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UNION BUDGET 2005

Benefits for capitalists deception for people

P. Chidambaram, the Union Finance Minister of the UPA Government, placed the general budget for the financial year 2005-06 to the Lok Sabha on February 28 last. Annual budget is not merely an exercise in balancing revenues and government expenditure, but an effective system for bringing about changes in the direction of economic activities of a country, an economic tool in the hands of the government to pursue its economic policies. Naturally, an oncoming budget arouses expectations among different sections of people, that there might be some amelioration to their growing plight and economic destitution.

This budget has been presented at a time when common toiling people of the country are reeling under ruthless capitalist exploitation further accentuated by the policies of capitalist globalization-liberalization-privatization. Life of the

80% rural population is in total shambles. There is concentration of land in the hands of a few rural rich, incidentally enjoying total exemption from paying any tax despite their having amassed huge wealth by depriving poor peasants of

their dues. There is no remunerative price for the agricultural produces either, as a result of which even many middle peasants often face huge losses, even ruination. The number of landless peasants is increasing by leaps and bounds. Agricultural workers have no or little work for the year. Eviction of peasants from the land is on the rise. The evicted rural poor through the cities as beggars. Starvation deaths, malnutrition, life threatening diseases are what these people have as their sole possession. Suicide reports

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Comrade Nihar Mukherjee on Union Budget 2005

Giving his reaction to the Union Government's budget of 2005-06, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in course of a statement said that :

As expected, the Congress-led UPA Government backed by the CPI(M) and the CPI has presented a budget for 2005-06 which under a populist cloak has been a subtle attempt to sidetrack and divert people's attention from the burning economic problems tormenting the life of the common people. Under coaxing words and verbiages as well as cunning cover of operation, the mounting problems of unemployment and sky rocketing prices of essential commodities – the main scourges haunting the people of the whole country – remain totally unaddressed. Instead of assuming any direct responsibility for creating more jobs by initiating bold scheme of industrialization under the aegis of the Government and rolling out a realistic plan to check the soaring price line, everything has been left to the whims and fancies of the market players – the national and foreign monopolists, capitalists and big business. As evident from the budget announcements Government's policy to gradually withdraw from the sphere of direct economic activities and hand over them to the domestic and foreign monopoly houses for intensifying their ruthless exploitation has been more pronounced, while the process of globalization-liberalization-privatization has been in a swift camouflaged manner given further momentum.

Under the circumstances the people of the country have nothing to hope from this budget. On the contrary, to combat the suffering and exploitation that is bound to become more acute and unbearable, they have no other alternative but to rely upon powerful democratic movement.

On Railway Budget, 2005

Reacting to the railway budget of 2005-06, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in a statement said that notwithstanding the mesmerizing exercise to present an apparently people's friendly budget, what has actually come out is a deceptive exercise which on the one hand encourages the process of privatization and on the other deliberately ignores the development and expansion activities, more particularly in the backward areas of the country. The measures enunciated in the name of rationalization of freight charges, are bound to escalate the prices of essential commodities including foodgrains. The urgent need of improving fast declining passenger service and ensuring safety of the passengers in the context of increasing number of railway accidents and rampant train dacoities have been completely overlooked.

INDO-PAK RELATION

Ending attrition, weaving unity — the crying need

[The first instalment of the article on Indo-Pak Relations was published in the last March 1, 2005 issue of Proletarian Era (Volume 38, Number 14). We conclude the article with this second instalment. — Ed. Board, Proletarian Era]

Since 1950, immediately after the independence, our party, SUCI under the guidance of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh warned through a series of articles, statements etc. in our English and Bengali organs, of unwanted turn, events may take in case the issues involved, the Kashmir issue in particular, were not

handled in proper light and manner. In unambiguous words we submitted that there was no denial that Kashmir was 'an integral part of India', not only 'legally and juridically' as also from the point of view of existing reality, administrative, political and moral. Its accession was supported by "...force

which had to its credit the record of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic movements in Kashmir, viz., the Kashmir National Conference headed by Sheikh Abdullah. ...the popular and democratic government formed under Sheikh's leadership practically completed the

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Indo-Pak relation**Kashmir issue demands political solution in a proper ambience of peace and friendship***Contd. from page 1*

process of Kashmir's integration with India"

At the same time, our party under the guidance of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh emphasized as far back as in 1965, that the accession was complete, but the political problem remained, though that could be and should be solved through all-out discussions and negotiations only. A "broad, democratic, rational and accommodative attitude to the problems within and a bold, vigorous and uncompromising stand against all external imperialist forces is the need of the hour." We added further "...in order that the Kashmir problem does not assume alarming proportions in future, in order that it does not tend to go out of control, and above all, in order to act in conformity with the genuine and patriotic interests of the Kashmiri people, it is highly desirable that the Government of India come forward and approach the problem politically, getting completely free from bureaucratic interests... from the way Sheikh Abdullah posed the question of self-determination of Kashmir, after he had been freed from jail and before he met the late Prime Minister Pandit Nehru with the hope of getting the problem solved during his (i.e. Nehru's) life-time, it seemed to us that by self-determination he did not mean secession, but meant extension of regional autonomy and a special status for Kashmir within the framework of the Indian Constitution and for that matter, if necessary, effecting certain amendments in the Indian Constitution. If we have not completely misunderstood Mr. Abdullah, then we think that he wanted to really depend on the patriotic forces of Kashmir and was ready to solve the problem in consultation with them on the basis of regional autonomy, remaining within the Indian Union. Prompt initiative on the part of the India Government with full confidence in the Sheikh's proposals could, we think, not only disarm Pakistan and the Anglo-American bloc politically but also could have helped to avert the present armed conflict. ... Even today, we propose that the leaders of the patriotic forces in Kashmir be taken into confidence and be

consulted with in order to arrive at a political solution of the problem. We strongly feel that political prudence and not bias, should prevail over everything else in order to overcome the present impasse. The leaders of the India Government should give up their short-sighted, narrow-minded attitude and should act with calm confidence to allow the Government of Kashmir to enjoy extended regional autonomy consistent with the principle of self-determination remaining as an integral part of India. This is a step which will not only make all Pak-propaganda ineffective, but may even help create a real urge in the minds of the people of the so-called "Azad Kashmir" for integration with India. ... It is our appeal to all the patriotic forces in the country to rally round this programme to give a crushing defeat to the imperialist intrigues in Kashmir and to open the door to a permanent solution of the Kashmir problem—particularly in the greater interest of the democratic and revolutionary movement in this subcontinent." (Quotations from *"The Kashmir Question : A Study of the Indo-Pak War in Retrospect, Socialist Unity, 4(2), New Series, November 1965*)

