) came to its rescue. It is with the help of these pseudo-lefts that the Indira Gandhi Government, then a minority one, was sustained on the Lok Sabha floor in the early stages of Smt Gandhi's ascendancy. During the dark days of Emergency, the CPI worked hand-in-glove with her while the CPI(M), acting cleverly, continued to assure Smt Gandhi of its support in various ways and did not join the country-wide anti-

Emergency movement led by Jayprakash Narain but at the same time maintained contacts with JP for future use. Only when it became apparent that Smt Gandhi would be swept away at the hustings, did the CPI(M) join hands with the Janata Party at the time of the 1977 polls to be on the winning side and Smt Gandhi turned from a radical to an authoritarian in their eyes. More recently, when the Narasimha Rao Government was formed, it was in minority. That government started formulating and implementing the new economic policy of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation in the aggregate interest of Indian capitalism representing all-out capitalistic onslaught on the lives and livelihood of the people who are now groaning under the burden of that policy. Had the CPI(M)-led Lefts voted jointly with other opposition parties, the Rao government would have fallen before it could take up the new economic policy.

The CPI(M)'s total politics have although revolved round the object of anyhow gaining in election politics. Its characterisation and assessment of other parties and forces never followed from any principle, but were determined by the prospect of its immediate loss or gain in parliamentary politics. When opposing the Congress was likely to pay dividend, it used to call the Congress authoritarian and any anti-Congress force democratic. Now that the support of the Congress is essential for sustaining the Deve Gowda ministry which allows the CPI(M) to exercise control at the Centre, the Congress has become secular and democratic, and all forces opposing this ministry communal !

### Pseudo-Lefts Serving Capitalist

The CPI(M)'s decision not to join the Deve Gowda ministry is a clever ploy to ensure that the stigma of enjoying governmental power with Congress patronage does not attach to it, but will it work ? People can see that the CPI(M) is in the UF, was a signatory to the letter sent by the UF to the Congress seeking its support, and is continuing to support the UF government which is dependent on the Congress for its very existence.

Under remote control of the Congress, how can the present government pursue any pro-people policy ? And today, any party that wishes to improve its lot in parliamentary politics, can aspire to do so only with the backing of the ruling class, and to secure this it has to serve the aggregate interest of that class through faithfully implementing the out and out anti-people new economic policy. The Congress, of course, launched this policy. The BJP, its main political contender, is also wedded to this policy, its occasional clamour for the Swadeshi notwithstanding. So, it is no wonder that Deve Gowda has come out in total support of this new economic policy. The CPI(M) had been practicing duplicity in this regard. Officially, it had been attacking this policy as an anti-people conspiracy hatched by the Central Congress(I) Government, but where this party really matters, that is, where it is in power, in West Bengal for instance, it has been following this anti-people policy almost in toto and has spread out a red-carpet welcome to imperialist MNCs to come and fleece the people. But the present proximity to power at the centre is making it difficult for the CPI(M) to keep up the "official" pro-people pretence. That is why, Harkishen Singh Surjeet advocated the "necessity" of the

new economic policy of reforms in the interview given to the *Ganashakti* quoted by us earlier in this article. But the "independent, pro-people stance" of the CPI(M) will have to be tried to be kept up for as long as possible for obvious reasons. That is why the CPI(M), CPI etc., created a row over the guidelines of austerity drive announced by the Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, involving a freeing of the emoluments of the government staff, only a few days back. Chidambaram had to back out and "leftism" was supposedly vindicated. But the Congress had the last laugh when Narasimha Rao warned in a speech on 19.6.96 last: "If it (the UF government - *Ed P. Era*) committed grave mistakes which went against the basic principles of Congress and did not correct them, we will be forced to reconsider our support to the government" (Report in *The Statesman*). This threat, coupled with Surjeet's advice to the UF to avoid clash or confrontation with the Congress as far as possible, will ensure that such "differences" will continue to be not fundamental but cosmetic. It cannot be otherwise because on all basic points, the CPI(M)-led Lefts already have unity of purpose with the Congress. But as a face saving device, the Congress and the CPI(M) will be at loggerheads and call each other names at the state level while conceding acceptability of each other on the national level. This is a necessity in parliamentary politics for both and will continue and may even intensify without altering the essence of the situation.

