

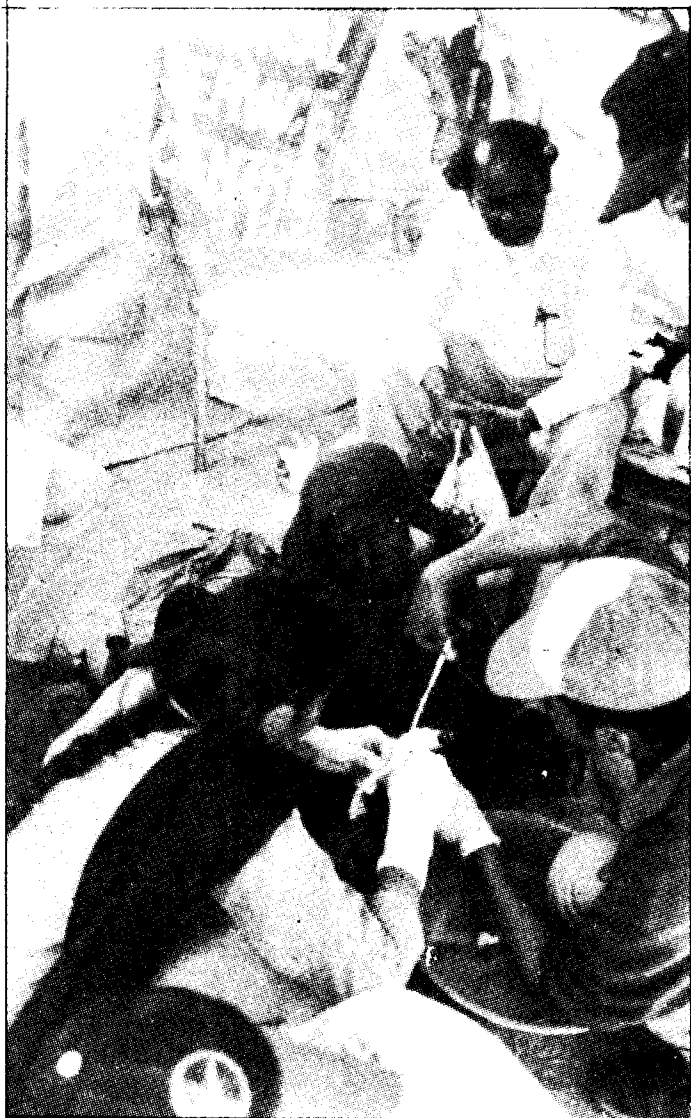
Proletarian Era

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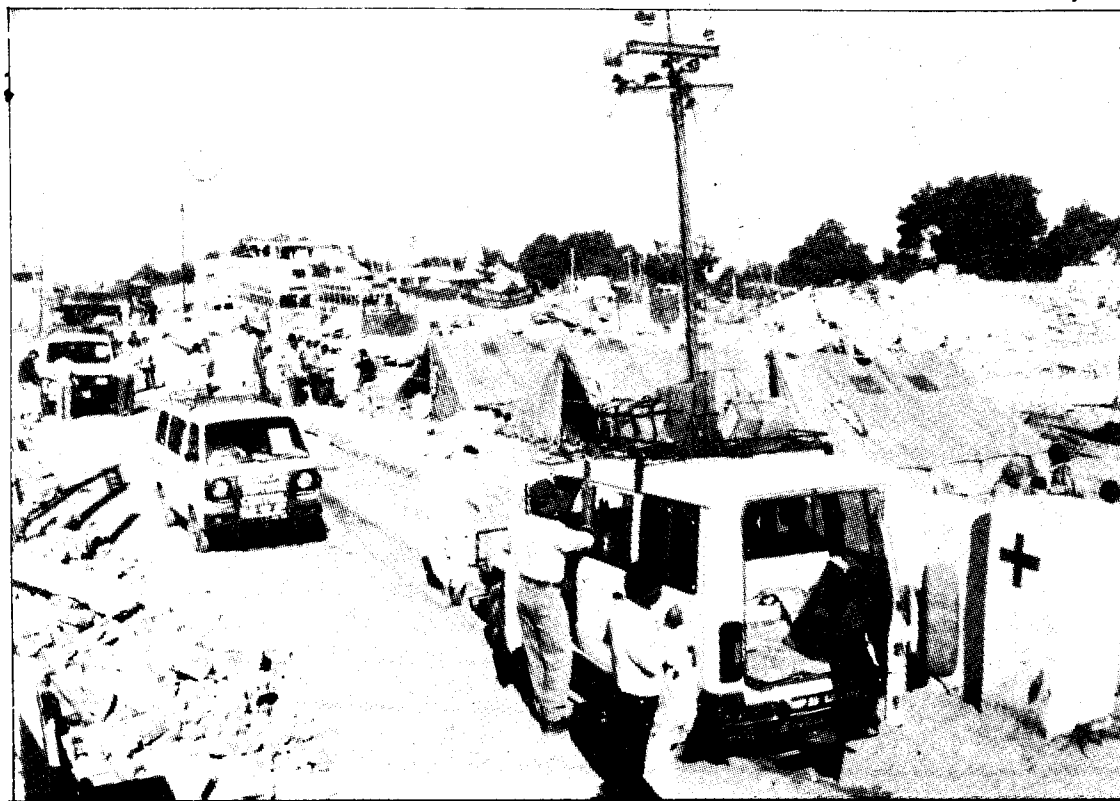
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SUCI'S RELIEF WORK



(Above) Patients are treated at the medical camp

(Below) Base camp site at Bhachau with mobile medical vans and relief vehicles



GUJARAT EARTHQUAKE

Stench Of Filthy Politics Fails To Destroy Fragrance Of Humanity

The earthquake in Kutchh of Gujarat in Western India left death and ruin in a catastrophic devastation on its trails. From amid the rubble, bodies and cries emerge two tales in the sharpest contrast of dark and light — of the prowling steps of political hounds, and of the outstretched hands of people, the stench of the filthiest politics failing to destroy the fragrance of humanity.

The state BJP government did claim in the beginning to have started relief and rescue operation on a war-footing. Almost two weeks after the quake hit, victims in more than a thousand villages await minimum of help. The government claims that the law and order situation is under control, but homeless and hungry survivors in many areas are victims of attacks by armed gangsters who loot them of whatever little they could salvage from debris and the foodstuff given by volunteer organizations. Angry people gheraoed the visiting union home minister and BJP leader, L.K. Advani, accusing the government of gross neglect and demanding protection against armed looters.

