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Founder Editor-in-Chief : COMRADE SHIBDAS GHOSH

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WEST BENGAL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Rigging raised to a new dimension

Recent municipal elections in West Bengal once again laid bare the skeleton of the bourgeois electioneering process it has been reduced to during these days of total decadence of the reigning capitalist system of the country. Significantly, this election took place in a state that is being ruled for decades by CPI(M)-led Front, a front that claims itself as left and a party that still carries the Marxist signboard and jargons.

What happened in the said elections? Let us not begin with the statement that it was a shamelessly rigged one; rather let us place the facts. In bourgeois parliamentary politics, contending bourgeois parties often have opposing claims. It may be argued that since CPI(M) and its cohorts could bag 48 out of 79 municipalities, increasing their tally by 19 over their immediately earlier position in 2000 election, the malicious vanquished opponents could have only consolation

in criticizing the ruling and winning block. But this time, at least, the facts bore out in the glare of TV screens or in the lenses and pens of few journalists, who could take the risk of presenting the truth to people, and more particularly, could return to their bases unhurt and with their materials undamaged.

For the last several elections an all-pervasive rigging machinery of CPI(M) used to start working long before the poll date. People would have had an idea, had the reports, 87 odd in number plus an 'explosive final report', submitted to the Election Commission by Afzal Amanullah, the special election observer and 200-odd poll observers sent by the Commission during the last Lok Sabha poll, been made public. The Commission refrained from making it public under frantic pressure from CPI(M) and its government. The final report by

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SUCI demands withdrawal of raised fare of platform tickets

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI in a statement issued on 31st May, 2005 deplored the decision of the Congress-led UPA Government to raise the fare of railway platform ticket from Rs.3 to Rs.5 through an administrative order. He demanded immediate withdrawal of this increase.

We observe with much indignation, said Comrade Mukherjee, that the government which is pretending 'nil' rise in passenger fare in the budget, is surreptitiously resorting to many deceptive measures, overtly or covertly, outside the budget to raise the railway tariff and thus imposing hefty financial burden on the passengers in a most undemocratic manner.

It is high time, Comrade Mukherjee said, that people rise in protest against all these deceptive acts.

Seed Act 2004 and Amendment to APMC Act

Spectre of monopoly takeover haunts agriculture

When the Congress-led government at the centre preens feathers over its own achievements in improving the lot of the peasants, a chicanery is operative underneath. To exacerbate the grueling impoverishment and savage exploitation of the peasants and allow monopolists, MNCs and foreign capital to establish their grip over both production and distribution of agricultural produces including plantation material, the central government fully backed by the CPI(M) and its allies has, of late, passed a black Seed Act, 2004 on the lines of notorious Patent (Amendment) Act and proposes to amend the existing Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act. Needless to say that such moves are in keeping with the

prescriptions of capitalist globalization wreaking havoc in the life of the common people including the vast multitudes of rural poor and peasants. With recession jumping to dizzy heights and scope for investment in industrial sector on a steady dwindle because of intense all pervasive crisis of moribund capitalism, capitalist owners are now increasingly turning towards the agricultural sector to amass super profit by slaying the slain rural populace. In order to work an appropriate stratagem, they are pretending as if with an emphasis on food and agro-processing, innovative harvesting, better distribution and integration of global markets, there will be an avalanche of fortune in the peasant's life. The deliberations that took place in the last WTO

conference also bear testimony to this latest capitalist-imperialist design. The initiatives of the Congress-led government as mentioned above have to be understood in that context, as it is wedded to the task of serving ruling Indian capitalism, an inalienable part of world imperialism-capitalism, to the best possible way, albeit under the garb of mellifluous verbiage and tall talks of rural development.

Let us take the Seed Act 2004. We discussed at length on a couple of occasions in the pages of Proletarian Era the disastrous consequences of the recently passed black Patent (Amendment) Act which allowed big monopolies and MNCs to hold long-term patent of pharmaceutical products. Through the Seed Act, similar patent of seeds

of agricultural produce is sought to be granted to the business tycoons, both domestic and foreign, as well as trans-national companies. The Act says that the government will constitute a central seed committee who in turn will set up a seed registration committee. No seed of any kind or variety shall, for the purpose of sowing or planting by any person, be produced or sold unless such seed is registered with this committee. Such registration conferring exclusive right on the 'farmer' or 'dealer' concerned to grow and sell a particular seed so branded will be valid for fifteen years in case of annual and biennial crops and eighteen years for long duration perennials. For the purpose of the Act, 'farmer' means who

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Agricultural production to be at the disposal of monopoly sharks

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cultivates crops either by cultivating land himself or through any other person, while 'dealer' stands for a person or a company or an organization who carries the business of buying, selling, exporting or importing of seeds and includes agents of dealer. There is also a provision for appointing outsiders as seed certification agencies by the seed committee and such agencies would also include organizations established in any foreign country.

The Act also proposes to appoint a seed inspection authority to ensure compliance with the Act. Anyone contravening any provision of the Act will be prosecuted under the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1973 and punished. The Act vests unbridled power upon the seed inspectors who can enter and search at all reasonable times, with such assistance, if any, as he considers necessary, any place in which he may have reasons to believe that an offence under the Act has been or is being committed and order the accused person in writing not to dispose of any stock of such seed for a specific period and even seize the stock of such seeds. So it is obvious that the Act leaves the peasants completely at the mercy of the seed patent holder and makes him vulnerable to all kinds of harassment and torture by the penal authorities who, as is the common experience of the people, are never kind to the exploited, but are too eager to protect the exploiter. The rich peasants may not be that affected but middle and small peasants will be hit very badly. Whenever a peasant wants to sow the seeds, he will be forced to purchase branded seeds paying the price as fixed by the private patent holders, including foreign companies and MNCs. In a monopoly situation, the stipulated price will also be monopolistic. As certification agencies could be of foreign origin as well, a kind of nexus between the overseas patent holders and the seed certifiers can not be ruled out either. The peasants would thus stand debarred from using, exchanging, sharing or selling his farm seeds and plantation material as all such would be patented by virtue of the originally purchased seed being of a particular brand. By virtue of the Act, not even slightest of control would be exercised by the

government, whose role would be that of a mere silent spectator, even if the patent holder flouts the law and the bona-fide is on the side of the buying peasant.

