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***What the May 2004 Election Results Tell Us
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What the Results of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha Elections Tell Us

(July 2004)

The results of the 14th Lok Sabha elections have proved wrong all the predictions of psephologists and bourgeois leaders. As a result of the election, a new government has come to power at the Centre. The following article analyzes this important development and addresses the following questions:

1. What do the election results reveal about the state of people's consciousness?
2. What do they reveal about the state of ruling class politics?
3. What are the implications of the election results for the ongoing onslaught of "economic reforms" and for the Hindutva communal fascist trend?

As we have earlier explained in the pages of this journal, the principal purpose of elections under the present set-up is to provide the system the stamp of legitimacy. We have explained earlier the appropriate tactics in connection with elections, namely, active political campaign to expose that the parliamentary system is merely a mask covering the autocratic Indian state. (See *Comrade* no.s 11 & 12)

Rather than restrict themselves to a negative exposure, communist revolutionaries must address the missing link in people's consciousness about the character of this parliamentary system, by helping the people conceive of the *revolutionary democratic alternative* to the present set-up. This they must do not only by presenting its broad outlines in the

appropriate popular idiom, but also by helping the people recognise the elementary expressions of the revolutionary democratic alternative which are present in their own organised strength and struggles. The people need to be made conscious that their own practice indeed gives birth to elements of democracy as they partially *assert their collective will against the will of the ruling classes*, on the basis of their own organised strength, struggle and resistance. It is when they are on this path that the people can advance towards consciously rejecting the present parliamentary system, asserting their own power to rule, and setting up genuinely democratic bodies for exercising their rule.

Why ruling classes were forced to make “development” the electoral plank this time

There was a significant specific feature of the recent parliamentary elections. The major ruling class political parties — the Congress and the BJP along with some of their respective allies — were compelled to make “development” the plank of their electoral contest.

Behind this lay principally the fact that class contradictions have sharpened and gathered momentum during the last five years. During this period, the effects of the reactionary economic policy measures carried out under the official slogan of “globalization, liberalization, and privatization” have assaulted the economic life of the people. As a result, people’s sharpened anger about the state of their economic life is getting expressed directly and prominently in their political behaviour.

Major ruling class political parties have sensed this change in the political atmosphere among the people. They have sensed that they can no longer ignore these economic issues or relegate them to the back burner while continuing to focus on their usual electoral planks. Thus these parties have embraced the electoral plank of “development”.

Of course, they twist or trivialize the real content of “development”. They *cannot* do otherwise, for by their class nature they cannot credibly respond to the people’s economic concerns. In fact, since the mid-term parliamentary elections of 1980, and especially since the 1990s, they have had less and less scope to use even *populist* programmatic slogans and measures in order to tackle political instability (which instability

is caused precisely by their chosen course of economic development). Instead, the main electoral planks of the political parties contesting for the Central government have primarily been addressed to the ruling classes and their patrons, and secondarily to some sections of the middle class: “stable government”, “leading India into the 21st century”, “the security and integrity of India”, “good governance”, and the like. Such planks have only superficially been addressed to the common people, who have been told that all these things are pre-requisites for their betterment; some vague promises and false claims were thrown in to make the whole mix more digestible. Thereafter the parties have done the rest by local-level manipulation of votes through sectarian appeals, petty inducements and various pressures.

That pattern will remain; but the fact that “development” has had to be posed as the major issue of the recent elections is significant. It provides an opportunity to the revolutionary forces to expose the *nature* of the “development” which the ruling class parties are talking about, and how such “development” is the direct antagonist of the self-reliant, progressive and vibrant development which the country and its working people need and yearn for.

Restraint in employing “Hindutva”

Why did the BJP not turn to its traditional weapon of Hindutva during the election campaign? Aside from the heightened economic concerns of the people, which would dilute the appeal of that plank, a second important reason was the changed situation on the India-Pakistan front. The Indian government ultimately executed an 180-degree turn and abandoned its long-standing confrontationist stance with Pakistan. This about-turn came after dragging its feet for some time, even when it knew that such a stance was no longer tenable in the face of US imperialism’s geopolitical requirements and demand. US imperialism’s main purpose in defusing Indo-Pak tension has been the release of their respective armed forces from border defence, in order to deploy them on the counter-insurgency fronts.

Anyhow, as diplomatic relations between the two countries began to be normalized, and as the Vajpayee and Musharraf governments both needed to present their respective political retreats under imperialist pres-

sure as diplomatic feats, they began promoting a public political atmosphere of Indo-Pak friendship. In these circumstances, the BJP was not in a position to revive Hindutva to gather votes.

The slogan of “development” raised by the ruling class parties in the recent electoral campaign nevertheless offered a convenient reference point for the revolutionary political campaign. The revolutionary campaign could use it both to expose the *nature* of “development” which the ruling class parties are talking about or promoting, and to present the socio-economic content of the revolutionary democratic alternative.

While the BJP-led alliance marketed its claims of “India shining”, the parliamentary parties opposed to the BJP-led alliance made the increased economic hardship of all sections of the people during the Vajpayee government the principal plank of their propaganda drive (from their own ruling class angle). As a result of both these drives, the already urgent economic concerns of the people got further sharpened, and overwhelmed their religious, casteist and regional concerns. In the absence of a country-wide people’s platform for properly channeling their economic concerns, they were expressed negatively during the elections: in the form of negative swings against whichever ruling parties they deemed responsible for their plight.

By now, almost all regions of our country and all sections of the people have come under the injurious effects of the so-called economic reforms. However, the intensity and pervasiveness of these effects vary from region to region. Imperialist and big native companies prefer to invest their capital in the regions which provide better infrastructure and services to their industries. Therefore, along with big industrial centres such as Mumbai and Kolkata, the relatively developed* southern regions of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have increasingly felt the onslaught of these so-called economic reforms. Relatively backward regions such as Bihar and Orissa have been less affected. Significantly, the rural masses of regions where agriculture has been relatively commercialized have taken the worst blow.

While the Centre’s role is decisive in policies and decisions to accel-

* Here and below, when we refer to “developed” regions, we mean relative to other regions of India; they are of course not developed either in comparison with capitalist countries or in the sense of genuine development that can be after the new democratic revolution..

erate the imperialist-designed “reform” onslaught, it is state governments that are very largely responsible for their *implementation*. They also have the main job of suppressing the consequently increasing popular unrest and anger. Thus people voted in a big way to remove the state governments that seemed to be responsible for their worsening economy and life: witness the debacle of the Congress in Rajasthan, M.P. and Chhattisgarh (ruled by it till December 2003) as well as in Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka and Assam. This was the main factor in the BJP’s success in most of these states.

Some more informed and vocal sections of the people — of the urban lower middle class — are capable of discerning the Central government’s responsibility for their worsening economic condition. Sections who have borne the direct brunt of the Central government’s policies — such as industrial workers, who are the direct victims of the privatisation of big industrial units and labour-retrenchment industrial policies — can easily discern the role of the Centre. This factor, along with some other elements, explains why the urban lower middle class sections, masses of workers, and slum-dwellers defeated the NDA alliance in metropolitan and many other industrial centres.

Certain state governments displayed a more active interest in implementing the “reforms” in industrially or agriculturally developed regions or pockets, intensifying the ill-effects of the imperialist penetration and economic onslaught.

Their flag bearer was Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh, the favourite chief minister of the World Bank and other imperialist institutions and corporations. On the one hand he criminally neglected the basic needs of the people, dismissed the suicides of debt-ridden weavers and peasants, and ignored the mass exodus from areas under severe drought for the last four years; and unleashed police repression to suppress the agitation against the hike in electricity rates. On the other, he busied himself with the drive to make Hyderabad India’s “IT industry capital”, with the help of imperialist loans and investments. He went to absurd lengths to run the state government on the lines of an imperialist comprador company, touting computerization of administration as a solution to all problems and titling himself the state CEO (Chief Executive Officer).

Hence Chandrababu's party collapsed in the assembly-cum-parliamentary elections. The Congress-led alliance swept three-fourths of the assembly seats and 36 of a total 42 Lok Sabha seats. From the Hyderabad-Secunderabad segment, into which he had drained hundreds of crores from the exchequer to attract imperialist corporations, the TDP-BJP alliance could win only three out of 13 assembly seats.

In bringing the "IT revolution" to his state and thereby endearing himself to foreign capital, big industrialists and traders, as well as in brazenly disregarding the basic needs of the masses, S.M. Krishna, the Congress chief minister of Karnataka, competed with Chandrababu Naidu. In order to fulfill the imperialists' loan-conditions, Krishna privatized the electricity sector, and hiked rates from Rs 300 to Rs 540 per horsepower. Far from providing cheap electricity to the rural poor, rates were tripled. In Belgaum district, peasants were to pay a fine of Rs 50,000 and be jailed for not fitting meters on their motors. The Hubli Electricity Supply Company even set up a "Pulkasi Brigade" to implement this order. Peasants retaliated by organizing themselves under the Belgaum District Pumpset Owners Association and setting up the "Sangoli Rayana Brigade". They publicly burnt bills for arrears of Rs 70,000 to Rs 80,000, and resisted the attempts of the "Pulkasi Brigade" to disconnect non-metered pumpsets.

The Krishna government abolished various subsidies, marginalized loans from cooperative societies and further slashed cheap rations. All this was done as the people faced the calamity of a four-year drought. Karnataka had witnessed even worse droughts in the past, yet peasants had never committed suicides in such large numbers and over such a wide area as under Congress rule.

Consequently the Congress received a severe blow in Karnataka, winning only 65 of a total 224 assembly seats and eight of 28 parliamentary seats. However, it escaped sweeping defeat because the main opposition parties, BJP and JD(S), could not form an alliance, and divided the anti-Congress votes.

The Congress chief minister of Punjab, Amrinder Singh, another enthusiastic disciple of the imperialist-designed "reforms", did away with free power and irrigation water for peasants, stopped old-age pension, banned new recruitment for government jobs and hiked the fees of uni-

versities and colleges. The Congress had to pay the obvious price in the elections: a complete debacle. Whereas in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections the Congress-led alliance had won nine seats, and in the assembly elections two years ago, it was able to win 62 of a total 117 seats, in the 2004 elections the Congress could win only two out of 13 Lok Sabha seats, and its allies drew a blank.

The case of the Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalitha is instructive. In the 2001 assembly elections she campaigned against the policies of "liberalization, privatization, and globalization". She reminded the people that as chief minister she had opposed these policies and had vehemently criticised the WTO agreement. But after assuming office she implemented the "reforms" with speed and gusto. Free power was snatched away from the drought-ridden peasants. An arbitrary income ceiling barred a large section of the poor from getting cheap rations. Twenty-one efficiently operating road transport corporations were put on sale. Employees were deprived of various bonuses, allowances and gratuity schemes, and so on.

Along with the whip of her "reforms", Jayalalitha's autocratic and repressive dealings with the people and her political opponents earned her much disrepute. She slapped the black law concerning "essential services" on agitating road corporation employees. To suppress a strike of ten lakh government employees in 2003 thousands were detained and their services terminated. False cases were registered to gag the press and POTA was used against political opponents. An anti-conversion law was enacted to please the BJP, alienating religious minorities. The inevitable consequence of all these actions was the humiliating drubbing of the AIADMK-BJP alliance, which won not even a single parliamentary seat out of 40.

In Haryana, the high handed and repressive behaviour of the Om Prakash Chautala government significantly contributed to the sweeping defeat of his party, the INLD.

Rural masses in the main influenced the election results

By now broad sections of the rural masses have been badly hit by the onslaught of the so-called economic reforms. Being the majority of the population, and one whose polling percentage is higher than that of their

urban counterparts, the pent-up resentment of the rural masses very badly hit the ruling parties in many states. Thus the resentful rural masses have played a decisive role in the election results in some states, and a very significant one in some others.

Post-election statements and steps by leaders of various parties prove that the consequences of the “reforms” (particularly the privatization of electricity) in irrigated areas played an important role in defeating ruling parties in various states.

The Congress in Andhra made the promise of free power supply to the peasants a major election issue. After the elections, the new Congress chief minister thought it necessary to sign the file for this decision within minutes of the oath-taking ceremony. In Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha, immediately after being badly defeated, decided to give free power supply to the peasants and to restore the provision of subsidized rations for all income groups of the people. In Punjab, the Congress chief minister and most of the defeated Congress candidates admitted in their post-poll statements that the decision to withdraw free power and irrigation water from the peasants was a major factor in their debacle.

Various states faced three or four consecutive drought years during the last five years; yet the thrust of the “reforms” dictated increasing callousness by the Central and state governments even in providing drought relief. The drought-hit masses thus became a significant factor against the ruling parties in Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

In Maharashtra, the ruling alliance of the Congress and Nationalist Congress easily defeated the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in urban centres, but it received a shock in the rural areas of Vidarbha and Marathwada, its known strongholds. Ranjeet Deshmukh, state president of the Congress, himself confessed: “We have been swept away in Vidarbha because we did not keep the aspirations of the people in mind. Similarly, people have expressed their resentment against us due to the drought.” The Nationalist Congress leader Sharad Pawar too accepted that “due to drought” they had to pay the “price of defeat”. That statement, on the other hand, also attempts to cover up the other reasons for their electoral reverses.

In Gujarat, the resentment of the rural masses dramatically reversed

the results of the December 2002 assembly elections. Many of the rural areas of the state were once strongholds of the Congress. A large number of usurers of these areas are Muslims, whose victims are the tribal masses. The BJP had succeeded in giving a communal twist to the anti-usurer anger among the tribal masses and in getting them involved in anti-Muslim riots. That whipped-up upsurge of the tribals’ communal sentiments has since receded, and their resentment once again is directed against the state government.

Last year the Modi government tripled the prices of electricity (from Rs 350 per horsepower to Rs 1050 per horsepower). The mood among the Gujarat peasantry can be gauged from the fact that the leaders of BKS (Bharatiya Kisan Sangh) — the peasant wing of the RSS — had to lead a peasant agitation to provide a safety valve to the wrath of the peasants against the Modi government. After a month-long agitation, the leaders of the BKS compromised with the government and accepted a rate of Rs 700 per horsepower. So the peasants are as angry with the BKS leadership as with the state government. Jayesh Patel, a peasant from north Gujarat, is quoted as saying: “Any government that does injustice to the farmers will go.... see how the BJP lost most of the rural areas in this election.”

The Congress was swept away in the assembly election held after the Gujarat riots. But this time in Saurashtra, where the Congress hitherto had a nominal presence, it snatched three of seven parliamentary seats from the BJP. The Congress’ performance this time was its best in the last 20 years, while the BJP’s is its worst since 1989, when it began its rise.

Positive expression of resentment by the rural masses

On the one hand broad sections of the rural masses expressed their resentment through negative voting. On the other hand, in many parts of the country, many sections of the rural masses expressed their resentment *positively*, through organized activities under the leadership or the influence of revolutionary forces, against all the ruling class parliamentary parties. The activity by peasants in Punjab is a case in point.

During the recent elections, a major section of the organized peasantry of Punjab organized an active and massive political campaign to

project their demands and to expose the anti-peasant character of all ruling class political parties. Not stopping at mere exposure, they launched a struggle for their demands as a part of this election-exposure campaign. After a week-long sit-in at Patiala (home town of the chief minister), gherao of the bus stand, railway station and state head office of the electricity board and blocking railway traffic at many places in the state, the struggle succeeded in winning some of its demands from the state government. Peasants participated in thousands in all these activities. At one place, hundreds of armed policemen attacked the demonstrating peasants; while one peasant was martyred and dozens were injured, the armed police attack was resisted and repulsed. (See the separate report in this issue.)

About countering communal fascist forces through parliamentary politics

The defeat of the BJP alliance in these elections may strengthen the illusion among some sections that communal fascist forces can be resisted by secular forces through parliamentary politics. Below we look at the question of the effectiveness of anti-communal parliamentary struggles.

There is only a very small layer of people in our society who have grasped the ideology of secularism through rational thinking, who believe that religious intervention in social and political life is harmful for the people, and believe that the issue of following one or the other religion, or none at all, should be limited to the personal sphere. Only persons of this layer, based on this conviction, can play a somewhat effective role against communal fascist forces.

But the broad masses of the common people do not have this conscious notion of secularism. Instead, they have a communal goodwill born out of their spontaneous social experience and sentiment of justice. Though this spirit of communal goodwill is vulnerable to ruling class propaganda, and as a result gets polluted by some prejudices against other religions, it generally prevents the common people from actually participating in communal riots. They participate in such riots only when they are misled by communal fanatics into believing that the targeted religion and its followers have become a terrible threat to their security of life,

property and other significant interests and concerns.

Though the common people may feel very unhappy about the heinous crimes perpetrated by rioters against the followers of targeted religion, they do not participate in any effective activity against the rioters. Because communal goodwill is not such a powerful conviction as can be transformed into a material force against the rioters. They can participate in any effective activity of one kind or the other against communal fanatics only when they grasp the fact that such resistance is indispensable for the protection or extension of their *own* other interests and concerns.

The same is also true, to one or the other extent, in the field of parliamentary politics. The common people take active interest in defeating or helping to elect a communal fanatic party only when they can somehow relate the victory or defeat of such a party with a loss or gain in their social and class interests and concerns. The BJP could win the Gujarat assembly elections after the riots principally because it and other Sangh Parivar organizations had succeeded in misleading large sections of Hindu community into believing that the Muslims of India, with instigation and support from Pakistan, seriously threatened the security of life, property and religion of the Hindu people and the security of India.

The situation in Gujarat has now changed. The once artificially inflated communal sentiments of the rural masses have more or less subsided, whereas their economic concerns are heightened. Now the tribals and other sections of rural masses blame the Modi government for their worsening economic hardship, and have turned noticeably to the Congress as an available parliamentary alternative. Their active interest in getting rid of the Modi government is born more out of their desire to protect their economic interests, than out of their sense of communal goodwill.

Therefore, in the thought-process of the common people, the creation and development of notion of secularism and of the need for struggle against communalism are an integral part of the struggle-process for the protection and development of their social concerns and class interests. The people continuously develop the assertion of their will as against the will of the ruling classes and the latter's State through a conscious struggle-process under the leadership of revolution-

ary forces. In other words they continue to create and develop elements of genuine democracy. The communal forces continue to try to split the ranks of the people communally in order to damage their struggles and to derail the process of generation of elements of people's democracy. With the help of revolutionary and anti-communal propaganda and education, the people continue to grasp better and better the need for struggle against communalism so as to maintain their class unity, to ensure the success of their struggles and to develop the process of generation of elements of people's democracy. The notion of secularism thus continues to take shape as an integral part of their democratic thinking.

Thus for the masses of people in our country genuine secularism remains an integral part of genuine democracy. That is to say, without the struggle for genuine democracy or isolated from it, secularism cannot be maintained and developed. In the final analysis no person can be a genuine secularist without being a genuine democrat, and vice-versa.

Therefore, the significance and requirement of anti-communist propaganda and struggle should be determined according to the level and requirement of the conscious struggle-process of the people for their social and class interests and for the assertion of their will against the will of the anti-democratic ruling class forces.

As there is no social basis of genuine democracy in our country, this so-called parliamentary democracy is misleading. Anti-democratic forces cannot be defeated through parliamentary, constitutional and legal struggles. Similarly, there is no social basis for genuine secularism in our country. Communalist forces, especially the communal fascist forces, cannot be defeated through parliamentary victories of secular political parties and through secular changes in the Constitution and the law. This menace can be effectively checkmated only in the arena of the people's multi-faceted movement for democracy and liberation, including specific anti-communist mobilisation.

Unable to grasp this integral link between democratic consciousness and secular consciousness, some sections of the people, particularly pro-people sections of the intelligentsia, were very disturbed by the results of the Gujarat assembly results held after the Gujarat riots. They nursed expectations that as a result of the heart-rending riots the common people of Gujarat and forces claiming to be secular would teach a lesson, through

these elections, to the BJP in Gujarat. They awaited a telling defeat for the BJP. The results, however, were entirely contrary to their expectations. BJP won a resounding majority in the assembly. The Congress, the biggest of the parties claiming to be secular, as well as the candidates of the "left" parties, were swept away.

Now, with the formation of a government of the alliance of "secular parties" at the Centre, the same sections of the people may nurture baseless expectations of containing and controlling the communalist forces through parliamentary, constitutional and legal measures.

Unevenness of phenomenon of negative voting

On the surface, the phenomenon of negative voting appears very uneven in these elections. In some states, the state ruling parties faced sweeping defeats; in some others the ruling parties did not lose much; and in yet others, the ruling parties seemed to defy the anti-incumbency factor by increasing their seats in parliament. An important reason is that for negative voting to manifest itself markedly, there must be an opposition party/alliance strong and effective enough to emerge as the parliamentary alternative to the ruling party/alliance.

In the recent elections, a further factor intervened. There were two strong trends of negative voting operating simultaneously. There was a strong trend of voting against state ruling parties among broad sections of the people, particularly in rural areas; there was also, among some sections of the people, particularly in the big urban centres, a strong trend of voting against the parties ruling at the Centre. In states where these two trends pointed in the same direction, that is, had a common target, the results took the form of a sweep against the ruling parties. On the other hand, wherever the two trends worked at cross-purposes, the effect of the negative voting got blurred.

The BJP is the ruling party in Rajasthan, M.P. and Chhattisgarh. However, the Congress lost badly here, because it was the ruling party in these states up to December 2003. The resentment of the people against the Congress governments, pent up during all these previous years, not only found an outlet in December 2003 but continued to batter the Congress even in these parliamentary elections. The BJP governments in these states had been in office for a short span (about six months), not

enough to earn such popular ire as could outweigh that earned by the Congress during their comparatively long rule.

