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BJP'S PRE-ELECTION 'FEEL-GOOD' BUDGET

A Parade in Deceptive Exercise

There was no surprise that with the elections round the corner, the party in power would swing into action – not for any welfare of the people but for distribution of promises. The BJP who had earlier promised of a full term of the government suddenly got emboldened by the poll victory in three of the four states in the Hindi heartland and lest this “popular support” switches side, dissolved the Lok Sabha eight months ahead of schedule to thrust upon another election on the people. And then all mouthpieces were arrayed in assembly to propagate a pumped “feel good” plank to power re-election bid. To reinforce, the BJP finance minister presented an interim budget in the parliament to parade in a deceptive exercise. Not that bounties of sops have been showered but an impression has been sought to be given as if there is a turnaround in the economy which enables the finance minister to celebrate instead of griping.

The ‘feel-good’ candidates

But the question is who is “feeling good” and for what? We had earlier seen the Garibi Hatao budget of Indiraji, the magic of Manmohan Singh’s economics, Chidambaram’s dream budget and Jaswant Sinha’s budget of administering food in the poor’s stomach. All these expectedly proved to be hoaxes with the life of the common toiling people becoming bad to worse with each of such announcements. Because whether it is the Congress or the BJP or for that matter any other bourgeois party, the

whole budgetary exercise or pre-poll rhetorics are meant to serve the exploitative crisis-ridden capitalism bestriding the country like a deadweight and begetting all miseries and destitution to the common people. Obviously, there is nothing cheering about the people. But surely the ruling capitalist class, the international monopoly houses, the imperialist camp and their bootlickers are having the feel of good. The president of Confederation of Indian Industries felt that ‘budget has shown the government’s commitment towards economic reforms’. The Association of Chambers president described the budget as “economic driven” that will boost growth. Echoing the same tune, the president of the Bengal Chambers of Commerce & Industry welcomed the budget as it, according to him, “augurs well for the future of the nation.”

While the spokesmen of the ruling class had been signing out certificates of praise, reports came that in Gujarat, a father, being unable to feed his five daughters due to appalling poverty, threw them all in the river. In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, poor and debt-trapped peasants were committing suicide by taking pesticides. In Orissa, rural have nots were dying by eating mango seeds in absence of food. Parents were selling their one year old son for just few thousand of rupees in West Bengal. The retrenched workers of locked out factories whose number is swelling everyday were ending their lives by hanging from the ceiling or jumping before moving trains. Starvation was sniffing out

hundreds of lives in closed tea gardens. Hundreds were dying in cold and heat waves in Bihar and UP as they have no means to protect themselves, no roof to take shelter under. Thousands of children are embracing death because of malnutrition and absence of health care. Surely, the hapless oppressed and suppressed are not the candidates for sharing the ‘feel good’ shrivers with the BJP and Jaswant Singh who look at the industry giants and big corporate tycoons to hold brief for them.

The hoax of budget proposals

Let us look at what is the budget bouquet of the BJP. Fifty percent reduction on Central government stamp paper duty is announced. Who would be the beneficiary? The rural poor or the factory worker or the lower middle-class or the big business, speculators, big transactors of property? One had recently seen how the sly market operators in connivance with the corrupt politicians, top police officers and tainted bureaucrats had circulated fake stamp papers of over Rs.30,000 crore and thereby fleeced the government exchequer. So it is the Telgi and his mentors who might rejoice as all such illegal

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Central Committee Flays Premature Dissolution of Lok Sabha

Strongly criticizing the dissolution of the 13th Lok Sabha by the BJP-led NDA government, eight months before it was due, with the ulterior motive to reap harvest in the elections through manoeuvre and manipulation, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary of the SUCI said, in a statement on 6 February, 2004 that this dissolution has nothing to do with people’s interest. On the contrary, it is a blatant manifestation of the ruling BJP’s naked greed for power.

Criticizing the BJP-led government’s recommendation to hold elections at a time when all final examinations in academic institutions are held, Comrade Mukherjee said that it would also seriously jeopardize the academic interest of the student community.



Comrade Krishna Chakraborty speaking at the delegate session of All India Womens' Conference on 30 January, 2004 at Cuttack, Orissa.

ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Delegates urged to step up movements, shoulder higher responsibility

The delegate session of the 2nd All India Women's Conference was held at Barbati Stadium, Cuttack on and from 29.2.04 to 30.2.04 last. Comrade Chhaya Mukherjee, the outgoing general secretary of the AIMSS placed the Secretary's Report and hundreds of delegates from all over India took part in lively deliberations. Comrade Priti Barua, eminent educationist of Assam narrated the horrifying picture of flesh-trade from Assam to Haryana with teenagers and young girls in hundreds falling prey to immoral trafficking. At the concluding session of the conference on 30th January, 2004, Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, member, Central Committee, SUCI, was present as the main speaker who addressed the delegates on behalf of the Party.

Speech of

Comrade Krishna Chakraborty

In his speech, Comrade Krishna Chakraborty said, inter alia, this All-India conference of women is being held at a time when the womenfolk along with the oppressed people of the whole country are facing all-out attacks on their lives by the ruling class pursuing the policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization, which again, is nothing but the reflection of the crisis of capitalism as a whole. But above all, the crisis in the lives of the women and in the field of culture afflicting their day to day life is the most menacing one. More particularly, under the dispensation of the BJP-led NDA government, crime and oppression over women are sharply increasing due to severe degradation in the field of culture in the society. In this connection, Comrade Chakraborty pointed out, moribund capitalism and the ruling bourgeoisie are aiding and abetting growth of decadent and vile culture to spread ever more in the society with the aim of throttling the prospect of working class revolution. It goes without saying that torture on and humiliation of womanhood at the hands of the men is the concomitant effect of the obscurantist ideas and values which are now being greatly encouraged by the BJP and also the decadent Western culture begotten by

moribund capitalism. Women have to fight tooth and nail every kind of repression over them both individually and collectively. But men should also join hand with them for their own interest because their emancipation is inseparably linked up with the emancipation of the whole society from capitalist exploitation and the society cannot be freed without the emancipation of the woman constituting 50% of the masses.