Nobody knows how many thousands now lie trapped and buried under debris of collapsed houses. Debris cannot be cleared, the injured cannot be taken to the hospital, any survivors cannot be saved, nor rotting corpses can be removed, because the government has pretext to offer that vital equipment like cranes, gas powered concrete cutters, bulldozers and ambulances are in short supply. This government of the much trumpeted richest state of India, that is Gujarat, as also the BJP-led central government which is all keen to demonstrate the Indian state's military powers in nuclear arms and rocket delivery system cannot procure these vital equipment but have the temerity to claim they did launch rescue operation on a war-footing! Proud of spending most of the money extorted from the people through taxation and price hike to meet the enormity of military budget and build a hi-tech communication and information technology system with the aim of augmenting the state power, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the prime minister, could tell without qualms that the government lacks adequate preparation to meet calamity situations like that of Gujarat quake and Orissa super-cyclone.

Unbelievable it may sound but the Gujarat BJP government has made short supply of vital equipment a plea to call off rescue operations. The army and civil authority are using explosives to pull down damaged buildings. And this in the face of the fact that in Ahmedabad itself, six days after the quake, a 25 year old woman and her 2 year old son were brought out alive by a rescue team. Instances are known of people having been rescued in the past in this country and abroad even after weeks from under debris, flooded mines, or inundated areas. Civilised governments call it a norm to explore all conceivable means till such time as will ensure rescue of any possible survivors and removal of bodies of the dead. Till accomplishment of this objective, they use other means to prevent damaged structures from collapse and will think of using explosives only at the end of it all. But with these governments and these political leaders no savage decision is inhuman enough to induce the humane sense to try and save at all costs even if it be a single life.

(Contd. on page 4)

Review of Constitution — BJP's Sinister Move

At the inaugural function of the golden jubilee celebration of the Election Commission at New Delhi, on January 17 last, Prime Minister Vajpayee said that a fixed tenure for Parliament and state legislatures was "essential for India's democratic system to become mature and deliver good governance." He opined that elections were becoming prohibitively expensive and frequent, and expressed happiness that the Constitution Review Commission had initiated a public debate on the subject (*The Statesman*, 18.1.2001).

Sometime back, the BJP-led central government had appointed a National Commission to review the working of the Constitution. The Commission had issued a consultation paper which called for a national debate on some aspects of the present electoral system. On January 31, the Commission Chairman Venkatachaliah confirmed in New Delhi that the issue of fixed terms for the members elected to the legislatures would be taken up for a debate (*The Statesman*, 1.2.2001).

The idea is to make the government, once formed, free from dependence on the legislature so that it can complete its full tenure of 5 years in office, irrespective of the support it commands from the legislature. This is sought to be achieved through the present review, and as its outcome, the amendment of the Constitution. Thus, even a basic concept of bourgeois democracy like the primacy of the legislature over the government, the executive, the government's accountability to the legislature — is sought to be given the go by. All this, with the avowed objective of injecting some stability into the bourgeois parliamentary political system.

Some people, disgusted by frequent mid-term election, may consider Vajpayee's proposal to be a positive step towards reducing instability. But is this really so? What is the present instability due to? The crisis and instability in our political system is a reflection of the intense crisis in the capitalist economy of the country. Indian capitalism came into state power in the post Second World War period and embarked upon the freest possible development of capitalism under the given circumstances at a time when world capitalism was suffering from the third intense general crisis of capitalism and had already become reactionary and decadent. Thus, capitalism in this country developed and consolidated itself under the shadow of ever deepening crisis and this crisis of capitalist economy was reflected more and more in the crisis of the political superstructure with time. The crisis got compounded owing to the utter selfishness and ego-centrism of bourgeois and petty bourgeois politicians whose greed for pelf and power, for self aggrandizement at any cost make them devoid of any principle and indulge in floor crossing at any provocation or inducement, generating instability in parliamentary politics.

The instability thus generated has been plaguing our parliamentary political system for long, and for long has the ruling capitalist class been devising ways and means to artificially stabilise the system to protect its class interest, implementing the same through the parties subservient to it, that crowd the political scene.

Congress, as the chief political agent of the ruling class, served it well and for long, being in government at the Centre and in the states. But with passage of time, it became unpopular due to its pursuit of anti-people policies in service of the ruling class, and it became increasingly difficult to maintain Congress governments in the face of growing mass discontent and wrath. To stabilise the situation, the ruling class tried to introduce the two-party system to keep the people pacified and confined within the bourgeois parliamentary

democracy. The Janata Party was propped up overnight to provide an alternative in Delhi, and other alternative governments were put up in some states too. The present bourgeois alternative currently being projected at the all-India level is the BJP, while the TDP in Andhra Pradesh and the CPI(M)-led Left Front are among the chosen alternatives of the ruling class at the state level.

Henceforth the strategy of the ruling capitalist class became to select a party or a combination as the best bet for faithfully implementing its policies and for keeping the people arrested within the capitalist system in a given situation, and to make the chosen alternative sweep the polls through its backing, money and muscle power, orchestrated fanfare in the media in its favour and through all-out centralised administrative rigging of the polls in its favour.

But the inherent instability of the system is such that even this failed to provide the required stability in the long run and there were instances of such cooked up majority, even a two-third majority in Parliament, fizzling out in a matter of months due to the unethical conduct of self-seeking bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians, resulting in fall of the government thus bolstered up, and necessitating a mid-term poll.

Then began the present phase of coalition governments. Unable to provide a viable alternative in the form of a government by a particular party or combination, the bourgeois press and other media and political analysts began to sing praise of coalition rule, saying that it represented an extension of democracy, thus making a virtue of the urgent necessity to prop up coalition governments to stabilise the political system. The present BJP-led NDA coalition at the Centre is one such government.

It is to be remembered that the parliamentary system is a part of the bourgeois democratic set-up. The capitalist class once fought against the state power of feudal absolutism to establish individual liberty, freedom of opinion and expression in the society. Elaborate bourgeois democratic set-up was evolved and established from country to country through long struggle, embodying the principle of clear-cut division of power between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary and provision of built-in checks and balances to ensure their relative independence. But however democratic, bourgeois democracy was in essence the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, based on bourgeois individual ownership and capitalist exploitation. Naturally, the bourgeoisie have always stressed that bourgeois parliamentary system is the last word in the evolution of democratic thinking and in regard to individual liberty.

