

# Dictatorship in **INDIA**



By Ernest Harsch, Malik Miah,  
Pankaj Roy, and Mary Tyler

# Dictatorship in INDIA



By Ernest Harsch, Malik Miah,  
Pankaj Roy, and Mary Tyler

## CONTENTS

---

INTRODUCTION	3
Ernest Harsch	
GANDHI'S COUP—A	
TURNING POINT FOR INDIA	6
Ernest Harsch and Malik Miah	
THE SITUATION IN INDIA	
SINCE JUNE 26, 1975	18
Resolution by the Communist League, Indian Section of the Fourth International	
INDIA AFTER ONE YEAR OF	
GANDHI'S DICTATORIAL RULE	25
Pankaj Roy	
THE CONDITIONS IN GANDHI'S PRISONS	29
Mary Tyler	

---

"Gandhi's Coup—a Turning Point for India" is from the January 1976 *International Socialist Review*. The other articles, © 1976, appeared in the following issues of *Intercontinental Press*, P.O. Box 116, Village Station, New York, N.Y. 10014: "The Situation in India since June 26, 1975," September 13; "India After One Year of Gandhi's Dictatorial Rule," June 27; "The Conditions in Gandhi's Prisons," April 26, translation by *Intercontinental Press*. All are used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 0-87348-387-1

First published in December, 1976

PATHFINDER PRESS, INC.

410 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014

## INTRODUCTION

Before gaining their independence in 1947, the Indian people carried out a heroic, decades-long struggle against British rule. They participated in demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and other actions in massive numbers, demanding an end to the repressive British laws and their right to independence. The democratic rights that existed in India after independence were the fruits of these gigantic struggles, and Indians viewed them as cherished conquests.

But the new rulers of India, like the property-owning classes in other neocolonial countries, saw these democratic rights as obstacles to their effective exploitation and control of the country's 600 million inhabitants, and they thus sought to restrict them. On June 26, 1975, all these rights were swept away with one sudden blow. Indira Gandhi imposed dictatorial rule on one-seventh of humanity.

Gandhi has claimed that the state of emergency is only a "temporary" measure. But even if it is eventually lifted, authoritarian rule will remain, since many new repressive and undemocratic laws have been adopted since the June 1975 coup. The draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act was amended to allow the detention of anyone for up to two years without the regime having to give a reason, even to the courts. It was also amended to allow the rearrest of persons whose detention orders are revoked or have expired. Other measures were enacted giving the regime special powers to prevent the publication of "objectionable matter," including material from the proceedings of Parliament.

On September 1, 1976, the regime formally introduced amendments to the Indian constitution, empowering New Delhi to outlaw "antinational activities and associations," a category defined as anything that "disclaims, questions, threatens, disrupts or is intended to disrupt the sovereignty and integrity of India or the security of the state or the unity of the nation." Other amendments bar the Indian courts from issuing writs of habeas corpus, take away the power of all courts below the Supreme Court to review the constitutionality of federal laws, and bar the Supreme Court from reviewing the constitutionality of amendments to the constitution. They also give the president, who acts at the prime minister's behest, virtually unlimited power to further amend the constitution by decree.

Since the regime does not have to disclose the names of those arrested, it is not known how many political dissidents have been jailed since the state of emergency was proclaimed. There were already 30,000 to 40,000 "Naxalites" in prison before the coup. (The term "Naxalite" is often applied to peasant activists or members and sympathizers of the Communist Party of India [Marxist-Leninist].) Even conservative estimates of those detained since the coup range in the tens of thousands. According to the London-based Committee for Justice for Indian Political Prisoners, there are about 200,000.

The rigid press censorship in India is partly aimed at preventing the publication of exposés of the conditions of these prisoners, but some information does

leak out through other channels. The International League for Human Rights submitted a seventy-three-page document to the United Nations on June 1, 1976, listing the names of hundreds of political prisoners said to have been tortured by the Gandhi regime. The forms of torture cited in the report include beatings with steel rods and rifle butts, use of electric shocks, burning with candles, and tying rods to prisoners' necks in order to strain the spinal cords. One form of torture is known as the "aeroplane," in which "the victim's hands are tied behind his back with a rope. The rope is taken over the pulley at the roof and the victim is pulled up a few feet above the ground."

A March 27, 1976, report by syndicated columnist Jack Anderson cited just a few of the known instances of torture in Gandhi's jails: "Hemart Kumar Vishnoi, leader of a Delhi University student group, which opposes the Gandhi regime, was arrested at a picnic. He was hung upside down and beaten. Then burning candles were applied to his bare soles and chili powder was smeared into his nose and his rectum. . . . "Seven persons, arrested by the police for putting up political posters, were tortured at the Andhra Pradesh police station. They were stripped and their bodies were burned with wax candles."

George Fernandes—the leader of the massive 1974 railway strike, the head of the Socialist Party, and a key oppositionist figure, who operated underground for nearly a year after the coup—was arrested by Gandhi's secret police in Calcutta in June 1976. According to sources in India, he has been tortured, and some members of his family may also have been arrested.

The Gandhi regime's use of terror tactics has been extended to the poor layers of the population as a whole. Blaming the slum dwellers and beggars themselves for their conditions of poverty, the government has launched a "slum clearance" and antibeggar drive. Bull-

dozers have destroyed a number of shantytowns in the major cities, and the inhabitants, together with hundreds of beggars, have been trucked to desolate camps in the countryside. As part of this terrorization campaign, several states have introduced compulsory sterilization for couples with more than two children. This has been resented by Muslims in particular and led to a rebellion in a Muslim slum in Delhi in April.

The bureaucratic regime in Moscow, which hailed Gandhi's coup as a blow against Indian "reactionaries," continues to support her repressive policies. When Gandhi made an official state visit to the Soviet Union in June, she was given the most lavish reception accorded to any foreign head of state since President Nixon's 1972 visit.

Although the Soviet Stalinists claim the Gandhi regime is "anti-imperialist," New Delhi's relations with Washington, the world's foremost imperialist power, are more than cordial. The United States is India's leading trade partner, and in 1974 American companies had \$345 million invested there, principally in the manufacturing sector. The August 11, 1976, issue of *The Hindu* of Madras reported: "The US Ambassador to India, Mr. William Saxbe, indicated here today that American investment in India will increase in the near future. The fact that the US topped the list of India's importers and emerged as the best buyer of its finished goods 'has served notice that we are coming back to India strongly', he said."

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger admitted in early August 1976 that heavy water supplied by Washington for an Indian nuclear reactor may have aided New Delhi in its May 1974 explosion of a "peaceful" nuclear device, thus allowing it to become the sixth member of the world's "nuclear club." Government documents released in Washington a month earlier cited American engineering assistance and training as additional factors. Although Washington claims that

it did not approve of Gandhi's nuclear explosion, the State Department has asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to okay a further shipment of nuclear fuel to India.

The growing ties between New Delhi and Washington since the state of emergency was imposed have been reflected in a number of high-level meetings. External Affairs Minister Y.B. Chavan met with Kissinger and President Gerald Ford in Washington in October 1975. G.D. Birla, one of India's most powerful industrialists and a key backer of Gandhi's Congress Party, met with Treasury Secretary William Simon, World Bank President Robert McNamara, the president of the Exim Bank, and Commerce and State Department officials in early 1976.

This American support to the Gandhi regime gives supporters of civil liberties in the United States a particular responsibility to protest Gandhi's suppression of democratic rights. The American people can especially play an important role in aiding political prisoners in India by organizing public protests—meetings, forums, teach-ins, etc. Such activities are urgently required in the United States and worldwide to expose the undemocratic character of the Gandhi regime and to place moral and political pressure on Washington and other imperialist powers to end their political and economic support to India's new raj.

The essay in this pamphlet by Ernest Harsch and Malik Miah assesses the significance of Gandhi's coup and explains the social conflicts that led up to it. Harsch, as a staff writer for the New York revolutionary socialist newsweekly

*Intercontinental Press*, has written on political developments in India for three years. Miah, a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party, visited India and Bangladesh in 1974.

The resolution adopted this year by the Communist League of India analyzes the declaration of emergency and its aftermath and outlines the tasks facing Indian revolutionists under the new conditions. The Communist League is the Indian section of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938.

In an article written one year after the state of emergency was proclaimed, Pankaj Roy, a New Delhi correspondent for *Intercontinental Press*, describes the offensive by the Indian bourgeoisie against the working class, as well as the general economic situation.

Mary Tyler, a British citizen married to an Indian, gives an eyewitness account of the conditions in which Indian political prisoners were being held even before the state of emergency. Tyler was arrested in May 1970 in Bihar state and was accused of being a "Naxalite." As a result of pressure on the Gandhi regime by friends and relatives in Britain, she was finally brought to trial after five years in prison. The charges of "conspiracy" were then abruptly dropped and she was released on July 6, 1975.

The fact that tens of thousands of additional political prisoners have been thrown into the already overcrowded jails described by Tyler demands vigorous protests by all supporters of democratic rights and civil liberties.

Ernest Harsch  
September 12, 1976

# GANDHI'S COUP—A TURNING POINT FOR INDIA

By Ernest Harsch and Malik Miah

"The president has proclaimed [an] emergency. This is nothing to panic about."

With these words, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi opened her June 26, 1975, speech announcing the declaration of a state of emergency throughout India, the suspension of democratic rights, and her assumption of personal dictatorial rule.