The history to follow was just the reverse. Problems deepened and multiplied. Solutions became a far cry. Ritualistically, every outburst of heat was succeeded by some peace efforts, though of no avail in the broad run. None of them could bring any long-term, leave aside a permanent solution. After the 1965 war, Kosygin, President of the then Soviet Russia mediated to hold the Tashkent Declaration on January 4, 1966, agreed upon by Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Prime Minister of India and Md. Ayub Khan, the Pakistani President. Though Shastri died on January 10, peace was temporarily restored. The few years' lull was broken in 1971, first with thunders from the eastern front in the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, followed by those in the west.

Rightful birth of Bangladesh added new thorns to the Indo-Pak scenario

Pakistan, which was born on religion, was neither a homogeneous nation, nor a unified

territory to begin with; the two parts, provinces of West and East Pakistan as they were called, were geographically separated for over thousands of miles as well as culturally-traditionally far apart. Within years, economically, politically and culturally, it took the shape virtually of a colonial rule of West Pakistan over East Pakistan, the governance being dominated overwhelmingly by the West Pakistani capitalists-bureaucrats and military. Naturally in the common people of East Pakistan subjugated under and oppressed by a virtual colonial rule of West Pakistan there developed strong resentment, which could not find any remedial way out in the then existing system. It thus gave rise to a nationalist aspiration, a Bengali nationality, an aspiration for freedom from colonial clutches. The process culminated in the freedom struggle and ultimately in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. Pakistani rulers, armed with US imperialist backing ruthlessly suppressed the struggle with rampant and wanton killing of people there. The Bangladeshis longed for Indian military support to help them. Indian people, too, extended their approval and support. Under the guidance of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our party had shown at that time that the ruling Indian bourgeoisie, which had already assumed an imperialist character, took up the opportunity, not from their love for freedom of the Bangladeshis, but with an eye to the new market there to be born and with a view to using this opportunity to fulfill their expansionist design in this part of the globe. Centring round it, the Indo-Pak relationship faced another crisis. But centring round it, the Indo-Pak relationship faced another crisis. Pakistan resented the Indian support and covering up the fact that the Bangladesh issue grew from the inherent contradictions of the then Pakistan itself, the latter squarely thrust the onus of dividing their state on India. Under the rule of the military dictator General Yahya Khan, it stepped up subversive activities and even launched air attack in early December 1971 on eight military airfields in western India including Kashmir, for India to successfully

thwart it and make the Pakistan Army surrender on December 16, 1971. The USA stood in support of Pakistan and as pre-emptive action against any possible US intervention, India had made a 20-year Indo Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971. But even this war could not make Kashmiri people desert India and the pro-Pakistani Awami Action Committee could not make inroad into them. Following this war also, there was the Simla Agreement signed on July 3, 1972 by Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan.

Under mounting political pressure the Government of India again sought for an understanding with Sheikh, this time headed by Indira Gandhi. In February 1975 there came the Kashmir Accord between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah. The Plebiscite Front, contesting as National Conference, gained majority in 1977 election. Sheikh became the Chief Minister of the state for the last time in his life. Sheikh Abdullah died in early eighties. After his demise Farooque Abdullah became the Chief Minister. But the way he hobnobbed with and started growing ties with the Union government, that itself had already been discredited to the people of India for gagging democratic movements and bringing down ruthless exploitation on them, the way he allowed bureaucracy to gain upper hand, the way he and his party swamped into corruption, all this made Farooque and his party more and more isolated from the Kashmiri people, causing greater discontent and resentment among them. In absence of any democratic leadership worth name in Kashmir, arch communalist and other reactionary forces cashed on this and could easily incite separatist-secessionist-fundamentalist forces to make inroad into the Kashmiris. But when Farooque joined the all India anti-Congress combination, he was simply ousted by the Governor Jagmohan and replaced by Ghulam Mohammad Shah, a breakaway from Farooque's party itself. In 1986 Shah was dismissed by Jagmohan, the Governor, who himself formed the government. In

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A Blueprint of Subservience to Monopolists

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are on the rise. So-called promise of guaranteeing hundred days' work that the Congress-led CPI (M)-supported Central Government announced with so much fanfare has already proved to be a hoax in view of the flaws inherent in the prescription itself. Subsidies and subventions provided for fertilizers or as bank loans or the like are usurped by the land-owning rural capitalists and now even the corporates, making forays into the agricultural sector.

The scene is equally grim in the cities. Acute insurmountable stagnation and recession haunt industry and capitalist economy of the country. Unemployment is spiralling upwards. Everyday hundreds of factories declare lock-out throwing thousands out of job. Layoff, retrenchment have become everyday affair. Existing vacancies are not filled up. On the other hand, merger, downsizing, job freeze, wage freeze, VRS, forced retirement are what stalk the employment scenario. The government itself is abolishing posts, reducing workforce and resorting even to contract labour system. Though the present Finance Minister says that he has "rejected the idea of jobless growth", the fact is that labour-intensive industries are on the wane and capital-intensive industries like information technology are being emphasized upon. Notwithstanding the tall claim of the government of containing inflation and arresting price line, prices of essential items continue to soar with purchasing power of the people falling at rapid pace; even subsistence level livelihood is eluding millions. In other words, the entire burden of capitalism is being thrust on people.

In this backdrop, let us see what this budget has in store for us and what has been the policy directive reflected in it.

Bounties showered on the rich

While introducing the budget last year, Chidambaram indicated to launch "an assault on poverty and unemployment." This year also he has highlighted the same phrase. Yet the monopolists, industrialists, MNCs and the monopoly-controlled media have jubilantly welcomed the budget proposals, even the policy directions reflected in the budget. This no doubt,

indicates to a great extent the character of the budget.