But history has proved them to be wrong. As capitalism developed, the inexorable laws of capitalist economy gave rise to endemic crises. As capitalism attained the stage of imperialism through growth and development of monopoly capital, even the most 'democratic' advanced capitalist countries became engaged in plundering the colonies, trampling upon the democratic rights and civil liberty of the people there. With the deepening of the crises of world capitalist economy with passage of time and in the face of growing mass disaffection, the bourgeoisie in different countries, from their fear complex about revolution, became less and less attached to democratic rights and civil liberty and started trampling upon the democratic norms, rights and civil liberty of their own people, which had once been achieved through long years of struggle. Fascism, naked or from behind the facade of bourgeois parliamentary system, became the order of the day.

Presently, world imperialism-capitalism is in the vortex of intense crises. Despite the fanfare about globalisation and liberalisation, world capitalist economy is rocked by crises day-in and day-out. Some areas of the economy in some countries suddenly get inflated up like a bubble only to burst and collapse on the morrow. The all out crises have enveloped the political sphere too, generating utter unprincipledness, instability and criminalisation in politics in various forms from country to country, laying bare the true face of bourgeois democracy and nakedly revealing the fact that it has been reduced to a mere apparently democratic outer shell to cover and hide the stark reality of the merciless, ugly capitalist exploitation. It is the communists who have held up this truth which is now clearly perceived by all democratic-minded people and has once more been dramatically revealed by the recent presidential election of the USA, the prime capitalist country of the world, which exposed the staggering level of involvement of monopoly capital, mafia, capitalist administration and judiciary in unethically supporting this or that candidate.

In our country, despite the crises, the parliamentary democracy upto the mid 70s enjoyed a degree of relative stability. But as the crises grew, so grew more difficult the maintenance of stable governance. Such instability in politics, if continued, makes the common man lose faith in the existing political system. This is the last thing the ruling class desires, and so it tries to bring about some change in the system of governance supposed to restore political stability and projects it with fanfare as the panacea to capture the imagination of the people. And in such prescriptions, the accent is always on strengthening the executive at the cost of the legislature and the judiciary, on curtailment of democracy. This reflects the growing tendency of the ruling capitalist class to resort to administrative fascism in some form to safeguard its class rule.

Thus, during the tenure of Smt. Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister, when it became increasingly difficult to form a government and sustain it to provide stability, the ruling circles tried to initiate a debate in favour of adopting a

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Resist Attempt To Foist Fascism In The Name Of Stability

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presidential form of government in this country. The main idea behind the move was to concentrate the power in the hands of a President, say Smt. Indira Gandhi, relatively free from dependence on the elected legislature, although that move failed to gain ground due to various reasons.

The present bid of Prime Minister Vajpayee to initiate a debate in favour of fixed term for a ministry once formed, irrespective of its subsequent support position in the legislature, is to be viewed as a renewed attempt to foist administrative fascism upon the country in some form. Heading the NDA coalition formed of the disparate and regional parties and forces as he does, it is no doubt politically expedient to him and his party BJP to be able to hit upon some scheme that would enable the present BJP-led government to continue its rule unhampered by the pulls and counter-pulls by the various NDA constituents, mostly regional parties, in serving their respective petty interest as well as the interests of the respective regional capital which promote them.

The BJP serves the aggregate interest of Indian monopoly capital which has in effect become the aggregate interest of Indian capitalism, and is now the chosen alternative of the ruling class to govern the country on its behalf. But it does not follow from this that this party is free to bring about changes in the parliamentary system at will just to serve its own political end. The Indian ruling class is intent upon the full and speedy implementation of the policies of globalisation and liberalisation by the government and brooks no dilution, delay or discontinuity in this regard and so deems a coalition government dependent on the whims and caprices of the small constituents for its existence to be an impediment. Therefore, it desires to explore ways and means to bring about some change in the political structure as would free the government from dependence on the legislature and make for speedy, uninterrupted implementation of its class policy of globalisation and liberalisation. It is this stabilisation that is aimed at through the presently proposed debate for changes in the system and this happens to coincide with the BJP's interest in parliamentary politics.

If some parties oppose this, they do so not because of their great love for democracy, but because of their different position vis-a-vis the BJP in parliamentary politics. Being in opposition, the contemplated change offers no immediate prospect of dividends in parliamentary politics to them whereas by opposing it, they can hope to project themselves before the people as champions of democracy, and gain in election politics.

It is to be remembered that globalisation has aggravated the crisis in Indian capitalist economy, sharpening the competition and contradiction between different monopoly houses and the contradiction between monopoly capital and regional capital. In this complex situation, amidst the pulls and counter pulls, it is quite possible that all parties, forces and personalities in the bourgeois political spectrum and establishment may not always speak with the same voice. For example, K. R. Narayanan, the President of India,

for whatever reason, strongly criticised the proposed change in the Constitution in his Republic Day address to the nation. But the point is that more than one daily, financed by monopoly capital, promptly came out against the President's remarks.

This is a straw in the wind, unmistakable sign that the real powers that be, monopoly capital, is seriously toying with the idea of changes in the political set-up in order to artificially stabilise the political scenario, through curtailment of the existing democratic rights if need be.

The people should ponder : If a government, once installed, is free to act as it pleases without any check or hindrance in the legislative forum, does it not make for unbridled tyranny ? Given the present lack of morality and rampant corruption in bourgeois politics, only a principled opposition inside the legislature coupled with the pressure of democratic mass movement outside can act as a deterrent to misgovernance and uphold the people's cause. Some who may fancy that "rule by an iron-hand" would weed out corruption and instil discipline should do well to remember that total negation of democratic rights and autocracy resulted in countries where well meaning but misguided people suffering from illusion about such 'strong rule' welcomed it.

Prime Minister Vajpayee, wishing to cash in upon the people's longing for clean politics, has gone on record saying that the proposed change, ensuring less frequent elections, would also reduce the corruption and malpractices the political parties have to take recourse to at election time. No one will be taken in by such 'pious' words. What is the BJP's track record ? The BJP is credited with having presented the nation with two governments of 13 days' and 13 months' duration respectively in the recent past and a fresh election when each of those

governments fell ! Even the present BJP-led coalition government is rocked by petty dissension among the coalition partners and the resultant instability almost every week. The people have experienced that before each election, the BJP forms alliance with disparate parties and forces, not on the basis of any ideology but by luring them with prospect of power and pelf, ministerial posts and even speakership. And at election times, the BJP thrives on use of unlimited money and muscle power, rigging, corruption and malpractices of all sorts. And after the election, in its bid to anyhow form a ministry, this party indulges in alluring legislators by all means, and even in outright horse trading to buy them up.

