

## **Oppose the Heinous, Anti-People Operation Green Hunt**

The CPRCI(ML) vehemently condemns the plans ("Operation Green Hunt") of the Central and State governments to launch a military offensive against the CPI(Maoist) and the masses under its influence. The motivation behind this war by the state on the most oppressed and exploited masses is two-fold.

First, as representatives of the interests of foreign and domestic money-bags, Manmohan, Chidambaram and their ilk are determined to crush the communist revolutionary movement, of which the CPI(Maoist) is a prominent part; for it is the communist revolutionary movement that most consistently and steadfastly defends the interests of the masses against the exploiters.

Secondly, the eyes of imperialists and the Indian comprador bourgeoisie are on the rich mineral and other natural resources of these backward regions of central India. Speaking in Parliament on June 9, the Prime Minister stated: "The world economy is inter-linked with the management of a vast country like India. There are international factors which affect us. There are also developments in security matters which also can derail the development process. If terrorism is uncontrolled, if Left Wing extremism continues to flourish in important parts of our country which have tremendous natural resources of minerals and other precious things, that will certainly affect the climate for investment. Therefore, as a Government we are committed to doing all that is in our power to ensure that terrorist elements are brought under control." In this way he made clear the link between the attack on the revolutionary movement and the desire of interna-

get their hands on the country's natural

the Indian military with US imperialist mili-  
tary anti-insurgency exercises, also points to the  
drawing up plans for "Operation Green Hunt".

the communist revolutionary forces, which stand for  
interests of the Indian people, are being slandered as anti-  
who are hell-bent on hawking the country's assets and  
at-rate prices to imperialism, and on subjugating India to

Minister, P. Chidambaram, has been issuing explicit warn-  
ings against opposing the military offensive. He is thus pre-  
paring ground for broader repression.

CI(ML) calls upon the people to resist the impending wave of  
repression. Every such wave of repression, including the notorious  
of 1975-77, has ultimately failed to suppress the just struggles  
of India, for the basic contradictions underlying those struggles  
present war on the people will meet the same fate, albeit only  
at terrible sacrifices on the people.

CC, CPRCI(ML)

1009

## Release of Binayak Sen, Significant Victory of Democratic Forces; Anti-Repression Struggle Must Continue to Build

The release on bail of Binayak Sen, paediatrician and national vice-  
president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, on May 25 is a signifi-  
cant victory for democratic and revolutionary forces, coming as it does at  
the end of a consistent two-year struggle for his release. Of course, the  
case against him continues in a trial court, and as such the struggle even  
regarding his individual case is by no means over. The fact that he has  
already been subjected to severe punishment, without trial, by keeping him  
in jail for these two years, exposes the nature of the Indian judicial system.

The Supreme Court provided no reasons for granting Sen bail, just as it  
provided no reasons two years earlier for refusing him bail. Both decisions  
were only nominally judicial, and were actually political.

The reason for his arrest was the State's desire to send a signal to all  
democrats and progressive forces that any individual, no matter how well-  
known and widely respected he/she may be, can be targeted if he/she op-  
poses ruling class repression of the people, particularly when vital interests  
of the State are concerned. The judiciary, acting as an arm of the repressive  
State, upheld this autocratic victimisation all the way up to the Supreme Court.

In the intervening two years, a sustained campaign nationally and inter-  
nationally regarding the Binayak Sen case embarrassed the rulers: further,  
it repeatedly called attention to the authorities' brutal Salwa Judum cam-  
paign being carried out to repress the revolutionary forces and broad masses  
in Chhattisgarh. The fact that Sen was being persecuted for exposing the  
regime of fake encounters, rapes, burning down of villages and forcible

... as to camps policed by a State-sponsored private army... As such, the rulers were being made to pay a heavier... than they expected for throwing Sen in jail. And so, on May... Supreme Court granted bail on May 25 within a minute.

... the post-election period, the ruling classes, revelling in the (superfi-... appearance of a decisive Congress victory and a 'stable' government, ... drawing up wish-lists of economic measures – which mean an intensi- ... economic war against the people and plunder of their assets. As a ... necessary accompaniment to such anti-people measures, ruling class circles ... beating the wardrums of "national security" for a fresh attack on the ... olutionary movement and on mass resistance struggles. The Union Min- ... of Home Affairs has announced that it is drawing up fresh, more ... nsive, plans to tackle the "Naxal menace". These include setting up a ... "counter-terrorism" multi-agency centre, strengthening and modernising ... police forces, imposing a national identity card system, and so on. Rul- ... class political leaders (prominently the present Home Minister, ... dambaram) have been loudly dismissing the notion that any "root causes" ... ing rise to Naxalism need be addressed; they assert the need for pure ... ice action to wipe it out before any "development" can be undertaken ... is confirming the anti-people nature of their "development"). Manmohan ... gh, Chidanbaram and their ilk have deliberately been characterising ... munist revolutionaries as "terrorists" (in place of the earlier term "ex- ... ists"), and clubbing the revolutionary movement with jihadi forces. Such ... oric is evidently an attempt to politically isolate the revolutionary move- ... it, in order to prepare the ground for attacking it.

... in such a phase, the persistent publicity regarding Binayak Sen's contin- ... incarceration would have kept exposing the real objectives and charac- ... of the State's war on the revolutionary movement. Hence this tactical ... at by the State. The democratic and revolutionary forces cannot af- ... to let down their guard in the anti-repression struggle-movement, or ... rtain any illusions regarding any reduction in the repressive environ- ... t; rather, the contrary would be the case. They must prepare rather to ... e determined, prolonged mass resistance against the attack on people's ... hood and rights by the exploiters and the State.

CC, CPRCI(ML)

25, 2009.

## Stand With the Struggling Masses of Lalgarh

The purpose of the current much-trumpeted operation by the paramilitary forces in Lalgarh region of West Midnapore (West Bengal), is to suppress the democratic upsurge of the tribals and to send out a warning to all oppressed sections against any attempt to similarly challenge the State authority and establish people's authority. It is also part of the ruling classes' systematic long-planned attack on the communist revolutionaries nation-wide who are challenging the entire *system* of exploitation and oppression. For these reasons it is incumbent on all communist revolutionaries and revolutionary democrats to stand steadfast by the tribals of Lalgarh, oppose the State's campaign of suppression, and uphold the right of the masses to rebel against the existing oppressive social, economic and political order and set up their own popular authority. Whatever the differences of tactical line among the communist revolutionaries, they stand united and with the revolutionary masses against the enemy onslaught.

The sparking point for the current rebellion was the atrocities committed by the police on the ordinary tribals to exact vengeance for a CPI (Maoist) land-mine attack on the West Bengal Chief Minister. These vengeful acts by the police ignited a great store of popular wrath built up over years of autocratic, exploitative, and terroristic treatment of the tribals at the hands of the police and the CPI(M) machinery. There followed an extraordinary and inspiring democratic assertion by the tribals, drawing on their traditions of collective struggle and management of their own affairs. The tribal masses seized control of the area, blocked off entry points, gheraoed the local police station, formed the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, drove the police and administration out of the area, and declared their democratic demands. No doubt these demands were of a limited nature (i.e., not relat-

## The Significance of the Struggle of Gurgaon Workers

On October 20 and the continuing struggle of the workers of Gurgaon, significant developments, calling for widespread working class solidarity as an immediate response.

The strike was sparked by the killing of a worker of Rico Auto Industries by management goons on the evening of October 18, in the course of an ongoing workers' struggle and dharna. (Rico is a foundry which supplies parts to Honda, Maruti Suzuki, Ford, Nissan, and other major auto firms in India and abroad. The workers of Rico have been locked out since September 21, 2009, as punishment for having formed a union.) This heinous attack elicited a powerful response from workers of the entire auto industry in this belt. About one lakh workers from 70 units participated in the ensuing strike. The agitation continues to date. More importantly, with the entire belt seething on the issues at the core of the strike, those issues will find expression again through struggles of workers in other plants in the near future. This strike, then, is an auspicious sign of a potential revival of the movement of industrial workers, which had suffered such a brutal, disorganised retreat and decimation in the last three decades (notwithstanding occasional eruptions of localised struggles). (This retreat was forced on workers by the economistic, bureaucratic and frequently treacherous established trade union leaderships and structures. These leaderships were useless for tackling the new challenges thrown up by the all-round attack under the banner of "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation", which rendered the old forms of struggle and organisation ineffective even within

the economistic frame. Nor did workers have at hand at that juncture sufficient alternative forces which could lead protracted, broad, militant, working class struggle-movements targeting the State, gathering wide solidarity and forging crucial links with the agrarian revolutionary movement.)

Now, throughout the country, there are the signs of stirring and struggle – in the automobile and related industries as well as in some other industries. The current crisis of the world imperialist economy has led to an intensified attack by global Capital on Labour. On the one hand, since September 2008, lakhs of workers in India have been thrown out of their jobs in a range of industries; on the other hand, the persistent steep price rise is eroding the meagre wages of even those workers who are still employed. Because of the growth of the practice of so-called contract labour (effectively, labour denied its legal rights, and therefore also not enjoying any dearness allowance), the erosion of real wages is particularly rapid. These conditions are thrusting large numbers into struggle. Unrest has been particularly prominent in the automobile and related industries over the last year: the MRF tyre factory and the Hyundai car factory in Chennai, the Mahindra car factory in Igatpuri, the Sunbeam and Rico factories in Gurgaon, and other instances. The repression by the employers in the auto industry has been so barbaric and intense that it has resulted in outbursts by the workers, resulting in the deaths of the chief executive officer of Graziano Transmission in Noida in November 2008 and a senior executive of Pricol in Coimbatore in September 2009.

