

Railway Budget—Bankruptcy Writ Large

The railway budget for 1981-82 is not merely a repetition of last year's budget but is something more. It imposes a record rate of increase in freight charges, gives the same false promise of operational efficiency as also surplus in revenue earnings which will not be fulfilled. Its attack on suburban seasonal ticket holders is only kept in suspense. But what is portentous, it will trigger high rate of inflation because of big hike in freight charges of all vital industrial inputs and consumption items especially after significant rise in prices of coal, pig iron and steel. And yet it is but the precursor to more dangerous attack that is coming through the general budget. It shows that the crisis-ridden economy is facing a crash, bringing in its train unprecedented sufferings and destitution of the people. The paramount question therefore at the moment is will the people bear it unmanly or should give a powerful rebuff through organised movement manfully? It's time to decide.

Budget in a nutshell

The railway minister Mr. Kedar Pandey, has proposed in his budget for 1981-82 a flat surcharge of 15 percent over the existing freight rates for goods other than salt for domestic use, fire-wood and charcoal. This stiff rate of

increase will fetch, it has been expected, an additional revenue of Rs. 276.08 crores. This is about goods traffic which include both vital industrial inputs and finished goods as also consumption items. Apart from this, even the increased transportation cost on

movement of food-grains will have to be borne by the government itself. Then comes the increase by 10 to 15 percent on passenger traffic expected to yield an additional revenue of Rs. 70.04 crores. It is now on first-class air-conditioned, ordinary first class and second class passengers, in mail, express and ordinary trains with varying rates from 10 to 15%. It is to be noted however that the minister says that the increase in fare and freight charges is 'ad hoc' supplementary charges hinting at further increase in fare of monthly or season tickets for the poor and middle class passengers in suburban trains. But for the present, the result of this budgetary exercise has been an esti-

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Surge of Movement in West Bengal

Salute to the fighting people of West Bengal! They have given a rebuff to the 'Left Front' Government of the state in the battle against its disastrous language and education policy. Reeling under the pressure of public opinion the government has taken recourse to the tricky move of declaring that this year it is not going to eliminate English from primary education. So long it had been impervious to appeals, logic and protest. Condemned by all sections and increasingly getting isolated from the people, the CPI(M) led Government has now resorted to this stand. The people have advanced, but they should beware for the Government has not abandoned its anti-people policy. It is not time to relax—the movement has to be advanced to force the Government repeal its policy.

Advancing from phase to phase, this movement under the banner of the *Committee to Resist Curtailment of Education Encroachment on Autonomy* went into a massive Civil Disobedience programme from February 16 to 21. Distinguished intellectuals, lawyers, women, teachers, workers, peasants, students, youths and others from all over West Bengal participated in this week long programme, the kind of which even this citadel of mass movement had not witnessed after the independence. Age, infirmity, pre-occupation—nothing stood as bar to the aroused sense of social responsibility. The cause had sparked the resolve which drew them into the streets to violate the pro-

hibitory law and court arrest in thousands day after day.

Once during the previous Congress regime in this State, a scheme had been implemented to begin the study of English at class V instead of at class II as was the practice. The grave consequences of it were soon realized by the people when it was found that the new measure had caused a decline in the knowledge of English of the people's who found it difficult to pursue higher studies at the college level with their poor equipment with the language. The government later changed its policy on advice from educationists and the systems of study of English from class III was begun.

Even this past ex-

perience could not deter the 'Left Front' from adopting the policy of eliminating English from primary education. Now defenceless, with no arguments to make out its case this government has started distorting facts and vilifying the critics. Ministers and leaders of the Front are saying that in most states of the country English is not taught at the primary stage. But the 'Left Front' Government's own statistics which it has released in an advertisement in the press show that out of 30 states (except Sikim) and centrally administered territories English is taught in as many as 23 at the primary stage between class I and V.

These leaders are also resorting to the falsehood of saying that in socialist countries like China and Russia two languages are not taught at the primary stage not to speak of a foreign language like English. The fact about the syllabus for China's primary schools alone proves—how far they are from the truth. This syllabus (Source: Peking Review,

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Comrade Nihar Mukherjee On Railway Budget

Strongly protesting against the proposed rise in Railway fares and freights, Mr. Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI has issued the following statement on 20th February, to the press:—

"Coming on the heels of the rise in fares of bus, taxi, tram etc. throughout the country, the unprecedented rise in passenger fares and freights as envisaged in the Railway Budget is going to be the most severe attack on the common people who have been already bled white due to extreme capitalist exploitation. This will surely boost up a fresh inflationary spiral bringing

in its wake unspeakable miseries to the toiling millions. This again exposes the exploitative class character of the Indira Congress Government despite its crocodile tears for the common people.

"We call upon the people not to prove themselves as pawns in the hands of the Central and State Governments serving the interest of the capitalist class but to build up mighty resistance movement to rebuff onslaughts. We again appeal to the Left and Democratic Parties to come forward and build up a joint movement against this decision".

Bangalore City Organising Committee Registers Protest

Bangalore, February 21:

The Bangalore City Organising Committee of Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) hereby registers its strongest protest against the recommendations of the V. K. Gokak panel which seeks to make the study of English optional while making Hindi or Sanskrit compulsory at the higher secondary level. Again, to force non-Kannada speaking students to study Kannada as the First Language from 5th Standard onwards is a highly undemocratic recommendation which is a direct attack on the rights of the community of linguistic minorities in the state.

The SUCI calls upon all sections of the people to oppose any move on the part of the Government to

denigrate the role of English in the field of education. We urge upon them to take cue from the glorious struggle being led by educationists, intellectuals, students, women and the vast masses in West Bengal who have taken up cudgels against the anti-people language policy of the 'Left Front' Government which if implemented would not only abolish English from primary level and make optional at higher levels but also make language study optional at the higher level.

The SUCI demands that Mother-Tongue, whichever it be, should be the first language and English should be the Second language and 'Optional' status to English which is the window to the world of

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The Government force the people to pay for inefficiency, corruption and crisis in economy

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mated increase in revenue to the tune of Rs 356'26 crores.