In Maharashtra the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) alliance had been in office for four and a half years by the May 2004 elections. Yet it won 23 seats out of 48, and thus increased its share by seven over the 1999 parliamentary elections. A cursory glance at the results might suggest that this ruling alliance has defied the phenomenon of negative voting. But this is not the case. In the 1999 elections Congress and NCP fought the elections against each other, thus contributing to each other's defeat. This time, they fought as allies, contributing to each other's victory. But even their alliance could only reduce the anti-incumbency factor, not eliminate it. Had they now won the combined votes that they got in 1999 parliamentary elections, they would have won a much higher number of seats. The erosion of vote-base due to the anti-incumbency factor is responsible for the modest increase in their tally, despite their alliance. Secondly, the contrary trend of negative voting against the Central government in cities such as Mumbai, Pune and Nashik helped the state ruling alliance to escape defeat.

In Orissa and West Bengal the people had no effective channel to express their anger against the ruling parties, for lack of a strong and effective opposition platform which could provide a viable parliamentary alternative. In Orissa, where the assembly and parliamentary elections were held simultaneously, the ruling BJP-BJD's tally of assembly seats fell by just three, and of parliamentary seats by just one (winning 18 of 21 seats). The reason is that in Orissa the Congress is very weak compared to the ruling alliance, and its leader J.B. Patnaik is much more infamous than the leaders of the ruling alliance.

The "Left" has been ruling West Bengal for over 25 years. Indeed in the May 2004 elections the "Left" Front's vote-share was six percentage points more than that of all the opposition parties in the state. It also increased its seats in parliament. The reason for the "Left" dominance is the utter feebleness of the main opposition party. In the earlier period this was the Congress party. Later on the split-away faction of the Congress party, the Trinamool Congress, began to emerge as the parliamentary alternative to the "Left" Front. However, under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, this party made repeated U-turns in order to

tie up with either the Congress or the BJP. Such opportunist behaviour led to internal squabbles. Moreover, the Trinamool had its share of the negative vote in West Bengal as an alliance partner of the NDA at the Centre. In particular, it had to pay the price in Muslim votes. For all these reasons this party was swept away in the parliamentary elections. Where the BJP-TMC alliance had captured eight seats out of 42 in the previous elections it was reduced to just one seat in the 2004 elections. The seven seats lost by this alliance have been divided between "Left" Front and the Congress, the latter getting the traditional anti-communist votes.

The phenomenon of Laloo Prasad Yadav is complex. His party (Rashtriya Janata Dal, or RJD) in Bihar is passing through its consecutive second term as a ruling party. In spite of such a long spell as a ruling party, the alliance it leads has defeated the BJP-led alliance. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the BJP-led alliance had captured 30 seats out of 40, whereas the RJD and its allies could win only nine out of their 29 seats. This time, 22 seats have been won by RJD alone.

The Laloo phenomenon in Bihar can only be properly understood if the social-political background of its emergence over the decade is kept in view.

Laloo's political career started as a student leader emerging during the political movement under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan. More recently, Laloo established himself as a Yadav leader during the controversy over OBC reservations and the confrontation with the anti-reservation (anti-Mandalisation) backlash. Yadavs constitute 14 per cent of the population of Bihar. His main rivals for support among the intermediate castes have been JD(U) leaders such as Sharad Yadav and Nitish Kumar, who share with him a common background — of the Socialist Party and the legacy of casteist mass mobilisations in Bihar. Laloo's tough and consistent stand against Hindu communalism created for him a relatively stable vote-base among Muslims, 15 per cent of the Bihar population.

The recent parliamentary results from Bihar may give the misleading impression that Laloo's popularity is continuously growing despite his decade-long stint in power. Actually, by the end of his first term in office, noticeable disillusionment among his political supporters had set in, particularly among the rural poor. This fact was clearly reflected in the 1999

parliamentary elections as well as assembly elections. In the subsequent period, he tried (with some success) to pose as a fighter for Bihari interests against discrimination by the Central rulers. His stand against the partition of Bihar, against depriving Bihar of its mineral wealth, and against non-implementation of the promised economic package for Bihar in compensation of that loss, helped him in extending his constituency beyond the Yadav-Muslim vote-base. Nevertheless, negative voting took place; but its manifestation was muted by the sorry plight of his political opponents. Because of the JD(U) and Samata Party leaders' alliance with the BJP, their opportunistic silence on BJP's obvious flouting of the NDA's common charter, and the unseemly public display of factional feuds in their party, they were unable to cash in on the anti-Laloo vote.

In these elections, another element in favour of the Congress-RJD alliance was that Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party switched from the BJP-led alliance to the Congress-RJD alliance. Paswan has a vote-base among the Dusad caste, five per cent of the votes in Bihar.

Crisis of ruling class politics and the significance of electoral alliances

As mentioned earlier, while negative voting against ruling parties was widespread, its expression required an effective alternative party. Such a party can provide a channel for expression of people's anger within the frame of parliamentary politics and provide a seeming alternative to the ruling party. Where there is not a single strong party, the formation of a multi-party alliance can meet this need.

The political crisis being faced by the ruling classes has made alliance politics indispensable, not only in the limited context of some states but also of national parliamentary politics. The crisis of ruling class parliamentary politics emanates from two contrary pulls: on the one hand, to speed up the process of exploitation and oppression as a part of the neo-colonial order, and on the other to manufacture a "people's verdict" to legitimise their rule. Ruling class parties are getting no respite from the pressure of these contrary demands. Their unpopularity is growing by the day with the so-called economic reforms, and it is becoming more and more difficult to perform these contrary tasks simultaneously. Their crisis is being expressed through

the instability of governments, the disintegration of ruling class parties, and the growing social-political turbulence.

As a result of this crisis, there remains now no national-level party of the ruling classes in the real sense. The Congress was the only such party with nationwide influence. It had a support base among various sections of people throughout the country. It was on this basis that it could hold together and lead a broad coalition of various and contending sections of ruling classes, under the Congress umbrella. After its disintegration as a national-level party, its decline as a protector of ruling class interests was expressed in the striking emergence of region-based parties. Thus the ascendance of alliance policy, as a replacement for the absent national-level party in parliamentary politics.

The most prominent reason for the BJP's success in capturing governmental power at the Centre through the 13th parliamentary elections was its successful formation of alliances with region-based parties. By contrast the Congress party took time to digest the reality that its life as a national party was over, and that alliances with regional parties (even as a junior partner in some states) were now not a matter of choice but compulsion. The return of the Congress as a ruling party at the Centre is largely due to its coming round to this realisation and its resultant success in forming direct and indirect alliances during the recent elections. In the absence of such an alliance, the negative vote against the Vajpayee government would have remained divided and regionally isolated.

In the absence of any national party of the ruling classes, and given the crucial significance of alliances with region-based parties for both the major parties, it is the sum total of victories and defeats in states which determined the victory or defeat at the Central level. The significance of state-level alliances is evident.

The alliances formed by the Congress in A.P. and Tamil Nadu were most effective, and provided a convincing refuge for negative voters against these state governments. Because of the four-party alliance in Andhra, the Congress party was able to win 29 seats as compared to only five seats in the 1999 parliamentary elections. In Tamil Nadu, the anti-Jayalalitha votes were effectively combined because of the formation of a seven-party alliance. The result was that the AIADMK-BJP alliance, which had won 15 seats in the previous election, now could not

win even a single seat. Similarly, in Jharkhand, BJP, the ruling party, had won 11 seats out of 14 in the 1999 elections; but in the 2004 election its vote-share fell by 12.5 percentage points in the face of a five-party alliance including the Congress and RJD. Although the BJP got more votes (33 per cent) in this election than any other single party, it could win only one seat thanks to the opposition alliance.

On the other hand, the lack of an effective alliance against the BJP-led alliance has damaged the prospects of the Congress party in some states. The BJP had been a participant in running the U.P. government. The anger against the BJP among the people, especially among the Muslims (a relatively larger section in the state), is acute. So a crushing defeat for the BJP was possible. However, U.P. uniquely saw the division of the anti-BJP vote among three rivals (SP, BSP, and Congress). Thanks to this division, the BJP succeeded in capturing 11 seats out of 80. Nevertheless, a section of the Muslim community partly succeeded in blocking the division of anti-BJP Muslim votes by "tactical voting", whereby the community would make constituency-wise collective decisions on which anti-BJP candidate to vote for on the basis of their chances of defeating the BJP.

In Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Punjab too the lack of effective alliances among opponents proved beneficial for BJP alliance. The BSP, SP or "left" parties remained outside the Congress-led alliance in one or the other of these states. This contributed to the victory of BJP alliance in 11, 6 and 5 constituencies respectively. Had they participated in the Congress alliance the BJP-led alliance would have lost in most of these 22 constituencies.

What this reveals is that people cannot by mere strength of their vote-power even get rid of a hated government and replace it with another ruling class government. They cannot on their own create the condition required for change of government through votes – namely, the availability of an opposition party or an alliance of parties which may provide a parliamentary political alternative to the ruling party.

Dispelling illusions about the new government

The election results have thrown out a government which was ruthlessly promoting the "economic reforms"; which had encouraged and

supported the heart-rending massacre in Gujarat; and which had imposed the draconian act POTA. Such a change may lead to an illusion among some sections of people that the elections may lead to their escape from such terrors as the "economic reforms", communal fascist forces and legalized state repression. However, the reality is that only leaders from the ruling class parties can provide a parliamentary alternative under the present political system. Only ruling class parties out of office lead the election fight, and use the people's resentment against the government. The faces of the rulers change with the defeat of one or the other ruling party or alliance, the ruling class character and essential role of the government remains unaltered.

This is what happened in the recent elections. While the ruling class opposition parties waxed eloquent about the plunging economic conditions of the people, they were alert to the possibility of people's anger getting directed against the "economic reforms" themselves, and against the imperialists and their native allies who are imposing these "reforms". Thus the ruling class opposition parties blamed the Vajpayee government alone for the economic degeneration of the people, and narrowly limited their criticism to the *methods of implementing* the so-called economic reforms.

Ruling class leaders and the ruling class media project the election results as a people's verdict in favour of "secular" parties, and the Congress-led alliance as an alliance of secular parties. Thus they present the central issue during the recent elections not as the "reforms" and their devastating consequences for the common people but the choice between "secularism" and "Hindutva communalism".

The Congress-led alliance government keeps making promises to differentiate itself from the previous government in the matter of implementing the "economic reforms". The solitary point of distinction highlighted is that the new government would implement the "reforms *with a human face*". That formulation is revealing. The qualifier "human face" is necessary only because of the basically *inhuman* character of the economic reforms: there would hardly be any need to provide a "human face" to a human phenomenon. The high-sounding talk about giving the "reforms" a "human face" may amount to little more than avoiding crude forms and methods of implementing the economic reforms.

Through the recent elections people's dissatisfaction and anger regarding the so-called economic reforms were partially expressed. That is all there is scope for in such an election. Therefore, the new government will carry on the onslaught of the "reforms" nevertheless. It will continue to judge the people's mood and reaction while carefully extending and promoting this onslaught. In case it is faced with conscious organized resistance or spontaneous mass anger of comprehensive nature and alarming dimensions, it may be forced to temporarily stall the onslaught or to retreat, in order to prepare conditions for re-starting the full-scale onslaught at the earliest. Any retreat or advance on the part of the new government is bound to be within the overall ruling class policy-frame to promote the "economic reforms".

The unusual sharpness with which the rural masses expressed their anger against existing governments through the recent elections may cause some sort of modification of governmental measures, as part of the "reforms with a human face": a relatively increased budget allocation for "support for the peasantry", "agricultural development" or "rural development", and the like. Such a modification would essentially mean a slightly greater budget-share for the landlord lobby in the form of loans, grants and development funds. The landlord lobby makes use of the rural mass dissatisfaction and anger in its tussle with other ruling class sections. So the slight change will be in line with the usual practice of dealing with rural mass anger: false promises or nominal gestures of welfare for the rural masses, and real bribery for the rural ruling classes.

While the Congress government has declared that it would withdraw POTA, that does not signal relief for the people from legalized repression. The imposition of draconian laws like POTA by the NDA government was a form of legalizing repression which may continue even now, in different forms. The post-Emergency experience of a short period of relief from legalized repression is not going to be repeated, for the present situation is different. The difference is that the Emergency period witnessed an oppositional wave in different parts of the country against the brutal and ruthless suppression of democratic rights. The Janata party government replaced the Congress regime in the midst of, and because of, an anti-Emergency mood and upsurge among the people. This phenomenon continued to act as a pressure on the Janata party regime for

some period during which it had to behave cautiously in using legalized repression against the people. But the Vajpayee government's black laws have faced no significant upsurge or mass resistance such as might obstruct the new government in persisting with the process of legalized repression.

The Congress alliance declared itself a coalition of secular parties, but the formation of such a "secular" government does not at all mean that the communal fascist designs and acts of Hindutva chauvinist forces now will come to a halt. The Hindutva forces never limited their communal fascist campaigns and riots to the tenure of BJP governments. On the contrary, a number of such campaigns and riots took place during periods when the BJP was out of power. Indeed, they usually occurred as a part of a conscious design to capture governmental power.

The Sangh Parivar would certainly seek to repeat its earlier black deeds. But the path of Hindutva fanatic forces has become a bit difficult and complicated for the time being, because the heightened economic concerns of the people run counter to communal polarization. The ugly task of providing communal colour to their concerns in the typical manner of a fascist force will demand more cunning methods and improved tactics from the Sangh Parivar forces.

However, the political conduct of the Congress during the past two and a half decades has clearly exposed its pseudo-secular character. It has repeatedly used the communalist weapon itself or played soft with the Hindutva fascist forces. Even the recent election results have not provided the Congress such evidence of the positive vote-gathering potential of genuine secularism as might have prompted the it to revise its policy. So there is no basis for any expectation that the present government would curb communal fascist forces.

Nevertheless, in order to protect its useful label of "secularism", the new government is taking some small steps, and may take some more such steps. The communalist changes in education syllabuses brought by the Vajpayee government may be reversed. Supporters of the BJP and Sangh Parivar who were given plum posts in academic and other government/semi-government spheres will be replaced with the supporters of the Congress-led alliance parties. The motive behind such changes would be to snatch away every bit of power from the hands of the NDA

and their supporters, in order to oblige the leaders and supporters of the Congress alliance. The removal of some communalist infection from academic texts and institutions would merely be a by-product of this effort.

On the whole, the results of these elections may not be exactly according to the preference of some imperialist powers and Indian comprador big business houses. Still, the change of Central government with little disadvantage to their vital interests is in tune with the wishes of imperialism and the Indian ruling classes. The resentment accumulated among the people as a result of the onslaught of "reforms" has been released, to the extent possible, through the safety valve of elections. The notorious Vajpayee government has been replaced through a "people's mandate" by a government whose prime minister had the distinction of initiating the onslaught of "economic reforms" as the finance minister of the Congress government at the Centre in 1991. In his very first statement as prime minister, he reassured foreign capital regarding the nature of his government, and declared that people in any case would have to pay user charges — that is, pay hiked rates for essential services, or get shut out of these services. Foreign capital breathed a unanimous sigh of relief on seeing his trustworthy person occupying the office of prime minister.

Particular tasks of communist revolutionaries in the post-election situation

The post-election situation demands the attention of communist revolutionary forces towards some related tasks. In the sphere of propaganda and education, they should make particularly sure to dispel any illusions or baseless expectations this governmental change has created in some sections of the people. In the sphere of agitation and struggle, demands and issues of struggle should be formulated and chosen so as to ensure that feudal landlords are checked (to the extent possible) from grabbing, behind the backs of the rural masses, the loans, grants, subsidies and development funds issued by the government in the name of agricultural and rural development. Clear-cut provisions should be demanded to ensure a proper proportion of loans, grants, concessionary credits, and so on to the rural masses, particularly the poor peasants and landless labourers. It should be demanded that the rural masses be shown

and convinced of the utility of various rural development projects launched in their name.

In the course of agitating on these demands the revolutionaries should be *able to expose* the governmental cheating of the rural masses through statistical claims of having allocated funds for them under non-specific heads. The revolutionaries should also seek to make the rural masses realise the limited scope for squeezing something out of such ruling class developmental plans and projects and the categorical need to move the fight towards agrarian revolutionary changes. A similar approach should be taken regarding the struggle-demands of the workers, particularly in exposing the fraudulent claims of the government concerning the social safety-net for the victimized workers.

Yet Another Government of National Treachery

-- by a correspondent

The new UPA government at the Centre has quickly established itself as one more government of national treachery on the economic and political fronts (domestic and foreign policy).

Even before ascending to office the Congress began telegraphing its reliability as a protector of imperialist interests. The Congress's choices of prime minister and finance minister were greeted by foreign capital with murmurs of profound satisfaction. World Bank veteran Manmohan Singh had as finance minister (1991-96) introduced and implemented the IMF-World Bank-dictated devastation of the economy. P. Chidambaram, Supreme Court lawyer for multinationals GE and Bechtel in the Enron case, had as finance minister presented the corporates' "Dream Budget" of 1997, responsible for thousands of starvation deaths since then. Riding to power on the back of an election in which the people had expressed their anger at the existing policies, the new ruling clique's first priority was to assure imperialism that those very policies would continue. In Chidambaram's words, "What more continuity can a country like India demonstrate to the whole world than bringing Dr Manmohan Singh as prime minister and me as finance minister?" (*Indian Express*, May 31, 2004)

The comprador press made much of the new regime's dependence on the 'Left' parties' support, and its alleged vulnerability in proceeding with 'reforms'. All this was nonsense, as the 'Left' parties made clear: they would no doubt express their differences with each policy measure in a gentlemanly way, submitting note after note for the consideration of

the government and organising seminars addressed by noted economists, but on no account would they seriously threaten to withdraw support for the government. "Those who may see in this a degree of potential instability for the present government will do well to recollect the track record of the Left's outside support to governments in the past," said Sitaram Yechury (*People's Democracy*, May 31, 2004). Never had the CPI(M) withdrawn its support from such governments; they fell for other reasons. "Thus, there can be no cause for any worry concerning the Left's outside support vis-a-vis the stability of this government." In order to reassure foreign and domestic big capital further, and as a token of the 'Left' parties' participation in the government, CPI(M) MP Somnath Chatterjee was made Speaker of the Lok Sabha. As the Nobel-winning 'human-face' economist Amartya Sen remarked approvingly, the CPI and CPI(M) would "engage in a public debate and yet *not hold up the government*".

What work are the CPI and CPI(M) "not holding up", that is, effectively *collaborating* in?

Economy

1. Rendering the country further hostage to volatile flows of speculative foreign capital

Most strikingly, the UPA government is opening the economy even further to the ravages of foreign speculative capital. Steadily since 1992, but most of all during the past two years, huge foreign speculative funds have flooded in. They now make up the bulk (at least \$75-80 billion) of the \$130 billion-strong foreign exchange 'reserves'. Their entry has nothing to do with the supposedly good performance of the Indian economy. The main reason for their entry is that the dollar's value is falling, and there are opportunities for quick gain for speculators by shifting their capital temporarily to other currencies (since the rupee's value is rising against the dollar at the moment, a person who buys rupees with dollars today can buy back *more* dollars tomorrow with those same rupees. Thus a foreign investor who brings in dollars to buy Indian shares reaps two crops: from re-selling the share at a higher price and from buying back dollars at a cheaper price). *At any time these short-term funds can exit*

and cause devastation in the economy. (At such a time, the value of the rupee would plummet in relation to foreign currencies. Seeing this fall, exporters would delay bringing in their export earnings; Indians working abroad would delay making remittances to India; the foreign exchange reserves would be drawn down rapidly; in order to persuade foreign capital to return to, or remain in, India, the government would steeply hike interest rates, depressing productive activity and consumption in India. To earn foreign exchange, the government would sell profitable public sector units to foreigners; bankrupted by high interest rates, many private Indian firms would also be sold at bargain prices. Such was the fate suffered by countries like South Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand after 1997.)

The flood of Foreign Institutional Investor (FII)* investment has sent the share markets to dizzy heights. The FIIs dictate the movements of share prices – their shareholding in the firms that make up the Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index (the “sensex”) rose from an already high 22 per cent in March 2004 to 38 per cent in September 2004 (*Economic Times*, December 8, 2004), and has risen further since. Yet no controls are placed (or can even be dreamt of) on the flood of such volatile speculative capital. Indeed, as a signal of its welcome, the UPA government *increased the limits* on FII investment in debt funds.

Apart from foreign investors, Indian corporate firms, and financial institutions, just over *one* per cent of Indian households own shares. The fluctuations of the stock market have *no* relation to national wealth or people’s well-being. Yet, as share prices plummeted in the days after the NDA defeat, massaging the markets was the new government’s first priority. The prime minister hastened to assure speculators, domestic and foreign, of the new regime’s bona fides; the finance minister made two trips to Mumbai to boost “investor confidence”, and promised them many more measures in their favour. These soon appeared in the Bud-

* FIIs are foreign institutions which are allowed to buy and sell shares and debt instruments in India’s share markets and debt markets. FII investment is restricted to such trading; it does not go toward industrial investment at all. In theory, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), such as when a foreign corporation sets up a subsidiary in India, goes toward such investment. However, in fact much of the FDI that has come into India has gone toward buying up existing Indian companies, or buying up shares of the foreign firm held by the public.

get: the complete removal of long-term capital gains tax on trading in shares (that is, if a person holds a share for over a year, his profits on the sale of the share are tax-free!). Tax on short-term gains (for sale of shares within a year) has been reduced to just 10 per cent. A tax on transactions in shares (whereby a tiny percentage of the value of each purchase would have to be paid as tax) was introduced briefly, only to be virtually scrapped – as if on cue – the moment speculators protested. Indeed, the government will get almost no tax revenue from the current hysterical boom in share prices.

The subservience of the Indian state to the flows of speculative foreign capital was most dramatically demonstrated on January 12, 2005. On that day the governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Y.V. Reddy, suggested in the course of a speech that some restraints could be placed on the flood of FII investments taking place. He hinted that some of the inflows may be from shady sources, and that tighter procedures to check the sources may restrain their inflow. Moreover, he said that taxing such inflows was an option, though its effectiveness was “arguable”. Immediately, FIIs pressurised the finance minister to rubbish Reddy’s statement. The same evening, Chidambaram announced that “There’s no move to tax FII inflows”, and Reddy was forced to call the press to announce that he felt taxing FII inflows was “not desirable”. Such humiliation of a central bank governor — within hours — shows the enormous political clout of foreign speculative capital in India today.