Let us begin with corporate tax. It has been cut to 30% from 35%; with 10% surcharge, the effective tax rate is reduced to 33.7%. Straightaway, hundred top companies will save Rs.1616 crores. Even Gurudas Dasgupta, a CPI MP, an ally of the government said that the budget has granted a tax benefit to the tune of Rs.45,000 crores to the owning class. Similarly, there is a plethora of excise and customs duty cuts that make big business to rejoice, because they will directly enjoy less tax liability and hence more profit though the people remain deprived. Also, the import duty of oil crude has been reduced from 10% to 5%. Such reduction on motor spirit and diesel (HSD) has been from the current level of 20 or 15% to 10%, while it will be 'nil' in case of kerosene and LPG. But there is an increase of cess by Re.0.50 per litre on petrol and diesel obviously to be borne by the consumers. The Finance Minister himself declares that the oil companies will enjoy the margin in the form of swelling profit. Import duty cut would enable them to reduce procurement cost of oil from abroad but help usurp higher profit as the retail price the common consumers have to bear, will not come down. Yet the minister says that he has been "assured there will be no increase in the retail prices of these products as a result of the changes in duty structure."

Next comes the question of subsidies and subventions to the monopolists and big business. Of each rupee that the government spends, 22 paise go towards debt servicing as interest. During the BJP regime, the subsidy to essential items progressively came down to 10 paise per rupee spent. This Congress-led CPI (M) supported UPA government has further brought it to 7 paise. Yet the powers that be, raise a hue and cry that the government is squeezed beyond limit to meet the subsidy obligation. Every time there is an inflated allocation of funds towards public utility services in the budget only to be curtailed later under the pretext of shortfall in revenue collection. But there is no cut in military budget or in the huge expenditure incurred by the government on its bureaucracy,

ministers, MPs and MLAs. Subsidy, as we know it, is mainly provided to food, fertilizer and oil. This year the subsidy amount is raised by Rs.2998 crore to make the total allocation to Rs.46,514 crore. Of this, 16,254 crore is for fertilizer and 26,200 crore is for food. But while the increase is 6.8%, the inflation, according to government, is over 5%, neutralizing the effect. Moreover, there is a hike of Rs.6000 crore in military budget which is more than the double the amount of subsidy. We also know that despite this subsidy, the prices of fertilizer have not come down which means that the entire benefit is being usurped by the rural capitalists while the poor peasants bear the brunt. Yet we are to accept the Finance Minister's claim that this "will bring the greatest good to the greatest number" and "the government holds, it is its sacred duty to empower the poor and eliminate the scourge of poverty!"

Now take the issue of deficit. Last year the Finance Minister said that in 2005-06, revenue deficit would be pegged down to 1.8% of GDP, while fiscal deficit would be 4.6% of GDP. But the projected revenue deficit of Rs.95,312 crore is 2.7% of GDP and the fiscal deficit of Rs.1,51,144 crore is 4.3% of GDP. Cunningly, the Finance Minister has not included in his fiscal deficit figure the sum of Rs.30,000 crore, which he says the state governments will raise as loans to finance plan expenditure. So the actual fiscal deficit is 5.1% of GDP, which corroborates our earlier contention that capital account has once again been sacrificed to feed monstrous government expenditure. For example, allocation for National Advisory Council headed by Sonia Gandhi has been increased from Rs.1.73 crore to Rs.14.59 crore.

The figure of capital expenditure is also down by 43%, from Rs.1,19,722 crore in 2004-05 to Rs. 67,832 crore in 2005-06 which is less than the fiscal deficit figure. It means there is substantially less allocation for asset creation as because major chunk of revenue collected is spent to meet government's expenditure. It further shows how the government is gradually moving away from discharging barest social obligation. On the contrary, revenue

expenditure is up by a whopping 15.66%, from Rs. 3,86,069 crore in 2004-05 to Rs.4,46,512 crore. It may be added that as per Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act 2003, there should be a zero deficit budget by March 2008. UPA Government has now pushed it back to 2009 to be coterminous with its electoral term. Even to achieve that, revenue deficit must come down by Rs.30,000 crore every year to wipe out the present level Rs.95,312 crore – a task or target that looks illusory in the backdrop of past experiences. To widen its tax base, the UPA Government, like its predecessors, is totally silent, from electoral exigencies, on including the rural capitalists or the kulaks into the tax net, though they have amassed huge wealth over these years. Agriculture contributes 25% to GDP but the landed gentry do not have to pay tax.

On the ridiculous, if not devilish, plea of checking black-money circulation, the finance minister has imposed a bank withdrawal tax at the rate of 0.1% on withdrawal of Rs.10,000 or more in a day, which will hard hit the small traders and even the middle class households. It will simply mean branding even the honest citizens keeping their hard-earned money in banks, as criminals. But he has not spent a single word on recovery of bank NPA, the vast sum of un-repaid bank loans, now amounting to Rs.1.3 lakh crore, which has been grabbed by the monopolists and industrial houses. On the contrary, the defaulters continue to enjoy their privilege to seek and grab more loans which they fully utilize. In addition, thousands of crore of rupees of income tax, corporate tax and indirect taxes lie unrealized and the Finance Minister has not taken, nor even spelt out, any measure to realize also this huge sum of money, which lies ready at hand to be realized.

The Finance Minister has proposed "to remove lower and upper bounds to the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)" the money the commercial banks are supposed to keep in specified easily encashable instruments, and also "to remove the limits of the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)", the

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A Deceitful Exercise of Pro-people Stance

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commercial banks are to statutorily keep deposited with the Reserve Bank of India to meet liquidity commitments and liabilities. This means the banks will have more liquid cash at their disposal for deployment. Banks are already flushed with funds and are not getting appropriate investment avenues. So the government is encouraging the Indian banks to open subsidiaries overseas and acquire banks abroad. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our beloved leader and teacher and a foremost Marxist thinker of the era showed long back that by coalescence of banking capital and industrial capital, a financial oligarchy had emerged in the country. Is not asking this financial oligarchy to invest capital abroad a clear symptom of banking finance capital being exported and thereby proving the imperialist character of the Indian capital?