A fit medium indeed for ushering in stability and clean politics !

In the present era of reactionary, decadent capitalism, it is not possible to achieve clean, stable governance. Even in advanced capitalist countries, monopolies engaged in cut-throat competition to maximise their respective super profits wield enormous money and mafia power to influence the election results in favour of their chosen party in the hope gaining better government patronage in the coming term, breeding all-round irregularities and corruption in politics, even resulting sometimes in fall of a government on corruption charges. There is no escape from the instability, corruption and all-round moral degradation inherent in bourgeois democracy. The solution lies in replacing it with proletarian democracy.

While striving for it, the people should remain ever alert and resist at all costs any attempt to further curtail whatever bourgeois democratic rights and norms that are still there, any move to introduce elements of administrative fascism, like the present one, in the interest of democratic mass movement.

Events In Congo

On January 16, President Laurent Desire Kabila, of Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) fell to assassin's bullets exactly 40 years after the first Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba — the towering figure of the anti-imperialist struggle in that country — was assassinated in a CIA-hatched plot that finally brought the dictator Mobutu to power. President Kabila's assassination comes at a time when the Congo is war ravaged as a result of military invasion by Rwanda and Uganda under the tutelage of the US imperialists, and about half the country is under occupation, which the imperialists have been trying to pass this off as a civil war, as an internal rebellion. But in reality Kabila had recently been able to engage the opposition forces in a dialogue and to successfully rally and unite the patriotic elements behind his government's efforts to defend the independence and sovereignty of the Congo against foreign aggression, and the dictates of imperialists. It is at this juncture that Kabila was assassinated in circumstances that point to a well organised plot.

The imperialist powers could scarcely hide their glee at this turn of events. The imperialist controlled media immediately flashed the news,

calling Kabila a dictator whose corrupt and despotic reign brought even worse disarray than Mobutu's. On the same day, when the Kabila government, in his name, imposed night curfew and appealed for calm, implying Kabila was grievously wounded but alive, government officials of USA, Belgium, Britain and Rwanda and Uganda stated that Kabila was dead, which is in total breach of diplomatic etiquette. This was clearly aimed at precipitating unrest and chaos — as part in their heinous conspiracy and plot to remove Kabila. This becomes even more glaringly evident from the provocative statements launched from Belgium's side, — the former colonial power of Congo — saying that General Kayembe, vice minister of defence, known for his loyalty and whole-hearted support for Kabila's ideas, had killed him in a clear attempt to incite a popular backlash to get him killed, and to unleash an ethnic clash between Kasains (to which community he belongs) and Katangis, which would have created a pretext for direct intervention for the imperialists. But Zimbabwe, which along with Angola — both with a history of anti-imperialist struggle against white Apartheid regimes are helping Congo fight against

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Criminal Apathy Towards Quake Victims Exposes Anti-People Character Of State and Central Governments

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In the fitness of its conduct and attitudes, therefore, this government tries to put death tolls at figures that can only excite laughter even amid the gloom of Gujarat. Keshubhai Patel, the chief minister, will not allow the official figure of death to cross 25000 despite the palpable scene of all round devastation. Whereas the union defence minister, George Fernandes assesses the figure at 1,00,000 at least. And the International Red Cross estimates the toll at 50,000. Where denial of responsibility is reckoned a privilege of power, no wonder the government will be guided by the convenient unscruple to employ means to wipe off evidence of the actual toll and pay compensation much less than it is legally and morally bound.

When hunger and deprivation drive people to demand of the rulers fulfillment of their minimal needs for life, the muscle of the state is on immediate evidence and the governmental machinery rapidly gears to let loose repression on the masses. Where is that machinery now to discharge its constitutional obligation to help people in need? Where is the will to save life, arrange medical care, restore supply of drinking water and electricity, prevent outbreak of epidemic, and rehabilitate those thousands whose shelter is the sky, food is rumour and solace is in tears?

But response was immediate from people from every part of the country to stand by the victims with relief and whatever possible. Teams from several foreign countries have arrived with materials and equipment needed for relief and rescue. But portable operation theatres and equipment cannot function as there is no electricity. Food, drinking water and medicines have piled up because there is no organization for distribution. Trained sniffer dogs have been brought to trace survivors under debris but the rescuers do not know where to go or whom to report to. Whereas, plane-loads of ministers and political highups are arriving each day from the Centre and the states. Assurance comes in galore for assistance, and promises are held out for reconstruction, rehabilitation and a national centre for calamity management, as if words are food and promises are rehabilitation by themselves. Cheated, deprived and in despair, people have started gheraoing government officials, demanding food, medicine and shelter.

Even so, despite the design of the rulers pursued over decades to degrade all sense of morals in people, disunite them on religion, caste and region, and instigate one section against another, the calamity has brought out the bright silver lining of people's role over the dark cloud of preformance of the government and the political gangsters. Muslim youths in large numbers, who have not slept since the quake hit on 26 January, are camping on hospital premises to donate blood but for which the lives of many victims of other religions could not have been saved. Christian youths are similarly donating blood and reaching people in distant parts with relief material. This is reality in resplendence in a state where majority-religion fundamentalists, the preachers of Hindutva belonging to saffron brigade with direct patronage of the state government, continue savage assaults on minority community people and government circulars seek to deny minority people some basic rights. Where,

at this moment of colossal human sufferings, RSS and BJP cadres are claiming all government relief material to distribute these on nakedly communal lines in the name of their own organizations and obstructing other organizations and parties from carrying out relief operation. Blood does not discriminate religion, that is why, Muslim blood saves lives of injured Hindus. Nor does food discriminate, that is why Christians' food gives life to Hindus. But political motivation behind religious fundamentalism does it. And the hour of crisis in Gujarat reveals that people stand by people irrespective of race, religion and region: it is the political design of the rulers to keep people divided on divisive lines.

A question here haunts the critical mind. Was damage to life and property inevitable on this scale? An earthquake of magnitude 6.9 on the Richter scale, which is said to have occurred in Gujarat, means in physical terms that all poorly built buildings will be destroyed but little damage to specially designed structures. In Ahmedabad nearly 150 recently built high-rises have collapsed, whereas industrial structures and many old buildings have withstood. The case only points out that the damaged buildings were designed and built in gross violation of the rules of the national building code. Gujarat, especially Kutchh, is however earthquake prone, no fewer earthquakes of lesser magnitudes rocking it every year. It has openly come out in the media that the promoters who built these buildings in disregard to the rules to mint fabulous money at the immeasurable cost of human life and property, had patronage of ministers, political leaders and government officials. With criticism mounting every day the government has at last started talking of measures to be taken against offending promoters, obviously as a show-off to people and to hide the nexus between promoters, political leaders, police and administration.