The railway minister justifies this additional impost, the impact of which will, to say the least, be disastrous on the economy, by making the arithmetic exercise to show that out of this additional revenue, Rs. 349'91 crores will go to meet the dividend liability and Rs. 38'47 crores towards expenditure chargeable to the development fund, there will be a net surplus, marginal though, of Rs. 11'41 crores.

It is to be borne in mind that this sort of arithmetic does not simply work. In the last year's budget after enhancing both fares and goods tariff stiffly, it was shown that additional revenue to the tune of Rs. 200 crores would be fetched out of which there would be a net surplus of Rs. 33 crores. But in the revised estimate it now comes out that instead of a net surplus there has been actually a deficit of Rs. 52'3 crores.

A Peep into railway economy

To know the actual state of affair in the railways, although the daily bare experiences of the commuters are enough, let us have a glimpse on the railway economy including the operational aspect. On the aspect of railway economy it would be enough to know that even for financing its projected developmental plans, this year's budget proposes to withdraw Rs. 450 crores from the depreciation reserve fund (DRF) when the budget makes a total allocation for this purpose far below the withdrawal figure, Rs. 321 crores to be exact means a precarious financial position of meeting developmental expenditure out of reserves for depreciation. And this the government is doing in the background of the specific comment in the main report of the Railway Tariff Enquiry Committee on the inadequacy of

annual depreciation provision. It says that: "The provision for depreciation by the Indian Railways has been less than at the desired level, especially after the financial position started deteriorating after the late Sixties." And what has been the result? Due to lack of funds, the railways could not place orders for wagons and coaches. The present bottleneck in railway's carrying capacity of goods traffic has assumed a serious proportion. In one estimate, when the present fleet of wagons of 500,000 should have been at least doubled to cope up with increased carrying capacity, in reality however, according to railway sources, 20,000 to 30,000 wagons are in such a condition that they may be inoperative at any time. In the matter of passenger coaches especially for the suburban trains where trains often do not run or are cancelled for want of rakes the less said the better.

Mr. Pandey, held out the promise that in the Sixth Plan which he described as a "rehabilitation plan" some 50,000 wagons in terms of four wheelers, 5000 coaches and 300 electrical multiple units will be replaced as also there will be renewal of 14,000 km of track. As if to atone for the past crime, Mr. Pandey was saying so or it may be, he was making this exercise to assuage the feelings of common people who would be the worst victims of his budget, both ways, by bearing the ever increasing cost of inefficiency, drift and criminal apathy as also the increase in prices of essential items of consumption. Whatever may there be the reason, facts do not speak of any possibility of change in the condition towards the better. This is because of some concrete facts and reasons. First, the ratio of working expenses to gross traffic receipts has been steadily increas-

ing to its present figure of 91.1 percent in 1979-80 (revised estimate). The government would have the people believe that this is because of increased cost of wages or salaries of the employees. No. This is not for this reason. This is because of the fact well known to the country. It is for rampant corruption, wastage, top-heavy administration and what not. In fact the railway administration has long been identified with all sorts of corrupt practices. And in every budget the people have been asked to pay for corruption and inefficiency as they are being asked to do the same now.

Secondly, the entire estimate about passenger and goods traffic revenue—their expected increase has been based on operational efficiency but because of the reason we have just mentioned, e.g. want of any planning for replacement, and or increase in wagons and coaches, improvement of railway lines etc. this estimate has gone awry. And to make good the loss, everytime there has been the easy solution of passing heavier burden on the people whereas, services have further worsened. Queer logic, queerer is the sense of justice. One example will make the point clear. In last year's budget, when the railway minister showed the country an arithmetical exercise for fetching a surplus in revenue, it was on the basis of estimated capacity of goods traffic of 215 million tonnes but later this estimate was considered not achievable in view of actual short fall by 21.5 million tonnes. And so instead of set target of 215 million tonne, the actual came down to 195 million tonne. Similar happened in case of passenger traffic. Not that there was less demand on both count in the country. Instead, industry, power stations and even common people

suffered tremendously because of wagon shortage as coal and other inputs could not be moved and even ration shops were out of stocks of grains. Need we comment on the sense of responsibility and or efficiency of the government? People pay or are forced to pay for this criminal apathy to their minimum needs as also for the corruption and inefficiency. We are not aware of any such sordid tale in any other country where a civilised government runs the public affairs. Let it be stated straight and clearly that it is the common people out of whose hard earned money and toil, the total capital asset of this giant institution has reached Rs. 6000 crores but because of corrupt practices, gross mismanagement, lack of planning on the one hand its carrying capacity of goods as also passenger traffic instead of increasing and improving is creating infrastructural bottleneck to the serious detriment of the economy and on the other its indebtedness to general revenue has been increasing sharply from Rs. 208 crores in 1973-74 to Rs. 426 crores in 1979-80. And it is the people who are again being forced to pay for this.

There is another part of the gross mismanagement and misdirection of the railway economy. The government, while covering up its inefficiency takes the plea that freight and fare increase is essential in the interest of bringing down the figure of deficit financing. But this so-called plea has no leg to stand upon. It is for the simple reason that the government is the biggest customer of railway service. The escalation of cost in moving food grains and other vital industrial inputs like coal or steel the prices of which have also been increased will be met either by increasing the money supply or taxation the worst victim in both

cases will be the common people.

Before we conclude we would like to mention another relevant issue in this connection. The engineering industry in Eastern region particularly of West Bengal has been the principal producer of wagons. Since, the later part of Sixties, to be more specific, from 1967 onward, the railways suddenly drastically curtailed its order for wagon building. There was deep depression in the engineering industry curtailing employment seriously. That the railways also suffered is being admitted today when wagon replacement has been made the principal programme in the railways in the Sixth plan after three decades. Even in this aspect, the government's bungling and the play of vested interest is noticeable. The railway authorities have stated that as the local manufacturers would not be able to supply 1,10,000 wagons within the plan period, wagons will have to be imported. Facts, however, state otherwise. The wagon manufacturing units in the region have an installed capacity of 28,000 wagons per year whereas they are getting orders of 8 to 9 thousand wagons. That wagon manufacturers can step up production has been proved when they claim to fulfill the orders of 10,000 four wheelers in a year. A country plagued with acute unemployment problem cannot afford to fritter away a valuable foreign exchange over an item, the production capacity of which is fairly well within the country and the fulfilment of requirement of which is well within the reach. Given the supply of the electricity in the state of West Bengal which is in a bad shape no doubt, and also the supply of essential parts like axles and wheel sets which the Central government assures to import, why this internal

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ASSAM—WHERE LIES THE SOLUTION

The Assam situation still continues to remain as a thorn in the Indian body politic. There had been no dearth of pious wishes for a right solution of the problem but situation remained unchanged. The AASU and Ganasangram Parishad who led the agitation in Assam were so long adamantly insisting upon 1951 National register to be the basis for the determination of foreign nationals. The Central Government adopted a dillydallying tactics and kept alive the situation paying no heed to any reasonable proposal urged upon time and again by our party which was the right solution to the problem of Assam.

