

ML Update: 2-8 October 2007

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While the CPI(M) Dilemma Continues, the Congress Readies for Early Elections

Even as the CPI(M) keeps diluting its opposition to the nuclear deal lest it might be held 'responsible' for pushing the country into another mid-term poll, the Congress is clearly readying for early elections. The loudest hint was dropped by the Congress High Command when Rahul Gandhi was coronated as a General Secretary of the Congress and then on his request the NREGA was promptly extended to all districts of the country.

The country has already seen Rahul Gandhi in action during the UP elections earlier this year. As the commander-in-chief of the Congress election campaign in India's largest state, the young heir of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty wanted the UP electorate to believe that Babri Masjid could not possibly have been demolished had someone from the dynasty been in charge of the powers that be in New Delhi. This preposterous pretension however only reminded the people of the actual role played by the Congress in the entire run-up to the demolition of the mosque. It was none but Rajiv Gandhi who had got the mosque unlocked and then proceeded to do shilanyas in the area, leaving the BJP and the Sangh brigade to provide the finishing touches through an aggressive communal mobilization across the country. The other gem from the prince was aimed at Pakistan reminding her of the humiliating blow delivered by Indira Gandhi in 1971, thus turning the official Indian version of India's role in the liberation of Bangladesh on its head and reducing the emergence of Bangladesh as an India-sponsored bifurcation of Pakistan.

This time around, Rahul Gandhi is being sought to be repackaged as a politician who is passionate about his concern for the poor and the unemployed. But if the UPA government wanted to extend the NREGA to the whole of the country why did it have to wait till Rahul Gandhi was made a General Secretary of the Congress and till he submitted a widely publicized petition to the Prime Minister requesting universal extension of the Act? This only goes to reveal how the Congress looks at the NREGA - an excellent opportunity for political publicity, an electoral largesse and not a right that must be guaranteed. No wonder the Act has managed to generate only a little more than two weeks' employment in 2006 - it is as low as just a week in Bihar, not to mention Left-ruled West Bengal and Kerala where rural households got only six and three days' employment courtesy the Act - as against the promised objective of 'guaranteed' employment for 100 days a year!

The Congress poll kit also includes some other cosmetic gestures like an insurance scheme for the aam aadmi and an increase in the eligibility salary ceiling for organized workers for purposes of

payment of bonus. If these populist sops are intended to buttress the 'human face' pretension, the most important political statement from the party has been the unmistakable demonstration of the UPA government's resolve to pursue the nuclear deal and other special strategic ties with the US even at the risk of a potential withdrawal of support by the CPI(M). In fact, Manmohan Singh publicly dared the CPI(M) to do so which earned him rich accolades from the corporate media for finally wielding his prime ministerial authority. Mr. Kakodkar and his team went ahead with the IAEA meeting, Pranab Mukherjee had a special meeting with Condoleezza Rice in Washington and Sonia Gandhi too used her visit to the US to address the UN General Assembly on October 2 to drive home the UPA's determination to have the deal operationalised in spite of the CPI(M)'s objections.

While the Congress is thus going ahead with its pre-poll offensive, the CPI(M) and its allies have been trapped in a defensive 'engagement' with the Congress which they are finding so difficult to call off. Instead of taking the much needed decisive step of withdrawing support and making the Congress face the music, and then going among the people with a powerful anti-imperialist message, they have reduced the whole thing to a series of parleys with the Congress, taking umbrage at Sonia Gandhi's articles and speeches for defending the deal. If the CPI(M) looks at Sonia Gandhi as a neutral umpire, as an impartial custodian of the common minimum programme and forgets her primary identity as the President of the Congress, it is obviously a problem of the CPI(M), a problem rooted in the illusions the party has always harboured regarding the Congress and the big bourgeoisie whose political organ it is. With such parliamentary illusions and inhibitions and 'condemned' by history to become the longest ever ruling party in a bourgeois system, the CPI(M) understandably finds it so difficult to return to opposition politics even on a crucial question like India's strategic partnership with US imperialism.

With the situation fast moving towards early elections, the people must get ready to teach the UPA-NDA parties a fitting lesson for their pro-imperialist anti-people policies.

Pay tribute to Bhagat Singh's memory by intensifying the struggle against imperialist policies of Nuke Deal and SEZs

UPA Government must either scrap the Deal with the US or quit the Government!"

New Delhi, 28 September 2007

CPI(ML)'s Anti-Imperialism March to Parliament against the Nuke Deal was a novel way of paying tribute to Bhagat Singh on the 100th anniversary of his birth. This spirited March had students and youth from all over the country raising Bhagat Singh's trademark slogan of 'Down with Imperialism', and waving colourful placards and banners saying "Scrap the Nuke Deal!" and "No Partnership with US Imperialism". The whole spectacle was marked in contrast to the ritual Centenary celebrations being held jointly by the Prime Minister and various BJP-NDA leaders at Amritsar, which maintained careful silence about Bhagat Singh's revolutionary character and scathing critique of the Indian ruling class leaders whom he called 'brown Britishers'.