Had the CPI(M) been truly leftist, it should have worked for combining all the leftist forces in a movement against communalism no matter who formed the government, or whether any stable government could be formed or not. But it became busy in bolstering up and stabilising the rotten bourgeois parliamentary system by anyhow working out a government. Stability in whose interest ? Not the people's interest certainly ? Lack of stability should be the headache of the ruling class, why has it become the CPI(M)'s ? The CPI(M) swears by the people, but in whose interest is it acting ?

### An Appeal

We appeal to the members, supporters and sympathisers of the CPI(M): If unprincipled moves are justified in the name of tactics and if this process continues, then what remains of leftism ? What distinguishes a leftist party from the bourgeois ones, if not the class and mass struggles led by it, the movement to uphold democratic norms, values and ethics in politics and life ? Look at West Bengal. The CPI(M) has been at the helm of affairs there for about 20 years at a stretch. Massive unemployment and poverty stalk the people, factories are closing down and thousands of workers are being laid off and retrenched — but there is no widespread protest movement in this state that was once the citadel of leftism, of democratic movement in the country. Not only has the CPI(M) forsaken the path of mass movements, it is the CPI(M)-led Left Front administration that is trampling upon the democratic norms and giving goodbye to administrative neutrality in all walks of life. Whatever democratic movements our party, the SUCI is trying to build up on the burning problems in people's life or for upholding democratic rights, are being crushed by the

(Contd on page 7)

**Finance Minister's Pre-Budget Discussion with Central TUs****UTUC - LS denounces government moves**

A pre-budget discussion was held on 21st June last between Mr P.Chidambaram, Union Finance Minister and central trade unions Comrade Ashutosh Banerjee, the Vice-President of the UTUC-LS and Comrade Shankar Saha, Secretary of the UTUC-LS took part in the discussion. A written statement on the state of health of Indian economy was placed before the Finance Minister by the UTUC-LS.

The statement denounced the practice of the government of India, of announcing important economic decisions and measures even before the budget was tabled. The statement pointed out that this year too, the Finance Minister announced with great fanfare without even waiting for the scheduled discussion with the Trade Union leaders slated on 21st June about a condemned anti-people scheme of expenditure control and management guidelines. The imposition of uniform commercial tariffs for agricultural sector reportedly decided by the Minister of State for Power, government of India, ignoring the power of the states and the Centre as defined in Sec.43-A&4 of the Electricity (Supply) Act, 1948 was also cited in the statement.

Pointing to the possible hike in administered prices of oil, coal and other basic products

through administrative fiat, the statement stressed that meaningful discussion on budget became infructuous in such case and the budget itself was actually getting devalued. The statement demanded an assurance that such pre-budget or post-budget bureaucratic actions should be done away with.

The statement criticized the New Economic and Industrial Policy which went against the common people, and commented that the entire economy of the country rested on shifting sand. The statement pointed to the danger of Foreign Institutional Investments (FII) by citing the examples of Mexico and the Tokyo Stock Exchange crash.

The statement criticised the policy of opening the door to the MNCs which are out to hire and fire the Indian workers. The MNCs are employing obsolete technology in building manufacturing capacity.

It was stressed that MNCs should not be allowed to invest in heavy and basic industries in the economic and political interest of the country. The statement demanded that the basic, heavy and infrastructure industries should remain in the state sector.

Discussing about the health and stability of

the rupee, the statement pointed out the most unstable condition of the rupee.

The statement condemned the policy of disinvestment of the PSUs and urged the government not to privatize heavy, basic and infrastructure industries in the public sector.

The statement pinpointed the burden of the working people and referred to forced retirement, voluntary retirement schemes and moratorium on fresh recruitment. The statement strongly opposed the idea of wage freeze as aired by the finance minister. The productivity of the employees is also pushed up by increasing workloads and by introducing various gadgets. The statement also pointed to the capital intensive nature of whatever new industries, if any, are coming up and so the generation of new job opportunities was very limited.