She claimed that such drastic measures were necessary to protect the country, that antidemocratic and antisocialist elements were threatening India's democracy. "The actions of a few are endangering the rights of the vast majority," she proclaimed. "Any situation which weakens the capacity of the national government to act decisively inside the country is bound to encourage dangers from outside. It is our paramount duty to safeguard unity and stability."

Even before her voice came on the air, the first phase of Gandhi's carefully plotted coup was set in motion. In the middle of the night, the police, following lists of names drawn up several days before, made lightning raids on the homes of Gandhi's major political opponents, of both the left and the right.

Within weeks, tens of thousands of political activists, students, teachers, trade unionists, and "lawless elements" were rounded up and thrown into Gandhi's jails and prison camps. The police and armed forces were mobilized "to maintain public order." Meetings, marches, and demonstrations were banned. The publication or distribution of literature "likely to cause disharmony amongst different sections of the community" was outlawed.

In early July, Gandhi banned twenty-six religious and political groups. Regional offices of some of the groups were raided, hundreds of leaders and members arrested, and files confiscated.

From the first day of the coup, a tight censorship was clamped on the Indian press. Foreign journalists who refused to comply with Gandhi's censors were expelled. Even quotes of such leaders of the Indian independence struggle as Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi are now subject to censorship.

A series of constitutional amendments was rushed through Parliament to place the state of emergency—as well as the offices of the prime minister, president, vice-president, and speaker of the house—beyond the jurisdiction of any court. The amendments were made retroactive, thus absolving Gandhi of any criminal charges placed against her.

## Historic Turning Point

Gandhi's suppression of democratic rights in India constitutes an important turning point in the country's history.

Those rights that existed had been won by the Indian masses during their long struggle against British colonialism. Although bourgeois democracy in India was feeble and corrupt—directly involving only a small percentage of the country's vast population—it nevertheless made it possible for the toiling classes to carry out political activities with fewer restrictions than under an open dictatorship.

With one sudden move, Gandhi and

the Indian bourgeoisie have swept away most of these hard-won rights. Despite the regime's claims, the turn toward dictatorship is not a temporary measure.

Gandhi herself has indicated that some form of authoritarian or dictatorial control will be maintained for the foreseeable future. "There can be no return to the pre-emergency days of total license and political permissiveness," she declared. "Political liberties and political rights can exist only so long as order remains."

Because of the strong democratic traditions in India, however, Gandhi was forced to portray her coup as the opposite of what it actually was, to claim that she was defending the best interests of the masses from an unruly and "undemocratic" minority. "I am sure you are all conscious," she said in her June 26 speech, "of the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began introducing certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India."

It is not necessary to dig very deep to discover the real nature of this "conspiracy." The conspirators, tens of thousands of them, carried out their activities publicly. Their demands—for an end to unemployment, inflation, famine, corruption—found a positive response among wider and wider sections of the population. Gandhi's ruling Congress Party was beginning to be seen as responsible for the country's deteriorating economic condition. The possibility that the "conspiracy" might acquire truly massive proportions was what prompted Gandhi to take action before it was too late.

One recent indicator of the Congress Party's declining support was the election of a new state assembly in Gujarat two weeks before the emergency was declared. From the commanding position it won in the state in 1972, when it gained two-thirds of the assembly seats, the Congress Party slipped to a parliamentary minority, losing to a bloc of four opposition parties. It was also the first

time the Congress had lost a statewide election in Gujarat.

As the election results were coming in, Gandhi suffered yet another major setback. On June 12 the High Court of Allahabad, her home town in Uttar Pradesh, found Gandhi guilty of illegal campaign practices committed during the 1971 elections. The charges had been filed against her in April 1971 by Socialist Party leader Raj Narain.

Opposition figures and parties stepped up their campaign to force Gandhi's resignation, holding demonstrations of tens of thousands and calling mass civil disobedience actions. Gandhi, however, decided not to wait for the outcome of her case. Instead of following Nixon's example in a similar situation and resigning, Gandhi threw her accusers into prison.

## **The Roots of Dictatorship**

For years, the bourgeois propagandists in the United States and other countries extolled India as a capitalist showcase—"the largest democracy in the world." Brushing aside the massive poverty and suffering of the Indian masses, the Western editorialists and columnists repeatedly stressed that the population of India was better off than that in totalitarian China. Of course, this argument was greatly undercut by the enormous economic advances achieved in China since the revolution, advances made possible through socialist planning and despite the hindrances of repressive bureaucratic rule. But India remained the best example, at least in the political realm, of what capitalism had to offer the semicolonial world.

The Gandhi coup demolished this theme. It provided fresh evidence of a general trend that has become increasingly obvious since the turn of the century: the growing incompatibility of capitalism and democracy on a world scale. This has become clear even in such a bastion of capitalist democracy as



the United States, where virtually every week there are new exposures of Washington's efforts to subvert democratic rights, from the illegal surveillance and harassment of domestic opposition groups to the overthrow of foreign governments. But it is in the neocolonial world, where the ruling classes are particularly weak, that this phenomenon is currently the most generalized.

Although Gandhi's immediate motivation for ending democracy in India was to save her throne, she was supported in her turn toward dictatorship by the Indian bourgeoisie as a whole. The Congress Party's wealthy backers knew that if they abided by the rules of their own bourgeois democratic system, and allowed Gandhi to fall, their political hold on the country could be seriously weakened.

The Indian bourgeoisie's hostility to democracy was evident from the early days of the independence struggle.<sup>1</sup> In 1937-38, for instance, while India was still a colony of Britain, the Congress Party accepted posts in provincial governments. Although it had previously held demonstrations demanding an end to Britain's repressive legislation, it made full use of it when the Indian capitalist and landlord classes were threatened. It employed the Criminal Law Amendment Act in Madras against the Dravidian nationalist movement and in the North-West Frontier Province against peasant struggles. In Bombay it enacted the 1938 Bombay Trade Disputes Act, which curtailed the right to strike, and in Ahmedabad it used the notorious Section 144 of the British penal code against strikers.

When India won its independence from

Britain in 1947, the Congress Party, under the leadership of the "socialist" Jawaharlal Nehru, incorporated the repressive legal code of the British into the Indian constitution. The head of state was invested with the special emergency powers that made it possible for Gandhi to carry out her coup within the legal framework of the constitution. Those democratic rights that were institutionalized were won under the pressure of the Indian masses, who played an active role in the independence struggle.

From 1947 until Gandhi's June 1975 coup, the Indian rulers used their repressive powers frequently, when it was politically possible to do so. There was a continual erosion of democratic rights as political power became more and more centralized in New Delhi.

When threatened with an uprising, the regime in New Delhi would declare the affected region a "disturbed area" and move in troops, as it did against peasants of the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh in the late 1940s and against the Naga and Mizo nationalist rebels in the northeast from the early 1950s until the present.

The first time a state of emergency was declared in India, during the 1962 border war with China, hundreds of members of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and other leftist groups were arrested and detained to prevent a breach of "internal security." In December 1964, more than 900 members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]), which was formed after a split in the CPI earlier that year, were rounded up throughout the country.

Elected state governments that were in political opposition to the federal government were occasionally ousted and President's Rule imposed, which placed the state under direct federal control. In areas where the Congress Party's electoral position was weak (and even in those where it wasn't), countless forms of electoral manipulation, intimidation, fraud, and bribery were employed to gain

---

1. For a Marxist history of the Indian independence struggle, with particular emphasis on the limitations imposed by its bourgeois nationalist leadership, see A.R. Desai's *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948) and *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (1960). Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

votes or to hinder the opposition. The use of common thugs against political activists became a standard practice.

Beginning in the late 1960s, New Delhi launched a major campaign against the various Maoist groups, particularly against the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of alleged members or sympathizers of the CPI(ML) were killed by police and paramilitary forces, often "while trying to escape." Tens of thousands, especially in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh, were thrown into the country's antiquated and crowded prisons. There have been frequent reports that torture was used against them. Many of the political prisoners have spent years in jail without being brought to trial.

New Delhi has also struck out with repression against struggles of oppressed nationalities, such as the independence movements of the Nagas and Mizos in the northeast. India is made up of dozens of different nationalities, some of which (the Assamese and Dravidians for example) have exhibited strong opposition to federal control. A successful struggle for national self-determination could have an explosive impact throughout India. In fact, it is a violation of the Indian constitution to advocate national self-determination.

One of the reasons New Delhi intervened in the national liberation struggle in Bangladesh in 1971 was to prevent the East Bengal example from spreading across the border to West Bengal.

Closely linked to New Delhi's inability to solve the country's complex national question is the continual outbreak of clashes between Hindus and Muslims. The creation of the predominantly Muslim country of Pakistan in 1947 did not end the religious strife, since Muslims

still constitute a large minority in India.

In addition to national and religious divisions, large sections of the population are still oppressed on the basis of their relation to the rigid Hindu caste structure. In recent years, however, the lower castes, so-called untouchables, and *adivasis* (tribespeople) have begun to organize against caste discrimination.

Although the country faces gigantic economic problems, New Delhi has managed to allocate larger and larger sums to strengthen its police and military. A report released in 1974 noted that the budget for the Central Reserve Police had tripled in five years and the one for the Border Security Force had doubled in the same period. In 1969, the Central Industrial Security Force, a special police force to guard government property, was set up. Within four years it had tripled in size. The police expenditures for 1974-75 were set at \$200 million, compared with \$115 million for health and \$74 million for education.