It is reported that an advance warning of the earthquake was sent to the central government. Was any action taken on it for checking and follow it up? Has the government, at the Centre as also in any of the states, taken any action worth the name towards preparation in advance to meet calamity situations like cyclone, earthquake, floods, drought and the like? But every year in one part or another it is for the people to suffer one or another of natural calamities. And every time after a calamity hits it is for the government to tell the people that these strikes from nature are but the strokes of fate whose burden is to be shouldered together. Scientists are carrying on research on national hazards, including earthquake, to develop means of prediction and prevention. Man has to travel long before he can come to grip with these blind forces of nature. Human history is testimony to how man has succeeded in the past to harness some of the forces for social advancement. It is, therefore, not for him to resign to fate but to explore ways of fighting blind natural forces, the prolific hazard of earthquake included.

No matter its performance in relief, rescue and rehabilitation of the victims, the state BJP government has been quick enough to calculate the damage at Rs.25000 crore and more. The central government led by the BJP, on its part, see in this

situation an opportune moment to exploit the countrywide sympathy over quake devastation and to pass the entire burden on the people's shoulder. During Orissa super-cyclone, when they were in the opposition in that state, they played with whether the Constitution provided for any such term as a national calamity. In the case of West Bengal, where too they are in the opposition, they played with words when severe floods inundated 9 districts and affected millions, to deny their responsibility. Being in government in Gujarat they have a different stake. The BJP has, therefore, utilised the central governmental machinery to issue an ordinance, bypassing the parliament scheduled to meet in 20 days' time, to impose an additional surcharge of 2% on income taxes. In actual terms, this burden will pass on to the common people in the end. The central government also contemplates to deduct 5% of salary of all government employees to the same end and the prime minister is repeatedly hinting at harsher budgets to follow soon. But match this punitive tax on the people with the magnitude of tax evasion to the tune of Rs.62000 crore which major industrial houses of the country enjoy as a privilege with impunity. The government also plans to take 'soft' loans of US\$1.5 billion from the Asian Development Bank. Recall here the attitude of China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, towards foreign help which came in galore in the aftermath of an earthquake. China gave thanks for the sympathy shown but refused to accept relief, only to depend on the initiative of the Chinese people to face the calamity.

The issue of earthquake calamity in Gujarat is water muddy enough for the parliamentary parties and bourgeois political leaders to fish in. The group rivalry in the BJP in Gujarat has nakedly come wide open, the plight of the quake victims coming as a ready handle for the state's anti-Keshubhai BJP faction to press their claim to governmental power by removing the chief minister. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi has made harsh criticism of the BJP government for failure in handling relief and rescue operations. She may do it, but the question cannot be avoided as regards what her party government did when the super-cyclone hit Orissa about one and a half year back. So low has gone down the credibility of all these governments, controlled by whichever of the parliamentary parties; that the government employees in Rajasthan have decided to donate a day's salary to the quake-hit victims of Gujarat only after a written assurance from the Ashok Ghelot-led Congress government that the money would be spent on the victims only and not for any other purpose. The suspicion arises because people have been kept in the dark regarding the huge sums of money collected through Kargil tax. People cannot also forget that cess on oil imposed during the Guif war is still in force even so many years after the war ended.

In the midst of this filthy politics, where bourgeois political leaders and parliamentary parties thrive on people's helpless sufferings and seek to cash in on every issue' public sympathy for electoral gains, the right thinking people ought to view everything from the standpoint of people's interest and on the anvil of people's interest. The situation warrants this, this first and foremost.

Glimpses of Situation in Gujarat and a Brief Report of our Relief Work

Immediately after the devastating earthquake in Gujarat on 26th January last, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, the General Secretary of our party while expressing profound grief and conveying his heartfelt condolence to the bereaved families appealed to the people to stand by the people of Gujarat in this hour of crisis. At the call of Comrade Mukherjee different state units of the party and mass organisations came forward and sent doctors, medicines, volunteers, relief materials and donations to Gujarat. Money, medicine, blanket, warm clothings, baby food, general volunteers, sugar, drinking water, rice, wheat etc. have been rushed from different states. Doctors' teams from Karnataka, Kerala, Delhi, MP, West Bengal, Chandigarh, Punjab among other states have rushed to the spots. These teams include Plastic surgeons, Anaesthetists, Orthopaedic surgeons, General Physicians, para medical staff, nursing staff and other volunteers. The volunteers from Gujarat worked day and night and rendered service which is practically unthinkable. Though our party has mobilised maximum volunteers and resources as per the strength of the party yet it must be admitted that our relief work is not more than a drop of water in a vast sea when compared with the actual requirement.

The task is indeed daunting. The earthquake has affected 3.5 crore people in Gujarat state. 13 districts have been seriously affected and the most affected district is Kutchh. Many cities, towns and villages are completely devastated. The death toll in Kutchh alone must be around one lakh and the total death toll for entire Gujarat state is more than 1,10,000. The government is hiding the number of deaths to avoid the responsibility of compensation. The loss of property even according to the official estimate is worth about 25 thousand crore of rupees. In Bhuj, Bhachau and Anjar every house has collapsed. Lakhs of people were injured, and thousands of children have been rendered orphans.

The most anti-people character of the BJP government of Gujarat and the BJP-led central government has been nakedly exposed in their total apathy to the distress of the victims and failure in tackling the situation after the earthquake on war-footing. Rescue operations totally failed. In Ahmedabad the BSF and Rapid Action Force were deployed, but they do not know anything about rescue operation. The military was deployed in only Kutchh but it was ill-equipped. They had no proper machinery and equipment for the rescue operation. So the military, too, failed in the operation. Due to bureaucratic hassles a good number of foreign teams could not reach the appropriate spots immediately. The deadbodies are lying under the debris even now. Government failed in giving emergency medical treatment to the people of Kutchh. Even on 10th February there is only a military hospital with 100 beds in Kutchh. The government had not provided temporary rehabilitation or tents to the people. The people are living under the sky, and no free kitchen has been started by the government. No compensation for death has been received by any people. The government machinery totally failed in rescue and relief operations.

