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STARVATION DEATHS IN WEST BENGAL

WHAT IT REVEALS

The heart-rending incident stunned every well-meaning person in the state of West Bengal, rattled every conscientious mind in the country. And the events following the trail have been even more tormenting to any sensible and sensitive mind.

Amlasole tragedy

Five hapless persons belonging to the Lodha-Shabar tribe, one of the most impoverished wretched segments of the society located in the remote village of Amlasole in the backward Belpahari region of West Midnapore district of West Bengal, marked marginal since independence, succumbed to death from starvation. Kailash Mura, the local CPI(M) panchayat member clearly stated that "People of Amlasole are dying out of starvation.... BDO is not listening, nor is the panchayat chief." But the CPI(M) top brass refused to admit that these deaths have been on account of starvation. Rather, one saw a cruel drama being enacted — telling a tale of criminal negligence on the part of the government and administration and palpable suppression of truth on the other. The CPI(M) government has a minister for the development of western region named Maheshwar Murmu, a tribal himself. Also it has a district secretary named Deepak Sarkar and a host of administrators including a District Magistrate and a BDO. At the behest of the CPI(M) chief minister who initially refrained from making any comment on the incident, a convoy of the aforesaid minister, CPI(M) district chief and bureaucrats duly escorted by a huge police force including RPF landed at Amlasole to make an on the spot enquiry. Excerpts from the conversations between the inspection team and destitute tribal

people as reported in the media are given below.

Cruel joke on people's misery

CPI(M) district secretary to the son of one of the deceaseds — "Your father died of jaundice, isn't it? And that too in December last, six months back, right?" The perplexed boy stared at him and made a nod and immediately the CPI(M) leader turned back to the crowd and bantered, "They are unable to state the month of either English or Bengali calendar. I am asking them whether it is six-months, they are nodding head in affirmation." The BDO, who draws his salary from public exchequer, asked one of the bereaved persons, "How did your father die?" "In starvation, of illness" replied the person. Enraged BDO lashed out at him. "Young as you are, you could not feed your father? Had you gone to the forest, you could easily earn Rs.100/-. Did you inform the Block office that you had nothing to eat? ... What do you think, you would rest at home and the BDO would come here to stuff rice in your mouth?" He immediately got a rebuff from an elderly tribal lady, "Have you seen the health condition of the menfolk languishing in starvation? How would they perform physical labour?" "The news of starvation-death in Amlasole is not true", remarked the district magistrate, "the cause is illness. I have myself seen rice being cooked in three of the houses I visited on Thursday." Arrogance

and disdain of minister Murmu were at height, "Don't people die? ... whether it was caused by starvation or disease is yet to be confirmed." And then, "there is no starvation death, so question of rushing relief does not arise." He was almost parroting former chief minister Jyoti Basu who said, after a diabolic incident of criminal assault on and murder of a lady government-employee in the agglomerate of Calcutta, "Such incidents do happen, there is nothing unusual about it." Suryakanta Mishra, the CPI(M) health minister who spoke in the same language to undermine the pathetic deaths of innocent children both in a government child-hospital in Calcutta as well as in the district of Murshidabad. Murmu also wondered if the villagers were so badly off, why did they not kill the chickens and goats, they rear as domestic pets? Of course, taking a

cue from his seniors and with so bagfull of wonders in the head Murmu asked the villagers of Amlasole if they knew him. One housewife quipped instantaneously, "Do you ever visit us that we would know you?"

However, it was left to Biman Bose, the CPI(M) politburo member and Chairman of the CPI(M)-led "Left Front", to stick the final nail, "The whole affair about starvation deaths is a campaign mounted by the media. Six hundred villagers were served food at the Shradh (last rites ceremony) of a person who said the media, died of starvation." Two days after, the CPI(M) chief minister in an exhibition of superlative pun, observed, albeit in a twist of his earlier stand, that "starvation like situation does prevail in Amlasole," and "this is not a sudden development. There are villages in North Bengal and South Bengal." And then came his confession soaked in banter, "You don't have to go to Amlasole to see poverty... you can find it in Kolkata." Bravo, no doubt! Till the

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SUCI demands judicial enquiry into Ahmedabad killing

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in a statement issued today, the 20th June 2004, expressed strong support for the demand for a high level enquiry into the gruesome killing of four persons in Ahmedabad on 15th June 2004, by the Gujarat Police charging them of having link with Lasker-e-Taiba and coming to Ahmedabad with a mission to kill Narendra Modi, Gujarat chief minister. Comrade Mukherjee said that this ghastly killing which involved, among others, a 17 year old girl student has shocked the conscience of all the right-thinking people of the country and raised serious doubt about the veracity of the whole incident.

He, therefore, demanded immediate constitution of a high level judicial enquiry to go into the whole episode and let the countrymen know the truth. If in the course of such an enquiry, it is revealed that it was a fake encounter engineered by the Gujarat Police to divert the attention from the simmering wrath of the people against Modi for having masterminded Gujarat pogrom, the persons found guilty of such a heinous crime should be meted out exemplary punishment.

Criminal caricature of love for poor

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other day he was denying news of starvation-deaths among tea-plantation workers of closed gardens, potato-grower peasants, unemployed agricultural workers of Murshidabad and so forth. Instead, he was busy informing the captains of the industry and representatives of foreign monopoly capital under media glare that West Bengal has achieved self-sufficiency in rice.