The statement pointed to the prohibitive cost to acquire high skill for the common people and asked the government to enlighten how the New Economic And Industrial policy can prescribe remedy for these ills.

The statement demanded that pension should be given as third benefit to be financed by the government and the employer.

**PRESS CLIPPINGS****German Industrial bosses on the rampage against job & Service**

The German economic statistics available at the beginning of 1996 point to the increasing difficulty for the working class families there. Seven million people that is the 20% of the work force are jobless. More than 1 million children are on welfare; more than 2.2 million are poor and a half-a-million people live in public shelters or similar housing as reported by the European Union and UNICEF.

The former German Democratic Republic, i.e. the East Germany is the worst victim of this rampage as trade associations predict more than 30,000 bankruptcies, mostly in medium-sized industry. The major industries promise more layoffs as part of restructuring. The automobile bosses plan to eliminate 100,000 of the current 650,000 jobs by the year 2000, 90,000 of 1.5 million construction jobs are to disappear by the decade's end.

In spite of the record making high profit in the Chemical industries in 1995, tens of thousands of workers were let go and this trend is continuing. Big capital in this sector prefers to move factories to areas in Europe where wages are 25% lower like Portugal, Ireland, Poland. The owners of the Tengelmann Company, for example, have said that it is more attractive to invest in low-wage cities like Prague, Budapest and Warsaw. Electro-Siemens goes one step further saying, "We invested near Prague, but if they strike or demand higher wages we will leave the Czech Republic and go — for example — to Kiev in the Ukraine."

The German government also curtails social services, which have been much greater in Germany than even in the USA. They have repeat-

edly cut subsidies for medical care, welfare and unemployment payments for the jobless and poor. (Courtesy: *WORKERS' WORLD*, 8.2.96)

**Papua New Guinea : Rests on hanging sword of the World Bank**

Papua New Guinea (PNG) the tiny island nation in the Pacific is once more an example of the World Bank's and the IMF's rampage against the economies of the Third world countries. These two deadly wings of the world imperialist powers, have been working for long to trounce the economies of those countries and force them yield to the wishes of the West. On 18th April last the World Bank gave Papua Guinea 90 days notice to reform its economy according to the Bank's conditionalities, or face the loss of more than \$ 150 million in US aid. In August 1995, the World Bank negotiated with the PNG government about the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which involved the payment of two installments of funding provided the government implemented the major reforms. Of these two installments, the payment of the first was conditional on staff retrenchments in the public service, elimination of price controls on basic foodstuffs, major changes to financial planning and management in this public service, new legislation for foreign investment, removal of tariffs, trade restrictions and import bans. It also meant introduction of student fees and loans for university and increases in health care fees at hospitals and clinics.

The second was conditional on other measures like a wage-freeze and abolition of the statutory minimum wage and privatization of government-owned corporations.

The people of PNG are fighting hard against this neo-imperialist attacks. Over 35

organizations including Churches, NGOs, trade unions and other community groups have joined hands to form the National Coalition for Social and Economic Justice (NCSEJ) to launch a countrywide people's movement against this attack. (Courtesy: *THE NEW WORKER*, 12.5.96)

**SUCI, West Bengal State Committee on Congress sponsored Bangla Bandh**

Comrade Provash Ghosh, Secretary, West Bengal State Committee, SUCI has issued the following statement to the Press on Congress's bandh call on 5th July '96 in so-called protest against CPI (M) terrorism :

The CPI (M) and the Congress, on the one hand, have struck an out-and-out opportunist and unethical combination at the Centre for *Gadhi*, while on the other, they are engaged here in West Bengal in clashes to grab power. It has nothing to do with people's interest.

It is a matter of anxiety, the way the CPI (M), backed by administration, is continuing murders, loots and plunder, and it should be stopped by pressure of democratic mass movement. When Congress (I) was in power in this and in other States and presently is in Punjab and in other States, it suppressed or is suppressing the Opposition. So, the Congress has no moral right to protest. Under the circumstances, we neither support nor oppose the proposed Bangla Bandh on 5th July.