Analyzing the phenomenon of dual exploitation of women by men and the ruling class in the light of history of subjugation of woman, once free in matriarchal society in the age of primitive clan-communism, as shown and established by Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, Comrade Chakraborty showed how male domination was established with the emergence of private property. So long the private property exists, in the language of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, 'private property mental complex' exists, and hence the domination of men over women cannot be done away with. Women's emancipation can be achieved only through the establishment of socialism, that is, dictatorship of the proletariat constituting both men and women, and thereafter, communism. So, emancipation or freedom of womenfolk cannot be won by merely sharing privileges enjoyed by men. For this purpose, they have to actively take part in the revolutionary struggles of the masses side by side with men. Thus the whole struggle is very much complex, subtle and delicate. Women have to fight it, can fight it if they wage their struggle consciously making the same conducive to the socio-political struggle for changing the society as a whole along the path charted out by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, affirmed Comrade Chakraborty.

Speech of

Comrade Protiva Mukherjee

After the speech of Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, Comrade Protiva Mukherjee, the outgoing president of the AIMSS addressed the delegates in the concluding

session. In her address, Comrade Mukherjee reminded the delegates that the AIMSS was spreading out throughout the country for building up revolutionary movement along with the toiling masses of India with the teachings of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh for the emancipation of womenfolk. In this regard, she urged upon all the members of the AIMSS to take up yet higher responsibility at all levels for building still higher movements, plunge themselves into movement for, only through building up movement fighting character and organization can be built up. She

fervently appealed to the delegates to 'Stand up and go ahead with the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh'!

Lastly, in the delegate session resolutions with a charter of demands against atrocities on women, dowry menace, liquor and drug menace, obscenity, communalism, effect of globalization on women and culture, imperialist war and the deceptive move for reservation of 33% seats for the women in Parliament and state assemblies were unanimously adopted.

A strong All India Committee with 27-member Working Committee and 48-member Council with Comrade H.G. Joylaksmi as the General Secretary and Comrade Chhaya Mukherjee as the President was unanimously formed in the delegate session.

Speeches of fraternal delegates and distinguished guests

In the last issue of Proletarian Era dated 1-2-04, we had published the message of our beloved General Secretary Comrade Nihar Mukherjee and the speech delivered by Comrade Tapas Datta, member, CC, SUCI at the Open Session of 2nd All India Women's Conference organized by the AIMSS held on 28th January, at Cuttack. Here, we publish synopses of speeches delivered by distinguished guests and fraternal delegates from Bangladesh and Nepal.

Parvin Akhtar, Socialist Women's Forum, Bangladesh

In her speech Comrade Parvin Akhtar conveyed, first of all, her heartfelt greetings and overwhelming regards to the members of AIMSS for organizing this massive conference. Congratulating the AIMSS for conducting heroic struggles among the women community of India following the path of Marxism-Leninism and Comrade Shibdas Ghosh thoughts, Comrade Parvin Akhtar said, AIMSS is fighting against atrocities on women, dowry system, obscenity, imperialist war and communalism. Women of Bangladesh are also struggling to assert their rights. In this connection, she cited the instance of recent heroic struggle of women workers in garment industry in Narayungunge braving showers of bullets by the police and goons employed by the owners.

She said, Socialist Women's Forum guided by our party, Socialist Party of Bangladesh and the teachings of Marxism-Leninism and thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh is engaged in developing movements and struggles. Socialist Women's Forum in alliance with other progressive women's organizations on a platform named Shommilito

Nari Samaj undertook series of programmes on various women's issues like dowry, brutality against women, imperialist aggression on Iraq, trafficking of women and children and direct-election for people's representatives in the reserved seats for women in the Parliament. It has become imperative under the present circumstances to intensify struggle for democracy, peace and progress by developing anti-imperialist movement throughout the world. From this conference held at Cuttack, the birth place of valiant freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, we urge upon all peace loving people of the world to unite against imperialist war machinations. By strengthening the movements of our respective fronts we will be able to strengthen the resistance movements against imperialism. We wish wholeheartedly grand success of your conference, she said.

Speech of Comrade Anjana Bishankhe

On behalf of All Nepal Women's Association Comrades Anjana Bishankhe and Padma Rai were present in the Open Session. In her address, Comrade Anjana Bishankhe said, today imperialism particularly

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New Economic Policies of Globalization : Globalization of Fascist Corporate Policy

The Liberalization and privatization that are on in the name of a new economic policy under globalization, are nothing new fundamentally. In this, the government directs the process of preserving, developing and accelerating private enterprise to uphold it as the principal stream of all production activities. It has been seen that the aim and purpose of this economic policy have been the same from country to country, and the steps taken to implement it have also been more or less pre-planned and similar. Not only this. It has been seen that based on this economic goal, some definite political attacks are also launched upon the common people including the workers-employees. Although the economy, politics and state structure under bourgeois democracy in different countries are historically similar in essence, some differences also crop up due to difference in time and place. After crossing the phase of so-called unfettered development of capitalist economy, bourgeois democracy, in order to mitigate the intense market crisis, has generated war and militarization of economy. In the post Second World War situation, caught in the vortex of unprecedented market crisis and permanent recession, bourgeois democracy has shaken off whatever commitment to welfare of people it had in the past, and the governmental effort and role in ruthless exploitation and utter subservience to the ruling capitalist class are now becoming naked. The striking similarity between the present world situation and that immediately preceding the Second World War, plunged in permanent recession, cannot but remind one of the blackest chapters of history. Such is the universal character of the bourgeois democracy today – in India, Britain, USA – in a word, in all capitalist countries, advanced or relatively backward. The WTO has been formed to remove whatever shortfall in ruthless exploitation of the people to maximize the profits of monopoly capital that is there, wherever it is, through consolidated planning, and the IMF and the World Bank have appeared in roles associate to it.