Subhuman livelihood of Amlasole tribals

Despite all these childish utterances, attempts to quibble over the issue and scurrilous lampooning on the destitution of the have-nots, the stark reality could not be covered up. Let us have a look at the wretched livelihood of these tribal people of Amlasole-Belpahari, hardly 200 kms away from Calcutta and within 30 kms of Kakrajhore, a sprawling tourist spot. They do not figure in the BPL list. They pluck *Kendu* leaves, an ingredient for manufacturing cheap smoking item, *bidi*, from the forests between March and June. Earlier, they used to sell their collections to private agents at Rs.25 to 30/- per kg. But now the CPI(M)-government has forced them to sell their procurements to government-run LAMPS, at just Rs.10/- to Rs.11/- per kg. The LAMPS office, incidentally, is far away at Belpahari proper and these forlorn tribals have to carry the load upto that place for a pittance. Moreover, they used to collect firewoods from the jungles, trekked 6-kilometers to Jharkhand and earned Rs.20/- per bundle. Now the CPI(M)-government has banned that also citing the context of terrorism. These starving people have no ration card in their possession. Cards issued in their names are kept in the custody of the ration-dealers for reason best known to the authorities. (However, this illegal system is in vogue in remote rural areas of West Bengal.) Hence, they are denied the rice quota under the "Annodaya Yojna" of the Central government.

Unable to manage a meal of boiled rice and salt even once a day, these hapless people, more often than not, satisfy their hunger with wild potatoes, *mohul* and *sal* seeds and forest-grown jackfruits. So malnutrition and fatal diseases take a stranglehold on their life. In

absence of drinking water, they are compelled to consume dirty water to contract water-borne diseases like jaundice and hepatitis. There is no healthcare available either. Nearest health-centre, where seldom any physician or health staff is seen, is situated at least 30 kms away that ailing starving people can hardly walk down. So they die like cats and dogs, uncared and unnoticed. The diminished power of immunity against diseases gets transmitted in the offsprings rendering the entire tribe crippled from birth. But the CPI(M) leaders and ministers, to one's dismay, find these tribal boys "playing cricket", tribal girls "wearing necklaces and earrings" and families "having stacks of rice and straw piled at home." So, they dismiss the starvation-deaths of Amlasole tribes as "media constructs" purported to malign the state government and shield "the remarkable progress" it has achieved in "uplifting the lot of the people".

West Bengal government's report contradicts CPI(M) stand

But paradoxically, when the CPI(M) hierarchy is so desperate to prove the reality otherwise, the "Human Development Report of West Bengal - 2004", published by the Development & Planning Department of the state headed by the CPI(M)'s Nirupam Sen, considered next to the chief minister in the cabinet, has given vivid description of starvation-deaths, both in the North as well as South Bengal districts. The report, inter alia, mentions, "Some of the most backward regions that are located in the western part of the state, have the lowest per-capita income. As a sequel to severely underdeveloped infrastructure coupled with absence of all-out development, the human development index in these areas is very low. Some blocks of Bankura, Midnapore, Bardhaman, Purulia and Birbhum districts which constitute these areas in the Western part, are relatively isolated with poor transport facility and hence so underdeveloped. ... The *Adivasis* are the worst sufferers insofar as rural unemployment is concerned. ... life of both rural and urban poor is in crisis situation... the state government had lot to do in these areas. But, since it did not give attention to that, the people of the

state has been seriously harmed." (free translation from the Bengali version published in the media).

Perhaps, the CPI(M) leaders are a trifle disappointed at this report coinciding with the news of harrowing starvation deaths stalking the state. It may be recalled that there have been reports of such telling tales of starvation deaths from Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and other states governed by known bourgeois parties like the BJP, BJD, TDP and the Congress. Everywhere, the attitude of the state governments had been to somehow cover up their incompetence and negligence or suppress the truth under drumbeats of so-called progress and development. When the tribal people in the Kalahandi district of Orissa died of starvation, the inhuman Orissa government shamelessly held that deaths were caused by intake of poisonous mango-seeds and not starvation as if people eat such stuff in fancy. The CPI(M) leadership at that time cried hoarse and blamed those governments in an apparent bid to brandish its "pro-people" credential which is its election capital. Just a month ago, CPI(M) leader Cherupally Sitamaralu, while investigating the death of Yadagiri, a jobless worker of Kattangur in Andhra Pradesh asserted that the death was on account of starvation. "He had no food for five days prior to death", said Sitamaralu, "As many as 11 weavers ... died of hunger-related ailments in the last two years." So a starvation-death or starvation-related death in other states is reality but such instances in a CPI(M)-rule state are damp squibs, concocted stories. What a double-standard! But the CPI(M) leaders could not hide the truth for long. The Amlasole and other incidents proved that they are no different to the branded bourgeois outfits in playing truant with the poor and the pauper.

How government cares for the poor

To chalk out plans for remedying the plight of the affected tribal poor, the CPI(M) ministers and those belonging to the department of backward class development met in a luxurious luncheon meeting in Calcutta where chicken biriyani and chicken curry

were served to stimulate the participants. It has been so naked an affair that the chief minister had to snub the organizers and called for dispensing with such sumptuous menu during the government level meetings. And what has been the outcome of such a grand meeting? It was decided to establish 100-odd granaries in the affected regions so that the poor starving people, instead of going to private money-lenders, could take loan from the government and repay with interest. In other words, the government would now take over the usurious trade to exploit the hunger-situation that reminds one of the role of the hoarders during famine. What else one could expect of these sham Marxists who now treat the people not as human beings but voters and are inseparable part of the utterly corrupt nexus of police-administration-anti-socials-criminals-kulaks that rules the roost. Murmu, the CPI(M) minister himself admits that half of the sum budgeted for development of the weaker areas of the western region has not been spent. Could it be otherwise as resources continue to get siphoned out for "other reasons"? A good part of the funds allocated in 2003-04 primarily for providing drinking water in Belpahari, was diverted to set up 10 make-shift tents for the tourists and making club houses. Funds were also diverted to install generators for illuminating 20 houses. These are glimpses of what the CPI(M) boasts of as "achievements in the rural sector to improve conditions of the rural poor". Let alone nobility of Marxist ideology, even a minimum human feeling, least of sympathy would have restrained someone to stoop to such a level.

