

## **ML Update: 06-12 January 2009**

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### **Freedom for Palestine! Cease-fire in Sri Lanka!!**

Relying the fond hopes of all those who greeted each other for a 'peaceful' and 'terror-free' 2009, the New Year has begun on a particularly aggressive note of war and destruction. Armed Israeli forces have mounted an all-out assault on Gaza, killing and maiming hundreds of Palestinians through air strikes, ground offensive as well as sea-borne attacks. Nearer home, the Sri Lankan Army claims to be advancing towards Mulaitivu, after having already captured the LTTE stronghold of Kilinochi. The LTTE claims to have killed more than 50 members of the Sri Lankan armed forces in retaliatory resistance and counter-operations, both around Mulaitivu and in capital Colombo.

Both these campaigns seem to have been timed deliberately at this particular juncture. Busy with the post-election change of guards, neither Bush nor Obama will have to face the heat on account of these wars, and the European Union and all other major players in international relations are preoccupied with the global financial meltdown and economic recession. Israel's attack on Gaza clearly enjoys the fullest backing of the US which sees Israeli aggression merely as a 'reply' to acts of military 'provocation' by the Hamas. The Sri Lankan military offensive may not enjoy that sort of explicit endorsement by the US and its allies, but Sri Lanka is out to seek international legitimacy for its action by projecting the whole thing as a crucial victory over "savage terrorism". The history of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in Gaza and West Bank goes back to four decades. Notwithstanding periodic changes of guards in both Israel and the US, the two establishments have always had the closest strategic partnership. Every military assault by Israel on Palestinian/Arab territory or people has enjoyed the protective political umbrella of the US and since 2001 the partnership has been reinforced by the US-led global 'war on terror'. While the US has gone on to invade and occupy countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, Israel has specialised in targeting the backbone of Arab resistance, Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. But just as the US has got stuck in Afghanistan and Iraq, two years ago Israel too had to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Regrettably enough, the US-Israel axis has been emboldened not only by the silence of much of the Western world and big Asian countries like China and India, but also by the complicity and acquiescence on the part of sections of Arab rulers. Egypt and Jordan have already been pushed into so-called peace treaties with Israel, and they now look away, if not play willing accomplices, as the US-Israel axis targets the Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians. In spite of such a division within the Arab ruling establishment, the Hezbollah had successfully withstood and defeated Israeli aggression two years ago, thanks to overwhelming popular support within the Arab world. This time too, the Hamas and Hezbollah have both called for organising mass protests and resistance across the Arab world and Israel may once again have to pay a heavy price for its military misadventure in Gaza.

Reports of communist-led protests are also coming in from within Israel.

Interestingly, the Sri Lankans decry the Israeli action and would like to project their military operation in a different light than the ethnic cleansing unleashed by Israeli armed forces even as President Mahinda Rajapaksa hailed the fall of Killinochi as “the most honourable victory in the annals of military heroism that runs through many centuries” of Sri Lanka’s history. Whatever truth there may be in Rajapaksa’s military claims, the fact remains that Sri Lanka’s aggressive military bid to put an end to the “false Eelam struggle” and unite the whole of Sri Lanka under one single flag and as one single nation smacks very much of the Zionist politics of ethnic hatred and racist domination.

India has traditionally opposed the Israeli occupation of Palestine and since the disastrous IPKF experience in the late 1980s, officially India has favoured a political, and not military, solution of the Sri Lankan Tamil question. But over the last ten years as Indian foreign policy has started revolving increasingly around the US-Israel strategic axis, India too now effectively endorses the aggressive military strategy pursued by Israel and Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the FBI has virtually taken over the ‘Indian’ probe into Mumbai terror attack and, through the newly set-up NIA, the US now has an ever tighter grip on various aspects of India’s domestic security as well.