In such a situation a large number of common people from all over Gujarat and other states of India came forward spontaneously to extend their
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Pictures :

(Top) Team of Medical Service Centre is treating a patient at a village of Bhachau Taluk

(Middle) SUCI volunteers are distributing the relief materials to the quake affected people in Bhachau Taluk area on 5th February

(Right) Doctor's Team of Medical Service Centre with health workers and general volunteers with a truck load of materials in a devastated village of Kutchh.

Imperialists Guilty Of Genocide Through Proxy War In Congo

(Contd. from page 3)

foreign aggression, however, immediately took him under their protection, to pre-empt any such possibility.

But though the imperialists leave no stone unturned to instigate rebellion and violent clashes nothing of the sort happened. Rather the scene at the funeral of Kabila, according to different sources, was one of deep grief, and a sense of anger and outrage at what many people perceived as an outside plot. Yet the huge mass of people, estimated by some at 2 million, who had turned out in the capital Kinshasa to bid their slain leader their last farewell with deep pain and tears flowing, was disciplined and dignified. What a far cry from the violent unrest, looting, and perhaps even coup, which the imperialists had hoped for and tried to precipitate, but in vain.

The Editorial of the newspaper *L'Avenir* (The Future) from Kinshasa, on 19th January, titled: "Even when dead, Kabila is still alive", wrote among others: "The African nationalist leaders, one of whom was Kabila, never have demanded anything else than that the managing of their countries' riches be left to themselves, rather than kneeling for aid." This sums up aptly why Kabila had become so hated by the imperialists. The Democratic Republic of Congo, the third largest African country and situated in the centre of the continent, is endowed with rich mineral deposits. It is the leading producer of industrial diamonds and cobalt, one of the leading producers of copper, and its mineral wealth includes, gold, coal, manganese, tin and zinc. Its soil is rich and fertile, and it is endowed with other natural resources of strategic importance, like oil. For all these the Congo is of special strategic importance for the imperialists. Yet despite such immeasurable wealth, its population lives in abject poverty, as a result of most ruthless colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.

Even at the time of Lumumba, in 1960 when Congo gained independence from Belgian colonial rule, and conditions for liberation movements were more conducive than today, the imperialists vying for control over the immense wealth of the Congo, all combined in their subversive activities, intrigues and aggression, using even the UN as an instrument to accomplish their aim and overthrow the left-leaning, Pan-Africanist regime of Lumumba - whose inspiration went far and wide. They did so through a string of assassinations, unleashing a reign of terror with the help of their agents and inciting secessionist movements etc. Today when the socialist camp has been dismantled, which despite its deviations and weaknesses had exercised a restraining effect on the imperialists, direct interference and aggression of imperialist powers, which are out to re-divide the world, with US imperialists in the lead, have increased by leaps and bounds of which Iraq and Yugoslavia are glaring examples. And another is unfolding in Congo.

Yet only a few years back, in 1997, when the troops of Kabila who headed the four party Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) were sweeping across the Congo on waves of popular support, he was

backed by Rwanda. The US imperialists dropped their long-time puppet, the corrupt, kleptocratic dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, whose despotic misrule had long ago left the country totally bankrupt and in a shambles, but whom they had bailed out time and again so long as it served their interest, instead extended their support to Kabila. But that support proved short lived. For soon it became clear that Kabila, far from becoming a pliant tool in the hands of US imperialists, tried to pursue an independent nationalist course. He refused to sell the mineral wealth of Congo at cut price to the large mining corporations, and annulled some contracts, like those of American Mineral Fields, Ashanti Goldfields and Banro Resource Corporation etc., nationalising the latter, for example. Simultaneously he refused to pay back the World Bank and IMF loan contracted by Mobutu who used a great part of it for augmenting his personal wealth, much of it abroad, including different castles in Europe and 3 billion dollars stacked away in Swiss banks.

But this is just the opposite of what the new agenda of the imperialists, led by USA, of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation, has in store for third world countries with the help of IMF/World Bank - an agenda of loot and plunder of the third world countries resources that goes far beyond the neo-colonial exploitation practised so far. Therefore imperialists had decided by 1998 that Kabila was a threat to "stability" of the region and had to go. The usual war cries of the imperialists were heard, like democracy in danger, human rights violated etc. While in Iraq and Yugoslavia the USA was directly involved, dragging with it almost the whole world in the first instance, and in the second the NATO controlled by it, all on false pleas, in the case of Congo it is doing so from behind the scene, using the proxy of Rwanda and Uganda.

By August 98 troops of the Rwandan Tutsi regime invaded Congo, justifying it on the plea that Kabila had armed and integrated Hutus into his army, guilty of genocide in Rwanda and this caused a security threat, but one year later it reversed the pretext, accusing Kabila of genocide of Hutus as justification for the invasion, into which Uganda had joined. In April 99, even the UN was forced to admit that Congo was the victim of external aggression. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution where it asked the forces which had not been invited into the Congo to withdraw, but it was vetoed by the US imperialists. Instead the US imperialists, in particular, have been painting it as an internal rebellion. Some reports in the international press, however have clearly pointed to the close link between the Mobutists, Rwandan regime and US imperialists. Clearly the imperialists are waging a proxy war. Ludo Martens, chairman of the Belgium Workers' Party, thoroughly familiar with the situation in Congo, wrote in *Solidaire*: "Without the support of the United States, France and Belgium two small countries which produce nothing more than tea, coffee and bananas, would never dare to attack a huge country of 55 million inhabitants and

immeasurable extractive wealth." Rwanda and Uganda are only too eager to get an opportunity to loot and plunder the riches of eastern Congo. Thus, for example, according to a British diplomat, Rwanda alone, that has no gold, sold 2.2 tonnes of gold to Belgium between 98 and 99. And in this war of aggression against the Congo that is going on since 98, a genocide that has surpassed in extent even the genocide in Rwanda is taking place — almost 3 million people have died, according to Congo official figures, in the occupied territory in Congo, the majority from starvation and lack of medicines, locked in under enemy occupation — yet the imperialists are silent on this point. To them and the media controlled by them, this is a non-issue.