After a lull once again there has started some talk on the Assam question. The BJP has advanced a formula for the solution of the Assam problem to which, according to some newspaper report the AASU and Ganasangram Parishad expressed accord. Of course the AASU leadership on 17th February last denied their accord and said that they had their own formula which they would advance at the negotiating table and expressed their willingness to sit for negotiation without any precondition now. The same report of Statesman dated 18 February, further stated that AASU would respond "positively" if a formal invitation was received from the Centre. The same report further stated that the Union Home Minister had reiterated last week the Government's readiness to invite the Assam agitation leaders for talks provided it was not spurned.

At an enlarged meeting of the Assam State Committee of our Party it was strongly felt that in order to restore normalcy, sense of security in the minds of all sections of the people of the state, a negotiated settlement of the foreign national issue is the crying need of the hour. The State Committee strongly opined that in the overriding interest of unity, amity, goodwill and understanding among all sections of the people and in the interest of uninterrupted development of Assamese language and culture, all concerned should adopt a flexible approach towards the solution of the issue.

The State Committee also proposed a scheme

in this regard, cardinal points of which are:

Strict vigilance must be kept against new infiltration into the state and for this purpose to arrange for impartial but strong machinery; as for the economic development of the State the Central Government must immediately announce a 'package deal'; the Assamese language must be declared as the 'official language' of the state and for that if necessary the Constitution should be amended, ensuring, of course, the rights of the minorities to cultivate their respective language and culture.

In all our previous articles on Assam problem we have shown that the resentment among the Assamese speaking people grew due to, on the one hand, acute economic crisis in people's life while on the other because of their concern for the preservation of Assamese Language and culture and more particularly their anxiety and apprehension over the status of Assamese language as the medium of instruction and as the official language of the state. Due to the weakness of the left movement, people could be diverted to the wrong track and the agitation was directed against other sections of the common people and in the name of a so-called movement for the deportation of foreign nationals it took the character of a narrow, provincial, communal and even a separatist movement.

At the very outset when the situation in Assam was taking such a turn, the Assam State Committee of our party submitted a concrete

proposal to the Central Government for its solution pointing out the crux of the problem. In our proposal, referring to the volcanic situation in Assam and the possibility of an all out fratricidal strife in the state, we demanded that immediate measures be taken to remove all sorts of apprehensions of Assamese people regarding the protection of identity of their language and culture as well as giving recognition to the Assamese language as the official language of the state. We also demanded that the parochial and communal forces must be dealt with severely and security of the minority people and their right to cultivate their own language and culture must also be ensured. We also demanded that if necessary the Constitution should be amended to remove any obstacle to declaring the Assamese language as the official language of the state. We further demanded that in order to contain the ever increasing unemployment problem and the economic backwardness of the state a package programme must be taken up immediately, for speedy economic development of the state. But the Central Government did not show any inclination to implement these concrete proposals. Rather, instead of fulfilling the legitimate will of the people the Congress (I) showed more eagerness and made frantic efforts to anyhow form a government with the help of opportunist floor crossers and made all out efforts towards this end.

At last, in December last, the Congress (I) installed a minority government in Assam with the help of opportunist defectors. Before forming the government they declared that this government would activate the inactive administration for fulfilling the aspirations of the people, would tackle the basic problem of the state. But after they assumed power till now,

there have been no signs of any such initiative.

When the Congress (I) Cabinet assumed office, the AASU and Ganasangram Parishad gave call for a non-cooperation movement. When the reactionary forces took advantage of it and the movements turned into a communal strife, this government did not take any effective step to ensure the safety of the minority people. On the contrary, in the name of maintaining law and order they came down heavily on the peaceful non-cooperators with coercion. Naturally, solution to the basic problem did not come any nearer by this. Had they really wanted a solution to this problem and wanted to put an end to the President's rule out of love for democracy, then it would have been the primary task of the government to take definite effective steps for the solution of the problem through calling the Assembly and discussing there the burning issues of people's lives. But they took no such step. Moreover the way in which the Central Government is now shirking its own responsibility on the plea that now it is up to the State Government to solve the problems of the state cannot but raise doubts as to its motive. It is trying to give the impression that when a "popular" government has been installed in the state, it is they who will solve the problem; and the responsibility of maintaining law and order lies with the state and not the Centre. But the Assam problem is not an ordinary law and order problem. We have time and again analysed in depth this problem and pointed out its crux and have also placed definite proposal towards solution of the problem in order to isolate the parochial, separatist reactionary forces. It was not difficult for the Central Government to accept our proposals and take effective steps for the solution of

the problem. But they did not do so. On the contrary, avoiding what is its basic responsibility, the Central Government is following the politics of manoeuvring in Assam by trying to utilise the problem in petty parliamentary interest. And with that end in view they are preparing the ground for a secret understanding with the AASU and Ganasangram Parishad.

It would not be out of place here to dwell a little on the BJP formula advanced with much fanfare by Mr. Atal Behari Bajpayee recently.

Let us first of all see what is the cardinal point of the BJP formula: Those who settled in Assam till 1961 should be treated as citizens of Assam; those who came between 1961 and 1971 their names should be deleted from Voters' List and they must leave Assam and settle elsewhere in India.

But if 1961 is accepted as the base year for the determination of foreign nationals, it will mean that a person cannot be called a foreign national even if his name is not included in 1951 National Register.