The Indian people must therefore come out ever more vociferously against the Israeli attack on Gaza and also for an immediate cease-fire in Sri Lanka. The more India endorses the marauding military expeditions of the US-Israel axis, the more India weakens her own battle against terrorism. A free Palestine remains the most crucial unfinished agenda of the contemporary global battle for peace, justice and democracy and the Indian people must throw their entire weight behind the just forces of Palestinian resistance and for a dignified political resolution of the Sri Lankan Tamil question.

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## **Over 150,000 in Israel Protest Gaza Deadly Military Operation**

(with inputs from Communist Party of Israel)

Over 150,000 people demonstrated in Israel on Saturday, January 3, 2009, against Operation Cast Lead: in the northern Arab town of Sakhnin and in Tel-Aviv. The demonstration in Sakhnin was, by far, the biggest such protest in Israel. According to one report it was the largest protest held by the Arab-Palestinian in Israel in many years. Marchers held Palestinian flags and pictures of children said to have been killed during the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) operation. The protest opened with a minute of silence, in memory of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the operation began.

The event was attended by several Arab Knesset members including Muhammad Barakeh and Hanna Zweid (Hadash - Democratic Front for Peace and Equality - Communist Party of Israel). Also, dozen of thousands of peace activists arrived at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv Saturday night to protest against the military operation. The protesters marching in the streets and carrying red flags and banners flags reading “Stop the fire” and “Children in Gaza and Sderot wish to live.” Knesset members Dov Khenin and Muhammad Barakeh (Hadash) were among the political figures who attended the rally. “I came here to demonstrate along with thousands of citizens in Tel Aviv and all across the country, Jews and Arabs alike, who are calling to stop this war, which is a disaster. It hasn’t solved the security problems in the south, and nothing good will come out of it,” told Khenin. “We came here to demand an end to the war, an agreement on a ceasefire, the opening of the border crossings and a prisoner exchange deal,” he said. “This will be the outcome anyway, and no

unnecessary blood should be spilled in the meantime.”

The demonstrators chanted “Defense Minister Barak, how many children have you murdered today?” Hundreds of right-wing activists demonstrated opposite the leftists in support of the IDF’s ground incursion in Gaza. During the last week, and across the country, 471 Arabs and Jews have been arrested in protests against the deadly Israeli operation in Gaza, 149 of those minors.

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### **CPI(ML)-led Protests Against Brutal Aggression on Palestine**

In New Delhi, the chilly-cold weather at the Parliament Street on 2<sup>nd</sup> January of the new year was warmed by the protest when CPI(ML) and AISA members assembled to express their wrath against the brutal aggression on Palestine and killing of hapless children and civilians. Party members burnt the effigy of imperialist Israeli and US governments and expressed solidarity with the struggle of Palestinian people against Israeli imperialism and war. The highlight of the protest was a large participation of Palestinian students in the CPI(ML) protest.

In Lucknow the Party members assembled in front of the UP Vidhan Sabha and demanded an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against Palestine. Later an effigy of Israeli-US nexus was consigned to flames. Protest was also held in several district head quarters of the State including - Varanasi, Kanpur, Muradabad, Sonbhadra, Mirzapur, Chandauli, Ghazipur, Mau and Devaria. In Chandauli the protest was held at four centres of the district - Chakia, Naugarh, Dhanapur and Mughalsarai. It was also held in three centres of Ghazipur district - Dildarnagar, Bhadaura and dist. HQ. UP’s Party State Secretary Comrade Sudhakar Yadav led the protest in Sonbhadra Dist. The protests in UP have sent memorandum to the President of India asking her that India strongly condemns the Israeli aggression and intensifies diplomatic efforts to stop the war on Palestine.

In Jharkhand too State-wide protests were held on January 3 and 4. Party called upon the people of Jharkhand to unite against the Israeli offensive and US-Israel led global war on the people and their livelihood. The protests among other places were held in Lohardaga, Ramgarh, Barhi, Dhanbad, Bagodar, Giridih and Rajdhanwar. Effigies of Israeli prime minister and George Bush were burnt at many places.