Nor has New Delhi ignored its army, which is now the fifth largest in the world, composed of 830,000 troops (1.1 million including the Border Security Force). The Gandhi regime has launched a drive to achieve self-sufficiency in arms production and has already begun manufacturing tanks, aircraft, artillery, destroyers, and missiles. With the explosion of a "peaceful" nuclear device in 1974, New Delhi proved its ability to build an atomic bomb.

## A Record of Poverty

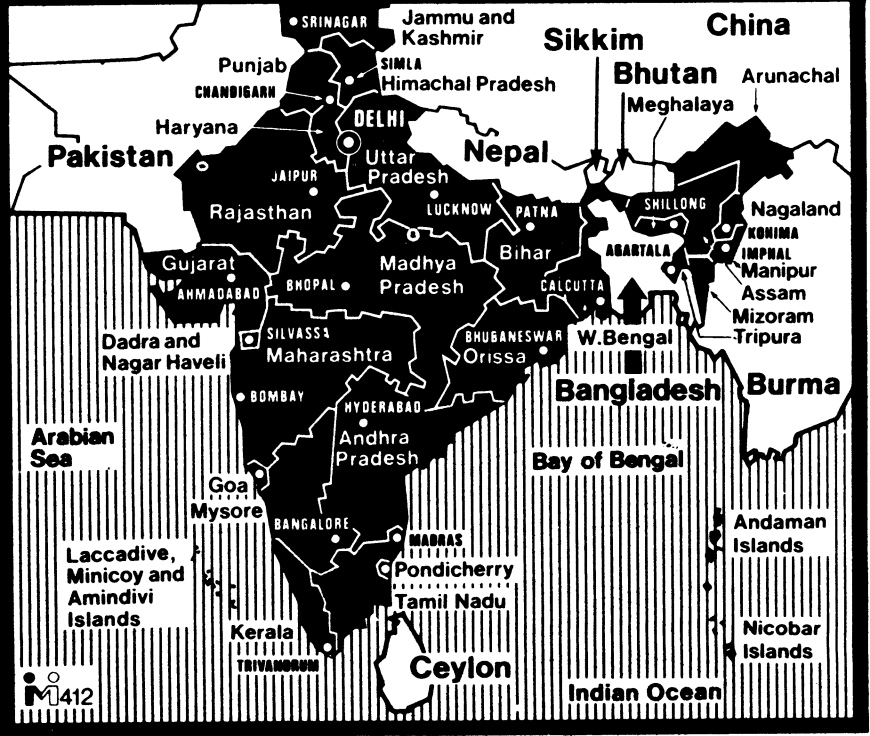
From the ruling classes' perspective, the increased repression and the more frequent use of dictatorial powers—culminating in the June 26 coup—were necessary. The extreme poverty that has persisted throughout the twenty-eight years of Congress Party rule has bred widespread unrest in both urban and rural areas. In many respects, the economic conditions of large sectors of the population have actually deteriorated.

---

2. The CPI(ML) was formed in 1969 after a pro-Peking split in the CPI(M). Members of the CPI(ML) are often called Naxalites, after the 1967 peasant uprising in Naxalbari, West Bengal.

# INDIA States and Union Territories

600 mls



About three-fourths of all Indians have no secure work and earn less than fifty dollars a year; about half of them earn less than forty dollars a year. Real wages today are actually *less* than they were in 1947.

India's stagnant industrial sector cannot absorb the millions of persons entering the labor market each year. According to some estimates, as many as fifty million workers are unemployed. In addition to the most destitute sections of the working class, the skilled layers have also been hard hit, with unemployment among the educated increasing 20 percent each year; of the sixteen million youths who graduated from colleges in 1974, one-third cannot find any work.

Underemployment in India is also a chronic problem.

The stagnation in the rural areas has been even more pronounced. Because of the bourgeoisie's ties to the wealthy landlord class, no significant land-reform measures have been carried out.

About 38 percent of the peasantry are agricultural workers, owning little or no land. Another 45 percent own small plots of land or work as tenant farmers. The remaining 17 percent own more than half the cultivated land in India, which they either rent out at exorbitant rates or have worked by landless agricultural laborers. An estimated forty-five million landless peasants, most of whom are "untouchables," are in almost continual debt to

landlords or moneylenders. In some areas semifeudal property relations still exist. Unemployment in the countryside has risen 600 percent in the past two decades.

Because of the "overpopulation" in the countryside, relative to the amount of work available, millions of peasants have flocked to the cities in search of jobs. Finding none, they have been forced into the hundreds of slums and squatter settlements that proliferate in most major Indian cities.

In addition to all the other daily sufferings, the Indian masses still face the periodic danger of famine. For the poorest layers, in fact, it is a continual threat. Because of the agricultural and industrial stagnation of the capitalist economy, the country cannot produce enough food to keep its population alive, nor can it afford to import enough to stave off the threat of starvation.

The much-touted "green revolution" of the late 1960s did nothing to improve the situation. Only the wealthy farmers could afford the special hybrid seeds and fertilizers necessary to increase farm productivity; those farmers grew even wealthier as a result. Nor could the "green revolution" prevent large-scale farmers or hoarders from limiting production or withholding grain from the market to artificially boost prices. The average consumption of food per person in the early 1960s stood at 480 grams a day; today it is down to 418 grams. Average meat consumption has dropped from three kilograms a year to less than two.

The inability of the bourgeoisie to develop the country economically is particularly glaring when India is compared with China. In 1947, China was as underdeveloped as India was, if not more so. With the introduction of planned production after the Chinese revolution it was possible to increase agricultural and industrial productivity and eliminate the danger of famine, which had been a common occurrence before the over-

throw of capitalism. Today, China's gross national product is between two and three times that of India.

## The Gujarat Example

Indira Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress Party have tried to avoid responsibility for India's deteriorating conditions. Claiming to be "socialist," they demagogically pose as defenders of the poor and as sworn enemies of the corrupt and the wealthy. In the 1971 elections, for example, the Congress Party won a landslide victory on the slogan of "Garibi Hatao" (Abolish Poverty). In reality, the Congress Party is backed by the most powerful sectors of the Indian bourgeoisie, such as the monopoly interests controlled by the Tata and Birla families.

By early 1974 the Congress's "socialist" image had become totally tarnished and the party was beginning to be identified by ever broader sections of the population with the same corrupt and wealthy interests that it claimed it was against.

The first significant indication of this mass disillusionment with Congress Party rule came in Gujarat, which was considered one of the most developed and economically stable states in the union. In January 1974, protests by students against inflation quickly led to large demonstrations against food shortages in the government-run ration shops in the state. Other sectors of the population joined the protests on a massive scale. The demands soon escalated to a call for the ouster of the Congress Party's corrupt chief minister for Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, and the dissolution of the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislative Assembly).

Ahmedabad, the state capital, was paralyzed January 10 by a general strike called by the Fourteenth August Shramajivi Samiti, a united-front organization led by the leftist trade unions. A successful statewide general strike was held Janu-

ary 25. New Delhi responded to the upsurge by sending in federal troops and killing more than eighty-five persons. Patel, however, was forced to resign February 9 and to suspend the state assembly. But the protesters were not satisfied by this concession. They held demonstrations and strikes demanding the dissolution of the assembly and the holding of new elections. On March 16, the assembly was dissolved.

The upheaval in Gujarat was unprecedented in the history of postindependence India, touching virtually every city and town in the state. It reflected a wide discontent with conditions in Gujarat, which were similar to those in many other states. Significantly, the populations in the cities—students, workers, and slum dwellers in particular—took the lead in the protests. The upsurge as a whole was not under the control of any established political party, whether of the right or the left. New organs of struggle, such as the Nav Nirman Samitis (New Order Committees), arose.

The example of Gujarat quickly spread to Bihar, one of India's poorest states. In

March 1974, students in Bihar staged protests against food shortages, inflation, corruption in the state government, and unemployment. On June 5, about 500,000 persons marched through the state capital, Patna, demanding the dissolution of the Vidhan Sabha. As in Gujarat, federal troops were sent in, killing more than eighty persons. Home Minister Dixit justified the repression by claiming that the unrest was a "fascist" attempt to stifle democracy.

In April 1974, Jaya Prakash Narayan, an old disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, emerged from retirement and proclaimed himself the leader of the mass movement in Bihar. J.P., as he was popularly known, became a rallying symbol for forces opposed to the Congress Party. In alliance with various right- and left-wing parties, Narayan had a strong influence on the political direction of the Bihar movement.

As the unrest in Bihar developed, India was hit by a countrywide general strike of railway workers, the first such strike since 1960. Demanding recognition as industrial workers, an eight-hour day,



*Striking railway workers march in New Delhi, May 1974.*

and a minimum wage, the railway workers paralyzed India's transport system for twenty days. Gandhi broke the strike by arresting tens of thousands of railway workers. One of the principal leaders of the strike, George Fernandes, the head of the Socialist Party and a leader of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation, later allied himself with Narayan.

Narayan tried to extend the base of the Bihar opposition movement to other states, with the aim of building a viable political bloc capable of opposing the Congress Party at the federal level.

The first significant step in this direction was a demonstration of 100,000 in New Delhi March 6, 1975. The protest was supported by the reformist Socialist Party, the rightist Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD—People's Party of India), the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), the Hindu-chauvinist Jan Sangh, the Socialist Unity Centre (SUC), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), the conservative Organisation Congress (Congress [O]), the Forward Bloc, the Marxist Communist Centre, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK—Dravidian Advancement Association), and other opposition parties. The CPI(M) later supported actions called by this bloc.