But what basic difference can there be between the years 1961 and 1971? What logic can there be in the proposition that persons who came before 1961 are citizens of India but those fail to be so who came after?

There is no logic in it, a fact the BJP, the AASU as well as the Ganasangram Parishad leaders know well. When AASU leaders say, even if the report about their unanimity with the BJP formula is accepted as incorrect, they have their own formula they will put on the negotiating table—it means they are now shifting from their original position of 1951 National Register which they were so long adamantly insisting to be the basis for the determination of foreign nationals. But whichever year they now propose to be the basis other than 1951 would raise a pertinent question:

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Surge of Movement in West Bengal

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7-1-80 issue) includes, among other subjects, a foreign language (which in most cases is English). These leaders have stooped so low as to fabricate the falsehood that the leaders of this movement do not want the mother tongue to be the medium of instruction. Like the fascists they think they can make a lie true simply by repeating it.

So all this fuming and fretting of the Government. So also the rousing spectacle of the historic Civil Disobedience Movement in Calcutta against the Government's language and education policy. Each day of the programme was observed in a specific way.

The 16th February marked the opening day of the movement. Eminent intellectuals like Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy, distinguished historian, Dr. B. N. Dasgupta, former Vice-Chancellor of North Bengal University, Dr. Arabinda Bose, former Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, Sri Manoj Basu, noted writer, Sri Sankar Prasad Mitra, ex-Chief Justice of Calcutta

High Court, Sri Sailesh Day, noted writer, Sm. Bani Ray, noted writer, Manik Mukherjee, Vice-President of the Committee and others were present to lead the violation of law. Lawyers had come wearing their professional dress. Teachers, students, guardians had rallied.

The big, decorated, disciplined procession which started from the meeting place advanced to Esplanade East raising slogans against the Government's anti-people education policy. The rush was lined up in either side by members of the public who were enthused to see their cause assume such massive resistance. Behind the Committee's banner at the front walked down its distinguished leaders.

The lawyers followed next. The big mass of people of other walks came behind. The distinguished leaders and lawyers first broke the police cordon and were arrested. A deep roar and a wave of applause from the vast public around greeted them. The stream of participants violated law

batch after batch for hours together. Long afterwards, remaining participants were told by the police of their inability to take any more violators to the jail as they had no more vehicles. The street lights were put out. At this thousands of people who were waiting to be taken away by the police went back in a procession.

On the 18th, 'Women's Day', thousands of women violated law and courted arrest. Sm. Pratiba Basu, noted writer, walked on crutches to court arrest, Sm. Gouri Ayub was also arrested. Earlier, a meeting in Subodh Mullick Square was addressed by them and the mass leader, Pratiba Mukherjee.

On the 'Teachers' Day' 19th February teachers from schools, colleges and universities participated in the mass violation of law led by Sri Pramathanath Bishi, noted writer, and professor Subir Basu Roy, Joint Secretary of the Committee.

Workers and peasants came on the 20th to press demand for opportunity to learn English and access to higher education. At a rally before the

procession began, distinguished leaders of workers and peasants, Fatick Ghosh, Sitesh Dasgupta, Amir Ali Halder addressed. Badsha Khan presided over. Sri Dwijendralal Sengupta, former MP, was also present to address the rally. After the long procession reached Esplanade East, thousands of workers and peasants were arrested for violating law.

The last was the 'Students' and Youths' Day', on the 21st February to commemorate the martyrs of the historic language movement of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). There could be hardly anything else to equal this history. From places afar, from schools, colleges and universities, braving odds, assaults and obstructions by the student wing of the CPI (M), had come thousands of children, students and youths. Their assembly spilled over from the lawns of the Calcutta University premises to the streets around.

Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy former Vice-chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Dr. Protul Gupta, addressed the

gathering on behalf of the Committee. Dipankar Roy addressed on behalf of the Students' Struggle Committee.

The spectacle of the long procession—portraits of Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra, Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Saratchandra, Nazrul and Netaji carrying in front, placards displaying quotations of the pioneers stressing the importance of learning English by our people, festoons and banners all around—electrified the witnessing public on the streets. It was a great manifestation of the resolve of the students and youths to resist at all cost the anti-people policy of the Government. Thousands of them broke the police cordon and courted arrest amidst deafening applause of the public. The police acknowledged in the end its inability to take any more to jail.

The Government is yet to give up its course. The people should beware that hard struggles are ahead. They must rise to be equal to the task of forcing the Government abandon its anti-people language and education policy.

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I, Sukomal Dasgupta hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Anti-people Railway Budget

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employment potential should not be utilised to the fullest extent? The play of vested interest must not intervene in a matter of such importance to the economy.

Aftermath of the budgetary exercise

There can be no two opinions about the grave inflationary potential of the railway budget particularly when it has come with the proposal of freight and fare increase in the wake of increase in the prices of oil, coal, pig iron and steel—all essential inputs to production. The jackals of industry are yelling seemingly in protest but with glee at heart. They do not miss a single opportunity of making a plea for increase in prices, the governments' tax and fiscal measures. That is why all the burden

supposed to be borne by them is passed on to common people and the profit of the capitalists instead of diminishing goes up. The recent survey of RBI about 421 big industries shows that profit rose in a single year by 56 percent. Indeed, the country has become a paradise for the capitalist looters, tax dodgers and corrupt people. And the common people who toil hard just to eke out their bare subsistence are being forced to pay the price for all this.

Organised movement the only alternative

But what will the people do? Will they bear this burden of this corrupt and exploitative system which is growing heavier and still heavier and backbreaking just like slaves? Tolerance or endurance, said

Saratchandra, the great litterateur may be the quality of beasts of burden but is a slur on manhood. We would appeal to the people to realise the truth that no injustice anywhere, anytime has ever been removed without organised resistance and struggle. Human history has progressed thus. Today, history has placed our party SUCI, the only revolutionary party on the soil to uphold the cause of the people and the banner of struggle. The party leadership chalked out the programme of countrywide struggle on some burning issues among which the rising tax burden, prices are included. The party has been endeavouring its best to build up a mighty resistance movement on democratic demands and rights. It depends, for its success, people's active response and participation. Will they not do it?