Outlook of a genuine left government

Of course, the CPI(M) leaders through their subservient columnists and intellectuals are trying to argue that not much could be done under the system. This is another piece of political hypocrisy. Had they the will and if they really followed leftist ideology, turn of events could have been otherwise. We discuss briefly a very pertinent question in this connection. If a revolutionary party gets an opportunity to form government in a bourgeois set up,

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Comrade Krishna Chakraborty places UTUC-LS Viewpoint before Prime Minister

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh invited central trade union leaders on 23rd June last for a consultation before giving final shape to the central budget. UTUC-LS was represented by its Vice-president, Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, also a member of the central committee, SUCI.

While presenting the viewpoint of UTUC-LS, Comrade Chakraborty, at the outset, drew attention to the havoc wrought in the life of the toiling millions by the policies of liberalization-privatization. He showed that in pursuance of the so-called economic reforms, subsidies on agriculture have been withdrawn, prices of seeds and fertilizers increased heavily, electricity charges hiked forcing the small and middle peasants to take huge loans which they could never repay by selling their produce. Rather, they have been reeling under the impact of the market forces that have been set in from the beginning of 'reforms'. And the result is shocking — thousands of farmers have committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and even in Punjab and Kerala. Equally, because of the liberal import policy and reduction in tariff wall, thousands of small and medium-scale industries facing competition from the powerful multinational companies have fallen sick making the future of thousands upon thousand of workers totally insecure. Many factories have been closed down, costing lakhs of workers their job. Many of the retrenched and jobless workers are committing suicide throughout the country including West Bengal.

He also mentioned that introduction of Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) by the government and corporate houses compelled lakhs of employees to leave their jobs. In the banking industry alone, 1.5 lakh employees have already been removed while the plan is to remove 9 lakhs out of 13 lakhs employees. Consequential vacant posts have been abolished. Similar are the plans in the LIC, GIC, Railways and different government departments. In the process of privatization the public sector industries which were built with people's money are now being sold at throw-away prices to the corporate houses who are

asking the government to give them the right to hire and fire, amending the labour laws so that by downsizing the workforce in those industries they can bring back the so-called sick units back on profit trail.

He also drew attention to the fact that the outlook of globalization has completely reversed the concept of a 'welfare state' which despite its basic exploitative character, adopted some social welfare schemes to discharge its essential responsibility to provide education, health-care, employment or pending employment, unemployment allowance, etc. But under globalization, all the governments are washing off their hands of all such obligations. And all the jobs, even government jobs, are going to be on contract. The so-called reforms, he regretted, practically

remained unopposed.

Comrade Chakraborty said that while the relief measures proposed by the UPA government for the poor and middle peasants are welcome, the fact is that whatever relief is provided to them, if the basic cause behind all aberrations and sufferings remains, like continuation of economic reforms, such problems will continue to recur.

Comrade Chakraborty also demanded of the present government to reexamine the whole issue of 'globalization' and immediately come out of WTO.

Comrade Chakraborty then placed the following demands for immediate consideration :

1. Roll-back of the increased prices of petrol, diesel and LPG ;
2. Appropriate steps to restore the right to strike by the government employees ;
3. Rejection of Kelkar Committee's Report on tax reforms, increasing the limit of

standard deduction, raising the tax-exemption limit for individuals to Rs.1,50,000/- per annum ;

4. Increase in the rate of Corporate tax and adoption of stringent measure to realize around Rs.1.50 lakh crores of non-performing assets from the defaulting corporates and spend the money, so realized for public welfare ;
5. Forestalling introduction of VAT ;
6. Guarantee of employment for the rural poor and formulation of a National Employment Policy ;
7. Withdrawal of VRS and moratorium on employment in government departments ;
8. Repeal of 'The Electricity Act, 2003' ;
9. Reversal of the policy to sell out PSUs ;
10. Enhancement of interest on PF to 12%

AIDSO Organizes Students' Political Training Camps

On the occasion of 50th anniversary of All India Democratic Students Organization (AIDSO) the All India Committee had decided to organize zonal level students' political training camps at four different zones of the country. In accordance with this decision an Eastern India students' political camp was organized in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal from 10 to 12 June 2004. Student delegates from West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Tripura and Sikkim attended the camp which was inaugurated by Comrade Asit Bhattacharyya, member, Central Committee, SUCI and one of the founder organizers of AIDSO, by placing wreath at the martyrs' column.

Comrade Bhattacharyya conducted the first two sessions on theoretical aspects of Marxism, the history of growth and development of AIDSO, the role of individual in

social movement and various organizational issues. He also, in the course of his discussion, highlighted the historic struggle of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh in building a genuine revolutionary party on this soil and in the process emerging as a giant leader and teacher of the proletarian revolutionary movement. The concluding three sessions were conducted by Comrade Provash Ghosh, member, Central Committee, SUCI and advisor, AIDSO. He dwelt at length on why it is imperative to conduct and cultivate higher knowledge and in the process, conduct a revolutionary struggle to attain a higher cultural-ethical standard in life. He said that people are having great expectations from SUCI. The students and youths must shoulder greater responsibilities to live up to these expectations. He called upon all to

rise above all limitations and wholeheartedly engage themselves with revolutionary emotion and fervour to strengthen the organization.