2. Opening up more sectors to foreign takeover

The UPA government is opening up fresh sectors, several among the most profitable in the economy, to foreign takeover.

- **Banks:** On October 30 Chidambaram coolly announced that foreign banks would be allowed to take over domestic private banks. “Foreign banks can acquire up to a 10 per cent stake in a private bank every year and take control of private banks in three or four years.” At India Economic Summit (December 5) for foreign investors, Chidambaram disclosed that the government is coming up with a roadmap to allow foreign banks to own up to 74 per cent in Indian private banks very soon.

• **Insurance:** In his Budget speech Chidambaram announced that the ceiling for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector would be hiked from 26 per cent to 49 per cent. The insurance firms in imperialist countries have a record of colossal financial misdeeds and destruction of people's savings. Among the culprits are some of the major firms investing in India. A sign of things to come: the Law Commission has proposed amending the Insurance Act to allow insurance firms to invest their funds abroad – a virtual invitation to them to put funds beyond the reach of Indian policy holders in case they go bankrupt.

• **Airlines:** The FDI ceiling in domestic airlines has been raised from 40 to 49 per cent. While foreign airlines are still barred from investing in them, civil aviation minister Praful Patel says that they may be allowed to do so in a year or two. Airlines in the imperialist countries have been making large losses, and in some prominent cases have had to be rescued by their governments (including the US, Belgium and France); whereas in India the domestic airline business is profitable. So our comprador rulers are eager to hand such business over to the imperialists.

• **Telecom:** Chidambaram announced in his Budget speech that the ceiling for Foreign Direct Investment would be raised in the telecommunications sector from 49 per cent to 74 per cent. The main lobby for this change is the association of cellular phone companies, some of which are foreign-controlled, and others of which are Indian firms which would like to sell out to foreign firms. Chidambaram (till recently Supreme Court lawyer to the cellular phone companies) has produced a novel argument for allowing the increase in foreign shareholding: that the foreign firms already hold in excess of the ceiling, by investing in holding companies which in turn invest in the Indian firm. Rather than put a stop to this evasion of the law, Chidambaram proposes to make it legal. Further foreign investment in this very profitable sector will mean more drain from the country. Moreover, as the CPI(M) has pointed out, the United States, like many other imperialist countries, does not allow a foreign shareholding of more than 25 per cent in its telecom sector, since through a telecom company e-mail and conversations can be monitored.

• **News media:** Similarly, many countries place restrictions on foreign

investment in their news media. As such media shape public opinion on political issues, foreign control of them would interfere with the sovereignty of the host country. Such concerns hardly worry our comprador rulers: they propose to raise the ceiling on FDI in newspapers/newsmagazines from the present 26 per cent, and propose to allow FII investment in addition to the 26 per cent FDI ceiling in television news channels.

• **Retail trade:** The NDA government declared its intention to open up the retail sector to foreign investment; the UPA government is following in its footsteps. In November, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, promised initial steps to allow FDI into certain retail segments in order to “*boost investment in employment generating sectors*”. This is a grim joke, as in fact foreign giants' entry into retail trade will play havoc with what is perhaps the second largest source of employment in the country (after agriculture). The revenues of the entire Indian retail sector, organised and unorganised (including the smallest *kirana* shops and *paan* stalls), are estimated at \$200 billion, and the sector employs an estimated 30 million in 12 million establishments. By contrast, the American retail firm Wal-Mart (the world's largest corporation), has revenues of \$263 billion, but employs only 1.5 million. In the US, “Wal-Mart” is a synonym for the closure of small shops and destruction of local employment.

• **Small industries:** At the same time the government has moved further in the direction of demolishing the last, crumbling defences of small industries, by striking more items off the list of products reserved for the small scale sector. On November 29 another 85 articles were struck off the list, including razors, copper and silver utensils, shoe polish, natural essential oils, eatables, sanitary towels, drinking straws, various auto part components, various sports goods.

• **Blessing violations:** The UPA government casually scraps even the mild conditions placed on multinationals by its predecessors. For example, the oil giant Shell was allowed to enter India on the condition that it sell to Indians 26 per cent of its subsidiary here. After entering, Shell did not bother to implement this condition; now the UPA government has for-

mally scrapped the stipulation, and further has allowed Shell to open 2,000 retail outlets in the country.

Similar is the example of the Japanese firm Suzuki, which has a long-standing, highly profitable joint venture with the Government of India – the country's leading automobile manufacturer, Maruti. The earlier NDA government had already surrendered formal control to Suzuki in 2002, and then diluted its own shareholding to just 18 per cent. Now the UPA government has allowed Suzuki to set up two separate ventures of its own – a diesel engine plant and a car assembly plant – ignoring Maruti. In future, no doubt, Suzuki's latest models, particularly in the high-profit category of large cars, would go not to Maruti but to the new venture. Although Maruti will be allowed to invest in these new ventures, they allow Suzuki to advance its interests at the expense of Maruti (whose share prices immediately dropped upon the news).

In line with its record on Maruti, the government has announced that Press Note 18 will soon be diluted. "Press Note 18" is the stipulation that, in the case of a joint venture between a foreign firm and an Indian firm, the foreign firm will need to obtain the Indian firm's permission before setting up a separate venture in India.

3. Pillage of public sector assets

The UPA regime is persisting with the devastating sell-off of State assets to private parties, including foreign parties – the sale of Rs 2,700 crore of NTPC shares, the imminent leasing of the profitable airports, the transfer of the remaining 44 per cent of BALCO shares to Sterlite despite Sterlite's having violated the agreement. It has opened up foreign routes (earlier reserved to the state-owned carriers) to private airlines, and is preparing to sell off its shares in Air India and Indian Airlines (according to civil aviation minister Praful Patel, "We will have to dilute our stakes in the two airlines in the long term. First we have to straighten the two carriers, then the government can divest its stake. It could take a year or two.").

According to press reports, the following firms' shares are soon to be sold: BHEL (16 per cent), Shipping Corporation of India (20 per cent), Power Grid Corporation, and Power Finance Corporation, and NHPC (five per cent each). In fact, the government has prepared a list of 35

profitable public sector undertakings whose shares may be sold in the near future.

Natural resources are to be looted as fast as possible in the name of attracting investment: ONGC has put up another 19 offshore oilfields for sale, the prime minister has personally intervened to speed up the clearance of new private sector coal mine projects, and there is a rush of private sector (including foreign investment) projects in the mineral-rich central belt of the country.

Moreover, the UPA, like the NDA before it, plans to tie the creation of infrastructure to high-cost foreign investment – along the lines of the notorious Dabhol deal with Enron.

It is retaining the Electricity Act and trying to chop up the state electricity boards into separate generation, transmission and distribution corporations – an obvious prelude to privatisation. The Act is also aimed at eliminating alleged cross-subsidy on electricity for weaker sections, including for agriculture; in effect it will make electricity for agriculture much more expensive, dealing a further blow to already crippled agriculture.

In September, Manmohan Singh made a sales pitch to the heads of the largest US financial corporations at the New York Stock Exchange. India, he pleaded, needed \$150 billion of foreign investment during the next few years for a "quantum leap" in the infrastructure sector. Over this, he claimed, there was maximum "political consensus". "India needs America's support and active involvement in realising its dream". This dream of the compradors will be a nightmare for the nation, which will have to pay extortionate tariffs, fees, tolls and the like on infrastructure, the effect of which will be to suppress all development that depends on this infrastructure.

As Kamal Nath, commerce and industry minister, told the US-India Business Council in Washington D.C. on June 8, "You should rest assured that there will be a host of privatisation opportunities for you."

4. Yet further sell-out to the WTO

Geneva deal: In July, the UPA government concluded a framework at Geneva with the imperialist countries for a WTO agreement. This was trumpeted by Kamal Nath as a great victory for India. In fact it was one

more traitorous sell-out.

According to the agreement, while the imperialist countries have promised to phase out their agricultural subsidies, no time-frame is provided for implementation. More to the point, however, the imperialist countries anyway get to maintain their bloated agricultural subsidies by re-classifying them as “Green Box” and “Blue Box” payments to farmers (Green Box payments are supposedly not targeted at particular products; they include direct payments to farmers. Blue Box payments are subsidies given to farmers supposedly to limit production. In fact both of these are merely labels, under which the imperialist countries can continue to provide subsidies.) If even these do not suffice to protect their domestic agriculture, the imperialist countries have the freedom to restrict “sensitive” imports – the US dept of agriculture has assured the American Sugar Alliance that sugar would very likely be designated as a “sensitive” product.

In the words of US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick: “The new global trade agreement protects US farm subsidies when prices for wheat, corn and soybeans drop.... A pledge by the US to reduce farm subsidies by 20 per cent won’t undercut the payments Congress promised in a \$125 billion bill in 2002. This reduction will not weaken our ability to support our farmers.” US chief agriculture negotiator Allen Johnson put it even more bluntly: “The United States succeeded in shifting farm subsidies to a new WTO category to avoid actual reductions”. (D. Sharma, *Business Standard*, September 20, 2004) The new framework has been welcomed by a group of US companies, including Monsanto.

While the imperialist countries are free to continue subsidies, the third world countries will have to reduce subsidies, except to a narrow section of “resource-poor” farmers. Moreover, third world countries will have to reduce their import tariffs on agricultural and industrial goods.

All this is part of a calculated imperialist plan to protect their own agricultural production with subsidies, even as they cripple the agriculture of the third world and create food shortages. This crippling is accompanied by opening the third world further to agricultural imports from the imperialist countries. In sum, the plan is to sieze the food markets of these countries. The Indian rulers have affixed their thumbprint to this plan.

Patent Ordinance: Further, in their eagerness to prove their faithfulness to the imperialist-dominated WTO, the UPA government issued an ordinance to amend the Indian Patent Act before the deadline of January 1, 2005. The Common Minimum Programme of the UPA government, which the CPI and CPI(M) uphold, clearly states in regard to the WTO that “Commitments made earlier will be adhered to, even as efforts are mounted to ensure that all agreements reflect our concerns fully”. Given this, the ‘Left’ parties could only complain that the government went even further, and did not make use of such flexibility as remained in the WTO agreement on patents (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights, or TRIPs). They could at no point make the genuine national demand, namely, that the UPA government *withdraw the country from the WTO*.

Yet the CPI-CPI(M) objections do reveal the extent of the servility of the UPA government, as the NDA government before it, to imperialist interests. Let us briefly recall the history here. In 1994, the Congress rulers signed the Marrakesh treaty making the country part of the World Trade Organisation. Among the agreements signed at the time was regarding so-called Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs). The life of patents (that is, monopoly rights over, and the right to charge a rent for, the use of an innovation) was extended from seven years to 20. The signatories to the TRIPs agreement would have to introduce not merely “process” patents (which covered only the particular method of making a product, and allowed other methods of making the same product). Now “product” patents too had to be allowed, which covered the very product itself, by whatever means it may be made. And patents were to be allowed for food, agriculture and medicines as well, which had earlier been barred because they so directly conflicted with public welfare. There is scope opened up for patenting even life forms occurring in nature. All these changes enormously increased the monopoly power of the patent-holders, that is, not the innovators themselves (the scientists or technologists), but the giant corporations which owned the patents.

Developing countries were to shift to this regime over the course of the ten years ending December 31, 2004. Accordingly, India amended its Patent Act of 1970 twice under the NDA (in 1999 and 2002), and now under the UPA (December 2004). Although it is only in the last amend-

ment that product patents are introduced, the government took two measures in 1994 itself: first, monopoly Exclusive Marketing Rights for patent-holders to introduce new products here; second, a "mailbox" facility, whereby patent applications would be filed with the Indian patent office pending the introduction of product patents in January 2005. With the introduction of product patents, the applications in the mailbox would be examined and either awarded or denied patents.

In the interim, great discontent has been brewing in the third world at the TRIPS agreement. The sparking point was the question of drugs for HIV-AIDS, which has devastated Africa worst of all. Drug multinationals from the imperialist countries held patents to a number of medications to treat HIV-AIDS, but would sell it only at \$10-12,000 (Rs 4.5-5.4 lakh) per patient per year. However, Indian firms such as Cipla were able to duplicate the entire cocktail of such drugs and were willing to sell them at \$140 (Rs 6,300 per year), while making a profit. This was possible because product patents did not as yet exist in India. Such extraordinary profiteering by the multinationals evoked widespread resentment, and put even the comprador rulers of these third world countries under pressure. As a result, at the Doha meet of the WTO in 2001, they pressed for, and obtained, a statement to the effect that the TRIPS agreement does not and should not prevent members from taking measures to protect public health and promote access to medicines for all. This was trumpeted as a major victory, and indeed it provided some small opportunities *if the regime were interested in availing of them*. However, both the NDA and UPA governments have discarded those opportunities and gone further, confirming once again that it is not the formal position that matters but the real imperialist domination.

1) In the new Ordinance, drafted by the NDA government and issued by the UPA government, there is no provision to compel a patent monopolist to actually manufacture his product in India; he can merely patent the drug here and continue to import it.

2) Whereas other WTO member countries have limited the rate of royalty extracted at the patent monopolist to four per cent, the UPA ordinance places no such limit.

3) Export of products being manufactured here under licence from for-

eign firms is not allowed, even to desperately poor third world countries without the manufacturing capability. A separate licence from the patent monopolist will have to be obtained. The relevance of this provision becomes clear in the light of the earlier example of HIV-AIDS drugs.

4) There are no clear provisions to ensure that only genuine innovations are given patents, so all sorts of formulations, combinations and minor changes might get patented, creating a maze of patent monopolies. There are ample indications that such preparations has been carried out by the multinationals. Despite the fact that there has been a slowdown in the number of new drugs developed in the last decade, and less than 500 drugs were given Exclusive Marketing Rights between 1995 and 2004, the government now says there are *12,000* applications piled up in the mailbox, overwhelmingly filed by foreigners. It is evident that the vast majority must be frivolous, and there will be a flood of litigation, for which Indian firms and consumers will be ill-equipped, but in which the multinationals will thrive.

5) Provisions for objecting *prior* to the award of a patent have been diluted. The objection is merely taken on record, and the objector is not made a party to the proceedings; moreover the grounds for such opposition have been narrowed.

6) The amendment made by the NDA regime in 2002 allows for patenting of microorganisms and microbiological processes. However, since 1999 the WTO is to have reviewed this question, and has not yet done so; this offered scope for the UPA government to have stopped such patenting till the completion of the review. It did not do so.*

The over-eagerness of the UPA regime to please the imperialists caused the 'Left' some embarrassment. It needed to distance itself from the amendment while continuing to support the government (thus rendering its 'opposition' meaningless). The government, for its part, needed to allow the CPI(M) some honourable way of recording its dissent and preserving its fig-leaf. Indeed the method adopted by the UPA – avoiding a discussion in parliament, and merely issuing the amendment as an ordinance – saved CPI(M) the blushes.

* The new amendment has also allowed for patenting of embedded computer software, a step for which Microsoft has been lobbying.

The CPI(M) at first demanded that the government not pass the measure "hastily", but refer the question to a parliamentary committee for discussion. Later, after consultations with the government, it dropped this demand, and restricted itself to submitting three notes criticising different aspects of the proposed amendment. Kamal Nath magnanimously allowed the CPI(M) to have its point of view, as long as it was of no consequence: "Like every party, the Left is entitled to its point of view. We have had consultations with the Left. They have made their suggestions to us in writing."

The government ignored all the CPI(M)'s notes, ignored parliament itself, and issued the amendment as an ordinance on December 27.

The immediate effect of the ordinance may be muted, but will become evident over the space of about two years, as patents are granted on the pending applications. It is reported that at the outset drugs worth about Rs 3,000 crore, or 15 per cent of the market, will come under patent protection. (For example, a drug for chronic myeloid leukemia, for which the Swiss firm Novartis holds the international patent and markets under the brandname Gleevec, costs Rs 1.2 lakh per month abroad; its Indian generic version costs Rs 9,000 to 12,000 per month.) However, as drugs for which the patent has expired are withdrawn from the market, and patented drugs are introduced in their place, the effect will be much wider. As lives of lakhs of Indian people are destroyed by the WTO, they must identify the criminals through whom this was implemented – the NDA which carried out the earlier amendments and drafted the latest amendment, the UPA which issued the latest amendment as an ordinance, and the 'Left' which played out a mock-drama of opposition.

5. Anti-people Budget

Chidambaram has presented a Budget almost identical to the NDA interim budget, with a paltry Rs 12,000 crore towards additional expenditure on welfare and agriculture.

Employment: There is an actual cut in spending on rural employment schemes. With much fanfare it was announced that a national employment guarantee scheme would be set up to provide 100 days' employment to the rural poor (any person not provided employment on demand

would be entitled to a dole). However, the eventual draft of the Employment Guarantee Act extends the scheme to only 150 districts, and puts off the extension of the scheme to the rest of the country to the indefinite future. Moreover, it does not provide for payment of minimum wages. Crucially, its extension is to be restricted to those officially recognised as poor. In effect, even in the few regions selected for the implementation of the scheme, the majority will be weeded out by the need to be certified as "poor" (as if any but the poor would sign up for work on rural employment works!). And finally, the provision of work is to be contingent on the poor "demanding" employment. This last condition makes a final mockery of the scheme, for it is near-impossible for the *unorganised* rural poor to insist upon getting employment and, in its absence, force the panchayat officials to pay them a dole.

Agriculture: At the time of the formation of the UPA government the CPI and CPI(M) spent much energy in discussing the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA. Thereafter they constantly waved this piece of paper as their alibi for supporting the current regime. If we ignore for a moment the numerous provisions in the CMP laying the basis for *anti-national* policies, the *rest* of the grand document has *nothing* to do with actual policies of the government. Agriculture enjoys pride of place in the CMP: rural investment, agricultural extension activities, rural credit, dryland farming, wasteland development, protection from imports, remunerative prices – all find a place. However, within two months of the CMP, the Budget has *frozen* expenditure on almost all heads relating to agriculture at the same level as the NDA government. This has been done even as the agricultural crisis is so grave that thousands of peasants are being driven to suicide.

Weapons: Meanwhile the Budget provides for an *additional* Rs 11,000 crore in armaments purchases, to fill the coffers of arms merchants from Russia, Israel, France, the U.K., and so on.

Armed forces and foreign policy

Further subjugation to US imperialist interests

Under the Vajpayee regime the domination of US imperialism in India's

military and foreign policy has grown sharply.

“Next Steps in Strategic Partnership”: The most prominent expression of this was the January 13, 2004 joint declaration by Bush and Vajpayee of the programme “Next Steps in Strategic Partnership” (NSSP) between the two countries. This would cover “cooperation” in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space activities, high-technology trade and missile defence. That is, by implication, (i) the US would transfer to India various hitherto off-limits technologies, (ii) it would extend to India its umbrella of defence against missiles (in reality, it would involve India in its offensive targeting of China’s nuclear forces) and (iii) it would grant India the status of number one US flunkey in the region. While the Indian side could hardly restrain its enthusiasm at the announcement, the US side was low key, and merely demanded that India now submit to tighter US controls on its nuclear, space, and other high-technology programmes.

Joint exercises: In the last days of NDA rule the US and India also continued the series of joint military exercises they had begun in 2002. In February 2004 the two air forces held joint exercises at Gwalior; in April US troops trained at India’s counter-insurgency school in the jungles of Mizoram. While these exercises had obvious benefits for the US military, in case they ever wanted to fight alongside (or against) Indian forces in the future, they would have trivial benefits, if any, for the Indian military in its traditional tasks.

Ally of Zionist fascists: The period also saw increasingly intimate ties between India and the US’s most important military outpost Asia, namely, Israel. India had already imported a range of systems from Israel, including radars, sophisticated rifles, night vision goggles, laser equipment, sensors to detect infiltration across the Line of Control, and so on. Israeli troops were involved in training Indian troops in Kashmir in the counter-insurgency methods they use on Palestinians.

Suppressing Nepali people’s revolt: As footsoldiers in the US’s global “war against terrorism”, one of the Indian rulers’ important duties is to check “terrorism” in its vicinity. The most prominent local instance of what the US calls “terrorism” is the people’s armed revolt in Nepal. India has been assisting the decrepit Nepalese monarchy with all sorts of

help: Rs 400 crore in aid since 2001, including helicopters, machine guns, rifles, trucks, and ammunition, as well as training of the Royal Nepal Army at the counter-insurgency school in Mizoram. The US army also has a direct presence in Nepal, training troops and even taking part in certain operations, but it finds it convenient to sub-contract much of this work to India. (Of course, the Indian rulers have reasons of their own – namely, the need to suppress the revolutionary forces in India – for wanting the crushing of the Nepali masses’ revolt.)

Supporting the US occupation of Iraq: The Vajpayee regime would have liked to send Indian troops to Iraq in support of US imperialist occupation there, and it made noises to this effect, but it could not do so for fear of opposition by the Indian people, and fear of complete exposure as a US imperialist stooge. However, it took a number of surreptitious steps to lend its masters a hand. Most importantly, it allowed recruitment of Indians to serve the US army in Iraq in different capacities. Many of these persons were brought there under false pretences (eg told that they would be working in Kuwait or Jordan) and later were forced to work in Iraq under duress.

In all these respects, the Manmohan Singh regime has followed in the footsteps of the Vajpayee regime, and taken a few steps further.

NSSP: Almost as soon as the new regime entered office, the Indo-US Defence Policy Group met, with the Indian defence secretary and the US undersecretary for defence heading the respective delegations. The missile defence programme was discussed. This was followed in September by a meeting of the Indo-US joint working group on counter-terrorism. A meeting between Manmohan Singh and George Bush in September explicitly reaffirmed the NSSP, and promised more to come, saying that with the completion of Phase I of the NSSP, it was time to move to Phase II. The talks on Phase II began in October in New Delhi with two high-level visitors from the US. The US and India refused to disclose the content of the talks on missile defence.