Fiasco of Land Reforms in West Bengal

The much trumpeted 'Operation Barga' of the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government has failed to achieve its objective as is evident from the latest circular by the Land and Land Reforms Department to the Divisional Commissioners, District Magistrates and Sub-Divisional officers. In the said circular it has been stated, while informing that the 'Operation Barga' will end by March 31, 1981, 'Our success till date has been only 50 percent and to withdraw a programme at this level of achievement would really mean admission of defeat'. 'Operation Barga' was launched in July 1978 to give a push to the programme of recording the names of bargadars and originally it was decided to last upto December 31, 1978. But since then the time limit has been extended several times and at last the 'Left Front' Government decided to withdraw the operation by March 31, 1981.

We discussed in our previous issues the pros and cons of the much trumpeted 'Operation Barga' and showed that the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government was not at all serious to implement the minimum democratic demands voiced by the poor and landless peasants of our country. Had they been really serious in recording the names of the share croppers, in distributing the vested land among the poor and landless peasants, in confiscating the ceiling surplus land, in providing institutional credit support to the small and marginal farmers, in enforcing the minimum wages to the agricultural labourers etc. etc. they would have shunned the legalistic approach and instead of depending on the administrative machinery and the Panchayat bodies whose members mostly belong to the land owning class, they would have put more reliance on the democratic movements of the poor and landless peasants for the implementation of the democratic demands of peasantry with a view to giving them a respite from the capitalist exploitation. But it is seen that after three and a half years of office the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government instead of admitting defeat publicly and making serious investigation as to why the operation has failed to achieve the desired result is trying to hoodwink the people through false propaganda. It

clearly demonstrates that the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government did never contemplate to strike a blow to the rural vested interest by firmly breaking the chain of this class with the police and the bureaucracy. But what is this due to? Is it a failure and if it is so then is not this failure of the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government due to the stark reality that the necessary political will was totally absent because of CPI(M)'s close link with landed vested interest? A look into the very composition of the Krishak Sabha, the peasant front of CPI(M) will bear testimony to this fact.

Any one acquainted with the rural scene in West Bengal knows how the number of landless agricultural workers is increasing by leaps and bounds and the pauperisation of the majority of the rural folk is going on in an accelerated pace. The majority of the poor and landless peasants is on the brink of physical extinction because of starvation and malnutrition. All of these hapless people are under the clutches of the rural vested interest. They are forced to accept consumption credit at a fantastically high rate of interest which is sometimes as high as 300 percent per annum. According to the West Bengal Government Publication, "An Evaluation of a pledge" the average daily earning of an agricultural labourer is only 35 paise and in some districts such as Bankura

and Purulia it is even less. An agricultural labourer in West Bengal remains without work for at least seven months out of twelve months in a year. As against this picture of gloom, the intense pauperisation of the vast multitude of the people in the country side, their growing burden of usury and misery, the other side of the picture is completely different. There is growing concentration of land in the hands of a few, the share croppers are evicted, the rightful share of crop is denied and the whole agricultural economy is controlled by the jotedars who constitute small section of rural population. Under such a situation any pro-people Government must have tried to take some positive steps to encourage building up of peasants' movement so as to free them from the clutches of the vested interest and also for realisation of the just and legitimate demands of the peasantry. In this connection it is to be mentioned that Indian bourgeoisie also wants implementation of some land reform measures and this is surely not due to any pro-peasantry attitude of the Indian bourgeoisie but due to their frantic bid to stave off their own crisis—the crisis of capitalism. The growing concentration of land in the hands of a few is a feature in a capitalist agricultural economy and in our country, where capitalism has firmly entrenched itself in agricultural economy, the small and marginal farmers are forced to sell their small holdings to the big jotedars owing to the inexorable law of capitalism. But because of the deep-seated crisis of the present day capitalism which is generating unprecedented unemployment, the bourgeoisie shudder to think what will happen if the vast army of rural masses alienated from land join the rank of the urban unemployed. So in order to stave off their own crisis they are trying various palliatives in order

to arrest the rural masses, as far as possible within the fold of the landed economy thereby giving capitalism which is existing on borrowed time, a lease of life. So it is observed that during the previous Congress regimes also attempts for some reforms in land relation were made but while trying to implement these reform measures they have taken utmost care to nip in the bud any possibility of the growth of a militant movement of the peasants as they are mortally afraid of these militant movements which in course of time under the leadership of a revolutionary party will dig the grave of capitalism. So they depended solely on administration for implementation of these measures. But since a powerful and vicious chain of the jotedars, police and bureaucracy is operating the implementation of even of these land reform measures remained only on paper or was mere pious wish. Under such a situation when the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government was installed in West Bengal, people who were not aware of the petty-bourgeois character of the CPI(M) leadership, were in an expectant mood and were hoping that the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government would stand by their side in their fight for the fulfilment of their just and legitimate demands. But their hopes were belied, their dreams of coming out of the shell of bondage are shattered. They discovered that the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government are not at all eager to smash the notorious chain of the rural vested interest along with the police and administration and instead are talking about enactments and administrative measures only. They talked loud about the bargadars' right just to confuse the poor peasant masses. In fact, it did just the same as was done by the previous Congress Government. It drove out the bargadars who were

either engaged in land for long or were brought in by the Congress and in their place implanted those who were ready to work as musclemen at their behest. It is noticeable that they did not in any way hurt or antagonise the jotedars but their attack was mounted mostly against those middle peasants whose support or sympathy they failed to win. Now that the election is approaching, they in their bid to win the sympathy of middle peasants have stopped the 'Operation Barga'.

Another point is that enactments and administrative measures alone can not be of any help in implementing the land reform measures are not unknown to the leaders of the CPI(M). For Congress too made similar attempts in the past and made legislations in fixing minimum wages, in stopping eviction of sharecropper and in fixing ceiling on land. But was that of any help in changing the rural scene? In spite of all these enactments by the previous Congress Governments eviction of share-croppers, flouting of land ceiling laws through benami transactions in a clandestine manner, denial of minimum wages to the agricultural labourers and the like are the main features, even today in rural life. Whenever the poor and landless peasants are unorganised they cannot protect their right as they are economically dependent on the jotedars. But in an organised peasants' belt the right of the poor and landless peasants is protected to some extent against sinister attacks from the vested class backed by the police and administration.

