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Latest Assembly polls in five states

EC's latest fiats are tantamount to ridding election of democratic content

Elections in India today have almost been reduced to a mockery. It has been the experience of the people that it is money-muscle-media power that controls the polls. Violence, killings, forced stamping, booth capturing, threat and intimidation mark the poll day scenario. The contending parties do not base their campaign on people-related issues but seek vote on casteist-communal lines, dangling carrots of benefits or holding out surfeit of counterfeit promises. Hardly people's choice, urges and aspirations are reflected in the results. Gradually, the whole

electoral process is turning out to be pro-rich and out and out anti-poor as parties having enough financial resources and clout in the corridors of power are getting all facility and visibility while the parties and forces representing the poor and have-nots are gradually eliminated from the scene.

Elections made exclusive domain of the rich

After independence, there was, in limited bourgeois sense, some scope for the representatives of the middle and lower middle class, the parties representing the poorer strata

of the people to participate in the polls and get elected based on people's support. But this scenario prevailed only for a brief period. With the accentuation of the endemic crisis of world imperialism-capitalism, subversion of democratic rights and principles was palpable in independent capitalist India. The ruling Indian bourgeoisie started baring all its tooth and claw with no less cruelty than what the people experienced with the alien rulers during colonial domination. In the arena of elections also, certain calculated measures were taken to keep it out of bounds of the common people and the genuine representatives of the downtrodden and poor.

To start with, Election Commission (EC), an organ of the

coercive exploitative capitalist state, without any consultation with the political parties, steeply raised the deposit money for candidature from Rs.500/- (in general seats) and Rs.250/- (in SC/ST constituencies) to Rs.5000/- and Rs.2, 500/- respectively for assembly polls. For a parliamentary seat, it was made as high as Rs 10,000. Similarly, the price of voters' list was increased exorbitantly so that candidates put up by the forces representing the poor lack affordability of procuring adequate number of copies. Stringent, if not arbitrary and impervious, rules were invoked in granting registration to political parties. The whole orientation was to deny registration to the parties upholding people's cause and genuinely opposing the glaring anti-

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UTUC-Lenin Sarani takes part in ILO Convention at Geneva

Comrade Shankar Saha, General Secretary, places his views

On June, 16, 2006, trade union representatives from 178 countries assembled at Geneva, Austria, to take part in the plenary meet of International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt Report of Committees based on ratified conventions. Comrade Shankar Saha, General Secretary, UTUC-LS represented the organization in the said meet. He was honoured with the membership of the Plenary Committee on Application of International Labour Standards which discussed, among other things, points of international importance in trade union movement as well as labour inspection and implementation of standard in 25 individual countries.

Participating in the deliberations, Comrade Saha stressed that no country can claim to have not experienced abuse of labour in the given context of appalling poverty and hunger, mounting unemployment, joblessness, dismantling of social security system, privatization of government organizations and such other onslaughts of crisis-ridden moribund world imperialism-capitalism. International labour standard can be ensured only if through a radical transformation, the motive force of production is changed from earning maximum profit to maximum satisfaction of the need of the people. Particularly

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SUCI strongly denounces Congress-led government's anti-people decision to disinvest profitable PSU shares

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in a statement issued on 23 June, 2006 strongly denounced the most reprehensible decision of the Congress-led Government at the Centre to disinvest 10% of its equity holding in National Aluminium Company (NALCO) and Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC), two profit-making Public Sector Units (PSUs). This step, emphatically stated Comrade Mukherjee, is purported to pave the way for eventual privatization of the public sector industries built with hard-earned money of the common people simply to satisfy the greed of the monopolists, both domestic and foreign, entailing further accentuation of severe unemployment and ruthless exploitation of working people.

Comrade Mukherjee, therefore, exhorted the countrymen to come forward and resist this latest offensive of the ruling capitalist class and its subservient government. Comrade Mukherjee also called upon the CPI(M), CPI and its allies to either force the government to rescind the move or come out of the government alliance and join people's movement.

People's right to information is subverted

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people policies of the ruling capitalism and its servitors. Instead, it was made an exclusive domain of the forces and outfits showing allegiance to the ruling class. Parties born yesterday even by way of split in any of the existing outfits were being granted registration even recognition instantaneously so that they, while contesting elections, were entitled to all benefits including allocation of permanent symbol, propaganda slot in the media, etc., and thus were in visibly advantageous position compared to the parties representing the poor, most of whom were de-recognized, de-registered and their candidates categorized 'independents' to be deprived of preferred symbol allotment in advance and such other facilities. Thus, it had been a calculated ploy to eliminate the genuine representatives of the toiling people from the parliamentary forum by, in effect, debarring them from contesting elections. Clearly, the fascist cloud loomed large on the horizon. On the other hand, the very conduction of the election was found to be far from any rudiment of democracy. All kinds of manipulations and malpractices were galore.

It went to such an extent that the confidence of the people in the very election process reached the bottom. The ruling class took note of it. In its own class-interest, it did not want the people to be disillusioned about the bourgeois parliamentary system, to come to know its limitations and erosion, to unravel its class-character and ineffectiveness in mitigating the burning problems of life. Hence it was essential to pretend that the government was keen to remove the flaws and aberrations inhibiting free and fair elections and would act with due firmness. Accordingly, the EC was pressed into action and conferred unbridled power to, what was called, "handle the defects and deviations with due strictness."