Joint exercises: The series of joint exercises with the US armed forces continues. In July 2004 Indian Air Force Jaguar fighters participated in the Cape Thunder exercise in the US state of Alaska, along with other close military allies of the US. In October 2004 the Indian and US navies

held the joint naval exercise “Exercise Malabar 04” off the coast of Goa. The series is to continue in 2005. In January 2005, the US President declared the setting up of a military mission to bring relief to the tsunami victims, consisting of the armed forces of the US, Australia, Japan and India – confirming the Indian rulers’ status as close ally.

Israel: Ties with Israel have become closer than ever. The vice-chief of army staff and the heads of the two other services have all visited Israel after the new government assumed office. Indo-Israeli trade (largely purchase of weapons by India) has reached \$2 billion, with Israel threatening to displace Russia as India’s main arms supplier; trade is projected to touch \$5 billion in the next three years. It is reported that the two air forces will even hold joint exercises next year. All programmes involving Israel started under the Vajpayee regime continue – Israeli forces training Indian forces in counter-insurgency in Kashmir, India providing use of the Mizoram school to Israeli forces, and so on. All this as the Zionist regime carries out fascistic drives against the Palestinians, killing their leaders, demolishing their houses, slaughtering their children, destroying their economy and seizing their land and water.

Nepal: As the new External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh’s first trip abroad was to Kathmandu, on June 4 – almost as soon as he assumed office. He met the King, the prime minister, and the chief of army staff. He told the press that the two sides had discussed “common concerns” and that they proposed to expand the ongoing military cooperation to include more counter-insurgency training and equipment, including weapons. The Nepali prime minister too visited India in September for the same purpose – as the two sides put it, combating the “scourge of terrorism”. After the UPA government assumed office, the Nepalese chief of army staff has made three trips to New Delhi for more equipment and training. The National Security Advisor, J.N. Dixit, even embarrassed the Nepalese rulers by making plans for India to air-drop supplies to Kathmandu to overcome the blockade of that city by the Maoists – when no such help was requested by the Nepalese government. On January 20, 2005 the two countries signed a revised treaty for extradition and mutual legal assistance on “criminal matters” (ie “Left-wing extremism”). India is to provide counter-insurgency training to the Nepal police.

Iraq: From its inception, the UPA government took the stand that it “welcome(d) adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1546 as a first step in restoring sovereignty to the Iraqi people, leading to stability and reconstruction” – in other words, it backed the US puppet regime in Baghdad. However, it knew that Indian public opinion is overwhelmingly against the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Natwar Singh in fact promised that India would take a “new look” at sending troops to Iraq to back the puppet regime, but he retracted his statement in the face of adverse public opinion and anxious cries from the CPI(M). Further, even in the face of the kidnapping of two Indians in Iraq, the UPA government refused to ban travel to Iraq, refused to compel the return of Indians working there for the US, and failed to even protest the US holding Indian workers there against their will. By November, official statements of the UPA mentioned Iraq as already enjoying “full sovereignty”, and explicitly supported the “Interim Government of Iraq” which is maintained solely with US troops. As a token of its support, the Manmohan Singh government is willing to train Iraqi government servants in how to conduct elections.

So confident is the US of its sway over the Indian rulers that, after the bomb blasts in Assam and Nagaland in October 2004, the US ambassador wrote directly to the chief minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi to offer the help of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in investigating the matter. Instead of protesting this interference with Indian sovereignty, the Union home minister merely called it a “gesture” of help. Nor has the UPA regime been able to make even token protests regarding various other American infringements of Indian sovereignty – the spy scandal in which a senior Indian intelligence officer defected to the US, the US’s transport of weapons to Nepal through Indian airports without informing India, the sanctions placed by the US on Indian scientists on false grounds, and so on.

Such is the pathetic condition of the Indian ruling classes, servants of imperialism. Such is the sham of Indian parliamentary democracy – a change in the faces at the top, while the pro-imperialist policies continue, even intensify, without a break.

January 2005

Red Salute to Comrade Ramalingachari!

The following is a translation of a Telugu leaflet released by the Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari Memorial Committee.

Dear people and comrades!

Builder of the Srikakulam Girijan Peasant Movement, Communist revolutionary leader, and an associate member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Reorganisation Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist), Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari had a massive heart attack and became a martyr in the early hours (3.45 a.m.) of 24th November, 2003. Throughout his political life, Comrade Ramalingachari endeavoured to abide by Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse Tung Thought, and to practice it continuously.

Comrade Ramalingachari was born to Shri Vasantada Mallayyachari and Smt Ramayamma in Vizianagaram on December 21, 1929. He studied upto SSLC in Kaspera High School in Vizianagaram. He was the second of four brothers, and took inspiration from his elder brother, who had already introduced Communist Party features into the family. His elder brother, in his student days, was active in the student movement. During the period in which his elder brother was in government service in West Godavari district, Comrade Ramalingachari came into contact with the communist leaders of the Telangana Peasant Revolutionary Movement. Inspired by the discussions he had with them and by the literature he got through them, Comrade Ramalingachari came to the firm resolve to lead his life as a communist. He started to work as a full time cadre of the Communist Party since 1952 and undertook leadership responsibilities at different levels during his more than five decade-long revolutionary life.

Comrade Ramalingachari imbibed the experiences of the great



Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari, 1929-2003

Telangana peasant struggle that raged against the cruelties of the Nizam rulers and the then Hyderabad feudal estate and that established village soviets in 3,500 villages by defeating the Nizam government and the Indian state machinery. With such revolutionary orientation, Comrade Ramalingachari, while working in the CPI, shifted from Vizianagaram which was then in Vishakhapatnam district, to the erstwhile Srikakulam district in 1953. Initially he worked for party building in Bobbili taluka (tehsil or division). Subsequently he played an important role in developing the communist revolutionary political practice and communist revolutionary organisational forces in the Bhadravari Agency area and in the teachers', youth, student and agricultural labour fronts in the North Andhra plains areas. In this, particularly the efforts made in the teachers' front had played a significant role in the development of the Girijan movement with a revolutionary perspective. He carried out the leadership responsibilities as the secretary of the Srikakulam district committee for about 10 years — during the later period of the CPI, during the period of the CPI(M) after the CPI split, and after the Communist Revolutionaries broke off from the CPI(M) — till 1968.

During the periods of the CPI and the CPI(M), Comrade Ramalingachari, as the Secretary of the district committee, while playing a notable role in the inner-party struggle against revisionism and neo-revisionism, had played a crucial role in developing the Srikakulam Girijan peasant movement on revolutionary lines, and in moulding those struggling people into a revolutionary political force, by combining Marxist-Leninist understanding with the revolutionary practice in the sphere of movement building. With such revolutionary practice, he made serious efforts to progressively advance the Srikakulam Girijan peasant struggle in such a way that it could loosen the grip of the most cruel feudal exploitative classes on the social life of the Girijans and raise to the level of confronting even the attacks of the state machinery, with an agrarian revolutionary perspective and practice. That is why, even though the state could succeed in temporarily suppressing the movement by unleashing the most autocratic and barbaric repression, throwing thousands of Girijans into jails and killing more than three hundred communist revolutionary cadre and Girijan movement cadre, that struggle left an indelible imprint on the minds of the Girijans even today and took an eternal

place in history as the Great Srikakulam Movement.

Having opposed revisionism and neo-revisionism from the beginning and standing firmly on the side of the communist revolutionary line, Comrade Ramalingachari became a state committee member of the Andhra Pradesh Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (APCCCR), after the communist revolutionaries broke off from the CPI(M). During this period, while making efforts to develop the Srikakulam movement to a still higher level, he played his due role for the unification of the communist revolutionary forces on the basis of a correct communist revolutionary line. With the developments that took place in this period with regard to the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), after the APCCCR was expelled unilaterally by the AICCCR led by Comrade Charu Mazumdar towards the end of 1968, during 1969-75, Comrade Ramalingachari discharged his responsibilities as the state committee member of the Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee (APRCC) that was formed in 1969 under the leadership of Comrades TN and DV. After the Srikakulam movement succumbed to left adventurism, Comrade Ramalingachari made special efforts towards building a Girijan peasant movement in Kondamodalu Agency area of East Godavari district. Subsequently, in the unity process of communist revolutionaries, when the Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (M-L) — UCCRI(ML) — was formed in 1975, Comrade Ramalingachari took up the responsibilities of the Secretary of the AP State Committee of that organisation and in that capacity strove to develop the movement and the party organisation in different parts of the state till 1977.

Due to the Hyderabad conspiracy case and the Parvatipuram conspiracy case foisted by the government on the communist revolutionaries towards the end of 1969 and in 1970, along with Comrade Tarimela Nagi Reddy and other communist revolutionaries, Comrade Ramalingachari led a prison life for about three years. In the context of these conspiracy cases, Comrade Ramalingachari gave a statement in the Hyderabad Additional Sessions Court in December 1971. This statement expounded the conditions of the Girijans, the development of the Girijan movement and its significance, while exposing the ruling classes' policies and conspiracies. To date it is in use as a valuable document on

the Srikakulam movement for all the communist revolutionaries. Similarly, the document "Leadership's criticism regarding the resolution of the Regional Committee" drafted by Comrade Ramalingachari in the context of discussions on the experiences of the Srikakulam peasant revolutionary struggle in the years 1970-72, is useful even today, as it helped to understand, with a correct perspective, the serious mistakes that occurred then, and gave an understanding of the political policy and practice to be followed in accordance with the tactical line of the present stage of the revolution. Comrade Ramalingachari was engrossed in revolutionary activities even while being on bail between 1972-75. Subsequently with the declaration of Emergency in 1975, he went underground and continuously pursued his revolutionary activities even while leading an underground life since then, till the time of his death.

Owing to the differences that cropped up in the then UCCRI(ML), Comrade Ramalingachari had disassociated from that organisation in 1977, and formed the "Andhra Pradesh Communist Revolutionaries' Organising Committee (APCROC)". Between 1978 and 1987, as the leader of the APCROC, even under conditions where he had to work almost single-handedly with very meagre resources and forces, Comrade Ramalingachari endeavoured to the best of his ability to develop communist revolutionary practice and communist revolutionary forces in different fronts, to struggle against the left and right deviations and for the unity of communist revolutionaries. As part of this endeavour, he brought out such ideological-political literature as, "Naxalism does not mean individual annihilation and it is not Marxism to oppose Naxalism in the name of (opposing) individual annihilation", "Problems of unification and organisational tasks being faced by communist revolutionaries", and so on, and so forth.

In the course of the struggle for the principled unity of the Communist Revolutionaries, five communist revolutionary organisations, including the APCROC, merged to form the Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist) – CCRI(ML) – in 1988 and Comrade Ramalingachari carried out his responsibilities as a member of the Central Committee of that organisation from 1988 to 1995. Subsequently after the emergence of the Communist Party Re-organisation Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist) — CPRCI(ML) — with the merger of CCRI

and three other communist revolutionary organisations in 1995, Comrade Ramalingachari carried out his responsibilities as an associate member of the Central Committee of that organisation till the end of his revolutionary life. Throughout this period and till his last breath, he tried to help the political-organisational development of these all-India organisations with his experiences and views formed in the course of revolutionary practice, to the best of his ability. Particularly he made a serious effort to sustain the revolutionary seeds in the regions of the erstwhile Srikakulam movement and to rebuild that movement. In the conditions where the communist revolutionary forces are segregated as separate organisations, whatever be the leadership under which the people rallied in struggle on their economic, social and political problems, Comrade Ramalingachari responded to those struggling people with an ardent sense of revolutionary responsibility, by giving necessary suggestions and taking prompt steps. In those situations he made necessary political efforts to analyse those peoples' problems in the light of the revolutionary mass line and help those struggling masses to advance in the revolutionary practice in such a way that they can repulse the ruling classes' exploitation and atrocities and can confront the state machinery. Even while critically pointing out the weaknesses and defects manifesting in the struggle policies of the concerned leaderships of those struggles, on the basis of the experience of the people's revolutionary practice, he used to motivate and mobilise the organisational forces he was leading into action to build solidarity to those struggles. It is as a part of the political effort he made to develop the organisational forces and revolutionary practice here, with such high revolutionary standards, that the booklet "Political Situation of Vizianagaram-Srikakulam Districts and the Necessity of the Communist Revolutionary Political Force", the magazine *Diksuchi*, and various leaflets on different struggle-occasions were published.

With a view that wrong trends are responsible for the failures and weaknesses that are hampering the proper emergence and shaping of the communist revolutionary political force that can affect the revolutionary social transformation, and holding that these wrong trends have taken deep roots, Comrade Ramalingachari waged a consistent struggle against those trends. Observing the ever-intensifying objective revolutionary conditions in accordance with the state of the Indian society un-

der the impact of the changes occurring owing to the ruling classes' political policies and the Indian state's measures, Comrade Ramalingachari used to express deep anxiety that the communist revolutionary practice that is so necessary for making the people conscious and moulding them into a mighty revolutionary political force that can repulse the ruling class attacks and take on the might of the state machinery in the course of building revolutionary struggles, is lagging behind. Feeling that a serious struggle is inevitable for the development and consolidation of the practice-oriented communist revolutionary force that is necessary for firmly establishing such communist practice, Comrade Ramalingachari made serious efforts till his last breath to help the inner organisational forces as well as the forces outside the organisation to proceed towards that end. It is in the course of making such political efforts in various forms according to different situations that Comrade Ramalingachari became a martyr. The only true homage that could be paid to such a comrade as Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari, would be that of relentlessly striving to fulfill the ideals for which he devoted his whole life. All communist revolutionary forces should take a pledge to that effect.

All those who want to be devoted to the cause of revolutionary social transformation:

1. Be steadfast in upholding the standpoint of dialectical-historical materialism.
2. Be steadfast in the struggle against the offensive attacks being unleashed on Marxism, the proletarian world outlook.
3. Be steadfast participants in the decisive people's revolutionary practice for the revolutionary social transformation.

Memorial meeting:

Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari Memorial Meeting will be held on 14-12-2003 from 10.00 a.m. onwards, in Bobbili town of Vizianagaram district in Andhra Pradesh.

Date: 6.12.2003.

With revolutionary greetings,

Comrade Vasantada Ramalingachari Memorial Committee.

Memorial Message from Central Committee, CPRCI(ML)

The following message was read out at the memorial meeting

Comrades and friends,

On behalf of the Central Committee, we join all of you who have gathered here to pay respects to the veteran revolutionary comrade V. Ramalingachari (also known as "Chandrashekhar"). His highly purposeful life as devoted to the proletarian revolutionary cause came to a sudden end on November 24 2003 at the age of 74 years. Since the year 1988, he has been a part of the central leadership first of the CCRI and later on of the CPRCI(ML). His life of a steadfast communist revolutionary throughout has been a source of strength not only to us but also to other communist revolutionaries and people who have got some association with him. We share with all of you the sense of loss on the expiration of such a live-source of revolutionary strength.

At the fag end of his life, com. Ramalingachari's persisting ill-health has been a severe constraint on his movements and organisational activities. Still, that could not dampen his intense revolutionary concern and ideological-political effort. He remained thus engaged till his last breath in promoting Bolshevik orientation and conduct among communist revolutionary forces, against the opportunist deviations and influences.

Of all his revolutionary qualities, the singleness of purpose and firmness of conviction constituted the hallmark of com. Ramalingachari's communist personality which commanded deference from one and all who worked with him in the revolutionary movement. He had unshakable confidence in the resurgence of the world proletarian revolution before long. He was as confident of the growing potential for renewal and unification of the Indian communist revolutionary movement through better grasp and application of Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse Tung Thought. Irrespective of the ebb and flow of revolutionary mass movement in any part of the country, he always banked on the inexhaustible revolutionary urge and talent of the oppressed masses of Indian people. This ideological confidence recharged his stamina for fulfilling with zeal his revolutionary responsibility till his last breath.

No doubt, com. Ramalingachari maintained the line-based loyalty to

our organisation, the CPRCI(ML), as the most consistent flag-bearer of the correct trend in the communist revolutionary camp in India. He never entertained any sectarian organisational thinking. Rather, he always visualised genuine communist forces in different circumstances and organisational formations to be striving to struggle against opportunist deviations or influences and to embrace or uphold the proletarian revolutionary line and orientation. Hence his deeply-felt sense of belonging to all such forces, wherever they are struggling to reorganise the Party and advance the revolution.

Owing to historical-political reasons and his own political background, comrade Ramalingachari had a special relationship with the Girijan masses of Bhadravari Agency area in the old Srikakulam district and with the workers of Bobbili town. Even so, he never entertained any parochial thinking and he would immediately identify himself with the revolutionary mass movement wherever he perceived it to be taking shape.

Comrade Ramalingachari had a solid political orientation of pursuing the mass line with its revolutionary content. At every step of building a revolutionary mass movement, he would emphasise always to grasp its two cardinal aspects: The role of the State and the role of revolutionary practice of the concerned masses of people. Thus, he contributed to sharpen the features of our party-organisation's mass-line orientation.

Comrade Ramalingachari is physically no more among us now but his dedicated life and revolutionary qualities will always remain a source of revolutionary strength and inspiration for us. We bow the red flag as a mark of respect to his memorable service to the revolutionary cause and to his lasting memory.

December 14, 2003

S. Pratap,
Secretary, Central Committee
CPRCI(ML)

Punjab

A Peasant Struggle Integrated with the Election-Period Exposure Campaign

-- by a correspondent

During the last parliamentary elections (May 2004), a Joint Peasant Platform (JPP) in Punjab successfully launched a campaign of about 10 weeks of exposure and struggle. This campaign included massive mobilisations and a number of mass militant actions. In one incident the police staged a bloody attack on the peasants, and the peasants replied with successful mass resistance. A young peasant was martyred; about 150 peasants and many policemen were injured. As a result of all these developments, the government was compelled to reach an agreement with the JPP and to fulfill some of the peasants' pressing demands. While this victory was in itself impressive, even more significant was the expression of the heightened political consciousness of the peasants.

The JPP effectively implemented its stand on parliamentary elections. This stand of the JPP is as follows: to organise a propaganda and agitation campaign during elections to expose the anti-peasant character and role of all parliamentary parties; to project demands of the peasants; and to exhort them to rely on their own organised fighting strength and organisation to protect and promote their interests, and not look to the government of this or that parliamentary party. It is the integration of the election-exposure campaign with the struggle that can enhance the effectiveness of both.

The JPP has evolved through a period of joint activities by two militant peasant organisations. One is Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan),

which evolved out of BKU (Ekta) through a long process of realignment against the opportunist dominant leadership of that organisation. It is identified by the name of its president, Joginder Singh Ugrahan. (Hereafter, we will refer to it as BKU (E-U).) The second constituent of the JPP is the Kisan Sangharsh Committee (KSC), a militant organisation based mainly in the border district of Amritsar.

The JPP has totally rejected the stand taken by some opportunist peasant organisations wedded to parliamentary politics, such as the BKU (Lakhowal) and BKU (Rajewal). The leaders of such organisations vociferously pose as champions of interests of the peasantry, and from time to time organise rallies and demonstrations against the ruling party and the government of the day. But they then invariably strike a deal with, and climb onto the election bandwagon of, one or the other ruling class party such as the Akali Dal or Congress during the assembly and parliamentary elections.

The JPP has also differentiated itself from those peasant organisations that try to take up struggles before and after the elections but avoid such attempts during the election period. The leaders of such organisations say that during the election period the attention of the people is focused on the elections and they cannot be mobilised for struggles. Moreover, the government authorities, being under the code of conduct imposed by the election commission, cannot be forced to concede any demands during the election period.

By contrast, the leadership of the JPP thinks that the election period is rather more favourable for the promotion of the interests and movement of the peasants. For in the election atmosphere peasants (and all other people) are more amenable to propaganda and education regarding their real interests, demands and issues. Therefore during this period one should seriously strive to project the peasants' demands and issues, rouse the peasants and sharpen their consciousness about these demands and issues, and mobilise them into struggles regarding their pressing demands.

During the election period, the leadership of the ruling party is more amenable to the pressure of the struggles, failing which they might immediately pay the price in electoral defeats. Therefore, the government is less likely to unleash repression with impunity to suppress the struggles.

At the same time, the opposition parties are more interested to support the struggles (on partial pressing demands), depending on their electoral considerations. Thus a more favourable situation exists during elections for utilising the contradictions among the ruling class parties for the promotion of the peasant movement.

Assessment of the concrete situation

Based on this general understanding the leadership of the JPP made a broad assessment of the concrete political situation at the time of the elections, which was as follows:

The Congress government of Maharaja Amrinder Singh aspires to project itself as the champion of the New Economic Policy to earn the goodwill of the World Bank and other imperialist agencies. The Government has been isolated from all sections of the people due to its consistent anti-people policies — such as revoking the provision of free electricity and free canal water to the peasants, stopping old age pension, manifold increase in fees of colleges and universities, increase in user charges, stopping of recruitment for government jobs, and hectic attempts at privatisation of the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB).

Although this government is on the track of confrontation with the peasants and other sections of the people and repression of their struggles, it is riddled with internal rifts and squabbles. Its parliamentary rivals (Akali Dal, BJP) are on the offensive and are determined to catch it on the wrong foot and fully exploit each and every difficulty. Therefore it is less likely that the ruling party, being in such a politically fragile condition, would dare take the risk of electoral losses by unleashing severe repression against the peasant movement. Moreover, the Congress's electoral allies (CPI, CPI-M) would try to pressurise it in favour of working out a compromise of some sort with the peasant leadership.

The peasant organisations under the leadership of the JPP are well prepared to face a moderate-level repression. For the peasantry, particularly the poor peasantry, is deeply resentful towards the Congress government. The JPP, under these circumstances, would emerge as a representative of the feelings, urges and voice of the peasantry and broad sections of the peasantry would respond very favourably.