The parties involved in the demonstration called for an end to such repressive legislation as the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and the Defence of India Rules, and raised a series of economic demands reflecting the interests of workers, peasants, and petty-bourgeois layers. In addition, one of the focuses of the campaign by the opposition parties was to expose corrupt government figures. By the time of the coup, Gandhi herself had become the chief target of the anticorruption campaign. As with Nixon's Watergate scandal in the United States, the charges of corruption against Gandhi were but a reflection of a deeper social crisis in the country as a whole.

The most influential of the opposition

parties in the anticorruption movement appear to have been the Socialist Party, the BLD, Jan Sangh, and Congress (O), which emerged from a right-wing split in Gandhi's ruling Congress in 1969. In an effort to exploit the volatile political situation for their own ends, these opposition parties tried to ride out the wave of unrest in the country and to channel the "dangerous" mass protests in a safe electoral direction. They scored an initial success when the Janata Morcha (People's Front), a coalition composed of these four parties, won the Gujarat state elections in June 1975.

Although all the parties in nominal leadership of the mass movement were reactionary or class-collaborationist, the Indian capitalists, in their overwhelming majority, continued to support the Congress Party. They feared that Narayan and his allies would be unsuccessful in controlling the mass unrest and that new upsurges could erupt, passing beyond the control of the traditional political leaderships.

It was to head off such a possibility that the Indian capitalists backed Gandhi's efforts to crush and demobilize the mass movement.

### **CPI: 'Strengthen Gandhi's Hands'**

The failure of the two main Stalinist parties in India, the CPI and CPI(M), to provide any leadership for these mass struggles made it possible for the rightist forces to fill the vacuum to a certain extent and to gain some political influence over the mass movement. The orientation of both the CPI and CPI(M) is toward popular-front electoral maneuvers. Neither has the perspective of mobilizing the Indian masses against the capitalists or of organizing independent working-class struggles. When they do stage mass demonstrations or other actions, it is in support of their class-collaborationist policies.

Although both Stalinist parties advocate allying with the "progressive national bourgeoisie," they differ in their

attitude toward the Gandhi regime. The CPI follows the foreign policy line of the Soviet Stalinists, who back Gandhi. The CPI therefore considers Gandhi's wing of the Congress Party part of this "progressive national bourgeoisie." The CPI(M), which is aligned with neither Moscow nor Peking, does not.

The CPI's support for the ruling bourgeois circles has made its role particularly treacherous. In Bihar, for instance, it became the strongest defender of the Congress Party state government in opposition to the demands of the anticorruption movement for its dissolution. "Blood will flow in the streets if the Legislative Assembly is dissolved," the CPI warned. On November 11, 1974, it organized a mass demonstration against the "rightist offensive" of J.P. Narayan. One CPI slogan has been "Strengthen the hands of Mrs. Gandhi to fight the combined reaction."

At the CPI's tenth national congress in

February 1975, Chairman S.A. Dange said that India faced two main dangers: imperialism and the "fascist movement" of Narayan. At the same congress, the Stalinist party called for the installation of CPI-Congress coalition governments in all of India's twenty-two states.

When Gandhi staged her coup, the CPI tried to give the suppression of democratic rights a left cover. It claimed that Indian "reactionaries" had "put forward their plans for subverting democratic institutions at a time when U.S. imperialist circles threaten the independence, security, and unity of India by setting up military bases in the Indian Ocean and [encouraging] the splitting of India and counterrevolutionary forces."

The CPI's position was an echo of the position taken by its mentors in Moscow. The June 27 *Pravda* stated: "The measures taken by the president and the government are aimed at defending progressive gains and frustrating plans of the reaction."



*Leonid Brezhnev welcoming Mrs. Gandhi in Moscow.*

The CPI has a long history of defense of bourgeois and even imperialist rule, following the twists and turns initiated in Moscow. During the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact, Moscow and the CPI opposed Britain's efforts to mobilize its Indian colony in support of the war effort. After Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, however, Moscow did an about-face and backed the Allies. The CPI then supported Britain's—and India's—participation in the imperialist war, coming into direct conflict with the Indian independence movement, which launched a massive noncooperation campaign in 1942 demanding that the British "Quit India." While the British imperialists arrested independence fighters on a wide scale and banned the Congress party, the CPI was legalized as a reward for its dutiful aid.

Jawaharlal Nehru exploited this treacherous line of the CPI in order to strengthen the Indian bourgeoisie's control over the nationalist struggle. In an October 24, 1945, speech, Nehru declared that "the role of the Communist party had made all nationalists its 100 percent opponent," and that "when thousands of Indians staked their all for their country's cause the Communists were in the opposite camp, which cannot be forgotten." He also noted that "the cause of Communism had suffered most at the hands of the CPI."

By 1962, when the border war between India and China broke out, the CPI supported the capitalist Nehru regime against the Chinese workers state. A draft resolution adopted by a CPI National Council meeting in November 1962 was entitled "Unite to Defend Our Motherland Against China's Open Aggression." Although Moscow initially took a "neutral" position on the war, it later added its backing to the Nehru regime.<sup>3</sup>

Since the mid-1969 split in the Congress Party, which culminated in Gandhi's victory over the Morarji Desai wing, the CPI has consistently backed the

Gandhi regime. This was also in line with Moscow's foreign policy objectives.

Moscow's main interest in the Indian subcontinent is to gain diplomatic leverage against both Washington and Peking. Soviet support for Gandhi became particularly evident in 1971 during the Bangladesh independence struggle and the war with Pakistan. The same year, the Indo-Soviet "friendship" treaty was signed. During Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's visit to India in November 1973, a fifteen-year "economic development" agreement was signed, providing for increased trade between New Delhi and Moscow and Soviet participation in India's iron, steel, and oil industries. Moscow also promised to supply SAM-6 anti-aircraft missiles.

The CPI's continued backing to Gandhi was part of this Moscow-New Delhi deal. In case the CPI had any doubts about the role assigned to it, Brezhnev met with CPI leader Dange, advising him to support Gandhi and not to encourage strikes. Since Dange is also general secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress, one of the largest union federations in India, this piece of "advice" was particularly helpful to Gandhi.

On December 19, 1973, shortly after Brezhnev's visit, Gandhi tried to allay the uncertainties that some Congress Party leaders had about her alliance with the CPI. Speaking to a meeting of Congress members of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, she said that the CPI alliance had "helped to contain communism" in India, rather than strengthen it.

The CPI leadership may face problems as it becomes clear to their rank and file that the Gandhi coup was directed not only against "right reaction" but also against the left. In addition to providing a

---

3. The CPI leadership sided with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute as early as 1960. That dispute, plus the CPI's total support to Nehru during the 1962 war, precipitated the 1964 split in the CPI, which led to the formation of the CPI(M).



left cover for Gandhi's policies, the Stalinist CPI is laying the groundwork for future attacks against itself.

### **The Lukewarm Response of the 'Opposition'**

Some protests and demonstrations were staged immediately after Gandhi declared the state of emergency.

In early July, in the southern city of Madras, in Tamil Nadu, the ruling party in the state, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, organized a protest rally of 100,000 persons. In Gujarat, a number of protests were staged against the state of emergency by the Janata Morcha coalition regime. A rally of 10,000 persons was held July 26 after a week of nonviolent civil-disobedience actions, or *satyagraha*.

The rally and earlier actions organized by the Janata Morcha were much smaller than could have been held. The coalition leadership consciously limited the size of the protests for fear of losing control of them. Chief Minister Babubhai Patel of the Congress (O) explained: "We have to see to it that we don't lead people into violence or destruction of property. But public feeling has to be given expression, though in a restricted way."

The mass protests in the spring of 1974 had taught these "leaders" of the opposition some lessons. They had lost control of the masses and were only able to reassert their influence when things cooled down. To maintain their "opposition" status, however, a few protests against Gandhi's coup were required—but only token ones.

Protests were also reported in New Delhi, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana. In Amritsar in the northern state of Punjab, 300,000 Sikhs reportedly demonstrated July 9.

The Maoist Naxalites continued their past suicidal course of propagating guerrilla warfare as the main road to a socialist India. They denounced the coup

and viewed it as having been engineered by "Soviet social imperialism." According to Satyanarayan Singh, the leader of one faction of the CPI(ML), the coup made it "easier to convince people of the necessity of armed struggle."

The CPI(M) is capable of organizing mass protests, even though it has suffered the arrest of several of its top leaders and thousands of its members. But it has so far staged only a few token demonstrations in the state of Kerala. From all indications, the Stalinist leaders of the CPI(M) are hoping that the state of emergency will be declared unconstitutional by the courts.

### **Gandhi's Smoldering Volcano**

The default of the main opposition leaderships has made it easier for the Congress Party and its CPI allies to portray Gandhi as a woman on a white horse fighting off internal reaction and external subversion.

But the Indian bourgeoisie realizes that opposition to the government will grow unless some of the worst effects of the economic crisis, such as uncontrolled inflation and widespread food shortages, are eased. Gandhi's twenty-point economic program, announced July 1, 1975, was designed to limit corruption, hoarding, and black-marketeering and to give the appearance of moving on the broader social and economic problems facing the masses.

