

AIALA National Conference Concludes in Rajahmundry

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Revive the spirit of Telengana, Naxalbari, Srikakulam and Bhojpur in a new context by creating a new tide of agrarian movements

On 30 January, Rajahmundry, on the banks of the Godavari, was awash in a sea of red flags. The town had been christened Alluri Sitarama Raju Nagar after the great peasant guerilla freedom fighter of Andhra Pradesh. A Rally of thousands of agrarian labourers, mostly from Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, as well as delegates from all over the country, had gathered there to participate in a Rally marking the inauguration of the second All India Conference of the AIALA on 30-31 January. The Rally, led by CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Poliburo members Swadesh Bhattacharya, DP Buxi and Kartick Pal, as well as AIALA leaders from various states, marched from the railway station through the town, garlanding the statues of Bhagat Singh and Alluri Sitarama Raju. At the head of the procession full of colourful banners and flags, were the team of cultural activists of JSM, performing a traditional tribal dance. The Rally culminated in a mass meeting at the Shaheed Subramaniam Grounds, (the first peasant martyr of the East Godavari region, during the freedom struggle). Veterans of the Telengana movement and the freedom struggle were honoured at the mass meeting.

Comrade Ramnaresh Ram, President of the outgoing committee of AIALA, sent his message of greetings to the Conference as he is seriously ill and undergoing treatment in AIIMS, Delhi. He hoped that AIALA would become the biggest and strongest organisation of every agricultural labourer and rural poor in the country. Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, General Secretary of the outgoing committee, also sent his message from the Beur Jail in Patna. Both the messages were read out in the rally.

Addressing the Rally, Comrade Dipankar remarked that two years back, AIALA held its founding Conference at Bhojpur, a noted centre of agrarian struggles; it was fitting that the second Conference was being held at Andhra Pradesh, the historic soil where the Telengana struggle was waged against the British and the landlords - a struggle which made Communism a household word in India. Today, when we face the onslaught of US imperialism, we are inspired by the struggle of the heroic peasant warriors of like Sitarama Raju. He said that the second Conference of AIALA was being held at a time of great assaults on the rural poor - the UPA's attempt to cut back on food subsidies is the latest instance. The question of land continues to be a central one. The Telengana movement had waged a war for land reform - but land reforms have yet to complete. In every state, ceiling surplus land is grabbed on one or the other pretext. Eviction from land in the name of 'development' is a burning issue. At Kalinganagar, not only were tribals protesting eviction shot dead, their limbs were chopped off as a 'lesson' to those who protest. It is time to turn the tables, and make Kalinganagar a lesson for the ruling class instead.

Comrade Dipankar congratulated agrarian labourers for forcing the UPA to pass the NREGA, but pointed out that past experience showed how many laws enacted under pressure of movements remained on paper and were never implemented on the ground. Local power groups are seeing the EGA as a new treasure house of loot and plunder; AIALA must foil them and break the stranglehold of tractors and contractors on the EGA. We must demand that the minimum wage be fixed at Rs.

100, and at least one man and one woman per family must be guaranteed a job under the EGA. He concluded by calling upon agrarian labourers not to confine themselves to their own issues, but to play a leading role in national politics. In particular, he called upon AIALA to resist the entry of imperialist war criminal George Bush in India.

After the Rally, the delegate session was held at a Hall named after Comrade Mahendra Singh. A total of 882 delegates from 17 states (including 101 women delegates), including Assam, Tripura, Manipur, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, UP, Bihar and Jharkhand, as well as Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills regions of Assam participated in the deliberations of the Conference. Cultural teams from Orissa, Andhra, Assam, Karbi Anglong, and Jharkhand presented colourful and rousing songs and performances. The guests and observers who expressed solidarity with the Conference included leaders of AISA, AICCTU, AIKS, the Mazdoor Kisan Sanghatana and the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) of Maharashtra, leaders of the Chilika Matsyajeebi Association, the Chhattisgarh Naagar Jotta Samaj, as well as noted economist and activist Jean Dreze.

During the Conference, delegates from various centres and states shared their experiences of organising agrarian labourers and leading struggles. Comrades from Andhra spoke of the recent success in expanding the movement in the Telengana region, and waging land struggles. Delegates from Orissa spoke of the ongoing struggle against eviction and state repression after the Kalinganagar massacre, as well as the Chilika fisherpeoples' struggle.

Those from TN described the initiatives taken by AIALA in the wake of the tsunami that devastated the rural poor in the coastal regions of the State. Activists from West Bengal discussed the complexity of struggles in a Left Front ruled State, where land laws were being reversed to facilitate corporate takeover; those from Tripura spoke of the successful attempts to organise adivasis and win them over from the CPI(M). Leaders from Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills shared their experience of building AIALA and achieving more than 1 lakh membership in the face of the state-sponsored extremism and massacres; also their success in exposing corruption in the Food For Work scheme and preparing to ensure implementation of the NREGA. Activists of the tea garden workers of Assam also spoke of their struggles against state repression, closure, starvation and unemployment.

A moving point in the Conference was when Baljeet Kaur, the daughter of Bant Singh, the Dalit AIALA leader from Punjab who was mutilated, spoke up. She said that her father had had to pay such a heavy cost for fighting for justice when she was raped; it was now time for her to fight for her father, for her people and for the class of agrarian labourers.