So without organising the peasants will it be possible to give effect to the measures of land reforms? Even if it is admitted for argument's sake that these measures can be implemented through enactments, and administrative measures

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then how can these minimum gains be protected in case of onslaught of a reactionary Government. If experience was at all needed to verify this truth then was it not a fact that the bargadars whose names were recorded and were conferred the legal right by the 'Left Front' Government were deprived from harvesting, having any share in crops after years of toil? Our party has been conducting a grim fight in the rural side even to defend the rights of those bargadars who have 'certificates' from the Government. In Sunderbans alone scores of bargadars either died or were severely injured to defend their rights accepted by the Government itself! What is the meaning then of conferring of right to the bargadars who are not ensured to have their just share of crops? And yet CPI(M) claims that conferring of right to the bargadars was some sort of a 'revolution'. Yes, if it is a 'revolution' it is a 'paper revolution' indeed.

So a genuine left party and the Government run by it cannot neglect the task of developing and strengthening organised peasants' movement. And this can be done by keeping these movements free from police interference. But the 'Left Front' did not take this only correct path but only reflected a bourgeois reformist outlook.

We know in a capitalist country a Government which claims to be left must never depend on bureaucracy but on legitimate democratic mass movements conducive to revolutionary struggle. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of the era, the departed leader and teacher of our party, the SUCI taught us that—"In a capitalist system and state structure where class exploitation continues to exist, to say that we shall make reforms—shall formulate plans within this very capitalist social system to remove this exploitation and shall

bring the welfare of the people by change in laws only—these are all self deceptions, these are nothing but deceiving ourselves and others. Struggles for reforms may be conducted for the welfare of the people. But that must have one

specific object and that is, all these movements for reforms and relief measures must be conducted to make wide open the path of the anti-capitalist revolution—must not create a hindrance to that—must never create illusion about reforming capitalist system, about legalism and parliamentary system—must help on the contrary, to get rid of any illusion about all this. If movements for reforms are conducted with this very object and outlook—the revolutionaries support such a movement, we also do support it. Those reforms which are not conducive to the revolutionary struggle—were self deception—a bourgeois fraud to keep the people subdued under cover of soothing but empty verbiages". (Speech delivered on People's Liberation Pledge Day, 1967).

Judged on the anvil of this Leninist principle the CPI(M) has betrayed an out and out non-left outlook and angularity. The CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government has not only failed to take steps for the growth, development and strengthening of democratic peasants' movement but on the contrary has promptly taken steps to crush any movement organised by our party. Of course in some places the CPI(M) is organising peasants' movement with pseudo-militancy with a view to putting pressure on the Jotedars who are still aligning with the

Congress (I) or some other party on one hand and also to create disruption in the ranks of poor peasants. But it is one thing to organise peasants' movement for redressal of their just and legitimate demands and it is quite a different thing to organise

CPI(M) aligns with landed vested interest and suppresses poor peasants' movement in pursuit of its parliamentary interest

them for the petty party interest in parliamentary politics. As a matter of fact the main objective of the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government in its land reforms policies is not only to woo jotedars but to organise them as a class and bind the poor peasants to the interest of this class with the help of party and Panchayat machinery.

In this game the 'Left Front' Government is performing a fine acrobatic feat behind the mask of sympathy to the cause of the peasants while at the same time assuring the jotedars that they do not mean any real harm to them. Otherwise its dismal performance which is admitted in its official publications cannot be explained in any other way. Let us now review what the official publications comment on the question of the implementation of the land reform measures of the 'Left Front' Government.

The 'operation barga' started in September 1978 and till April 1980 '8'55 lakhs of share croppers were recorded out of an estimated number of roughly 20 lakhs' (Land Reforms in West Bengal—a publication of West Bengal Government). There is a controversy as regards the number of share croppers in this state. According to Sri Benoy Krishna Choudhury CPI (M)'s Land and Land Revenue Minister the total number of share croppers in West Bengal is nearly 3 million and in official records this has

been reduced to two millions. Cultivation with hired labour is now rapidly replacing the system of share cropping. During the period from 1961 to 1971 the number of agricultural labourers in West Bengal increased from 18 lakhs to 32 lakhs

and by now this figure is nearly 40 lakhs. This rapid increase in agricultural labourers is one of the criteria by which the deep inroad of capitalism in agricultural economy can be ascertained. But the CPI(M) led 'Left Front' Government has not included any step to ensure minimum wage to the agricultural labourers in its programme of 'land reform'.

Let us now examine the case of distribution of available land over the ceiling surplus. It has been estimated that total ceiling surplus land in West Bengal is nearly 30 percent of the total land under cultivation. So if the total land under cultivation is taken as 137 lakh acres, the total ceiling surplus land will be nearly 40 lakh acres. Of this 40 lakh acres only 11.77 lakh acres have so far been declared surplus and again out of this 11.77 lakh acres only 6.31 lakh acres have so far been claimed to have been distributed and the remaining 3.74 lakh acres are still available for distribution. But during the three and a half years of the 'Left Front' regime no tangible progress has been made for distribution of this 3.74 lakh acres of available land. According to estimate made by the Land Reforms Commissioner, the annual income accruing from these 3.74 lakh acres of land amount to more than Rs. 14 crores. Now let us look into what the West Bengal Government's

Third Workshop on Land Reforms, held on September 15-16, 1980 observed on this issue: 'It was found that progress made up to dates (regarding distribution of vested agricultural land) was rather tardy and unsatisfactory in almost all the districts'. The workshop observed that these acres of vested land could not be distributed as the elected rural institutions meaning thereby the Panchayats declared these lands as 'unfit for agriculture'. The 'Left Front' Government assigned a major role to the Panchayats to this task of distribution of the vested land. As the members of the Panchayat bodies are either land owning persons or are themselves linked with landed interest, it is no wonder that they would find this available surplus land as 'unfit for agriculture', one can easily understand in whose pocket the annual income of Rs. 14 crores is going.

