

Movement Continues in Punjab (India)

Thursday 4 June 2009, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 2 June 2009).

Even with approximately 1337 agricultural workers, activists and leaders in 8 jails of Punjab, protest activities continued unabated. A large demonstration was held at Barnala on 30 May, and at Sangrur on 31 May. On 28 May itself, a meeting of various Left groups including Comrade Raminder Patiala from CPI(ML) New Democracy, Comrade Inderjit Singh Grewal from CPM Punjab (Pasla), Com. Tara Chand from Inquilabi Kendra as well as Comrades Tarsem Jodhan and Harbhagwan Bhikhi from CPI(ML) attended the meeting. A decision was taken to jointly demand release of all arrested workers and leaders; and upholding of the agreement of 19 May and allotting of housing plots to the rural poor. The government's repression on the landless poor was condemned.

On 31 May, Comrade Bant Singh held a dharna in protest against the arrest of agricultural labourers at Mansa - where he was arrested from the dharna site and confined to the CPI(ML) office. Others too were arrested with him, including his wife comrade Harbans Kaur, and Punjab Kisan Union Vice President Gamdoor Singh Kotdharmu. On 1 June, Bant Singh again held a dharna at Matka Chowk in the state capital of Chandigarh. On this day, the arrested workers were to be produced before a magistrate in court; but in order to thwart the large number of people gathered in courts to meet the workers, they were not produced in court. Instead the next date for appearance in court was announced in jail itself. The workers gathered in courts immediately protested at Mansa, Budhlada, Dhuri, Ludhiana, and Moga. At Mansa, protesters were again arrested, including RYA activist Iqbal Singh.

On 30 May, 184 arrested workers including 30 women held a one-day hunger strike in Patiala jail, in protest against the news that CPI(ML) leader and candidate in the last Lok Sabha elections from Bathinda, Comrade Bhagwant Singh Samaon, was being held in solitary confinement in a cell in Gurdaspur jail.

Sangrur: 102 men; Ludhiana: 11 men, 174 women, 24 children; Patiala: 164 men; Bathinda jail: 64 men, 126 women, 9 children; Gurdaspur: 56 men; Firozepur: 112 men, 70 women; Faridkot: 110 men, 70 women; Jalandhar Nari Niketen: 9 girl children, between 10-14 years of age; Jalandhar jail: 70 women; Amritsar: 100 men, Naba jail: 65 men, and one woman, employees' leader Jasbir Kaur Nat

(Total: 784 men, 511 women, 42 children)

AIPWA-led Team Visits Punjab

On 1 June, a team from Delhi comprising Kavita Krishnan, Secretary, AIPWA and Manisha Sethi of the Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Group, visited Punjab. The team, accompanied by Comrade Hasmeet of RYA, Punjab, met with some of the jailed workers, and also with women who had recently been released from jail. The report of the visit will follow in the next issue.

Is Fighting for Basic Necessities a Crime?

(Open Letter by Revolutionary Youth Association, Punjab)

Dear Friends

We the youth of Chandigarh are writing this letter on behalf of landless daily wage rural labourers of Malwa. We want to address the learned citizens of Chandigarh about inhuman conditions in which the landless poor of our 'Proud Democracy' are living. The conditions, which have forced the innocent poor to take the steering wheel of politics in their own hands by acquiring the 1/3 share in Common Panchayati land which is their legal right and 50 year old unfulfilled promise of State and Center Govt., are as follow:

- Where in Rural Punjab 20% of richest population owns 67.7% of productive forces, the bottom 40% owns only 2% of productive forces. So broadly the poor have almost no productive forces which include land and animals.
- Only source of income left with the rural labourers is to work either on daily-wages (in Villages/Cities) or yearly contract with landlords. Daily-wage rate is Rs. 80-120 and yearly contract rate is Rs. 18000-30000. Due to modern machines like Combines, lift trolleys etc. a labourer gets work on an average 10 days a month making annual income of nearly Rs15000. So in both case the average daily income they get comes out to be Rs. 40-70. How can they feed their children with such a petty amount??
- Central Govt. has started NREGA scheme. The scheme stipulates 100 days of employment to them at rate of Rs. 123/- daily. But the reality is instead of implementing this scheme Punjab Govt. has returned the grant of 350 crores which Center Govt. sanctioned under the NREGA scheme.
- Malwa is becoming hub of Cancer caused due to contaminated land water. Even students of Govt. schools are forced to drink land water as the panchayati taps are removed. Providing clean water for drinking is duty of Govt. The responsibility was earlier given to Panchayats but this has now been given to private companies. The security for getting Tap is Rs. 2000-2500 and monthly bill is extra. The labourers are left with 2 options either drink contaminated land water and get cancer or take loans from rich to get water taps.
- Loans are not easy to get as labourers do not have any property to keep as security. So the only option left is to approach the non-institutional mortgagers who charge 4-5 times more interest than banks. Once the loan is taken, the women of labourer family is forced to do household (cleaning of animal waste) for years of mortgager's family in lieu of interest of loan as long as Principal amount is not paid off.
- The condition of their present houses can be judged from the fact that most of labourer families even have no space to build toilets and they (including women and young girls) are forced to go out in fields for answering nature's call. The Owners of fields don't allow them and women are insulted daily over this.

Above points may have cleared the pitiable conditions in which the poor labourers are living. A law (Consolidation and fragmentation Act, 1961) has been made long back in 1961 giving them 1/3 of the share in Common Panchayati Land. Various Governments have befooled them for Votes with promises to implement this act and allotting them houses. Political, Social and Youth Organizations like CPI (ML) Liberation, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha with Revolutionary Youth Association took lead of the rural labour when they decided to solve this by themselves. Consequently possessions were taken in 35 villages by labourers of their 1/3 share in common panchayati land. Under pressure from the labourers, the administration signed an agreement stating that plots will be allotted to all

landless labourers of area within 3 month time and NREGA job cards will be made for all within 1 month. In the agreement CPI (ML) promised the no new possessions will be made and this promise is kept till date.

But the administration, led by Dy. CM Sukhbir Singh Badal, breaking the agreement on 21st May started arresting state leadership of CPI (ML) Liberation and lathi-charged the labourers sitting on peaceful protest, arresting nearly 400 labourers which included mostly women and children. Continuing the arrests on 22nd May, police arrested 950 more labourers from 2 villages where labourers gathered to attend Akhand Path. Many have been kept under illegal confinement as no information is being provided till date by police that how many arrests they have shown. Where are remaining people?

What are the various charges under which 1500 people have been detained and kept? As among those arrested are mostly women and children, what steps are been taken to provide them basic requirements like clothes and medicines?

WE APPEAL TO THE RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS OF CHANDIGARH TO STAND WITH US IN THIS STRUGGLE FOR BASIC DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS OF THE OPPRESSED CLASSES OF OUR SOCIETY.

P.S.

* From ML Update, a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 12 No. 23, 02 - 08 JUNE 2009.