Comrades from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan discussed their experience of organising agricultural workers and poor peasants in the region.

Those from UP spoke of the AIALA's growing influence and also of their strategies to fight severe state repression, with AIALA leaders being booked under Gangster and Goonda Acts. Activists from Jharkhand narrated how they raised the issue of corruption and how they sustained the blow of Comrade Mahendra's murder and led the movement against this assassination.

Comrades from Bhojpur and Jehanabad in Central Bihar spoke of their long struggle against the Ranveer Sena and the movement against the use of TADA to book agrarian labour activists. Those from West Champaran spoke of the growing struggle against the feudal repression in that region, while activists from North Bihar spoke of the agitations launched on the issue of recurrent floods.

Delegates debated the draft document at the Conference, which analysed the current political

situation and the question of evolving an agenda in the light of changing political context. The document discussed issues of land struggles, wages, dignity, democratic participation in and control of rural poor over Government schemes, and challenged the Government's anti-people model of development based on displacement and eviction. They also discussed strategies to mobilise around issues like health, housing, education, water and so on. The Conference resolved to develop panchayats as a centre of struggle, by organising rural poor at the panchayat level. In particular, delegates from all over the country shared their plans in preparation for ensuring implementation of the EGA, especially of ensuring registration and issue of job card to all agrarian labourers. A booklet suggesting guidelines for struggle on the EGA issue was released at the Conference.

The delegates noted that AIALA had borne the brunt of several attacks: its General Secretary Rameshwar Prasad had been in jail on flimsy charges for several months, several of its activists had been killed by anarchists at the behest of the RJD in Paliganj, and its popular leader of agrarian struggles, Comrade Mahendra Singh, had been assassinated. Despite this, AIALA had succeeded in achieving a membership of 16,66,643 - marking a 20.5% increase. This included the four districts which achieved more than 1 lakh membership - Bhojpur, Giridih, Karbi Anglong, and Siwan; and also those which achieved more than 50,000 membership - Patna, Rohtas, Garhwa, and Darbhanga. The delegates passed the draft document unanimously after having adopted suitable amendments.

The Conference adopted several political resolutions, viz.:

- 1) demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners from the agrarian labour movement including the outgoing AIALA GS Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, and withdrawal of all false cases and draconian charges under TADA, in order to secure the release of those imprisoned in Bihar on TADA charges;
- 2) demanding resignation of the Naveen Patnaik Government responsible for the Kalinganagar Massacre, and demanding an immediate end to all plans of eviction in favour of corporates;
- 3) resolving to call for a gherao of the Punjab Assembly on February 20 to protest against the brutal assault on a Dalit AIALA leader;
- 4) condemning the massacres of rural poor from the extremely backward and Muslim communities at Raghapur and Chilaon in Champaran, which expose the Nitish Government's claims of providing 'good governance' and a 'Bihar free of criminalisation';
- 5) calling upon agrarian poor to resist the assault by the UPA Government on food security and food rights through cuts in the rationing system and food grain subsidies;
- 6) reiterating the demand for an integrated all-India law for agrarian labourers, and demanding extension of NREGA to the whole country;
- 7) to wage struggle for land reforms, and for the right of rural poor and adivasis over land, forests, water sources and homestead land, even more urgent in the light of the moves in several states including LF-ruled West Bengal, to reverse land ceiling laws;
- 8) resolving to organise massive protests of agrarian poor all over the country on the day that Bush sets foot on Indian soil, and demanding the recall of the US Ambassador David Mulford who made statements which were offensive to India's sovereignty by seeking to dictate India's policies.

In his concluding speech, Comrade Dipankar said that the task of organising agrarian labourers as a class was one which the Party had adopted from its very birth. Rural poor and agrarian labour had played a decisive role in all its landmark struggles. He said that the tussle between Communists, who seek to organise agrarian labour as a class, and the ruling classes who seek to divide it, can be

seen on all fronts: not just in bullets and lathis, but even in policies and slogans. He called upon the delegates to revive the spirit of Telengana, Naxalbari, Srikakulam and Bhojpur in a new context by creating a new tide of agrarian movements.

The Conference then went on to elect a National Council of 142 members. The Council in turn elected a 35-member Executive. Comrade Ramnaresh Ram was nominated the Founder President, Comrade Rameshwar Prasad as President and Comrade Dharendra Jha as General Secretary; 7 Vice Presidents - Swadesh Bhattacharya, Kshitish Biswal, Ibnul Hasan Basru, S. Balasundaram, Pwawan Sharma, Krishna Adhikari and Malleswara Rao, and 6 Secretaries - Janardan Prasad, Bangar Rao, Satyadev Ram, Ravi Kumar Phangchu, Srikant Rana and Sanjay Sharma, were also elected. In conclusion, the AIALA Conference donated Rs. 51,000 to the CPI(ML) Central Committee. Speaking on behalf of the newly elected Committee, Comrade Dharendra Jha concluded the Conference by announcing the resolve to achieve a target of 25 lakh membership and to develop and consolidate AIALA structures and activities from the panchayat to the State level. The Conference ended with rousing rendition of revolutionary songs by the various cultural teams and by the entire house.

P.S.

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