Dictatorial fiats of EC

And the EC got a favourable launching pad with the assembly polls in Bihar and West Bengal falling due. Each and every citizen in these states could make out that during 15 year regime of Lalu's RJD and 30 year long rule of the CPI (M), elections were completely rigged and manipulated. So there

was a simmering discontent over the issue among the people of these states. The EC seized this opportunity and posed as if it were determined to remedy the situation. Bihar was first to go to the polls. People here were fed up with the mafia-raj and abysmal deterioration in law and order. Most of the bourgeois politicians and legislators in the state were known to be either patron of large-scale goondaism or goons and dons themselves. But with Lalu in power, much of the wrath and ire was directed against the misdeeds and brigandage of his and his party men. The class also thought that perhaps a regime change preceded by certain stern postures by EC would help diffusing the situation and simultaneously establish EC's credibility. So the EC began by saying that it would not allow musclemen and armed hooligans to take over on the poll day and would ensure preservation of rule of law. It also undertook certain cosmetic steps to brighten its image before the people. Lalu lost the polls to pave way for JD (U)-NDA combine, another chosen bourgeois outfit pursuing same rotten bourgeois politics and policies and abetting mafiadom. Through a crafty maneuver a change in the ruling dispensation was brought about and this was projected as a 'triumph of democracy' and 'laudable achievement of EC'. Thus the so-called "anti-incumbency" factor was exploited to the hilt to foist another bourgeois alliance in power to keep the grinding wheel of ruthless capitalist exploitation propelling as before. But the dividend derived was establishment of a "supra-class, supra-state, neutral" image of the EC.

Emboldened by the success in Bihar, the EC swung into action in the four other states of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala as well as Union Territory of Pondichery scheduled next to go to the poll. It arrogated to itself a position of unlimited power and authority to impose any such measure as it deemed fit, arbitrarily and unilaterally, under the pretext of making the election "free and fair". It had been to such an extent that there was no administrative or legal route available to restrain the EC in adopting any step, howsoever draconian or anti-people, anti-democratic it might be. In fact, it did

announce certain decrees which had dangerous import in the context of preserving the hard-earned democratic rights of the people. This is what we are deeply concerned with. Let us discuss some of such new orders the EC issued claiming that it would facilitate free and fair exercise of franchise.

Blanket ban on time-tested means of propaganda

The most dangerous and fascist attack has been on the time-tested modes of undertaking campaign and disseminating political viewpoints when EC, despotically and unilaterally, clamped a ban on wall writing, display of banners and even sticking a poster or issuing a leaflet. In West Bengal, the imposition of the ban was total since the CPI (M)-led West Bengal government in last 29 years did not revoke a black Act captioned "West Bengal Prevention of Defacement of Public Properties Act of 1976" promulgated with the same objective during the black emergency period under Congress rule. It was only our party which vehemently opposed the act and called upon the people to stall its implementation. Under public pressure, the then Congress government could not make it effective. But now under EC's directive, the West Bengal government as obedient servant made the draconian proclamation operative. The CPI (M) made some customary gestures of resentment for public consumption but tacitly allowed the things to go EC's way. This Act also stipulated ban on processions and use of microphones during most part of the electioneering. Use of vehicles except under an emergency situation was also sought to be restricted. So the EC had no problem in practically bulldozing all forms of campaigning by invoking the black act.

This order has serious ramifications as it infringes upon the very basic democratic right to information. It may be recalled that the exponents of bourgeois parliamentary democracy had held that on the eve of the elections, the people ought to be communicated in details the political viewpoints of the various political parties and forces, the background of the candidates and all such other relevant facts so that they could take

an informed decision. Hence was impressed upon the necessity of political meetings, speeches, debates and discussions so that the people could judge for themselves the right or wrong, dos and don'ts and accordingly cast their votes. Even inside the parliament, emphasis was on meaningful political debates and discourses at length. But that was the time when the bourgeoisie was a rising force. Now when capitalism is in a moribund stage, haunted by the fear complex of anti-capitalist revolution, the bourgeoisie could no more afford to encourage free debate, unfettered expression of various opinions and thoughts as it fears that would unravel the truth — the truth of capitalism being the root of all evils, distress, plight, and misery. To stall this fear of exposure, the ruling bourgeoisie is working its stratagem to curtail freedom of expression, reduce scope and standard of debate both inside and outside legislatures as well as in public life, pander to all kinds of convoluted and muddled thinking to retrograde the mental process. While curb is imposed on all available forms of democratic movement and propaganda, there are all endeavours to reduce the sessions of the parliament, squeeze time and dilute standard of debates and even scuttle and throttle raising genuine people's issues inside the house. The EC's decree to ban all kinds of election propaganda is to be understood in the context of this class design of the ruling bourgeoisie. On one hand, there is unlimited high handedness and ruthlessness in crushing democratic mass movements, trade union movements and all forms of extra-parliamentary legitimate class and mass struggles while on the other, even fetters are put on releasing an effective struggle inside the parliamentary forum.

Fallacious logic of disfigurement

Next is the question of impairing visual beauty. EC's alibi has been that graffiti, posters and banners cause visual pollution; disfigure the walls and vacant structures, spoil the beauty of the surroundings and cast unusual influence on the voters. On the other hand, meetings, speeches, processions, slogans create sound nuisance. In a couple of articles in

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Measures to hit the poor, benefit the rich

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the earlier issues of Proletarian Era, we had shown how fallacious the logic has been.

Display of banners and posters as well as wall-writing as forms of expressing ideas and opinions, solicitation of support during the election came to be recognized in the course of people's struggle for establishing truth, reflecting objective reality, freeing life and livelihood from all kinds of distortions and aberrations and advancing the course of social progress. So these were always considered to be pieces of beauty, marvel of creative art, vehicle of intellectual communication, transportation of social and political thoughts. They were relished as cynosure, beauty in the eye of the beholder. Notably, the same EC discarding these forms as sore in the eye did not find anything objectionable when obscene hoarding, vulgar film posters, obnoxious government advertisements in the name of AIDS prevention flock cities and towns, even rural areas. But they were uncomfortable with posters and graffiti giving vent to the genuine feelings and aspirations of the toiling people bleeding white under ruthless capitalist exploitation, or when these downtrodden exploited millions in exercise of their right to information, seek to obtain political viewpoints, policies and principles, names and symbols of the various candidates contesting in the election. Let it be reiterated that beauty lies in truth not in subverting or vulgarizing truth.