South India students' political training camp was organized at Erode, Tamilnadu, from 17 to 20 of June. More than 200 students participated in this political training camp from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. This camp was conducted by Comrade Provash Ghosh, and also by Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, member, Central Committee of SUCI.

Comrade Provash Ghosh in his speech showed, among others, how moral, ethical and cultural values of man are deteriorating in society. He appealed to student delegates to unleash a struggle based on the teachings of Marxism-Leninism and

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Naked exposure to CPI(M)'s anti-people policies

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what should be its outlook of governance? In this context, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our leader, teacher and guide, and a foremost Marxist thinker of the era raised a precise question, "Should we act as servitors and agents of the capitalist state and bourgeois social order? Or we should transform the discontent of the people against capitalism into a well-organized disciplined political movement?" (The significance of United Front and its limitation, 1967). Based on the teachings of and guidelines by Comrade Ghosh, our party had shown long back that the government run by a genuine left party ought to be distinct from other bourgeois governments on two counts. First of all, it should encourage growth and development of legitimate democratic movement on the burning issues of life bred by the exploitative capitalist system, facilitate creation of people's own instruments of struggle and restrain the police-administration from crushing such class and mass struggles. Second, it must take up

would ultimately lead the toiling people to build up the struggle for emancipation. The pressure of conscious democratic mass movement would work as check and balance to proper utilization of resources, exercise necessary vigil against misuse of funds, bureaucratic arrogance and lax, as well as corruption to creep in. It was Comrade Ghosh who for the first time in the world provided a comprehensive guideline in this regard and our party, as constituent of the first United Front Government of West Bengal in 1967 declared this as a policy directive from the labour portfolio allotted to us. One would recall that this brought a new wave of the working class movement, inspired people to join and build up massive democratic movements shaking the ruling capitalist class who arrayed all its arsenal to topple the government, concentrated all-out attack on our party and pulled strings from behind to see that our party is kept out of the left-democratic combination. The CPI(M), CPI and its associates who

saddled in power in West Bengal in 1977 and with the blessings of the ruling class continue to hold on to that for 27 years. The grim tragedy of Amlasole and the likes is a fall-out of its pro-capitalist anti-people outlook. If the CPI(M)-led government had any iota of concern for the poor especially the most oppressed tribal people, they could have taken some definite time-bound programme to extend minimal necessities of life to these people, introduce some employment-generating schemes ensuring that they receive legitimate wage to eke out a living. 27 years of uninterrupted rule was no less a time to do that.

Not poor but rich is CPI(M)'s concern

But that had not been their agenda. As exposing the decadent capitalist system is not either. The CPI(M) leaders had long back decided to be a part of the moribund capitalist system breeding all miseries and malices and be in the corridor of power through appeasement of the ruling class. So they are more concerned to elicit certificates from the captains of the industry, project "inflow of foreign capital", "quantum of domestic capital investment", "establishment of multi-crore shopping complexes and IT parks", "prevalence of industrial peace and harmony at the cost of the workers interest" and "capitalist reforms with a human face" as indicators of progress. So

their way of argument is also on the rotten bourgeois line interspersed with distortions, palpable falsifications, subversion of facts, cooked up stories, contrived reasons and hypocrisy. Revelations of truth, media exposure to the starvation death and subhuman living condition of the destitute come as a thorn to their loud propaganda of a "happy prosperous state". Hence is the demonic attempt to turn a grim human tragedy to a commonplace affair! Not only that. Any legitimate democratic movement by these downtrodden people or to uphold their cause is brutally crushed by the CPI(M) government just like any other BJP or Congress government as could be seen during the people's movement against the Amlasole episode. The entire police-administration and Rapid Action Force were pressed into action to ensure that surge of protest is scuttled, voice of truth is throttled. It is this politics of the CPI(M) which has made them support and protect the reactionary Congress government at the Centre no matter what dose of anti-people policies the latter implements with "the consent of the CPI(M)".

Well-meaning people, the toiling millions have nothing to expect from these sham Marxists rather than bouts of deceptions and treacheries. Amlasole incident bears a glaring testimony to that. It is only through the path of conscious, organized democratic movement under a correct revolutionary leadership that could inflict a crushing defeat to such opportunists to steer clear the road to genuine emancipation from the yoke of capitalist oppression and exploitation.



Wanton lathi charge by police on SUCI demonstrators protesting against Amlasole starvation deaths, in Midnapore on 15 June, 2004

within the limitation of the system, some definite programmes for providing relief, to whatever possible extent, to the people and the most backward downtrodden segments should feature first in the list of the people to be covered by such relief measures. And to implement such programmes, the government must not depend on the bureaucracy but rely on the democratic mass movement that

were in deep trouble at this surge of democratic mass movement and the consequential rage of the ruling class, played in the hand of the bourgeoisie, assured it of their faithful service, committed to emasculate movement from within and promised to run the government on the bourgeois line under Marxist verbiage to confuse and frustrate the people. It was in this backdrop that the CPI(M) and its associates were

Students' Political Camps

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Comrade Shibdas Ghosh's thought and build up mighty students movement against all attacks on education and humanity by the rulers.

Comrade Krishna Chakraborty in his speech dealt with the need for systematic development of education in society. He also elaborated on various education problems in society and the task of the students to fight back to achieve a truly secular, scientific and democratic education which was the dream of the leaders of renaissance

movement in India.

Comrade Debashis Roy, General Secretary, All India Committee, AIDS0 while addressing the delegates informed about a series of programmes being organized by AIDS0 to commemorate its 50th anniversary, which will culminate in a grand programme in Calcutta on December, 28, 2004.

Students staged cultural programmes like dramas and songs based on the theme of commercialization and communalization of education and other socially relevant themes.