We appeal the people to build up powerful mass movement to reintroduce English and Pass-Fail system from class - I, to withdraw the plan of employing teachers and doctors on contract basis, to check price rise, to scrap the decision of raising electricity charges, to bring out the investigation report of Wafk scam and punish the guilty and to stop politics of murder.

# International Seminar in Brussels

## Build up militant peace movement against forces of war — SUCI's Call

Comrades,

On behalf of my party, the Socialist Unity Centre of India, and myself I offer thanks for giving us the opportunity to address this august gathering.

Today people around the world witness imperialism on the rampage. The collapse of the socialist camp and resultant weakening of the non-aligned movement have left open almost the entire world, in particular, the developing countries, to unrestricted imperialist exploitation and stepped-up onslaught. To exploit this changed world situation to their full advantage the imperialist powers are projecting the lure of a 'new world order', without a parallel socialist order, to usher in a 'new age of peace, prosperity and freedom'. For concrete formulation of the strategy of struggle against this concerted and mounting imperialist onslaught we should examine carefully the objective and mode of imperialist functioning in this new design.

In the first place, although the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the East European socialist states restored to the capitalist world the major chunk of the market previously lost, that failed to bring relief to it, shattering all illusion of recovery. In the present and third phase of intense general crisis of world capitalism, when the relative stability which the capitalist market enjoyed prior to the second world war has been lost, the imperialist powers have been trying for long to tackle the basic problem of absence of market for investment of accumulating surplus finance capital and utilization of excess productive capacity by taking recourse to militarization of the economy and side by side by raising trade barriers and like other protective measures.

All these exercises having proved only temporarily effective, futile and counter-productive, the imperialist powers, especially the US, Japan and the European Union headed by Germany, have struck a deal for some concrete measures towards globalisation and liberalisation of the world capitalist economy. All through the imperialist epoch, it should be borne in mind, both before the second world war when imperialism was identified with direct colonial rule and after the war when the subtle new phenomenon of neo-colonialism with its mode of colonial exploitation without direct rule emerged, the essence of the imperialist objective has remained one and the same, that is to ensure the market for operation of the finance capital. In the present new arrangement the sole purpose of the accord, the GATT and its offspring the WTO, are two-fold. On the one hand, to try to avoid avoidable frictions and irritations in trade and commerce, and introduce a managed trade across the world. On the other hand, to try to foster agreements and understandings among the G-7 imperialist powers on the division and redivision of the world market, and to make or force the developing countries open up their markets to the MNCs.

In other words, this is a crisis management bid, on the one hand, and, on the other, is meant to keep the developing countries with the large

**An international seminar was organised by the Workers Party of Belgium in Brussels from 2nd to 4th May '96. A detailed report of this seminar was published in our previous issue. Comrade Ranjit Dhar, the Central staff, represented our party in Brussels and delivered his speech which is reproduced here.**

est share of man power, including a potential scientific and technical man power, and vast proportions of natural resources in reserve for division and redivision among the imperialist powers.

By their own practice, however, the imperialist powers are proving that this bid is less than temporarily effective and that globalisation is an illusion. While they are urging for rapid liberalisation and globalisation, they are organizing new sectarian regional common markets like the European Common Market and the NAFTA, and are maintaining old regional common markets and continuing to indulge in discriminatory trade practices. While they pledge to adhere to the GATT, each is sidelining the accord and is using its own penal provisions to enforce its terms of trade on others. Thus the bitter contradiction within the capitalist world system goes on intensifying without any sign of abatement.

Excepting the apologists of the GATT and the WTO, none would deny that for the developing countries the GATT is an unequal treaty, and an unequal treaty is unequal to eliminate the growing contradiction between the G-7 imperialist powers and the developing countries. On the one hand, the imperialist powers are seeking to rope in the economy of the developing countries by granting huge loans through the imperialist financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. On the other hand, in the name of economic liberalisation and free market economy, they are using the GATT to demolish the protective barriers of the national markets of these countries for the MNCs to exploit and plunder while devising subtle means to protect their own markets from each other. With the imperialists, 'free market' has come to mean in the present situation freeing the markets of the numerically vast developing countries for free, unrestricted and peaceful imperialist plunder.