Such has in fact started happening right now. Section 20 of the Act says that if a patent holder does not disclose all necessary details to the buyer before sale of seeds or if disclosures, so made, are subsequently found to be incorrect, the buyer is entitled to receive necessary compensation from the seller. But a few months back, the peasants of Hoskote and Anekal in Karnataka bought Super Talky Red radish seeds from a Japanese company. After sowing the seeds, leaves began to appear. The peasants thought the crop was ready and got down to harvest the yield. But there was no tube underneath. Angry peasants neither got any compensation from the company, nor did they receive any help from the University of Agricultural Sciences. Ultimately, they had to take recourse to the path of movement to press for their demands. On the other hand, the MNCs and monopoly houses, who exalt over the Act, boastfully flaunt their gains at the cost of the peasants — "We would have invested capital to produce quality seeds. If we permit them to reuse these seeds after having once sold them, our business would be affected. We would profit only if we have a control over our brand of seeds in the market" said an MNC executive (*Kannada Prabha* : 6 May 2005)

In fine, the Seed Act 2004 would mandate patenting of all seeds and mostly the big monopolists and MNCs will hold the patent rights. The peasants, under compulsion of using registered seeds only will have no other way but to go to these patent holders to buy seeds at whatever prices the latter stipulate. Thus for all intent and purpose, the peasants will be totally dependent on these handful of profit-seeking patent holders. The government will wash off its hands by taking refuge under the Act and the penal authority will as usual side with the patent holder to coerce the peasants. In this process, the monopolists and MNCs will have a strangulating grip over agricultural production and dictate terms.

The buck does not stop at

production only. Even the area of sales and distribution is under threat of monopoly invasion. At present, as per APMC Act, agricultural produce is sold by the peasants in the APMC yard to a group of merchants who are licensed by the APMC, a body elected by the peasants. Not that this body does much to safeguard the interest of the peasants, yet this body does have some control over the licensed merchants and thus some kind of pricing mechanism, notwithstanding many a limitations, does operate to have at least a semblance of regulation. But the government, in order to "protect the interest of the majority of the Indian farmers who are very small/marginal", to help them have access to "direct and free markets, organized retailing", to make them benefit from "smooth raw material supplies to agro-processing units, information exchange and adoption of innovative marketing systems", has felt the necessity(!) of establishment of private markets/yards besides APMC yards, opening direct purchase centres, promoting private public partnership for management and development of agricultural market as well as development of contract farming arrangement. So an amendment to the APMC Act is on the anvil.

Once the amendment is through, there will be parallel markets and free entry of all and sundry including the monopolists and MNCs in the agricultural produce markets. Initially, these monopoly houses including foreign monopolists keen to get a foothold in this extremely lucrative market, will offer to the peasants prices higher than those of APMC yard to not only corner the produce, but also wean away the primary producers from the APMC approved merchants. Once they accomplish that and render the APMC yards defunct, the APMC licensed merchants will be wiped out from the scene. That is what the government aims at when it talks of "downsizing of distribution chain". When this is accomplished, the monopolists and MNCs will bare their tooth and claw, start calling shots and dictate the price to suck off the last drop of blood from the peasants. They would also force the peasants to grow crops that earn them maximum profit in either agro-processing or export market. In the name of contract farming, another

kind of savage onslaught will be unleashed. Hapless peasants will have no choice but to comply. Ministry of Agriculture, central government also shows excessive keenness to use latest technologies in post harvest operation, agro-based industries, warehousing etc, and hence requires huge investment of around Rs11200 crores in next ten years for modernizing agricultural marketing system. And the government feels it "reasonable to expect that a substantial part of this investment may have to come from private sector". So "to encourage the private sector to make large investments in the marketing infrastructure and the supporting services", the floodgate of yet another fierce loot and plunder is opened to the monopoly houses. This scheme perfectly conduces to the government's policy of allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail business. And to camouflage the intended monopoly control over retail including agricultural retail trade, the government is coining some euphonious commercial terms like "facilitation of forward linkage", "helping the farmer to get a better share of consumer price" etc. METRO, a German firm hitherto engaged in wholesale distribution of agricultural produces has already started advertising availability of rice, dal(pulses), wheat etc., on retail at its Bangalore counters. This firm, it is reported, is very close to the Union Finance Minister who is lobbying hard for earliest amendment to the APMC Act so that the firm and its ilk can prosper in the new legal framework. It is indeed preposterous when the Congress-led government says that such "policies of liberalization" will have all safeguards against displacement of small traders and merchants.

We have already shown that the Seed Act 2004 will place the agricultural production at the disposal of monopoly sharks. The proposed amendment of the APMC Act will allow these tycoons to take over the procurement and distribution of agricultural produce. So while the peasants will be left in the lurch and the countrymen will die out of starvation and severe want of essential foodgrains, the domestic and foreign monopolists will merrily swell their coffer. The central

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Remembering sixty years of victory over Fascism

Comrade Stalin's speech at Red Square on the anniversary of the October Revolution, on November 7, 1941



On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the victory over fascism, this year on 8 May, we took it as our fraternal obligation, to recall the boundless sacrifice and brave patriotic fight of the Soviet people under the leadership of the great proletarian leader Comrade Stalin, that saved humanity from one of the gravest danger of the time. In this connection, we published in the Proletarian Era, June 1 issue, the speech to the Soviet people by Comrade Stalin on July 3, 1941. In the present issue, we reproduce another speech of his delivered in November of the same year. Both these addresses delivered within the span of a few months of the German invasion on June 22, 1941, unambiguously reveal the source, the guiding light from which the entire Soviet people derived their strength, courage and determination.

Comrades, Red Army and Red Navy men, commanders and political instructors, men and women workers, men and women collective farmers, intellectuals, brothers and sisters in the enemy rear who have temporarily fallen under the yoke of the German brigands, our glorious men and women guerrillas who are disrupting the rear of the German invaders !

On behalf of the Soviet Government and our Bolshevik Party I greet you and congratulate you on the 24th anniversary of the great October Socialist Revolution.

Comrades, today we must celebrate the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution in difficult conditions. The German brigands' treacherous attack and the war that they forced upon us have created a threat to our country. We have temporarily lost a number of regions, and the enemy is before the gates of Leningrad and Moscow.