The twenty-point program is little more than a rehash of earlier Congress Party promises. It pledges the distribution of some surplus land to landless peasants, an end to bonded labor, legislation to limit the size of land holdings, the liquidation by stages of peasant debts to rural moneylenders, tax relief in the cities, a "crackdown" on smuggling and the hoarding of essential commodities, and the institution of price controls.

The implementation of such a program would be a major step forward for the

country's impoverished millions. But the Congress Party has no intention of carrying it out. The rural bourgeoisie and the landlords, along with the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie in the cities, are the principal backers of the Congress Party. They would not tolerate such measures.

Gandhi's real economic program is to increase production through the strict disciplining of the rural and urban working class. Shortly after announcing the twenty-point program, Gandhi banned all strikes and other labor actions under the guise of preventing "economic chaos." She attempted to enlist the aid of the trade-union bureaucrats—most of whom support the Congress Party or the CPI—in this effort.

The "socialist" rhetoric in Gandhi's program and the limited actions against black-marketeers, smugglers, and hoarders were designed to win some support

from the poor peasants and urban slum dwellers. The inability of the opposition parties to expose Gandhi's "progressive" facade helps her perpetuate these illusions for a while longer and hinders the organization of a working-class response to her antilabor actions.

Because Gandhi's economic program cannot close the vast gap between the country's rich and poor, her antidemocratic measures will inevitably lead to greater opposition by workers and peasants to the regime. The bottling-up through repression of India's class tensions will only make the future social explosions more powerful and on a broader scale than those before the coup.

New "Gujarats" are on the horizon; the Indian ruling classes and their agents cannot prevent them from developing. Gandhi's future as Empress of India will be a shaky one.



*Anti-hunger demonstration in Calcutta.*

## **THE SITUATION IN INDIA SINCE JUNE 26, 1975**

### **Resolution by the Communist League, Indian Section of the Fourth International**

The June 26, 1975, Declaration of Emergency throughout India and the consequent suspension of democratic rights and civil liberties constitute a throttling of normal bourgeois-democratic rule in India.

Though even in normal times it was considerably restricted, bourgeois democracy had functioned in India for almost three decades. It had enabled the toiling people to engage in varied political activities such as unionization, strikes and struggles, holding of demonstrations and publication of their own literature legally, and to gain access to accurate information in the press. Such activities, understandably, would not have been possible to the same extent under a military or civilian dictatorship. The institutionalization of democratic rights in India had been achieved by the Indian people during their long struggle for independence from Britain. It thus signified a precious conquest won by the masses after hard-fought struggles.

Indira Gandhi's coup, carried out within the legal constitutional framework, swept away all these gains. Even if there will be some relaxation here and there or even if ultimately the present emergency is lifted, it is now crystal clear that there will be no return to pre-June 26, 1975, bourgeois-democratic rule in India. In this sense, the political physiognomy of pre-June 26, 1975, bourgeois-democratic rule has been completely altered beyond any recognition.

From a broad historical standpoint and also from the viewpoint of the development of the class struggle in India, the Gandhi regime's suppression of demo-

cratic rights marks a decisive watershed in the political history of India. Momentarily it has dealt a veritable deathblow to the current class struggles of the working class. It has decisively tilted the class correlation of forces in favor of the bourgeoisie and against the workers. And since June 26, 1975, the class correlation of forces has continued to operate against the working-class struggles.

For the protagonists of bourgeois democracy all the world over, Indian bourgeois democracy was a means to be extolled as a capitalist showcase—"The largest democracy in the world." This showcase was contrasted to so-called totalitarian China. The Gandhi coup demolished this theme. Suppression of bourgeois-democratic institutions and rights in India on June 26, 1975, provided one more proof, if there ever needed to be one, of the general trend that has become more and more pronounced since the advent of the 20th Century: the growing incompatibility of capitalism and democracy on a world scale.

Revolutionary Marxists in India had already pointed out various factors that accounted for an ever-increasing trend to authoritarianism in Indian policy. This trend was considerably reinforced after the brutal suppression of the railway strike in May 1974. Nevertheless we have to provide an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic crisis which compelled the Indian bourgeoisie to adopt this course. Only on the basis of such an analysis can the party orient itself on the question of its immediate future short-term tasks.

In the last analysis, the severe economic crisis confronting the Indian bourgeoisie must be regarded as the main reason prompting the ruling class to opt for imposition of the State of Emergency in June 1975.

This crisis was most potently described as "the gravest crisis of the Indian economy since Independence."

Since 1965, the growth rates of industrial output, industrial investment, and employment were consistently low. The underutilization of productive capacity had assumed crucial significance in several key industries. The Annual Report on Currency and Finance of the Reserve Bank of India for 1974 listed inflation as the main characteristic of the economic crisis. It warned about recession by citing the slackening demand for iron and steel, construction materials, machinery, transport equipment, cotton textiles, and durable consumer goods.

The unemployment situation was becoming grim.

The food problem was increasingly becoming more and more acute in its price, distribution, and procurement aspects.

This economic crisis was structural in character.

The Indian bourgeoisie and its spokesmen were quite clearly aware of the gravity and the magnitude of this crisis. A December 6, 1974, *Economic Times* editorial was representative of this awareness when it warned: "Whoever analyses the state of economy today will find some of these ugly features posing a grave threat to the country's economic stability. Such crisis conditions, if continued too long, would provide ideal stamping ground to political adventurists."

The Indian bourgeoisie's policy was to rely more and more on the private sector to tide over the crisis both on the agrarian as well as the industrial front. At the same time, it attempted to pass the burden of this unbearable economic crisis onto the shoulders of the masses.

The partial wage freeze was part of this strategy.

Meanwhile, impelled by the intolerable conditions of their living, above all inflation, the masses had begun to rise. Throughout 1974 and the first quarter of 1975 mass discontent was seething. In 1974, mass struggles on a gigantic scale and beyond the established political bounds were launched in several states, most notably Gujarat and Bihar. Nineteen seventy-four also witnessed a decisive class confrontation between the ruling class and the working class in the May railway strike, which resulted in a grave defeat for the latter due to a divided and weak union leadership and the firm determination of the bourgeoisie.

Thus while mass struggles were developing, they were, nevertheless, sporadic and uncoordinated. Except in the railway

---

**“ . . . impelled by the intolerable conditions of their living . . . the masses had begun to rise.”**

---

strike, the working class did not participate in these struggles as a class. The Stalinist parties and left-centrist formations failed to provide a genuine class orientation or leadership for these growing mass upheavals. Consequently the leadership fell more and more into the hands of right parties headed personally by Jayaprakash Narayan, who tried to extend the base of the Bihar opposition movement to the other states, with the aim of building a viable political bloc capable of opposing the Congress Party at the federal level.

On March 6, 1975, in New Delhi, a massive demonstration called by a conglomeration of several rightist parties and reformist socialist parties and left-centrist formations was the first significant step in this direction.

The Charter of Demands presented to the Parliament March 6 by this demonstration included: a minimum wage for all; controlled prices of basic necessities; full employment; land reforms; full political and trade-union rights for workers in commercial and industrial enterprises in the public sector; an end to corrupt electoral practices; lowering of the voting age to eighteen years; educational reform; an end to draconian repressive laws.

The rightist parties tried to blunt the radical thrust of these demands by presenting them in Gandhian terminology.

By then, corruption had also become the central theme of the agitation by these parties both in and outside the Parliament.

The participation by rightist parties on a large scale in these spontaneously developing mass struggles provided a pretext to Gandhi, the ruling Congress Party, and its fellow travellers like the CPI [Communist Party of India] (pro-Moscow) to brand these movements as "reactionary" in an attempt to divert attention from the regime's policies.

There were two most important aspects of these mass struggles. First of all, their mass character due to unbearable economic conditions. Secondly, their spontaneous character.

These struggles, especially in Gujarat and Bihar, were not the brainchildren of any particular party. In default of the Stalinist parties, the right and reformist parties appropriated these struggles. And in the process they were compelled to raise these demands in a demagogical manner, talk of "total revolution," etc., at the risk of losing their political influence over these movements.

In themselves, these demands were either economic or democratic in character, affecting workers, peasants, and the petty bourgeoisie.

While Jayaprakash Narayan and the political parties spearheading these struggles did receive some support from

a section of the Indian bourgeoisie, the Indian bourgeoisie, as a class, in the main, continued to support the ruling Congress and Gandhi, who had considerably regained its confidence after her handling of the railway strike and the wage freeze. The Indian bourgeoisie, in its majority, was not sure whether Narayan and his allies from the right and the left would be able to contain the potentially explosive danger that such demands and such struggles posed. Because even if raised by thoroughly reactionary leadership and organizations, such demands, in the then-prevailing surcharged political and socio-economic climate, had a dynamic of their own to inspire the masses in other parts of India to imitate Gujarat and Bihar. The verdict in the June 1975 elections in Gujarat and the tension over the Allahabad verdict in Gandhi's election case were sufficient pointers to even those vacillating strata of the Indian bourgeoisie which were supporting Narayan and these parties.

On the economic front, by June 1975 the economy was nearing a precipice. The pre-budget economic survey for 1974-75, which the regime had presented to the Parliament in late February 1975, had described 1975 as the year of the most "unprecedented economic challenge since Independence" and discounted any possibility of "dramatic changes in the short run."

Prices had climbed to an all-time high. The purchasing power of hard-pressed consumers was steadily being eroded, leading to a growing decline in demand for a wide range of goods.