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### **AICCTU Protest in Assam**

At the call of AICCTU a protest meeting with the participation of 41 trade unions and mass organisations was held at Guwahati Press Club on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2008. The meeting demanded immediate revocation of suspension of Sri Biren Kalita and also resignation of Cabinet Minister Akon Borah from the portfolio of Presidentship of Refinery Workers’ Union, Guwahati, else, the movement of workers and employees will be intensified throughout the State. The important resolutions are: submitting a joint memorandum to the E.D. Guwahati Refinery, to take a united protest action at Noonmati in particular. The meeting vehemently condemned the attack by the degenerated trade union leaders at the patronisation of Party in power and the Guwahati Refinery management to suppress the voice of protest of workers and employees, creating hindrances on the way of developing trade union democracy and revolutionary trade union culture. The meeting also resolved

and demanded immediate withdrawal of illegal lockout of the Rangagora Tea Estate of Biswanath Sub-Division.

It is worth mentioning here that the AICCTU Central Committee has already submitted memoranda to the Union Home Minister, Petroleum and Gas Minister, Central Labour Minister and also the Chairman, IOCL. Moreover, the Central Trade Unions at Delhi have also taken a series of programmes demanding revocation of suspension of Sri Kalita and State Committees of AICCTU of different states have already sent memoranda to the Chief Minister of Assam with the same demand.

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### **Women Members' Meet In TN**

TN Party Women Members workshop was held on 23-24, Dec 2008 in Chennai. Com. Kavitha Krishnan, CCM, attended the meeting. 36 women comrades from 10 districts participated in the meeting. SCMs, Comrades Bhuvana, Thenmozhi and Usha presided over. Com.S.Kumarasami, PBM, who inaugurated the meeting, said that global capitalism in crisis has opened up enormous opportunity before the revolutionary communist party and the party should take all efforts to grow and expand for grabbing the opportunities. He stressed that all-out efforts must be taken to make the Pledge Campaign a success. He emphasized that, for AIPWA to have its own independent identity, it should develop its own base.

Group discussions were held on the paper presented by Com.Kavitha Krishnan in the Central Women Workshop held in Burdwan, on the topic, 'Policies and Orientation of Women Organization'. Questions were raised on issues such as Fascist attack on women, women reservation, our relationship with NGOs, gender sensitivity, homosexual relationship etc. Com.Kavitha Krishnan spoke in detail on all the questions raised. She explained in detail on Marxist view point on women liberation. She called for building AIPWA as the biggest organization in the state.

It was decided to ensure the participation of all women members of the party in the Pledge Campaign, to go in for a campaign on 'Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities' for a week in February, to organize district conference wherever possible in March and to go in for the State conference of AIPWA. A 9-member state organizing body for AIPWA was formed with Com.Thenmozhi as the convenor. Com.Balasundaram, State Secretary, also spoke in the meeting.

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### **Workers' Rights March in Kanyakumari**

AICCTU-led Workers' Rights March of was held in Kolchal of Kanyakumari district on 27 December. Com.Anthony Muthu, SCM and State Vice-President, AICCTU led the march in which more than 600 participated. More than 95% of the participants were women. Comrades from the neighboring Tirunelveli District also participated in the Rally. Com.Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary, CPIML called for the TN people to reject the clamor of the UPA government for war in the name of tackling terrorism. Com.S.Kumarasami, PBM, called it a shame on the part of the official left in TN, to mortgage the struggles of the working people of TN to Jayalalitha for a few seats. Comrade Balasundaram, State Secretary, Comrade N.K.Natarajan, State GS, AICCTU and Com.Sankarapandian, State Vice President, AICCTU also attended the meeting.

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## **State-wide Protests Against Engr. Manoj Gupta's Murder in UP**

The CPI(ML) in UP held a State-wide protest on 25 December 2008 and burnt effigies of Chief Minister Ms. Mayawati against the brutal and shocking murder of PWD engineer Maoj Gupta at the hands of BSP MLA and leaders. Protests across the State demanded immediate resignation from Chief Minister for whose birthday celebrations extortion and crime is becoming rampant in the State. The Party press statement read that the CM is directly responsible for whatever happened. In Bhadaura of Ghazipur the protest demonstration was lathicharged by the police. There were clashes with the police in Balia, Ambedkar Nagar and Mirzapur also.