The enemy calculated that our army would be dispersed at the very first blow and our country forced to its knees. But the enemy wholly miscalculated. Despite temporary reverses, our army and our navy are bravely beating off enemy attacks along the whole front, inflicting heavy losses, while our country — our whole country — has organized itself into a single fighting camp in order, jointly with our army and navy, to rout the German invaders.

There was a time when our country was in a still more difficult position. Recall the year 1918, when we celebrated the first anniversary of the October Revolution. At that time three-quarters of our country was in the hands of foreign interventionists. We had temporarily lost the

Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. We had no allies, we had no Red Army — we had only just begun to create it — and we experienced a shortage of bread, a shortage of arms, a shortage of equipment.

At that time 14 states were arrayed against our country, but we did not become despondent or downhearted. In the midst of the conflagration of war we organized the Red Army and converted our country into a military camp. The spirit of great Lenin inspired us at that time for the war against the interventionists.

And what happened? We defeated the interventionists, regained all our lost territories and achieved victory.

Today our country is in a far

better position than it was 23 years ago. Today it is many times richer in industry, food and raw materials. Today we have allies who jointly with us form a united front against the German invaders. Today we enjoy the sympathy and support of all the peoples of Europe fallen under the yoke of Fascist tyranny. Today we have a splendid army and a splendid navy, defending the freedom and independence of our country with their lives. We experience no serious shortage either of food or of arms or equipment.

Our whole country, all the peoples of our country, are backing our army and our navy, helping them smash the Nazi hordes. Our reserves in manpower are inexhaustible. The spirit of great Lenin inspires us for our patriotic war today as it did 23 years ago.

Is it possible, then, to doubt that we can and must gain victory over the German invaders? The enemy is not as strong as some terror-stricken pseudo-intellectuals picture him. The devil is not as terrible as he is painted. Who can deny that our Red Army has more than once put the much-vaunted German troops to panicky flight?

If one judges by Germany's real position and not by the boastful assertions of German propagandists, it will not be difficult

to see that the Nazi German invaders are facing disaster.

Hunger and poverty reign in Germany. In four and a half months of war Germany has lost four and a half million soldiers. Germany is bleeding white; her manpower is giving out. A spirit of revolt is gaining possession not only of the nations of Europe under the German invaders' yoke, but of the Germans themselves, who see no end to the war.

The German invaders are straining their last forces. There is no doubt that Germany cannot keep up such an effort for any long time. Another few months, another half year, one year perhaps, and Hitlerite Germany must collapse under the weight of its own crimes.

Comrades, Red Army and Red Navy men, commanders and political instructors, men and women guerrillas!

The whole world is looking to you as a force capable of destroying the brigand hordes of German invaders. The enslaved peoples of Europe under the yoke of the German invaders are looking to you as their liberators. A great mission of liberation has fallen to your lot.

Be worthy of this mission! The war you are waging is a war of liberation, a just war. Let the heroic images of our great ancestors — Alexander Nevsky, Dmitri Donskoi, Kusma Minin, Dmitri Pozharsky, Alexander Suvorov, Mikhail Kutuzov — inspire you in this war !

Let the victorious banner of great Lenin fly over your heads!

Utter destruction to the German invaders!

Death to the German armies of occupation!

Long live our glorious motherland, her freedom and her independence!

Under the banner of Lenin — onward to victory!

[Soviet Russia Today, December, 1941]

West Bengal Municipal Elections

CPI(M) front government strangles all democratic rights and norms

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Amanullah, in particular, is said to have described the entire exercise as 'farce', that deserved to be countermanded. As revealed in that report and experienced by people of the state, cleverly and neatly the electoral rolls, i.e., voters' lists, were tampered, striking out names of potential opponents and including 'ghost' names, to make them 'heavily weighed' in the ruling Front's favour. The process was certainly repeated this time, rather it was further elaborated. As it was evident from a few cases, for example, with Ward 28 of Bhatpara Municipality in North 24-Parganas district, the party had instructed people assigned with the charge of conducting the last census in parts of the locality, to increase the figures by 4 to 8%. They argued that it would help the locality to be included in the Mega-city plan in the offing. But the game was clear now when opponents found that suddenly the voter-population had increased by the said percentage. Certainly the increase was covered by bogus, ghost names conveniently used for false voting. But the typical tune of the present election was still more dangerous, a tune that had already been set in earlier occasions. Thus the said report of Amanullah mentioned, among others, how 'white shrouds' and 'white sarees' (symbol of widowhood) had been sent to the families of opponent activists and leaders who refused to submit to pressure. This time again, since the campaign days themselves, as they created heat, the opponent candidates were threatened, assaulted, in cases to be removed to hospitals, but more so exemplarily. Candidates, organizers and activists of opponent parties were driven out of the locality after their party offices had been forcibly shut down; their houses were bomb-charged; in their absence, even their family members were intimidated; their election offices were ransacked and vandalized; banners and posters set to fire; there was at least one report of abduction of an opponent candidate; though he was rescued by the police, he dared not stay in the locality any further; and lastly, locally unknown 'musclemen' on motorbikes rode through localities asking people not to venture out of house during the polling date. It is also reported that at places, this mission was carried out at midnight on the eve of election by a band of ruling party cadres, who

had their faces masked. The purpose in every case was singular: to create an ambience of terror and panic which would prevent genuine voters to fall back from casting their votes, leaving the field open to the CPI(M) cadres and their goons on the polling date. Incidentally, the central observer's report gave vent to a feeling of having been 'cheated' by 'the trickery of some senior bureaucrats', who issued the Press note with such wordings that defeated the purpose of banning of armed motorbike brigades — a plan suggested by Amanullah. The results of this pre-election terror were twofold: in many cases the CPI(M)-led Front candidate returned uncontested (to cite one example as the type, in Arambagh town of Hooghly district 14 out of 18 seats went uncontested); the victorious trumpeted this as a mark of absolute popular support behind him. The second was as desired; in many wards and booths, voters fell back. Booths lay deserted, but that did not prevent the poll-percentage to record 60 (in 22 out of 79 municipalities), 70 (in 14 of 79), 80 (in 9 of 79) or even higher in individual booths. How and why?