As a result of this, the elections this time were a dull and vapid affair as if being conducted in a desert with the people in complete oblivion of the things happening. It was almost a stage managed affair with bourgeois media assuming the role of conscience keeper of the masses. This ban will not remain confined to elections only but will gradually extend to all kinds of political propaganda throughout the year. The obvious target is democratic movement and democratic rights of the people.

So called voting list revision

The EC blared out that it was determined to make the voters' list free from all fake names. In carrying out this measure, it enacted a drama

indeed! Everyone knows that as the first step of rigging the polls, all the big bourgeois parties, both ruling as well as opposition make every effort in connivance with the bureaucracy and administration to delete the names of genuine voters they think would vote against them and simultaneously strive for inserting false names to increase the tally in their favour. To exhibit how serious they were in detecting false votes, the EC observers guided and accompanied by government officials paid some random visits to a few pockets particularly in West Bengal. The whole bourgeois media threw its gauntlet behind such investigative postures of the EC officials so that it receives a huge publicity and the people could be made to believe that some drastic steps were in the offing to set right the master roll. But while the EC was claiming deletion of 2.5 million false votes in West Bengal, equal number of new additions made way to the list. So there was in effect no change in the character of the list based on which the election was finally conducted and the CPI(M) and its associates, allegedly responsible for manipulating the voters' list came back to power with increased majority. It was a foregone conclusion. Everyone knows that EC has no machinery of its own to either prepare or revise the voters' list. The government employees and officials under the supervision of the state government carry out the entire work. Could such employees and officials working under the state government be more loyal to the EC (even if it is assumed that intention of the EC is fair) than the government they are working under? So what was then the sanctity of such electoral roll revisions? Even if for argument's sake it is assumed that EC was serious in the matter, it should have postponed the elections, completely overhauled the list over a sufficient period of time with separate machinery and then ordered the polls.

Decree of procuring identity documents

Like voter's list revision, another stunt was introduction of EPIC (Electronic Photo Identity Card) to all voters so as to prevent false voting. Though lot of fanfare was made over the issue, the fact is

that ultimately EC could not make it successful across the board. In West Bengal and Bihar, issue of such cards was partial while in Assam, EC could not implement it in the face of stiff opposition from parochial-chauvinistic forces like AGP and AASU. Instead it mandated production of such documents as proofs of identity which were either not available with the poor citizens or impossible for being procured by them as it involved severe harassment and bribing. Only the rich and affluent could lay hand to such documents. Ultimately under pressure from the people, EC had to be a little flexible in the matter. Otherwise, just because of the whims of some EC bureaucrats, almost 60% of genuine voters would have been disfranchised.

It may be added that earlier also EC with T. N. Seshan at the helm floated such idea of voter identity card that later proved to be a big fiasco. In West Bengal, such identity cards could hardly prevent scientific rigging. Rather, the ruling party and its associates made use of this provision to get multiple identity cards issued to a single person either in the same constituency or in different constituencies under fictitious identity to strengthen their false voting machinery. Incidentally, there was no provision for such identity cards in the elections held immediately after independence. But no one would disagree that elections then were much more fair and free. On the other hand, introduction of such identity cards could hardly resist false voting or safe passage of anti-people forces and dubious characters to the legislatures through rigging.

EC lenient with extravaganza, strict with spendthrift

Likewise, EC's discriminatory attitude was manifest in another area. Everyone knows that electioneering in our country today is hardly a political battle but a billion rupee extravaganza. As in some imperialist countries like the US, it is guided by the rules and methods of capitalist market economy. Election has almost assumed the character of a profiteering industry, a sought after place of investment. Parties or candidates funded by the capitalists invest money to win the elections so

as to spin money afterwards at the cost of the people's cause. There is no check on it. That is why a bonfire of spending in the electioneering has become a rule of the day to purchase votes. Elections in the wake of independence had also witnessed use of money to influence the voters. But that was nothing compared to the domination of money in the polls today. The latest round of assembly elections has been no exception to but a reconfirmation of that. The EC itself has fixed ceilings of expenditure—Rs.2.5 million for a parliament seat and Rs 1 million for an assembly constituency. However, in reality, it is not millions but almost billion of rupees that is spent in each seat. The monopoly houses provide this financing to get their chosen parties or candidates returned. A party like ours which fight the elections collecting money bit by bit from the masses of the public through street collections cannot reach even to the fringe of such gigantic spending. Hence we trail behind in the campaign, often fail to reach out to all voters and lose out to others. What is to be noted is that EC remains a passive, if not indulgent, onlooker to all this extravagant spending by the parties of capitalist class, irrespective of hue. On the other hand, its all surveillance is on the parties like us. While the Congress, BJP, CPI(M), AGP or DMK, AIADMK went scot free with highly expensive campaign material of different forms, EC on finding the cost of our poll campaign so low accused us of suppressing facts. While being extremely lenient with the big parties of the establishment, the EC directed smaller parties like ours to rigorously maintain and submit every minute details of poll expenditure regularly on time. Seemingly it was an harassment for us and kept our workers unnecessarily engaged in otherwise avoidable compliance with procedural formalities. This is just an instance to show for whom the election is free and fair and whose interest the EC is custodian of.