At noon, thousands of students and youth – from UP, Bihar, Punjab, Bengal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Delhi – gathered at Ferozeshah Kotla Grounds. They garlanded the statue of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru. Jan Sanskriti Manch's cultural team

from Patna, Hirawal, sang rousing revolutionary songs. National President of the Revolutionary Youth Association Mohd. Salim led the assembled students and youth in taking a pledge to uphold the revolutionary anti-imperialist legacy of Bhagat Singh and the martyrs of the 1857 War of Independence and to nurture and cherish the fighting unity of the people of India against communalism, imperialist economic policies and the growing unity of India's rulers with imperialist forces. Following this, the March was flagged off by veteran human rights activist Justice Rajinder Sachar, who reminded that Ferozeshah Kotla was the spot where Bhagat Singh and his comrades had launched their revolutionary organisation - the HSRA. Justice Sachar exhorted young Indians to struggle for a democratic India truly free from exploitation in keeping with Bhagat Singh's dreams.

The March then proceeded towards Parliament Street, ending with a mass meeting at Jantar Mantar. The main speaker at the mass meeting was CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya. Addressing the gathering Comrade Dipankar said that for Bhagat Singh, freedom did not mean an exchange of white rulers for brown ones. Rather he had called upon Indians to resist imperialism and every kind of exploitation and repression - whether it was inflicted directly by colonial rule or by agents of imperialism in the Indian ruling class. This great martyr who gave up his life to struggle in the freedom struggle, believed true freedom required a revolution. And the sword of revolution, he said, was sharpened on the whetting stone of ideas. Bhagat Singh sharpened his revolutionary determination on the whetting stone of Marx's and Lenin's ideas. Those parties - be they Congress or BJP - which are betraying Bhagat Singh's vision by shackling India's freedom to US imperialism have no right to take the name of Bhagat Singh, he said.

Today, the sun has set on the British empire but the US imperialists have taken their place. Their East India companies of today are demanding land, concessions, water and special zones where Indian laws will not apply. They are once more asking Indian soldiers to fight colonial wars for them; they want India to be an outpost of their empire in South Asia. It is all too clear that the Nuke Deal will not solve India's energy needs. In the name of the Nuke Deal, the US is actually seeking to make India dependent on it for fuel, and to bind India to its strategic and military design. Any Government interested in defending India's self-respect, security and sovereignty ought to reject the Nuke Deal. The UPA Government, instead, is acting as the spokesperson of the US within India, and is deliberately misleading Indians about the content and character of the Deal. The BJP too is restricting itself to some minor criticisms of the Deal while approving of the overall strategic embrace of the US. Shamefully, the UPA Government is arguing that the Deal does not require ratification by Parliament.

By now, Comrade Dipankar said, there are no grounds for any illusion that the Government is 'pausing' the Deal to please the Left. Rather, Pranab Mukherjee has just yesterday met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In this meeting, and at the IAEA meet too, is all too clear that the Government is taking all the steps to clinch the Nuke Deal. No inheritor of Bhagat Singh's legacy can allow a Government which is forcing such a slavish Deal on the Indian people to continue for a single day longer. The UPA Government must pass the test of Bhagat Singh's anti-imperialist nationalism and must scrap the Nuke Deal - or else must quit the seat of power, said Comrade Dipankar. He ended with a rousing call to the people of India to pay true tribute to Bhagat Singh by intensifying their battle against the concrete manifestations of imperialism today: starvation deaths and suicides of peasants, Jallianwala Baghs against peasantry at Kalinganagar, Nandigram, Khammam to make way for SEZs; witch-hunting of today's Bhagat Singhs as 'terrorists'; and the growing intervention and control of the US in the sub-continent and in India in particular.

The mass meeting was conducted by the National President of AISA Indresh Maikhuri; other speakers included the General Secretary of RYA Kamlesh Sharma, Jan Sanskriti Manch leader Madan Kashyap, AICCTU General Secretary Swapan Mukherjee, and AIPWA General Secretary Kumudini Pati.

Bhagat Singh Birth Centenary Celebrations in Tamil Nadu

In Virudhachalam of Cuddalore distt. and Thirubhuvanam of Tanjore distt. meetings were held on this occasion, addressed by Comrades Ammayappan, Suganthan, Elangovan and Gunasekaran. In Komarapalayam of Namakkal distt., a convention on Bhagat Singh's Legacy was organised. Civil Rights Activists Balamurugan, Comrades N.K. Natarajan and Govindaraj SCMs of the Party and Com. V. Sankar, CCM, addressed the convention.