Gurgaon is the centre of the country's auto and auto parts industry, accounting for the bulk of its production. India's comprador rulers are trying, with various open and hidden subsidies, to promote the country as a "hub" for global automobile production, thus integrating the Indian economy further into the world imperialist economy and subjecting it to further imperialist exploitation. To make Gurgaon attractive for investment by foreign and domestic large capital, the rulers have been aggressively suppressing workers there, to keep Gurgaon as a virtual union-free zone; a similar policy is being applied in many other zones of new industrial units around the country. (Correspondingly, whenever the workers organise and assert themselves, the capitalists and their representatives – including, at one point, the Japanese ambassador to India – begin warning that such unrest will deter future investment.) The bulk of the workers even in the large plants are

...and the status of permanent workers, and are labeled "contract", "casual" workers etc. Despite years of service at these plants, despite significant work done, and despite the nature of their work being identical to that of permanent workers, in every fashion they are denied the salaries of permanent workers. In fact they are four to five times the "contract" workers' wages and their legal rights too. Each plant is part of a long production chain which often stretches backward to small slum workshops and forward to the imperialist countries. Through its access to such international markets of Third World workers, Capital is able to greatly increase its extraction of surplus value.

The employers of Gurgaon have maintained their rule over the workers with a private army of thugs, who terrorise, assault, and even kill workers who resist, with the complete collusion of the State. The police, labour officialdom, administration, and the judiciary, have been acting with perfect coordination. When the private thugs do not suffice, the police are called in. The most notorious instance took place in front of television cameras in July 2005, when a demonstration of Honda workers was attacked by the police and beaten extensively, relentlessly and mercilessly, resulting in the hospitalisation of hundreds of workers. Since then, the unrest among workers of this belt has continued simmering, with agitations breaking out in different units from time to time.

The significance of the present strike and underlying struggle movement in Gurgaon is threefold. First, the workers have got organised and united across factories over an entire belt. Participation in the strike extended far beyond the membership of either the formal leader of the strike, AITUC, or indeed all the unions in that belt. Indeed, it is the workers who are organising themselves and rallying around whatever banner is available. Secondly, the workers' demands are not principally economic, but *political*: namely, the right to organise and struggle (the right to unionise), apart from proper compensation to the family of their martyred comrade. Thirdly, the struggle is pitted against a powerful combine of imperialist and domestic big bourgeoisie and the state, who are determined to crush all labour organisation in an industry which has been given special status in the comprador pattern of development.

Such an important battle calls for a genuine and militant workers' leadership: leadership which has the stomach and stamina for a long-drawn,

sacrifice-filled struggle; which grasps the need to mobilise wide solidarity of workers and to conceive and wage the struggle as that of the working class against the ruling classes and their state. The reliable gain of any struggle is not economic, but the resultant greater organisation, consciousness and fighting spirit of the workers. The need therefore is not only to educate the mass of workers but also to build out of the current struggle cores of conscious political workers as the main instrument for sustaining the working class movement through all its ups and downs: For the Indian working class is to emerge as the leader of all the revolutionary classes in the country, and such big battles are excellent political schools for the education and steeling of the working class and the consolidation of its best elements.

However, all the Gurgaon workers have at hand today is the bureaucratic and domesticated central leadership of the CPI front, AITUC, whose sole concern is to institute itself among the workers as their established leadership, and among the ruling class as reliable sub-contractors of "labour peace". It is no surprise that, on the crucial day of the strike, the top AITUC leadership of Gurudas Dasgupta and D. L. Sachdev stayed away from the rally, on the plea that the local administration had persuaded them that their presence would "inspire" the workers and make them "uncontrollable"; in fact the AITUC leaders preferred instead to petition the prime minister to intervene. With such a leadership the immediate prospects of the present movement are clouded. Nevertheless, the conscious sections and the revolutionary forces among them must strive to strengthen the struggle to the maximum possible extent, make the workers aware of the need to democratically develop their own fighting leadership, and garner and consolidate nuclei of fighters to carry forward the movement.

October 25, 2009.

resistance. The struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils for self-determination is justified: it cannot be permanently defeated; it will arise again under one or the other banner, with all the richness of its experience, and strengthened by the terrible sacrifices it has endured. Just as the rulers of India have collaborated with the Sri Lankan butcher clique, the democratic and revolutionary masses of India must steadfastly support the just struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils for national self-determination.

May 22, 2009

## On the Jehadi Suicide-Attack in Mumbai

No person sensitive to human suffering can fail to be pained by the direct human toll of the recent strike on Mumbai – hostage-taking, and killing and wounding of innocent persons of various classes.\* Even more painful is the indirect toll for the country as a whole: a harsher political climate, in which the rulers can further fan and harden majority communal sentiment; in which national-chauvinist forces enjoy an even more open field; and in which the state can take various repressive steps in the name of “curbing terrorism”.

The media and the authorities, while shedding copious tears over the human tragedy, are motivatedly obscuring the underlying causes of such recent attacks: Namely, that as US imperialism and its allies trample underfoot the masses of peoples in a large belt between Palestine and Pakistan, they find themselves pitted against a wide range of political forces in this region, including Islamic fundamentalist forces. As the Indian rulers have hitched the country to US imperialist strategy, India has predictably been drawn into the target of blind retaliatory strikes by these forces. Thus the Indian people are being made to pay the price for their rulers’ ambitions of becoming a junior world power.

\* The rulers’ claim that they attempted to minimize the loss of lives in this operation is bogus. For it has now emerged beyond doubt that the hostage-takers were trying to negotiate for certain demands (as is generally the case when hostages are taken). The Congress rulers, having made much capital of their BJP-led predecessors’ decision to exchange prisoners for the IC-814 hostages at Kandahar, now cold-bloodedly and cynically calculated that any negotiation would give the BJP a stick with which to beat them in the coming elections. And so they declared and implemented a policy of “no negotiations”, guaranteeing a higher death toll.

Obvious evidence regarding the motives of the attackers has been swept under the carpet. In both the five-star hotels the squads were openly hunting for US and UK citizens to hold as hostages; at the third hostage site, their intended targets were Israelis. In a telephone interview, one of the hostage-takers referred to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Indian occupation of Kashmir, and the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The e-mail from the unknown "Deccan Mujahideen" claiming responsibility for the attack reportedly demands an end to attacks on Muslims. The available evidence, then, indicates that the Mumbai strike had two motives: to retaliate against US imperialism and its old and new allies for their misdeeds in various lands; and to retaliate for atrocities on Muslims by Hindutva forces and the Indian state machinery. These two facets become linked by India's emergence as junior partner in the US's global strategy.

### The background to the recent event

The misdeeds of the US imperialists in west and south Asia and of Hindutva forces in India have created a pool of disturbed and traumatised Muslim youth in the subcontinent. Lacking the required outlet of a powerful revolutionary democratic movement for combating the Indian ruling classes' policies of communalism, chauvinism and subservience to US imperialism, they tend to be swayed by Muslim fundamentalist forces targeting Hindu society as a whole, failing to see that ordinary Hindus are themselves oppressed by the very same ruling classes and state.

The ruling class media have consistently propagated various half-baked notions regarding the reasons for these attacks. However, what should be noted is that before the organised destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 (by the Hindutva forces with the complicity of the Congress government at the Centre), there was no prominent instance of such retaliatory strikes by Muslim fundamentalists in India: the first major instance was the March 1993 bomb blasts in Mumbai following the massacre of Muslims in December 1992-January 1993. In the following years, the continuing failure of the Indian state to punish the culprits of similar massacres, and indeed the rise of the culprits to the highest offices of the land, has deepened the alienation and anger of the Muslims. In the aftermath of the Gujarat genocidal pogroms of 2002, the number of such retaliatory strikes has increased.

The phenomenon has acquired a new, *international*, dimension as the US-India strategic alliance began to emerge after 2001, and even more so after the strategic alliance took definitive shape in 2005 (with the signing of the defence and nuclear agreements). Various statements by the al-Qaeda and other such forces warned India that it had now become part of their target, and an explicit reminder of this was recently provided by the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul.

The Indian ruling classes cannot afford for the Indian people to see that the latest attack in Mumbai and other such attacks are linked to their own striving for "big power" status. Hence the elaborate propaganda exercise to the contrary by their media – in fact making a case for closer linking up with the US superpower "to fight terrorism".

### Distorted presentation

Painful and traumatic as the recent acts of bombing, random killing and hostage-taking are for the people at large, the attempt by the ruling class political forces to present them as acts of violence without parallel in recent history is patently false and motivated: The recent attack in Mumbai spanned 60 hours; by comparison, the Mumbai pogroms of Muslims in 1992-93 were spread over two months, and the Gujarat pogroms of 2002 were spread over 19 districts for a month. The official death toll in the recent strike on Mumbai was 172; whereas the estimated death toll in Mumbai in 1992-93 was over 1,000, and in Gujarat 2002 the death toll was over 2,000. In the recent attack on five-star hotels, some hundreds were made hostage or were trapped in hotel rooms; whereas the number forced to live in refugee camps in the Gujarat riots was around two lakh. (In the recent Sangh Parivar attacks on Christians in Kandhamal, over 30,000 were driven to take refuge in camps.)

The most striking difference is the attitude of the state: The Mumbai police responded immediately to the news of the latest strike, and when it proved insufficient, first marine commandos and then the National Security Guard were brought in within hours, the latter remaining engaged there till the end of the operation. By contrast, the state machinery played an active role in helping the rioters in the Mumbai and Gujarat riots, and even itself engaged in the slaughter. (The military was called into Mumbai as a standby only after the rioters had decided to halt their killing; and it was never

brought to Gujarat.)

These comparisons help understand the extent of trauma to which the Muslims have been subject in India, which has also created the soil for acts of blind retaliation.

Even among the recent bomb blasts and killings of innocents by Muslim fundamentalists the Mumbai strike has been elevated to a special status by the media: for not only did it take place in the country's financial capital, but also in the city's most prominent symbols of ostentatious wealth and splendour. Of course, among the propertied this has aroused a great wave of indignation, and led to demands by them for greater "security". However, particularly in a third world country, it is virtually impossible to secure large areas from all such threats. The latest episode of attack, for instance, required only a handful of men – perhaps 10 – directly in the attack. At most, such efforts for greater "security" will lead to an increase in security expenditures and the securing of certain VIP/high-income locations (similar to Baghdad's "Green Zone"), abandoning ordinary people to their own fate.\* More to the point, as we have seen above, the source of insecurity lies within the system itself: it is the ruling class political process in this country – its alliance with US global terrorism, and its use of communalism – that has given rise to the present situation. Unless that political process is countered, such retaliatory strikes may continue.

