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## Khatau Workers' Struggle A Source of Optimism and Lessons

--- by a correspondent

*At different junctures particular trade union struggles become focal points of the overall working class struggle in that region. This is the case when they objectively pose (regardless of the nature of the leadership) questions of crucial political significance to the whole working class, and represent the focal point of fight on those questions at that time.*

*At the moment, in Bombay, the year-long, continuing Khatau workers' struggle is playing such a role. The Khatau workers have revealed a continuing vein of vibrancy, fight and stamina among the most beleaguered section of the organised sector workers today. Fighting under the most adverse conditions, they have demonstrated that the establishment has very prematurely written them off. The fresh wave of agitation, a full year into the struggle, reveals much about the opportunities for revolutionary work among the working class today. Hence an account of the struggle.*

At 6 a.m. on January 1, 1998, over 3,000 workers had gathered in front of Khatau Makanji Spinning and Weaving Co. Ltd, located at Byculla in Central Bombay. They were demanding entry into the mill to sign their musters for their jobs. They had the Labour Court orders to do so. A hundred-odd policemen had cordoned off the mill-gate, refusing them entry: the owners, they said, had a High Court order to prevent entry if they feared damage to property and the workers could sign the musters on the street. The present owner, Mrs Panna Khatau, had obtained that order to the effect that workers may not enter the mill to occupy the premises or to damage the property.

On failing to convince the police with arguments for over an hour, the workers formed several rows of hundreds and stormed the police cordon daring a brutal lathi-charge. With their sheer

strength of numbers the workers overpowered the police and entered the mill gates and signed the muster inside the mill. Several workers were injured in the lathi-charge. One was hospitalised with a serious eye injury.

The workers sat inside the mill till 3.30 p.m. A massive police force was brought to the mill gates after the morning's incident. As some workers were deciding to sit in the mill through the night the police enforced eviction of all the workers. In a disciplined way the workers gathered for a meeting at the gate and announced that they would conclude the agitation for that day. Workers of the Borivli unit of Khatau, in the western suburbs, also conducted a similar agitation simultaneously and entered the mill premises.

The new year's day agitation of Khatau mill workers was under the banner of the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS -- Mill Workers' Struggle Committee). It was against the illegal suspension of production by the management and non-payment of wages for the past one year. This agitation marked a new phase in the Khatau workers' struggle to force the owners to reopen the mill and restore some 6,000 jobs and hence the livelihood of over 30,000 family members of the workers.

On January 2, at 6 a.m., again, the workers gathered in strength in front of the gate. But a massive police and state reserve police force prevented them from entering to sign the muster. Workers refused to accept that they should enter the mill in groups of tens to sign the muster. They protested and blocked the road opposite the mill and completely blocked the traffic. They decided to continue their agitation through the night of January 2-3.

During the afternoon of January 3, other mill workers joined them in solidarity. Workers took out a massive rally -- over 4,000 strong -- around the mill area. It is important to note that this area around the mill is the stronghold of the Arun Gawli gang, which had played a major role, using force, in the closure of their mill. The Gawli gang had worked hand in glove with, and in the pay of, the owners and the recognised union. The rally of January 3 was charged with anger against the millowners, the goondas, the recognised union RMMS (Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh), and the Sena-BJP government. They demanded the mill

be reopened and announced their resolve to fight to the end. They concluded their 36-hour sit-in struggle by announcing an indefinite agitation from January 5, 1998.

The indefinite sit-in began on January 5 morning at 6 a.m. and continued without break till January 11 on the trunk road opposite the mill. Other workers around the area supplied food for over 2,000 workers sitting-in daily. In the course of this agitation, on January 5, about a hundred workers took out a morcha and held a demonstration in front of the office of the ICICI (Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India) some 3 km away, and blocked the main road to North Bombay for two hours in the busy hours of the morning. A delegation of workers met the ICICI officials and demanded that 1) they should require the sale of finished goods lying with the mill and payment of workers' salaries, 2) they should complete all the formalities and accelerate the reopening of the mill by the owners, and 3) in the absence of the owner reopening the mill, they should consider reopening under a workers' cooperative. Since 1995, when the mill was declared sick under SICA (Sick Industrial Companies Act, 1986) ICICI has been the Operating Agency for Khatau Mill under the BIFR (Board for Industrial Finance and Reconstruction). Over 26 textile mills have so far been declared sick in Bombay alone. (The BIFR was created under SICA to bring together financial institutions for a supportive role. The BIFR's orders override the provisions of other Acts. It writes off crores of rupees owed to electricity boards, the tax and excise authorities, and financial institutions in favour of millowners ostensibly because those mills are "sick". Whereas the fact is these mills have been made sick after they have been bled by diverting their profits and resources to other ventures. Khatau is the latest in the long list of such millowners.)