Debarring educationists from taking part in elections

There was another ominous and formidable edict from the desk of the EC. It is well-known that the

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Attempt to withdraw existing pension scheme

A sinister design

The Congress-led UPA government at the Centre has decided to withdraw the conventional pension scheme for the central government employees. A Bill to that effect is slated for discussion in the parliament in the coming monsoon session. As the new formulation seeks to relieve the government of one of its foremost duties of providing minimal economic security to the employees on attaining super-annuation and instead place a contributory accumulation during their service period to certain market players for investment in stock market albeit in the name of offering better return, it merits serious discussion. Right at this moment, the new provision is sought to be applicable to those having joined central government service on or after January, 1, 2004. But once it is on the roll, almost all the state governments are sure to cover their employees as well under similar schemes. In fact some of the state governments have already taken initiative to this effect and it is rightly apprehended by the thinking quarters that the government has up the sleeves plans to extend jurisdiction of the newly framed policy to the cases of all existing central government employees as well.

Background

On the basis of the report of Bhattacharjee Committee on social security of the retired government employees, the previous BJP-led NDA government issued an order titled 'Pension Scheme for Central Government Employees joining on and after January 1, 2004'. In December, 2004, the newly elected UPA government promulgated an ordinance to give effect to the above-mentioned scheme for central government employees. Although the NDA government tabled the scheme, the successor UPA government took up the responsibility of full-fledged implementation of the same. With that objective, it replaced the ordinance by a Bill introduced in the Parliament on March 21, 2005.

The scheme of things

As of now, the central government employees are entitled to superannuation pension without any contribution on their part; the

sole responsibility of paying pension after retirement lies with the central government. The current provision stemmed from the concept of welfare state. Since the employees as government servants render service towards welfare of the society, it is obligatory on the part of the society to acknowledge the same by way of securing their post-retirement life through a reasonable stream of monthly cash flow out of a fund to be constituted with contributions from government exchequer, over and above their salary amount. According to the new pension scheme, employees joining service on or after January 1, 2004, will be required to compulsorily contribute 10% of their basic pay plus dearness allowance every month to the pension fund and the government will also contribute equal sum. The whole amount will be deposited in a 'Non-withdrawable Pension Tier-I Account'. The employees covered by the new scheme of a kind of 'personal pension' will not be entitled to the facility of existing recognized pension scheme and General Provident Fund (GPF). However, they will have an option to voluntarily join a 'Withdrawable Tier-II Account' from which they will be allowed to withdraw either in full or in part their accumulated contribution plus return at any point of time. The government will not contribute to this Tier-II Account which, incidentally, unlike GPF or existing pension scheme, will not be liable for any tax exemption. Any retired employee will be able to exit from Tier-I Account but he must have to deposit at least 40% of his accumulated balance in an Annuity Fund functioning under the supervision of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). Disbursal of pension to the retired employees or their heirs will be from this annuity fund. In case an exist from Tier-I Account is sought before attaining the age of 60 years, 80% of the accumulated balance has to be deposited with the Annuity Fund.

Though the new personal pension scheme is being implemented for the central government employees and in all probability would later be extended to state government and other

organized sector employees, there is no direction as to what would be applicability to the private sector or non-government employees. While involvement of the government in the form of any contribution is ruled out, it has not been spelt out whether the private employers will be under any obligation to make any contribution to such fund or not.

According to the provision of the Bill an independent statutory body named 'Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority (PFRDA) will regulate the whole pension fund market like the way SEBI does in case of capital market. But the most vital point is that the pension funds will no more be managed by government but by private and semi-government financial institutions or companies. These market players as Fund Managers will be endowed with the job of investing the accumulation in Tier I and II accounts in high risk bearing capital and money market instruments. Clearly, the market risk (that is, the chances of gain/loss by way of investment in speculative capital and money markets) will have to be per force borne by the retired employees or their families. Once this new scheme is fully operational, a huge chunk of money compulsorily realized from the employees in the whole organized sector will enter speculative markets in phases. With such massive inflow of public fund in pure speculation, the market players and punters will have heydays as the scope of minting money through market gambling will be widened. In fact the domestic operators as well as Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are also eagerly waiting for the opportunity. Thus in keeping with the rabid pursuance of the capitalist globalization-liberalization policy, the government through this Bill has simply kicked off a process of bringing at the disposal of market operators and under the dragnet of speculation a sizeable public fund and it will go snowballing.

Pushing the employees to abyss of uncertainty

From the discussion above, it is quite clear that by abolishing the convention of superannuation pension, the government is trying to shirk off its responsibility of paying

the employees pension at a predetermined rate along with suitable adjustments for dearness allowance (DA). In the new proposition, there will be no guaranteed income to the employees who, having been exposed to the market risk would receive fluctuating, even 'nil' income, as per the returns generated by the Fund Managers owing no obligation whatsoever to the contributors. How safe is investing money in stock market and money market, particularly by small investors is evident from the last UTI scam and frequent share scams in India. Who can guarantee that the Fund Managers will not play sixes and sevens with the personal pension fund money which actually belongs to the retired employees? Secondly, the employees will also be deprived of the facility of General Provident Fund (GPF). In that case, future of the retired employee and his family will be totally insecure. Thus the new scheme is glaringly subversive of the concept of social welfare and instead a mechanism to pull out of the pockets of employees their hard earned money for fuelling speculation

Menace of capitalist globalization

Throughout the imperialist-capitalist world, the workers and employees are thus back-broken by incessant economic assaults. A total insecurity and uncertainty is gripping them, day in and day out. Enmeshed in intense third general crisis endemic of the system, the moribund world imperialism-capitalism, in order to sustain earning of maximum profit is systematically shifting the brunt on the common people. Mounting unemployment, loss of existing jobs, depleting income, soaring price line, worst fiscal savagery are wreaking havoc in the life of the common people. The gap between the few rich and myriads of poor and destitute is increasingly widening. Particularly after introduction of capitalist globalization-liberalization-privatization policy as a last ditch attempt of the crisis-stricken world imperialism-capitalism to somehow manage the situation, the plight and penury of the working people has accentuated beyond limit.