### Further into the US embrace

Instead, the Indian rulers have responded to the Mumbai strike with much sabre-rattling and threats to attack Pakistan. This, despite the fact that the Indian government could immediately discern that, in the present circumstances, no wing of the Pakistani state could be involved in any way in such a Jehadi attack with an obvious edge against US imperialism and its allies. That in the drastically changed and changing alignments of forces in Pakistan, no Islamic fundamentalist group there which is not already engaged in armed confrontation with the Pakistani state, or now ready to do that, would carry out such an attack. Moreover, they know well that high-level conflict with a nuclear-armed Pakistan (such as bombing targets in

\* It can even mean greater harassment of ordinary people and taking of bribes in the name of greater security and checking operations. Worse still, it can lead to the creation of fascist bands of unemployed youth as "security militias".

Pakistan, or sending troops in "hot pursuit") is no longer tenable. In fact, even a low-level conflict, such as build-up of troops at the border and engaging in petty skirmishes, would not be tolerated by the Indian rulers' patrons – US imperialism; for that would lead Pakistan to divert troops away from its rebellious tribal agency in the west, where they are engaged in doing the bidding of the US. Given their limited options, the Indian rulers, in their response to the Mumbai attack, have had to turn to their chief patron, US imperialism.

What the Indian rulers really expect, in the circumstances, from the US is some open humiliation of Pakistan and confirmation of the second-rate status of Pakistan's sovereignty (in the US coinage, a "failed state"). This can be displayed by the Indian rulers as a trophy, to strengthen their domestic political base.\* However, even this demand creates complications for the US. The Pakistani rulers' domestic political credibility is already at its nadir on account of their utter subservience to US imperialism. Any move by the Pakistani rulers that appears to submit to India's junior-hegemony over the region would arouse even greater indignation among the Pakistani people, and further destabilise the Zardari regime – and perhaps even the Pakistani state. The US imperialists, aware of the delicacy of the situation, are trying to find some way to balance the conflicting requirements of their war in Afghanistan-Pakistan on the one hand and their strategic alliance with India on the other. One should expect that the US will extract from the Indian rulers the full price of any "help" they give them. One dangerous form of that price would be if India gets more directly dragged into the vortex of America's Afghanistan war which has already spilled over into some areas of Pakistan, under the name of "war against international terrorism".

Nevertheless, for the present, this truth is hidden under a cloud of propaganda. Rather, the strike on Mumbai has given a handle to the Indian state and Indian reactionary political forces to whip up chauvinistic sentiment, strengthen the repressive machinery (in terms of both "anti-terror" legislation and security forces/agencies), and strengthen this country's ties to US

\* Even though India's alliance with the US is the principal reason behind the recent attack in Mumbai, the Indian middle classes are easily swayed into even *stronger* support for the alliance in the wake of the attack. In their imagination, the US is supporting India, rather than the other way around.



imperialism. The reactionary campaign is clothed in propaganda against "politicians", but this is merely meant to broaden its appeal among a public alienated from parliamentary politics – a well-worn technique of fascistic propaganda.\*

Among the ruling class parties, the BJP is best positioned to derive maximum benefit from the recent incident, but the ruling Congress-led alliance may recover lost ground if it is able to extract some "trophy" from Pakistan. As on all "national-security" issues, the CPI(M) and CPI are barely distinguishable from the other ruling class parties, and only suggest how the same ends might be more effectively achieved.

In these circumstances it is necessary for communist revolutionaries not to get overawed or overpowered by the wave of chauvinism and fascistic propaganda, and not to blur the lines of demarcation between ourselves and the reactionary political forces. While taking care of the sentiments (of sympathy, anger and anxiety) among the masses, and while presenting our views in whatever form people will be more open to receive, we need to point to the fundamental causes of the latest tragedy. We need to help people come out of the sway of communal and chauvinist propaganda. Only by doing so will we be in a position, as the current economic crisis deepens, to direct the people on the proper secular course of the class struggle, rather than let them fall under the diversionary sway of national chauvinistic or communal fascistic forces.

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December 15, 2008

\* Another typical element of fascist politics is the exaltation of the armed forces and police for their 'heroism' and service to the 'nation'. It is worth noting in this context that the glorified National Security Guard, far from displaying courage, took caution and self-preservation to ludicrous lengths: outnumbering the hostage-takers by 100 to 1 at the five-star hotels, they took more than two days to complete the operation, keeping their losses to just 2 while hotel guests died in large numbers. In the Jewish centre all hostages were killed, yet the NSG operation was proclaimed a success.

## *An Unassuming but Staunch Communist Revolutionary Cadre* **Com. "Srikakulam Rama Rao" Passes Away**

– by a correspondent

Comrade Rama Rao, who had been the secretary of the Vizianagaram-Srikakulam Area Committee of the CCRI and later of the Area Committee of CPRCI(ML) for the last two decades, died of hepatitis B jaundice on October 31, 2009. Being immersed in work in the Vizianagaram Agency area, he failed to notice the visible symptoms of the disease in time. Later he travelled alone to Hyderabad, where his family is residing, and where proper medical care is supposedly available. In Hyderabad he took treatment for about a month and a half. Only after running from pillar to post and consulting specialists could his family members and friends get a clear picture of the critical nature of his condition, just two days before his death. The calm and courage that com. Rama Rao showed in battling the disease till his death was fitting of a revolutionary. He continued to be concerned about the work and gave instructions for the same till the day before his death.

Com. Rama Rao was born into a very poor Dalit family in Dundugopalapuram village of Srikakulam district. His parents named him Erraiah: "Rama Rao" is the name he adopted in the party. His date of birth was recorded in school records as March 8, 1948, though it may have been earlier. He completed the 12<sup>th</sup> Standard. During his student days, he was attracted to the office of the Andhra Pradesh Teachers' Federation (APTF). He came under the influence of a prominent Communist teacher, Pondala Venkata Ramana Murthy, and learnt his initial revolutionary lessons from him and other teachers who frequented the APTF office. From 1965, he

worked actively for the Communist Party student organisation, Students' Federation, and in 1966 took active part in the Students' Federation agitation for a steel plant in Vishaka (with the slogan "*Vishaka vukku, Andhrala hakku*" – Vishaka steel, Andhra's right).

Through his contact with the APTF leaders Ramana Murthy, A.V. Chainulu, Balakrishnamma, and Appaya Master, he was attracted to the Srikakulam Girijan movement. From there on, he came into contact with persons such as Vasantada Ramalingachari, Panchadri Krishnamurthy, Tejeswara Rao, Adibhatla Kailasam, Vempatapu Satyanarayana, D.V. Rao, and T. Nagi Reddy. Inspired by their example, he started working wholly for the movement.

Com. Rama Rao was taken as a squad member of the squad of Polla area in the initial period, and, apart from participating in other people's actions, he took part in the people's action led by the squad against a *sahukar*, Sakala Bhaktula Krishnamurthy of Kapu Umilada village, in September 1969. Just two or three weeks after this action, he was arrested in the Kapu Umilada case, and spent a little over two years in jail. He was active in the prisoners' struggle in jail against inhuman treatment. He was released on bail in 1971. While attending the dates of the case, he worked as an agricultural labourer in his village.

After the case was quashed, he went to Bhilai as a worker in the Bhilai Steel Plant. But when, in 1973, he received a letter from his early mentor, Venkata Ramana Murthy, saying that he should not forget the ideals that the martyrs of Srikakulam fought for, he left his job and returned to Srikakulam. At the time, under the banner of the defence of those accused in the Srikakulam Conspiracy Case, and under the leadership of comrade T. Nagi Reddy, mass-political activities were being conducted to revive the Srikakulam Girijan movement. In the course of these activities, comrade Rama Rao once again firmly took to the mass revolutionary line. During the period of the Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist) (UCCRI-ML), he rose to the district-level leadership and became secretary of the Srikakulam-Vizianagaram Area Committee.

With the declaration of Emergency, com. Rama Rao went underground and continued his activities. He came to be popularly known as "Srikakulam Rama Rao". This affectionate address by the revolutionary ranks and people continued till the end of his life.

In 1976, he became member of the Andhra-Orissa Border Regional

Committee (AOBRC), and, from July 1983 to December 1985, he worked as the Secretary of the AOBRC. During this second phase of his political life, the following types of activity were prominent: in Cheepurupalli area, the formation of a youth organisation and related activities; in the Agency area, agitations and struggles for Girijans' rights over forest products and for remunerative prices for these, and for construction of the Varithada reservoir and check dams; and in Bobbili, giving political direction to the Bobbili Kalasi Sangam's functioning and political activities. (In 1980, he married com. Shanti, also an active cadre in the organisation at the time. They had a son. Later, frustrated with the wrong trends and splits, com. Shanti became distanced from the movement. While single-handedly discharging family responsibilities, she remained a sympathiser of the organisation. Meanwhile, com. Rama Rao continued his underground life and responsibilities as a professional revolutionary.)

When a right deviationist trend emerged within the mass-revolutionary trend represented by UCCRI(ML), he took a stand against right opportunism in the split with D.V. Rao. Later, when UCCRI(ML) as such progressively went under right opportunism, he single-handedly took the lead at the area level to demarcate from the right deviationist politics, and joined forces with those that became part of the Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (CCRI) in 1988.

When CCRI was formed, the Area Committee of Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts was reorganised in 1989, and he became its secretary. The organisation had become very weak, and its forces were meagre. In a situation of predominance of wrong trends, setbacks to the movement, and splits, everything had to be built from scratch. After this there was immense pressure on him from friends and family circles to leave the work. But he stood firmly by his convictions, and continued in the work, undeterred by the difficulties in getting immediate results. He treated the work as a life-commitment, irrespective of ups and downs. As a true communist revolutionary, he adhered to the line and persisted in struggle.

During this period, he retained a special bond with the Girijan area and identified with the Girijans. He strove to reorganise the Girijan Sangh and to revive the party organisation and its activities in different fronts, despite further desertions and physical losses to the Area Committee. Subsequently, after 1995, under CPRCI(ML), he undertook fresh initiatives to revive the Girijan Sangh. In the process of discussing local problems among the people,

*pocketwise* committees were formed in place of the district-wide committee.