In all capitalist countries which got affiliated to the WTO, the principal task of the ruling governments has been to implement the policies of liberalization and privatization in the interest of the ruling capitalist class, particularly the monopoly capitalists. In India, the Central governments in Delhi, earlier those run by the Congress and the UF, and the BJP-led NDA governments during the past few years, have been implementing these policies to maximize the profits of monopoly capital, national and foreign, at the cost of the Indian people through a series of anti-people measures. The governments in the states of India, not only those run by the branded bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties but even those run by the pseudo-communist party like the CPI(M) with its red flag and “revolutionary” verbiage, are toying the very same policies adopted by the Central governments. The political reality in the country today is that no party can come to power without massive monetary support and orchestrated

media-propaganda support in its favour provided by monopoly capital in order to sway the election results in its favour through employing money power, muscle power and even all-out rigging. To an official communist party like the CPI(M) wedded to bourgeois parliamentary politics, making gain in election politics anyhow has become the be-all and the end-all. It has become a part of the bourgeois political establishment. That is why, on the one hand, it denounces the anti-people policies of the Centre to keep up its oppositional, leftist, “communist” image which is its political capital in election battles, while on the other, wherever in power, it serves Indian monopoly capital by pursuing in practice the very same anti-people policies being implemented by the Centre under the WTO-IMF-World Bank dispensation, and behind the smokescreen of anti-Centre tirade, is busy in developing closeness with the BJP-led Central government. While highlighting facets of the anti-people policies of the BJP-led

Central government, we shall illustrate the anti-people policies of the CPI(M)-led West Bengal government in some spheres as well.

Soaring budget deficits : causes and anti-people remedial measures

In the last Union budget, presenting the final figures for revenues and expenditure, the Indian finance minister announced a deficit of Rs.1,53,637 crore in a total budget of Rs.4,38,795 crore ! And what are the major causes of this huge deficit ? These are the ever increasing military expenditure and the huge tax exemptions allowed to the corporate establishments. The corporate tax stands at 36.75% at present, but often, even this is not collected. Again, exemptions are allowed too. In a survey report, The Economic Times dated 17.2.2003 showed that in 2001-2002, 200 big companies paid only 29.5% tax on their income although the tax payable on their income is 36.75%. The two large corporate houses ITC and Hindustan Lever paid only 33.6% and 19.6% tax respectively. Meanwhile, the Kelkar Committee has recommended that the tax be reduced to 35% for foreign companies and to 30% for Indian companies.

Side by side with the Central government, the CPI(M)-led West Bengal state government too has been providing tax exemptions to companies. In the financial years 1994-95 and 1995-96, the state government, with Jyoti Basu as the chief minister, allowed sales tax exemptions totalling Rs.39.16 crore to eight big companies. All these were profitable companies (Source: CAG Report, Bartaman, 13.9.2003).

Another factor that has been causing deficit is the thousands of crore of rupees loans given to corporate houses and monopoly capitalist owners that are subsequently being exempted or remain un-repaid by them. In 2001, the Central government provided subsidies totalling Rs.14,000 crore – at a time when the outstanding taxes stood at Rs.64,784 crore (Times of India, 20.3.2002). It is to be noted that in the budget, 24 out of every 100 paise spent are used up in

repaying government loan, 13 paise on military expenditure and 10 paise in providing subsidies ! It is for these that the budgets show huge deficits. Again, bulk of the subsidies provided are pocketed by the capitalist owners.

How are the huge budgetary deficits made up ? This is done by imposing additional burdens on the people. For example, in the financial year 2003-04, an additional Rs.2200 crore are proposed to be collected through increasing railway fares and freights. Earlier, in 2001, an additional Rs.860 crore were collected by imposing surcharge on railway tickets by raising the clamour of providing passenger safety with the additional money thus collected. Thus, huge sums are raised on the plea of making up the budgetary deficits by raising the prices of commodities, by cutting down pension-bonus, by reducing the interests on money deposits, by making the services dearer.

New pension scheme to hard hit employees

A new pension scheme for the Central government employees has been approved by the Central cabinet. The scheme will apply to those who will be employed from 1st January, 2004 onwards. Under this new scheme, 10% of the salary and dearness allowance of the employees will have to be compulsorily deposited into the pension fund. The general provident fund will be abolished. The government will deposit an equal amount into the pension fund. This money will be exempt from income tax. On retirement, 40% of the sum accrued in the name of the employee in the pension fund will have to be compulsorily deposited into annual insurance scheme of a recognized insurance company. Besides, the new pension scheme will be supervised by a separate body. The bodies managing the pension funds will decide how and where the moneys deposited by the employees will be invested by the employees. 60% of the money could be invested in shares of government organizations, 30% in corporate bonds and 20% in equities. Again, 40% could be invested in G-

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All-out Attacks on the People's Livelihood

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section, 40% in corporate bonds, 50% in equities and half of the balance money in government bonds and the balance half in corporate bonds.

Leaving aside the Telecom, the total annual load on the Central government on account of pension is Rs.23,158 crore, 1.66% of national income. During the past 10 years, pension amount has increased by 21% at compounded rates. On this argument, the government now seeks to release itself from its responsibility in regard to employees' pension through the new pension scheme. The money of the pension fund would now directly go into private sector. The advantages of the present provident fund would no longer be there. Subject to a particular fixed process, the employees would now be "free" to invest money as they please to make money. Vision of such a golden mirage has been dangled before the employees. 40% of the money in the pension fund will have to be compulsorily invested – no matter whether the employees wish it or not. There is no way to get that money in hand in the form of cash. A fresh slogan has just been aired: dearness allowance should no longer be paid to those entitled to pension. How is the term "pension" to be explained? It is in reality a part of the social security system. Responsibility of providing this social security falls upon the employer under whom the workers-employees work – the private owners or the governments. Once upon a time, the Supreme Court held in a judgement: "Pension is a valuable right of a government servant and the right to receive pension is propriety under Article 31 of the Constitution."

Reduction of interest on PF and bank deposits to benefit capitalists : the government's argument in justification bunkum

Quite sometime back, the Central government took the path of ruining the employees by reducing the provident fund interest rate from 12% to 9.5%. The Central government is gradually nullifying the fundamental right to have provident fund and the essence of the law pertaining to that right. Here too, the West Bengal state government similarly reduced the

interest on GPF and CGF by 1.5%. Again, a few months back, the Union finance ministry announced a further cut of 0.50 per cent in PF interest rate which would bring it down to 9%, but the measure was temporarily withheld in view of the coming elections to some state assemblies so as not to impair the BJP's election prospects ! To facilitate availability of loans to owner-capitalists at low interest, the Reserve Bank of India has been progressively reducing the bank rates. It is because of this that the common people have been receiving less and less interest on their bank deposits. The interest rates have at present been lowered to 6-7% maximum. This is a major blow on the livelihood of low-income and middle-income groups of common people, especially those retired people who have to somehow make do with the interest received on deposits.