In Tiruvallore, another oath-taking meeting was organised. Comrades Janakiraman and A.S.Kumar, SCMs spoke in the meeting. A colourful oath-taking meeting was held in Ambattur, Chennai. There were big digital banners depicting the struggles of 1857, Naxalbari, Bhagat Singh and against American Imperialism. There were 100 comrades with red flags and 100 comrades with Bhagat Singh T-shirts along with more than 500 participants. S. Kumarasami, S. Eraniappan, Radhkrishnan, Sekar, Bharathi and Palanivel spoke in the meeting.

In Pudukottai, a well-attended and well-received public meeting was held. Balasundaram, State Secretary of CPI(ML), and Asaithambi, District Committee Secretary addressed the meeting. In Coimbatore, from 25 September onwards, 2000 Pricol workers wore Bhagat Singh badges during their work. On 28 Sep. oath-taking meeting was held by them. This was addressed by TU leaders Krishnamurthy, Janakiraman, Kaliannan, Advocate Rajendran, HMKP leader Selvaraj and Comrades Damodaran and Bhuvana. Over 1000 Pricol workers attended the oath-taking ceremony.

Centenary Celebrations in Punjab

Rallies were organised in many towns of Punjab including Mansa, Sunam in Sangrur (Birthplace of Shaheed Udham Singh), Barnala, Ludhiana and Bilsapur in Moga by CPI(ML), AISA, RYA and Punjab Kisan Union. A large number of posters of Shaheed-e-Azam and pamphlets were also distributed on this occasion. These rallies were addressed by Punjab State Secretary Rajwinder Rana, Harbhagwan Bhikhi, Bhagwant Samaon, Sukhdarshan Natt, Ruldu Singh, Balkaran, Nikka Singh, Kanwaljit, Iqwal Kaur Udasi and others.

Dharna at Bhind Collectorate against Anti-Poor Policies

On 19 September, hundreds of activists of CPI(ML) participated in a dharna at the collectorate at Bhind in Madhya Pradesh, raising several issues relating to the city's poor.

After the daylong dharna, a memorandum was submitted to the Collector by a delegation. Some of the demands raised were: inclusion of the genuinely poor of Bhind city and district in the BPL lists; proper functioning of ration shops and distribution of ration and kerosene to the poor through these; better electricity facilities for all; implementing the schemes of old-age pensions, widow pensions, funds for the physically challenged and National Family Welfare; and allotting space for a mandi (market) to the poor peasants who sell vegetables in stalls near the Sabzi Mandi (vegetable market).

The mass meeting at the dharna spot was presided over by AIPWA's District President Comrade Suraj Rekha Tripathi. Leading participants in the dharna included CPI(ML) State Committee member and District Secretary Comrade Devendra Singh Chouhan, Srikant Insan, Dr. Prabhudayal, Ramsingh Kshatriya, Rambeti, Shilabai Jatav, Zarina Begum, and Nafisa Begum.

AIKSS Dharna Before UP Assembly

The All India Kisan Sangharsh Samiti held a day-long dharna in front of UP Assembly on Sept. 27 to press for the demands of payment of dues to sugarcane producers, loan waiver for poor peasants,

rehabilitation of peasants affected by floods and erosion of lands by rivers and against continuing farmers' suicides as well as SEZs. Peasants from various districts including Lakhimpur, Pilibhit, Sitapur, Unnao, Jalaun, Gazipur, Kushinagar, Ambedkarnagar, Gonda, Moradabad, etc. participated in the dharna which was addressed by AIKSS UP convenor Ishwari Prasad Kushwaha. The speakers said that Mayawati govt. is undermining the problems of peasants in UP. The sugar mill owners have to pay thousands of crores to the peasants but in spite of the govt. assurance that the payment will be made before 31 August, nothing substantial is being done in this regard in favour of the peasants. The Govt. is also silent over the payment of compensation against the lands taken over for various projects of irrigation department, development authorities, tourism department, and now there are proposals to snatch lands from the farmers in the name of high-tech city and SEZs. It is the policies of the Mayawati's as well as Manmohan Singh's governments which have sent farmers into a trap of devastation and penury.

All India Agricultural Labour Association (AIALA)'s UP President Krishna Adhikary apprised the audience of debt ridden farmers of terai region and called for much bigger and nationwide movement of peasants, agri. workers and rural poor to reverse these policies. She also demanded to redistribute lands illegally occupied by land mafia and feudal goons. The dharna was also addressed by Yashwant Singh, Rohtas Rajput, Brijbehari, Balmukund Dhuria, Ramchandra Verma, Kamlesh Rai, and many others. This was presided over by Vasant Singh and conducted by Kranti Kumar Singh. A memorandum of demands was also sent to the Governor of UP through this protest dharna.