On January 6 a large section of workers went to South Bombay and gathered in Azad Maidan in south Bombay to take out a morcha to the State Bank of India's (SBI's) office at Nariman Point. But the workers were cordoned off by the police for over three hours, preventing them from taking out a morcha. Only a

delegation was allowed to visit the SBI office to discuss their demands. SBI is the lead bank for Khatau under the BIFR.

On January 7, the workers went around the entire Byculla area in groups of tens and twenties from the indefinite sit-in agitation, canvassing for "Saat-Rasta" area bandh on January 8. Saat-Rasta is an important junction leading to Central Bombay and so has a special value for propaganda purposes. It is also close to residential areas of large sections of mill-workers. The bandh was total and all shops in Saat-Rasta-Byculla area -- the domain of the Arun Gawli gang -- were closed in genuine sympathy for the workers. This is the first time that this area has responded to Khatau workers, implying defiance of the gang's role in the area.

The continuous sit-in agitation continued till January 11. On the 11th, the Chief Minister invited them for talks. This was the result of the wide newspaper publicity the agitation received in the press by way of write-ups, editorials and front page display (especially in Marathi dailies) during the current election season. The sitting MP of the area belongs to the Shiv Sena (a mill worker's son and a friend of Arun Gawli), so it became necessary for the Sena to appear to take note of the workers' organised voice. Another reason why cognisance had to be taken was that the agitation received enthusiastic support from other mill-workers of the area and the Municipal Employees' Union of Sharad Rao, who is likely to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections from the mill areas.

The government asked the workers to discontinue their agitation and promised "nationalisation" of the mill by the State Textile Corporation (which is, however, in the process of being wound up), if Mrs Panna Khatau, the present owner, does not proceed by January 30 to re-start the mill in accordance with her proposal. The Chief Minister promised to write thus to the BIFR. But, on the pretext of obeying the election code, this decision was not officially announced.

However, on this assurance, the workers have suspended their agitation with a decision to revive the agitation in February if the mill is not reopened by then.

On January 14 the RMMS, the old Congress-dominated officially recognised union (the only union recognised under the Bombay Industrial Relations Act for the entire textile industry) countered the workers' campaign with a morcha of its own demanding that its proposal for the revival of Khatau should be given priority over that of the GKSS. The RMMS leaders criticised the GKSS for failing to open Khatau despite its agitation and contested the view that the workers would be able to run the mill as a cooperative. This engineered morcha was to re-assert the presence of Sachin Ahir (secretary, RMMS, deployed by the Gawli gang in Khatau to help the management terrorise the workers) who is planning to contest elections.

With the already pro-management RMMS becoming a mafia force in the textile industry since the 1982 strike, and as the left unions and Datta Samant's MGKU were mostly non-functional, a substantial section of mill workers rallied to the "Bandh Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti", set up in 1989 (BGKSS, later in 1996 called GKSS), which was willing to fight against closure of mills. Though with social democratic orientation, a number of the leaders were themselves workers of functioning textile units. Some militant struggles were conducted under GKSS in eight textile units affecting jobs of over 20,000 workers. While GKSS did not pose a revolutionary alternative, textile workers chose to rally around it as they found the new union relatively a fighting one and democratic in practice. It provided the legal framework and a banner to fight under.

The recent phase of the workers' own agitation is part of the long-drawn-out struggle for the reopening of the the mill closed since a year ago. The workers, in that year, have undertaken many demonstrations, morchas, a week-long mass hunger strike, and a militant gherao of the owners in their office. All this was to draw the attention of the government to their plight and expose how the management has faked the sickness and the eventual closure of the mill.