From after 2000, the BJP-led Central government and its finance ministers have been saying that the inflation rate that had been 7% or more in the past, had now been lowered to become 4% or thereabouts. And because the inflation rate had become lower, the value of interest had now appreciated in real terms! That is, although the interest remained the same in terms of money figure, the investor could now buy more commodities with the same money! So, their proposition was: since the interest received had increased in terms of real value, it needed to be reduced! The interest rates were lowered on the basis of such false argument, and the same "argument" for reducing interest is still being made use of. With the reduction of interest on bank loans taken, profits of the owners-capitalists have gone up. On reviewing the income-expenditure of over 100 Indian business houses, The Economic Times said in a report in 2003 that in the year 2002-03, the expenditure of those companies for payment of interest had fallen by 11.1% while their profits had climbed up by 43%. But the prices of the essential commodities the common people buy have been going up. The rates of increase vary from 15 to 20%. Starting from drinking water, fertilizers, water for irrigation, seeds, insecticides, electricity, transport fares, education, medicines and health services, food

and clothing – prices of all essential commodities and services have soared. But even then, interests on deposits, not only with the banks but also under the small saving schemes, are still being lowered.

The claim of the Central government that the inflation rate had been brought down from 7% to 4% is false on many counts. Firstly, the inflation rate actually exceeded 6.5% by mid-2003. Secondly, the government considers the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) for calculating the rate of inflation, whereas the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the measure of the price level of the retail consumer market, should be the basis of calculating the inflation rate as far as the consumers, that is the people are concerned. And who does not know that the CPI is considerably, even arbitrarily higher than the WPI due to the manipulations by the middlemen and the traders? Again, the CPI is often calculated in a fraudulent way by giving extra weightage to some commodities not usually consumed by the common people for which the inflation rate is not high, in order to arrive at an arbitrarily low value of CPI. In reality, the price of essential commodities of daily use by the common people have been going up by 15-20% per year. And lastly, even if the inflation rate is 1%, it must affect the people adversely by reducing their real income, that is purchasing power, by that much. When the inflation rate was 5.99%, The Economic Times (dated 11.4.2003) provided the important information that during the past 12 years, the rate of interest, in real terms, had gone below zero. That is, interest had ceased to provide any real income, rather the values of the sums deposited were suffering erosion. Through this terrible contraction of the purchasing power of the workers-employees-teachers and all other sections of the people

with fixed salaries or wages, the government is satisfying the lust for profit of the monopoly capitalists and the corporate houses. The lust for maximizing profit is all-devouring today. As a result of this, the contraction of purchasing power is intensifying market crisis. Demand for goods and services is falling.

Government failure in paying dues

Those who get salaries upto Rs.6500/- per month, are eligible for receiving medical facilities through the ESI scheme. The units in the state of West Bengal taken over by the Central government have not paid up their contributions to the ESI scheme. As per sources in the state government, the arrear dues on this account total Rs.13 crore. Besides, 54 private establishments, too, have not been paying the dues to the ESI scheme. The West Bengal state government also does not lag behind in this. The total payments to be made by 29 concerns taken over by the state government that lie outstanding is Rs.11 crore. Already a good number of loss making concerns have closed down. The net result of all this is that the minimum medical protection arrangement that had been there – that opportunity and right are non-existent in practice. The way in which the owners of mills and factories in West Bengal are usurping the money deposited with them by the workers and employees and then vanishing, the way in which they are selling off their factories and shaking off their responsibility towards the workers and employees – the Central and the West Bengal governments are playing a similar sinister role. The West Bengal government is yet to pay Rs.25 crore dues to the provident funds, and has, of late, not paying bonus too.

The picture is broadly similar from state to state of India.

(To be continued)

AIMSS Conference at Sultanpur (UP)

Sultanpur (UP) : The Sultanpur district conference of the AIMSS, was held on 18th January 2004, at Kalikaganj Primary School. The conference was presided over by Comrade Usha Singh and conducted by Comrade Kushan Pal. Comrade Roshmi Malviya (State Convenor of AIMSS, Comrade Swapan Chatterjee (Central organizer of SUCI), Comrade Bechan Ali (Member, UP State Committee, SUCI), Comrade Jagannath Verma (Secretary, Sultanpur district committee, SUCI), Comrade Shanti Maurya, also spoke on the occasion.

New Tripartite Agreement in Jute Industry

Abject Surrender of the Capitulationist Leadership

The prolonged strike of 11 days in Jute industry in West Bengal ended in one more black tripartite agreement on 8th January, to the detriment of the workers' interests. Unions like the CITU, INTUC, AITUC, etc. reiterated the black agreement of 5th January, '02. On the other hand, six unions, UTUC-LS, BMS, AICCTU inclusive, observed 10th January as the day of condemnation against repetition of black agreement in jute industry.

The leaders of the unions of strike, including the CITU, INTUC, and others, the millowners, as well as the government have all expressed satisfaction over the agreement. They were all very pleased at working out such an agreement. Labour Minister Md. Amin commented "United struggle of workers has won. Millowners too have shown positive attitude". The President of the owners' association IJMA, jute tycoon Sanjoy Kajoria has remarked, "production-based salary will be introduced from the very day the jute mills reopen. There will be cut in the workers' wages if production lags. Simultaneously, 'no work, no pay' policy will be applicable." Gobinda Guha, General Secretary of CITU union in the jute industry, has not missed to remark, "Target of production in jute mill will certainly have to be reached, to keep up with competition."