In the name of rationalization of income tax structure and enhancing the exemption limit to Rs.1 lakh, the Finance Minister has benefited the higher group of tax payers with progressive bigger tax cut i.e., the higher the income, the more the tax is reduced, the lower groups getting lesser and lesser benefits. It will not be out of context to mention that this year, the income tax rebate for savings under section 88 has been abolished and, instead, a flat rate exemption of Rs.1 lakh for savings has been proposed under a new section 80C. And investment in mutual funds and shares has been included in the permitted savings instruments. And this investment will be taxed at the time of withdrawal. This will push the tax payers indirectly towards speculative share markets with its attendant risks. On the other hand, through this the industrialists will have more opportunity to mop up money for their investments at the cost of interests of the small investors.

It may be added that real implications of some of the measures announced by the Finance Minister in sweet words, cannot be properly understood at the outset, but are unfolded with time. Deregulation of pricing of petro-products is a case in point. Similar is the case of individual taxation. Apparently it may occur that tax-

payers are benefited. But on a careful observation it would reveal that discouraging public savings has two objectives. By forcing people to spend, an attempt is made to create some demand in the market plagued by acute recession. On the other hand, shortfall in capital formation on account of increased spending and reduced saving would be made good by inviting FDI. This is the sinister design.

Moreover, the Finance Minister has kept derivative trading on the stock exchanges i.e., futures and options outside the purview of the taxes on speculative trading. Rather any income from such trading will be reclassified as business income. This would allow an investor (read big monopolists, giant speculators, banks, insurance companies) to set off any losses from derivative trading against his regular business income – almost a bonanza to the moneyed segment. Everyone is aware that trading on shares is a speculative activity. Now the crisis-ridden capitalism, in order to intensify speculation on the bourses, has introduced derivatives or forward, futures and options, a set of instruments where widespread speculation is the main activity so much so that the speculative bet is what is contracted under this trading. There is heavy Foreign Institutional Investment (FII) exposure in derivative market. With such liberalization of rampant speculation, there will be more circulation of capital both indigenous and foreign in the stock market that brings no benefit to the industry or the common people or for that matter economic development in the truest sense of the term. It is also apprehended even by the government, if all the foreign capital entering the country either in the form of FDI or FII investments, has a foreign origin. It is also Indian money hoarded as black by the monopolists and other unscrupulous elements that are being moved out of the country through illegal routes like hawala etc. only to be brought back to the country as foreign investment.

Pro-monopoly tilt of the government is also evident from the decision to introduce VAT, through a complicated procedure and bringing even small traders within its purview. Implementation of such

a complex system through existing flawed corrupt machinery would only increase harassment and invoke an inspector raj thereby gradually throwing out small traders and intermediaries from the retail business. This would pave the way for retail invasion by the monopolists both national and foreign, forcing people to procure items of daily use from big retail chain or shopping malls at higher price.

Hoax of pro-people measures

To cover up these offers to the monopolist-capitalists, the Finance Minister waxing eloquently at his best on his and the ruling party Congress's concern for the people of the country, particularly the villagers, dished out a plethora of promises for the common people which the monopoly-controlled and government media, both print and electronic, pompously publicized. To sidetrack and divert people's attention from the burning economic problems of life, he, with populist verbiage, announced allocation of Rs.25,000 crore for implementation of National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) which includes their National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. While granting Rs.11,000 crore for this scheme he said, "when fully rolled out, the scheme will provide livelihood security for crores of rural families..." Even on paper, let alone in reality, according to the scheme, one member of a BPL family will be provided only 100 days' work a year. We, in pages of Proletarian Era of the past issues had shown, and it was also widely reported in the dailies, how the wage rate per day violates even the Minimum Wages Act. So, how only 100 days' work for a single member of a family can 'provide livelihood security' to the whole family for the whole year? Is it not duping par excellence? Can it touch let alone solving the rural unemployment problem?

In the budget, the allocation towards capital account under the head Plan Expenditure which is meant for investment for industrialization etc., has been drastically cut by Rs.20,199 crore, from Rs.47,714 crore in 2004-'05 to Rs.27,515 crore in 2005-'06. If industrialization is thus slowed

down, will it not adversely affect growth of employment opportunity in the country? Thus, let alone chalking out definite scheme for industrialization to minimize unemployment problem, the government is doing the opposite and leaving everything at the mercy of market forces.

Announcing introduction of the high-sounding Bharat Nirman Programme, the Finance Minister has glibly promised to create one crore jobs in villages, to build 60 lakh new houses for the poor, to connect all villagers with roads, to supply drinking water to 74 thousand habitations, to connect all the remaining 125,000 villages with electricity and 66,822 villages with telephone by 2009, but all without any allocation in the budget!

Citing such other tall talks in his budget speech, the media blare out "Plenty of money for the common people". But just within two days, the Union Rural Development Minister Raghubans Prasad Singh punctured (albeit for other reasons) the balloon. As reported in all leading dailies, he openly branded the Finance Minister's claim as an 'arithmetical jugglery', if not a 'hoax'. He explained with detailed facts and figures available to him how the trickery had been perpetrated and showed that the allocation for rural development has actually been reduced.

This apart, every year in the budget, the government announces different yojanas or schemes for the common man. Last year also this UPA Government did not lag behind. But how much have those been implemented and how many needy people have been benefited is the moot question. In our country, people are accustomed to see that finance ministers of different ruling parties at different times shower promises in budget speeches but at the end of the year very little of those promises are realized, on account of non-availability of the promised allocation on the plea of shortage of fund in the case of public welfare programmes. The difference in this year's budget is that the present Finance Minister, in tacit understanding with CPI (M) and CPI, has overdone it with a view to projecting the government as pro-people without indicating as

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Indo-Pak relation

Kashmir issue notwithstanding peace efforts must be kept on

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the long run for power Farooque again colluded with the Centre and in 1987 with the blessings of Rajiv Gandhi trounced the opponent 'Muslim United Front' in a completely rigged election. Whatever be the political complexion of the Union government, at each stage during this period, a state government of the Centre's choice, was used conveniently to introduce further constitutional measures for the Centre to interfere in the State administration and governance. As the state thus continued to remain at the centre of controversy, with the military rule, Pakistan mustered all its arsenals to step up anti-Indian campaign resulting into further stiffening of the relationship.