The government has finally responded "favourably", yielding a meeting with the owners as part of an attempt at a negotiated settlement. Even this level of response became possible because

the Sena-BJP government would like to score some points against the Congress-affiliated RMMS and the Gawli gang -- Arun Gawli with his Akhil Bharatiya Kamgar Sena at one point posed a political challenge to the Shiv Sena. But the workers have also acquired enough experience, through prolonged agitations in 10 other mills opposing closure of units, retrenchment, shifting of machinery, contracting out jobs to powerloom, fraudulent land sale, and construction of commercial premises on mill land all under the guise of "modernisation" and "revival" of 'sick' mills, to know that no government or political party finally stands with them.

A detailed review of the Khatau's background and the recent history of its management would reveal how the textile workers have been steeled through their sufferings and their fight to resist the criminal action of the millowners. Displacement of workers; illegal closures, retrenchment, sale of land, shift of the production to outlying low-paid sweatshops, are not peculiar to the textile industry alone, however. It is the same in the electronics, chemicals, engineering, and pharmaceuticals industries. The economic "reforms" and the opening up of India's markets for the MNCs to reap their superprofit are policies that are every day destroying the country's production units to replace them with sales and assembly units. As part of this process, a green signal has been given to all managements to close and retrench at will. Lakhs of workers are being thrown into unemployment, forcing them to take up any odd job for sheer survival. Homelessness, destitution, hunger are visibly on the increase in Bombay. Sections who find re-employment in sweatshops receive upto 50 per cent of their earlier wages, without benefits or guarantees. In this way workers are beaten into accepting the suppressed terms set by the present economic reforms under the directives of the World Bank and IMF. The organised resistance to this onslaught is fragmented and hence weak. In this context, the Khatau workers' struggle is a most significant fight.

The background of Khatau Mill's "sickness" and the role played by its owners exposes the role played by the

industrialist-cum-State combine in the rapid deindustrialisation of the country and in the destruction of the workforce.

Khatau Makanji Spg. & Wvg. Co. Ltd., which is being sought to be finally shut down by the owners, is a 125-year-old mill. It has three units -- one in Byculla (central Bombay), the second in Borivli (in a northwestern suburb of Bombay), and a third in Mahad (in the adjoining Raigad district of Maharashtra). It is a composite mill employing over 6,000 workers in the above three units. The Khatau family is owner. Until the historic textile strike of 1982, it used to daily produce and supply as much as 1,40,000 metres of cloth to the market, with full production in three shifts a day on all days of the month. Its products were considered to be of superior quality in terms of durability and design due to the skilled workforce.

The Khatau mill workers were among the more conscious and militant section of textile workers. They had been in the forefront of the historic textile strikes earlier led by the then undivided Communist party. The ruling classes enacted the Bombay Industrial Relations Act in 1946: It was evolved out of the earlier, British colonial, Bombay Industrial Relations Act of 1937.

The anti-worker 1946 Act was designed to curb the growing influence and sway of the left unions in the textile industry. Under it the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS) affiliated to the Congress could be officially recognised as the sole representative union for the entire industry, evolved out of the Congress's Mill Mazdoor Sabha in 1945. The record all-industry textile strike of 1982 and the current Khatau workers' struggle as from 1988 have also been suppressed by this thoroughly undemocratic piece of legislation. Workers had been paying the membership fees to RMMS under duress, as the only available legal safeguard to get their legal dues from the management. Thus it was that RMMS had the majority of workers as its members.

Ironically, the Employees' Credit Society and other bodies to which representatives were directly elected by the workers themselves were represented by members of Left unions. RMMS could never win these elected posts despite a majority of workers paying their membership fees to RMMS.

When, in 1982, textile workers dared to defy RMMS and the BIR Act by calling Dr. Datta Samant to lead their struggle for better wages and union terms, Khatau workers fully responded to the strike call of Samant's Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU). By February 1982, RMMS membership had declined from 1,07,912 to a mere 1,135 (according to the Assistant Registrar of Trade Unions). Claiming 90 per cent support of 2.5 lakh textile workers, MGKU applied for representative union status in May 1982. The 8,500 workers of Khatau mill at the time also joined the 2.5 lakh textile workers of Bombay and Khatau mill was also closed completely.