So long as there was the Soviet Union and the world socialist camp acting as the bulwark of working class interest, there was some check on the imperialist-capitalist

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New Pension Scheme in the interest of market manipulators and speculators

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brigandage. The workers and toiling people in different countries led militant trade union and mass movements against capitalist - imperialist onslaughts. But with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and collapse of the world socialist camp, a deep frustration gripped the working class movement. Opportunism and social democratic compromise and capitulation weakened the working class struggle from within. Taking advantage of the situation world capitalism-imperialism headed by the US imperialism through their globalization programme, intensified oppression and suppression in various spheres and in various forms. The capitalist governments, in connivance with the imperialists and at the service of their own ruling capitalist class, are handing over public sector industries and government departments to the private industrialists, opening wide the door of economy to the native and foreign monopolists and MNCs for their using the same as their free hunting ground to ruthlessly exploit and mint profit. In the interest of the private capital, the governments are withdrawing their responsibilities from public welfare sectors like health, education, electricity, transport, etc. and rapidly commercializing those sectors and services to maximize their rate of profit. The capitalist owners and bourgeois governments with alacrity are resorting to trimming of workforce by retrenching, restructuring, enforcing voluntary retirement, ordering premature termination of service, giving perennial job on contract, outsourcing various operations etc. At the same time, hard-won rights and privileges of the working class are being increasingly snatched away. All welfare measures once adopted as per the charter of capitalist welfare state are being withdrawn or abandoned. Curtailment of the social security provisions has been a part of this all-out attack on the working people.

On the other hand, with the capitalist market crisis, in the words of Com. Shibdas Ghosh, the great leader of the proletariat, becoming a daily and hourly affair, the multinationals (MNCs) and

monopolists of both developed and advanced developing countries have been frantically searching for avenues to invest the massive capital at their disposal for reaping further profit. But due to ever-growing shrinkage of market it is finding few scope or areas of its investment in industries or productive sector. So there is a pressing need on the part of the world imperialism-capitalism to bring depth and expanse in the speculative capital market to pump in this capital for harvesting gain through churning. And to infuse more money in the system, there is an eye on the public fund. In the traditional imperialist countries, such grab on pension and other superannuation funds had started much earlier. In the mid-eighties of the last century, bogged in widespread recession in economy, the ruling bourgeoisie and controllers of the national economies in Europe gradually got hold of the idea of handing over pension fund and provident fund to the private sector in place of recognized pension with government responsibility and under government control on the plea of relieving the government exchequer of a substantial financial liability and allowing the employees to multiply earning by participation in the prospects of a growing capital market. Crisis-ridden capitalism had thus no qualm in drifting away from the obligations and duties of the state, even in bourgeois sense, and pass on the brunt on the common people. In fact, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) are now taking lead in guiding and controlling the functioning of the capital markets worldwide and forcing every country to liberalize and amplify their respective capital market operation. During the last five-six years, the IMF and World Bank have been very more aggressive in putting enormous pressure on the governments for privatizing pension and provident fund. And the capitalist governments of Europe and Japan are trying to foist pension reform upon the workers and employees by enacting new laws in the Parliament. Movements of speculative secondary market indices like Dow-Jones in US or BSE Sensex in India, as is known to

everybody, are now projected as measures of economic growth or slide of a country so as to impress upon the people the so-called importance of speculative activities. In case of our country, the IMF, in September, 2001, prepared a document titled 'Programme of IMF on Pension Reform in India' wherein it forcefully pitched for constituting pension fund with employees' contribution and tried to prove how it would be much beneficial to the 'country's economy'. If one refers to the financial survey published by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India during annual budget presentation in 2005, one would find striking similarity even in language between the IMF proposals and the Indian government's views on the issue. As already stated earlier, Indian financial institutions and the FIIs have been hyperactive in pursuing the government to expedite the matter. Thus it is this lobby of Indian financial institutions and FIIs in whose interests the government in line with its policy of liberalization-privatization-globalization and at the advice of IMF-World Bank, has taken the policy decision of handing over the lucrative pension sector to the private operators and speculators.

Queer logic

It is interesting to note that the government while justifying the new scheme is claiming that this scheme will relieve the cash-strapped government from shouldering a formidable financial burden. If that be the case, why then in spite of the fact that it will have to contribute a sum equivalent to 10% of basic and D.A. of the employee the government is trying to bring this new scheme at all? We know the government will fumble over this question because the reason is not shortage in the exchequer but to shell out more funds to stimulate speculation. Up till now, both employers' and employees' contributions to PF are invested in secured fixed interest-bearing government securities. While the deposit is, as per stipulations, meant for undertaking developmental work through different government departments and state-owned industries, the accumulation is ploughed back to

meet commitments of superannuation benefits. But now it will be deployed in capital and money market instruments with no guaranteed rate of return. Intention is further clear when one finds government permitting FIIs to take exposure upto 10% of the fund capital. So the aim is to benefit market operators, both native and foreign, in keeping with the prescriptions of capitalist globalization and at the instance of IMF and World Bank. It has nothing to do with the interest of workers and employees and the people at large. On the contrary, it is a grievous attack on them

This fierce attack has to be resisted

But the working people have risen in protest everywhere. The workers of Japan led massive protest rallies. The Civil service workers' strike paralyzed Britain and several strikes against this onslaught rocked France since 2002. In 2002 and 2003 the whole of France came to a halt as a result of nation-wide strike of workers and employees including toiling people of unorganized sector as well against privatization of pension and curtailment of other social security benefits there. In our country also, because of opposition from the central trade unions, the implementation had been delayed. The rightist trade unions and parties avowedly adhering to the new economic policy of liberalization-privatization-globalization were not expected to come forward seriously to launch any movement against this move of the government. But, of late, the opportunist and dubious role of the big trade unions and federations of employees unions guided by the CPI(M), CPI has been posing serious hurdle before development of any effective mighty movement against such fierce capitalist onslaughts. While to keep up its left image for electoral gains, the CPI(M), in Delhi and the states it is not in power, is pretending to be sore with the central government's economic and other anti-people policies, in the states ruled by them, it is most diligently and nakedly implementing the same policies. For example, in West Bengal, almost each and every directive of capitalist