Fifteen unions, including the CITU, INTUC, etc., had called this strike in jute industry. Although these unions reflect outlook inimical to the interests of workers and are sectarian in practice, those six unions, including the UTUC-LS, who have been conducting sustained movement against the black agreement of 5th January '02 (in jute industry) did not oppose this strike, so as to protect working class unity. They, however, raised the slogan that the black agreement of 5th January '02, should be repealed and the charter of legitimate demands of the jute workers be settled. Even the workers themselves were ambivalent about the strike. On the one hand, they were hoping that perhaps the two-year long resistance movement of the jute workers of all categories, against the black agreement would receive due consideration. At the same time their apprehension was

that the erstwhile black agreement might be renewed. But whatever little hope they might have been nurturing was totally belied, and instead, their apprehension was proved to be true. The leaders of the unions who gave the call of strike, i.e. CITU, INTUC and others signed a second black agreement to call off the strike serving the owners' interest even to a far greater extent. 8th January, 2004 was thus another black day in the history of Indian jute industry. The capitulationist class of the country had long been cherishing and trying to introduce the most dangerous and hated 'productivity-linked wage' system in the industry and it is the CITU, their associates and the most anti-people CPI(M)-front government which introduced this extremely anti-labour wage system first time in India through the black agreement on 5th January, 2002 much to the glee of the Indian capitalist class. This is why although the production-based wage was decided upon in the black agreement of the 5th January, 2002 last, neither the owners nor the government succeeded in implementing the same despite every effort over the last two years. This time the leaders of the CITU, INTUC etc., have, in the new agreement, promised implementation of productivity linked wage within four months. On the other hand, the owners have stopped payment of D.A. at the enhanced rate from 1.2.2002. Nor did the state government take any step to abide by the injunction, which the High Court had served earlier. Thus an amount of as high as Rs.150 crores that was legitimately due to the exploited jute workers as D.A., was doled out to the jute barons as a gift. Not only were the serving workers denied payment of their D.A. due in the past two years, but those workers who had already retired during these two years, were deprived of their bonafide superannuation benefits like gratuity, PF, pension, etc. Apart from that, this latest black agreement has also, like the previous one, provides for differential wage structure for the same nature of job. As a result, the wage structure, including minimum daily wage, which could be arrived at through a sustained struggle

spanning over 50 years since independence, was demolished. In place of Rs.190.63 per day in terms of this revised wage structure, a wage of Rs.115.68 for the same work has been agreed upon. In terms of the revised wage agreement signed by the CITU, INTUC and other associates, the minimum daily wage has been fixed at Rs.115.68 as against Rs.190.63. Thus after the retirement of the old workers in a year or two — who has been working in the old scale with wage of Rs. 193.63 per day — the newly recruited workers will have to do the same job with Rs. 115.68 per day. This means, from February '04, when an unskilled labour absorbed previously will earn a monthly salary of Rs.4965.63, a worker employed after the agreement in the same job would as per the revised structure be given Rs.3,007.83. Thus, through this reduced quantum of wage the owners have been endowed with an unfettered right of making a super profit of crores of rupees. Nor was a just solution worked out for payment of Rs.150 crore due to the retired workers as gratuity. It is true, in case of workers entitled to receive more than Rs.100 before 5.1.2002, which the owners forcefully reduced to Rs.100 by this agreement there were talks of paying this extra wage, but the owners have managed not to pay any arrear for the last two years.

There was no settlement of the issue of clearing pending gratuity to the tune of Rs.150 crore to the superannuated employees. Earlier the owners were denying the workers any wage above Rs.100 and instead forced them to accept Rs.100. This new black agreement fixes the wage above Rs.100 no doubt, but the owners were spared from paying the dues. In other words, enhanced wage would be effective prospectively denying the workers the rights to claim the amount retrospectively from the due date. There was no settlement either in regard to wage hike, P.F., ES, upgradation, etc. Moreover, there were agreements in the past for regularizing 90% of the daily wagers as permanent workers (assuming 10% remain absent) and providing employment in the 20% specially transferable posts. This was agreed upon to ensure job security and safety of the workers.

But by virtue of this latest black agreement, none of the aforesaid previous provisions could be implemented. Despite 60% of the jute workers being under the 'Badla' category, the so important an issue of making them permanent remained unresolved. Though the earlier 'Badla' workers were being paid at the old rate, the new 'Badla' workers would get Rs. 75 less per day. The mill owners have been depriving thousands of Badla workers of gratuity and other benefits. Nor are the workers being given annual increment since 1998. The owners in this process netted extra profit in cores. Thus in effect the workers have been 'favoured' with a meagre increase of less than 40 paise per day which is being highlighted as a 'historic victory', 'a big gain' etc. What a cruel joke indeed!

It may be added that taking advantage of the appalling unemployment problem, the jute barons have been subjecting the hapless jute workers to worst exploitation by merrily engaging them at a daily wage rate of Rs.30 to 45 in the name of trainee, learner, etc. with the direct patronage of Labour Minister and the Chief Minister of the state.

Then what has been the outcome of this strike? Nothing but backstabbing the jute workers' movement. In the name of workers' struggle, a well knit compromise was struck with the jute owners whose benefits ran in crores of rupees. And the workers got nothing, but gave away everything. The wage structure achieved through the process of sustained struggle has been foregone, instead a new structure with a reduction of about Rs.2000 a month was adopted paving the way for a yet more naked exploitation by the jute barons. In future, the struggle of jute workers for wage increase would have this lowered rate as the base. What a great betrayal to the cause of the workers under the garb of 'historic victory'!

This strike call, it is obvious, was given by the leaders of the CITU, INTUC and their associates to serve their purpose. On the one hand, they were trying to regain their lost image among the aggrieved jute workers feigning as

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KAY Report : US-UK Fraud Laid Bare

The people of the world witnessed how the US imperialist rulers, in association with their British counterparts, launched an all-out invasion on Iraq last year ravaging that country, on the plea that Saddam Hussein had stockpiled weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which could be deployed against countries of the Western world at 45 minutes' notice and that Iraq had reached an advanced stage in developing nuclear weapons.

Very recently, revelations by the US-appointed Survey Group, headed by David Kay, the chief weapons inspector, have once more thoroughly exposed this US-UK falsehood employed in justification of the invasion on Iraq. The report submitted by Kay to the US administration after the inspections stated that no trace of the supposedly stockpiled WMD had been found. The Kay report, in a pointed accusation, said: "Tony Blair and George Bush must acknowledge that they were wrong about Iraq's WMD and showed that they were taking sweeping action to rectify the concerns that led to this miscalculation." After this, David Kay quit as the chief inspector in protest.