In the process of democratic interaction with the people, two issues came to the fore, namely, the struggle for the demand for the Dekuraigedda reservoir, and distribution of forest and waste lands between Chintalakoridi and Arikakoridi villages among the landless Girijans. Various propaganda and agitational activities were taken up. The struggle for distribution of forest lands advanced in the face of intense pressure and threats from forest, revenue and police personnel. The Girijan Sangh courageously stood its ground and accomplished the distribution to needy Girijans. Thus a new village came up, Vempatapuram, named after Vempatapu Satyanarayana, the great revolutionary martyr. Despite various efforts to disperse the villagers – including the looting of all the timber collected by the villagers for building houses – the village was established, and the government has finally recognised it. The activists of this struggle are now the mainstay of the Girijan Sangh. In the course of this struggle, com. Rama Rao played a key role in resolving patiently the contradictions among the people (between different villages and different people), and in motivating the people to fight the ruling classes.

In Bobbili town, when an issue regarding the democratic functioning of a union became a controversy, and when not only the forces of the revolutionary trade union council of the town (where followers of different revolutionary groups were participating), but even the forces of the correct trend got divided, com. Rama Rao worked patiently for three to four years to reunite the revolutionary trade union forces and party forces, taking a balanced approach. Last year, all the unions of the council were able to unitedly observe May Day. In Bobbili town, he paid particular attention to the Kalasi Sangam, guiding with the party's orientation that guidance and help should be such that the workers themselves develop as the leaders of the union, without the direct intervention of the party. When the workers repeatedly requested him to take the formal post of adviser to the union, he politely declined, and explained why it was not proper. Such a team from among the workers has been emerging and taking shape, and has started leading their union in a democratically functioning manner.

As a cadre, com. Rama Rao observed certain exemplary communist revolutionary political standards:

In every struggle against deviations, and in the course of the several

splits of earlier years, he took a principled political stand. He remained undaunted even in the face of even the most difficult conditions.

He strove consistently to overcome his political limitations and to improve his political level through studying the literature of our party organisation, as well as the literature of other communist revolutionary groups. He would ever strive to apply his study in his practical work.

He was modest and genuinely practised criticism-self-criticism. While admitting to his shortcomings and mistakes, or while criticising other comrades, he would never succumb to agitation or personal prejudice. He would always strive to work with those who criticised him or had differences with him, refraining from factional methods and adopting a principled political method. Even after splits, while maintaining his political differences with the opposing trend, he not only maintained good personal relations but worked on people's issues harmoniously with those of the opposing trend, and with other political groups. That is why even those who belonged to other groups liked him and thought him trustworthy.

His financial discipline and simple living were exemplary. Even as he maintained strict accounts of each sphere of activity, keeping with himself only the bare minimum, he never behaved deprived. He maintained frugality with a political sense.

Due to com. Rama Rao's integration and relation with the masses, for the Girijans he was a son of the soil. For any problem, they treated him as a brother or father figure. He would not demand even the smallest facility from them when staying in their homes. (The Girijan masses' love and affection for him was expressed when, in the October 31 memorial meeting of the Girijan Sangh for the martyrs of the Srikakulam movement, the news came of com. Rama Rao's death. The whole gathering began weeping uncontrollably.)

In his work style, com. Rama Rao stressed the need to concentrate rather than spread work without sound basis. He stressed the need to develop the work according to one's strength, and through the course of one's activity to develop a core of mass activists who could carry forward the work.

The death of com. Rama Rao is a great loss for the area, particularly for the Agency area, and for the CPRCI(ML). It will have to be made up with the same selfless steadfastness and correct orientation he exhibited in his revolutionary career.

## Red Salute to Com. Gunadhar Murmu

— by a correspondent

Com. Gunadhar Murmu, undaunted fighter of the communist movement, passed away on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2009, at 6.40 a.m. under the close watch of comrades and physicians. He was suffering from tubercular meningitis. His life was dedicated to the agrarian revolutionary movement for the People's Democratic Revolution and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought. Such a life was taken away by the icy hands of death. The voice that inspired the poor and downtrodden landless peasants to be bold and to move into action against the class enemies, jotedars-jamindars would not be heard any more.

At the time of death he was 82 years old. He was born in June 1927 at Belar, Debra, West Midnapur, West Bengal, into an adivasi middle peasant family. He read up to Higher Secondary (Class XI). When he was a student, he assembled and organised the poor and landless peasants with the companionship of Com. Nikunja Behari Chowdhury, the then leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI). He got the membership of the CPI and became the Secretary of Krishak Samity around Debra Police Station. Centering on his house, the communist party and peasant movement had been built up and developed at Debra. Poor and landless adivasi (tribal) peasants were the axis of this movement. At the time of Sino-Indian border clash in 1962 he was arrested as a '*China-dalal*' (agent of China). When he came out of jail after one year he noticed that differences had cropped up within the party. Though the party worked to build up workers', peasants', students' and youth movements, it could not develop them as part of the revolutionary movement. At this time, a number of major differences of principle existed in the international communist movement — known as the 'Great Debate'. In this Great Debate

the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Com. Mao Tse Tung, conducted and led a principled struggle against the modern revisionism of Khrushchov which had taken over the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Gunadhar then supported the CPC and upheld the polemics of the General Line of the International Communist Movement. By adhering to this ideology, he was convinced, communists would be able to integrate Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice in their own country in a more mature way. In this context, after the split of the party (CPI), he decided to join CPI(M) on political grounds. He fought against chauvinism. At the time of the India-Pakistan war in the year 1965 he was arrested as '*Pakistani char*'.

He was among the pioneers who in the 1960s took initiative to assert the peasants' rights, broke the prevailing unbearable atmosphere, and organised them against the ruthlessness of the jotedars-jamindars. When the first United Front government was sworn in West Bengal in 1967, turbulent peasant movements (in continuation of the previous movements) were seen there under his leadership when he was in CPI(M) and the local party was with him. Thousands and thousands of peasants, mainly adivasi, came out with *tangi* (axes), bows-and-arrows, and sticks. In fact, the peasantry of the area became radicalised in the peasant movement even as the first UF government made promises of land redistribution. At that time, raids on blackmarketeers were organised under his leadership. Agitations under his leadership for seizure of land, however militant, reached a dead-end under the prevailing structure. Agricultural labourers raised demands for higher wages. There were clashes with the landlords. Under his leadership peasants faced the jotedars armed with 45 guns at Baulasini village of Debra Police Station where jotedars ran away from the village leaving the guns. There were active movements in Keshpur Police Station and Daspur Police Station and adjoining areas where struggles were going on. Even after the dismissal of the first UF government in November 1967, the peasants of Debra remained militant.

The leaders who fought against revisionism and neo-revisionism, like com. Amulya Sen, com. Kanai Chatterjee and com. Sushital Roy Chowdhury, supported his movements and came to meet him at his house in the year 1967. When the Naxalbari peasants' movement came into the picture he took the initiative to form the Naxalbari Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samity in Debra Police Station. In response to the call of com. Charu Mazumdar a number of students came from Calcutta. Presidency Group came to Belar (village of

com. Gunadhar Murmu) for red-guard actions. On April 22, 1969, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was formed. In May that year he along with his close comrades (com. Bhabadeb Mondal, com. Netai Das and others) joined the new party. On August 21, 1969 CPI(ML) decided to implement the programme of annihilation of class enemies in Debra, Gopiballavpur and Bahoragora. Com. Charu Mazumdar assigned a more affirmative role to the annihilation of class enemies in Debra in September 1969. In front of com. Charu Mazumdar and other leaders com. Gunadhar Murmu raised his voice steadily against the programme of individual annihilation of class enemies in the meeting of Kharagpur. He said that after the annihilation of a jotedar his descendant would be the owner of the property and from this action people would get nothing. But if we could seize the property through the village revolutionary committee and could distribute it to the people of the village and protect them, they would be benefited. He cited examples of how, through the actions of the armed squad, they were getting isolated more and more from the people. When the 'annihilation campaign' began in the area, police camps were put up. But the local police were helpless against the popular upsurge. There were cases when in November 1969, the police fled from places where thousands of peasants came to forcibly harvest the crops.

While the leaders in Debra favoured mass movements drawing rich lessons from the experience of similar movements in 1966-67, the Border Regional Committee of CPI(ML), which was in charge of setting down the guidelines of the movement, emphasised the tactics of annihilation of class enemies to the exclusion of other forms of movement. The leaders in Debra felt that in the absence of any firm base area, continuation of isolated annihilations would lead nowhere, and would merely narrow down the scope of further extension of Party activities. On November 1, 1969, at a meeting of the Border Regional Committee, CPI(ML), the leaders of Debra put forward the proposal of formation of Peasants' Committees. But their proposal was not accepted and they were criticised for organising mass meetings and favouring mass movements. At another meeting in Digha in January 1970, the Debra leaders were again attacked by the Border Regional Committee, CPI(ML), for their opposition to the tactics of annihilation. It is published in the Bengali magazine *Lal Tara* (Red Star) of May 7 and May 22, 1975, as a "Review of Debra Peasants' Struggle by a Group of Cadres". [Excerpted in *In the Wake of Naxalbari* by Sumanta Banerjee, p. 184]

At last Gunadhar was arrested on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1970. Even in the jail, the followers of com. Charu Mazumdar introduced the same annihilation line. Naturally, Gunadhar fought tooth and nail boldly against this line. The uninterrupted political fight by him against the annihilation line saved the lives of so many comrades inside the jail. Inside the jail he also fought relentlessly against the trend of right opportunism of the comrades who supported the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' of Indira Gandhi. Thus he fought to the last against both adventurist (left) and right opportunist lines. He, along with his close comrades, realised that through individual annihilation line, com. Charu Mazumdar and others negated the inseparable connection between agrarian revolution and protracted armed struggle. Moreover, they did not have a mass revolutionary line. The ideological-political struggle became more and more sharp. Through their experiences he, along with his comrades, conceived that the Telangana Peasants Armed Struggle was a Mass Revolutionary Armed Struggle. From jail com. Gunadhar Murmu played a very important role in publishing the Debra Report (mentioned above) in the Bengali magazine *Lal Tara* against the programme of class enemies' annihilation/*khatam* and in support of the mass revolutionary line. In 1973, inside jail they came to know of the mass agrarian revolutionary movement of the Andhra Pradesh Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries through *Lal Tara* Bengali magazine. After his release on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1977 from jail, he along with his comrades com. Bhabadeb Mondal, com. Netai Das, and others contacted com. Nagi Reddy's group and joined their organisation, Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist) (UCCRI-ML), at the beginning of 1978, ideologically-politically. Until his death Gunadhar adhered to the politics of the agrarian revolutionary mass line.