Though the USA is in the lead, there is an intense fight between the different imperialists for direct control over Congo's minerals and resources of strategic importance where France, Belgium and Britain, in particular are involved. And to achieve their end, they are trying to create division among the people along ethnic lines. Even where there is no ethnicity, they create it, as Belgium did in Rwanda, in the colonial days centring round Hutus and Tutsis, who were really different classes, with no ethnic or linguistic difference, but on whom the imperialists, managed to give an official and permanent stamp of ethnic difference. In its divide and rule policy Belgium used to heighten the differences, play one group against the other alternately. Subsequently the French and US imperialists used the same tactics as a handle to implement their hegemonistic design to dominate Rwanda and use it as a spring board in their competition to establish their sphere of influence in Central Africa, especially Congo, with France arming the Hutus and USA the Tutsis, and embroiling them in a genocidal war in 1994. Through this the Tutsis, backed by USA, came to power in Rwanda. It is by using the handle of Tutsi and Hutu refugees in Congo among others, that the imperialists have been waging their proxy war.

Now, to create disaffection and ethnic division in the ranks of Kabila forces, they have already begun a campaign that Kabila's son, Joseph Kabila, who has been appointed to head the government in place of his father, is really a Tutsi, i.e. that his mother is a Tutsi - playing upon the patriotic sentiment of the people. The people of Congo and everywhere should beware of this kind of trap by the imperialists and refuse to be misled by them.

No words are strong enough to condemn the crime against humanity which the imperialists are committing in the Congo. As Fidel Castro said: another Nuremberg is needed to put the imperialists in the dock.

This situation once more comes with the urgent message to the anti-imperialists forces throughout the world to close their ranks and step up their campaign and movement for justice and peace against imperialist aggression and intervention. But so long capitalism exists, this grave threat for entire humanity will continue. It is only by overthrow of capitalism that the real emancipation of people can come about.

Cause of Child Labour Basically Socio-Economic

[Comrade Ashutosh Banerji, President, UTUC-Lenin Sarani, raised some points in the National Conference of Child Labour — Response and Challenges, held on January 22, 2001, organised by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India. These points are given here.]

— Ashutosh Banerji

Due to the very short time allotted, the whole gamut of the problem of Child Labour cannot be discussed on this occasion. So, I am confining myself to certain basic points related to Child Labour in our country.

I shall draw your attention to certain erroneous propositions, occurring in the agenda paper. The propositions are self-contradictory also. First, it is said that "States having a larger population living below the poverty line have a high incidence of child labour." But simultaneously, it is being said that "The incidence of Child Labour is partly linked to the level of socio-economic development of an area and partly to the attitude and approach of parents of the children..."

On the one hand, it is being said that poverty is responsible for the high incidence of child labour, but on the other, in the same breath, attitude of parents of children has been focused as partly the cause of high incidence of the child labour. This is self-contradictory. It is erroneous also.

Actually, the cause of the incidence of child labour is basically socio-economic. The attitude

of the parents to allow their children to become child worker is the effect of the socio-economic basic cause. Even poverty is the by-product of the profit-motivated exploitative economy obtaining in our country. Here the need of capital reigns supreme. This need of capital of cheap labour power is responsible for the breeding of child labour.

Employers' attitude to child labour is solely governed by this need of capital for cheap labour, in order to earn maximum profit.

It cannot be gainsaid, that in agriculture, there is huge unemployed and under-employed manpower. This manpower, in a steady stream, is migrating to commercialised and industrialised urban areas, in search of jobs. All the members of the families belonging to this category of migrant manpower, are constantly being reduced to urban labour. Old, young and child, both male and female, all are becoming labour. This migrant manpower comprises not only landless peasants, but also small poor peasants apart from share-croppers and agricultural labour. This is one of the perennial sources of urban child labour, getting added to another category of urban child

worker, who are the descendants of the urban workers for generations. Thus, child labour has emerged with the process of mainstream proletarianisation of labour as a whole.

It follows, that this reality has to be taken into account, while dealing with the question of abolition of child labour, undergoing acute exploitation in various branches of commerce and industries.

But, unfortunately, the awareness about this fact has not been manifested on the agenda paper. The agenda paper recalls an interesting directive from the Supreme Court. The Court, among others, directed for "Providing a job to an adult member of a family which is sending its child for work in hazardous industry/occupation/process." It is to be noted that there is nothing in the agenda paper to show, that children have been withdrawn from hazardous industry and jobs have been provided to one adult member of such families. But a glaring contradiction between this aspiration of Supreme Court and the economic policy of VRS, downsizing, closure of factories, wounding up of government departments, ban on fresh recruitment in government jobs, etc., is staring at

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Secretariat March in Thiruvananthapuram against DPEP

Thousands of men and women, mostly parents and teachers marched to the Kerala Secretariat at Trivandrum under the banner of Janakeeya Prathirodha Samithi (JPS-People's Resistance Committee) on February 1, 2001 demanding complete withdrawal of the disastrous District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), a World Bank sponsored programme now implemented with great zeal all over the country by all ruling parties including the BJP, the Congress(I) and the CPI(M).

The march was led by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, eminent jurist and fighter for Human Rights and also the President of JPS, a people's forum fighting against all social injustices. Comrade V. Venugopal, State Secretariat member, SUCI is the General Secretary of this Forum. Along with Justice Iyer in the front row of the protest march were Dr. N.A. Karim, educationist and former Pro-VC of Kerala University, Pavanan, writer and leader of Rationalist movement and a host of leading intellectuals, writers, leaders of social and cultural movements, trade unionists and educationists. Thousands of people from all the 14 districts of the state followed them under the banner of their respective districts.

The new vulgarised DPEP syllabus has practically done away with primary education in Kerala in the past 5 years. People are simmering in discontent but no political force in Kerala either in ruling or in opposition front came up to raise people's voice. Rather all major parties, the CPI(M), the Congress(I) and the BJP supported the DPEP. The CPI(M)-led LDF created obstacles in the course of the movement. But the people's anguish and anger ultimately crystallised into this massive second Secretariat march on 1st February. A previous Secretariat march had also been organised by the JPS two years back on the same demands on 18th May 1999.

In front of the Secretariat Justice Iyer

addressed the huge gathering of the demonstrators. Justice Iyer said: a sinister conspiracy has been hatched by the ruling class of our country with the imperialist countries to keep the poor and down-trodden people in India in eternal darkness. DPEP provides no education. The imperialists want only slaves of market to suit the needs of globalised imperialist production. It is to create a politically dumb generation that a system of distorted education is being provided through DPEP. Peculiarly, the DPEP is meant only for the poor; the rich can have standard education upon payment of huge sums of money in the private institutions. DPEP is a ploy to privatise education. The people must fight this design of the ruling class.

Dr. N. A. Karim said: The fight against DPEP presents an important warfront in the fight against globalisation which is an all-out attack by the

globalised capital. Kerala people cannot afford to lose their battle for education which has been so assiduously built up over years.