So it was an opportune situation to advance the peasant struggle with

gusto to assert with the government and to get some of the demands accepted. An exposure and struggle campaign was planned according to this assessment of the political situation. The ranks of the JPP were equipped with this assessment as well as with the plan of the campaign and the possible outcome of the struggle. BKU (Ekta) called a state-level meeting of its activists for this purpose, which was attended by about 400 activists and leaders. KSC fulfilled this task in its own way through mass meetings and conferences of the peasants. Thus peasant leaders and activists, equipped with an assessment of the overall situation and its potential for a successful struggle initiated this campaign with enthusiasm and self-confidence. The JPP issued a leaflet describing the critical situation of the peasantry, the reasons behind it and the way out of it. This leaflet was fully utilised for initiating the campaign.

First round of the campaign: struggle-centre at Patiala

In this round Patiala was to be made a centre of propaganda and struggle for a limited period (about a week). This city was chosen for this purpose because it houses the head office of the PSEB, against which the peasants have many grievances, as well as the residential palace of the Chief Minister, the frequent venue of protest demonstrations of the people. The JPP declared that the main purpose of this week-long campaign at Patiala was the projection of the demands of the peasants.

The first round of campaign (from February 22 to February 29) was most successful in achieving its main purpose. After reaching Patiala, the demands were projected not merely through rallies and demonstrations but also through a series of struggle actions, ie actions of collective assertion against the administration. The very first act that gave a continuous and sharp pinch to the district administration was the complete occupation of the 1.5 km-long stretch of the main arterial road of the city, which is normally most busy with traffic. This road was occupied for eight days by about 3,000 peasants. This road, the Mall, links the railway station, the bus stand, the state head office of the PSEB, the civil courts, the district and divisional offices of almost all the departments as well as the medical college and hospital. The Mall looked like a battle camp of peasant fighters, with scenes of numerous make-shift kitchens, dozens

of vehicles decorated with flags and banners parked here and there and a big conference tent in the middle of the road. The administration had never allowed the full blocking of it for even a full day. But this time they had to bear with this bitter reality for eight full days. The occupation of this road remained the talk of the town and of the press for all those days.

A series of militant actions

From February 23 onwards, almost every day there was a militant demonstration concluding in the form of one or the other militant action, eg. gherao of the head office of the PSEB for three hours, not allowing anyone to enter it in the morning; gherao and complete blockade of the main bus stand for two hours; gherao of the railway station and blockade of rail traffic for four hours; and, the next day, blocking rail traffic for eight hours.

These continuous militant demonstrations and militant actions, daily pricking the rulers' arrogance, mounted increasing pressure on the government to get rid of this awkward situation. At the same time, these actions every day gave a new fillip to the peasants' confidence in their collective fighting strength and in their collective assertion of their will against the rulers. The demands of the peasants also got increasing projection in the press due to these militant actions.

An impressive show of solidarity

February 26 presented an impressive show of struggle solidarity of peasants and electricity technical workers, along with some other sections of the people. The electricity employees had gone through a state-wide strike on February 24 against the privatisation of the PSEB and for some other demands. The peasants struggling at Patiala had at that time gheraoed the head office of PSEB for three hours to express their solidarity with the struggling electricity employees. Now, as a fraternal response, more than 2,000 electricity technical workers under the leadership of Technical Services Union (TSU) reached Patiala on February 26 to express their struggling unity with the peasants. (Till recently, the top leadership of the TSU was an opportunist one owing allegiance to a breakaway group of CPI-M; however, recently the organisation had freed itself from this opportunist leadership through a long and protracted pro-

cess, and realigned itself as a progressive and militant organisation.)

Apart from TSU some other organisations of electricity employees also came to show their solidarity through a token participation in the rally and march of the peasants. Significantly, these were in fact the front organisations of the very ruling class parties which are opposed to the leadership and orientation of BKU (E-U). The projection and impact of this struggle at Patiala forced the leadership of even these organisations to come to show solidarity with the peasants.

In addition to this massive participation of electricity employees there was a token participation of students under the leadership of Punjab Students Union (Shaheed Randhawa), agricultural labourers under the leadership of Punjab Khet Majdoor Union, the Patiala district unit of Punjab Milkmen Union, and a group of 100 women peasants in solidarity with the struggling peasants. After a massive rally in front of the head office of PSEB this gathering marched towards the palace of the Chief Minister. A *jagrata* was held at night at the door of the residence of the chairman of the PSEB. (A *jagrata* is a traditional form, where anti-authority songs are sung the whole night before the house of the target of the struggle to keep him awake and disturbed throughout the night.)

Rounds of negotiations

As already mentioned, the series of militant actions one after the other, and the continuous projection of the struggle in the press, kept creating a more and more disturbing situation for the government authorities. They had only two ways out. One was to suppress the struggle with force. This was a very difficult option for them. Because, seeing the anger, fighting mood and strength of the peasants, mild use of force would not suffice to disperse the peasants; on the other hand, the political costs of wholesale repression, resulting in bloodshed, seemed prohibitive, especially with parliamentary elections in the offing. The other option was to negotiate and arrive at a compromise with the peasants. This too was difficult. Because the government authorities did not in fact intend to concede any significant demands involving considerable financial obligations on the part of the Punjab government. However the government made three efforts to defuse the situation through negotiations.

On February 24, when the peasants encircled the head office of the

PSEB and did not allow any employee or officer to enter the office, the secretary of the PSEB (an IAS officer) met the peasant leadership and proposed an immediate meeting with the chairman of the PSEB for negotiating demands concerning the electricity board. She also promised to arrange their meeting with the Chief Minister. The negotiations with the chairman of the PSEB proved to be futile as the ultimate authority for conceding any demand of consequence, even concerning electricity, rested with the Chief Minister.

Again on February 26, when the peasant leadership was leading a march of thousands of peasants, electricity employees and some other sections of people, they got a message from the government that the irrigation minister and the chairman of the marketing board (of cabinet rank) were waiting to negotiate with the peasant leadership on behalf of the Chief Minister. The peasant leaders were urged to see the ministers immediately as they had squeezed a little time out of their busy schedule to come to Patiala for negotiations. However, the peasant leaders did not go to meet the ministers until the conclusion of their march to the palace of the Chief Minister. At the end of their march the peasants' leaders, while going for negotiations, declared from the stage that they did not expect any positive outcome of the negotiations for which they were going. They said that after some discussions the government would postpone the negotiations under the pretext of the election code of conduct and would declare that negotiations were held in a cordial atmosphere and that peasants should end their struggle. The result of the negotiations was exactly as expected and declared by the peasant leadership. Till that time the Chief Minister had been avoiding inviting the peasant leadership for negotiations for whatever reasons. But when they adopted the form of rail-roko for four hours on one day and for eight hours on the next (February 29), disrupting the schedule of various trains, including some important long route trains, the impact of the struggle began to be felt far and wide, crossing the limits of the city. This direction of the struggle stepped up the pressure on the authorities and the Chief Minister was compelled to invite the peasant delegation for talks. The mere fact that the unwilling Chief Minister had to invite the peasant leadership for negotiations indicated his yielding to the collective fighting strength and will of the peasants, gave them a sense of partial victory; for the fact that the

peasant leaders had not been called by the Chief Minister had been made a point of prestige by the struggling peasants.

During the negotiations the Chief Minister postponed the fulfillment of important demands of the struggle under the pretext of the election code of conduct, though he conceded that the demands were justified. Even so, he promised to fulfill the following demands within 10 days:

— The arrears of the bills of electric tube wells would be settled once and for all. And the fee for load increase would be cut from Rs 4,200 to Rs 3,200. A meeting of the peasants' leadership with the chairman of the PSEB would be arranged after two days to negotiate other small demands concerning the electricity board.

— Orders would be immediately sent to withdraw all court cases registered against a large number of peasant leaders and activists during various past struggles.

— Payment of sugarcane arrears to the peasants by the sugar mills would be made time-bound.

— Arrests and attachment of properties of the debt defaulter peasants would be banned.

— If compensation is being given to the families of peasants committing suicide in other states, the same would be applied in Punjab (information regarding this fact was to be obtained).

Apart from these demands it was promised by the Chief Minister that a resolution by the Punjab assembly would be passed to demand that the central government not stop governmental purchase of agricultural products.

Although the Chief Minister's promise to fulfill the above demands was insufficient to declare the struggle fully successful, nor did the peasant leadership claim such success, yet the struggling peasants were upbeat as a result of the first round of their campaign. Because the main purpose of this round, namely to project the demands of the peasants, was satisfactorily achieved. And because such an action of collective assertion of the will of the struggling peasants expresses an advance of their organised fighting strength and determination, which they cherish as their gain and a promise of subsequent success.

Manawala episode: A fine example of militant mass resistance

The peasant leadership knew from their experience with the government that after acceptance of demands in principle as a result of a struggle, a further and still bigger struggle is required to compel the government to implement the accepted demands. So the Patiala struggle was a first round of a more militant struggle yet to come.

It was planned that the pitch of the exposure and struggle campaign should be raised corresponding to that of the election campaign of the parliamentary parties. The campaign should reach its climax in the period most sensitive for the electoral fortunes of the parliamentary parties.

It was imperative to expand and intensify the exposure and struggle campaign to mobilise the maximum possible mass opinion against all parliamentary political parties in general and the Congress government in particular before the climactic struggle action. So that such a situation could be created in which the ruling party was compelled either to concede some demands of the struggle or to pay a high political price if it chose to suppress the struggle with repression. As a next higher step of the campaign a call was given to block rail traffic at many places for four hours on March 24. A leaflet was distributed and posters were pasted in which all the important demands were projected. A new wave of big and small mass meetings, rallies and marches stepped up the campaign in widespread areas of the state. Giving concrete examples from a dialogue in the recent Patiala negotiation with the Congress ministers, the pro-imperialist and pro-usurer character of the ruling party was exposed. During the negotiations the irrigation minister had said, "We wanted to give free electricity to the peasants but the World Bank does not allow us to do so". The peasant leaders had raised the demand that the commission agents (the usurers) should be legally bound to issue passbooks (as bankers do) to the peasants, so that the cheating by the usurer commission agents in debt-accounting and illegal rates of interest imposed by them can be checked. The fulfilment of this demand requires no financial obligation on the part of the government. While discussing this demand, the minister said, "This demand cannot be fulfilled, because if it were, the whole financial business (usury) of the commission agents would collapse, since it is based on black money."

As a result of a vigorous exposure and mobilisation campaign, the

struggle action of March 24 was an impressive success. Rail traffic was blocked for four hours on ten main railway routes falling in nine districts. The news of this action got front-page coverage in almost all the vernacular newspapers in spite of their customary overload of news about the election campaign of the parliamentary parties.

After the rail-roko action of March 24, there was a problem in further stepping up the campaign. The first two weeks of April would be the peak period of harvesting and marketing of the wheat crop in the main areas of influence (Malwa region) of BKU (E-U). Therefore, there was little scope of engaging the peasants of these areas on a massive scale in any higher form of struggle activity and in countering the government offensive in case the authorities decided to suppress the struggle with force. So it neither seemed prudent to give a call for a struggle action of a level higher than that of the March 24 action, nor was it appropriate to have a break or slowdown in the momentum of the campaign.

This problem was solved to the possible extent by giving a call to block rail traffic on only one rail-route in Amritsar district on March 29. The wheat crop in this region (the Majha region) was late in ripening for harvesting. Therefore, the peasants of this region would not be engaged in harvesting and marketing their crops in the first half of April. As the rail-roko was to be organised at only one place (Manawala) in Amritsar district, the peasant masses of the Malwa region were not to be necessarily engaged in this struggle action. And, as the rail traffic was to be blocked for 24 hours on an important rail-link (Amritsar-Delhi), a busy route of express trains, this struggle-action being of a higher level of collective assertion of the will of the peasants, was liable to spur the momentum of the campaign. BKU (E-U) leadership sent a team of its leaders and activists to concentrate their efforts in its area of influence in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts. The peasants of the Malwa region were not supposed to participate definitively in this action, therefore, they were asked to participate on their own choice. The leadership expected a token participation from Malwa region. Even then about 700 peasants from Malwa reached Amritsar to participate in this action in spite of the peak season of harvesting. This response of the peasants for struggle was defying the assessment of the leadership itself.

Attacks by the police and determined resistance of the peasants

About 3200-3500 peasants (including women) started a sit-in on the rail tracks on a small station, Manawala, a few kilometres from Amritsar city, and declared this rail line closed for the next 24 hours. This daring action of the peasants inflamed the arrogance of the rulers, who had hardly controlled their bubbling urge to use their superior armed force during the Patiala struggle. Shatabdi Express, the train of the elite, was to leave Amritsar at 5 p.m. The Chief Minister had already given the green signal to the district administration to clear the rail line with force. The police forces of three adjoining districts had already reached Amritsar. The administration was so sure of clearing the line immediately that they asked the railway authorities to let the trains move as scheduled because the railway line would be cleared "within 10 minutes".

The deputy commissioner and the police chief of the district met the peasant leadership at Manawala and urged them to clear the line. They promised that the meeting of the peasant leadership with Chief Minister the next day would be ensured. Peasant leaders asked for a brief interval for their mutual consultation and started their meeting beside the venue of the sit-in. The later developments made it clear that the administration did not intend any negotiations with the peasant leadership. When they were engaging the peasant leadership in talks, top-gear preparations for police action were going on simultaneously and the attack was launched even without waiting for the response of the peasant leaders to the offer of the administration. The administration had posed for the negotiations just to put the peasants off their guard.

Hundreds of policemen attacked the gathering from two sides, especially the side where the women were. After an initial brief period of confusion and running helter-skelter, the peasant fighters quickly organised themselves into defence columns. The peasants' boiling anger, stones from the railway tracks, and lathis snatched from the police attackers all combined to form such powerful ammunition that the lathi-charge and teargas shelling by the police were totally ineffective to overpower and disperse the peasants. The tide turned within half an hour. The initially well-organised and well-armed police invaders were now in confusion, in retreat, with each running for his life. Then the police opened fire. Some policemen took up positions on the roofs of the houses of Manawala

village as vantage points for attacking the gathering. When the clash started the people of Manawala made all the policemen get out of their homes and offered all possible help for the fighting peasants. The stage of the sit-in had been continuously in operation during the clash, except for a brief period at the beginning of the attack. And the peasant leaders had been continuously motivating and instructing the peasant fighters from the stage. A young peasant, Angrej Singh, was martyred and about 150 peasants (including women) were injured. On the other side many policemen (including a few officers) were injured, some of them seriously. After the clash, the blockade of rail-traffic was maintained, even as arrangements were made simultaneously to take care of the injured peasants and get them admitted in hospitals at Amritsar. The people of the nearby villages continued to supply food for the participants of the blockade.

There were two lines of thinking in the administration about the continuation of the blockade after the clash. One was that by organising a bigger police attack the track should be cleared. This was the thinking of the higher police bureaucracy. The other view was that of the district administration. They pointed out the probability of bloodshed on a bigger scale, with adverse consequences for the government, in case the government decided to break the resistance of the peasants with greater force. The ruling party leadership decided against any further forcible attempt to undo the railway blockade in the given circumstances. So the rulers, under political compulsion, unwillingly had to swallow the bitter reality of the blockade of the main rail-line till the next day. This heroic deed of successful and organised mass resistance gave a big boost to the morale of the struggle-oriented peasants throughout the state, irrespective of the organisations to which they belonged. The next day, after concluding the 24-hour blockade, this gathering marched to the village (Bakipur) of the martyr. Thousands of raised fists and tearful angry eyes saw off the cremation of their departed fellow fighter.

Rulers are forced to bow at last

The Chief Minister publicly justified the bloody police attack and accused the peasant leadership of backing out from the "agreement" negotiated at Patiala. Yet he was inwardly shaken, for the Manawala episode

had stirred a new upswing in the anti-government resentment of the people at large and of the peasantry in particular.

On the other hand the parliamentary rivals of the ruling Congress, taking this as a godsent opportunity, hastened to utilise it in their heated electoral contention. These parties vehemently condemned the police attack on the peasants and expressed support for their struggle. The leader of the opposition and ex-Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal presented a cheque of Rs one lakh to the family of the martyr, offered a job to his wife and announced that his memorial would be built.

Even the electoral allies of the Congress (CPI, CPI-M) took strong exception to the anti-peasant statement of the Chief Minister given after the Manawala episode. They warned that such a statement might create a wedge between the Congress and the "Left" parties. Not only this, even the inner tussle of the Congress came into the open on this issue. The deputy Chief Minister Rajinder Kaur Bhathal, a staunch opponent of the CM, called this development "unfortunate", justified the right of the peasants to protest, and demanded a judicial inquiry and punishment of the guilty officers. No Congress minister publicly supported the anti-peasant stance of the Chief Minister. On the other hand, the JPP got widespread support of all pro-people mass organisations of various sections of the people whose leaderships otherwise dislike and are opposed to the leadership of the JPP. For example, the Kapurthala district unit of one such organisation (BKU Lakhawal) declared that their committee would participate in every action of the JPP during this struggle.

The government, on the one hand, tried to maintain a stern posture towards the struggle, and, on the other, tried to win over the family of the martyred peasant. The Chief Minister first announced assistance of Rs one lakh to the family, and then raised this to Rs two lakh after the Akali Dal president had presented a sum of Rs one lakh to the family. Also, the government tried to create a wedge in the fighting unity of BKU (E-U) and KSC by offering to negotiate with the latter separately and to withdraw cases against the leadership and activists of that organisation. But these manipulations failed badly. The mother of the martyr, herself injured in the clash, rejected the official offer of financial help scornfully, and the leadership of the KSC also flatly rejected the offer of a separate negotiation with it.

Victorious round of struggle

After the clash, the peasant leadership gave a call for burning the effigies of the government on April 4, 5 and 6 and afterwards reaching the village of the martyr to participate in his *bhog smagam* (ceremony of final funeral rites) on April 7. Again, the response of the peasant masses was more than expected. Not only were the effigy burning processions organised in almost all areas of influence of both organisations, but road traffic was also blocked at some places in spite of this being the peak of the harvesting season in the Malwa region.

The administration had intended to prevent any big gathering in the village of the martyr for his *bhog smagam* on April 7. They tried to create an atmosphere of terror in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts by carrying out raids on the houses of, and arrests of, the peasant leaders and activists and by hectic movements of armed police parties. Noting the government's plans to stop peasants coming to the *bhog smagam* by setting up police check-posts on all the routes leading to the village of the martyr, the peasant leadership called on the peasants to reach the *bhog smagam* even if necessary by overrunning the police checkposts. Visualising confrontations and clashes with big groups of peasants bent upon participating in the *bhog smagam*, the government retreated and announced that there would be no restriction on participation in the ceremony.

More than 5,000 people and representatives of about a dozen mass organisations participated in the ceremony. Though the opposition parliamentary parties had been vigorously projecting the bloody Manawala incident and supporting the struggle to use it for their narrow vested interests, their leaders knew very well that the leadership of the JPP would not allow them to utilise the stage of the *bhog* ceremony. The JPP, particularly BKU (E-U), has never allowed its platform to be utilised for the projection of the politics and identity of any political party at this stage of development of the peasant movement in Punjab. So no leader of any parliamentary political party dared to ask for time on the stage of the *bhog* ceremony.

In that most busy period of harvesting, the peasant leadership was to devise such a form of continuing the campaign as may allow the peasant masses to participate in the campaign without leaving their villages and

work for long intervals. So a protracted and comparatively low-pitched campaign was planned which would still continue to extract a political price from the Congress rulers for their misdeeds against peasants and other people. Accordingly, peasants were asked to hoist black flags on their houses and organise protest demonstrations at local levels. They were asked to collectively confront the ruling party candidates and their supporters coming to the villages for canvassing, with uncomfortable questions about the role and character of the ruling party. This round of low-pitched campaign was to be stepped up in the form of a march of thousands of peasants on a route of more than 300 kms. This march was to start on April 29 from the railway station of Manawala carrying the last remains of the peasant martyr to reach Patiala, addressing rallies and mass meetings in villages and towns of various districts falling in its route. After concluding this march at Patiala, a group of peasant leaders were to carry the last remains of the martyr for immersion in the river Satluj. In case the government did not concede any demands, a more militant mass action was to be organised between May 7 and 9, a period when electioneering would be at its climax.

After April 15, as the harvesting was over, parliamentary parties geared up their election campaign and peasants stepped up their campaign in hoisting black flags and engaging Congress candidates and their supporters with hard questions. The Congress candidates had started to feel the sharp pinch of adverse public opinion among large sections of the peasantry, in an acute form at many places, particularly in the areas of influence of BKU (E-U) and KSC. Therefore the Congress candidates began to build up pressure on the Chief Minister to reach an agreement with the leadership of the JPP. As a result, the representatives of the Congress leadership approached the peasant leaders and offered a concrete proposal for the agreement. All the arrested peasant leaders were released, as this was the precondition of the peasant leadership for initiating negotiations.

A new attack on the peasant leaders

While the higher Congress leadership was making hectic efforts to limit the damage to their electoral prospects by reaching an agreement with the JPP, the high-handed behaviour of an arrogant local Congress

leader (an ex-minister) suddenly reversed the direction of development of events.

On April 24, this Congress leader of Moga district (Malwa region) sent a group of his henchmen with a police party to a village, Machhike. They began to remove the black flags from the houses of the peasants. When the peasants resisted this high-handedness determinedly, the henchmen made a retreat and the accompanying police officer had to return the black flags. The same day peasants of this area had planned a march of about 150 peasants riding five or six tractor trolleys, and they intended to confront the Congress candidate from this constituency with questions. Fifty or sixty musclemen of that Congress leader armed with lathis and sharp-edged weapons pre-emptively attacked isolated groups of peasants at two places. One of these groups was fiercely attacked at Meenia village. The arms of the district president and of a block president of BKU (E-U) were fractured and 11 others were injured. The police party present there was fully hand-in-glove with the Congressmen. Instead of the arresting the attackers, the police arrested the badly injured peasants and implicated them in false cases.