In continuation of the continuous process of consolidation of the proletarian revolutionary trend for advancement toward the reorganisation of the Communist Party of India, he joined first in the Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (CCRI) along with his erstwhile organisation UCCRI(ML); and then, with CCRI, joined CPRCI(ML), in which he remained till his death. For reorganisation of the peasant movement, according to their ideology and politics, he along with his comrades com. Bhabadeb Mondal and com. Netai Das formed the Kshet-Mazdoor Krishak Sanstha at the time of UCCRI(ML). He was the secretary of that organisation till his death. Under this banner he launched some militant movements to realise the demands of poor and landless peas-

ants. Under his leadership peasants fought valiantly in the year 1990 in Abdalipur, an adivasi village under Debra Police Station, for seizure of the vacant land acquired by the Government. To achieve the desired results they boldly faced the attacks of the political parties, particularly of CPI(M) and jotedars. A number of times, he had to face the social fascist attacks of CPI(M) and jotedars. They attacked him to kill. They even looted and ransacked his house twice.

He led many struggles, at different times, for demands towards breaking the chain of economic exploitation of adivasi people, towards development of their language and culture, and towards establishing their livelihood with dignity. He always protested and stood boldly over the years against the humiliation, persecution and repression of adivasi people. He was detained for this reason as "Jharkhandi" by the Left Front Government on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1990 for 18 days. He observed that, because of the principles of the ruling classes, adivasi people could not get their due prestige. They were being isolated from the mainstream of the society for long long time with deprivation and acute exploitation. The development of their language and culture was being restricted. In this context, some political forces raised the demand for formation of Jharkhand state and a large section of adivasi people participated in this movement for getting some relief from their problems. Any type of persecution and repression on this movement was condemnable, he thought. He expressed clearly that this movement was a reformist movement and that a separate state of adivasi people within the framework of this Constitution of India would not solve their problems. To become free from the exploitation, repression and deprivation adivasi people would have to fight against their class enemies – the jotedars-jamindars-feudals and the imperialists. An anti-feudal and anti-imperialist democratic movement under the leadership of working class is necessary to reach the goal. To launch a movement against these enemies a United Front of all oppressed people, including adivasis, is necessary.

A communist revolutionary, com. Gunadhar Murmu was also an organiser and leader of the agrarian revolutionary movement of Malkangiri District, Orissa. He associated and integrated himself with Malkangiri Zilla Adivasi Sangh for a long time, from 1992 to 2002. He was one of the pioneers in building up a militant and powerful movement under the leadership of the Sangh. He played his role as an adviser and trainer there. He assembled and organised the down-trodden adivasi people for their movements of *jangal, jamin, jal* (forest, land, water) as a mass organiser. He was a good propagator and agitator with a distinct class approach. He traversed all the blocks of Malkangiri – the hills,

mountains, Tapu areas and dense forests. It was a surprise to see that he could travel 30 km to 40 km without any break or food. Since he was able only to speak in Santhali and Bengali, one interpreter was always along with him. He was never found reluctant to attend to his work, though malaria and other diseases plagued him. He merged himself with the land movement of the difficult to access and distant Tapu area. He involved himself deeply with the militant and powerful movement against the arbitrary and forcible felling of trees, i.e., deforestation of Padmagiri Panchayat, in defence of forests. He even travelled to Umerkot in Nabarangpur district at the border of Chhattisgarh and Ramgiri areas. He loved the tribals of the region and worked with them.

His political concerns were not restricted to the adivasi question. Rather, he propagated on other political questions among the adivasis. For example, he launched a campaign at Belar in Debra against the State and Khalistani terror in Punjab and in support of the mass resistance movement there led by the "Front against Repression and Communalism, Punjab". At the same time, he always used to come forward with ideas for the immediate betterment of the locality.

The whole band of revisionists, neo-revisionists and "left" and right opportunists reject in practice the agrarian revolution, which is the axis of the Indian Democratic Revolution. If the revisionists, neo-revisionists and the right opportunists reject it with the parliamentary path, reformism, and economism, the "left" opportunists fail to understand the inseparable connection between agrarian revolution and protracted armed struggle (protracted people's war), and reject it with individual violence. Gunadhar highlighted the importance of consolidation of the party forces on the basis of the mass revolutionary line, and the establishment of an all-India proletarian revolutionary party under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought. He set an example of adhering to the correct ideology and politics even in many different adverse situations. He was a leader but never did he focus on his personal self.

He passed away leaving his wife, four daughters, son, relatives and comrades, but his memory will live on in our struggle. Let us move ahead with firm determination to carry forward the task of establishing a People's Democratic State and Socialist Order for which we are all in struggle.

*Long live Com. Gunadhar Murmu*

*Red Salute to Com. Gunadhar Murmu*

## *Agricultural Labourers of Muktsar*

### **A Small but Impressive and Instructive Struggle**

— by a correspondent

August 21, 2008: A clash of agricultural workers with the police at a place 2 km from Badal, the native village of the Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badal. About 500 men and women were bent on reaching Badal village to start a sit-in in front of the residence of the CM's family, in order to get an agreement implemented. This agreement had been arrived at by the CM and the leaders of the Punjab Khet Majdoor Union (PKMU) four months earlier. The police, armed with lathis, tear gas, rubber bullets and a water cannon, were adamant that agricultural workers would not be allowed to break through the police checkpoint and proceed to Badal. On the other hand, the combat-ready agricultural workers, armed with class-consciousness and class-hatred of the feudal landlords and their government, were even more determined to prove that it was not that easy to check them. The inevitable result was a fierce clash. According to press reports, in this clash of 28 minutes, 32 agricultural workers (including women) and about half a dozen policemen, including a deputy superintendent and two women constables, were injured.

After the clash, the agricultural workers were not subdued; rather, they were enraged, and their determination to assert their will was heightened. They started a sit-in at the very place of the clash, and thus blocked the Grand Trunk Road. As news of the clash spread, reinforcements from various villages came to participate in the sit-in. The number of participants in the sit-in grew to 700. Apart from agricultural workers, about 200 peasants

came from the nearby district Bathinda, under the leadership of Bharti Kisan Union (Ugrahan). Similarly a good number of BKU members from Lambi block (in which this incident had occurred) rushed to the venue of the sit-in. The Lambi block unit of BKU announced that the peasant organisation would provide food, tea, etc to the whole gathering till the conclusion of the sit-in.

Usually, when the people, particularly peasants and workers, dare to resist the police attack to assert their will, challenging thereby the autocratic and brutal conduct of the rulers and their police forces, they are taught a very bitter lesson. Large contingents of the police descend on the area for a retaliatory campaign. There follows a spree of torture, arrests, and false cases against not only the leaders and activists of the concerned organisations of the people, but against any commoner whom the police hordes come across in their hunt. The higher police officers shift their camp from the district headquarters to the concerned area to supervise the retaliatory campaign.

In this case also, a few hours after the clash, all the top officers of the district administration rushed down to the area of the clash. These included the deputy commissioner, senior superintendent of police, superintendent of police (detection), superintendent of police (operation), subdivisional magistrate, tehsildar, etc. But they had not descended on the venue of the sit-in to supervise any retaliatory campaign, but, amazingly, to beg the leaders of the union (who had led the clash) for a compromise. There were six rounds of negotiations (from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m.) before reaching a written agreement. All the demands of the struggle were accepted. Though it required thereafter a campaign of about three months of follow-up and mobilisation to get this agreement implemented, finally most of the demands were fulfilled.

The most difficult demand for the administration to fulfill was the public apology by police officers. During the lathi-charge, two police officers had used legally prohibited caste-based derogatory words in the course of insulting the union activists. The two officers were to beg pardon publicly. There was a specific round of negotiation related to this demand. The administration was insistent that the concerned officers would beg pardon in a closed-door meeting, but not publicly. Finally, they had to beg pardon in the presence of 40-45 persons.

Apart from fulfilling the demands related to the building of latrines in a village and providing plots for dung-hills in two villages, a compensation of Rs 3.8 lakhs was provided to 32 persons injured in the August 21 police clash. An annual pension of Rs 3,600 was given to a woman of the village Singhwala whose husband was missing. A sum of Rs 75,000 was awarded to a family whose breadwinner was murdered by Khalistani terrorists more than 15 years earlier. (Such families were supposed to get compensation according to the decision of the Punjab government. But this family was denied compensation due to a technical error in the registration of the FIR related to this murder.) An agricultural labourer was awarded Rs 25,000 as compensation for an injury received in a lathi-charge on March 26, 2008.

These demands are not so significant as practical and economic relief measures. But the political significance is enormous in the context of the humiliating, repressive living conditions of agricultural labourers in this area. When they wanted to convey their complaints to the higher authorities, not to speak of getting the opportunity to talk face-to-face with the government officers, even the gatekeepers of the government officer did not allow them to get in the offices. Now when they saw the whole of the district administration begging for an agreement, coming to their own venue of the sit-in someone expressed the feelings of the collective of the workers, "See, the might and prowess of our unity! The whole range of officers, from the D.C. and S.S.P. were looking like goats before us!" A woman, whose residence is just near the spot of the police clash and who was therefore an eyewitness to the whole episode, distributed a big panful of sweets the next morning. When asked about the reason for this sweet-distribution, she promptly answered joyfully, "Sons! Why should I not sweeten your mouths, when you have emerged victorious from the police clash. It is only you who have beaten the police back, whereas I have seen many being beaten back by the police." There was widespread praise for the struggle in various sections of the people apart from agricultural labourers. While the struggling workers emerged from this struggle with high morale, higher consciousness and an expansion of the influence of the PKMU, the district administration felt humiliated.