The people of the world did not need a Kay report to tell them that the US-UK "justification" of the invasion was a tissue of lies. Their conspiracy of falsehood was exposed again and again before, during and after the Iraq invasion. During the nineties, the UN-constituted weapons inspection team led by the scientist Butler rummaged about Iraq in search of WMD but in vain. In 2002 and 2003, during the months preceding the invasion, The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN inspection teams headed by the Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix carried out very extensive investigation and inspection in Iraq. The IAEA chief El Baradei reported finding no evidence of Iraq's possessing or developing nuclear weapons, while Hans Blix's teams could trace no WMD. But the USA and UK went ahead with the projected invasion of Iraq regardless as the invasion was predetermined and pre-planned to serve imperialist design and whether the

"justification" put forward was convincing or not was of secondary consideration. The invading armies laid waste Iraq and occupied it. If Saddam Hussein did possess WMD, why did he not use those against the invaders when he was engaged in life and death struggle, with his very existence at stake? How was it that the captor US-British armies, even after thorough countrywide search, failed to unearth any of Saddam's WMD? In the meanwhile, Robin Cook had resigned from Tony Blair cabinet as the hostilities began, saying that Saddam did not have any WMD of his own and if he possessed any, at all, that could only be the remnants of those provided by the Western powers to him years back, for using against Iran; Hans Blix resigned, accusing Bush-Blair of not being interested in finding WMD but having made up their minds to invade Iraq on that pretext, virtually calling them liars; it came to light that the US diplomat who had been expressly detailed to Nigeria to investigate about the deal with Saddam to send Nigerian nuclear materials to Iraq, had already officially reported that he had found no evidence of any such deal; a number of NGOs and charity organizations like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the British-American Security (BASIC), as well as the former US Secretary of Treasury Paul O'Neill, in their findings, have stated the US-British claim to be unfounded.

Thus, there has never been any doubt that the US-British allegations against Saddam were unfounded, false and malicious, motivatedly cooked up and publicized to "justify" the pre-planned invasion of Iraq. The significance of the Kay report is that although the USA appointed the Survey Group headed by David Kay in a bid to anyhow substantiate its "justification" of the invasion, the Survey Group has not found it possible to work out any plausible basis for that since the reality does not offer any.

The Kay report has, in a way, belied the Lord Hutton Report which tried to absolve Tony Blair and company of the accusation of their complicity in the suicide of the

weapons scientist Devid Kelly had divulged to the BBC that the British government's dossier containing the story of launching nuclear-like WMD in 45 minutes time by Saddam Hussein was "sexed-up". This was a clear exposure that the Blair Government inserted a totally false allegation into the tailored document that had been originally rehashed from an anti-Saddam Iraqi scholar's thesis penned in the eighties! The motive had been to pave the way for conspiring with the USA to thrust a war on Iraq and occupy that country with its oil resources.

The imperialist rulers are now forced to confess that "there are differences between what we know going on and what we found on ground." Under mounting pressure from their own legislators, especially in the background of the people's anti-war movement, both the governments have had to order enquiry to investigate into the real fact. They now 'want to know the truth'! Finding no way of escape from their committed crime they now, as though, apologetically contend that their 'intelligence community misled them'; that they 'misunderstood a key part of an intelligence dossier'; that they had

been unaware of the 45-minute claim in the 2002 Iraq dossier being about only tactical battlefield weapons, and not long-range ballistic missiles; and that, what is the height of their fiendish volte face, 'they had never described the threat from Iraq as imminent'! The Anglo-US imperialist rulers are now pleading 'innocence', they are now feigning 'ignorance'. Meanwhile, of course, Iraq has been ravaged and occupied, the process of installing a subservient puppet government through the Iraqi Governing Council is on.

A misleading idea is being calculatedly sought to be instilled into the people's mind that it was not the government's 'political decision' but the 'failure of the intelligence community' that had led these governments to invade Iraq. As if people of the world are so naive as to believe all this trash! Is it possible for any 'intelligence community', in other words the spies, to mislead a country's political leaders to war on such a huge scale? Can the intelligence agencies dare to do so without clear instruction from the political leadership, as the Anglo-US imperialist rulers would have the world believe?

Nobody will be taken in by such ruse. The grim liberation struggle on the Iraqi soil would continue and gather strength. The anti-imperialist movement from country to country would advance with firm resolve.

Surrender of the Capitulationist Leadership

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if they were championing the workers' cause. But they had clear understanding with the owner class while giving the strike call and intended to strengthen the tie they built up with the jute barons through signing one more black agreement on the lines of the previous one of 5th January, 2002. Sensing that such a sustained mighty movement under the leadership of the 6-unions including UTUC-LS might further expose their compromising and pro-owner character, the CITU, INTUC and their associates, who signed the black agreement in 2002, suddenly gave a strike call on 1st December, 2003. Their sole objective was to misdirect the movement of the jute workers and

in fact, they blatantly surrendered the interest of the workers in ending the strike through another black agreement.

Naturally, the resentment of the workers has not receded but aggravated further. They observed a condemnation day on 10 January last to denounce the black agreement. Once again, preparations are on to launch a fresh resistance movement in the jute industry. The workers are well aware that neither the government nor the jute barons and the unions subserving them would pay any heed to their just demands. Hence, there is no other way but to close their ranks and organize a massive united, protracted movement under genuine leadership to save their life and livelihood.

The 'feel-good' baloon will burst after elections

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transactions are now 'sanctified' and further duty burden on the affluent class is lessened. Free baggage allowance for overseas air travellers is raised to Rs.25,000, customs duty on such baggage is reduced to 40% and relaxation granted in import of liquor bottles. Who are those fortunates who go on hopping overseas, shopping at duty free malls and cropping on foreign currency buys? At least, they do not belong to 99% of the population.