Moreover because of legalistic approach to this problem, 'Left Front' Government is spending huge amount on legal suits. There are at present nearly 20 thousand civil suits in the High Court, 27 thousand civil suits in the different civil courts. It is estimated that the 'Left Front' Government spent nearly 1.20 crore as the fees to the official lawyers. Mr. D. Bando padhaya, the Secretary Land and Land Revenue Department made an acid comment on the performance of CPI(M)'s lawyer leaders who were the beneficiaries of Government fees by holding that they could not go beyond professional outlook instead of showing any initiative to clear the lands under litigation for distribution. This comment enraged some of the CPI(M)'s 'democratic' lawyer leaders. A party not guided by revolutionary world outlook but by reformist outlook is sure to find itself in the blind alley of legalism. Our party has cautioned again

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Was the question of determination of foreign nationals at all their concern? Was the determination of the foreign nationals their real object or their sole object was to foment provincial jingoism throughout the state of Assam and prepare the ground for reaping parliamentary dividend? The whole thing lays bare their real character once again.

The Bharatiya Janata Party too has exposed their real character and object by advancing this so-called Seven-point formula for the solution of Assam problem. The proponents and followers of communal politics, Bharatiya Janata Party, supported the so-called Assam movement with the sole object of spreading their party's influence in Assam by fomenting communal and regional fanaticism taking advantage of the resentment of the people. And to fulfil this petty interest they used as a weapon this foreign national question. The Bharatiya Janata Party too know it well that for the real solution of Assam problem determination of foreign national is no point at issue and by advancing this proposal of 1961 to be the base year they have proved this. They have exposed as well how much of a "democrat" they are. By advancing the proposal of striking off the names of those refugees from the Voters' List who came between 1961 and 1971 and thus making them once again stateless refugees they have revealed their undemocratic character. If these people are really foreign nationals, that is, if the BJP really believes them to be so, then why did they advance the proposal of settling them in different parts of the country? They did so because they know well that these refugees are Indian nationals and not foreigners.

So, by advancing such an illogical, irrational, heartless proposal (they are trying to spread their party's influence in the state fomenting provincial

Defeat the Divisive Forces, Guard the Unity of the People

and communal jingoism there to reap parliamentary dividend—so this politics of manoeuvre! Their sympathy for the Assamese people is just a verbal one. The BJP has none and had never any concern for the economic development of Assam or for the fulfillment of the aspiration of the Assamese speaking people with regard to the preservation of their language, education and culture. Any concern they showed, they showed it with the ulterior motive of spreading communal politics taking advantage of the situation in Assam.

We would like to ask a relevant question to the leaders and workers of AASU and Ganasangram Parishad: Is it not a fact that what they have done all these days, according to their own ideas and whims involving the people, in the name of movement is providing opportunity to the Central Government as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party and other reactionary forces to practise such manoeuvring politics? Have they ever given a thought to this? The Assamese speaking people should also ponder over this.

In fact on the questions centring round their economic demands, language, educational and cultural aspirations, the Assamese speaking people belonging to the majority section should not have any conflict of interest with the people belonging to the minority. Naturally, it was not at all impossible to develop a united movement of all sections of the people irrespective of language, religion etc. incorporating their legitimate aspirations.

Truely speaking, this was the only course to give expression to the aspirations of the people of Assam through a broad-based legitimate democratic movement. Had a real legitimate democratic mass movement developed in

Assam in this way then neither the narrow provincial, communal and the separatist forces nor the Central Government, nor the Congress (I) could have taken advantage of it. But the AASU and the Ganasangram Parishad did not develop the movement along this course. On the contrary, just when the left and democratic forces were gradually gaining ground, they appeared on the scene as the leading forces, diverted the movement to wrong track and hindered the spread of left and democratic politics in the state. In the name of protecting the interest of the people, the AASU and Ganasangram Parishad waged attacks on the leftist forces of the state. By attacking the offices of the leftist parties and harassing their cadres, they in reality provided opportunity to the reactionary forces to gain ground. The reactionary forces, fomenting the sentiments of the people, created a wave of utterly provincial, communal and separatist movement in Assam. The AASU and Ganasangram Parishad not only became party to this, but spearheaded this trend. In this communal strife, scores of people lost their lives, and many lost their hearths and homes. But what the people got in return? People, with the belief that they were participating in a legitimate movement, engaged themselves wholeheartedly in it. More than a year has passed, but has any of their aspirations been fulfilled? Rather, due to this so-called movement, apprehension has grown among the tribal people about protection of their own language, education, culture and identity, causing a rupture in their unity with the Assamese speaking people.

Is this what the people of Assam wanted? Surely not. On the other hand, taking advantage of the ill feeling

and strifes between different sections of the common people, the dishonest traders have enhanced prices of all essential commodities, the owners have retrenched workers in the name of driving out foreign nationals, the Central Government using the blockade of oil refineries as a plea has raised the prices of all petroleum products which will in turn raise the price of each and every essential consumer product. What did the people gain then? People of Assam should also ponder as to why they did not get support of the broader sections of the Indian people even though most of their demands and aspirations were so legitimate and why the so-called movement has come to a sorry pass? Because, it is not the leaders but the people who have to pay the price for the movement—today and also in the future.

In this connection, they should also understand that in a country like India inhabited by people of various nationalities speaking different languages, however legitimate the demands and aspirations of the people of one part of the country may be, if a movement for the fulfillment of those does not develop as a mass movement conducive to the interest of all sections of the common people irrespective of language, caste, community and creed, then it can never acquire democratic character and in that event without the support of the broader sections of the common people it cannot advance very far. This is just what has happened in the case of the legitimate aspirations of the Assamese speaking common people.

So, we would request the Assamese speaking people to deeply and dispassionately ponder over these aspects. Did you want that the movement in which you plunged

yourselves with such emotional upsurge against economic exploitation and for the fulfillment of your language-cultural aspirations to degenerate into such a parochial, communal and separatist movement? Did you at all want that taking advantage of it the capitalist class and the dishonest traders bring further miseries in your lives? Certainly you did not also want the Congress (I) Government at the Centre to foist a minority government upon your state with the help of defectors in this manner. Not only that. The way in which the leaders of AASU and the Ganasangram Parishad are trying to preserve parochial tension in the state with an eye to future electoral gains and with this aim are trying to make clandestine understanding with the Central Government—is this what you wanted? Even if you did not want, the situation is heading towards that.