The outcome of this incident of clash seems to be a somewhat miraculous development. How could it happen? This clash was not an isolated and spontaneous outburst of agricultural labourers. Rather, this episode was the

concluding part of a two-year-long serial of many episodes of propaganda and agitation campaigns, selection and projection of demands, preparatory homework for the struggles ahead and various forms of struggle actions. It is thanks to the correct policies, plans, methods of work and flexible tactics of the leadership of the union, and due to the correct appreciation of the political situation and balance of forces, that a small force of agricultural labourers could carry on a struggle for two long years and could achieve relatively impressive political, organisational and practical gains. Let us have a brief look at the whole of this serial.

### Background

District Muktsar, the home district of the present chief minister and Akali Dal supremo, Parkash Singh Badal, is a part of southwestern Punjab. This area abounds with old-type big feudal landlords ("sardars"). There are feudal landlords in many of the villages, each owning hundreds of acres of land in gross violation of the land ceiling acts. A surplus of 3.16 lakh acres are owned by just 7200 families in this district, according to the government statistics. The family of chief minister Parkash Singh Badal is one of the biggest landlords. The oppression and exploitation of agricultural labourers is more direct and acute in this area as compared with other parts of Punjab. According to a survey conducted jointly by PKMU and BKU (Ugrahan) in March 2008, 101 agricultural labourers from 26 villages of this district have committed suicide due to intolerable conditions.

The overwhelming majority of agricultural labourers belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The landlords and the landed peasantry belong to the upper castes, making up the majority of the village population. In this situation it is very difficult to initiate the agricultural labourers' movement and organisation on anti-feudal economic demands. Whenever an organised attempt is made by agricultural labourers to revise wages and/or to improve working conditions, the landlords can easily provoke and mobilise the landed peasantry against the agricultural labourers under the joint slogans of upper castes versus SCs and landholders versus landless. A call of social boycott is given and the noose around the neck of the whole of the SC population is tightened. There has been contention in the revolutionary camp in Punjab on the point of whether agricultural labourers and landed peasants should be organised in a single mass organisation or there should be separate



organisations for them. There was a view that both these classes should be organised in a single mass organisation (Kirti Kisan Union) because both of these classes are integral parts of an anti-feudal peasant movement. Therefore organising them in separate organisations means breaking this integral bond between them. Practice soon proved this view to be wrong. There was another view that there are strong caste prejudices in both of them against each other, and there is a clash of some partial economic interest between them. Particularly the clash of some partial interests between upper middle and rich peasants on the one hand and agricultural labourers on the other cannot be wished away without a process of development of political consciousness and a period of struggle for unity between them. So at the initial stage (of class consciousness) both of these classes cannot be organised in a single mass organisation. There should be a simultaneous process of development of twin organisations of landed peasantry and of agricultural labourers cultivating a mutual fraternal relationship as their class consciousness goes on developing. This is the way to break the alliance of landlords and the landed peasantry and to make the alliance of peasants, particularly the poor peasants, and agricultural labourers and ultimately to bring them in a single mass organisation dominated by the agricultural labourers. The PKMU started its work according to the latter view:

The PKMU had to enter the villages of this district (in 2005) where there was no peasant organisation sympathetic to the agricultural labourers. Even now in many of the villages under the influence of the union there is no such peasant organisation. The union began its propaganda and agitational work related to the burning partial demands, including the oppression of landlords-police combine *linking them with basic demands particularly with the demand of land distribution and real democracy*. There has been regular propaganda and agitation against parliamentary politics, *institutions*, and opportunist political parties and in favour of relying on people's organised fighting strength and thus on creating real democracy by asserting their will at the grassroot level and developing it upwards. During parliamentary and assembly election, the joint platform of PKMU, Lok Morcha Punjab and Revolutionary Democratic Front of electricity technical workers has been organising propaganda campaigns among agricultural labourers, apart from other sections particularly projecting the revolutionary alternative system.

As the anger against the oppression and exploitation was burning among the agricultural labourers, the propaganda and agitation of the union got instant and active response from a section of the labourers. Many successful and militant struggles were fought against oppressive acts of landlords-police combine. But the social oppression as the main issue of struggles posed some limitations for the expansion of the movement and the mass organisation. Usually an act of oppression by an individual landlord against an individual or a few individual agricultural labourers were becoming the issues of the struggles. In these militant struggles only relatively advanced upper layer of the labourers participated actively, thus limiting the expansion of the mass base of the struggles. In such a situation the union leadership felt that without taking economic demands as the issues of the struggle the mass base of the union cannot be extended. But, as told earlier, it was very difficult to fight successful struggles on economic demands against landlords because the landlords were able to project such struggles against them as the struggles against all landowners and all upper caste population of the village. Hence, struggles on economic demands against landlords were not preferable, for the time being, in such a situation.

So the leadership decided to take the course in which generally the partial demands related to the fair implementation of welfare schemes for the SCs and below poverty line (BPL) people were to be the main issues of the struggles. All ruling class parties have been projecting such schemes from time to time to lure the people into their vote-banks. But most of the deserving people never get the relief and facilities announced in those welfare schemes. Such schemes included: old-age pensions; *shagun* scheme (gift money given to the bride on the occasion of her marriage), which was Rs 1500 in the beginning and now is Rs 15,000; grants for renovating mud houses and for building *pucca* (kiln brick) houses; free allotments of plot for houses and for dung-heaps; free building of latrines in the houses; and distribution of wheat and pulses on subsidized rates, etc.

Distribution of such grants etc in a village are usually under the control of feudal forces in the village. They use these grants etc to maintain and increase their grip on the agricultural labourers and other poor of the village. Thus the target of the struggle for fair distribution of grants etc are also feudal forces and their representatives along with the bureaucracy. The first step of the PKMU on this course was preparation of the demand charter.

### Preparation of the demand charter

The union leadership did not prepare its demand charter basing on general and vague demands. They took it as a serious project and invested in it a lot of time and energy. According to a report of the union:

“A significant aspect of the method of revolutionary mass work is connected with delineation of the demands of the related section of the people. This method demands that the selection of the demands should be based on the investigation of the concrete living conditions of that section of the people. Further, a demarcation between propaganda demands and struggle demands should be made. This demarcation does not depend on the subjective thinking of a leadership but it should be made according to the interest and current fighting mood manifested by the people, in relation to various demands. “Accordingly the union leadership had done investigations in more than 30 villages of the district to prepare a charter of demands. Those demands were included into a list of struggle demands about which the workers were most concerned and ready to struggle for. In the next phase of the explanation about the struggle demands, particular attention was given to propagating how these demands are ultimately linked to those important and basic demands which are essential to radically change their present conditions. Thanks to the time and energy invested in the selection of demands, during the meetings with union leaders, government officers were forced to admit that the demands were justified.”

Most of the union leaders and activists in this district are illiterate. When asked to address a gathering or go for negotiations with government officials they are usually reluctant and diffident, feeling only literate persons can do such jobs. But the process of concrete investigation to frame the demand charter and explaining these demands to ranks in the revolutionary political context made a section of these (illiterate) activists and local leaders confident for projecting, justifying and defending these demands. Thus they became confident for addressing the gatherings and for negotiations with government authorities.

### Projection of the demands

Particular attention was given to project the justification of the demands not only among agricultural labourers but also in other sections of the people, even among opponents. According to a report of the PKMU, “though it is necessary for every section of the people to project the justification of their

demands among the masses of other sections of the people to win them over and to get their support for the struggle on such demands, it is particularly necessary in the case of the agricultural labourers, who are marginalised and are victims of prejudices in society.” After the concrete investigations about the implementation of the welfare schemes, many write-ups were sent to the press detailing the number of deserving persons/families who were denied the benefits of these schemes. Some newspapers regularly published these write-ups, making these attempts of the PKMU a sort of campaign exposing the deceptive nature of these populist policies of the ruling party of the time. Similarly, while struggling for the implementation of the agreement with the CM, particular attention was given to project the justification of the agreed demands. Apart from such projection in the press, deputations were sent again and again to the officers who participated in the agreement. The CM was informed through a letter about the district administration’s ignoring the implementation of the agreement. His principal secretary was informed about the problems coming in the way of the implementation. A letter was sent to the MLAs of all the parties just before the assembly session. Finally, a written notice about the sit-in at Badal village was sent 15 days in advance, to the CM through the deputy commissioner of the district. The same notice was sent to the in-charge of the local police station (at Lambi) and the senior superintendent of police of the district. This notice of four pages included the details of the follow-up efforts of union leaders for the implementation of the agreement. A letter was addressed to the people of Badal village to get their support for the sit-in. After the projection of the justification of the struggle demands comes the next step of preparing the ranks and the people to initiate a struggle or to carry the struggle on to the next, higher, level.

### Preparation of the ranks for the struggle

According to a report of the union:

“In order to advance any struggle in a revolutionary direction, apart from other factors, the factor of making a concrete assessment of negative and positive assessment of ourselves as well as of our adversary becomes extremely important. The prestige of the adversary should be eroded by projecting their negative aspects and weaknesses. Our weak points should be pin-pointed and appropriate steps should be taken to strengthen these aspects. Assessment

should be made of the resultant situation of the possible enemy attack and our forces should be duly prepared to counter the possible attack."

When it became clear that the bureaucracy was not at all serious to implement the agreement, even after two months, it was felt that the situation demanded that the struggle be stepped-up. The concrete assessment of the situation is made as a preparatory step for the next stage of the struggle. This assessment was made common with the activist and lower level leaders of the union. An educative meeting of about 125 activists and leaders (including women) from about 20 villages was called.

The struggle had been going on for a long time (two years) and there was an atmosphere of uncertainty about the implementation of the agreement. So, in order to quell any possible feeling of failure or frustration among the ranks, the first point discussed was the achievements of the struggle up to that point of time. In this context it was reported that the administration was compelled to issue blue cards (related to the distribution of 35 kg of wheat and 4 kg of pulses per month at subsidised rates). As reported elsewhere, these cards had been blocked by the local MLA. Thus 150 families in two villages had got the subsidy of about Rs 5.85 lakh per annum. It was pointed out that the political implications of this victory were far more important than the economic relief. Because the feudal landlords of these two villages and their political representatives (MLAs) were bent upon denying these deserving families their blue cards till they bowed down to them and left the PKMU. The say of the landlords had been prevailing in the villages since time immemorial. The real issue underlying the blue card episode was whether this say was to continue to prevail forever or could be challenged successfully by the organised force of the agricultural labourers. The success in asserting their will in getting these cards proved the latter, though on a small issue.