This again is strictly a pincer attack on the peoples of the developing countries, combinedly launched by the respective native bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers under the GATT provisions of the 'new world order'. It should be understood that among the underdeveloped countries the relatively more developed ones, India comes among them, who have already given birth to monopoly and finance capital and acquired imperialist traits, have joined hands with the traditional imperialist powers, even accepting some detrimental conditionalities, in the hope of getting a share in the global market. The very weak have signed the agreement under compulsion of circumstances. That the

whole of the world, except for some surviving socialist countries, have fallen in line with the imperialist scheme for globalisation only underlines universal capitalist market crisis.

In any case, all these regulatory measures and instruments are unable to touch, let alone solve, the basic problem of constantly accumulating surplus finance capital and excess productive capacity in the advanced capitalist and imperialist countries. Earlier than this and side by side with this, to cope with the problem of the narrowing base and volume of production due to absence of scope of investment and utilization of the surplus finance capital and excess productive capacity, the advanced capitalist countries took recourse to high-tech, capital-intensive, high-value production to reap fabulous profit. The cumulative result: increasing retrenchment of workers, rising figures of the unemployed, unprecedented recession, growing inflation, budgetary crisis, and increasing curtailment of social welfare schemes including unemployment relief, and a deep crisis in morality in the developed countries. In the developing countries there is increased lockout, layoff, retrenchment, worsening unemployment problem, alarming rise in prices of all essential commodities including life saving drugs, and resultant increased pauperisation, destitution and cultural degeneration.

In this scheme, to ensure absolute imperialist hegemony of the world, the US and other imperialist powers have reduced the functions of the United Nations virtually to only approving all their nefarious designs. The US in particular, the bulwark of world imperialism, has been resorting to banditry, intrigues, or military interventions in the name of protecting freedom and democracy, political subversions in the name of peace keeping and relief missions, control of entire economy of recipient countries through loans and economic assistance, fomenting religious, racial and ethnic riots, manipulating elections to instal governments of their own choice, enforcing unilateral economic sanctions and blockades, giving out threats to wipe out non-compliant countries, and engineering military coups as in Latin American, African, European and Asian countries. Side by side, conflict among the imperialist powers over dominating the globalised market goes on intensifying. To ensure unchallengeable supremacy in military power, especially in nuclear armaments and industry, these imperialist powers are all set to enforce a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Each is, however, seeing to it that it has meanwhile acquired sufficient nuclear striking capability to increase its competitive and bargaining power and to defend itself in case of war breaking out among themselves. France recently conducted a series of nuclear tests to this end. The US, on the other, is trying to strengthen the NATO, despite the dismantling of the socialist camp, with the objective of maintaining its presence in Europe in order to contain the growing challenge from the European imperialist powers

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# Brussels Seminar

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to its supremacy and to curb the growth of military power of these countries, particularly of Germany, independently of the US. Globalisation fails abjectly to remove the root of imperialist domination which engenders war. So continues the cut-throat competition among the imperialist powers, arms race at an increased pace and the build up of war tension in the capitalist world for division and redivision of the world market, even by war if need be. Thanks to the modern revisionists, the imperialist war-mongers, instead of getting buried, have come to be crowned as the dominant force in the world today.

To think there is no more danger of world war, since globalisation has created a scope to compete freely and since the socialist camp with its deterrent role even under a revisionist leadership stands dismantled, is to indulge in gross error. Because, although the modern revisionists by their false understanding and practice sought to virtually redefine the role of the contradiction between the imperialist world system and the socialist world system as the root cause of war, the truth is that the root cause of war continues to be in the contradiction within the imperialist world system, even in the present changed world situation. In the present phase, the world course of events is being influenced mostly by the contradiction between imperialists and imperialists. And it has to be kept in mind that though finance capital has become multinational in form it is backed up, protected and helped to advance in its imperialist venture ultimately by the respective state and the army of the imperialist countries. Here lies the potentiality of the economic or trade war among the imperialist powers to turn into hot war.