CPI(M) leader Anil Biswas has qualified this as a mass-awakening, but answers to 'how and why' lead to appalling facts, the real nature of 'mass-awakening'. The CPI(M) cadres, rather the goons of the locality or belonging to the mobile squad formed especially for the purpose by the party, took one or the other of a number of victory-ensuring measures, singly or in any combination. In the most innocuous, non-violent cases, they made way into the booth repeatedly to cast false votes; impersonation went to such an extent that boys or men cast vote for girls or women and vice versa; In Baranagar area of North 24-Parganas district, 12 members of the same family, locally well-known as supporters of an opponent party, were first threatened. When they had decided to ignore that and reached the booth early in the morning, before they could take their turn, the polling was suddenly obstructed by booth-jamming and instantaneously 12 votes were cast by the CPI(M) cadres for those family members. CPI(M), this time, did not take chance with locally known genuine supporters, including leaders and cadres of their own party, saner and still conscientious; even such voters or their family

members entered the booth to be told that they needed not worry, their votes had been cast. Such traditionally left-minded aged supporters or workers not only expressed their frustration, they gave vent to strong indignation at these sorts of their own party. In tougher versions, the CPI(M) cadres and goons ran about and created hue and cry in front of booths brandishing all sorts of lethal arms, hurling bombs, as and when necessary; vivid photographs of such miscreants in action have been amply brought out in print and electronic media; naturally, voters waiting in long queues to take their turn, simply dispersed in panic to make room for the goons to take full charge. In the said North 24 Parganas district, in Kanchrapara Municipality, CPI(M) assistance booths were erected virtually across the whole approach road to the polling booths, acting as a screen, so as not to allow anybody to the polling booths avoiding or skirting them or without their approval. Supporters of opponent parties dared not venture through. On occasions, even such roundabout process was thought unnecessary. The goons, armed in most cases, dashed in and got busy with stamping on the ballots at their free will. Sometimes, they did not spoil their own hand; they conveniently planted themselves near, or by the side of the ballot box and watched the voter stamping. Panic-driven, the latter silently stamped on the 'required' symbol. The goons even plainly directed voters to stamp on the symbol, they pointed to. In the same Baranagar area referred to above, some CPI(M) polling agents relieved the poll-party from their official duty of issuing ballot papers to voters and took it upon themselves to perform that act, with clear instructions to voters which symbol to stamp upon. Where election agents of any other party dared to raise voice of protest, they were beaten up and thrown out. Even polling officials, the presiding officer or the polling officers, were given the same treatment. But in most cases, the officials chosen from the CPI(M)-led Coordination Committee of government employees or such other 'friendly' unions of other institutions nakedly lined up with the ruling party-goons, or helplessly succumbed to inaction. Even it was found that voters waited outside the booth in the scorching sun in a long queue, while, inside the

booth with its doors shut, the CPI(M) agent hosted the polling officials to a sumptuous lunch. In most of the municipalities of the North 24 Parganas district normal polling was over by midday; since then there were booth-jamming and stamping at free will of the goons; in many cases polling parties obliged them by completing the polling on the previous night, relieving the goons from the embarrassment of performing illegal stamping and genuine voters from taking trouble of moving to the booths in the hot summer day.

Police-in charge, almost invariably looked the other way; unwilling to face the music, they preferred to listen to music being played in the radio with them. Or, here again, loyal to their partisan identity, acted hand-in-glove with the goons; reportedly they even sent warnings to 'cadres' busy in stamping, when any batch of 'observers' or reporters approached the spot. In any case and everywhere, they were duty bound to the ruling party to report to the Press that a perfectly peaceful and smooth polling was going on.

This nakedly partisan attitude of the bureaucracy-police-government employees belonging to the CPI(M)-led Coordination Committee and serving as polling officials was noted and bitterly criticized even by Amanullah, the central observer. He earned CPI(M)'s wrath when he transferred the DSPs of Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts for their pronouncedly pro-CPI(M) bias. CPI(M) Politburo member, Biman Bose, retaliated by threatening to 'throw the election observer out by the scruff of their neck'. The central observer also had to warn the SP of a bordering district, an IPS officer, for his notorious partisanship. In the lower rung, the leaders of CPI(M)-controlled unions of policemen or Home Guards urged their members to ensure victory of their 'party' and Front 'at any cost'; the observers wondered how 'free and fair' election be held with such custodians of law and order. Amanullah reported instances of how state bureaucrats, including even seniors among them and also those belonging to the chair of CEOs were unable to withstand political pressure, often in the form of orders from the top, of the ruling party and the government. To 'curry favour' with the ruling party, many

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West Bengal Municipal Elections

CPI(M) bares its claws in rigging operation

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of them even refused to redress serious and genuine complaints of the opponents, even the voters themselves.

A particular feature of this election was CPI(M) cadres' and goons' dealing of reporters-photographers. Luckier of their lots could return successful from their mission, unhurt and with their findings not mutilated. Thanks to their effort, that people could see or read themselves about the 'peaceful' election. But there were, however, a number of instances, where the reporters and photographers, who had dared to note or take snaps of how the polling was on, were severely manhandled, grievously injured, their cameras and other belongings broken or torn apart and ultimately thrown unceremoniously out of the campus. Even lady journalists were not spared; they were dragged out of the booth. In all cases, the police was a mere onlooker. As it has been revealed in the print media, there was at least one instance, where a CPI(M) minister planted himself near the booth to conduct and oversee the whole process. When asked about the shameless acts of the cadres of his own party, he pooh-pooched it saying that in a huge event of this sort, a few such happenings were quite natural; those involved were only the 'wrong' supporters of his party.

The same threat-intimidation continued even after the poll, till counting at least. In the same manner as before, opponents were terrorized in a way that they dared not attend the counting process.

How was this whole process reflected in results? In the 4 out of 18 seats of Arambagh town in Hooghly district, where there could be a semblance of contest, the Front candidates got 2109, 1351, 1192 and 1239 votes, against which the strongest opponent candidates got 136, 96, 40 and 57 respectively. In Ward No. 15 of the North Dum Dum Municipality in the outskirts of Calcutta, the CPI(M) candidate secured more than 99.9 percent votes; in the Wards 9, 17, 18 of the Bally Municipality in Howrah district CPI(M) got 98%, elsewhere of the same municipality, too, they recorded 95, 96 or 97% votes in their favour. In Ward 2 of the Kancharpara Municipality of North 24 Parganas district the CPI(M)

candidate had 1417 votes while the opponents together could pull only 7 votes. These are only a few samples; the picture remained the same or worse in almost all other cases.