These provocative and high-handed acts of the Congress leader and his henchmen inflamed the already pent-up anger of the peasants. The very next day road traffic was blocked for two hours in five districts. A clash with a police party was narrowly avoided in a village near Moga. Big demonstrations were organised at some places in Amritsar and Mansa districts. The possibility of clashes between peasants and the police or Congress supporters at many places in Punjab was increased manifold. These circumstances further increased the pressure of the Congress candidates on the Congress leadership urgently to reach an agreement with the peasant leadership. Hurrying up the efforts already being made for a compromise, the government finally reached an agreement with the peasant leadership, according to which the following was agreed:

- Immediate compensation of Rs five lakh to the family of martyr Angrej Singh.
- An extra amount of Rs 2.45 lakh to clear the debts of the family of Angrej Singh.
- A permanent job in the office of the tehsildar to the widow of the

martyr.

— Rs 50,000 each to the six peasants injured seriously in the Manawala episode, and Rs 25,000 each to the 13 peasants injured in the attack in Meenia village.

— Payment of Rs 14 crore the same month as an installment of arrears of sugarcane payment to the concerned peasants. The whole sum of money received each month from the sale of four lakh bags of sugar would be used solely to pay these arrears.

— Urgent issue of instructions to the home secretary of the Punjab government for the withdrawal of all cases registered against peasants during all the previous struggles, irrespective of the peasant organisations to which they belonged.

— The constitution of a committee under the leadership of Sardara Singh Johal (an agricultural scientist, now vice-chairman of the Punjab state planning commission) to clinch the issue of the arrears of electricity bills due from the peasants. The committee would submit its report before May 28. (The report submitted by the committee recommended a remission of 50 per cent of the arrears of the electricity bill and the reduction of the load-increasing fee from Rs 4200 to Rs 3200.)

— The Chief Minister would call a meeting in the last week of May with all the peasant organisations to clinch the remaining significant demands.

A good experience, an impressive victory

This 10-week campaign demonstrated not only the fighting capacity, but the correctness of the struggle line and stand of the peasant leadership regarding countering the political offensive of the ruling class election campaign with the mass campaign and struggle of the peasants on their vital issues. The essence of the futility of parliamentary politics for the people is summed up in a slogan in Punjabi which means, "Don't have expectations from (these) governments (that they will come to your rescue), defend your interests and your rights yourself." The peasant leadership not only projected this slogan at the level of ideas but, by making the struggle component an integral part of this campaign, also provided an immediate and concrete channel to come forward and de-

fend their interests and rights. Thus the central idea behind this struggle has been transformed into an effective material force.

This force was so successful in asserting itself on the political scene of Punjab, that all kinds of political forces had to take note of it and to respond in one way or another to the developments stirred by it. The effectiveness of this material force was also reflected in the fact that the bourgeois press had to give it a due place in its coverage, whereas normally it tends to ignore the propaganda and agitation campaigns conducted by the revolutionary and pro-people forces during the election periods. Thus, due to the integration of the struggle component with the political campaign, the peasant leadership has been successful in sending home the message (of futility of parliamentary politics) not only directly to the peasants who participated in this campaign but also indirectly to the widespread sections of the people, through the bourgeois press.

Although the peasant leadership knew that the peasant masses were positively inclined to the struggle, they were nevertheless wonder-struck when, contrary to their assessment, the peasant masses vigorously responded to their calls. For example, it is generally believed that during the harvesting season no struggle can be initiated or sustained, because at that time peasants have "no time even to scratch their heads". (An anecdote goes in Punjab that a peasant had even postponed the cremation of his late mother, and preserved the dead body in an earthen container till the end of the harvesting season.) But in this campaign the peasants gave more than expected response even during the peak harvesting season. This experience has shown once again that when the minds of the people are gripped with the need of struggle they can subordinate every aspect of their lives to this need.

It is obvious that determination, militancy and spirit of sacrifice are necessary elements to win the struggles. However, this campaign has once again shown that in order to succeed, the correct political assessment of the overall situation, correct political calculations and considerations at every important turn of the struggle, and correct tactics are indispensable. So in the present times, when the masses are responsive for struggles, the need for rapidly increasing the political consciousness of the masses and the political capacity of the leadership are of utmost importance.

This campaign brought forth a significant achievement of the peasant leadership, particularly that of the leadership of the BKU (E-U). They have been successful, to a considerable extent, in inculcating in the minds of a section of the peasants the idea that militant and protracted struggles are necessary for the fulfillment of their important demands. Therefore any advance in the organised fighting strength and democratic consciousness of the peasants as a result of a particular struggle is more significant than the fulfillment of this or that political demand in that struggle. This politically significant achievement was evident at the end of the first round of the campaign at Patiala when the peasant masses returned upbeat from Patiala even without any material success of their demands. This was so because the eight day-long Patiala campaign was an impressive expression of the growing fighting determination and strength of the peasants.

In Punjab, attempts have been going on to evolve a multi-organisation joint platform of the peasants. But narrow or vested interests and the tailist approach of various peasant leaderships have been defying these attempts. These negative approaches have been expressed in the subordination of the peasant movement to parliamentary politics and its conflicting requirements; underestimation of the existing urge for struggle among the peasant masses and holding them back from taking the path of militant struggles; curbing of the independent initiative of a dynamic peasant organisation for advancing the movement; and unconcealed unease about an allied organisation's natural gain in influence and strength according to its role in promoting the peasant movement. Thus while these attempts are mainly presenting a negative experience, ie how not to evolve a joint peasant platform, this campaign of the JPP has brought forth a successful and positive example of how a joint peasant platform should be formed.

This campaign has clearly enhanced the stature and influence of the JPP and of both of the peasant organisations constituting it. This fact was palpably evident in the positive change of attitude and behaviour of a section of peasant leaders and activists towards the leadership of BKU (E-U). This section is under the influence of revolutionary politics and is a part of BKU (E-Sidhupur). This section had a bitter relation with the leadership of BKU (E-U) as a result of the inner struggle and split in

BKU (E). Now this campaign of BKU (E-U) has played a most important part in changing this relation in a positive direction. This experience has shown once again that the development of the democratic mass movement effectively reflecting the revolutionary orientation is the most potent and indispensable factor for promoting solidarity and unity among the broad masses of the people and among the advanced layers of the struggling masses; indeed even for promoting fraternity among various proletarian revolutionary elements within those advanced layers.

September 20, 2004

In the period after the above report was written, certain major developments have occurred with regard to BKU (Ekta-Ugrahan).

First, after having been exposed and badly discredited among the peasants, chief minister Amrinder Singh pulled off a major political stunt in order to pose as champion of the Punjab peasantry: He called a special session of the state assembly, unilaterally scrapped all agreements regarding the sharing of river waters with neighbouring states, and whipped up a diversionary wave against those states, blaming them for the water crisis. Using this favourable atmosphere, he began retreating on various promises and agreements made regarding the peasantry, including certain clauses of the agreement made with the Joint Peasant Platform (consisting of BKU[E-U] and Kisan Sangharsh Committee) after the Manawala struggle. The JPP called the Lalkaar Rally of September 13 in Chandigarh to expose the diversion and re-assert the real burning demands of the Punjab peasantry. The rally was preceded by an intense fortnight-long mobilisation campaign, including state-level and area-level activists' meetings. The Chandigarh rally exceeded all expectations: it was the largest peasant mobilisation in the state since 1990, and full of soaring peasant confidence and fighting spirit. The peasant leaders laid bare the conspiracies of the state government, affirmed the unity of the toiling peasants of Punjab and those of neighbouring states, placed a 14-point charter of the real demands of the peasantry, and promised that fierce peasant struggles would continue, calling on peasants to continue the elec-

tricity bill boycott. The Lalkaar rally had a serious impact on political developments in the state.

Secondly, the BKU(E-U) led a very significant statewide peasant movement against the auctioning of a peasant's land in Chathewala village, Bathinda district. The land was being auctioned to clear debts to a usurer arhtiya. This issue became the focus of the peasantry and democratic sections of the state, for whom it was an exemplary fight involving the interests of the entire toiling peasantry. If this trend were allowed, it would mean that a huge section of poor peasantry would be driven off the land. Despite mobilising police from seven districts, the state government was unable to prevent over 5,000 peasants entering and occupying Chathewala. Instead of the police sealing the village off, the peasants from throughout the state sealed it off from the police. Unable to hold the auction on the appointed date, October 26, the authorities postponed it. This struggle has proved to be a turning-point in the peasant movement of Punjab.

The state government began holding high-level meetings from the next day, and on October 28 police began a massive, statewide campaign of raids and arrests of peasant activists of the JPP. The excuse was the maintenance of "law and order" and the prevention of the programme of November 3 (a limited three-hour rail roko protest at the collapse of cotton prices). In fact such a limited programme could not have been the real reason for the repression. The real purpose was to break the back of the rising peasant movement. Hundreds were picked up throughout the state, and on November 3 police attacks were launched on the peasant leaders and gatherings. This was met by a glorious anti-repression struggle, marked by organised mass resistance of the arrests, the successful protests and jail bhara agitation, unprecedented participation of women, struggle within the jails, and even sympathy from the lower ranks of the police and jail personnel (many of whose relations are also indebted to usurers).

We hope to carry reports regarding these developments in a future issue of The Comrade.

— Editor.

Dare to struggle, dare to win

Tribal Peasants of Malkangiri Win a Major Victory

— by a correspondent

The tribal belt of central and eastern India, which abounds in precious minerals, ores and other material resources, has these days turned into a happy hunting ground for big corporate houses – both Indian and foreign. In the name of opening up the economy and ushering in development, the Central and various state governments are vying with one another in handing over, at throwaway prices, the precious natural resources to these capitalist vultures.

Let us take the case of Orissa. The corrupt BJD-BJP government of Orissa brazenly enters into shadowy deals with big comprador companies and is on a spree of signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with various industrial houses. It has recently modified its Industrial Policy Resolution to benefit big capitalists. It has committed 150 million tonnes of bauxite resources to Vedanta Alumina of the Sterlite group for establishing an alumina plant at Lanjigarh in Kalahandi district. Similarly, it has entered into an accord with Utkal Alumina of the Birla group for establishing an alumina plant at Kashipur in Rayagada district, in collaboration with Alcan of Canada. It has signed an MoU with the Sterlite group for setting up a five million tonne-capacity integrated steel plant in Keonjhar district. A 12 million tonne-capacity steel plant of POSCO of Korea is in the pipeline.

The list is long. In all such deals, huge grafts are taken by the rulers and in turn undue favouritism and concessions are showered

on industrialists to the detriment of people's interests. Recently, the Orissa High Court could not but strike down the government decision to lease the Tangripani chrome mines to the Jindal group, so obvious was the undue favouritism and huge loss to the state exchequer. All such deals further damage the toiling people (particularly the adivasis) who often lose their livelihood and homes in the process.

Seen in this context of the heightened onslaught on the toiling people's lives, this struggle report of the Malkangiri peasants represents a gust of fresh air. It shows the way to resist and defeat such onslaught.

Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh (MZAS) – a revolutionary mass organisation of the tribal peasants of Malkangiri district – has won an important victory against a powerful pipeline company of a big corporate house, after waging a five-month-long struggle. A bipartite agreement signed on October 22 between Essar Steels Ltd and the MZAS resulted in a successful culmination of the struggle of adibasi peasant masses under the leadership of the Sangh.

Essar Steels Ltd, formerly known as Essar Gujarat Ltd, has been laying an underground steel pipeline to pump its iron ore in slurry form from its captive iron ore mines in Bailadilla in Chhattisgarh state to its iron plant at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. So far, the iron ore transportation was being made through railway rakes. But in view of the heavy demand for iron ore in the world market, particularly for the Bailadilla ore (which has a low acidic gangue and can be used in making iron pellets without beneficiation), the company is expanding the capacity of its plant to three million metric tonnes per annum. This expansion is being undertaken in technical collaboration with Lurgi GmbH of Germany. The huge requirement of iron ore for this mega project cannot be met through road or railway carriages. Hence the company is laying a state-of-the-art 270-km-long steel pipeline to ensure speedy, cost-effective and hassle-free transportation of the ore.

It is worth recalling that Essar Steels is a part of the fourth largest conglomerate in India, the Essar group. The group has huge stakes in petroleum, shipping and steel. This company's hot briquetted iron plant at

Vishakhapatnam for making iron oxide pellets (and iron oxide concentrate thereafter) is the world's largest plant of its type. The minerals pipeline being laid by the company, when completed, will be Asia's longest such pipeline. The company has already completed the pipeline work in Chhattisgarh (nearly 45 km), and pipeline-laying work in A.P. (nearly 145 km) is nearing completion. Even in the Orissa territory falling in Malkangiri district, the company was successful in laying some 20 km of pipeline in a somewhat surreptitious manner. Once the issue came to the notice of the Adibasi Sangh, the company had to face stiff peasant resistance over land compensation and other related issues. The company work remained partially or wholly paralysed for two to three months, till a formal written bilateral agreement was signed with the Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh.

Surreptitious operation

The steel ministry of the Central government on September 30, 1997, issued a public notification for acquiring lands to lay the above pipeline, in the name of public interest. As per the rules, it is the statutory obligation of the government to ensure a detailed communication of such notification in a suitable manner to the concerned people whose lands are meant to be taken, so that they can lodge their objections, if any, before the appellate bodies. In secluded and overwhelmingly illiterate adibasi areas, such information could only be ensured through beating of drums or gram sabha meetings. No resident of these areas is aware of any such exercise having been undertaken. The people remained in total darkness about this project. On February 22, 2000, the government through a gazette notification transferred the right of use of the notified lands to Essar Steels Ltd. Whenever the Adibasi Sangh representatives, in the wake of rumours floating about regarding the pipeline, tried to enquire from the district authorities, they flatly denied having any knowledge of it. The latest the Sangh delegation formally and explicitly enquired about this issue was during its May 1st, 2004, rally at Chitrakonda. The tehsildar again expressed ignorance about the pipeline.

Actually, at that very time, the company bulldozers were operating in full swing in areas bordering Chhattisgarh, and the district land officer was distributing land compensation at the behest of the pipeline com-

pany. It was a willful and deliberate attempt at hoodwinking the Sangh and at laying as much pipeline as possible before it came to the notice of the Sangh. Familiar with the history and traditions of the Sangh, they were apprehensive of the Sangh, and anticipated resistance by it.

Essar on a looting spree

The actual pipeline-laying work by the company came to the notice of the Sangh for the first time during its zonal committee meeting held on May 23, 2004, at Chitrakonda. Some adivasi peasants from Badapadar panchayat broke this news and enquired about the Sangh's approach towards it. At that time, the Sangh lacked even the bare minimum information and was not in a position to say something definitive. The meeting decided to send a fact-finding team to the pipeline area and report back as quickly as possible. The facts collected by the team were startling.

The fact-finding team noted that the adivasi peasants were being given paltry compensation amounts of the order of Rs 11, Rs 25, Rs 42, etc to secure their thumb-impressions on certain papers (possibly agreement papers). The poverty-stricken adibasi people, unused to financial dealings and unable to read, were accepting without resistance whatever was being given to them by the company. The team further noted that even this meagre compensation was being paid only to those peasants who could produce their land entitlements. Hence, a large number of peasants were actually being denied any compensation for their lands taken over by the company. (It is worth mentioning here that in tribal areas of Orissa, land records are woefully messy and incomplete. A huge number of even officially-deserving adibasi peasant families have not been issued land *pattas* in their name by the administration, even for those lands which they have been tilling for generations or decades. Despite the show of numerous judicial rulings and governmental declarations, the situation remains abysmal and unchanged. The adibasi peasants continue to suffer even when on paper the law is in their favour. They are not only denied various benefits for want of proper land *pattas*, they also live continuously hounded by the fear of being driven out of their lands after being proclaimed land-grabbers.)

The team also noted that the company was paying land compensation at the rate of a mere Rs 1500 per acre. The forest law bans any cutting

or felling of trees in the rainy season, but the company was recklessly felling green trees and the forest department was a mute spectator. Further, the pipeline company was either paying no compensation for a variety of felled trees or making a nominal payment of Rs 100 or 200. Further, while the loan given by the government for digging ponds and raising dams is a minimum of Rs 50,000, the company was offering a pittance of Rs 1,000 or Rs 1,200 for damaged ponds. No compensation was being paid for communal properties and assets like graveyards, wells, community lands or pastures, etc. Taking all such things into account, it became clear as daylight that the company was playing a huge fraud on the adibasi people and the district administration, instead of protecting the interests of the innocent adibasi people, was enthusiastically acting in favour of the company.

The Sangh takes up the challenge

Taking serious notice of the blatant deception and loot of the adibasi people by the pipeline company, the Sangh decided to challenge it by mobilising the affected peasants against it. The adibasi inhabitants of erstwhile undivided Koraput district (of which Malkangiri district was a part) were uprooted time and again because of various hydro-electric and irrigation projects. Then the government settled 40,000 Bengali-speaking refugees in 1960 on adibasi lands under the Dandakaranya plan. In all such uprootings, the adibasi oustees were not given alternative land, houses, or any other help. Again, the danger of being uprooted loomed over thousands of adibasi families. Further, the lands being taken by the company were reserved lands under Schedule 5 of the Constitution and they could not be transferred to non-adibasi people. To circumvent this law, the Central government had acquired these lands in the name of public interest and then transferred the use rights to the pipeline company. By the time the Sangh came to know about the pipeline, the company had already laid the pipeline over nearly 20 km, had already distributed compensation in the majority of the remaining area, and had established a network of its *dalaals* in the area. The MZAS was then not in a position to challenge the land acquisition in a direct way. So, to mobilise the peasants against the company, it opted for a "land for land" and "house for house" policy.

The Sangh's decision to build peasant resistance against the company was easier said than done. There were many odds against organising the peasant resistance. First, the tribal peasants, inexperienced in matters of deception and loot, were mostly unable to comprehend the blatant fraud being played on them by the company. Rather, entirely unmindful of the implications of pledging their lands to the company at throwaway prices, they were happily accepting whatever was being given to them. They did not dare oppose the company. At first they did not appreciate the Sangh's opposing these monetary payments by the company. Those who were hesitant to accept payments by the company in the presence of the Sangh functionaries tried to avail of them clandestinely. The general mood was against initiating any struggle. Secondly, only a small section of the peasants were directly affected by the pipeline work. A large number of peasants were not interested in this issue. Hence building a popular resistance movement was not an easy task. Thirdly, in the name of fighting Naxalites, the police and the CRPF had spread a reign of terror in the entire area. For fear of police repression, the people were reluctant to take part in any agitational activity. Fourthly, because of the money, muscle power, and political influence of the company, and its corrupt, coercive and terrorising tactics, the task of organising resistance against such a formidable company was far more difficult than usual. Lastly, the woeful lack of adequate information related with the pipeline work and the company also made the task more difficult.

Big corporate houses are known for nourishing and spreading a culture of corruption. Essar Steels was no exception. It had already smoothed its way by winning over various district officials and functionaries through lavish gifts and bribes. Depending upon their rank and utility to the company, various organs of administration, revenue, police force, forest department as well as personnel of the media, NGOs, politicians and even local gangsters were accordingly and suitably rewarded. Unsurprisingly, a majority of them behaved like paid agents of the company.

Despite all these odds, the Sangh leadership was optimistic that given the utter loot and arbitrariness of the company, the peasants could be motivated and mobilised against the company and the company could be made to submit to the peasant resistance. For materialising this, sufficient time and an appropriate strategy were needed. To gain time for

organisational-mobilisational work at the ground level, a strategy of exerting pressure on the district authorities to safeguard the interests of the tribal people, undertaking propaganda work against the company but consciously avoiding direct confrontation with the company, and persistently arousing and mobilising the people in various activities was adopted. A well-considered tactic was adopted of not refusing to negotiate with the company, but of actually avoiding negotiations till the Sangh had garnered sufficient peasant support for holding a meaningful dialogue with the company. Survey teams were deputed to various areas for collecting more facts to concretise the propaganda and make it more effective, as well as to work out a concrete and comprehensive charter of demands.

First phase of the struggle

The ground-level mass propaganda and motivating of the masses against the company was the main characteristic of this phase. The points around which the written and oral propaganda were conducted were the selling of mineral wealth and other public resources to native and foreign big companies at throwaway prices, the reckless squandering of precious resources, the government's indifference towards the interests of the toiling people — in particular the tribal people, the cruel joke of paying land compensation of Rs 1500 per acre, the flouting of laws and the damage to the environment by the company, the government's inaction regarding this and the need to stand up against the company's loot, etc. Village-to-village propaganda was organised by the Sangh teams.

A delegation of the Sangh under the leadership of the Sangh president went on June 7 to seek an audience with the district collector. The collector being away, the additional district magistrate (ADM) met the deputation. This official behaved like an executive of the company and asserted in an apparently threatening tone that the pipeline would be laid at any cost, even forcibly if so needed. In the conversation, the ADM revealed that six villages under Badapadar panchayat were still resisting the laying of the pipeline and not accepting compensation. The next day, the Sangh lost no time in sending an organising team to those villages. To further bolster and intensify this peasant resistance prior to the visit of the ADM on June 12, a road blockade was started in Lamba Singa village jeopardising the movement of company vehicles to the company's

work-sites. The ADM's meeting was frustrated by the Sangh activists by organising a peasant mass meeting and dispersing it before the ADM's visit after passing a resolution to continue the struggle against the company till the demands were conceded. The ADM, instead of turning up in person, sent the Land Officer, who had to return without meeting the people.

The enthusiasm for continuing the road blockade began petering out after the LO's visit. Moreover, the company struck back by giving a job to the local tribal activist active in the road blockade. So it was formally lifted after a week. But this road blockade left a very inspiring impact on tribal peasants and activists in adjoining areas and helped in giving a fillip to the emerging peasant resistance. Led by an erstwhile leader of the Sangh, a big peasant gathering argued fiercely with the company officials under Nuaguda panchayat area and forced the company to shut down its ongoing work.