This 'new world order' portends an even greater danger. The GATT, the main instrument of globalisation, has brought within its range all of material and spiritual production for ruthless exploitation and profit. Through the instruments of intellectual property rights and patent rights,

for instance, every bit of knowledge and virtually every item of biosphere resources have been transformed into commodities for sale and profit. The power of capital will rule the roost, with the MNCs dominating the entire sphere of social life and patterning the cultural ideas and dazzling the public mind with the marvel of high-tech, while divesting people of the power and ability to analyse and investigate, even ridiculing moral and ethical values to promote sex and violence. The scientific temper is being destroyed to foster obscurantism. By fusing together the technological aspect of science and spiritualism the cultural base of fascism is sought to be created. Fascistic concentration and consolidation of capital to increase its competitive power has been going on since the second world war in both public and private sectors under the auspices of the state. Behind the facade of liberalisation and free economy the process is in operation at an even increased pace. The consolidation at the national level has been raised to the international level now. Having achieved fascistic concentration in economic and political power and control over the levers of culture, the imperialist powers are out to generate a blind, fanatic and jingoistic psyche among the respective people, each in its own favour. This they can easily channelise into war efforts, when need be.

Marxists shall learn from these new developments by applying the teachings of Marxism-Leninism to formulate the strategy of action. One positive aspect of the situation as a whole is the popular opinion against imperialist aggression, war machination, subversion and interference, among others, in worldwide popular support to Cuba against the US economic blockade and subversive activities. The situation is exhorting all revolutionary and progressive forces to combine to fight together the imperialist combination against all people. They shall strive to combine all forces that can be combined, with the communist revolutionaries in the core, and shall build anti-imperialist

people's movements all over the world and, in the course, give birth to a militant peace movement conducive to the mass and class struggles for emancipation of the toiling people around the world.

In the course of this struggle the communists shall have to carry on an unrelenting battle against revisionism in all its shades and forms. To this end the communists shall have to exchange opinions and know each other's stand on all the basic issues. Unitedly they shall fight the imperialist menace, the common enemy of all people, and while fighting imperialism they shall try to resolve their ideological differences through struggle on the ideological plane.

In this struggle against imperialism, the peculiarities and particularities of all the countries shall have to be taken into consideration. Struggles built in the traditional imperialist countries, while they have to be directed against anti-people policies of respective governments, shall strive to defeat the imperialist menace in fraternity with the fighting people of the world. In the more developed among the developing countries people shall have to build movements against respective governments while simultaneously fighting the imperialist design. In countries under direct threat of imperialist attack or economic blockade, the struggle against imperialism shall have to be backed up and resisted by struggles of all people the world over.

Comrades, the situation behoves us to exchange our opinions, as we are doing here and now, and to strive for giving shape to an international organization to co-ordinate and guide anti-imperialist struggles everywhere. Let us take a step forward from here towards the struggle ahead.

## Build up United Left Democratic Movement

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government just like any bourgeois government in other states. An unholy alliance of the ruling parties, industrialists, traders and rich farmers, the police and the administration, cadres and politically sponsored roughs rule the state. Unless one is swayed by blind emotion, is there any way to deny this reality? The "Left Front" is enjoying strength and power in that state uninterrupted for so long. Had it been a correct pro-people force, should not there have been an upsurge of new spirit there to struggle for a new and better life as against the present dismal picture? Is it not a fact that the CPI(M) has all along kept itself engrossed in just making gains in parliamentary politics instead of building up democratic mass movements against capitalism, against communalism and other divisive tendencies? This has no doubt helped the party in election politics and in government making, but what about the people, the radical transformation of the society which you cherished as the goal? In the name of leftism, of the noble ideology of Communism, we appeal to you to force your leadership to retrace steps and embark upon the anti-capitalist path. We can do no better than remind you about what Karl Marx said: "... Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, that is, the political power, of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against the ruling classes and adopting an attitude hostile to their policy. Otherwise it will remain a plaything in their hands. ..."