Similarly in a village (Khunde Halal) the demand of giving plots for dung heaps had been got accepted. The value of these plots comes to about Rs 2.7 lakh. Again there was fierce opposition by the feudal forces of the village (details of this struggle are given elsewhere).

The administration was compelled to withdraw false cases registered against 47 male and female activists. They were released unconditionally. This was an important victory against police repression.

Next, the positive and negative aspects of the PKMU were discussed. It was mentioned that the union had its mass influence in about two dozen villages, and was capable of mobilising about 1,000 militant people. It had two dozen leaders and speakers of various levels. The union had cordial and supportive relations with mass organisations of peasants and employees. It was also a positive factor for the union that the chief minister had already agreed to the demands of this struggle.

Discussing the problems before the union, it was pinpointed that some of the agricultural labourers may feel: "These demands are related to a few persons/villages. I have no stake in this struggle. Even if these demands are fulfilled nothing will come out of it for me, or for us, or for our village." Some of the people may be scared of police torture, arrests, and jail, etc. Some may not be prepared to face loss of workdays and to face other physical sufferings which are common in struggle periods. It was discussed in detail how to respond to such misgivings and questions of the people.

It was particularly discussed that though the issues of the struggle were small, the remaining demands were related to a few persons and a few villages. The state was supposed to spend a very small amount of money (not more than Rs 1.15 lakh), other expenses required (for building latrines) were to be spent (about Rs 18-19 lakhs) from central government funds and plots were to be given from common village lands. Then why was the government delaying the implementation of the agreement? It was because they saw the bigger political implications of such small victories of this force of agricultural labourers *organised on the basis of revolutionary politics*. Such small victories would lead to greater struggles on important and basic demands. A dangerous future prospect for the ruling class! It was emphasised that exactly due to the same reason, agricultural labourers should see greater long-range political importance for them in this struggle on small demands related to a few persons/villages.

Then it was discussed as to what were the limitations of the Badal family in this area at that time. Parliamentary elections were impending. Any severe police repression was liable to disturb parliamentary calculations of the Badal family in this pet election constituency. The defeat of victory the Badal family had always been a question of prestige for them, particularly in the context of a sharp contradiction between this family and another group of landlords (related to the Congress) and led by a cousin of

Parkash Singh Badal. (According to a press report, on getting news of the police clash on August 21, 2008, the office of the chief minister pulled up the district administration of Muktsar district and made them immediately rush for the settlement with PKMU.)

### Selection of forms of struggle

The selection of forms of struggle is one of the most important steps of building militant struggles. According to a report of PKMU:

"It is necessary for the leadership of any organisation that they should guide the organisation to adopt the forms of struggle in accordance with the level of the mobilisation, organised force, consciousness and capacity of the related sections of the people. Further, the leadership should go on increasing the level of consciousness and capacity of the organisation to make it adopt higher forms of struggle. Whereas forms of struggle higher than the level and capacity of the people create the atmosphere of fear in them, the forms of struggle lower than this level become the source of disappointment."

When this struggle was initiated (August 2006) by presenting a memorandum (of more than 35 pages) of demands to the deputy commissioner, the fighting strength of the union was limited. In that situation it was emphasised to adopt the forms of struggle which require and demonstrate boldness for facing police repression and not be cowed by any type of this repression. Militant mass resistance to the police attack was yet to be avoided.

Sit-in is one of the lowest forms of struggle. But the mass militant approach and sufficient motivation can make most of this lowest form. This two-year-long struggle was initiated by a week-long sit-in at the district headquarters. A round-the-clock sit-in at a place far away from the villages of the participants is very difficult for agricultural labourers. Because of the hand-to-mouth conditions it is difficult for hundreds of people to afford a continuous loss of work-days for many days. Further, it is very difficult to make arrangements for food and tea, etc. for hundreds of people for so many days apart from the expenses of tent and mikes etc for an organisation which always remains short of funds.

The sit-in was started by a demonstration of about 700-800 people (participants in the round-the-clock sit-in being about 250-300 persons). At first

the deputy commissioner (DC) chose to neglect the sit-in. The focus of the mobilisation was the villages of the area. The people were urged through meetings, rallies and demonstrations to participate in the sit-in and to register their complaints (against the administration) with the union. A large number of issues began to come to the union. As a result of this mobilisation about 1700 people from 35-40 villages participated in the demonstration at the district headquarters just after four days from the beginning of the sit-in. Seeing the increasing mobilisation of the agricultural labourers, the DC decided to relent and invited the union leaders for negotiations. The meeting was attended by all district officers related to the various demands of the union.

Almost all the demands were accepted, which includes grant of plots for some homeless and for dung-hills; grant for renovating mud-houses, free building of latrines in two villages, etc. A specimen of the dialogue:

*Union leaders:* Owners of the fair-price shops are cheating the people. What will you do to check them?

*District food supply officer:* We will take necessary action according to the legal procedure.

*DC:* No! No! Immediately cancel their licenses. If you cannot do it, get yourself transferred.

After the period of this struggle, this agreement was partially implemented. There was improvement in fair-price shops in some villages. Scheduled Caste certificates were issued to a large number of persons (normally it is very difficult for an ordinary SC person to get this certificate). There was a beginning of free electricity supply in some villages (as per the scheme announced by the government). Some families got *shagan* scheme money. Old age pensions were given in stray cases and 25 families in a village got grants for building brick-kiln houses. But a major section of the demands involving a big amount of money was not fulfilled.

In 2007 there was a change of government (from Congress to the Akali-3JP combine). The new Badal government implemented a scheme to distribute wheat and pulses at subsidised rates to the poor families. Blue cards were issued to the deserving families. In three villages about 150-200 blue

cards were blocked by the local Akali MLA to get these families to leave PKMU. Thus another important demand was added to the demand-charter.

This situation demanded a big and protracted struggle. But the struggle of the labourers cannot be continued at a stretch for a much longer time. There must be breaks in between periods of struggle, particularly in the peak seasons of agricultural employment. Similarly it is difficult to organise a round-the-clock sit-in during winter.

After due preparations a 13-day-long round-the-clock sit-in was held at the district headquarters (in March 2008). The focus of the activity was again in the villages. There were some new features in this sit-in. One, this sit-in was used as an opportunity for training new union leaders as public speakers. About a dozen leaders were thus trained. Some other local leaders were trained as negotiators by including them for the first time in the rounds of negotiations with government officials.

Second, there was a particular emphasis on economic self-reliance pertaining to the sit-in. Usually PKMU had to depend on the financial help of fraternal organisations during struggles. It was the first time that the union leadership successfully attempted to become self-reliant on this count. About Rs 1.5 lakh was collected from agricultural labourers alone.

It was also for the first time that the major part of the affairs related to the sit-in were handled by the district leaders themselves. Normally they had been over-dependent on the state leader in charge of the district unit.

In view of the district administration's attitude of neglect, a demonstration was held in which about 1,000 people participated. Then it was decided to combine the struggle form of roadblocks with the sit-in. In one of the roadblocks, the movement of a military convoy was blocked. In spite of the threats from the military officers, the union activists did not budge an inch and the convoy had to retreat. This incident increased the confidence and courage of the union activists and leaders.

The authorities invited the union leaders for negotiations, feeling the pressure of the struggle. But the negotiations failed. It was not possible to continue the sit-in for any more time. The sit-in had already been stretched for 13 days. Though there were no solid gains (in the form of fulfilment of demands), there was certainly a significant gain in the form of increased consciousness and organisational expansion. So it was decided to conclude the sit-in, to propagate its political-organisational achievements and to con-

tinue the struggle in the form of a flag-march in the area.

The morale of the activists and the people participating in the struggle was more upbeat than the assessment of the leadership, despite the failure of the sit-in in getting any demand fulfilled. The union leadership got the information after the decision to hold a flag-march that the Chief Minister was going to tour the very same area and during the same days as the flag march. The union leadership was quite apprehensive of the possibility that the authorities might take the decision of the flag march as a plan to disrupt the tour of the CM. An emergency meeting of the activists was called to instruct them not to disrupt the CM's tour in any form and to tell them that if the police forces checked the flag march, they should start a sit-in at the place instead of any confrontation. It was particularly projected in the press that the union had no plan to disrupt the CM's tour.

But the mood of the local leaders, activists and people was combat-ready, as was indicated by later developments, and by a conversation of a C.I.D. person with a district leader of the PKMU. The C.I.D. person phoned the leader to ask about the current plan of the union. The leader retorted: "Why should we tell you about our plan? Do you people tell us about your plans?" Then the C.I.D. person proposed that they could arrange a meeting between the union leadership and the CM. The union leader again retorted: "We have returned from the district headquarters after barking for 13 days (of sit-in). How come the CM is now itching for an agreement?"

The administration took the flag march seriously. On March 26, 2008, a group of flag-marchers was lathi-charged in the area of Lambi block. About 80 men, women and children were arrested and detained. This plan of terrorising the people was scuttled when about 150 agricultural labourers instantly demonstrated angrily in the nearby village (Singhewala). About 400 persons from Malout, Muktsar, and Gidderbaha blocks penetrated into Lambi block by dodging many heavy police checkposts and mobile contingents. In about one and a half dozen villages black flags were hoisted on the rooftops and black flag demonstrations were held in which 2,000 people participated. The village Singhewala (which was to be visited by the CM) was turned into a virtual police cantonment. More than 500 policemen and commandoes were deployed at every nook and corner of the village. Two young men of the village were arrested and detained while they were expressing their defiance by flaunting black flags on their house rooftops. But

in spite of these arrests, about 250 agricultural labourers (predominantly women) not only demonstrated in the streets of the village but even blocked the road under the very nose of heavy police forces. Solely because of the defiant mood of the people, the CM preferred not to enter the village for a public meeting which had already been fixed. A delegation of fraternal organisations (Technical Services Union of the electricity workers, Bharti Kisan Union – Ugrahan, Lok Morcha and the RMP doctors' union) met the CM on that very evening. The CM ordered the release of 33 men and 14 women from various jails under the pressure of the situation.

The PKMU held a rally of about 1,000 persons at Lambi protesting against the March 26 lathi-charge. A call was given to flaunt black flags at MLAs, ministers, and government officers visiting the villages. The state finance minister (the nephew of the CM) had to face a black flag demonstration by a hundred men and women in a village.