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Ploy to banish revolutionary force from election

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intelligentsia including educationists, teachers and professors have always played a conscious role in persuading and moulding public opinion in favour of progressive socio-political movement in every country. In our country also, throughout the period of freedom movement and till the other day after independence, this enlightened section of the masses took initiative in mustering popular opinion against imperialist-capitalist misrule, organizing people's movement in protest against the assaults and onslaughts of the ruling class. In course of discharging this social obligation, many of them took part in the elections as either candidates or active campaigners. The EC, all on a sudden, discovered that this section of the intelligentsia was deemed to be government employees and hence either their contesting or campaigning in the election or even ventilating their views and opinions in the public, are forbidden. In Assam, the teachers and professors were thus debarred from participating in such activities in the election. At one stroke, an inalienable right of a section of the citizens in a country claiming to be democratic was snatched away. So if the intelligentsia is prevented from contesting elections by such

arbitrary fascistic decrees and the poor people are left out of the arena by way of other similar impositions including exorbitant increase in poll expenditure, who else other than ruffians, criminals, smugglers and big industrialists, businessmen are left in the fray? Does the EC mean to say that only these segments of the populace have the competence and eligibility to frame rules for the country and enjoy seats of power?

The orgy of military deployment

In Assam election, one more dictate of the EC visibly scared genuine voters to exercise franchise. In the name of containing insurgency, terrorism and extremism, EC had requisitioned a huge contingent of military and Para-military forces and deployed them massively particularly in the areas having no background of any such extremist or terrorist activities. It may be added that deployment of army personnel or even armed police in democratic exercises like elections has always been seen as a disruption in free and fearless participation of the people. It has always been a demand of the democratic movement to abandon such steps on the part of the power that be. But in scant regard to the

popular democratic opinion, EC stuck to its guns and elections were held amidst flag march of army and allied forces. Curiously enough, no such patrolling or flag march of the rifle-wielding armed constabularies or defence personnel is seen when there is dire necessity of combating any communal or parochial conflagration or insurgent attacks. At that time, people at large are left in the lurch. Frightened and panic-stricken, many people stayed indoors on the poll day and did not venture out for voting. Obviously it helped the parties or combinations backed by the ruling class who stood discredited and were sure to be routed in the event of participation of the bonafide electorates. Thus such excessive mobilization of troops was clearly not to protect the people from any unforeseen attack but to create a fear-psychosis among the people and scare them away from voting.

Only the revolutionary forces are sufferers

Thus it will be increasingly clear that the EC's directives were not affecting the parties subserving the bourgeois class interest, receiving patronage from big monopoly houses and moneybags and backing from the bourgeois media and

thriving on the money and muscle power. By pumping into huge money provided by the capitalist class through various means, these parties of the establishment could get away with all violations, never felt handicapped in any matter, smoothly carried out campaign by hiring private TV channels, inserting costly advertisements in print media, distributing millions of apparels and dresses with their political message, election symbol, candidate's name embossed on them. Even they could display on autos, buses and rickshaws multi-coloured show-boards using expensive material since there was no ban on such costly publicity. Moreover, the bourgeois media, keen to keep the electoral battle confined within the chosen representatives of the ruling class, gave over flowing publicity to the parties or combinations propped up and blessed by the class. Full page interviews of the leaders of these parties, detailed coverage of their elections meetings and speeches, complete bio-data of their candidates were galore in both print and electronic media during the pre-election period. There was no meaningful thought-provoking, illumining debate nor was any ventilation of truth and reality. On

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UTUC-Lenin Sarani takes part in ILO Convention at Geneva

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when in terms of the prescription of capitalist globalization there is a spree of outsourcing of jobs, national laws have to be amended to protect every individual worker in every establishment. He also added that unless there is some rein on escalating unemployment there can be no check on a heinous practice of engaging child labour.

Comrade Saha also drew attention to the fact that rise in deregulation and privatization, new forms of sub-contracting and outsourcing and gender discrimination has increased the importance of labour inspection. Most of the governments and employers are pressing for more and more 'flexible' labour legislation so as to deny the workers, the creators of wealth and pillars of civilization, the minimal state protection. Even they are not being paid wages regularly. It has, therefore, become

imperative to strictly enforce labour inspection system, extend its jurisdiction to health and safety,



Comrade Shankar Saha at Geneva

working conditions, wages, social security and implementation of collective agreements. Violation of law should entail stringent penal action.

Referring to the series of

systematic discriminatory practices against women both in access to employment and treatment being received during employment in Special Economic Zones (SEZ-s), he expressed such ill-treatment like denial of leave and other maternity entitlements, compulsion of working in hazardous and difficult conditions, etc. would continue to occur unless specific labour legislations recognizing honour and dignity of women were promulgated and strictly adhered to. He also added that annually 50,000 women and children trafficked mostly from South-East Asian countries, are engaged in illicit trade in the USA. It is also reported that around 8,00,000 children in USA are employed in agriculture in pitiable working condition and air polluted with pesticides. Working hours often extend beyond 12-hours. Thus, they are exposed to extreme health hazard entailing curtailed life

span. In absence of any political will on the part of the government, there is no abatement of employment of cheap child labour and punishment to women and children traffickers, willful violation of labour laws and other norms. This is the civilized sense the US rulers demonstrate in their own country. He demanded that the USA must supply all information on the status of its compliance with the prescriptions of the convention on the issue of child labour.

The points raised by Comrade Shankar Saha and the fact-based impeccable arguments put forth by him in support of his contention were highly appreciated by the participating members. In this way, UTUC-LS in discharge of its international obligation to the working class of the world, has been playing a significant role in focusing on the most pertinent and burning issues on the platform of ILO.