On the day of the routine zonal meeting of the Sangh at Chittrakonda on June 23, nearly 150 militant tribals reached the meeting venue. It was a clear indication of the charged atmosphere. In the meeting, some tribals told the meeting about three heavy machines of the company proceeding towards the company's camp. It was correctly inferred by the Sangh activists that these machines would be deployed for taking up some major work over the Sileru river. It was resolved in the meeting to immediately gherao these machines and resist their deployment till the peasant demands were met. Specific instructions were given to observe restraint, skillfully tackle and resist all provocations by the company and insist on sending the machines back. After the conclusion of the meeting, nearly the entire gathering, after walking for many hours, reached the company's camp and began a gherao of the machines amid slogan-shouting. The speakers warned the company officials not to deploy these machines till a settlement with the struggling peasants was reached. Demanding the removal of these machines, the speakers made it amply clear that the Sangh would not be responsible if the enraged people inflicted some damage to these machines. Sensing the mood of the enraged tribals, the company officials declared they would immediately return two machines to Chittrakonda base camp and not deploy the third machine (which could not be sent back due to some technical problem) without the consent of

the people. They also offered negotiations with the Sangh. This victory gave a further boost to the fighting spirit of the tribal masses.

A string of propaganda and agitational activities in and around the pipeline-affected villages was going on daily. The atmosphere was warming up for further struggle. A mass rally against the company on June 26 at village RSC-10 received an unexpectedly huge response. Nearly a thousand adibasi people from neighbouring villages like Paliguda, Rathaguda, Katanipadar, Kamlapadar, Purunapani, RSC no.s 8, 10, 11, and 19, Tatmanguda, Rampur, Haridaguda, Oringi, etc. thronged the rally venue. The struggle against the company was clicking in the minds of the adibasi people. Militant speeches were made reiterating their resolve to continue and further intensify the struggle against the company. The company was warned not to undertake any pipeline work without reaching a settlement with the struggling people.

The deepening resentment among the tribals against the company and repeated work-closures forced by the struggling tribals made the company relent and seek some compromise with the Sangh. In a hurry to extract some agreement immediately, the overzealous company henchmen waylaid an important Sangh functionary when he was returning by bus after a visit to the district officials. The company henchmen pressurised the Sangh functionary to negotiate. He stood his ground and flatly expressed his inability to negotiate on behalf of the Sangh. Later, he was dropped at the Sangh office by the company people. The Sangh took it as an effort by the company to browbeat the Sangh and coerce it into submission. The next day, an angry verbal duel took place with the company *dalaals* who came to prevail upon the Sangh to lift the work blockade imposed on the company. Only when senior officials of the company visited the Sangh office, regretted the unpleasant events and behaviour of the company people and assured emphatically that they would not allow such things to recur in future, was the Sangh pacified, and desisted from further action against the company.

The company tried its very best to somehow continue and quicken the work of the pipeline in order to finish it on schedule. It tried to buy the local adibasi leaders spearheading the peasant resistance by offering huge bribes. It tried to terrorise the ordinary masses by recruiting local ruffians and goonda elements and unleashing them for spreading terror

as well as through floating rumours. It tried to lure the people to its side by offering increased compensation. But none of these tactics served the company's purpose. Finally, it tried to sound out the Sangh for a settlement. The Sangh, by this time, had attained a relatively favourable position from which to negotiate. As the company was not acquiring peasant lands permanently but only for transient use, the Sangh decided in favour of negotiating for land compensation and formally invited the company and district administration for negotiation talks on August 20. It also sent a copy of its charter of demands along with the invitation. The company received the invitation with open arms. Intimating its acceptance of the talks offer, it sent its reaction in black and white to the Sangh charter of demands. Apart from agreeing to negotiate, the company informed that it was ready to pay crop damage compensation equal to 20 quintals of paddy per acre, and it increased the daily wage from Rs 40 to Rs 60 with immediate effect. The company pleaded with the Sangh to allow it to resume the pipeline work.

Second phase of the struggle – sharpened militancy

From mid-June to roughly mid-August, a sort of hide-and-seek continued between the company and the struggling peasants. Sometimes the struggling peasants surged ahead and imposed total work-cessation on the company. At other times, when the struggle activity receded a bit or the agitators relaxed, the company would immediately resume work or resort to work stealthily at night. This ding-dong battle was going on.

The district administration was not reconciled to the idea of negotiating with the Sangh. Instead of responding affirmatively to the August 20 tripartite meeting, the diabolical district administration conspired to frustrate the Sangh initiative. It prevailed upon the company to double the land compensation, and fixed August 20 and 21 as dates for compensation distribution, to foil the Sangh initiative. Earlier, the district administration had slapped legal notices on key Sangh leaders to sign good conduct bonds in the court of the district magistrate. Rumours were rife that the district administration intended to detain the Sangh leaders on some pretext. In view of this hawkish attitude of the administration the Sangh resolved to give a sound rebuff to the district administration. It gave a call for the boycott of the administration-sponsored compensation-distrib-

bution function and ensured through elegant planning the total success of the boycott call. To mount further pressure on the wavering company, the Sangh opened a day-and-night camp in the struggle area in the vicinity of the company's worksite. Two days later, it started a road blockade and the movement of the company vehicles was totally stopped. To further tighten the noose around the company's neck, another camp was opened in another village. Hundreds of slogan-shouting tribals daily marched through different villages from one camp to another and made forays to the company worksites. Sangh banners and flags were planted atop all company vehicles and machines. The whole atmosphere was charged with revolutionary enthusiasm. Such vigorous activity continued for over a week. The company's work-force and machinery lay totally idle.

The work-closures were costing the company several lakhs a day. The company had rented very costly machinery to engage in some operations across the Sileru river, but it could not be deployed for over two months due to the tribal people's threats and resistance. The company, as a result, was suffering huge losses and there seemed no immediate prospect of work being resumed in the near future. The company was eager to hike the compensation many-fold, provided it was allowed to resume work. In the meanwhile, a contingent of adibasi fighters armed with their traditional weapons like *tangias* and bows and arrows caught red-handed a high-ranking company official secretly distributing enhanced land compensation despite assurances by the company to the contrary. He was severely roughed up and a *tangia* was thrust on his neck by the enraged tribal people. He was saved by a local Sangh leader from the fury of the people. The official got so terrified that he vowed never to defy the Sangh or the tribal people again, and he specially visited the Sangh office later to thank the Sangh for saving his life.

The months of July and August are the peak of the four-month-long rainy season in Malkangiri. The fury of the rains during these months is well-known. The torrential rains during this period forced the Sangh activists and peasants to remain indoors for quite some days. The desperate company executives tried to seize even this opportunity to further the pipeline work in a stealthy way. The local militants somehow got wind of it. A large group of tribal people, armed with their weapons, all of a

sudden swooped down on the company camp on September 7 and caught red-handed nearly 15 people engaged in pipeline work in clear defiance of their commitment not to resume work till a negotiated settlement. All of them, along with the contractor, were captured, taken to the Sangh camp and kept confined there until the company higher-ups came, begged pardon and assured not to go to the police nor violate their commitment in future. The detainees were released unharmed. Later, the police and CRPF contingent visited the Sangh camp to enquire about the incident. The police even misbehaved with the female Sangh activists. A strong and angry protest by the Sangh, particularly the women, forced the police official to regret his action and retreat.

Much later, it was known that the irritated company authorities, getting wary of the Sangh, particularly after the developments of September 7, proposed teaching a good lesson to the Sangh by bringing hired goons from outside. This proposal was shelved because the local authorities, well aware of the Sangh history, did not support it, apprehending the escalation of tension and even the danger of the situation going out of hand.

The company even tried to engineer a rift among the struggling tribal people. Utilising the services of some erstwhile mass activists bought over to its side, the company tried to lure the tribal masses of four villages on the river bank, namely, Oringi, Rampur, RSC-8 and Tatmanguda – by offering them enhanced land compensation at the rate of Rs 35,000 per acre, compared with the earlier rate of a mere Rs 1500 per acre. The company even dangled a promise of providing them with an iron boat for crossing the river. These were the very villages where the company's costly machinery was stuck idle. An agreement with the people of these villages would have paved the way for a very strategic part of their pipeline work. And the company was almost successful in its nefarious design when the company stooges lured the people of these villages to send a written intimation to the Sangh of their agreement with the company.

The Sangh leadership immediately saw through this design of the company aimed at promoting dissension and division among the struggling sections of adibasi people. The unity of the struggling masses was at stake and even a single wrong step could spoil the whole. Had the

Sangh rejected the agreement, it would have hurt the ego of the leaders of those villages, antagonised them and turned them hostile and possibly on a collision course with the Sangh. Had the Sangh upheld their agreement, it would have led the company to resume work to the detriment of the interests of the struggling people of other villages as well as overall interests. Either way, the danger of division and infighting among the adibasi people loomed large and the company gleefully stood to gain.

The Sangh leaders tackled this delicate situation very deftly. They chose neither to reject it straight away nor uphold it, but kept it on hold. Further, although the company stooges were exposed before the Sangh, the Sangh leaders chose not to train their guns at them either. After all, they were ordinary tribals who were lured by the company through monetary enticements – the way they were now luring the people to the company's side. Instead of antagonising them and pushing them to turn into hard-core opponents of the Sangh, they chose to ignore them for the time being. To foil the company's game, the Sangh adopted the strategem of vigorously mobilising the people of the area around these villages and concentrating protest-demonstrations against the company in these villages, thus indirectly pressurising the said villages not to go against the joint will of the people of the area. This strategem of the Sangh proved highly effective.

On September 12, the Sangh leaders held a meeting of nearly 200 activists and militants in the Sangh camp, where the above issue was thoroughly discussed. It was decided to make a show of force in the form of a militant mass demonstration from the camp to Oringi ghat and Tatmanguda. To ward off any attack from hostile elements, the call was issued to the people to come fully armed with their traditional weapons. The security of the camp was further beefed up. Hectic activity throughout the villages under the adjoining four panchayats warmed up the atmosphere. On September 17, hundreds of armed adibasi peasants brimming with militant fervour and shouting slogans against the company reached Oringi river ghat and then assembled at Tatmanguda, where the gathering swelled to more than a thousand people. The local *dalaals* of the company, fearing the fury of the struggling masses, fled their homes. The company was harshly warned against engineering rifts among the people and a decision was taken not to allow the company to resume

work till an all-embracing agreement was reached with the Sangh. Thus yet another move by the company was defeated.

Final phase – for a negotiated settlement

With the peasant resistance intensifying and turning more and more militant, the company officials and work-force operating in the field started feeling insecure and reluctant to work. The company had tried all sorts of tactics but success had eluded it so far. The closure of work, partly or wholly, over the past few months had cost the company dearly. Still no silver lining was visible for Essar and resumption of work remained uncertain. The target for the completion of the work was fast approaching. And the only possible solution seemed to be a negotiated settlement with the Sangh – the sooner the better. Thus the company decided to proceed towards a bilateral agreement with the Adibasi Sangh, sidelining the diffident district administration. Once the company had opted for a negotiated settlement with the Sangh, it concentrated all its efforts to quicken the process of negotiation. It seemed to be in an amazing hurry. If the Sangh demanded any document or information from the company, it was made available the same day. The company representatives insisted on smaller gaps between the two negotiation meetings. A computerised copy of the proceedings and partial agreements would be made available without any demand for it. The company officials made a bee-line to the Sangh office. They were ever ready to adjust according to the needs and compulsions of the Sangh leaders, could tirelessly wait for them, hold talks till late in the night, take black tea and go anywhere, any time, to further the negotiation process. Their overwhelming requirement was a quicker agreement and a resumption of work.

On the other hand, backed by a strong peasant resistance movement, the Sangh was in a far better position to negotiate. Although it was in a position to tighten the noose around the company's neck if it violated the commitments given, the Sangh nevertheless trod cautiously. The company was desperate to resume work at Oringi ghat where its machinery was rusting, and was offering one concession after the other. The company even offered to deposit the entire compensation amount in the Sangh's account as a token of its assurance that it would carry out its commitments. The Sangh wanted to exert maximum pressure over the

company before allowing it to resume work, so that it dare not violate in future the agreement made with the Sangh. Finally, the Sangh invited the company officials to the Oringi ghat work-site on October 3, where a peasant assembly would give its verdict on whether or not to allow the company to work.

On October 3, it was raining heavily. Despite the rain, hundreds of armed adibasi peasants reached the Sangh camp. After a meeting in the camp, the peasant procession proceeded to the Oringi river ghat for an on-the-spot inspection of the pipeline work and deliberations with the company representatives. But presuming that the Sangh people would not turn up in such heavy rain, the company representatives returned to their base camp. The peasant gathering, drenched with rain, returned to their camp after leaving a message for the company representatives. After getting the information, the company people made a dash to the Sangh camp braving the heavy downpour and criss-crossing through mud, drenched from head to toe. They again appealed to the peasants to allow them to resume work. As per the decision, the local leader of the resistance allowed them to undertake a limited specified work till the final agreement was clinched. It smoothed the process of negotiations and a formal bilateral agreement between the two sides was signed on October 22nd 2004.

A distinctive feature of the negotiation process that the company representatives were not prepared for was the democratic approach of the Sangh. In all the negotiation meetings held between the two sides, a large number of pipeline-affected tribal peasants, usually ranging from 50 to 200, invariably participated in the talks. As the company representatives could neither speak nor understand Oriya, their statements and arguments were translated from Hindi into Oriya for the tribal peasants. Whatever the Sangh representatives or the tribal peasants spoke was also translated in toto in Hindi for the company people. It made the negotiation process quite cumbersome and time-consuming. But even then, it was consciously adhered to to ensure the participation of the peasants. The tribal peasants took keen interest in the discussions, listened to every word with interest, and resented it if something was not translated for them or any conversation was carried on outside the main meeting. At times, they also intervened. Their mood and intervention saved the

negotiations from breaking down on more than one occasion. Every decision was clinched after the approval of the peasant participants. Before the final agreement was signed, it was read aloud and explained in detail to more than 200 tribal peasants and their consent was taken. It was a novel and baffling experience for the company representatives. They had in the past interacted with numerous parties and organisations, but they were encountering this sort of practice for the first time.

Memorable victory, major gains

After a process of prolonged and hectic talks spread over nearly a month, the successful conclusion of a bilateral agreement between Essar Steels Ltd and Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh signalled a major victory for the Sangh and adibasi peasants. For the Sangh, it was in many ways unprecedented. The victory reaffirmed and further enhanced the political credibility of the Sangh and reiterated its position as a premier fighting organisation of the tribal people. Some of the important gains made by the adibasi peasants through the agreement are being given below.

1. Land compensation

Land compensation was a core issue of contention between the two sides, and the success or failure of negotiation hinged on it. Little wonder that it was one of the most contentious issues as well. The contention was centred on three related points: namely, the basis and amount of compensation, the eligibility for compensation, and the territorial domain for compensation. Let us discuss each of these points separately.

(a) The Malkangiri district collector had fixed the value of land at a uniform rate of Rs 15,000 per acre. Citing the provisions of "The Petroleum Pipelines Act 1962", which authorised one-tenth of the land value as land compensation for ceding user rights, the company was paying a paltry Rs 1500 per acre as land compensation. The Sangh rejected it with all the scorn it deserved.

The company's contention was that it was paying land compensation according to the law, and at government-determined rates. Moreover, as it was not acquiring lands permanently, but only for transient use, and the lands would be returned to the peasants for cultivation after burying the pipeline, the compensation being given by the company was adequate

and justified. On the contrary, the Sangh reminded the company reminded the company that it was not the tribal peasants who were eager to sell their lands. Rather, it was the company which was forcibly taking over their lands. The tribal peasants had every right to demand a negotiated value for their lands. The Sangh point-blank refused to be taken in and abide by any laws of the like of "The Petroleum Pipelines Act", which promote the interests of big business to the detriment of the interests of the toiling people. The Sangh further argued that as the company was acquiring user rights over peasant lands for the operative duration of the pipeline, it enjoyed the right to intrude in peasant lands at will. Hence it was fully legitimate and justified on the part of the peasants to demand the aggregate of total crop value over the whole operational life of the pipeline as land compensation. Finally, this premise was mutually accepted as the basis for computing land compensation. In the final accord, the land was classified into three different categories, namely, irrigated land, unirrigated plain (beda) land and highland (dongar). Accordingly, instead of a uniform land compensation of Rs 1500 per acre, compensation of Rs 1,25,000, Rs 1,00,000, and Rs 62,5000 per acre respectively was determined for the above-mentioned three categories of land. The company, while agreeing to pay this compensation, was reluctant to enunciate clearly in the agreement the basis of its working out this compensation, as it feared opening up a Pandora's box in other areas of the pipeline. Anyhow, it amounted to a tremendous victory of the Sangh in terms of compensation. It is a momentous 43 to 85 times the amount being given by the company earlier.

(b) Seemingly less spectacular but politically far more significant than the quantum of compensation was the Sangh's victory regarding the eligibility for compensation. As mentioned earlier, the company was paying compensation only to those peasants who could produce their land patta papers as proof of ownership. As the majority of adibasi peasants do not have land entitlements in their names, they stood automatically disqualified for availing of any land or other compensation. The Sangh had for long been struggling to obtain land *pattas* for those peasants who had been cultivating various lands. The Sangh demanded of the company that it pay land compensation for all lands under cultivation, irrespective of their classification as *patta* land, non-*patta* land, or forest land. The

Sangh, from the very beginning, made it amply clear to the company that this issue was neither negotiable, nor could any accord be reached by leaving it aside. The company resisted, citing legal problems. The Sangh remained firm. Finally, the company relented and agreed to pay full compensation for all lands, irrespective of the nature of their ownership. The acceptance of this demand not only enabled a large number of adibasi and Bengali peasants to avail of compensation for land, trees and crops, etc, but it has a long-term significance for the peasant movement. It affirms the peasant claim over lands under their cultivation and will serve as a valuable precedent in future negotiations over land claims and rights.

(c) During negotiations over land compensation-related issues, for the company, the most contentious issue was whether or not to pay compensation as per the agreement to be signed with the Sangh in those areas of Malkangiri as well where the pipeline had already been laid and all compensation claims had been settled. The Sangh had all along insisted that the company pay the new compensation rate over the entire stretch of the pipeline in Malkangiri district. The company was willing to pay compensation as per the agreement where the pipeline remained to be laid, but was averse to re-opening the compensation issue where it was already settled. It was apprehensive that conceding this demand could give rise to people's discontent and similar demands in Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh areas, where the pipeline work was over. But the Sangh remained firm on its stand. Finding no other way out, the company finally had to agree. As a result, even those sections of unorganised tribal and Bengali peasants will avail of just compensation which was earlier denied to them.

The agreement makes it obligatory on the part of the company to return the peasant lands in a fully cultivable form after burying the pipeline and filling the pits.

2. Crop compensation

The company requires only a two-metre-wide strip of land for laying the pipeline and pays land compensation only for this width. But in actual practice of laying the pipeline, the movement of land excavation machinery, vehicles, materials and personnel of the company damages crops in a much wider area. Keeping in view the sentiments of the tribal people,

the Sangh forbade the company to undertake pipeline-laying work till the standing crop matured. The company observed this stipulation, though somewhat unwillingly. Nonetheless, the agreement envisaged a 20-metre-wide strip of land permissible for crop compensation at the rate of the yearly crop yield over that land. The company is liable to pay the compensation for any lands that remain vacant for the pipeline work, or if normal crop-raising is vitiated due to the company's failure to level the land, or due to the appearance of excessive sand or stones as a result of diggin work.

3. Compensation for trees

Prior to the agreement, the company was not paying any compensation for damaging a large variety of trees or paying only a pittance of Rs 100 or Rs 200 per tree. The agreement stringently compelled the company to ensure minimum loss of flora and fauna and ecology of the region.

* The agreement envisaged the evaluation of all uprooted or damaged trees for their timber, fruit, flower or any other use-value over their average life-span. A formula has been evolved to calculate their value. As per the agreement, the peasants will get approximately Rs 5,000 to Rs 50,000 per tree as compensation.

* Where the pipeline had already been laid, the joint survey committee (established under the agreement) would listen to the peasants' claims and village people's opinion and adjudicate accordingly.

* The company will provide 10 saplings of trees of people's choice free of cost for every tree destroyed.

* The company will also bear the full expenditure of regenerating community forest over 60 acres of land.

4. Compensation for houses and assets

* Every house destroyed by pipeline work will be compensated at a minimum rate of Rs one lakh. If the value of the house/building is claimed to be more than that, the joint survey committee will assess its value and decide accordingly.

* Homestead lands will be compensated at the rate of Rs five lakh per acre.

* Community lands and assets (such as *bajarna*, *masani*, graveyards, *dhangra-bassa*, commemorative tombs and religious places, wells, public utilities, etc) will be compensated on the basis of "land for land" plus cost of the structures through a negotiation process.

* *Pokhars* (ponds) and *bandhas* (earthen dams), if damaged, will be made good by the company to the satisfaction of the owner. Failing that, compensation will be paid at the rate of a minimum of Rs 50,000 as digging cost plus equal land.

It is worth recalling that prior to the agreement, the company was not offering any compensation for community assets, or ludicrous amounts such as Rs 1200 for ponds.

5. Compensation in case of accident

Generally, big private companies hire workers on contract and in case of grave accidents leave the injured to their fate or pass the buck to petty contractors. In the agreement it has been made clear that if any person, whether labourer or villager, suffers any injury or fatality during the pipeline-laying work or as a result of any occurrence associated with the pipeline (such as bursting of the pipeline, leakage of any toxins, etc), the company will be liable to pay accident compensation within 48 hours of the accident. In case of death, the company will pay an ex-gratia amount permissible under law plus Rs 1.5 lakh and costs towards final rites of the deceased person. In case of grave injury leading to permanent incapacitation (physical or mental) or physical handicap, the company will pay compensation as per legal provisions plus Rs one lakh and full cost of treatment. The company will bear all treatment cost in case of minor injuries.

6. Employment and wages.

It was agreed by the two sides that the company will engage only local youth from among the pipeline project-affected tribal or dalit families as wage labourers for all low-skilled or semi-skilled jobs. Wherever necessary, the company will impart the necessary technical training to these

workmen at its own cost.