International oil price-hike — Handiwork of imperialist cartel

Just the other day, the Congress Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in his first address to the nation, said: "...we cannot forsake the obligation of running a government that works for the people." (*The Statesman*, 25.6.04) Yet one of the very first steps taken by the CPI(M)-backed Congress-led government after coming to power has been to increase the price of petrol and diesel by Rs. 2.4, and Rs. 1, respectively and cooking gas by Rs. 20, on the plea of rise in international oil price. At the same time price of coal, which is unrelated with oil price, too, has been hiked steeply, by over 16 per cent. Needless to say that all this will have a cascading effect on the rising prices of essential commodities, including transport and electricity, and inflict a further blow on the millions of common people already bent low under the crushing burden which inhuman exploitation of crisis ridden capitalism has placed on them.

After this anti-people measure by a government, that claims it "works for the people", the CPI(M) and CPI who proclaim themselves as leftists, and on whose support the Congress-led government depends, are engaged in the shameful task of justifying it to make the aggrieved people accept this new hardship as inevitable. The CPI(M) leaders are arguing that the former BJP-led government would have hiked the price of petrol and diesel anyway but had deferred it in view of the elections, and that now the Congress government was forced to do so. Then where is the difference between the two governments? - to such questions the CPI(M) leaders declare that it is due to them that only such a 'small' (!) price hike was effected, brazenly brushing aside the fact that for the downtrodden people this hike is anything but small! When in opposition, the CPI(M) had in the past strongly protested even 'smaller' price hikes of diesel and petrol by the previous BJP-led government. Of course, in their usual duplicity they had used those occasions in the states ruled by them, like West Bengal, to raise transport prices including tram fare, not affected by diesel and petrol hike, and with brute force tried to crush the ensuing protests, even as

they sometimes protested in other states to get parliamentary benefits. This time, too, duplicity is not lacking. For the sake of playing to the galleries, the CPI(M) leaders voiced some protests, especially about the hike in prices of cooking gas, even though the Union Minister, Manishankar Iyer, himself had disclosed before the actual announcement that the left parties had agreed to the decision for price hike.

To confuse the people the CPI(M) leaders are defending the price hike with the argument that it was inevitable since the international price had risen. But is that true? Let us see whether this price hike is really inevitable.

It is well known that to meet internal consumption needs, the government imports about 70 percent of oil. On this oil the government puts a hefty dose of import duty, and this increases the price of oil in the first place. In every budget the import duties in general have been slashed in the interest of the monopolists, but import duty on oil has not been cut at all, even though it goes against the government's policy of globalization. This is done in the interest of the oil companies in India. The PSUs like Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum, and private sector Reliance company, alike, profit thereby as they sell the Indian oil — on which there is no import duty — at the same price as imported oil and amass huge profits. Even after the price rise in international oil, when the oil price in the country was not raised, Indian Oil, for example, made a staggering profit of Rs. 1,849 crores 94 lakhs in the first three months of 2004.

But import duty is not the only tax that contributes to high price of oil. Over and above, the Centre imposes excise duty on petro-products. The excise duty on diesel, for example, now stands at 11 per cent and on petroleum at 26 per cent. This is a source of huge revenues for the central government. But that is not all. Among the other factors that further jack up the selling price of diesel and oil are state sales tax, which in West Bengal, for example, amounts to 17 percent. Apart from this, the CPI(M)-led government has further

imposed a cess of Rs. 1 per litre of petrol and diesel. All of this is passed on to the consumer, as a result of which price of oil has shot to such height in India, that it is even more costly, in terms of money, than in USA.

As a result of the latest price hike by the Congress-led government, Indian oil companies, be they government owned or private, will make even more staggering profits, while the people already suffering from deep economic crisis, will be bled white.

Even if the price of oil and diesel had not been hiked this would not have entailed a deficit for government exchequer, not to speak of the oil-selling companies, only the margin of profit would have been somewhat less.

Had the CPI(M) leadership even the minimum regard for the people, they could have raised this demand. Moreover, the CPI(M) leaders talk of bringing in transparency in the price making process, which means they know where is the lack of transparency. So why not they make it public? Had they been sincere then they would have first demanded transparency and exposed the falsity of official propaganda, instead of reinforcing it. They would have exposed the US imperialists' role behind the steep rise in international price of oil.

It is well-known that a few giant Western oil companies — mostly US - like Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texaco, Conoco Philips and Shell, have established monopoly control over the refinement and distribution of oil. Within the USA itself accusations have been raised that these big oil companies, grown bigger through constant mergers, are monopolizing the oil trade, and through closures of refineries manipulate the market and prices by creating artificial crisis to maximize their huge profits. Thus according to a study released on May 12 by the Consumer Federation of America and the Consumers Union, unrefined crude oil is being held back from the market, to artificially inflate prices and generate huge profits for Big Oil. (*Workers World*, May 27). Thus, for example in California, Shell, has been accused of planning to close down its

Bakersfield, Calif. Refinery with the motive of "intentionally crimping supplies," (*Los Angeles Times*, May 18, quoted in *ibid*) Only last year's price increase made profits of oil companies shoot up by a combined 926 per cent, according to one consumer group report. "The industry engineered \$ 250 billion of total price increases since 2000 so it could reap \$ 80 billion in profits", reported *Doylestan Patriot* (May 20).