Force EC to withdraw the measures

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the contrary, the most reprehensible flaunting of casteist, communal and such other divisive doctrines made headlines. False promises, blatant lies, deceptions, suppressions, concoctions received prominence.

In every respect, as could be seen from the above discussion, the worst sufferers have been the common people, the poor and destitute and the genuine revolutionary forces. Running on public charity, a revolutionary party like ours could not match the éclat and grandeur of bourgeois electioneering. On the other hand, it was a complete blackout for us in the bourgeois media proclaiming to be democratic and neutral. Even there was wide discrimination on the issue of symbol allotment. While the big bourgeois parties and the pseudo-Marxists enjoyed the advantage of a permanent symbol or a symbol of their choice for all the constituencies they contested, our party as well as some other smaller outfits were allotted symbols, often different for different constituencies and that too at the penultimate hour leaving hardly any time for the electorates to be aware of the same. Thus we fell far behind others in information dissemination.

EC has boasted that it had succeeded in curbing creation of any bias in favour of any candidate before the elections. What could be a bigger joke than this! How could then it allow publication of pre-poll surveys as well as post-poll reviews in the media indicating who would win and who would lose and that too by what margin. In the name of holding free and fair elections, EC had a staggering schedule of polling spread over weeks. In that event, what was the propriety of the media and the so-called market research

agencies to declare, after each phases the probable results as found by them? Were not these having a direct bearing on the succeeding phases of polling? We know the EC officials would observe the code of conspicuous silence over the issue because they, as part and parcel of the capitalist state machine, know that all the so-called hullabaloo about cleansing the electoral process were cover-ups to restrict the choice among two principal contestant groups of the bourgeoisie in keeping with the policy of 2-Party Democracy so that genuine revolutionary forces and spokespersons of the toiling millions do not even for a moment figure in the imagination of the electorates.

Foil move to stage-manage election

This is the real import of the autocratic and dictatorial fiats of the EC to be understood in the given context of our country. No one other than the real revolutionary force upholding the genuine cause of the people will bring it to the notice of the countrymen. With the passage of time, there has been a systematic attempt on the part of the ruling Indian bourgeoisie, the capitalist state under its command and the governments run by the parties wedded to the task of serving its vested class interest, to rid the election process of its democratic content. Instead, it is designed in such a way that notwithstanding an outward façade, it only protects the class-need of the moribund, decadent bourgeoisie, enmeshed in insoluble market crisis and increasingly becoming more despotic, autocratic and fascistic to stretch its exploitative class rule. Throughout the world, the ruling bourgeoisie is now on a spree to rob and curb all the hard-earned

democratic rights of the people, flout and trample all democratic norms, values and practices so as to stifle the voice of dissent and frustrate any possibility of growth and development any organized united people's movement threatening its class-rule. The ruling Indian bourgeoisie, as an inseparable part of the crisis-ridden, gasping, utterly corrupt and ruthlessly oppressive world imperialism-capitalism, is no exception in buttressing the heinous agenda with alacrity and hence each and every walk of life is under attack, overtly or covertly. So the sword has descended upon the people's right to vote, freely and fairly, as per their conscience, for electing representatives to the legislatures and other democratic bodies as was envisaged in the charter of bourgeois democracy during the days of its advent. The focus is now on manipulating and doctoring the verdict through various dubious means in favour of

the parties or candidates the ruling class deems fit in carrying out its dictates and orders.

If these measures are not rolled back, elections in the coming days will follow the same pattern with no reflection of people's opinion in the verdict. As the days roll by, things would worsen further and under the garb of removing fads, the electoral process itself would be a fad in the system denying the common people even the least of rights to exercise voting power as per choice. It will be a complete fiefdom of the political agents and managers of the ruling bourgeoisie running the steamroller of oppression on the people. So is the necessity of building up countrywide public opinion in demand of withdrawal of all the dictatorial fiats of the EC backed by united organized mass movement to force the government rescind moves to reduce elections in India into a full-fledged stage managed game in favour of the handful of rich.

New pension scheme

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globalization is being given effect to under the smokescreen of so-called development. This double-dealing and perfidy, it goes without saying, is creating worst confusion and disarray within the left political and trade union movement causing incalculable harm to the cause of the people. However, the social democrats are historically destined to ultimately serve the bourgeoisie in this way. In such a situation,

realizing the gravity of the attack the working class of the country has to come forward organized and united to thwart the government's pernicious moves. The honest right-thinking rank and file of the CPI(M), CPI must exert effective pressure on their leadership to shun politics of opportunism and capitulation and join people's resistance struggles. This is the need of the hour and there is no other way out.

Chinese people resist erasing of Mao Zedong

On the occasion of 40th Anniversary of Cultural Revolution through which China wanted to rid herself of all bourgeois vices there is hardly any enthusiasm in that country. ... The present state leaders of China are more active to suppress the reminiscence of Cultural Revolution. ... Fact is that in the pro-development China today there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor. That is why there is simmering discontent among the millions of have-nots and starving peasants. Corruption is on the rise. Aggrieved at acquisition of land and excessive tax burden, non-availability of pension and work, millions of Chinese citizens have participated in altogether 87 thousand protest demonstrations last year. Many of them believe that Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao is the right course to remove this inequality. (News from Beijing – reported in Ananda Bazar Patrika, 17.5.06)

“Mao is in capitalist trap. Capitalism turns everything into commodity. And in compliance with that tradition, a portrait of Mao, the architect of China, is slated to be auctioned next month. This is the main model of the portrait that is hung at the Tiananmen Square. It was painted on the occasion of first anniversary of People's Republic of China in 1950. ... There are innumerable admirers of Mao throughout the world. Obviously many people are aggrieved at commercialization of the portrait. According to many of them, the historical importance of the portrait is tremendous. Hence it should be preserved in a national museum instead of auctioning.” (News from Beijing – Ananda Bazar Patrika – 20.5.06)