Thus, sensing the widespread and intense protest of agricultural labourers, the CM, on his own initiative, held a meeting with a delegation of PKMU and agreed to fulfill all the demands of this struggle within one month. Though the blue cards blocked by an MLA were released in two villages and plots for dung-heaps were allotted in one village within the specified time, fulfilment of the rest of the demands took another round of struggle for four months.

## Today's Movement of Government Employees of West Bengal and Its Past

— by a correspondent

(1) 1940 is an important turning point in the history of the state government employees' movement as well as organisational development in West Bengal. From this point, trade union consciousness gradually began to be injected in the movement, which naturally influenced organisational activities also. The national and international situation of that period created the conditions for this development. The nationwide anti-British struggle, and internationally the October Revolution in the USSR in 1917 influenced all mass movements of this country. Naturally, the state government employees movement could not remain out of this orbit. Another factor was also important for this change. Numbers of politically conscious young people from the student movement got jobs as state government employees and a section of them made conscious efforts to change the character of the organisation and movement of the government employees in this state.

(2) The period from 1946 to 1966 was an impressive period of the state government employees' movement in West Bengal. It was a period of rapid development of organisation, the social, political and trade union consciousness of the organisers and as a whole movement. This is the period when the organisation got a strong foothold in the masses of the state government employees and it emerged as a true profession-based mass organisation. After the direct street-fight of the government employees against de-rationing in 1948, resulting in thousands of employees being rendered surplus, it became an urgent need to organise the entire state government employ-

ees under a more organised organisational structure. Out of this compulsion, in 1956, a federative organisation, namely, "Co-ordination Committee of the State Government Employees' Unions and Associations" was formed with the existing eight unions and associations. Up to 1966 it was essentially a profession-based trade union with employees of different political and social beliefs.

(3) Under the influence of the then national and international situation, as in other mass organisations, the hold of the Communist Party on the state government employees' front gradually increased. At the same time, a sectarian attitude based on parliamentary electoral interests also rapidly engulfed the organisation, which was contrary to the idea of an industry-based, factory-based or profession-based single trade union. As a result, the Congress party in 1966 was able to form a Congress-based organisation, namely, "Federation of State Government Employees of West Bengal". This was the first split of the organisation. Nevertheless, this was the period of organisational development, of militant trade union movement and of earning several important trade union rights.

(4) The historic food movement of 1966 engulfed the entire social and political life of West Bengal. In the wake of this glorious movement, from 1967 to 1970 the "Left" parties came to power for two terms (for a period of 9 and 13 months, i.e. a total of 22 months) under the leadership of the CPI(M) and the banner of the United Front. As a natural development, the vices of parliamentary politics gripped all the constituents of the United Front government: it was especially powerfully manifested in the CPI(M). As with all other mass organisations they tried to make the Co-ordination Committee a tail of the CPI(M) and established absolute control over the organisation, which encouraged other constituents to follow the same path. As a result, in this period, the State Co-ordination Committee split into a number of party-based, cadre-based organisations. As such, this period may be termed the period of the disintegration of the state government employees' movement in West Bengal.

(5) The period from 1970 to the first part of 1977, which includes the dark period of internal emergency as well, was a very critical period. It was the decade of the greatest attack on the democratic rights, trade union rights

and economic rights of the toiling people, including the government employees. At the same time, in case of the government employees of this state, it was the decade of several higher forms of struggle. A three-day continuous strike in August 1970, a one-day strike in 1974, a continuous dharna for a long period and numbers of massive demonstrations were organised throughout this period. In support of the historic 22-day strike of railway workers and employees in 1974, the State Co-ordination Committee played a struggle role and held several solidarity programmes. Naturally, among the state government employees, and even among workers and employees of other sectors, this organisation earned a prestigious and popular image.

(6) In spite of a number of splits and disintegration in the state government employees' movements, from 1969 to 1970 and onward, and the different shades of deviation infiltrating the organisation from 1967 along with the United Front government's ascent to power, the essential role of the State Co-ordination Committee remained pro-employee. At the same time this organisation had a struggling past and well-knit organisation. For all these reasons this organisation was the biggest, and had an all-embracing hold on the major section of the employees.

(7) The pro-employee and democratic role of the State Co-ordination Committee, the main force of the government employees' movement of West Bengal, completely ceased just after the emergence of the Left Front government in May 1977, with an understanding with the ruling classes. From this turning point, this organisation began to serve the Left Front government instead of serving the interests of the employees. Naturally, in spite of the existence of a trade union like the Co-ordination Committee, an essential vacuum was created in the movement, since there was no other force to protect the employees from the all-round onslaughts of the state government other than the Co-ordination Committee. There are a few small organisations under the control of constituents of the Left Front government, which have to follow the path of the State Co-ordination Committee. Other than these government followers, there are numbers of small organisations – federative, unitary, departmental, cadre-based, having different shades of views. These organisations are mainly divided in two blocks – left-oriented and right-oriented. Left- and right-oriented organisations have their divergent views and both have been apathetic about building a united

movement. At the same time, none of them individually was capable of resisting the attack of the employer, i.e., the Government. In this vacuum, the Left Front government, out of their extra need to prove themselves faithful to the ruling classes, and demonstrate their capability in serving the interests of their masters, became more aggressive toward the employees. The Left Front government ruthlessly brought down an unfettered attack on the trade union and economic rights of the employees. The government snatched away the right of promotion on seniority basis, and brought back the black rule of the C.C.R. system. Arrears of dearness allowance were never allowed to employees of this state: from 2002, 50 per cent of the bonus was curtailed and only Rs 1,000 of ad-hoc bonus was paid to the employees. Major portions of arrears of pay revisions were regularly denied to the employees and teachers of this state. In the case of pay revision in 2009, 27 months' arrears was forfeited. Most of the other states' arrears were paid from 1.1.06, whereas in West Bengal it is allowed only for the 12 months: 1.4.08 to 31.3.09. In the case of house rent allowance, no enhancement has been made for about the last 40 years. It is only 15 per cent, whereas the Central Government raised it for the major portion of its employees from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. There is no education allowance or transport allowance. Medical allowance is a mere Rs 300.

(8) In such a state of affairs, the fragmented unions with left or right views among the government and semi-government employees saw that such a deep and all-round attack cannot be resisted by individual efforts. Under pressure from below, the leaderships were compelled to unite in a common platform in the year 2002. Twenty-two organisations of various shades, comprising state government employees, school and college teachers, local self-government, school and university employees, doctors, and workers of the electricity board, came under a common umbrella to realise their essential demands and to protect the employees and workers from the unparalleled attack of the state government. A similar phenomenon was taking place in the State Secretariat (Writers' Building). There too emerged a joint platform, namely, "Mahakaran Sangram Committee", comprising six to eight organisations, in the same period. It is a notable fact that in the whole of Bengal this is the first effort of a joint and united forum of government and semi-government workers and employees of this state to raise a protest

against the onslaught of the state machinery. "Joutha Sangrami Mancha" is the product of this effort.

(9) Since 2002 these two joint forums continuously organised various forms of agitation and demonstrative programmes against the ever-growing deprivation. They conducted protest rallies, mass deputations with mass signatures, stay-in programme, civil disobedience, etc.. Through continuous agitational programmes these two forums became an alternative centre of movement in government and semi-government employees and workers. The agitational activities of these two forums gradually reached a peak from 2007 to 2009. The wave of movements during this period all over the state, especially the Singur and Nandigram movements, was also an important source of inspiration behind the higher form of movemental activities in this front. The success of the statewide programme of one day's mass casual leave on February 15, 2007, at the call of Joutha Sangrami Mancha, and the unprecedented stay-in programme in Writers' Building by Mahakaran Sangram Committee, created a high level of enthusiasm among the employees from the first part of 2008. Preparation was going on for higher forms of agitation. In Writers' Building a compact three-phase programme was taken up: On August 19, 2008, notice-giving Maha Michil; August 20, 2008, stay-in programme; and September 11, 2008, half-day mass casual leave. All these programmes achieved the greatest success and inspired the masses of employees. Under the banner of "Joutha Sangrami Mancha", preparation for a one-day statewide strike was taken up unanimously. The demands of both the programmes were more or less the same.

The setting up of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pay Commission and introduction of a new pay structure from January 1, 2006 on the basis of need-based pay, up-to-date dearness allowance with arrears from the due date, 8.33 per cent bonus, filling up of 3.5 lakhs vacant posts with unemployed youths, trade union and political rights, etc, constituted the 10-point urgent demands.

(10) The broad forum "Joutha Sangrami Mancha" (JSM) decided to hold a mass convention to mobilise possible other forces around JSM for the ensuing strike programme, and to declare the specific date for that. Accordingly, the convention was held at the Centenary Hall of Kolkata University on November 18, 2008. Unfortunately, one of the important constituents, namely, the convenor organisation of the Mancha, opposed the immediate



strike programme. They proposed to defer the strike indefinitely. This organisation had a reputation as militant and radical. They, along with two Trinamool Congress-guided organisations, raised their differences among the 21 participating organisations of the convention. Thus the break-up of the vote was 18 in favour of holding a strike on January 22, 2009, and 3 against. The dissenting three organisations, especially the convenor organisation, refused to obey the majority decision of the convention. From the date of the decision, they tried their best to sabotage the strike programme. They circulated a whip to their members not to participate in the strike, issued show-cause letters, issued suspension letters to the organisers who defied their dictation, and published statements in the media against the strike. Lastly, they joined hands with the administration and the agent organisation, and resorted to all sorts of means to damage the strike. The leadership who opposed the strike and their ranks were divided vertically on the question of participation in the strike. The major portion of their organisation participated in the strike.

(11) Irrespective of political beliefs and views, the government and semi-government employees and workers spontaneously stood in support of the strike. The strike was highly successful. The administrative offices were paralysed throughout the districts and in Kolkata, including Writers' Building. On the average, 70 to 80 per cent of the employees took part in the strike programme. After 32 long years the employees and workers of the government and semi-government sectors of West Bengal placed their feet on the ground. And they got the daring to turn back to struggle with the overwhelming success of the strike. It may turn out to be a turning point on this front.

August 15, 2009.