The credibility of the Gandhi regime both on the political and the economic level was rapidly evaporating. The situation demanded drastic action on a political level.

Gandhi's swift but firm and stunning action on June 26 clinched the issue. The bourgeoisie as a whole rallied round her. The events, since then, have not belied their faith in her.

The imposition of the emergency has temporarily checked the economic crisis. Prices were stabilized to a certain extent. Raids, searches, demonstrative curbing of smuggling, and the arrests of some economic and social offenders have reduced to a certain extent speculative activities of certain strata of the bourgeoisie in land and in the building industry.

But the major achievement of the emergency from the class point of view is that it clamped the lid on working-class struggles. As early as September 16, 1975, the editorial of the *Economic Times* noted with satisfaction that the climate for production had improved with the restoration of "industrial peace." The Union Labor Minister, Mr. Reddy, was quite justified in his recently made claim that the climate of industrial relations has "changed beyond recognition." There has been a steep fall in man-days lost in both public- and private-sector enterprises in the last few months. Nineteen seventy-four registered the peak of industrial unrest, a loss of 40.25 million man-days, a nearly 100% rise over 1973. In 1975 it came down to 19.24 million man-days, and between July 1975 and January 1976 the loss of man-days was only 5.4 million, as compared to the loss of 18.1 million man-days during the seven-month period preceding the declaration of emergency. The number of man-days lost was higher in the private sector than in the public sector.

Working-class struggles have almost come to a standstill. A complete industrial truce has been promised and practised by the leadership of the major trade unions. The emergency measures have greatly slashed overtime payments to employees and cut the minimum bonus of the workers in the organized sector from 8.33% to 4%. In fact, the test for accreditation of trade unions is whether or not they resort to agitational methods for redressal of their grievances. The Indian Labor Conference and the tripartite machinery have been dis-

mantled. These measures obviously have their impact on the creation of surplus value and on the valorization of capital.

As against these anti-working-class and antidemocratic measures—such as promulgation of Three Ordinances on December 5, 1975, to prevent publication of "objectionable matters," etc.; prolon-

---

**"The credibility of the Gandhi regime . . . was rapidly evaporating. The situation demanded drastic action on a political level."**

---

gation of the tenure of the present parliament by a year, etc.—the Gandhi regime had already offered a New Deal to the bourgeoisie to induce it to revive the sagging economy.

1. This deal centred round: (1) relaxation of the conditions for issuing bonus shares; (2) stepping up of construction activity; (3) augmentation of urban transport; (4) diversification of controlled cloth distribution schemes to clear accumulated stocks.

2. The 1976-77 budgetary proposals of the Gandhi regime have further continued this trend. The *Economic Times* estimate of budget concessions calculated that the corporate sector will benefit to the tune of Rs. 96 crores [960 million rupees] a year from the various concessions and modifications in these budgetary proposals.

3. The direct tax rate of 77% has been lowered to 66%.

4. Personal income tax and wealth tax have been lowered at all levels.

5. A scheme of investment allowances has also been introduced to save industries from obsolescence.

6. On April 14, the regime announced a considerably liberalized import policy

under which eighty-eight items have been taken off the list and procedures have been streamlined. The *Economic Times* survey of reactions to this policy showed that the entire bourgeoisie and trade and commercial circles have hailed this policy.

7. A voluntary disclosure scheme for tax evaders.

The results have not been long in coming. The *Economic Times* Research Bureau study of the top 101 industrial giants in the private sector that suffered from sluggishness in 1972-73 showed that they had improved their performance in 1974-75. Their total assets went up substantially by 21.1% in 1974-75, against 11.4% in 1973-74 and 7.7% in 1972-73. This list includes forty public-sector undertakings. The rest belong to the private sector. Nine new entrants have been included in this study which were not there in previous similar studies. The combined gross profits of these giants in 1974-75 recorded a substantial rise of 43.7%—Rs.615.2 crores [6.152 billion rupees]. Net profits registered a spectacular increase of 41.4%. Because of restrictions on dividend payments, the retained profits of these giants show a record rise of 90.0% in 1974-75.

The politico-economic implications of the emergency are very clear. They are certainly anti-working-class in nature. These measures have been directed against the working class in favor of the bourgeoisie.

Hence there is hardly anything surprising in the findings of a Commonwealth Intercharge Study Group which recently visited India. This group remarked that the emergency was widely welcomed by the business community. The report said that the business community agreed that the emergency had four effects: (1) an end to industrial unrest and a new sense of discipline instilled into labor; (2) a new sense of urgency in government departments; (3) a new determination to

implement policies and projects; (4) a decline in corruption.

Hence revolutionary Marxists cannot support the emergency nor its aftermath on the ground that it fought right reaction. Such an approach overlooks its anti-working-class implications and involves a superficial analysis viewing the emergency as the result of a conflict between two wings of the bourgeoisie. In addition, such an approach merely tends to provide a left cover for the classically antidemocratic and anti-working-class thrust of the bourgeois regime in India. Hence the party condemns the emergency and all consequent antidemocratic and anti-working-class measures.

We also cannot support the 20-point programme. Here the stand taken by our party Central Committee at its last meeting was, to say the least, unprincipled. We cannot adopt a positive attitude to measures like workers participation in managements of private- and public-sector undertakings. We are for workers control of industries. On this question the position adopted by the last Central Committee meeting was politically disorienting.

The 20-point programme is nothing more than a rehash of earlier Congress Party programmes. Even if implemented, it is unlikely to broaden the base of capitalist economic development. In any case, the 20-point programme cannot be viewed in isolation. Promulgated as a by-product of Gandhi's antidemocratic thrust, as a part of her overall pseudo-socialist demagoguery, this programme essentially provided a left cover for her crucial curbing of the democratic rights of the people and shift towards the right. The party cannot support piecemeal some of the "progressive" items of the 20-point programme critically. In its pedagogic work the party must explain to the masses the real nature and the overall context of this programme, and expose its class limitations.

Despite our political standpoint and our political exposure of the 20-point programme as a demagogic cover, when the masses are propelled by their conditions to take the path of struggle, we will be with them. We will try to mobilize them independently for the granting of these demands. Even if these items of the 20-point programme are implemented due to mass pressure, which is very unlikely, we shall urge the masses to press for more concessions. In the process, we shall be able to convince the masses to rely on their own strength, on their own independent street mobilizations, and not to place any political confidence in this regime for the implementation of the 20-point programme.

The emergency has considerably changed the political landscape of India.

The popular-frontist orientations of all types of Stalinist parties in India have disoriented the struggling masses in India. None have the perspective of mobilizing the Indian masses against the bourgeoisie or organizing politically independent working-class struggles. The CPI (pro-Moscow) has gone the furthest in providing left cover for Gandhi's suppression of democratic rights.

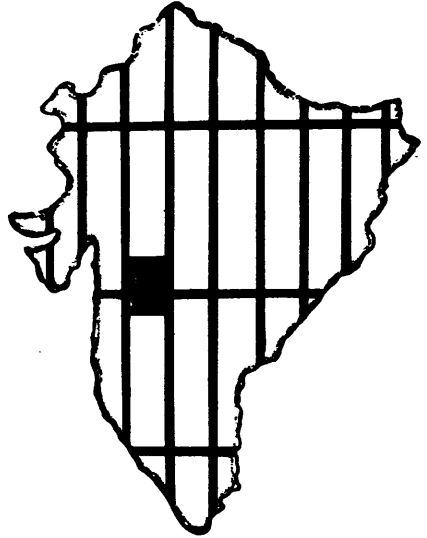
Left-centrist formations have also failed to provide an independent working-class political orientation.

Rightist parties like Congress (O), Jan Sangh, and BLD (Bhartiya Lok Dal) have been more or less routed by Gandhi. As a result, the ruling Congress Party has once more become the main political party of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The utter inability of the opposition parties to expose and explain the Gandhi regime's "progressive" facade renders considerable assistance to her regime in perpetuating confusion and thereby obstructing the organization of a working-class response to her regime's anti-working-class thrust. The political developments prior to and since June 26, 1975, have exposed the class limitations

of bourgeois opposition politics.

In fact, in an underdeveloped capitalist country like India, bourgeois opposition parties cannot transcend the class limitations of a parliamentary polity whose rules are set by the bourgeoisie. Even Stalinist parties and left-centrist formations have been caught in the mire of the popular-frontist, class-collaborationist politics of the Indian bourgeois parliamentary polity. The emergency and its continuance have increasingly rendered parliamentarism and parliamentary institutions politically obsolescent, in the



present context. While reckoning with this fact, revolutionary Marxists have nevertheless an obligation to make use of such institutions as tribunes for revolutionary agitation and propaganda.

Though Gandhi's coup is very broad-based and she has still been able to keep the military at bay, the forced suppression of class tensions through a constitutional dictatorship which is not strictly bonapartist will only make the future social upheavals more powerful and on a broader scale than hitherto.

In these circumstances, a transitional programme of economic and democratic demands assumes great significance for



building a sizeable nucleus of Trotskyist cadres of the party in India.