Thus, for a political problem that was virtually created by the high-handed arrogant attitude of the Indian rulers, the Indian monopolists themselves, and that demanded nothing but political solution through dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, they took to the path of administrative coercion and treason to establish their centralized rule of Indian capitalism over Kashmir, going back upon their own commitments. By that, they trampled upon not just the special rights of the Kashmiris, their special autonomous status on affairs other than defence, foreign affairs and communication, but even demolished the kernel of the Article 370, the democratic right that was awarded to them by agreement. This way, they also struck at the *Kashmiriyat*, the feelings of the Kashmiris, earned through a long struggle. Naturally it gave birth to an alienated and injured feeling in a nationality that had stood by the cause of India itself, in 1947, 1965 or even 1971, when the Kashmiri people, opting for accession to India, fought side by side with the Indian Army to resist Pakistani invasion. Day by day, the events turned towards worse. The Indian rulers in their haste and arrogance proceeded with more curtailment of rights and oppression through the Indian Army itself and, in reaction, the feelings of Kashmiri people turned in a snow-balling process

into a strong anti-Indian attitude. The ground was prepared for communal, divisive and secessionist forces, of the country and abroad, with or without patronage of Pakistan, as well as imperialist hawks to take advantage and penetrate into the softened ground. In India, since eighties of the last century, with the rise of Hindu fundamentalists to the vicissitudes of power, BJP- RSS combination rule at the centre and different states in India, rapid increase in the influence of fundamentalists in the Indian administration, the situation assumed a new dimension and tended towards further explosive end. The Muslim fundamentalists set out more and more with new armed insurrection under the slogan of *Jihad*. The Hindu fundamentalists, in their turn, harped on 'terrorism' equating it with Muslim fundamentalism as well as on ISI, i.e., Pak conspiracy. The explosive situation that cropped up in the late eighties of the last century continued, in the main, till to date, even worsening in course. Similarly, the ruling class of Pakistan has constantly tried to communalize the issue of Kashmir, often with material and military support and encouragement from the imperialists, particularly the US imperialists, with a view to quenching and diverting resentment of their own Pakistani people crushed under the exploitative and oppressive rule there.

In the face of such an arrogant and treacherous attitude of the ruling class reflected in policies of the governments of bourgeois political parties, Congress or BJP in India, it was expected of the left and democratic forces, particularly the big lefts, had they been true lefts, to give exposure to the design and activities of the ruling class and their henchmen to make people conscious and equipped with the correct understanding of these problems. But the reality stood otherwise. All through the years these so-called left parties like the undivided CPI, or later CPI(M) – CPI busy in the fray of parliamentary politics, instead of articulating and organizing genuine aspiration for autonomy of the Kashmiri people with a view to

preventing them from falling victim to the fundamentalist infiltration and propaganda, has acted a second fiddle to, and only provided the Indian government with free passage to carry on with their faulty and high-handed Kashmir and Pakistan policies. Naturally, toeing the government's policy by the CPI-CPI(M) could not prevent the governments from continuing their haughty approach. It merely resulted in more and more erosion of regional autonomy of Kashmiri people and thus helped this situation to worsen to the present low.

Undeniably, the 'existing reality' at present has not remained the same, it was in the days of independence. Also it is a glaring fact that with all-out support from Pakistan, the arch-communist-fundamentalist-separatist forces are perpetually continuing their offensive in Kashmir. But it can still be noted that side by side, the secular forces within Kashmir still persist in their line of thinking, oppose the offensives of the fundamentalists and strive to explore different other alternatives to solve the Kashmir problem.

Restoration of Article 370 as it was during accession and forthwith stopping of military atrocities and bureaucratic highhandedness are the only way to a permanent solution

Considering all the different aspects of the backgrounds and developments of the Kashmir issue through years, the Central Committee of our party presented a comprehensive analysis in 1998 in the publication "Kashmir Problem Re-examined". There we indicated that for Kashmir there cannot be any alternative, as the most effective solution, to granting full autonomy as it was conceived during the time of accession. No democratic process or measure, including legislative elections, could earn credibility with the Kashmiris under the condition of eroded autonomy, enforced by military and administrative strength and measures. We showed that the Kashmir problem was the phenomenon of nationality domination amidst uneven growth of different nationalities, inherent in capitalism. The domination was

established by the ruling Indian capitalists-monopolists, set to drive the roots of Indian capitalism there in Kashmir, by eroding its regional autonomy and imposing the single pattern of rule prevalent in other parts of India.

As discussed elsewhere in the present article, this problem was initiated shortly after independence and accession of the state to India. It underwent quantitative, but no qualitative changes during all these years. The more there was the curtailment of democratic right and autonomy, the greater and more acute was the alienation of the Kashmiris from India. There also developed regional and ethnic feelings within Jammu and Kashmir too. At the same time, alienation of the Kashmiris found further ground in the shocking discrimination against them by the Union government in some spheres of jobs in administration.

We held it firmly that in a "country inhabited by nationalities with many languages, if a nationality that has its own language, definite culture and a particular mental make-up, is exploited and oppressed by the ruling clique of another nationality dominating in spheres of economy, politics and culture—then the former nationality has the right to demand self-determination" It does not necessarily imply secessionism by that. Rather regional autonomy is the way out. However in no case religion could be the main basis, not even a factor. We also made it clear that "In a multi-national, multi-lingual country, class conscious workers... generally strives for preserving the unity of all the nationalities in a single state while fighting all nationality oppression of the bourgeoisie of the dominating nationality. But, if in some cases nationality oppression – linguistic, political, cultural, economic etc., becomes very acute and irreconcilable and legitimate demands develop for right of self-determination ... then the working class should support such demand provided it is free from imperialist intrigue and religious fundamentalism, parochialism and secessionism... this struggle can achieve logical culmination only if it is led by a working class party." (Quotations from Kashmir Problem Re-examined : 1998 : Published by SUCI, Central Committee)

We reiterate our opinion, we have expressed all through the years

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Indo-Pak relation

People's vigilance the only guarantee for peace and accord

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when the Kashmir problem grew, aggravated and reached its present disturbing character. We maintain that, for a permanent solution of the Kashmir issue, forthwith, brutal military atrocities against the people of Kashmir must be stopped and military be sent back to the barracks, civil rule be restored in full. Secondly, the Article 370, as it existed at the time of accession, must be at once restored for granting full autonomy to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Obviously this means restoration of the kernel of the Article 370, the democratic right as well as the special rights of the Kashmiris, their special autonomous status on affairs other than defence, foreign affairs and communication, that was awarded to them by agreement. Only this way, can the feelings of the Kashmiris trampled and injured during all these years, be freed of misgivings and damages, a vital premise for a permanent solution of the Kashmir problem.