It is established by now that Samant dragged out the strike while at the same time curbing the self-organisation and fighting class spirit of the workers -- ultimately benefiting the owners. So, too, the Khatau management under Samit Khatau diverted production to Bhirwandi (outside Bombay) by setting up powerloom plants as subsidiary units for a processing plant at Bhandup (a suburb of Bombay) and filled the market with cloth sealed as Khatau mill cloth. It reaped higher profits: the cost of production was much cheaper owing to the low wages, low power tariff, and exemption from excise duty for the cloth so produced. In this period the production and supply of cloth in the powerloom section increased manifold. Khatau also diverted over Rs 12 crore to establish the plant in Raigad district at Mahad with Japanese water-jet looms.

In the seventh month of the historic strike the Khatau management decided to break the strike to teach the workers a lesson and render them helpless. It sought the help of Arun Gawli, one of the two major gangs operating in central Bombay, to break the strike. Around 500 boys attached to the gang were brought inside the mill to force the weaker sections of the workers, worn out by the prolonged strike, to re-start the mill. Datta Samant, by that time, had given the inexplicable call to workers to go, without any programme of action or propaganda, to their villages so as to "prolong the strike", instead of tactically retreating and re-starting the mills with at least full complement of workers. The RMMS at the same time gave a call to fill the mills. Khatau

resumed full operations over the next three months with the RMMS screening the workers' entry and the Gawli gang providing armed backing. All those who had been active in the MGKU-led strike as well as all temporary workers (helpers, substitutes etc) were summarily denied jobs. The workforce was reduced by 2,500 by the time the mill resumed full capacity production.

With the help of the gang members and the legal sanction under the BIR Act, RMMS negotiated agreements with almost all millowners. Workers were forced to resume work with no increase in or improvement in conditions. Every mill retrenched a large number of their workforce. The pre-strike workforce of 2.5 lakhs was drastically reduced by 50 per cent. This strength got further reduced (by offering VRS schemes on closure of units or "modernisation") to a mere 80,000 in the next ten-year period. This has been further reduced by tens of thousands in the present criminal wave of closures and retrenchments with the State's collusion.

Khatau established full control over the workers in the mill through the gangsters enrolled on the payroll. A few of them with guns, inside the mill, were sufficient to manage the affairs of the mill. Others were also on their payrolls, and were marked present regularly. The gang inside Khatau was headed by Vijay Ahir (relative of Arun Gawli) and a certain Tiwari. Both were employed in Khatau mill. They openly carried guns inside the mill and moved around in the mill compound on a motorcycle. From the status of strike-breakers they turned into the direct executors of management's decisions and authority. As the mill was declared sick, the officials from ICICI and SBI were appointed directors by BIFR to manage the mill. The nationalised banks cooperated by ploughing in over Rs 80 crore into the mill. The owners with the force of the goondas interfered by procuring low quality cotton, preparing false bills, setting terms for contractors and suppliers, etc. They supervised, gave orders, and fixed the price for every transaction inside the mill. Any worker or officer who disobeyed the orders of the gang was openly punished, often beaten up in the streets or at the gate.

At the same time, RMMS put up candidates for credit society elections -- and got elected now as the other candidates were simply forced to withdraw. Under RMMS control, loans were given to members who were not eligible and even the corpus was swindled. The RMMS worked hand in glove with the gang members in controlling the affairs of the mill and helping the owners in all sorts of financial irregularities, such as to drain out resources from the financial institutions for a fraudulent "rehabilitation" of the loss-making unit.

The next phase was when Sachin Ahir, a cousin of Arun Gawli (a detainee under NSA) who had been employed in Khatau became the RMMS leader in the mill. Through him the management got involved in manipulating elections to the executive committee of the entire RMMS. The RMMS president of 11 years, Haribhau Naik, was replaced by the gang's nominee, Shankarrao Jadhav. The gang issued threats to members to elect Jadhav. Sunit Khatau funded the elections. An attempt on Jadhav's life was made by the rival Amar Naik gang in central Bombay following this. Gradually Sachin Ahir himself was elected secretary of RMMS with the backing of Sunit Khatau.