Obviously this led CPI(M) to claim and the world knew it from them, that they were overwhelmingly popular by virtue of their 28 year long rule. But the brief account of only a few instances would speak enough of the background that produced such results. CPI(M) could further argue that the opponents, too, have a number of municipalities and in a number of such cases, the pattern of events during the poll and of results themselves was the same as that in CPI(M)-won wards or municipalities. In fact, such instances could be found in Nadia or Murshidabad districts, where Congress dominated or parts of Medinipur district where Trinamul Congress had its reign. CPI(M) would also have points that in general, Congress and Trinamul Congress, the two major parliamentary oppositions in the state were in a disarray, faction-ridden and mutually bickering, that solved the equation in favour of CPI(M) or its Front. So the scenario was perfectly natural, proving that processes of democracy were fully operative in the state. The fact is that, these so-called strongholds of the bourgeois parties like Congress and Trinamul Congress were nothing but the strongholds of local goons remaining still loyal to these parties, which either had been in power sometime back (Trinamul in the last BJP-led NDA government at the Centre) and still dreaming to regain the position or had been enjoying power now, like Congress that led the present union government of the UPA. Thus they enjoyed some share of the political party-mafia-administration-police nexus at least locally and could take the same measures as CPI(M) took in a larger scale throughout the state. The latter, by virtue of their control over the administration-police-anti-social nexus, though had the power and chance to intervene even in these strongholds of oppositions, preferred to refrain from so doing. They had nothing to lose with the opponents controlling a few municipalities. After all, that semblance of democracy added credibility to their claims and could

save their face.

But whether the opponents could win one or tens of municipalities, was not the crux! The point is how. Does the way CPI(M) conducted the electioneering process, and for that matter Congress and Trinamul too where they could, bear any iota of democracy? Is it not a gross violation of all democratic norms? Is it not a demonic trampling of all democratic rights: right to oppose, right to express and propagate views and the right to vote? In the Press Conference in the evening of the election date May 22, journalists asked Anil Biswas, the CPI(M) West Bengal State Secretary why there were no booth offices of the opponents to be found in the vast stretch of North 24 Parganas district, including Khardaha, New Barrackpur, Kamarhati, North Dum Dum, Baranagar. The CPI(M) leader answered how could he know why there were not any. Of course, had they appealed to them (i.e., CPIM) earlier, they would have erected offices themselves for the opponents. (Ref. *Ganashakti*, May 23). It showed that the 28-year long rule of the CPI(M) had made them such power-blind, so arrogant and audacious as to indicate that their opponents must seek their permission to conduct any election campaign. All sorts of incidents cited above took place in the belt, referred above; some of them have already been mentioned. This stretch of North 24 Parganas referred above was once a humming industrial belt, are now reeling under the spell of lock-out, lay-off, closure, retrenchment, unemployment. The situation is further aggravated due to the anti-labour, pro-owner stands of the CITU spawned by the policy of appeasement and collaboration with the ruling bourgeois class pursued by CPI(M) for pelf and power. Similar is the role of other big trade unions controlled by either the big bourgeois parties or the associates of CPI(M). This only generated a strong resentment in the workers, poor and middle class population of the area and at the same time it prompted the ruling parties to make this belt a haven of hooligans and money-bags. There was every possibility that people's resentment could have burst out in the present election. So CPI(M) chose to nip it in the bud; they found terror was the only means to keep opposition away. In

fact, this was the same scenario for the whole of the state. The 28-year long rule, it boasted of, was marked by pro-monopolists-capitalists anti-people policies in every sphere of life; it clamoured of its opposition to globalization-privatization-commercialisation, yet pursued the same policies in one and all spheres of activity including vital services like education- health - power and such others, only to the benefit of the rich at the cost of the poor and middle class. Added to it and no less important, CPI(M) had been unleashing a reign of terror of its cadres moving in league with anti-socials in localities of cities and towns and even in villages. CPI(M) installed a virtually parallel rule interfering in even personal or familial affairs pushing the population to a point of dismal resignation. Certainly, all this could never generate the 'overwhelming' support that the result of the election prompted people to believe. On the contrary, even after such a huge victory, people were found to remain absolutely indifferent; the squads loudly announcing victory around the localities could only fetch those cadres and goons who had taken up earlier the tasks of stamping ballots or creating terror in the area. Even where such squads had some saner members of their rank and public, they looked like mourners leading funeral processions. All definite signs of popular support indeed! Thus CPI(M) has perfected its rigging machinery by resorting to terror and brute force, in connivance with the administration and through open deployment of anti-socials and criminals. The situation has become so bad that even the barest minimum of democratic norms and practices could no more be preserved. Under the CPI(M), rigging apparatus is becoming more refined. That is why, a CPI(M) cadre told a SUCI activist campaigning in one ward in North 24 Parganas: You keep on working hard in this sun; it won't pay; we will play one-day match. That is what the party has told us to do!

In nutshell then the reality comes out to be that the thumping victory of CPI(M) in the recent municipal election in West Bengal, does in no measure reflect popular support. Rather it was the outcome of a totally manipulated and rigged election that violated all norms of

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West Bengal Municipal Elections