## **Jharkhand: Protests against Police Brutalities**

A widespread protest was witnessed in Jharkhand against torture and humiliation of Left leaders languishing in Daltongunj jail. The jail officials are behaving in utmost barbaric and feudal manner. CPI(ML)'s popular leader Comrade BN Singh lodged in jail was even beaten up inside the jail. In protest against violation of even basic rights of inmates of the jail hundreds of jail inmates went on hunger strike and inmates of other jails in Garhwa and Latehar demonstrated inside their jails in solodarity. People in hundreds have protested on streets in support of the striking jail inmates.

## **Unorganised Sector Workers Demonstrate**

Under the joint initiative of Jharkhand General Mazdur Union, Jharkhand Construction Workers' Union and Jharkhand Krantikari Visthapit Sangharsh Morcha a rally and protest demonstration was held in front of the Governor's house in Ranchi on the question of continuing oppression and exploitation of unorganised sector workers associated with production and construction work in Jharkhand. Thousands of workers participated in the rally and demonstration and presented a memorandum to the Governor. The protesting workers were addressed by AICCTU State General Secretary Comrade Subhendu Sen who said that the bubble of liberalisation has burst with a bang and it was the time working class mounted offensive on the prevailing exploitative economic-political order. The ruling classes are making every effort to mount the working class with more burden arising from the financial collapse. He also emphasised that it was crucial to unite and organise the unorganise sector workers if a powerful offensive against the prevailing order is to be mounted. Revolutionary songs were sung by artists of Jharkhand Jan Sanskriti Manch Comrades Anil Anshuman and Soni Tiriya.

## **Haryana Party Unit Commemorates VM's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

The CPI(ML) Haryana Party unit commemorated 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Comrade Vinod Mishra by organising an awareness meeting of workers on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The meeting was organised in Dharuhera of Haryana. CPI(ML) State incharge Comrade Prem Singh Gahlawat was the main speaker who introduced the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the present economic crisis and its only possible solution through a socialist organisation of entire economic life.

## **Peasants' Agitation for Rights over Land in Uttarakhand**

A massive demonstration was held in Haldwani (Nainital) on 29 December 2008 to demand the status of revenue village to Bindukhatta and on the issue of Jamrani dam construction. Highlight of the demonstration was a large participation by the women. Bindukhatta has been settled after a

CPI(ML)-led land struggle during the last 33 years and since then people are demanding legal rights over the land they are tilling all these years. Then ruling Congress and the present BJP led Govts have consistently denied the villagers their basic demands ensuring they do not get even minimum democratic rights like ration cards, BPL cards, voter ID, bank loan etc. Over seventy thousand people now living in some 23 villages of Bindukhatta area will be directly affected adversely or otherwise based on governments decision or denial.

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### **AICCTU's Immediate Reaction on Wage Agreement for CIL**

The wage agreement for Coal India limited has ultimately been finalized in the JBCCI meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> January 2009 in Hyderabad. The salient features of the agreement are following:

1) The wage agreement is for 5 years. (2) The increase in 'basic pay' is around 50%. (3) Increase in underground allowance is from 10% to 12.5%. (4) Medical benefit is extended to retired persons.

JBCCI will meet for taking up the rest of demands in the coming days.

Now it is important to go into the detail of the situation of coal industry in particular and PSUs in general before taking up the analysis of the present (8<sup>th</sup>) wage agreement. In last wage agreement, the management insisted for 10yr wage agreement in coal citing the guidelines of the 'Bureau Of Public Enterprises' and the signing of the 10yrs agreements in other PSUs like steel. Incidentally, the same 5 central trade unions (CTU) who signed 10yrs agreement in steel were part of JBCCI; so the credit for the 5 yrs agreement in the 7<sup>th</sup> wage board in coal goes to the long struggling legacy of the coal workers and the various shades of left-union leadership and rank and files at collieries, areas and even subsidiary levels. In that sense the coal workers played a vanguard role in the struggle of the whole public sector undertakings.