In any case, the Kashmir problem has persisted rather aggravated during this whole stretch of more than half a century. Nobody can expect an overnight solution. It may require days, nay years, to mend things right to normalcy. The process must start somewhere honestly and sincerely. Side by side, the relation between the two major countries of South Asia, India and Pakistan, cannot be allowed to deteriorate further. Notwithstanding solution of the Kashmir problem, the Indo-Pak relation should be independently handled through dialogues and discussions without any intervention, interference or intrigue of foreign, imperialist forces to reach a mutually agreed upon peaceful accord. Obviously the onus lies on the concerned governments of the two countries. But the common toiling people of India and Pakistan have important part to play. They should never forget for even a moment that they are chained by the ruthless exploitation and oppression of capitalist rule in their respective soils. For either of them and for both, there cannot be any goal, more emergent and unavoidable, than to free themselves from their exploitative and oppressive

capitalist systems. The Kashmiri people also must take it to their heart, that their much dreamt-of autonomy too, can only come in this path to emancipation of Indian people from capitalism. All these struggles are conducive to and included in this one broad struggle, the only way to emancipation. This is a realization people of these countries must keep alive and alert. Guided by it they must remain vigilant that any problem, be it the Indo-Pak relations or the Kashmir issue, is approached in the correct and right direction by the concerned ruling classes and their governments. Democratic-minded, secular common people of India and Pakistan, thus need to realize that their approach and outlook for a permanent solution of these issues cannot be the same as that of their ruling classes. It is a reality that we, who should have belonged to one and the same people, have been brought to the present fragmented entity by the follies and designs of the ruling classes of our lands. They have always tried and will ever try to dismember us from the great community of the united working people of these lands. They thus try

to keep the problem alive in an atmosphere of hostility and war with any and every kind of campaign-counter campaign on fabrication, falsehood and smacking designs; they will foment war-tension and national zingoism and even provoke limited wars, interspersed with peace talks. They will have the imperialists, particularly the US imperialists joining their band-wagon in these designs. But all this they do with a view to distracting their respective people from their burning problems of life, confusing them with phrases like border security, aggression, war etc. so that the latter fail to identify the real cause at the root, the exploitative system of capitalism; they will go on increasing their military budget to abnormal heights, even at the cost of basic amenities of their respective people. The US imperialists also want the two countries with locked horns, with a view to interfering and intervening in the name of mediating for peace, thereby serving its geopolitical interest in this region, as well as to selling arms and arsenals to the two countries to keep its own military-industry

complex alive. It will thus remain with the people of both countries to build and step up mighty mass movements and class struggle under genuine left and democratic leadership to fight out war-zingoism, national chauvinism on one hand and communalism-fundamentalism-separatism on the other, as well as to create pressure on their respective governments to make amends for the past and pave way for a peaceful future. It is such movement of people of the two countries that will not just help each other to attain their goals, the vigilance and pressure of such movement may put weight upon the efforts for peace and accord, be it through the present course of dialogues since the last Lahore Meet or any such in future. Only this way can a really friendly peaceful relation can develop between India and Pakistan. Any lapse or slackness in this vigil, will only allow the reactionaries, the ruling bourgeoisie, the fundamentalists – separatists or the imperialists hawks, that feed upon the flesh and blood of oppressed people, to take advantage of the situation and sustain their rule of exploitation for longer and longer periods. The road to peace must reverberate with the calls and clamours of these movements to lead us to reunite on the common goal of freeing ourselves from exploitation and oppression.

Chinese people pay homage to Mao and face prison sentences

On the anniversary of Mao's passing on September 9, people in Zhengzhou in China, would gather before Mao's statue in the Zijinshan Square, to pay tribute to their great leader's memory by laying wreaths or reciting poems. This year, too, there was a peaceful gathering for the same purpose on September 9. A local resident, Zhang Zhengyao, however, was taken into custody by plainclothes agents because of his distributing leaflets titled *Mao Forever Our Leader — A statement in commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Passing of Mao Zedong*.

Next day, Zhengzhou City Police implicated and arrested three more persons: Wang Zhanqing for allegedly arranging the printing of the leaflets, Zhang Ruquan for writing the commemorative piece and Ms. Ge Liying for posting it on a Maoist website, Mao Zedong Flag.

A trial, originally scheduled for December 14, was held on

December 21, albeit in a closed session, and not open to public, as originally announced. Zhang Zhengyao and Zhang Ruquan were tried; declared guilty, and each given three years imprisonment on December 24.

Despite the heavy snowfall, people moved to the city of Zhengzhou, from all over the country, in a spontaneous response to the news of the trial of Maoists in Zhengzhou, spread through leftist websites. Unorganized though, they came out of the deepest sense of loyalty to a socialist republic, concern for China and the most profound respect and love for their deceased leader and teacher, Chairman Mao Zedong, united by a common concern for justice. The accused resolutely refuted the charge made against them declaring they felt "immensely proud" "for being arrested for honouring the memory of Mao Zedong." Chinese people in their support hailed them for their deeds. With indignation

they asked: Why are they afraid of people paying tribute to Mao's memory? On September 9, an old worker is arrested before Mao's statue for an act in commemoration of the 28th anniversary of Mao's passing; On December 21, a few days before Mao's 111th birthday anniversary, he and others are tried in secrecy. What kind of signal is this? Freedom-loving people of the world would like to add: What kind of signal, does this incident, completely blacked out by the bourgeois press, send to the world? Is it not the signal of the fact that in spite of frantic efforts on the part of the world reaction, Mao Zedong is far from being removed from the Chinese people's heart? He resides there to inspire them to regroup themselves under the revolutionary leadership and rebuild their beloved country on greater strength of socialism, fighting out forces of counter revolution, as well as evils of modern revisionism and all bourgeois thoughts and processes.