An election bereft of an iota of democracy

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democracy. People at large may feel confused and resigned. But that can never be the way to put a stop to this butchering of democracy! Those who feel frustrated or scared at such acts and conduct of CPI(M) today, must know that such has not been accidental or something not apprehended or anticipated earlier. Analysing the class character of the CPI(M), and pointing at the way it was compromising with the ruling class while in vortex of united left movement, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the founder General Secretary of our party SUCI, forewarned way back in 1973 that CPI(M) in the days to come would not hesitate to trample democratic norms and values and suppress the opponents. "The CPI(M) claims that it is a Marxist-Leninist party. They proudly declare that their influence over the people and the youth, at least in West Bengal, is increasing most. Well and good....But would they answer a pertinent question? .. their growing influence over the youth and the people should have a restraining effect on the cultural degeneration engendered by capitalism... the reality is not that. .. At the time of the United Front Government of 1969 when the strength of the CPI(M)... increased most of all, the people got scared at the muscle flexing of their cadres and supporters. Let alone reflect a high moral and cultural standard and exert a restraining effect on the students and youths along with the increase in the organisational strength of the CPI(M), this was the period when students took to mass copying in the examination halls! Under their influence a tendency grew among people to increasingly make use of police and administration to benefit from undue favours and privileges for personal gains. And instead of a growing sense of social obligation, a tendency towards neglect of duty grew rampant. Similarly, instead of developing an attitude of philosophical tolerance, a base tendency to stifle the voice of political opponents grew among them. They even took recourse to cowardly physical assaults..." [On Cultural degeneration and Unemployment Problem, 1997 edition; English rendering of a speech at the Youth Convention on 26 June, 1973] Thus the CPI(M) is not just increasing its strength or

rigging the election through sectarianism, blindness, valuelessness, indiscriminate use of the nexus of police-administration-hooligans. It is in fact opposing right to form association, demonstrate or oppose and thereby undermining the very right of the people to voice their opinion, agitate against injustice bred by the moribund capitalism. Thus whatever little of bourgeois democracy is still left is seriously threatened by incipient fascism. Comrade Ghosh also pointed to a bitter historic truth : "...In our time, those communist parties .. who have already degenerated into revisionist parties and reduced themselves to the position of national communist parties, or, in other words, who are communists in name only, but are social democratic parties in practice, do have every possibility of turning into fascist parties, if these parties, while they wave the red banner and move under cover of Marxism, combine blindness and fanaticism with their so-called militant character." [Why SUCI is the Only Genuine Communist Party in India, first published in Bengali 1971; quoted from Selected Works, volume II, 1992; p. 206-07]

We fervently request the honest rank and file of CPI(M) and its associates to ponder if it is not incumbent on them to make sincere effort to dissuade their leaders from being instrumental in invoking fascism in this country.

Thus even when CPI(M) was in the thick of the democratic movement, our party, led by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, an eminent Marxist thinker of the time, did not fail to recognize the real class character of CPI(M) and to foresee what future awaited it and what disaster to people's movement it could bring. Now three decades after coming to power and holding on to it with blessings of the ruling capitalist class, it is not only bringing down election to a farce, making it a completely rigged and manipulated one, it is taking up every measure to curb and destroy mass-movements with a view to appeasing the capitalists of the land and abroad in a manner that may only benefit fascist forces, the worst enemy of mankind. It is throttling voices of protest and strangling toiling people's movement so that they cannot rise to fight against injustice, exploitation and corruption. At the same time, to see to it that the resulting people's

resentment against its pro-capitalist anti-people policies does not crystallize and is not directed against it, CPI(M) has chosen the very dangerous, again with fascistic trend, path of smashing the moral backbone of students and youth, of poor and middle class working people at large. It indulges in all sorts of unethical means of livelihood for the latter to adopt. Taking a firm grip over the Panchayat system in villages and making use of the grants for it, it distributed privileges to a section of the village poor. Thus taking full advantage of their wrenching poverty and craving for bare survival, CPI(M) is compelling these rural destitutes to succumb to its pressure and cast vote in its favour. This is how CPI(M) rigs the election with the help of police, bureaucracy, anti-socials and money power and in the process weans away the rural poor from the path of democratic mass-movements thus fulfilling its objective as a social democratic force of compromise between labour and capital, of levelling mass and class struggles to the ground, retrograding the very process of growth and development of such struggles. Unchecked at this conspiracy, CPI(M) is pushing the state of West Bengal, its common toiling people, workers-peasants-middle class-students-youths to a dark future.

And CPI(M) ventures this feat ultimately and really with the blessings, patronage and protection of the ruling capitalist class itself. The latest proof of this glaring truth has come out with the said 'explosive final' report by Amanullah on the last parliamentary election of the state. Reportedly, Amanullah was assigned that job by the

Election Commission itself. But the same Commission could not dare to publish the report, nor did the Central government take any initiative in this regard. Does it require too much of intelligence to infer how could CPI(M) wield so much clout with the top administration as to completely suppress such an important report? Who else but the ruling could pull the string from behind to completely hush up the document and shield the CPI(M) from public wrath?

The well meaning people, the saner section of the masses are no doubt exasperated at all these acts of subversion of democracy and are gravely concerned at the manifest fascistic tendencies. But they are often found to be at a loss to get at the actual remedial course. SUCI, armed with the teachings of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has all along been saying that when and only when people would build up indomitable surge of sustained mass-movements on vital burning problems and in course of and from within those movements can form people's committees and the band of soldiers tested in struggle and steeled with higher standards of culture, ethics and morality to develop people's own volunteer forces, can this fascistic trend be combated and put an hold to. It is only the conscious struggle of the people and the people's committees as instrument of these struggles that can confront and resist such fascist onslaughts, provide safeguard against random flouting of democratic norms and values. In the process it might be possible to at least restore some democratic climate and contain the extent of rigging in elections.

Seed Act 2004

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government led by the Congress and supported by the CPI(M) and its allies have finalized all arrangements for that. It may be added that as the Congress, hell bent to push forward the capitalist reforms much more aggressively than its predecessor, the BJP, its friends in the CPI(M) are also equally determined to complete the reforms process as is being openly declared by them. West Bengal Chief Minister's penchant for the catch-phrases like "Public Private partnership", "Foreign

Direct Investment" and fast "Development of food-processing and agro-based industries" with the help of monopoly is well known. While the servitors of the ruling capitalist class under different hues and placards are agog with their zeal to implement the sinister class designs of their masters, the people must join the peasants in putting up serious resistance against the aforesaid Seed Act 2004 and proposed amendment to APMC Act and compel the government reverse its anti-people decisions.