Fifty percent of dearness allowance would be merged with the basic salary of the central government employees. What a generous government! First of all, most of the government employees continue to be deprived of the awards and recommendations of the various Pay Commissions and other review committees. This instalment of DA was also long overdue as per 5th Pay Commission Report. But so long this legitimate due was not settled. Suddenly before the elections, the BJP government felt the urgency of releasing the amount obviously to firm up the support of this segment in favour of the ruling dispensation. This is a typical rotten bourgeois politics of deceiving the people by dangling carrot on the eve of elections.

There is an announcement of cheap credit being made available to the farmers. Jaswant Singh has hoped that by 31st March, 2004, all deserving peasants would receive rural credit cards. He has called upon the state owned banks to lend cheap to the farmers, dilute collateral norms and make automated teller machine facility available to them. Question is who are these deserving farmers? Surely not the half-clad, half-fed destitute languishing in sub-human conditions in Indian villages. So the target group is the rural bourgeoisie, the rich peasants and the kulaks who invest capital in land to reap maximum profit by selling the produces in the market and in the process suck out every drop of blood of the poor peasants and agricultural workers. If this rural gentry could be kept in good humour, the flow of the votes is expected to be towards the BJP since in the absence of conscious class struggles in the rural areas this kulak class in connivance with the vested interests, administration-police-criminal-storm troopers of

bourgeois political parties, control the rural votes.

Moreover, when the finance minister speaks of self sufficiency in agricultural production it appears to be a cruel joke. If there is no augmentation in their income, how would they purchase the "abundant" foodgrains? So the rural bourgeoisie either export these foodgrains or sell to affluent section at higher prices in the market. Foodstocks get perished in the godown but common people do not get a square meal a day. The kulaks avail cheap loan (much of which get forfeited or waived subsequently), compel the government to purchase the produces from them with public money and keep agricultural income free of tax and secure thousands of concessions in foodgrain export. The government instead of distributing these foodgrains to the people through Public Distribution System at cheaper rate, sell them even as animal feed. Thus the rural capitalists are usurping profit while the poor peasants are forced to distress sale of their crops. This is the common scenario throughout the country. Naturally, when the BJP government speaks of growth in agriculture and increased competitiveness of Indian agricultural produces, it becomes so obvious as to whose prosperity at whose cost is clamoured of.

Crunch of resources?

Whenever the BJP government had been confronted with any legitimate demand for increasing grants towards essential utility services like health-care, education, irrigation, supply of drinking water, it had in a manner typical of any bourgeois political outfit, pointed out at cash strapped public exchequer. But there is no crunch of public fund when it is to be unethically used for releasing 'Bharat Uday' campaign to brighten poll prospects. Likewise when it comes to the question of sanction for defence purpose, there is no shortage of fund either. This time also, a Rs.25,000 crore defence modernization fund has been announced. There is an allegation that most of such budgetary grants towards military expenditure remain unspent. Hence, the BJP government has ensured that this new fund is a non-lapsable one so that undisbursed amount is not required to be refunded. One has to see this measure in conjunction with the

spate of defence scams in the recent past including Bofors, Tahelka, Coffin and others involving thousands of crores of rupees.

Also, when the government takes pretext of resource crunch, one is constrained to observe that no less than Rs.20,000 crore worth of excise exemption has recently been granted to one particular monopoly houses. Tax amnesties to defaulters are also not unknown. Non performing assets of banks which are nothing but the loan plus interest amount due from the big corporate industries have gone beyond 1.5 lakh crore of rupees. And of course, there are several instances of swindling of public money and illegal money hunts by big rackets known to receive patronage of and protection from the power that be. Repeated assaults on the pocket of the poor has been restored to for replenishing the government coffer denuded by the waste and profligacy lavished at the industrialists-bureaucrats-corrupt politicians axis. It is the Telgi-Judeo-Jogi-Rudi-Bangaru and the likes who have enough reasons to be overwhelmed by the BJP-sponsored brand of 'feel good'.

Growth in Industrialization, Forex, GDP — sickening prattles

One chuckles in amused disbelief when the finance minister speaks of industrial development and creation of jobs. Everyday, thousands of existing establishments are getting closed. Retrenchment, lay-offs, closures galore. VRS and downsizing have become buzzwords. Even in the government and the public sector employment opportunity is nil. Yet, we are to believe that there could be fresh capital investment and generation of job opportunity. The workers' struggle and legitimate trade union movements are now accused of obstructing industrial progress and hence the hard-earned legitimate, democratic and the trade union rights of the working people are being snatched away. But the fact is that the internal crisis of capitalism accentuated every hour by the dwindling purchasing power of the people bled white by the capitalist exploitation, is impeding industrial growth. No capitalist would ever invest capital unless there is an opportunity for reaping maximum profit which in turn necessitates availability of market. But the falling

purchasing power of the people causes shrinkage of the market. This is the vicious circle of capitalist system.

Another deception is the so-called boasting of forex reserve. Time and again, we have shown that this swelling forex accumulation is not a sign of health but disease. The forex is not pouring in through the channel of export. In that event, trade deficit would have been lower which incidentally is not the case. This forex reserve is built of components like demand deposits by NRIs, foreign loans, etc., which can be withdrawn at any time. Similarly, another deceptive argument in favour of economic health is GDP growth. GDP is nothing but a statistical average and does not reflect the wide discrimination in wealth and income between the handful of owners and millions of oppressed people. Also, the slum and boom of the capital market is only an indicator of the crest and trough of the speculative activities and is in no way reflective of anything associated with the economic welfare of the people.