This programme must be premised around the central axis of an imperative need for absolutely independent working-class politics in India. This need to provide a revolutionary-Marxist alternative leadership of the working class cannot be fulfilled by the formation of a

---

**“Democratic demands must centre around lifting of the emergency, restoration of bourgeois-democratic rights, release of all political prisoners. . . .”**

---

“Janata Morcha” or a “Lok Paksh” [people’s party] or any other brand essentially involving class collaboration with any of the wings of the bourgeoisie or its parties on a lasting basis. No. The need of the hour is to liberate completely the Indian working class from the political spell and influence of the bourgeoisie and its reformist agents in the working-class movements.

The Indian working class has been considerably debilitated politically, disoriented and atomized by the consistent and persistent betrayals of the traditional working-class or left parties. It is therefore essential to pose the task of an

audacious united-front policy to defend the working class against the onslaught of the bourgeoisie. All the transitional demands must aim at forging real united-front organs of the toilers in actual class struggles.

Democratic demands must centre around: (1) lifting of the emergency; (2) restoration of bourgeois-democratic rights; (3) release of all political prisoners; (4) lifting of the ban on all political parties; (5) repeal of all draconian laws; (6) repeal of press censorship or precensorship.

The economic demands must have the central axis of protecting and preserving the gains of past working-class struggles and extending them. More especially they must include: (1) full trade-union rights for all central trade unions irrespective of whether they support or oppose the emergency, including representation at all levels of negotiations and bargaining, etc; (2) repeal of the wage freeze; (3) repeal of the bonus cut; (4) promulgation and strict enforcement of suitable legislation to ban all types of layoffs, retrenchments, and closures; (5) reopening of all such closed establishments or units and reinstatement of retrenched or laid-off workers; (6) formation of factory committees to fight for these demands.

In the immediate period ahead, such demands assume immediate importance in the party’s pedagogic and propaganda work, and in orienting cadres in the task of building a Trotskyist party in India.

## INDIA AFTER ONE YEAR OF GANDHI'S DICTATORIAL RULE

By Pankaj Roy

NEW DELHI—June 26, 1976, marks the completion of one year of emergency rule by the Gandhi regime. The entire week is being officially celebrated as "emergency week." Special official dispatches hailing the gains of emergency rule have been published by all the newspapers.

For the bourgeoisie, the major achievement of the emergency was its success in bringing working-class struggles almost to a standstill. It effectively restrained legitimate trade-union activities such as bargaining, negotiations, and settlement of disputes through arbitration, not to mention picketing and strikes.

The overall situation during the past year of regimentation has been characterized by a comparative passivity and indifference on the part of the masses. Wherever strikes and struggles have taken place despite Gandhi's rigid rule, they were predominantly of a defensive economic character. They did not have the political thrust they had in 1973-74.

The bourgeoisie has taken full advantage of this passivity and pressed further its economic offensive against the workers. A rigid wage freeze has been continued for one year, while the curb on dividend payments has been relaxed. Bonus payments to workers have been cut without evoking much organized resistance.

The lull in the class struggle has had the desired effect on raising production and increasing the profitability of investments. The steep rate of inflation was reduced, making it possible to keep

demands for higher wages under firm control.

In addition the bourgeoisie has adopted a classical means of restraining demands for higher wages—artificially swelling the industrial reserve army of labor. This huge army of unemployed hangs over the workers like the sword of Damocles. This serves as a weighty consideration preventing employed workers from agitating for their demands.

On March 19, 1976, Labor Minister Reddy informed the Rajya Sabha (upper house of Parliament) that the total number of workers laid off since the promulgation of the emergency on June 26, 1975, was 479,000. This figure does not include some major states, such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Haryana. In view of the fact that layoffs are now often a prelude to the closure of an establishment and retrenchment, this figure for a period of only six months is certainly alarming.

The regime amended the Industrial Disputes Act March 5. The amended act provides that employers in factories, mines, and plantations employing 300 or more workmen have to obtain prior governmental approval before they lay off or retrench workers, or close down their establishments. They were also required to apply within fifteen days of March 20 for permission to continue any layoff, retrench workmen, or close down establishments where the periods of the notice of retrenchment or closure already set had not expired.

The labor minister said March 19 that

no application seeking permission had been received so far from the central regions. He did not bother to try to reconcile this fact with his own figures, which showed that in the central regions as many as 111,670 workers were laid off between July and December 1975. This shows that the laws that are supposed to ameliorate the situation of labor are not applied.

Sporadic workers' struggles do take place, and news about them can be gleaned from the otherwise heavily censored press. The situation in West Bengal seems to be illustrative. According to a survey by the State Labor Department—"Labor in West Bengal, 1975"—there was a rise in the number of strikes, lockouts, retrenchments, layoffs, and closures.

Speaking in the West Bengal Assembly, State Labor Minister Gopal Das Nag also admitted that the situation was far from normal. He said: "Dark clouds are hovering over the industrial scene and almost every day the labor department

ed demands for nationalization of the jute industry.

The survey pointed out that so far as West Bengal is concerned, 1975 saw a disturbing labor situation that did not improve even after the emergency. Closure of industrial units in jute, engineering, and small factories alone affected 11,194 persons in 1975, up from 6,820 the previous year. In the period between the promulgation of the emergency and the end of 1975, 4,128 workers were retrenched in all. Sixty strikes involving 31,997 workers occurred in West Bengal resulting in a loss of 240,159 man-days. There were 45 closures, 51 lockouts, and 392 cases of layoffs, affecting 144,243 workers during the second half of 1975.

It is obvious that whatever workers' struggles have taken place after the emergency was declared are defensive in character and have centered mainly around the questions of layoffs, retrenchment, and closures. They remain uncoordinated and have not made a dent on the overall situation of passivity.

---

**“ . . . the reformist union leaders have docilely submitted to each attack.”**

---

hears complaints from employers that because of lack of funds and orders they would be forced to shut down their units.”

The jute industry is in severe crisis today, and the plight of jute workers has worsened. Their wages have been arbitrarily reduced, while their workload has been increased. They are forced to work on holidays without extra pay. Retrenchment of women workers goes apace. In contrast, the Gandhi regime has granted a series of concessions to the jute industrialists to enable them to continue to reap profits. It has consistently resist-

The central trade unions have not been able to substantially raise the level of these struggles, nor to take up effectively the cause of the workers. For the most part they have succumbed to the rigors of the emergency. The trade-union bureaucracy and the reformist union leaders have docilely submitted to each attack on the workers' standard of living, as well as on their trade-union and democratic rights.

To preserve its bureaucratic privileges, the union bureaucracy has been compelled to give up its earlier policy of resorting to pressure tactics to secure certain concessions for the working class. It has completely surrendered itself before the bourgeois state.

The Gandhi regime is bent on harnessing the forces of the organized labor movement to implement the emergency measures and silencing all opposition in the trade unions. The regime deals with only those trade unions that have sup-



ported the emergency. Even those federations like the AITUC (All-India Trade Union Congress), dominated by the pro-Moscow Communist party of India (CPI), are allowed to function only within carefully circumscribed limits.

The AITUC has perhaps gone the furthest in servile and abject adaptation to the current needs of the bourgeois state. This, of course, fits in well with the CPI's overall strategy of total support to the Gandhi regime. Even so, CPI Chairman S.A. Dange's reported remarks at a May Day meeting in Bombay are indeed revealing.

According to the account that ap-

peared in the May 22 issue of the *Bombay Economic and Political Weekly*, the exclusion of GKU (Girni Kamgar Union—textile wing of AITUC) from the agreement on workers' participation in management figured very prominently in the speeches by union leaders. Dange, however, is reported to have criticized all speakers who "complained so much" about the condition of the working class, the exclusion of the GKU, and so forth.

"It does not matter much that we do not get participation in the Bombay Mills," he said, "for are we not represented adequately at the top, in the national apex body?" He urged the workers to

tighten their belts at this crucial juncture, and to stop complaining about such minor matters as wages. "Have not our conditions improved substantially over 25 years?" he asked. "It is a lie to say they have not."

Dange also stated that CPI/AITUC's support to the twenty-point program was absolute, unconditional, and uncritical. He said: "It is the duty of workers to understand the historic significance of the 20-point programme and of the struggle against imperialism led by Indira Gandhi, the unique anti-imperialist ruler."

This helps illustrate the predicament of the organized trade-union movement in India. It has been politically expropriated by various bourgeois and reformist political parties. The Stalinist parties have failed to liberate the working class from the political spell of the bourgeoisie, owing to their political perspective of confining socialist revolution to an indefinite future stage. They cannot be expected to do so, since their policies are based on a strategy of class collaboration.

It is essential that the working class in India be decisively won away from the corrupting political influence of the bourgeoisie—whether exercised directly through the capitalist parties and

---

**“He urged the workers to tighten their belts . . . and to stop complaining about such minor matters as wages.”**

---

through unions like the Indian National Trade Union Congress, which is dominated by Gandhi's ruling Congress Party, or indirectly through working-class parties like the CPI.

There is an equal need for independent working-class politics in the unions. Even limited struggles require a correct and completely independent political

perspective. For example, the bonus cut provided a good opening for coordinating workers' grievances and organizing resistance. On a very limited scale, the Trotskyists of the Communist League of India were able to organize such resistance wherever it had pockets of influence in the working class, and they are currently carrying out similar work on the question of layoffs. The organized all-India trade unions could not exploit this opening because of their political perspective of subordination to the Gandhi regime.

Within this fundamental political axis of complete political independence of the working class, the basis can be laid for initially defensive struggles around such immediate economic demands as stopping layoffs and closures, repealing the bonus cut, and ensuring strict enforcement of laws protecting past gains of the workers.