## BJP No Alternative – People's democratic movement the only way out

(Contd. from page 2)

### Mere parliamentary alternative can not be pro-people

Can such a party having out and out anti-people character bring any benefit to the people? The people are, no doubt in a desperately suffocating situation and this is why they are again and again seeking an alternative to the Congress which is most anti-people and rotten to the core. But should they not take into account their past experiences? The past experiences show that Morarji Desai government and V. P. Singh government were installed as an alternative to the Congress rule. But had the people's miseries been reduced or had they got back their democratic rights? After emergency Morarji Desai came to power after assuring restoration of democratic rights, but his government instead crushed mass movement during its short stay. The V. P. Singh government also divided the people by following casteist policies. These governments, too, pursued anti-people

politics and fleeced the people to serve the ruling capitalist class. All the parliamentary parties which are vying with one another to serve the ruling capitalist class are bound to be anti-people, corrupt and rotten to the core without possessing any moral and ethical value in the present epoch when capitalism worldwide has become out and out reactionary. In such a situation no parliamentary alternative can be pro-people. Instead of being swayed by the hallow of martyrdom of the BJP the people will have to pause and ponder whether Hinduism, hinduvta, religion, dharma, Mandir or Masjid can solve the basic problems in the life of the people. The BJP if enthroned at the centre will not hesitate to mount ruthless onslaughts on the people to serve the ruling capitalist class. So the people will have to search for such an alternative which can uphold the cause of the people in democratic mass movement which is the only way to resist the onslaught of the capitalist class.

## Press clippings

# “Fractured Franchise”

The euphoria in Delhi is understandable. A 49 per cent voter turnout in the Baramulla and Anantnag Lok Sabha constituencies in the Kashmir Valley is no doubt impressive a dramatic five-fold increase in votes from the 1989 figure. But even as the state administration, the security forces and other managers of the May 23 polls are patting themselves on the back for the remarkable success, accusations abound that the turnout was stagemanaged, and that the security forces worked in tandem with surrendered militant groups to coerce a sizeable section of voters to exercise their franchise. The role of the security forces ever since polls were announced has been such that doubts persist on whether the elections were ‘free and fair’.

Already Ghulam Rosool Kar, the state Congress chief and candidate from Baramulla, has complained to the Election Commission that gun-wielding men had captured 50 of the 66 polling stations in Pattan. Kar alleges that his polling agents were prevented from entering polling stations at Sopore. At Sonaware, the returning officers were directing voters to vote BJP. Kar wants a repoll in all these segments. The National Conference (NC), which boycotted the elections, is also preparing its protest to the EC.

Points out Saifuddin Soz, official spokesman of the NC: “These elections were full of irregularities. Everything was allowed to happen in the ‘national’ interest. So you have this manoeuvred percentage to prove a high turnout. This was achieved through a fear psychosis spread by a section of the army, particularly the Rashtriya Rifles (RR). Now they want us to believe that the voter-response was higher than in Gujarat.”

There is enough evidence to suggest that to achieve ‘outstanding’ voter-response, the security forces did resort to various forms of persuasion to hustle reluctant men and women to polling booths. Any observer who toured the two constituencies on May 23 minus Government public relations bifocals will tell you that the impressive turnout was rather suspect and that the efforts of the security agencies to pressurise people to vote was not entirely democratic.

In village after village this correspondent visited, the story was the same. Crowds of people squatted outside polling stations like herds of sheep. One question, and all sprung to life with their complaints. The common thread in their stories was that members of the RR, a force created to manage counter-insurgency operations, had made announcements from the mosque asking everyone to vote. This was followed up by house-to-house visits by jawans of the RR and the paramilitary. The message was that dire consequences awaited those who refused to vote. In many villages the security forces warned that the index-finger of those above 18 would be inspected to see if it has the indelible voter mark.

Outside Anantnag, at the Dialgam village’s polling station in the Government Higher Secondary School, a crowd of about 300 male vot-

ers had lined up outside the booth by 8.30 am. They said it was pressure from the RR stationed in their village that had forced them to come to vote. Even when interviewed individually, the refrain was similar: an RR Major had asked the local mulla to announce from the mosque at about 6 am that everybody should vote. Later, RR men came to their houses and told them that they would be beaten up if they did not cast their votes.

But, it was not as if everybody was against the polls. Some senior citizens said they did not see any point in voting because they could think of no candidate worth electing. Since they had been coerced, they would vote for all candidates: “Our policy is to vote for everyone. Everyone will be happy and the army will leave us in peace.”