Protest in Delhi against Crack-down on Burmese People

The All Burma Students' League (ABSL) organised a protest at Jantar-Mantar on 2 Oct. against the brutal crack-down on Burmese people by the military junta of that country. The protestors demanded from the government of India for taking a proactive and pro-people action on Burma. Various democratic organisations and individuals participated in the protest. Comrades Prabhat Kumar and Kumudini Pati addressed the gathering on behalf of the CPI(ML).

District Conference in Deoghar

The first Conference of CPI(ML) in Deoghar was concluded on 30 Sept. Nearly 100 delegates including a good number of women members participated in the Conference which elected a 15-member District Committee, including five women members, with Comrade Gita Mandal as its Secretary. Comrade Ibnul Hasan Basru addressed the Conference as Observer.

Shame on the UPA Govt.'s Shameful Support to The Burmese Military Dictatorship!

Support The Heroic Battle of Burmese People for Democracy!

"We have strategic and economic interests to protect in Burma. It is up to the Burmese people to struggle for democracy." – Pranab Mukherjee, Foreign Minister, UPA Government.

"We value our growing military relations with Burma" – outgoing Army Chief JJ Singh.

On the streets of Myanmar, Buddhist monks are at the forefront of a remarkable upsurge against the military dictatorship. They – and anyone who is seen with them – are being crushed ruthlessly with

bludgeons and bullets. Recently, a Japanese photographer covering one of the peaceful demonstrations was shot dead in cold blood by the Burmese military.

This isn't the first time blood has flowed on the streets of Burma. The pro-democracy movement in Burma has kept alive despite harsh, cruel, unrelenting repression. During the 1988 movement, the dictatorship was reeling under the impact of strikes in the oil industry, transport, postal services, telecommunications and factories, as well as widespread protests; and brutal and bloody repression was unable to end it. The dictatorship managed to cling to power by striking a deal with the main political opposition, the NLD, to end the protests in return for elections in 1990. Having staved off the uprising, the generals rejected the outcome of the elections, suppressed the opposition and continued in power. NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi was elected in a landslide victory – but has spent most of her time since in imprisonment or exile.

There is an enormous gulf between the pampered lifestyle of the generals and the poverty of Burmese people. The latest protests were triggered last month by the junta's decision to slash price subsidies on petrol, diesel and gas, increasing transport costs and sending the price of basic items skyrocketing.

In the latest round of resistance to the military regime, monks who are a large and influential institution in Burmese society have refused to accept donations from the military. This is a major embarrassment for the military generals who claim to be devout Buddhists. Some Burmese military officers have formed a group called the Public Patriot Army Association and expressed their backing for the monks' movement. In Burma, priests have a long history of joining political struggles, from the fight against British colonial rule to the pro-democracy uprising in 1988 that was crushed by the army. Monks run the only schools in rural areas; monasteries also often provide money for medicines and offer meals for the destitute. This time, monks have demanded an instant reduction in fuel prices, the release of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and a swift move to democracy.

The attitude of successive Indian governments to the Burmese dictatorship has been one of shamefully close and warm economic and military ties; the Burmese military is supposed to cooperate with the Indian military in repression of insurgency in the North East. Even now, as pro-democracy activists are being massacred on the streets of Burma, the UPA Government has sent its Petroleum Minister Murli Deora to clinch oil and gas contracts with Burma.

India's appeasement of the military dictatorship is a reflection of the same appeasement by the US and UK. George Bush has made loud noises calling for sanctions against Burma. Washington's objection to the Burmese junta is not its suppression of democratic rights, but its close alignment with China. No doubt, China and Russia are cynically supporting repressive regimes to advance their economic and strategic interests. But they are not alone. Burma's largest trading partner is not China, but neighbouring Thailand, which is ruled by a military dictatorship with tacit US support. The Bush administration's campaign on Burma is not motivated by concerns for ordinary Burmese, but is aimed at establishing a pro-US regime in Rangoon as part of its strategic encirclement of China.

US and European corporates continue to do business with the Burmese military regime. The EU has bolstered the regime by increasing imports from Burma, worth around US\$4 billion between 1998 and 2002.

The Total Oil Company, part-owned by the French government, is the largest foreign investor in Burma, where the oil companies' infrastructure of roads and railway access have long been the subject of allegations of forced labour. Other such corporates include the US oil corporation Unocal. The military dictatorship uses such foreign investment to buy the weapons that shore up its reign of terror.

Pranab Mukherjee says it's the Burmese people's job to struggle for democracy - while it's the Indian government's job to 'safeguard' its business and military interests by cosying up to the military dictatorship! Well, we must tell our Government that the Indian people consider it their job to support the brave struggle of the Burmese people for democracy, and also to resist the Indian Government's shameful support for the dictatorship.

P.S.

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