Expose and Resist the Anti-People Budget

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to where the money would come from. Last year, in the budget for 2004-05, the target for revenue collection was set at Rs.3, 17,733 crore, but the government could collect only Rs.3, 06,021 crore. The shortfall was thus Rs.11, 712 crore. This year too, it is apprehended by most eminent economists that the shortfall will be greater and government loan will escalate by 42%, resulting in spiralling inflation, the brunt of which will have to be borne by the common people. Another trickery of the Finance Minister is that in almost all public welfare programmes announced, states are to provide a matching grant varying from 25% to 33.33% and he deliberately declared the total outlay as central government outlay without taking into account the states' liability — as if the Centre will bear the whole expenditure. This also shows the hollowness of his claim of concern for the well-being of the common people for if any state fails to fulfill the matching grant condition, the central grant would be withheld.

Similarly, while waxing eloquent about the betterment of small scale and cottage industries, the budget, at one stroke, "identified 108 items for dereservation. Among them, 30 items are in the category of textile products including hosiery". Clearly this is a ploy to hand over these sectors to the monopolists and MNCs by ousting the small businessmen and manufacturers.

Likewise, while the government is boasting of success in giving the industry an 'export thrust', budget reveals that while exports have gone up by 25.55%, imports have gone up by 34.72%. Hence imports far outstrip exports.

Mr. Chidambaram has claimed credit for investment in his budget statement, but conveniently forgets to mention that the PSU-s are borrowing for their own funding half of the investment of Rs.1,00,86 crore.

The whole budget is replete with such deceptions. The entire budget document in fine print is not covered by the media in general and hence common people can not go through it and find out the deceptions interspersed in between the lines. This is what the Finance Minister has tried to cash on.

CPI (M)-CPI support this anti-people budget

Thus it is clear that what the previous BJP government did, this UPA government led by the Congress, in its second budget, also has done the same: actually ignoring the public welfare measures and helping the monopolists and industrialists, etc. to mint higher profits. One difference is that this government has cleverly kept the issue of privatization and disinvestment out of the budget to deal with those issues separately.

CPI (M) has vociferously publicized the absence of disinvestment in budget proposal as an outcome of their maintaining

pressure on the UPA government. On the day of the budget they said, "It is due to the pressure of the leftists that Chidambaram, the proponent of reform, refrained from disinvestment". (*Ganashakti*, Bengali daily of CPI (M), 1.3.05) But the Finance Minister in a post-budget interview to the *Economic Times*, made no secret of the fact that he will certainly "take the proposals (of disinvestment) to CCEA, if it approves the divestment we will sell the shares and put the money in the National Investment Fund. Otherwise, how will the fund be built up?" Also, before the budget, the UPA government had already allowed FDI in telecom industry up to 74% and in aviation industry up to 49%. Only three days before the budget it had allowed, inter alia, deregulation of PSU banks, giving them the right to hire and fire and merging and abolishing branches. Moreover, in the budget it opened up important sectors like mining and construction, trade and pensions to monopoly capital with probable risky consequences for workers and employees of the country.

Cunning as the government is, many of the important financial decisions, including price increase and tariff hike are kept out of the budget only to be made effective through ordinances. Earlier we have seen this in the case of postal tariff. Of late we have seen petrol, diesel prices increased in a similar manner. Similarly decision to augment FDI limit in telecom, aviation and insurance and now in

private banks and retail trade have been taken outside the budget.

Thus, judging all these aspects our Central Committee opined, "As evident from the budget announcements Government's policy to gradually withdraw from the sphere of direct economic activities and hand over them to the domestic and foreign monopoly houses for intensifying their ruthless exploitation has been more pronounced, while the process of globalization-liberalization-privatization has been in a swift camouflaged manner given further momentum."

But it is surprising that the parties like CPI(M) and CPI, who claim themselves as leftists, yet extend support to the government led by the Congress, one of the most trusted representatives of the ruling capitalist class, have, in general, ensured and expressed their support to this budget. We have discussed and shown above the deceitful and anti-people character of this budget. It is now evident that the UPA government and its Finance Minister have drawn out this budget, including its proposals and provisions, in full consent and consultation with CPI (M)-CPI. So, under these circumstances, people must come to realize further that they cannot expect anything from parties like the CPI (M)-CPI. Rather, they have no other alternative but to build up powerful democratic movement to resist such economic onslaughts on their life and livelihood through this budget.

SUCI holds Citizen's Convention on problems of Delhi Metropolis life

Socialist Unity Centre of India, Delhi State Organizing Committee held a Citizens' Convention on 20th February at Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, against water tariff hike, privatisation of electricity supply, problems of public transport, education, health, eviction of colonies/settlements, forcible closure of industries, crime and crime against women. The well-attended Convention was presided over by Comrade A K Majumdar, Member, Delhi State Organising Committee, SUCI, and was addressed by a number of eminent personalities from various quarters of the capital, including Shri Rajinder Sachar,

former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, Ms. Gita Dewan verma of Master Plan Implementation Support Group, Shri S. A. Naqvi of Water Workers' Alliance, Comrade Pratap Samal, Secretary, Delhi State Organizing Committee, SUCI, Comrades R. Rajesh, Kailash Tyagi, P. K. Power and a number of speakers from different areas and colonies of the city.

The convention adopted a resolution with a 12-point list of demands. It emphasised "All basic services like water, electricity, education, health and transport are human rights, and not businesses to be run for profit. Hence there is a corresponding obligation of the

Government of a democratic society to ensure that all citizens are provided these services." The Convention also resolved to organise local-level movements, signature campaigns, dharnas and demonstrations in different localities of Delhi, involving citizens from all sections of society, culminating in a massive demonstration in front of the Chief Minister's Office on Wednesday, 18th May, 2005, in support of the people's demands.

A separate resolution condemning the recent brutal gangrape of a schoolgirl by her Principal and associates was unanimously passed.