A few kilometres down the road at Bunadayalgam, the response was quite similar. A J&K police officer patrolling the area agreed that the common complaint of the people was that they had been forced into voting but said that he could not comment on any action involving the RR. As for the voters, a sizeable section of them wished to be heard and their view is that they had merely come to vote to stay clear of trouble.

But not all the villagers are as docile. At Malangpora, close to Pulwama, a district town, Shubhan Krishen Tickoo, the Anantnag candidate of the Awami League, a political front of the surrendered militant group Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon was surrounded by irate villagers who impressed upon him that they had nothing to do with an election in which people like him were contesting. Tickoo was on a tour of his constituency and had nothing to say about the RR and his men threatening people who had not voted. In this village, those who did not vote were told that they would be asked to sit in a trough of cold water through the night. “One swallow does not a summer make. This is an odd incident”, Tickoo countered.

About three kilometres out of Pulwama in Machbana village, the entire community men, women and children included was out protesting against RR atrocities in the morning. So agitated were the villagers that they were even ready to assault the press party since it represented the Government in Delhi. The protesters wanted to make it very clear they were totally opposed to any election imposed with the help of the gun.

In Anantnag town the surrendered militant groups, Muslim Mujahideen, the JK Ikhwan of south Kashmir and the Ikhwanul-Muslimoon, were out in full force. And although army corps commander, Maj Gen. J.S. Dhillon, had on the day before elections categorised surrendered militants as those who have given up arms, there were armed civilians moving about in the town in vehicles. In booth No. 46 Mushtaq Ahmed, the polling agent of the JK Ikhwan-sponsored Independent candidate, Abdul Rashid Misgar, admitted that force was used to bring the voters out of their homes. Said he: “If you

don’t use force there can be no elections here. In another polling centre in Anantnag, a surrendered militant was found inside the booth. He shied away from the press.

Many polling centres in the Anantnag constituency were conspicuous by the absence of any polling agent from any other party other than those sponsored by surrendered militants. Though he had no complaints about the elections, the Congress candidate from Anantnag, Taj Mohi-ud-Din, pointed out that his polling agents refused to go to the booths out of fear of the Ikhwan militants.

What transpired in Anantnag found clear echoes in Baramulla. Here again, the RR and some of the paramilitary forces heaped discredit on themselves in trying to achieve a high voter turnout. In Baramulla town, voters whose names did not figure on the list were actually herded into the polling booth and given a mark on their index finger so that they would not be troubled by the security forces later.

In Sopore, which is identified as a sensitive area, the press parties were subjected to the same complaints of RR excesses. It was remarkable that unlike in the rest of the country a crowd of disgruntled voters were present at almost every polling booth. Many said that they had been waiting since morning. No one in Sopore looked like they had come on their own free will to vote. The response from the people in Pattan and Delina was also quite similar....

But there was no way the chief secretary or the chief election officer, J.A. Khan, could explain how those below the age of voting had actually cast their votes in both Baramulla and Anantnag constituencies. Neither could Khan account for the lack of secrecy in many of the polling booths where the voters had to stamp their choice on the ballot paper in the presence of the polling officer and sometimes under the watchful eyes of surrendered militants....

In fact, a fortnight before the polls officials in the state administration admitted that a 20 per cent turnout was what they were working towards. Candidates of political parties like the Congress, Janata Dal and the BJP expected no more than 25 per cent votes to be cast. Now they admit that it was a forced turnout. But they are waiting for the results on June 3, after which many of them will voice their grievances, for those who expect to win do not want to risk a repoll as a result of complaints to the EC.

The obvious effort of the Government was to prove to the world that the people of Kashmir are all for democracy. There is no doubting that there is a growing sentiment which is opposed to the gun culture of the militants. People have also lost faith in Pak-sponsored insurgency which has disrupted normal life in the Valley for the last seven years.

But the goodwill earned through its operations seems to have been squandered by the state administration’s unleashing of surrendered militants who, ironically, continue to wield their guns. To add to this, some of these militants were even allowed to contest the elections and their presence made it difficult for most candidates not backed by surrendered militant groups to campaign. (Source: *Outlook*, June 5, 1996)

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