Under massive public protest, Mao Zedong's portrait is ultimately not going to be auctioned. ... The pressure of public protest was so severe that government's decision to auction had to be ultimately abandoned. ... Opposing the “state level conspiracy” to enmesh Mao in capitalist trap by putting his portrait in action, thousands of people registered their protest through internet and other modes. (News from Beijing – Ananda Bazar Patrika – 27.05.06) [Translation ours]

SUCI protests fuel price hike round the country

In response to the call of the Central Committee, the different state and district committees of SUCI observed a countrywide protest day on 7th June 2006 against the recent hike in the prices of fuel, namely petrol and diesel. Protest demonstration, burning of effigy of petroleum minister etc. were organized at different state capitals as well as district towns. Everywhere, state or district leaders who led the demonstration and addressed the gathering, strongly criticized the UPA government at the Centre, sustaining with the support of so-called left parties like CPI(M)-CPI, for their raising the fuel prices for the sixth time in two years. They all pointed out that this hike will have a cascading effect on the prices of essential commodities and will come down heavily on none other than the common people already burdened with gruelling problems of life and living. The decision is made clearly to pave the way for the oil-giants and corporates to reap sky-high profits. The party called upon the people to come forward to resist this move.

In Assam, at Paltan Bazaar, Guwahati, Comrade Chandrelekha Das, member of the state committee of our party, addressed the gathering. Similar programmes were also held at Silchar, Goalpara and Dhubri.

Bangalore District Committee of SUCI organised a protest demonstration at Mysore Bank Circle in Bangalore, where the gathering was presided over by Comrade H.V.Diwakar, member of the State Committee of SUCI and

was addressed by Comrade K. Radhakrishna, Karnataka State Secretary, SUCI, as the main speaker.

In New Delhi, there was a demonstration at the Jantar Mantar, which was addressed by Comrade R K Sharma, member, Delhi State Organizing Committee.

The Sagar District Committee of the party held a protest meeting at Katra Bazar on 7.06.06 against petrol diesel price hike. A memorandum was sent to the Union Petroleum minister Sri Murali Deora from this meeting which was addressed mainly by Comrade Ramavatar Sharma, Secretary, Sagar District Committee and others.

In Jharkhand protest demonstrations were held in Ranchi, Bokaro, Jamshedpur and other cities.

In Bihar, Patna District Committee of the party organized protest demonstration on 7th June.

In UP also the local and district units of the party organized protest demonstration at Budlapur, Jaunpur, Pratapgarh and other places.

SUCI workers arrested in Surat

While the Surat Unit of our party demonstrated at the central place of Surat, Chowk Bazar on 8-6-06, the police arrested the Surat unit incharge Comrade Rambharat Maurya, All India DYO secretary of Surat Comrade Satyendra Singh and Comrades Kedarnath Maurya, Prayagraj, Babluray, Adyaprasad, Samsar Singh, Pradeep Kumar.

In protest, a joint demonstration of the citizens was held in Vadodara on 9-6-06.

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee condoles death of master light technician Tapas Sen

Expressing profound grief at the demise of Tapas Sen, renowned light technician of theatre world and left-minded intellectual, and recalling live association with him during the founding years of the SUCI, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in a condolence message on June 29, 2006 said that at the death of Shri Tapas Sen, the country has lost one of the dedicated front-ranking personalities of progressive art and cultural movement. Comrade Mukherjee also conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved family.

Convention against commercialization of education in Mumbai

Under the joint auspices of All India Save Education Committee (AISEC), Maharashtra, Forum Against Commercialization of Education (FACE) and Janmukti Sangharsh Vahini, Shikshan Vyaparikaran Virodhi Parishad, a convention against commercialization of education was held at Mumbai Central (W) on May 28, 2006. The convention divided in four sessions was attended and addressed by eminent educationists and social activists like Vidyatai Chavan, Dr. Shyam Pofle, eminent educationist and honorary secretary of Moni Bhavan, Gandhi Museum, Dr Ushaben Thakkar, Kumar

Kulasrestha, Dr. Vivek Khorde (FACE), Prof. Ishwer Ahire, Principal P. G. Chavan, Sri Shashikant Rasal, Prof. Sudeh Ranade, Alauddin Saik, Mr S. K. Ire, Editor, Gulf News, Kedar Nath Pandey of All India DSO. The participants, in one voice, criticized the government policy of commercializing and privatizing education in the country by the government trampling the very basic concept that education is the fundamental right of all and it is the responsibility of the government to implement this principle into practice. The convention strongly demanded secular, scientific and free education for all.

UTUC-LS flays decision to disinvest NALCO and NLC

Comrade Krishna Chakraborti, President, All India Committee, UTUC-Lenin Sarani issued the following statement to the press on 23.06.06 in protest against the decision of disinvestment in NLC and NALCO :

"We strongly protest the Union Cabinet decision to disinvest 10% share of National Aluminium Co. Ltd. and Nayveli Lignite Corporation Ltd., both highly profit making companies. The plea of raising fund by such disinvestment which is nothing but a step towards privatization, is untenable as the government did not explore raisings fund by realizing income tax dues to the tune of Rs.1.2 lakh crores from the corporate houses.

The opinion of our organization is that even the non-profit making basic industries essential for growth of the economy should not be privatized, not to speak of privatizing Navaratnas and profit making ones.

The process of privatization has been vigorously pursued to achieve the goal of globalization and all the governments at the Centre right from the Congress government followed by United Front government, NDA government and the present UPA government supported by CPI(M) are practising the same thing with the same and singular objective.

We call upon the working people of the country to come out and resist the heinous game of the Union Government unitedly."



Demonstration against petrol-diesel price hike at Nagpur on 07-06-06

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