Following this, the RMMS signed several agreements with various mills, such as SriRam, Raghuvanshi, New Great Eastern, Mafatlal, Swan, and Piramal, for illegal closure of units, retrenchment of workers with forced acceptance by workers of the Voluntary Retirement Schemes, and for sale of mill land.

In Khatau mills, the gang and RMMS joined hands to support the owner's plan to close down the Byculla unit altogether and sell the land. Sunit Khatau deployed the Arun Gawli gang to obtain the "consensus" of the workers. The land price had rocketed to artificial heights, at the time, with the entry of MNCs and corporates into real estate business. Sunit Khatau was killed by the Amar Naik gang to curtail the growing wealth and power of its rival gang. And the government came out quietly to cancel the permission to sell the land of the Byculla mill.

Thus it was that, when the RMMS realised that the Khatau workers had secretly collected signatures to file an appeal against the Khatau management through the GKSS to bypass the RMMS,

a worker was kidnapped and beaten up. Little did the RMMS know the seething anger and hatred among the cheated workers whose very source of livelihood was being snatched away. That episode became the spark that inflamed the workers' determination. They came out in strength, defying the RMMS-Gawli gang goondas, their filthy oppressors! They had gate meetings addressed by GKSS union leaders. The agitation since then took the form of a strong unified fight against the gang-supported RMMS and the owner who have no interest in running the mill.

The GKSS has proposed that a workers' cooperative run the mill if neither the owner nor the Government are willing to do so. It is said that this tactic forced the owner of Swan Mill to reopen his mill, for fear of losing the assets to the cooperative. However, this tactic is fraught with a different type of problem. The present political economy of credit, finance, supplies and market is wholly subservient to the big owners of capital (the big bourgeoisie) and international finance capital. Any amount of sacrifice by workers and their effort to secure for themselves the working capital from the present system will be unsuccessful and will push workers in the end against the wall. All such experiments at workers' cooperatives so far have failed -- notwithstanding the propaganda to the contrary by the rulers (this includes the much-publicised cooperative at Kamani Tubes Ltd -- see *Comrade* no. 2).

Even though it is said that the demand for a cooperative has been advanced merely as a tactic, it might project to the workers that this is indeed an alternative. In that case it would truly mislead workers. On the other hand, the demand for nationalisation as one of the demands of the Khatau mill workers' struggle pins the responsibility for keeping the mill running with working capital on the State and makes it clear to workers where the fight has to be directed ultimately.

As with any large struggle of workers, there is much to learn from the struggle of Khatau workers. In particular, the Khatau struggle reveals aspects of the overall condition of working class struggle during 'structural adjustment' of the Indian economy.

I. The first notable aspect of the Khatau story is the willingness of a large body of organised sector workers to abandon the established trade unions and choose instead a non-established/non-traditional trade union. No doubt, the GKSS has over the last eight years or so established itself as a stable entity, capable of carrying on various types of activity (legal and agitational). But even its ability to establish itself is based on the workers' search for alternatives to the established trade union set-ups: that is, its team of activists has been built up in the course of its preliminary organisers taking up the cases of various closed mills.

One reason for such a search for alternatives by the workers is their long years of mistreatment at the hands of the trade union bosses. Workers' patience has worn out over long years of such treatment. They are also very alert nowadays to dishonesty and treachery among established leaderships.

Secondly, the all-round onslaught on the working class going on under the name of 'structural adjustment' has also played a crucial role in propelling workers to search for new leadership. At one time, even if a section of organised sector workers sympathised with and respected revolutionary activists and non-traditional working class fronts, they very rarely turned to them to lead their practical struggles. This was so even when such activists and fronts were professional and experienced enough. The reason was that the workers feared that managements and the Government would not negotiate with such organisations (in the case of trade unions labelled 'Naxalite' the workers might even face State persecution for having turned to them). At any rate, in those times, manufacturing workers could still force the management to negotiate by stopping production, and they then turned to established unions to negotiate wages and benefits.