Joint programme against commercialization and privatization of education in Mumbai

All India Save Education Committee and All India Democratic Students' Organisation along with some other organizations held a Maharashtra-level Workshop against commercialisation and privatization of education at Mumbai on 29th May 2005. The co-organisers of the workshop were Forum Against Commercialisation of Education, Bombay University and College Teachers' Union (BUCTU), Students' Federation of India (SFI), Shiksha Mukti Abhiyan, Jagrut Kamgar Manch, Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), Medical Students' Parents' Association, Janmukti Sangharsh Vahini and Samtavadi Chhatrabharati. The workshop was attended by hundreds of students, guardians, teachers and educationists, at the well-decorated Janata Kendra at Tulsiwadi, Tardeo, Mumbai Central (West) and was inaugurated by noted surgeon of KEM Hospital and former Vice-Chancellor of Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, Dr. Ravi Bapat. The inaugural session was presided over by Dr. Vivek Korde of Forum Against Commercialisation of Education. Prof. Chandrasekhar Kulkarni of BUCTU and Sushil Chauhan, Secretary, SFI, Mumbai,

among others, addressed the session.

The second session on Private Universities Bill was presided over by Prof. Sadasivan, President of Maharashtra Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations (MFUCTO). The speakers were Dr. Ravi Bapat, Dr. Sanjay Dabhade and R. Rajesh, member, All India Save Education Committee. In his hard-hitting speech, Dr. Ravi Bapat, who had resigned as Vice-Chancellor of Maharashtra University of Health Sciences after resisting interference by commercial interests and politicians, showed that the poor condition of medical education in Maharashtra was due to denial of resources by the state government and blatant commercialisation resulting in a steep fall in educational standards. R. Rajesh gave a detailed background of the commercialisation and privatisation of higher education right from the National Policy on Education 1986, various Supreme Court judgements legitimising capitation fees, to the Birla Ambani Report, UGC's Concept Paper for a Model University Act, and the impending opening up of the higher education sector to foreign universities and foreign private

investment under GATS. R. Rajesh warned that the central government may re-introduce the Private Universities Bill in the guise of protecting students' interests. All India Save Education Committee's paper, "Private University Bill and its effect on the field of education" was well received by the Workshop participants.

The third session on Economic, Social and Political Consequences of Privatisation and Commercialisation of Education was presided over by Prof. Kishore Theckedath (Editor, Teachers of the World). Dr. Maharudra Dhake (Secretary, SFI, Maharashtra), Dr. Ushaben Thakkar (former Head of the Department of Political Science, SNDT University Pune), Gyanendra (National Co-ordinator, Janmukti Sangharsh Vahini) and Pratap Samal (President, All India Democratic Students' Organisation) were the main speakers.

The final and concluding session was presided over by Kumar Saptarshi (President, Yuvak Kranti Dal) and Kumar Kulshreshtha (Member, All India Save Education Committee). Pramod Kamble of All India Save Education Committee Vidharbha spoke in support of a resolution adopted unanimously.

May Day observed in Mumbai

At the call of "Save Employment and Labour Rights Committee" under the auspices of UTUC-LS, hundreds of power-loom workers and other working people including women observed the historic May Day at Bhiwandi, in Mumbai on May 1. Md. Nasim Ansari, a respected citizen of the locality presided over the meeting. Comrade Sunil Mukherjee, one of the Secretaries, UTUC-Lenin Sarani, addressed the rally as the main speaker. He drew attention to the background of the historic May Day. He pointed out how American workers' struggle for 8-hour working day and their sacrifice in the face of ruthless oppression of the owners and the police in 1886, triggered international protest and how guided by Comrade Engels, the great proletarian leader, May 1 became the international solidarity day of workers all over the world. He called upon the toiling people to observe the historic May Day not as a ceremonial ritual but a day for taking oath to build up struggle all over the world against excess working hours, job insecurity, low wages, privatization, downsizing, curb on or snatching away of hard-earned rights of workers, including right to strike and organization. Comrade Mukherjee also highlighted teachings of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the founder President of the UTUC-LS and the great proletarian leader who showed the path to the working class and exploited people of this country and provided the correct course of workers' struggle. He urged upon workers to know the historical changes that have taken place and identify the correct revolutionary leadership for their struggle. He warned that only slogans for unity and struggle cannot provide the correct understanding until all these are linked with class consciousness and struggles with a class objective i.e. emancipation from capitalist exploitation system. Shri Shamim Azami, an advocate, Shri K. Kuleshreshtha, an organizer of the Committee, also Comrade A. Tyagi, In-charge, UTUC-LS of Mumbai addressed the meeting. At the beginning, local youngsters staged a street drama on attacks coming on workers. The meeting ended with the address of President Md. Nasim Ansari and finally the Internationale.

2nd Conference of Haspatal-O-Janaswastha Raksha Committee opposes privatization and commercialization of healthcare

Second West Bengal State Conference of Haspatal-O-Janaswastha Raksha Committee (Committee for Protection of Hospital and Public Health) was held at Calcutta Medical College Hospital Auditorium on 31st May, 2005.

The main resolution unanimously adopted in the conference by thousands of doctors, nurses, para-medical personnel and common people strongly condemned the mischievous move and health policy of CPI(M)-led government of the state.

Behind the slogan 'public health at the hands of the people themselves' the government in a recently placed proposal titled 'Draft Policy for Public Private Partnership (PPP) in Health sector' has in a most calculated way tried to get rid of the responsibility of providing facilities to the common people and hand over the health sector fully to the private businessmen in great detriment to the interest of the common people,

particularly the middle class and the poor. By the decision to hand over 1200 rural health centres including 921 Primary Health Centres, 260 Block Health Centres and 100 Rural Hospitals to private concerns on lease for 30 years in consonance with the prescription of the imperialist consultation agency McKinsey and thus fulfilling the conditions dictated by the IMF, World Bank and WTO, the government has cleared privatization and commercialization of the health sector. Installation of CT Scan and MRI machines by private agencies in district hospitals and Calcutta Medical College Hospital, exorbitant hike of hospital charges, even handing over of supply of diet at individual patient's cost to private contractors are all such steps of privatization of hospitals in phases. Besides, appointment of doctors and nurses on contract basis, reduction of staff strength in hospitals, moratorium on recruitment to vacant post, policy of hire and fire,

introduction of capitation fee in medical colleges, abolition of the GNM Diploma course for nurses and closing down nursing schools, etc. have already created grave uncertainty in the field of health service to the common people.