This time situation became more complex with the management declaring their intention for 10 yrs agreement even before the actual negotiation process for wage agreement started. Taking cue from management's assertion, INTUC leader Dadai Dubey and notorious Babulal Marandi started open campaign and mobilisation of coal workers for 10yrs agreement with the tacit support of the management and the UPA govt. These leaders cunningly exploited the sentiment of the large number of employees, particularly staffs who are going for retirement by 2011, numbering around 50,000. The 5 CTU representatives in JBCCI failed to take up any active programme and only involved themselves in behind the door negotiations with the management, the content and nature of which is not shared with the general coal workers. Actually many of the 5 trade unions were vertically divided on the issue of tenure of agreement. The division within INTUC, HMS and BMS came out openly. This created an atmosphere of gloom and frustration among workers which gave leverage to forces like Marandi and Dubey. In this backdrop was our call for 18 December All-India coal workers strike and going for full scale mobilisation for dignified, immediate wage agreement for 5 years attacking both pro-10yrs and ineffective trade union representatives in JBCCI. The rath-yatra roamed Hazaribagh's Bhurkhunda covering entire coal belt of CCL, BCCL and ECL in Jharkhand culminating in Chirkunda in Dhanbad and this acted as a catalyst in galvanising coal workers for strike battle. This created an atmosphere of massive movement in the most vital coal belt of 'Coal India', which prompted 5 central trade unions to give call for nationwide 3-day strike in coal India. CMW, keeping in view the interest of united broad based struggle of coal workers, withdrew 18

December strike call in favour of 3 days coal strike to be held from 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009.

This massive pressure of the 3 days strike call and impending Parliamentary elections forced the Govt and coal management to enter into wage agreement in their meeting from 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009 at Hyderabad. But in this favourable situation the coal workers representatives in the JBCCI failed to bargain hard to extract maximum for coal workers. In 6<sup>th</sup> wage agreement, rise in the basic pay salary was 94%+ when the workforce was more than 6 lakhs; in 7<sup>th</sup> wage agreement the rise in the basic pay was 68%+ when workforce was around 5 lakhs whereas in the 8<sup>th</sup> wage agreement the rise in basic pay is a mere 50% when the coal workers number came down to less than 4 lakhs. And between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> wage agreement the production has increased manifold. Even the 5 CTUs failed to bargain for inclusion of 10% quarterly bonus merger in the basic pay. There is a lot of resentment among the workers on these issues as just few months back the management got raise in the basic to the tune of 200-300%, whereas the 5 CTUs failed to bargain even for maintaining the parity with 7<sup>th</sup> wage board rise.

Marandi, Dubey like forces are trying to exploit this genuine resentment of coal workers for their vested narrow sectarian interests so we should plan for immediate intervention to give the resentment a positive struggling orientation. It is also a fact that workers could safeguard their right for 5 years wage agreement and can gain medical facilities for the retired employees. But still the crucial issues of contract and loading workers, jobs for dependant and land losers, outsourcing and privatisation etc are still pending and two meetings of JBCCI is going to be held soon. We must vigorously continue the campaign on the above mentioned issues. We must expose the ineffectiveness and vacillating character of 5 CTUs in upholding the interest of coal workers and nationalised character of coal India. We must also project our unique initiative in demanding the labour co-operative of the rural youth in the coal-fields area which will go a long way in eliminating mafias and strengthening the nationalised character of coal India. In this over all context, we are the only consistent trend in the CIL struggling against the 5 compromised CTUs in JBCCI and forces like the Dadai-Babulal combine, who were bent on dividing coal workers to open up the coal India for privatisation. Now the time has come to make full fledged thrust to make the CMW, the main centre of coal workers movement and to make an all out effort to force our entry to all the bilateral forums, from HQ to subsidiaries to defend the rights and aspirations of the coal workers.

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**P.S.**

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