But now, under structural adjustment (since the later 1980s), for most organised sector manufacturing workers the main issue is the *loss of jobs*, in many cases closure of the whole unit. There is no space to retreat further: their very livelihood is being extinguished. And on the other hand, the established trade unions are putting up hardly any resistance to this onslaught. Even

assuming that the established leaderships wanted to resist (which is not the case), they are ill-equipped to do so, since their entire activity revolves around court cases, traditional and harmless forms of agitation (dharnas, rallies, etc) and, at most, the weapon of strike (which is useless when the owner wants to close the unit).

*Hence objective conditions are rendering considerable sections of organised sector workers more amenable to non-established workers' organisations.* This trend is visible in agitations such as Kanoria (West Bengal), Nellimarla (A.P.), Khatau, and so on. There is thus much greater *scope* for revolutionary work among the working class to make headway.

II. However, one should not understand that workers remain attached to the non-established unions by dint of sheer desperation. Rather, once they choose the new union and repose faith in the new leadership, they can show remarkably loyalty and determination over a long and difficult fight. Despite 14 years of uninterrupted setbacks for textile workers, and despite the odds being stacked heavily against them, the Khatau workers have exceeded all expectations of militancy and stamina. They have battled on grimly despite being denied their salaries for over 10 months so far; they have exhausted all avenues for loans and payment on credit; their wives are doing low-paid piece-rate work such as stitching buttons on readymade garments; many of their children have been withdrawn from school, and even their food intake has been slashed. Yet the workers turned up in thousands as late as January 1998 for a week-long, exhausting struggle.

It may be argued that the reason for their persistence is the sheer bleakness of the alternative. So aggressive and confident is the Khatau management that it is not even offering any compensation worth considering. Hence workers have no option but to struggle. Inevitably, there is a sizeable section of Khatau workers who believe that there is no hope of reopening the mill, and that the battle is now really for decent compensation. However, the union leadership has consistently emphasized that the fight is to save the workers' jobs, not merely get compensation, and a

section of workers are fighting on the basis of this consciousness. It is this which has sustained the struggle. When the ruling classes, their media, and even many on the 'Left' have proclaimed textile workers' resistance to job loss futile, the Khatau workers have shown that *even such embattled, cornered sections of workers may have unsuspected reservoirs of fighting capacity in them, and that this capacity can be applied to not merely winning compensation, but to defending their jobs (which is a demand of political significance).*

III. After the initial phase of firming up their support among the workers, the real problem arises for the non-traditional leadership: namely, how to actually resolve the issue at hand -- that is, in most such cases, how to get the factory re-opened, or defend the jobs of the affected section. For this problem there is no easy answer. **First**, as we mentioned earlier, the traditional weapon of strike is useless in the case of closures, and of very limited use nowadays even in other cases. **Secondly**, the problem affects not one or two but most units. By contrast, in the past (during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s), when a particular millowner would close his mill, not only that mill's workers but also workers of other mills would come onto the streets to fight for its nationalisation. Many pitched battles were fought by the workers over the years to get closed mills nationalised and re-opened. Now, however, retrenchment and/or closure are so commonplace that a general sense of fatalism has set in among the workers, whereas for a collective fight morale is crucial. **Thirdly**, just as workers had earlier, through their successful struggles, more or less established a principle that no unit should be allowed to close (if necessary the unit should be nationalised), following the defeat of the textile strike and other setbacks to the working class movement nationwide the Government has announced and successfully implemented a policy of 'no nationalisation under any circumstances'. It will take a very powerful movement of the working class to force a reversal of this policy -- all the more so when IMF-led 'structural adjustment' and the wooing of foreign investors has made nationalisation an

absolute taboo (in fact, *privatisation* is now the policy). All these factors (which are actually various aspects of the single fact of a total onslaught on the workers) make such a struggle truly uphill.

IV. The struggle so far has underlined the need for workers to keep the following points in mind.

(a) The capitalists have always relied on thugs to attack the workers, but these were generally an irregular force, and the pro-management trade unions generally maintained a veneer of civilisation. With the deepening economic and political crisis of the ruling classes, they are setting up regular outfits which are quite openly linked to the underworld. The killing of even such an established, non-challenging trade unionist as Datta Samant, and the absence of any real action to date against the killers, underlines the increasing weight of the mafia in the trade union field. Hence the *perspective of organised self-defence has to be imparted from the outset of the workers' struggle*, in order to avoid being nipped in the bud. In Khatau the workers have shown that even a major underworld outfit with its headquarters next door to the mill holds no terror for organised workers.