So clearly international price rise has come about through an artificially manipulated, a heinous game by Western, specially US oil companies, aided and abetted by their servitors — the Bush administration that in turn has provided in its budget for huge revenues from oil. All this comes in a situation when already there is a shortage of oil, without which modern industry cannot be sustained - a shortage created to a large extent by US imperialists. For a huge amount of oil or petroleum is being diverted to grease US imperialists' war machinery throughout the world. There is no denying the fact that criminal US-UK aggression and occupation of Iraq has brought on the break down of oil production and refinement in that country to such an extent that these warmongers are even forced to depend on imported oil in Iraq despite that country's huge oil resources. Together with the heinous manipulations of the big US oil companies to hike the price to increase their profits, here lies the true cause of shortage. To confuse the people and shield themselves against their wrath, the Bush administration is blaming OPEC - the 11 oil-producing countries of the Middle East (producer of half of the world's oil), Asia, Africa and Latin America. The US imperialists accuse them of deliberately creating a worldwide shortage by drilling too little oil. It is true that OPEC had in April cut down the production somewhat because of fall in dollar value. Yet according to a report on BBC News website, on May 5, under the heading "Oil soars despite overproduction" OPEC countries are even now pumping about 1.5 million barrel per day above their quota. Moreover, it has been reported that on May 24 Saudi Arabia agreed to raise oil production by 800,000 barrel per day. Still prices keep soaring, because of the role played by the US imperialists.

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Countrywide protest against price-hike of oil, LPG and coal

Delhi

Delhi Unit of SUCI along with UTUC-LS, AIDYO, AIDS and AIMSS organized a protest demonstration on 16-6-2004 at Jantar Mantar. Secretary of Delhi Unit, Comrade Pratap Samal addressed the demonstrators. A memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister's office demanding immediate withdrawal of the increased price.

Calcutta

A massive protest rally was held in Calcutta on 16th June, 2004. The rally was addressed by Comrade Manik Mukherjee, member, West Bengal State Secretariat and Secretary Calcutta District Committee.

Ranchi

Ranchi unit of SUCI organized protest demonstration in Ranchi on 17th June. The effigy of the Prime

Minister was burnt. Comrade Hem Chakraborty, Secretary, Jharkhand State Organizing Committee, lighted the effigy. A protest rally marched through the main thoroughfares of the city.

Muzaffarpur

On 16th June a protest march traversed the streets of Muzaffarpur against this price hike, followed by a street corner meeting. It was addressed by Comrade Arun Kumar Singh, member, Bihar State Committee, SUCI.

Patna

A protest march was held in the Bihar State capital and an effigy was burnt protesting the price rise. The march was led by Comrade Shiv Shankar, Secretary, Bihar State Committee.

Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat

SUCI, Ahmedabad District Committee demonstrated against the price rise in petro products on

17th June. It was held near Income Tax Traffic Circle. On the same day Baroda and Surat District Committees also held demonstration and dharna against this price rise.

Rewari

SUCI, Rewari District Committee, organized a protest dharna at Rewari, Haryana district headquarter on 17th June. At Namol also protest demonstration was held.

Bhopal

Bhopal Unit of SUCI held a protest demonstration at Roshanpura Chowrasta near Bhopal Raj Bhavan on 15th June, 2004. Comrade J. C. Barai, Secretary, Bhopal SUCI in his address explained how the Congress led UPA government with the support of the CPI(M)-CPI imposed such a huge burden on the common people. Also spoke on the occasion was Dr. A. S. Tomar of CPI(ML)-Red Flag.



Burning copy of hike-order at Calcutta



Burning of effigy of prime minister Manmohan Singh at Patna, Bihar



Dharna at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand



Dharna at Rewari, Haryana

Oil price hike

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And the fall out, the burden of above manipulations — resulting in huge profits for a handful of companies and fat revenue earnings for Bush administration — has to be borne by people in the USA, as well as people in the developing countries already languishing in deep economic crisis, and who are especially cruelly hit.

So, the real question is whose interest to serve: that of the people or a handful of monopolists, the owner class? But what is the CPI(M) leadership doing? Instead of

exposing the heinous role played by US imperialists and oil companies manipulation and mobilizing the people against it on the one hand and on the other putting pressure on Congress-led government not to resort to price hike, it lends its voice to help justify the Congress-led government's anti-people measures on the plea of international price rise. At the very least if it were sincere with its demand for transparency in price making it would have demanded that actual facts and figures be made public for people's scrutiny.

Gospel of Murli Manohar Joshi

Murli Manohar Joshi, the Education Minister (Human Resources Development Minister) in the former NDA Government at the Centre and the chief architect of giving effect to the agenda of communalization of education mooted by the RSS-BJP combine, was defeated in the last parliamentary election. But, even then, he was not spared of accusations and allegations. In self-defence he has come out of late with a high-sounding, verbose speech made at Allahabad on May 25 last. (Source : the Bengali daily *Sangbad Pratidin*, May 26). Obviously he asserted that it was not true that he had been communalizing education. According to him, it was really otherwise, because "During the rule of the NDA government, with a view to modernizing education system, attempts were being made to impregnate it with ideas about human values, protection of environment, duties of people to their country,... harmony of all religions. ... Some correct facts and information were being introduced in the NCERT textbooks.... so that students may come to know of 'the true history of India'".

Some 150-200 years back, questions like what should be included in curricula and what should not be, had been decided upon by countrymen led by the then leading personalities of the soil; the decisions have also stood the tests of history, science and experiences of reality. Joshi and his likes now make attempts to bring back the same that were discarded so long back and yet claim they are modern!