Justice Rajinder Sachar, in his words, recalled that a claim was made that privatisation would put an end to the over 40 percent power theft in the capital. The media and the capitalists alleged that the working class and the poor and their slums were responsible for it. But numerous studies by officially-appointed commissions had established that large factory owners and high-income house-owners were actually responsible. Even after privatisation, this theft continued unabated, and private companies on top of that demanded concessions from the State Government. Criticising the so-called Left parties, he asked whether "communalism versus secularism" was the only issue, when there were so many burning issues of daily life and survival before the people.

Real Face of the Railway Budget

The Railway Minister of the UPA government has placed his budget for 2005-'06. It received certificates from his Prime Minister as a budget towards modernization, as also from the 'left' allies for being pro-people. But those could not be enough for covering up the minister's relying on verbosity and stunt.

On paper, there has been no enhancement of passenger fares. Freight tariff has been 'rationalized' with various classes of commodities clubbed together to bring them down from 4000 to 80 categories. A few categories of passengers have been exempted from paying for their travel: for instance, farmers and milkmen moving for their training, rural students from government schools on educational tours, interviewees for government services on their way to the interview centre. But these do not end up in facts only.

Let us first speak of the benevolent exemption. What percentage of countrymen will actually be benefited by this benevolence? How many of poor farmers or milkmen travel out-of-station to receive training? Are not government schools becoming a precious, rare thing to be found villages? Students attending still existing government schools normally find it hard to arrange for a square meal. How many of them can even dream of educational tours? Government jobs are also evaporating fast; a few offered draw applications in thousands; the applicants pay their usual train fare to move to the examination centres. The railway is kind enough to exempt only the fortunate few who have the call for interview.

It is true that in general, fares have not been enhanced. At the same time, it is equally true that traveling by Indian railways has become increasingly uncomfortable, even dangerous, with minimum services and basic amenities of food, light, water, cleanliness and others disappearing rapidly; security becoming an obsolete word with dacoity, hooliganism by local goons and mafias and such other crimes mounting every day; safety vanishing with more than frequent accidents on account of ill-maintenance of age-old tracks, bridges, manned or unmanned level-crossings etc.

The budget does not present any concrete plan for redresses for any of these difficulties of common people; the Minister has only reiterated a promise for renovation of 411 bridges, made in his last year's budget, exposing his bankrupt verbosity.

Secondly, before the budget, the railways have effected a significant change with the Tatkal reservation. The charge for Tatkal was raised from Rs 50 to 150, nothing much for businessmen and industrialists on hurricane tours, who favour and avail of this facility more frequently and particularly, but certainly a lot for the common people in need of a ticket in case of emergency. In addition, an increased 10% of reserved berths have been brought under the Tatkal system, meaning an equal amount of loss in the normal reservation facilities for common passengers. The Railways have already robbed travelers of Rs 10,000 million through these measures; mind that, it was all before the budget in which "fare has not been raised" to bring in an 'air

of relief' in people, as commented by the big 'left' ally of the UPA government and its Railway Minister!

About freight rationalization, even the industrialists had to admit that this reduction of 4000 commodities into 80, "irrespective of raw materials or finished goods for application of tariff will certainly push up the freight burden.. for all industrial raw materials and output, thus fuelling inflation in the economy". The minister spoke of acquiring Rs 6500 million from the freight restructuring; as the media reported, higher officials of the railways admit an actual arrangement of pulling up Rs 30300 million from increased freight. Obviously this adds to the apprehension of inflation. The truth, the chambers of commerce and the media did not dare to admit, was that the burden of this 'inflation' will be passed onto people only.

Last, but not the least, this budget presents an attempt, not even

veiled, to open this profiteering public sector to the private capital. A Rail Development Corporation Limited is being formed, to make way for private capital to creep in and even lay new railways. The Catering and Tourism departments have already been privatized. A 'Land Development Authority' has been framed to help build up on railways-owned lands commercial complexes with private investments. Above all, a wagon investment scheme has been introduced in container movement, under which the Container Corporation of the Railways that earned a profit of Rs 3680 million last year is being clipped and partly privatized. It has been hailed by none other than CII President, a leading representative of the industrialists.

In summary, then the rail budget has presented a face of the UPA government, that was to bring forth and has actually done so, hearty applauses from the different chambers of commerce. It is left to people to judge how far this budget is pro-people or popular.

Russian Youths want Communism back with a leader like Stalin

In a survey conducted on the occasion of 60th year of Soviet victory over fascist Germany in the second world war, 50% of the people, mostly the young generation, spread over the provinces of Russia, expressed deep respect for Stalin and his leadership during those crucial days of anti-fascist struggle. They firmly believed that Stalin had played a very positive role in safeguarding the interest of the country, the then Soviet Union. According to these young Russians, Russia needs a leader like Stalin today to come out of the present condition of growing uncertainty and combat spiralling crime graph. Another survey shows that most of the people feel that Communism should return to Russia. This once again indicates that what a high esteem the nobility of communism and the contribution of a great communist leader like Stalin are held by the people of Russia despite tirade of anti-Stalin propaganda and ceaseless campaign to malign Communism

ABECA meets the Press on the ensuing Delhi March against Electricity Act 2003 on 22 March 2005

The All Bengal Electricity Consumers' Association (ABECA) announced in a Press conference on March 9, 2005 its decision to hold a massive demonstration on March 22, in front of the Parliament in New Delhi on demand of repealing the anti-people Electricity Act 2003, to be participated by consumers from different states of the country. While explaining the background and the purpose of the demonstration, ABECA made it clear that the

menacing trend of converting power into a commodity to help power barons earn super profit, was initiated by the former BJP-led NDA government at the centre and was overtly or covertly supported by different state governments, including that of West Bengal run by CPI(M)-led Front. Though the last electoral verdict went against, among other things, this trend, the present UPA government led by Congress and supported by so-called

lefts like CPI(M), has toed the same line, announced the National Power Policy to be followed by a new tariff policy in March. All this stems from the anti-people Electricity Act 2003. It thus needs to be resisted and the Act repealed on the strength of a powerful movement with a view to preventing the poor and middle domestic consumers as well as small industrial and agricultural sectors from the impending debacle to come as a result of these measures.

A few recently published and reprinted books of
Comrade Shibdas Ghosh

- **Lessons of November Revolution and Revolutionary Movement in India**
- **An Evaluation of Saratchandra**
- **Why SUCI is the only genuine communist party in India**
We will continue this list in incoming issues

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