(b) Given the adverse conditions described under heading IV, the workers *need to prepare for a long fight*, full of twists and turns. The main weapon of the management and the Government is merely time: they reason that after a year or so workers will tire out and desert the agitation. But if the leadership is able to keep alive hope among the workers, they can defeat this tactic. This is also borne out by the struggles of Kanoria and Nellimarla workers.

(c) In order both to keep up the tempo of the struggle and to place pressure on the Government to intervene, the workers will have to *adopt new, more militant forms of struggle*. Mill-capture, rail roko and gherao of Government offices are some of the forms witnessed in recent times, but it is mechanical to prescribe

any particular form: only the advance of the struggle will decide that. The point is that since *the struggle can only win by forcing State intervention*, those forms that put pressure on the State are most suitable. These require from the workers higher preparedness for repression (including lathi-charges, firings, etc), which may be possible given that they have no alternative to fighting.

(d) In line with the same objectives of resisting repression, developing resources for a long fight, maintaining morale, and putting pressure on the State, it is *necessary to broaden the front to other workers, toiling masses, and democratic sections as well*. The support from various sections has certainly played a role in sustaining the Khatau workers' struggle and in putting pressure on the state government. In the case of Kanoria and Nellimarla, the support of various outside sections played an even more important and organised role. No doubt, the leading activists are already overworked in such struggles, but once the ordinary workers are trained to canvas widely for support to the struggle, they prove to be most effective.

(e) While keeping in mind the present level of consciousness of the workers, it is important for the struggle to *develop a clear political thrust exposing the connection between the millowners, State policy, and imperialism*. This is crucial.

Indeed, during the period of agitation workers are generally anti-Government, and would also be receptive to propaganda on broader issues: for example, on how the World Bank is calling for an 'exit policy' and sale of mill lands; or how the state government is wooing foreign investors like Enron while allowing mills to close; or how the Government is slashing rations quotas; or how 'elections' have not helped the workers an iota; and so on.

However, let alone the question of exposing imperialism, which is a new concept for many workers, there is frequently resistance among sections of the leaderships to exposing the millowner-State nexus. (This was seen glaringly, for example, during the Kanoria struggle.) It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that, since

the Government's intervention is required, workers should focus their fire on the millowner while maintaining 'good relations' with the Government. The Government also helps maintain this illusion by turning a 'sympathetic ear' to the workers while actually doing nothing concrete to help them.

Quite apart from its effectiveness or otherwise, such a tactic counterposes the immediate task of the working class (to get the mill re-opened) against the long-term goal (to overthrow the present system). Once the solitary objective of the struggle becomes to re-open the mill 'by any means', there is no scope for imparting working class politics.

The concrete situation invariably also calls for exposure and political thrust, in order precisely to serve the struggle. For example, the Shiv Sena-BJP's posture to the year-long agitation has been utterly hypocritical. Repeated assurances by the Government to the workers, reached after prolonged agitation, have been thereafter brazenly violated. While it is true that the Shiv Sena is pleased to see Arun Gawli's political influence taken down a peg or two, they certainly do not want a victory for an independent, challenging force of textile workers with the potential for attracting many more workers to its fold. Thus the Government approach has been quite deliberate: appear sympathetic, give assurances, and allow the struggle to drag on and on without providing any real concession.

What the Government fears is the *political challenge* nascent in the Khatau workers' struggle. While reduced in number, the city's textile workers are still a considerable force of about 70,000 or so. If Khatau were to become a rallying point of all the workers, and a beginning for broader, more militant resistance, the situation would be qualitatively more difficult for the Government to handle. Such a situation of explosive unrest and possible concessions by the Government would alienate their god, that is, foreign investment. Hence the Government's efforts are directed at *containment of the political challenge*. Equally, the workers' best weapon for forcing the Government's hand is to widely expose its collusion with the millowners.