So, it is clear that this 'feel good' factor is groggy with a hangover. Like all binges it would peter out with dizziness as the hidden costs get surfaced. For example, the government has not announced any hike in LPG and kerosene prices. But there is 44 per cent cut in the subsidy to these two items. But before the polls the BJP has not taken the skeleton of the cupboard and the large oil companies would have to fund the largesse. But once the election is over the people would discover the hollowness of the 'feel good' bunkum. If the BJP comes back to power, it would start singing the other tune, exhort people to bear more 'hardships', make more 'sacrifices' to add further glaze to the 'shining India' and hence tighten the belt. There would be increased doze of taxation, escalated fiscal savagery and all such other economic onslaughts on the people to sustain the 'good feeling' of the ruling class. If the BJP fails to make it despite all such deceptions and gimmicks and the Congress with its associates become fortunate holders of the rein, the same attack would be mounted under the pretext that the BJP government had ruined the economy. We have seen such things

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All India Women's Conference

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the US imperialism and its barbarity are threatening and interfering in the internal affairs of independent nations, in the self-respect of their people. Not only it is interfering in the integrity of independent nations, but also it is suppressing revolutionary parties and people of those nations which have widespread communist influence. Such interference is taking place overtly and covertly. She further said, feudal patriarchal system based on the foundation of Hindu nation and Hindu Brahminism is greatly hampering and setting back the women's emancipation movement since long in Nepal. The Royal proclamation by King Jnanendra on October 4 last year, is largely affecting fundamental rights of the Nepalese people. The state in the name of so-called unifying command is perpetrating atrocities upon people including the women and pushing the country towards militarization. Nepal, in these days, is in the vicious circle of war and violence of which women and children are the worst victims. The colonial attitude of the Indian rulers is establishing their perpetual control over the natural resources of Nepal, particularly the water resources. Similarly, the expansionist attitude of the Indian rulers has led to border encroachment. In this situation, Nepalese people are fighting against the expansionist attitude of the Indian ruling class. Nepalese women also are fighting against all anti-women policies and operations — political, economic, cultural — since last 56 years. Similarly, they are fighting against foreign pressure and intervention. Comrade Bishankhe lastly showed, although the forms of struggle may vary with that in India, the essence of the problem is the same. The women of Nepal and India have to struggle hard against all oppressions in the days to come.

Dr Satchidananda Rout Roy
Dr Satchidananda Rout Roy,
eminent writer and Chairman of the
Reception Committee of the
Conference said, inter alia, in the

Open Session :

Please allow me to the outset to welcome you to Orissa which is otherwise known as Utkal, the land of superb arts. I welcome the delegation who have come from all parts of India to take part in the deliberations of this august conference.

In our society, women have many problems to face. Killing of the female child in the embryo of the mother and killing of the tiny girls are in the increase. The worst thing is killing of the bride for the sake of dowry.

Equal wages for equal work is the crying need of the day. We find running of rampant anti-culture and decadent performance, such as beauty competition.

It is now high time women found out effective remedy for removing these evils. They should help themselves both in a organised manner and at individual sphere. I wish this conference all success.

Nirupama Bargohain

In her speech in the open session, Smt. Bargohain, eminent litterateur of Assam elaborately showed that in the past women in Assam enjoyed much more freedom than those in the other states of India and they were less socially harrassed and oppressed. Women in Assam were much economically independent. But now many a unprecedented kind of atrocities and torments has started afflicting them. Smt Borgohain opined, this is a pernicious fall out of a consumerist society. Secondly, since rise of terrorism in Assam, womenfolk of this state are increasingly becoming victim of atrocities at the hands of both the police-soldiers and militants. In her speech, Smt Bargohain respectfully referred to the great contribution of Chandraprova Shaikiani in women's emancipation movement of Assam.

Errata

In lines 24 and 25 of col. 3 in page 5 of the last issue of Proletarian Era, 'Ramkrishna Parija' should be read as Frankrishna Parija.
The error is regretted.

— Ed. Proletarian Era

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee convalescing after operation

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI sustained a fracture of the neck of right femur following a fall on 12 January 2004. On 23 January, 2004 he was operated upon by a team of surgeons led by the eminent orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Anjan Pan for hip prosthesis.

At present, after being released from the hospital on 10 February, 2004, he is recuperating at the Salt Lake commune, Calcutta.

BJP's pre-election 'feel-good' budget

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in the past many a times. We also witnessed pre or post budget impost of taxes and tariff increases by way of promulgating ordinances. More crises-ridden is the moribund capitalism, more rampant is such fleeing and oppression.

Pseudo Lefts also join vote
bandwagon

When the most trusted representative of the ruling capitalist class like the BJP and the Congress go on duping the people through such pre-poll rhetorics, the role of the CPI(M), CPI who call themselves left is no different. Instead of exposing this nasty politics of the bourgeois political outfits, these so-called lefts, too eager for pelf and power, have also openly joined the bandwagon of vote politics. Both of them have entered into a poll alliance with the Congress to defeat the BJP. The same CPI(M) leadership, it may be recalled, once joined hands with the Advani-Vajpayee company to support V. P. Singh ministry and dislodge the Congress from power. The Janata Government, with the present BJP leadership as its constituents, was called a "friendly" government by the CPI(M) and CPI. This alteration between the BJP and the Congress depending upon who makes them "feel good" in securing better poll results, is the politics of CPI(M) leaders have engaged themselves to. Over and above, the CPI(M) who heads the governments at West Bengal and Tripura is also on a promise-distribution spree on the eve of elections in the same way like the BJP. West Bengal chief minister and his colleagues are now in a hurry

to announce fresh budgetary grants to various welfare measures, sanction hefty amounts for infrastructural developments, lay foundation stones of various projects and hold out promises of industrial development and job growth by inviting Indian as well as foreign capital. While the BJP is usurping public money to produce ad films depicting ludicrous growth during its regime, the CPI(M) too, is also not far behind in releasing similar ads cataloguing the 'series of progress' during its rule in West Bengal.

Democratic mass movement —
real alternative

But the people through their experience have realized that this switching between the BJP and the Congress, or the DMK and AIDMK, or the Trinamul and the CPI(M), in the election game is no alternative to end their misery, destitution and ruthless exploitation under the capitalist rule. Rather it allows the ruling class to intensify the degree of exploitation. The only alternative is to build up a conscious democratic mass movement to press for the genuine demands of the people and gradually elevate the struggle to the level of a revolutionary movement to overthrow the rule of capital. People must come forward to organize such a mass movement to thwart the surreptitious attempt of the bourgeois parties and the pseudo-lefts to keep them arrested within the vortex of parliamentary politics. The SUCI, as the genuine left party on the soil would spare no effort in organizing such class and mass struggles of the people and expose the ugly face of decadent capitalism and its servitors of different hues.

Make 24 February All India General Strike a grand success

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