For instance, on the plea of imparting traditional Indian education, Dr. Joshi and the Sangh Parivar leaders would like to see teaching of *Vedas* and *Vedantas*, and to help in this, learning Sanskrit is to be made compulsory for all students at all levels of education. But Rammohan Roy, who was among the leading torchbearers of introducing modern education in India, fought with the British rulers right on this issue of teaching and learning of Sanskrit. To thwart their move to found a new institution for Sanskrit education, Rammohan Roy wrote in a letter to Lord Amherst as far back as in December 11, 1823, "We now find that government is establishing Sanskrit school under Hindoo Pundits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary ... can only be expected to load the minds of the youth with grammatical nicety and metaphysical distinction of little or no practical use...". Then again, on teaching of *Veda - Vedanta*, there remain the unforgettable utterances of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. About thirty years later, on September 7, 1853 Vidyasagar in his letter to then Secretary of the Council of Education, opposed Ballantyne's (Principal, Sanskrit College,

Varanasi) report with the words, "that *Vedanta* and *Sankhya* are false systems of Philosophy is no more a matter of dispute." During the National Education Movement that involved boycott of British institutions, Lala Lajpat Rai, the revered leader from Punjab, opposed the emphasis on Sanskrit and traditional education and said : "Any widespread revival of the ancient and medieval systems of education is unthinkable, it will take us centuries back and I am certain that the country will not adopt it" (in his book : *Problems of National Education*). From another corner of the country, Jyotibarao Phule, the fore-ranking social reformer from Maharashtra, was of the opinion that the traditional Indian education was outdated and stagnated. Imparting it was a conspiracy of turning the Dalits (the lower caste downtrodden) to slaves again and bringing back the unfettered domination of priests and landlords, particularly the Peshwas. Have Joshi and his lot ever been able to prove wrong the opinions and thoughts of these past luminaries of the country, who were also the forefathers of modern education in this soil? No, they didn't, neither they ever tried it. Their mainstay, rather the only prop, was their being in government holding the rein of administrative power. When their attempts to induce education with their *Hindutwvadi* communal outlook and thoughts met stiff opposition and protest, when they were accused of digging out and reintroducing outdated thoughts and knowledges of some 500-1000 years back or of bringing back ruinous educational plans and programmes of the British imperialists, it was

only then that Joshi and the BJP-RSS combine took defence in claiming that their agenda on education were really modern. Of course, modernism of their brand finds definition only in their dictionary.

Joshiji claimed that while in charge, he tried to make education system 'humane' and thus started to impart to it 'human values', senses of 'duties towards the country', consciousness about 'environment' or thoughts of 'harmony of all religions'. Joshiji is known as a scholar, but he is totally mistaken in this claim of his. All this was initiated by the RSS-Sangh Parivar a few decades back through thousands of schools called *Saraswati Shishumandir* and *Bal Shishumandir* run by them. They have been able to impart such values and patriotism to the children there, that they have learnt to foster hatred towards other children, even their playmates, simply because they belong to other different religious communities; they have also learnt to ignite communal riots as they grow up, or even to kill innocent people without repent or hesitation. People of this country have experienced with awe and anger how the sense of values nurtured by Joshiji or his compatriots could intoxicate the youth under the fold of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and BJP with devilish brutality all over the country. The real face of the sense of values the BJP nourishes is exposed in the photograph of the ferocious youngman brandishing open sword with a saffron headband betraying his loyalty during the infamous Gujarat riot. The image was too well circulated all

over the country for BJP to hide its real face any more under cover. Their sense of values is reflected in boastfully killing the foetus after bringing it out of the womb of the mother at the point of a lance. The brand of education the BJP-RSS combine and their sort imparts, only produces butchers like Narendra Modi and inspires others to eulogize them with titles like "chhote sardar". Joshiji speaks of religious harmony, while he himself with Advani, Uma Bharti, Ritambhara, Vinoy Katiyar and such others were present in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 and enthusiastically incited thousands of Karsevaks, de facto the Bajrang youths, to demolish the 400 year old historic monument of the Babari Masjid. The same lot of youth in Gujarat could hammer down and wipe out the tomb of Fayaz Khan, the famous musician and the pride of Indian music, or, in Orissa, could burn alive the missionary Graham Stein and his sons, or could rape and kill nuns in different parts of the country. All these people must have been imbued with the sense of 'harmony of all religions' preached by Joshiji and others: Isn't it so?

Joshiji refers to environmental consciousness. The absurd and devastating multi-crore rupee plan of linking north and south Indian rivers with canals is the brainchild of his BJP government attesting to their environmental consciousness. The vast majority of environmentalists and scientists of the country was unanimous in condemning this project as absurd. They made it unambiguously clear that it would not only bring about sheer wastage of some thousands of crore of rupees (of course the BJP may not take it as wastage, as it was sure to fill the coffers of the

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Demonstration in New Delhi against electricity tariff-hike and water scarcity

Gospel of Murli Manohar Joshi

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contractors in their fold), the project would lead to drying up of most of the rivers resulting into severe draught and flood all over the country, would completely destroy the ecological balance throughout the land. Joshiji and his lot may boast of their effort at making people environment-conscious, but in reality their brand that ends in such thoughts as of river-linking would not just go otherwise, it would undoubtedly bring disaster to the country as a whole.