The victory of individual struggles is never entirely in the hands of the leaderships or the workers. Overall conditions, objective and subjective, also play their role. Hence any struggle devoted to material victory *to the exclusion of other ends* may wind up with neither political nor mass organisational gain. Whereas a struggle which manages to truly place before the workers at large the character of the State and the role of imperialism in devastating our country, whether or not it wins material victory, invariably wins some political gain.

(f) Clearly, for all the above tasks to be carried out successfully, the already overstretched leading teams of such struggles are not enough. What is required is the development of *an advanced section among the workers*, workers with a higher level of consciousness, who would act as the medium through which politics could be carried to the larger mass of workers. In particular, the creation of *conscious political cores* of workers, equipped with revolutionary understanding, would be the backbone of the struggle and the only guarantee of its long-term political gain.

The struggle of the Khatau workers is very much alive and continuing. Already it has written a rich chapter in the history of textile workers' struggles. The eyes of the working class will be trained on its future course.

### *South East Asian collapse* **Outcome of Imperialist Crisis, Accentuating Imperialist Crisis**

During the last nine months, several East Asian currencies have taken a terrible beating as capital has flown from their countries.\* What were deemed the most successful 'developing' economies in the world are now to be the recipients of the largest financial 'rescue packages' in history -- so far \$94 billion for South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand together.\*\* Yet the Indonesian rupiah, at the time of this writing, has slipped steeply even further, from 6,900/dollar on January 14 to below 16,000/dollar on January 23. All this is already having, and will have even more, dramatic consequences for the economies of all these countries.

The imperialist media are busy constructing theories about how this has been brought about by 'inadequate liberalisation' by these countries, the only solution for which is 'more liberalisation'. This means allowing freer imports, facilitating the takeover of domestic firms and financial institutions by foreign ones

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\* Between end-April 1997 and January 14, 1998 the Indonesian rupiah depreciated by 64 per cent; the Malaysian ringgit by 42 per cent; the Thai baht by 48 per cent; the Korean won by 46 per cent; and the run of depreciation has not, apparently, ended.

\*\* The eventual figure may be much higher. It should be mentioned here that the 'rescue packages' are actually not intended to rescue the recipient economies. They in fact consist merely of fresh loans at full commercial rates, in order that the recipient countries continue their payments to foreign banks -- the real object of the rescue.

Inqulab-Zindabad!

Down with the fake vote-raj!

**BALLOTS HAVE NOT TRANSFORMED YOUR LIVES  
NOR WILL BALLOTS EVER TRANSFORM YOUR LIVES**

**CHANGE THE STATE POWER, NOT THE  
GOVERNMENT**

*Toilers!*

Vote-seekers are once again knocking at your doors. Whichever vote-party may succeed in forming the government, it will change neither the extortionist bureaucrats nor the butcher police. The ballots are not going to hurt the foreign and native exploiters, the big monopoly capitalists or the big traders -- the culprits responsible for raising prices. Nor will you get deliverance this way from the rapacious moneylenders and landlords or feudals. This State-power is in the hands of the exploiting classes. The vote-parties and their governments are mere tools of this State power. So long as the present exploiting State set-up remains intact, your chains of exploitation and slavery will never be smashed. Take the path of overthrowing this system rather than just changing the government.

**BUILD THE PEOPLE'S POWER**

**STATE POWER IS NEVER CHANGED THROUGH BALLOT-  
BOXES, IT IS OVERTHROWN BY ARMED FORCE**

\* Organise yourselves as a class in organisations and unions, build struggles on class issues and class demands, at each and every place.

\* Organise joint struggles on common issues and evolve a joint political front.

\* Dare to challenge each and every atrocity, each and every act of high-handedness and exploitation by the rulers and exploiters, dare to fight and resist on every issue and assert the people's power.

\* Raise volunteer forces to protect your organisations.

**TAKE TO THE PATH OF BUILDING AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND ANTI-FEUDAL BROAD REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF THE PEASANTRY, AND THE PATH OF PROTRACTED ARMED PEOPLE'S WAR, TO OVERTHROW THIS STATE AND TO USHER IN GENUINE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY.**

**Punjab State Committee**

**Communist Party Reorganisation Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist)**

Dt. Jan. 25, 1998

(Translation of poster)