After the conference, that unanimously elected a state committee with Dr. Asim Kumar Raychaudhri as President and Dr. Ashoke Kumar Samanta as Secretary, the participants led a big protest demonstration from the venue of the conference to Esplanade area and handed over a 10-point charter of demands to the labour minister, Md. Amin in conspicuous absence of the Chief Minister and Health Minister, to meet the deputation in spite of being intimated beforehand. The rally severely condemned such behaviour of the CM and Health Minister which smacks of their government's utter negligence to the cause of healthcare to the common people.

Dharna before Kerala Secretariat and march to Rajbhavan

At the call of the Kerala State Committee, SUCI, thousands of industrial workers, agricultural labourers, poor peasants, casual labourers, employees of service sectors, youths, students and women participated in a Dharna (Stay-in-demonstration) before the Secretariat and march to Rajbhavan in Tirubanantapuram on May 23, 2005.

The Dharna and March held in culmination of weeks of intensive campaign demanded repeal of the amended Patent law and the Seed Bill, withdrawal of Value Added Tax (VAT), stopping Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), scrapping Electricity Act 2003, giving up of the on-going World Bank directed Modernizing Government Programme (MGP), stopping diversion of Tsunami Relief Fund and betrayal of the decision for mineral sand mining from Alleppey coast, throwing out of Coca and Pepsi Cola Companies from the state, etc.

Comrade C. K. Lukose, Secretary, Kerala State Committee, addressed the dharna. He said in his speech, there is only one way left before the toiling millions of the country crushed by the policies of globalization pursued by the central and state governments — that is the path of sustained and united democratic mass movement. These policies pursued by the ruling class for the last 14 years have created deep crises in the lives of the common people. Still graver attacks against the people are in the offing. When not only the branded bourgeois parties like the Congress

and BJP, but the pseudo communists such as CPI (M) and CPI also are openly following the policies of globalization in service of the ruling capitalist class of India, it is only our party, SUCI, which is fighting uncompromisingly against these anti-people measures through out the country, he said. He called upon the people to get organized themselves in peoples struggle committees against the ruthless exploitation and oppression forced upon them as the inevitable consequences of capitalist globalization.

Dr. N. A. Kareem, well-known educationist and writer, who addressed the Dharna said that globalization is not the policy of any particular party, but it has been the policy of the rulers for the past few years. Veteran Trade Union leader Comrade K. P. Kosala Ramadas said that globalization is robbing the workers of all the rights which they have won through decades long, bloody battles. He strongly criticized the Left Front led by CPI (M) for being accomplice to the ruling class in this most inhuman attack against the toilers. Comrade K. Sivaraman, Kerala State Secretary of CPI (ML), Comrade Sreenivas Das, Trivandrum District convener of BTR-EMS-AKG Janakiya Vedi, and Dr. Nandiyode Ramachandran, journalist and writer, also addressed the Dharna. Comrade V. Venugopal, member, Kerala State Secretariat of the party, presided over the meeting.

The March was then held which was addressed by Comrade C. K. Lukose, Comrade V. Venugopal and others.

How safe are women in the 'oasis of peace'

During the campaign of last parliamentary elections, the CPI(M) made it a point to upbraid the BJP-ruled states for their "ruinous and anti-people policies" that had forced "lakhs of women to sell their bodies". But how better have been the womenfolk in the state of West Bengal ruled by the CPI(M)-led government for the last 28 years and boastfully claimed as 'oasis of peace' by the CPI(M) chief minister? According to the latest report published by the National Women's Commission headed by Girija Vyas who is known for having continuous interaction with the CPI(M)'s women wing, West Bengal has earned the dubious distinction of being the state where women trafficking is highest. And so far as rape is considered, the state is a proud (!) third next only to Delhi and Maharashtra. The Commission has also observed that the Panchayats, the CPI(M) is so bragging about, have done little for social uplift and personal security of women in the state. It also shows how hollow is the claim of the CPI(M) that the social and economic conditions in West Bengal are better than other states. Alas! Reality is so cruel to the self-styled Marxists.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF : NIHAR MUKHERJEE

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AIDSO forms joint front of left students' unions

Successful strike in Punjab ITIs against fee-hike

To intensify the struggle against the fee hike from Rs. 3,450/- to Rs. 12,000/- and ongoing privatization of ITI and 2000 govt. schools, All India DSO succeeded in forming of Joint Student Front (JSF) of all left students' organizations. The JSF succeeded in making total strikes on 11th and 12th May in ITI Mohali, Ropar, Budladha, Rajpura, Patiala, Banur and Sunam etc. where state committee leaders Comrade Inder Singh, Kirat Grewal, Manjit Kotra, Manu Kaushal, Hardayal and Dharminder Bittu took the lead.

Total strike again on 30th and 31st May, as well as gate rallies and

marches were held at several of the abovementioned ITIs.

In a press release on 6 June, 2005, Comrade Inder Singh said that already with the price hike and fee hike, parents and students are under severe pressure. Now the way Punjab Govt. is going for privatization of education and health is simply disastrous. He strongly criticized the decision of privatization of Rajpura and Barnala ITI and announced the full support to ITI Employees' Union for their militant efforts for the reinstatement of the Principal and Superintendent of Ludhiana ITI who raised their voice against privatization.



Students' protesting against fee hike and privatization in Mohali

SUCI protests privatization of Electricity Board in Sagar

Sagar District Organizing Committee of SUCI organized a meeting at Sagar on May 12 last against fragmentation and privatization of the State Electricity Board, against imposition of penalty of Rs. 10 per day for late payment of electricity bills, for supply of electricity to everybody at cheap rate and withdrawal of exemption of arrears to the tune of crores of rupees of the big industries. Comrade Ramavatar Sharma, Secretary, Sagar District Organizing Committee of SUCI, among others, addressed the meeting. Similar programme was also held in Jabalpur.

SUCI condemns police attack on Jadavpur University Students

In a statement issued on June 13, Comrade Provash Ghosh, West Bengal State Secretary of SUCI has strongly condemned the brutal police atrocities on students of the Jadavpur University on hunger strike and bitterly criticized the attitude of the university authority, CPI(M) leadership and their student organization holding brief for this heinous event.

He greeted the fighting students of the university and demanded neutral enquiry of the police atrocities and punishment of those responsible, fulfilment of all legitimate demands of the students and stopping of police attack on movements in educational institutions.