Dr. V. Venugopal declared that if the government is not prepared to heed to the sanest voices of the state, JPS will intensify the movement wherein all parents and teachers in deep pains at the fate of their children, will mobilise themselves and force upon the political patrons to backtrack their steps.

The movement created a sensation in that such a movement of such a magnitude was led by no big party but by a People's Forum and in that, too, renowned and respected leaders of the society, with integrity and of high esteem took to the streets to impress upon the rulers.

People are getting prepared for still higher forms of movement ultimately to thwart the DPEP.



Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer leading the Secretariat March against DPEP. Also seen are (Left to right) Comrade V. Venugopal, Dr. N. A. Karim, Adv. Mancheri Sunderraj, Pavanan and Dr. D. Surendra Nath (Another picture on page 8)

Conference on Child Labour

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the fact of the families of child worker.

There is another aspect of the child labour problem. This is mainly related to child labour involved in rural household industries. In this sector of cottage industries, particularly in rural belt, along with other members of families, the children are also involved in labour. This type of labour constitutes self-help labour within the family. Families involved in household cottage industries are, in general, poor. They are mercilessly exploited by money lenders and middlemen, who constitute the conduit to the market for household products.

So, the problem of abolition of child labour in this sector can only be tackled by freeing the household industries from the tentacles of the money lenders and middlemen, on one hand and ensuring fair income for these households on the other. Only then the children of these families can be freed from self-help family labour and be induced to go for education.

But the recognition of this reality and the required approach towards the resolution of this problem are not found in the agenda paper.

In this case also the economic policy of the

government is not conducive to the flourishing of household industries. Rather, the removal of import quota restrictions from consumer items and dereservation of the small and medium industries have sounded the death-knell of vast household and cottage industries along with the small and medium industries, cash crop based agro-industries etc.

Under this circumstance, government's attitude and actions in the sphere of abolition of child labour is permeated with only pious wishes.

Another, similar pious wish has found expression in the agenda paper. This is related to self-help schemes. It is said, "To supplement income loss, mothers of child labour to be given appropriate skill training/encouraged to form self-help groups etc." Now, various documents published by Labour Ministry, Government of

India indicate with data that number of self-employed are gradually coming down, being unable to withstand the hi-tech commerce, servicing and industries.

In fine, this is very clear that abolition of child labour cannot be viewed in isolation from the economic policy of the government. The economic policy has to be conducive to the aim of the abolition of child labour. But the economic policy now being followed is only aggravating the child labour problem. Even the hi-tech engagement policy is not decreasing the need of child labour. On the contrary, hi-tech has decreased the necessity of strenuous manual labour and has increased the demand for light manual labour. This has resulted in growing urge among the employers to engage cheap child labour power. So thorough change in the present economic policy should be viewed and made conducive to abolition and rehabilitation of child worker.

Glimpses of our relief work in Gujarat

(Contd. from page 5)

helping hand to the affected people. But the BJP government wants to spoil this spontaneous response and initiative of the people, and is trying to show that only the RSS volunteers are working. The myth is being created that relief materials are in excess. But this is farthest from the truth. Whatever little relief is in supply is being distributed on communal and caste line. Minority communities and socially backward communities are the worst sufferers.

In such a situation the SUCI took a plunge in rescue and relief work right from the day of the occurrence of the devastating earthquake. On 30th January a strong contingent of the SUCI volunteers was sent to establish a camp in Bhachau, 350 km away from Ahmedabad. An emergency medical camp was set up at Bhachau Taluk where outdoor and indoor medical treatment for 24 hours was arranged from 1st February. A relief work base camp was also set up there. Medical Service Centre from different states came forward and helped the injured and the affected patients almost in every house in these areas — Bhachau, Anjar and Rapar and their surroundings and distant villages.

From 2nd February the party has taken up

immense relief work. With stones from demolished walls, a hospital was built up in Bhachau. Nine tents were set up, five for medical relief and four for other material relief. Collected relief materials from different states were distributed in Anjar, Bhachau and Rapar areas of Bhuj district. More than 25 villages were covered. Names of some of the villages covered are : Dhamadka, Dhujodi, Kukama, Bagathala and Khervalia.

It may be pointed out in this connection that the NGOs and other voluntary organisations which are getting wide media coverage are concentrating their work mostly in urban areas, but remote villages are by and large not covered by these organisations.

The mobile medical vans of MSC have been going to the remotest villages for assessing the requirements of the people. Tents, blankets, woolen clothes, grains and milk powder, etc., are being distributed in different villages. Medical relief and other reliefs are still going on. But whatever relief is given by the party volunteers and other voluntary organisations is much less than the actual requirement of the people. Since the need of the people is enormous and the relief work spread over a large area requires to be supplemented further, relief operation will have to be continued for a good length of time.

Bihar Bandh against National Agro Policy

Bihar bandh was observed on 17th January 2001 in protest against anti-farmer, anti-khet mazdoor national agro policy. The bandh call was given jointly by the SUCI, CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), RSP, Forward Bloc, MCPI and Marxist Coordination Committee. Since a month back the anti-farmer and the anti-khet mazdoor character of national agro policy was exposed through group meetings, street corner meetings and dharmas. On 16th January a torch-lit procession was organised in the capital and all district headquarters. During the bandh rallies were organised from different areas of Patna. All rallies converged on Dak Bangalow Chauraha. From there police arrested senior leaders of left parties including Comrade Arun Kumar Singh, State Committee Member, SUCI and thousands of activists. Police took away all the processionists at Danapur camp jail. In jail a joint meeting was held and it was addressed by senior leaders of all left parties. Comrade Arun Kumar Singh called up all left parties to build up protracted mass movements. Stressing the need of left unity he urged to adopt a common minimum programme and a code of conduct.

Police lathicharged the bandh supporters at Mahua block of Vaishali district and Comrades Lalit Ghosh and Ramjeevan Singh were injured. In Munghyr police arrested SUCI district incharge Comrade Pramod Kumar, AIDS state secretary, Comrade Dipak Kumar and many others. Many workers and supporters of SUCI and other left parties were arrested from Bhagalpur, Banka, Bhojpur, Rohtas and other districts.

Comrade Amriteswar Chakraborty, Bihar State Secretary of our party congratulated the people of the state for their participation in the bandh. He urged the people to build up strong and protracted mass movement. He also condemned the incident of lathicharge by police at different parts of the state.



Demonstration against DPEP in front of Trivandrum Secretariat on 1.2.2001

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