Initial efforts might simply be propagandistic in character; nevertheless they are bound to strike a sympathetic response in the workers, since they are, by all indications, very much concerned about the way the emergency has continued to operate against them.

Much will depend on the further evolution of the economic situation. The continued passivity of the masses depends on (1) fear of unemployment, (2) repression by the regime, and (3) momentary control over rampant inflation. We say *momentary* because the bourgeoisie's ability to control inflation is very much due to favorable natural factors, such as the timely onset of a good monsoon last year. Recently, the wholesale price index of several essential commodities has again shown a rise.

In any case, a further reduction in workers' living standards is a certainty. This is a basic fact of life that will help erode the continued passivity of the working class. A revolutionary-Marxist policy must be based on this premise, so as to build a proletarian defense against bourgeois attacks.

## THE CONDITIONS IN GANDHI'S PRISONS

By Mary Tyler

Following the declaration of a state of emergency on June 26, 1975, Indira Gandhi arrested a large number of her political opponents. However, the problem of the conditions facing political prisoners in India is a very old one. In fact, the country has lived under emergency laws almost without interruption since 1962. Even before last June, it was estimated that there were 30,000 to 40,000 political prisoners in Indian jails, without trial for five to seven years.

Many of these people have been charged under specific clauses of the Indian penal code, which is almost unchanged since the era of the British Raj. But, since 1972, massive arrests have been carried out in the name of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, as well as under the Defence of India Rules, which had been drawn up by the British colonialists to suppress the independence movement.

The political prisoners are placed into two main categories: those who are released after a relatively short time, and the "hard core," who have already spent several years in prison without trial. The majority in the first category are strikers, satyagrahis [satyagrahis are demonstrators who practice nonviolent civil disobedience in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi], and demonstrators, as well as people who publicly denounced the government or participated in "illegal" meetings. The government makes generous use of Section 144 of the Indian penal code to ban meetings of more than five persons in order to carry out mass arrests of the participants, who then are

kept in jail until the agitation has died down.

In 1974, during the protest campaign led by Jaya Prakash Narayan against corruption, unemployment, and high prices, and which was also aimed at winning reforms in the educational system, thousands of workers, peasants, students, lawyers, and other members of the liberal professions were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). In all of Bihar state, only two persons' detentions were upheld after appeal to the High Court. Many persons were also arrested several times (since then, the right to appeal arbitrary detention has been abolished). For several months in 1974, the three prisons at Hazaribagh alone held more than 6,000 political prisoners. Since 1972, it has become necessary to reopen the old prison camps, which were used by the British, following the waves of arrests that have hit striking teachers, railway employees, non-civil-service government employees, miners, antigovernment demonstrators, and others.

The majority of those who remain imprisoned without trial for long periods are alleged to be Naxalites, members or sympathizers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The party was eventually banned by Gandhi after the state of emergency proclamation in June, but in reality its activists and supporters, in order to escape arrest, have never been able to function other than clandestinely since its formation in 1969. At the time of the big anti-Naxalite campaign in 1970-71, many students were arrested for having in their posses-

sion literature published in Peking. Such literature had not been officially banned. Others were arrested because they pasted up posters or wore "Mao" buttons.

In Bihar, where I was myself detained without trial for more than five years, the present number of "Naxalite" prisoners is estimated at 2,000, although exact figures are not available. No trials have yet been held. The case in which I was



involved—until the charges against me were withdrawn—is not yet over, seven months later. The slowness of this process suits perfectly the government's objective of eliminating potential opposition while sparing the police from worrying about investigations to support the charges. On the other hand, the accused cannot afford the high costs needed for their defense in prolonged cases, which, by the way, enables the government attorneys and their aides to assure themselves of a substantial income.

The law stipulating that all persons accused of a criminal offense be brought before a court every two weeks is openly

violated. Arrested in May 1970, I did not come before a court for the first time until April 1973, still without being informed of the charges lodged against me. During the longest part of my detention, I was in a prison located 250 kilometers [about 155 miles] from the court where my case was to be heard. My demand for legal aid had been ignored. I was not able to get my first real consultation with a lawyer—away from the presence of all police—until October 1974. For three years they prevented me from communicating with my codefendants. And when a petition concerning me was at the point of being presented to the High Court in Patna, 250 kilometers from Hazaribagh, I was not notified until 5:00 p.m. the day before, making it impossible for me to contact a lawyer to represent me.

Prisoners' mail is arbitrarily withheld. Their visitors are confronted with all sorts of obstacles, often traveling long distances (in my case 450 kilometers from Calcutta to Hazaribagh) in order to have the privilege of waiting, sometimes for nine hours, before being able to talk to the prisoner for five to ten minutes. It is often impossible to find the papers relating to one's own case. Under such conditions, it is extremely difficult for relatives or friends of prisoners to do anything to help them. The petitions that the prisoners address to the courts, prison authorities, or government agencies are ignored.

The physical conditions of detention vary from one area to another, but there probably is not one Indian prison that can conform to international standards. The waves of arrests are so massive, the judgments so slow, that the prison population is growing at an alarming rate. At Jamshedpur (in Bihar), where I spent several months, there were, at the time I left in July 1975, 1,100 prisoners detained in a prison built to hold 137.

Ill and in good health, mad and sane, old and young, tried, and untried: All are crowded together, in temperatures that

surpass 40 degrees Centigrade [104 degrees Fahrenheit] in the summer and in a climate where the humidity often reaches 90 percent. Rats, bedbugs, mosquitos, and flies abound. Scabies, smallpox, malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, and dysentery are constant illnesses. With a nearly total absence of medical care, prisoners die every day. There is no arrangement to ensure the isolation of prisoners suffering from an infectious or contagious disease. The diet is extremely deficient in protein and vitamins, water is scarce, and hygienic facilities are primitive. Clothes are rarely provided. There are no educational or recreational services.

In the same prison, fifty "Naxalite" prisoners were confined in a row of cells, two by three meters, each holding five prisoners. They were young people for the most part, sixteen or seventeen years old when they were arrested. The cells are in darkness even during the day. And one can read only by crouching in front of the grated door, the only source of light and air.

The "Naxalites" were in irons day and night. The use of irons is supposed to be a punishment for those prisoners who tried to escape or a means to control dangerous madmen. In the prisons I passed through, it was in reality a constant practice to place those detainees held as "Naxalites" in irons from the moment of their arrival. These shackles impede walking, sitting, sleeping, washing, or going to the toilet in a normal manner.

By the time my trial began, my codefendants had worn their irons night and day for four years, almost without interruption. Their shackles were removed to allow them to appear in court: It was obvious that they could not walk normally; their limbs had atrophied.

Since 1971, about 150 "Naxalite" prisoners have been shot to death and many others wounded during "incidents" in the prisons of Bengal and Bihar. At the central prison in Hazaribagh, on July 25, 1971, sixteen prisoners were killed and thirty wounded following minor disturbances in which some "Naxalite" prisoners took part. On June 19, 1973, six of my codefendants, already in irons, were

---

**"With a nearly total absence of medical care, prisoners die every day."**

---

placed in handcuffs and beaten by the prison guards and by trustees for having made tea over their gas lamp (tea is not given out in Bihar prisons).

Those considered potential leaders are isolated, sometimes in cells with condemned criminals. Some prisons prohibit writing materials. For more than two years, I could have neither pencil nor paper. Newspapers and books are heavily censored by the employees of the special police, who are permanently posted to those prisons where "Naxalites" are detained. Bail is never granted, even in the case of serious illness, and limited liberty on parole was refused to one of my codefendants when his father died of cancer of the liver.

In recent years, many of the old prison camps previously used by the British have been reopened, while new prisons, like Bhagalpur in Bihar, which are entirely devoted to the solitary confinement of "Naxalites," have been built at various places. Everything was done as if the Indian government were seeking to acquire the means to continue throwing a large number of political dissidents into prison for a long time to come.



# Further Reading

## BOOKS

<b>CAPITALISM IN CRISIS</b>	\$1.95
Dick Roberts	
<b>DEMOCRACY AND REVOLUTION</b>	2.95
George Novack	
<b>LEON TROTSKY ON CHINA</b>	6.95
<b>PROSPECTS FOR SOCIALISM IN AMERICA</b>	2.95
Edited by Jack Barnes and Mary-Alice Waters	
<b>THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM FOR SOCIALIST REVOLUTION</b>	2.45
Leon Trotsky	

## PAMPHLETS

<b>DETENTE: WHY IT WON'T BRING PEACE</b>	.50
Caroline Lund and Dick Roberts	
<b>FASCISM—WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO FIGHT IT</b>	.60
Leon Trotsky	
<b>THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA</b>	.35
Tony Thomas	
<b>MARXISM VERSUS MAOISM</b>	.60
Tony Thomas	
<b>PUERTO RICO: U.S. COLONY IN THE CARIBBEAN</b>	.35
José G. Pérez	
<b>REVOLUTIONARIES IN MAO'S PRISONS</b>	.50
Li Fu-jen and Peng Shu-tse	
<b>SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY</b>	.25
Linda Jenness	
<b>SOCIALISM AND THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS</b>	.25
Linda Jenness	
<b>A STRATEGY FOR BLACK LIBERATION</b>	.60
Tony Thomas	



PATHFINDER PRESS, INC.

410 West Street, New York 10014 / 47 The Cut, London SE1 8LL  
Complete catalog of books and pamphlets free on request