The Sangh demanded a minimum wage of Rs 100 per day, but finally the two sides agreed to Rs 80 per day. It was immediately implemented. The company assured it would observe an 8-hour working day and a paid weekly off for all workmen.

7. Community collective compensation

While executing so-called development projects, the big capitalist companies inflict heavy damage upon communal resources such as forests, water-resources and courses and ecology of the area. While damage to private resources and assets is made good to some extent under the concerned people's pressure, communal damage mostly remains uncompensated. Sometimes these big companies do undertake certain welfare works which are portrayed as the magnanimity of these companies. Far from this, such doles can, at best, be called partial communal compensation in lieu of damage done to communal assets. The Sangh, while dealing with the pipeline company, tried to undo the damage by stipulating the planting of trees and generating of forest. Still, it made Essar Steels pay further collective compensation to the local community. The following decisions were incorporated in the agreement.

- * The company will restore all roads and *rastas* damaged by its vehicles. It will construct a motorable road from Oringi to Tatmanguda and Hatguda to Janbai.
- * The company will construct a bridge (of approximately 10 metres span) over the canal at Parjaguda and culverts at Tatmanguda.
- * The company will provide six boats each with a carrying capacity of upto 50 people, free of cost, for the use of the local people. These boats will be deployed at different ghats as decided by the Sangh.
- * The company will provide potable drinking water in the tribal villages falling along the pipeline where such facilities do not exist to this day.
- * The company will construct a community hall for the tribal people in the village decided by the Sangh.
- * Two mobile medical camps will be made operational in Malkangiri and

Chittrakonda areas on a continuous basis manned by qualified staff. Medical camps will be conducted once every 15 days at a designated place to cover 10 villages. Free medicines will be provided in these camps.

* The company will provide adequate quantity of medicines to the Sangh for free distribution among the patients for diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, skin diseases and other general purpose medicines.

Payment of compensation

Generally it is seen that big bourgeois companies, when caught in some difficult situation, make very lofty promises and even enter into such agreements which are very favourable to the resisting masses. But once their purpose is served and the situation turns favourable for them, they lose no time in discarding and violating such agreements. The Sangh itself had tasted such a bitter experience in the past. In the year 1997-98, after a long and resolute struggle against the tin ore companies Hamco and REME, the Sangh succeeded in arriving at a splendid agreement. But within a few months of signing this accord, the company fled the scene, after pocketing several hundred crores of rupees of the public sector banks, and the agreement remained largely unimplemented. Drawing proper lessons from its experience, the Sangh this time has tried to ensure that the company is made to implement all key provisions of the agreement before the completion of the pipeline work. It has been decided that the pipeline work will be undertaken in segments of two km after payment of full compensation. Side by side, the payment of the balance compensation will be made for those areas where the pipeline had been laid before the agreement. Similar steps have been taken to ensure the implementation of some other constituent parts of the agreement. The Sangh has been vested with decisive powers as the final authority to settle various disputes.

Significance of this struggle

The bold and determined struggle of the Adibasi Sangh against the pipeline-laying company and the amazing victory achieved in it is of tremendous significance for the Sangh. The victorious struggle, no doubt, has economically benefited immensely hundreds of adibasi, dalit and Bengali peasants.

The successful assertion of peasants' right over all lands during this struggle will serve as a valuable precedent in all future agrarian revolutionary fights over the land question. The huge victory has inspired and emboldened the Sangh activists and support base and helped the Sangh to expand into some new areas. The struggle has reaffirmed the revolutionary prestige of the Sangh and again projected it as an unwavering true champion of the revolutionary interests of the adibasi peasants. Further, this valiant struggle deserves attention and appreciation for its following three distinctive features:

(i) This struggle is unique in the sense that it was not fuelled by any spontaneous upsurge of the tribal masses against the pipeline company. Rather, the situation was the exact opposite, and very adverse. The pipeline company had already laid 30 per cent of the pipeline without encountering any difficulty. It had distributed land compensation in much of the remaining area. The company had created a network of its *dalaals* and mollified and won over the various limbs of the administration, media and other influential sections to its side. There was hardly any visible resentment against the company. A resistance movement against the company seemed to be a far cry. Even a section of the Sangh activists considered it a lost cause. The Sangh leadership was hopeful of building and putting up some resistance against loot and arbitrariness of the company, but the prospect of building a powerful peasant resistance movement was looking dim. The significance of this great struggle lies in the fact that the Sangh leadership persevered in diligent effort to build the peasant resistance, brick by brick, in a well-planned and organised way, and ultimately succeeded in changing a highly adverse situation into an increasingly favourable situation. What seemed once to be inconceivable was made rather easily attainable. The seemingly all-powerful steel company was made to bow before the organised strength of the adibasi masses. The struggle provides a valuable lesson for all struggling people, more so for the tribal masses of South Orissa who are facing an increased onslaught of the exploiting classes. The lesson is: if your cause is just and genuine and you rely on the great power of the masses and dare to struggle, even a seemingly powerful and invincible-looking enemy can be brought to its knees or severely restrained.

(ii) Ever since the Bengali refugees were settled in South Orissa under the Dandakaranya Plan of the 1960s, an undercurrent of apprehensions and resentment had all along remained prevalent among the local tribal populace against these Bengali settlers, for various reasons. The fleecing trade and money-lending practices of a section of the Bengali migrants and usurpation of adibasi lands by them turned the simmering suspicions and discontent into a sharp antagonism. The increasing socio-economic divide between an exploiting and hegemonic layer of the Bengali settlers and the suppressed and exploited masses of the local tribal people could not be directed along class lines. The vested interests on both sides, but particularly among the Bengali settler community, tried to direct this class divide along communal lines. Long-drawn and violent clashes claiming many lives were witnessed in Nabarangpur district between the Bengalis and adibasi only two years ago.

This remarkable struggle against the pipeline company, for the first time in Malkangiri, if not the whole of South Orissa, has brought the adibasi peasants and the dalit and toiling Bengali peasants together on a big scale in their joint struggle against the common enemy. It has paved the way for removing mutual suspicions and bitterness among the toiling sections of the two communities and forging a fighting bond among them against their exploiters, whoever they may be. Such struggles over common class interests can overcome the polarisation along narrow caste or communal lines and enhance them along class lines. In this way, the arch-communal as well as exploiting elements among the two communities can be isolated and the people's joint struggle for livelihood and better lives advanced along a correct cause.

(iii) The pipeline being laid by Essar Steels criss-crosses the territory of three states, namely, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Coincidentally, democratic revolutionary forces under various banners are active along the whole stretch of this pipeline in all three states. Unfortunately, only Malkangiri Zilla Adibasi Sangh put up a determined resistance against the brazen loot of the powerful company to safeguard the interests of the toiling adibasi people. At no other place did the company have to confront any serious mass resistance, and it could lay the pipeline with relative ease and at minimal cost. The act of laying a pipeline can hardly go unnoticed by pro-people forces intimately linked with the

toiling people. These revolutionary forces should not have ignored such a vital act of plunder by a big corporate house for so long. A broader resistance would have sent a strong reminder to the capitalist vultures on the prowl in this region.

Postscript:

The implementation of the agreement is unfolding without any serious hiccups. Distribution of more than half the compensation is over. The bridge over the canal is under construction. Mobile medical teams are operating and free medicine distribution is on. Some boats have arrived while others are said to be under preparation. Prospects for fuller implementation of the accord seem to be good.

January 2005

A Report on the Zhengzhou Four

“I feel immensely proud of being arrested for honouring the memory of Mao Zedong”

Zhengzhou is a centre of the workers' movement against the capitalist class ruling China today. The following material describes the fate of those who distributed a leaflet in Zhengzhou commemorating Comrade Mao Zedong on his 28th death anniversary. Whether or not one agrees with the exact formulations used in the leaflet, it is a bold exposure of the capitalist rulers of China and upholds comrade Mao's legacy as a powerful weapon for the proletarian ranks to overthrow them.

Two of the accused were tried behind closed doors and sentenced to three years in prison. However, by that time many people had come to know of the case and began expressing their solidarity with these revolutionaries. The events described below indicate how dearly the Chinese working class cherishes the memory of Mao Zedong, and demonstrate that, in the words of the leaflet, “As long as classes and the class struggle still exist in our world, Mao Zedong will remain alive”. — Editor, Comrade

A Brief Account of the Case

— China Study Group, USA

In recent years, on the anniversary of Mao's passing on September 9, many people in Zhengzhou would gather before Mao's statue in the Zijinshan Square, to pay tribute to Mao's memory by laying wreaths or reciting poems. Each year there would be a massive police presence,

which inevitably would lead to incidents of confrontation and arrest.

This year a crowd again gathered on September 9; the event was relatively peaceful, as no police was dispatched to forcefully disperse the crowd. A local resident, Mr. Zhang Zhengyao, however, was taken into custody by plainclothes agents around 10:00 am, apparently because he was distributing leaflets whose contents were judged inflammatory or subversive in nature. What Zhang handed out were copies of a commemorative piece, titled "Mao Forever Our Leader", specifically written for this occasion. On September 10, 1:00 A.M., Zhengzhou City Police took Zhang Zhengyao in handcuffs back to his apartment to conduct a search; they took away his computer, the remaining copies of the commemorative piece and other documents. Three other persons were implicated in connection with this case: Mr. Wang Zhanqing has been detained for allegedly arranging the printing of the leaflets through an acquaintance in a printer's shop; Zhang Ruquan and Ms. Ge Liying, wife of Zhang Zhengyao, were placed under surveillance; Zhang allegedly had penned the commemorative piece at the request of Zhang Zhengyao, and Ms. Ge was said to have posted it on an internet Maoist website, Mao Zedong Flag.

The incident went pretty much unnoticed, even among China's left circles. Zhengzhou has acquired a reputation as a hotbed of radical Maoism. It has seen some of the most militant labor protests and repeated clashes with police over Mao anniversary in recent years. Many activists there had experienced brief detentions, many more than once. This incident and related arrests were not considered a big deal, especially since Hu Jintao was believed to be more tolerant to dissent coming from the left. The authorities, however, decided to deal with them this time by the 'force of Law'. A trial was originally scheduled for December 14, the date later changed to December 21; initial charges state subversion against them had been dropped; instead, they are being charged with a lesser crime: deliberately spreading falsehoods to damage other's reputation, and undermining social order and national interests.

The news began to spread on left-leaning websites about the pending trial; many sites, when reporting on the case, also published the entire text of the commemorative piece. It is now becoming a sort of cause celebre on China's radical left. On December 21, the scheduled trial did take place, albeit in a closed session, and not open to public, as originally

announced. Many people actually went on that day, some from other parts of China, to attend the trial as an expression of solidarity, but were unable to get in. Only two defendants, Zhang Zhengyao and Zhang Ruquan were tried that day; both were found guilty, and each given three years on Dec. 24. The other two's trial date is yet to be set.

An abridged translation of the leaflet

Mao Zedong Forever Our Leader!

—A statement in commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Passing of Mao Zedong

28 years have elapsed since Chairman Mao left us.

In the past 28 years, the reactionary forces headed by capitalist roaders within our Party have usurped the state and Party powers and divided up state assets among themselves. Meanwhile, they have been spewing deep-seated hatred and venom against Mao Zedong and his socialist legacy. They have done their utmost to attack and slander Mao Zedong, by the use of such tactics as concocting Party resolutions, issuing official documents or reports, and publishing articles and editorials in official news media; moreover, in their attempt to smear Mao Zedong, they have resorted to such low blows as "Democracy Wall" posters, rumors and innuendos, personal memoirs and interviews with foreign journalists.

But the great majority of Chinese people, accounting for more than 95 per cent of the population, and in particular workers and the peasants, will always stand by the side of Mao Zedong. Under Mao Zedong's leadership, to serve the people wholeheartedly was set out as the fundamental precept guiding the work of the Party, the government and the army. He had repeatedly urged all Party members and all the cadres always to take the mass line and stand on the side of 95 per cent of the people; he emphatically stated that: "To take the mass line is a fundamental principle of Marxism." Through out his life, he had fought for the liberation of the people, until his last breath.

From their direct experience, the Chinese people realized that Mao Zedong and they themselves were intimately bound together, in good times and bad, in victory and defeat: with Mao Zedong as their leader, Chinese people were the masters of the country, and enjoyed inviolable

democratic rights. They lived a happy life, confident, optimistic and reassured of ever better days ahead. But after Mao Zedong passed away, the working class in China was knocked down overnight by the bourgeoisie; they are no longer the masters of their own country. In this society of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics," money means power and social status. The wealth polarization has driven working people into abject poverty; as a result, they have lost their social status and all the rights they had enjoyed previously. They are no longer dignified socialist laborers; instead, they are forced to sell their labor power as commodities for survival: they have become tools that can be bought freely by the capitalists.

Part of the working people work for so-called state-owned enterprises, but the term 'state-owned' actually means capitalist-owned because the entire state is owned by the capitalist class. The laborers are no longer working for themselves; they are working to create surplus value for the capitalist class. Another part of working people have in effect become slaves for large and small capitalists. They suffer from even crueller exploitation and oppression. In addition, hundreds of millions of workers and peasants have been constantly subjected to layoffs, and forced migration, living from hand to mouth, always on the march, looking for jobs, and struggling for mere survival. Labor has become the only means for the survival of themselves and their families. Work is no longer a guaranteed right. As a result of the commercialization of education, health care, cultural activities, sports and legal recourse, they have been in effect deprived of the right to send their children to school, access to health care, the right to pension and other rights associated with old age, the right to participate in cultural, recreational and sports activities; and even the right to legal protection. Moreover, as a result of the waste of resources and environmental pollution caused directly by the rapacious development pursued by the capitalist class, the working people have even lost their right to healthy food, clean water and fresh air. Poverty has brought them untold suffering!

A line has thus been clearly drawn. Mao Zedong is the leader of the Chinese working class; he is the leader of over 95 per cent of the Chinese people. The imperialist revisionists and bourgeoisie and all the reactionary forces within and outside of China oppose Mao Zedong and hate

him, while the people love him. The longer he has left this world, the more vehemently his enemies oppose him, the more profoundly, unshakably, sincerely and passionately do people love him. It is indeed laughable for those who oppose Mao Zedong and stand against the people to pronounce a verdict on Mao Zedong, which of course is categorically rejected by the people. The "Mao Zedong fever" that has occurred repeatedly in China over these years has eloquently refuted the two official "resolutions" purporting to pronounce a verdict on Mao Zedong. They are unacceptable to the Chinese people and to the people of the world.

Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and the like call themselves the core, or chief architects, of China's reforms, or the proud author of the "Theory of the Three Represents"; a close look at their performances and deeds will lead to the conclusion that they only represent the interests of imperialism, and the interests of the bourgeoisie. The historical practice and stark social realities of the past 28 years have opened our eyes and raised our class consciousness; the bourgeois elements within our Party is the head and the backbone of the Chinese bourgeois class. These are extremely selfish persons, stubbornly pursuing the capitalist road. They are much more sinister, ruthless, greedy, and devious than an average capitalist outside the Party.

Just take a look at what has transpired in a relatively short period of twenty plus years: the large and small capitalist-roaders in the Party and their family members have all become millionaires and even billionaires; who can deny that all their talks about socialism, and the "Three Represents", are outright lies. What they really want is capitalism, because only capitalism will bring them the greatest benefit. They are the enemies of socialism and the people.

We, however, must not forget that the CCP after all is a Party that had been founded and led by Mao Zedong, and one with a long revolutionary tradition. It is a Party that had carried resolute struggle against Kruschew's revisionism, and had been tempered by the Cultural Revolution. And consequently, just as there are capitalist-roaders in the Party, there are certainly socialist-roaders in the Party as well, particularly at the grassroots level. Among the rank and file Party members and low-level cadres, the overwhelming majority are resentful of revisionist lead-

ers within the party. They wish to see the Party change its current line and to revert to the socialist road. Some of them cannot tolerate it any more. They have stepped out to openly challenge the current leadership, but more people still find it safe for themselves or for their families not to speak their minds. We are convinced, along with the deepening of the revisionist clique's push for privatization, the class contradictions in China are bound to become more acute; and the masses will certainly intensify their struggle on ever wider scales. When development of contradictions and mass struggles nationwide reach a climax, the people within the Party, the government and the army who have understood the true nature of revisionism will wage a resolute struggle against it, and will rejoin the proletarian class ranks to hold high the banner of Mao Zedong and to resume the fight for socialism in China.

As long as classes and the class struggle still exist in our world, Mao Zedong will remain alive, forever the leader of the oppressed and exploited classes. As the entire history of China's revolution has repeatedly shown, as long as the revolutionary people follow steadfastly the guidance of Mao Zedong, their struggle will surely advance from victories to victories.

The struggle of the people is the unexhaustible source of our confidence and power.

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An Eyewitness Account of the Public Response

The following report is posted on the website of the book-store/political-salon Utopia. It was penned by Shao Jingyan.

"Today was an unusually cold day for the city of Zhengzhou, it snowed heavily, contrary to weather forecast. But despite the daunting weather conditions, many people have come to the city of Zhengzhou, from all over the country, in a spontaneous response to the news of the trial of Maoists in Zhengzhou.

"They come here, without orchestration or an agreed plan, but rather, out of the deepest sense of loyalty to a socialist republic, and most profound respect and love for their deceased leader and teacher, Chairman Mao Zedong, united by a common concern for justice, and a perception that what is at stake with this case is the fate of the socialist republic and

of the people. They know that the outcome of this trial will speak volumes about the attitude held by the authorities of the city of Zhengzhou toward the banner and legacy of Mao Zedong. This case is a public litmus test of for the Zhengzhou authorities: Are they sincerely following the instructions of our party center regarding the imperative need to 'hold high at all times the great banner of Mao Zedong Thought'? The defendants in this case, Mr. Zhang Zhengyao, and other workers, have been arrested for no crime whatsoever other than an act in honor of the memory of Chairman Mao.

"As their trial began today, the informed people all over the world will be watching. Supporters in a position to do so have traveled to Zhengzhou to express solidarity. Many older workers in Zhengzhou braced the heavy snow to go to the court if only just to see these Maoist defendants in person. The trial held today, Dec. 21, only days from the 111th anniversary of Mao's birthday on Dec. 26, was supposed to be a public proceeding, but the intermediate court of Zhengzhou city without advanced notice had decided to hold it in closed session. The charge was also changed from 'subverting state power' to 'libel'.

"People kept waiting and waiting outside of the court in a state of suspended animation; finally, the lawyer came to give a brief account. In particular, the people learned, Mr. Zhang Ruquan had made a rousing statement, resolutely refuting the charge made against him and declaring, in conclusion, 'I feel immensely proud of myself for being arrested for honoring the memory of Mao Zedong.' When Zhang Zhengyao was put into a police vehicle, to be whisked away, the crowd chanted aloud: 'Justice will be done'; 'Truth will prevail!'; 'Solidarity!' The police car was gone. But people still lingered on, voicing their indignation: Who are the real criminals that are daily breaking the laws with impunity? Who is it on earth that are trampling the constitution underfoot? Why are they afraid of people paying tribute to Mao's memory? One person said angrily: these evil, corrupt officials are lording over us and having a ball for now, but sooner or later people will get even with them! On September 9, an old worker was arrested before Mao's statue for an act in commemoration of the 28th anniversary of Mao's passing; On Dec. 21, a few days before Mao's 111th birthday anniversary, he and others were tried in secrecy. What kind of signal is this?"

Comrade Gonzalo and Others Produced in Court

On November 5, 2004, Abimael Guzman (Chairman Gonzalo) and 16 co-defendants were produced before a court in the prison of Callao in Peru. Comrade Gonzalo has been in prison since 1992, when three hooded judges (naval officers) of a military court sentenced him to life imprisonment after a mockery of a trial. The official charge was "treason". The real charge was having led the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP) in waging a people's war for liberation from imperialism and feudalism. He has spent 12 years in intolerable conditions. A worldwide movement has been waged for his release as well as that of other PCP Central Committee members and hundreds of other PCP members and supporters crowding the country's jails.

In 2003, Peru's highest court ruled that the anti-"terror" laws under which comrade Gonzalo and other leaders of Peru's Communist Party (PCP) were tried were illegal. The Inter-American Human Rights Court in Costa Rica also ruled that these trials were contrary to international law. Logically, those tried in such a fashion should have been freed, but the Peruvian rulers hurriedly passed new anti-"terror" laws to prevent this eventuality. Over a thousand PCP members have to be re-tried in this fashion.

When he was produced in court, Gonzalo embraced his fellow-accused comrades. Then he turned towards the reporters, smiled, and thrust his fist defiantly in the air before taking his seat. The hearing started with each co-defendant standing to address the court, with most saying their lawyers needed more time. Gonzalo's lawyer had already indicated to the press that Gonzalo had no intention of cooperating with this fresh illegal trial. When Gonzalo's turn came, he whispered on one side to Elena Iparraguirre (comrade Miriam), and then on the other with another co-defendant. The defendants then all stood, turned and chanted (according to various press reports), "Long live Peru's Communist Party! Glory to the Party of Leninism, Maoism!" "Glory to Marxism!", "Long live the armed struggle!", "Glory to the Peruvian people!". The judges immediately adjourned the proceedings. Gonzalo calmly stood up, turned his back to the bench, smiled and, along with comrade Miriam, raised his fist in a victory salute. As he walked out, the mother of comrade Miriam put her hand up to the glass partition. Gonzalo did the same from the other side.

Even as this scene took place, it was reported that the PCP temporarily seized control of some villages and called mass meetings before dispersing again.

After November 5, Peru's President Toledo, former World Bank official and present servant of imperialism, condemned the scene in court as a "shameful spectacle". "This arrogant behaviour", he said, "cannot go unanswered". He said a new judge would try the case. Face-to-face prisoner visits were ended. Gonzalo and other PCP leaders were sent to solitary confinement. Gonzalo's lawyer was now denied all access to his client.

IMMEDIATELY RELEASE COMRADE GONZALO AND ALL PCP COMRADES!