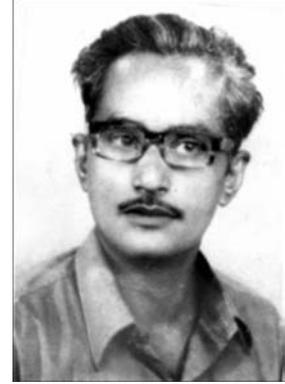
The former education/HRD minister, also a teacher himself, said that a few "correct information" were being included in the textbooks published by the NCERT with a view to enabling students to know the correct and true history of India, their motherland. Whatever samples of these 'correct information' have come out in public, are startling enough to make people wary about their 'correctness'. We glean a few. SC Mittal in his textbook for class XII refers to Subhas Bose as 'like his elder brother Ras Behari Bose', whereas so far no blood relationship between the two leaders has ever been claimed by their respective family members or anybody else. Again, on page 256 of the same book, Mittal states that BD Savarkar suggested Subhas Bose to leave the country. The well known facts of history are as follows. Savarkar, intimately connected with RSS and Hindu Mahasabha and thus dreaming of a crusade against the Muslims, was totally against anti-British imperialist national independence movement, except for a few early years of his life and activity. He and his followers were opposed to the Quit India movement of 1942, a movement that involved virtually the whole patriotic population of the country against the British rulers. On the other hand, Subhas Bose was bitterly critical of the communal forces like the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. In a speech in Jhargram, Bengal in 1940, he made it clear, "The Hindu Mahasabha has sent the Hindu monks and nuns (*sanyasees* and *sanyasinees*) with *Trishuls* (tridents) in hand for begging votes. All Hindus bow down whenever they see *Trishul* and saffron clothes. Hindu Mahasabha has appeared in politics, polluting religion by taking advantage of

religious faith. Hindus without exception have the duty to condemn it... You remove these traitors from the national life and don't listen to their words. We want all freedom-loving people of the country to serve the nation as one soul." And Mittal digs out a fact that such a man as Savarkar, whose lot Subhas Bose considered 'traitors' and not 'freedom-loving', would advise a leader of Subhas' wisdom and courage to take his historic decision. Is it just a misrepresentation or a simple travesty of truth or a deliberate, though vain, attempt to gain respectability for an avowed anti-nationalist movement personality, really a traitor to the then nationalist cause?

Similarly, history textbooks published by the NCERT contain ample evidences of distortion of several issues, such as the Vedic Age, Aryan civilization, Mughal rule, contributions of the Hindus and the Muslims to the Indian culture and so on. We refrain from dragging on with examples and cite just one significant aspect. The world over people are conversant with the rich treasure of Indian architecture and sculpture which attracts tourists and connoisseurs as well, treasure of Indian classical music which enralls audience in all corners of the globe, treasure of Indian painting that wins distinction by virtue of its character and brilliance. It is also well known that all this treasure bears significant and rich contributions from both the Hindus and the Muslims. However, at the behest of a man like Joshi or the organization such as the RSS, the writers of NCERT history textbooks [India and the World (for class VI) by Prof Makhan Lal; Contemporary India (class IX) by Prof Hari Om, Ancient India (class XI) by Prof Makhan Lal and Medieval India (class XI) by Meenakshi Jain and Modern India (class XII) by Prof SC Mittal] make deliberate attempts to vent out to the students the ideas that there were nothing good or worthwhile in the Mughal period or Muslim culture as such; rather so far, textbook writers have given 'too much emphasis' on 'Hindu-Muslim unity' or on 'composite culture'. Obviously this attitude and many other such distortions are simply fitted to the Hindutwavadi thoughts and outlook of the RSS. It boils down to the fact

Comrade Durga Das passes away

On June 9 last Comrade Durga Das, veteran member of Singhbhum District Committee of the SUCI and a distinguished mass leader of Singhbhum breathed his last after a long suffering at the age of 73. During his last journey at the Party office at Narsingharh, Comrade Ranjit Modak on behalf of the Jharkhand State Committee and Comrade Rudra Das, on behalf of the District Committee, paid their tributes to him by garlanding his mortal remains. Tributes were also paid on behalf of AIKKMS, UTUC-LS, AIDS, other political parties like CPI, Congress, Janata Dal(U) and different clubs, drama associations, libraries and social welfare organizations.



During 1952, Comrade Durga Das played a leading role under the AITUC while he was in service at Sambalpur in Orissa, in organizing the workers with their demands and as a result he was sacked from his service. After returning from Sambalpur to his own village Narsingharh, he came in contact with the thoughts of the great Marxist-Leninist thinker of the era Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. Being imbued with the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, he devoted himself as a worker of the party to build up organization in his locality. He recruited his brothers, sisters and daughters into the party who, not only in Jharkhand but also in other states are working as responsible organizers.

From the very early stage of his party life, he started organizing one after another mass movements of the poor tribal people. Under his leadership, Dhalbhum Gravel Khadan Union was organized in 1954. Afterwards when the then Bihar government was handing over the forests to the private businessmen depriving the tribal people of the forest wealth, Comrade Durga Das with his compatriot Comrade Amal Krishna Banerjee successfully organized those people and compelled the government to distribute the vested and fallowlands among the landless peasants.

Through these struggles, Comrade Durga Das could inspire the downtrodden people so long accustomed to feudal exploitation, customs and obscurantism to live anew with self-respect and earned tremendous popularity. He organized various cultural-educational organizations, clubs, libraries, etc. in Dhalbhumgarh area.

Comrade Das played a leading role in quelling Hindu-Muslim riots in Dhalbhumgarh areas in 1964, in the historic food movement in Dhalbhumgarh area, in the historic movement led by Jayprakash Narayan in 1974 and the copper mine workers' movement at Musabani. He was imprisoned many a time.

Thus through such untiring and hard struggle and by dint of limitless love for the people he was accepted by all as a distinguished mass leader of a vast region. Even during his long illness, he kept himself abreast of party activities and encouraged the workers and organizers always. At his demise the party lost an efficient organizer and a soul dedicated to the cause of revolution.

that Joshiji and his lot did never intend to search for historical truth with a proper scientific method; they simply had the design of twisting and distorting established historical facts to their choice as also of framing facts to dish them out to students as correct representation of history. However they may try, they cannot wipe out this shameful history of their efforts to distort the history itself, be they in power or not.

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