This wayward movement, a year back, at the call of AASU and Ganasangram Parishad drew a vast number of people—but its massive character is no more there. The student community no longer comes forward in large number with the zeal it showed earlier as the major force of this misguided movement. The way, once, just at a call, employees stayed away from offices and courts—there is no more such a response. Whatever little response there is today, is more out of fear than support. In many places, even skirmishes have taken place among the students on the question of boycotting schools. It is not at all difficult for the political forces who are leading this wayward movement including the AASU and Ganasangram Parishad to understand what all these prove. They know, if this continues further the situation will go entirely out of their hands. That is why they are now so eager to keep alive regional tension in Assam by making an understanding with the

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Operation Barga

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and again that the democratic demands of the poor and landless peasants cannot be fulfilled depending only on administration and by legal measures unless the same is backed by the peasants' mighty movement.

As regards vesting of the remaining ceiling surplus land still retained by the rural vested interest by clandestine manner nothing has so far been done.

In the said report it is seen that the 'Left Front' Government felt "there is further scope for vesting land in the state if the deficiencies in the law could be removed". Wonderful achievement indeed!

As regards providing institutional credit support to the small and marginal farmers, the record of the 'Left Front' Government is dismal.

Out of the total credit need of Rs. 450 crore only 150 crores i.e. one third of the total requirement is available. In 1979, 80 thousand sharecroppers and assignees of vested land were to get this amount from the nationalised banks and the Left Front Government assigned the Panchayats with the responsibility of selecting them. The Panchayats could select only 52 thousand cases and the rest of the cases lapsed. Again this year banks agreed to advance credit to 150 lakh share-croppers and assignees of vested land but the Panchayats could sponsor 41 thousand cases!

As regard assigning permanent title, as permissive possessors to all landless agricultural workers for homestead purposes, who are occupying others' lands upto 0.08 acres, this is to say that this provision was made by the Act of the Central Government on June 25 1975 and the progress of implementation by the Left Front Govern-

ment is virtually nil. There is even no official record to show how many people are in need of such homestead land in West Bengal. The report of the Third Workshop on Land Reforms say: "It was felt that the scheme was not being properly implemented".

Lastly let us look into what the Third Workshop on Land Reforms observed on the question of the implementation of Restoration of Alienated Lands Act which is also an old act and for which the CPI(M) led Left Front deserves no credit. It was pointed out: "a comparatively large number of cases was being disposed of by rejection of the claims". The Workshop warned "congestion of pending cases presented a major problem, especially in areas where there was concentration of tribals. This might result in rural tension." Furthermore there is no official record of the extent of such alienation due to distress sales and there is also no move on the part of the Left Front Government to have a comprehensive idea on the extent of such alienation.

Thus after three and a half years of the rule of the 'Left Front' Government, minimum democratic measures were executed on land reforms and the lot of the poor and landless peasants which hangs on the mercy of the rural vested interest with eviction of the sharecroppers, looting of the rightful share of the crop of the poor peasants by jotedars backed by the police and administration, denial of minimum wages to the agricultural labourers and perpetuation of a reign of terror by the jotedars in rural areas has further worsened, let alone and improvement. Moreover with the rural people being encouraged to develop the opportunistic habit of seeking personal privileges

through Panchayat members, a calculated harm has been done to what little pro-movement environment and mental make-up in the state is still left. The CPI(M) leadership is least worried about it as the rank of the CPI(M) is swelled by self-seekers through this process. In this connection let us recall the teachings of Comrade Stalin. He showed:

"To a reformist, reforms are everything while revolutionary line is something incidental, something just to talk about, mere eye wash. That is why, with reformist tactics under the condition of bourgeois rule, reforms are inevitably transformed into an instrument for disintegrating the revolution. To a revolutionary, on the contrary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reforms; to him reforms are a by-product of the revolution. That is why, with revolutionary tactics under the condition of bourgeois rule, reforms are naturally transformed into an instrument for disintegrating that rule, into an instrument for strengthening the revolution, into a strong point for the further development of the revolutionary movement"—J.V. Stalin.

Let the poor and landless peasants grasp this basic revolutionary teaching. We know, the CPI(M) propaganda machinery at state expenditure is drumbeating in different parts of the country to project its false image as a champion of poor peasantry and democratic reforms. For this reason, we have quoted mainly the government documents and statistics to show the utter hollowness of CPI(M)'s claim as regards democratic land reforms. Today, this party is aligning openly with the parties of the jotedars and their cause like Lok Dal. They have forsaken the path of democratic move-

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Central Government so that both sides may reap electoral dividends by arrangement in future from this. Did the common people want this? Did the common people want that, diverting their aspirations to the wrong track, some self-seeking, opportunist leaders and parties should reap dividends? No, certainly not. But this wayward movement provided the scope for this. The Assamese speaking common people should deeply ponder over this aspect. They should realise that in the present era, if a legitimate democratic movement for the fulfilment of the aspirations of a section of the people is really to be developed, then it has got to be on the base political line of anti-capitalist revolution uniting all sections of the oppressed people. Otherwise, it is sure to fall in the hands of career-seeking parochial, communal and separatist forces. This is just what has happened in the case of the present Assam movement.

So, today, the Assamese speaking people must come forward with a dispassionate appraisal of the whole issue free from bias, and freeing themselves from the influence of the regional and separatist

ment for the exploited. They contend with bourgeois parties in parliamentary politics to be the chosen alternative of crisis-ridden bourgeoisie. They take their stand in defence of crisis-ridden capitalism. They are trying to organise the rural bourgeoisie or jotedars and are corrupting the toiling peasants movement with opportunism, bribery, vulgarity to tame the exploited so that the class struggle in the countryside is not intensified. By this naked betrayal to the cause of toiling peasantry, they try to earn the blessings of the rural vested interest

forces they have to create the grounds for a real united mass movement by strengthening the genuine left and democratic forces, freeing themselves of bias and blind emotion; they should put pressure upon both AASU and Ganasangram Parishad leadership as well as the Central Government for a realistic solution of the Assam problem safeguarding the unity and interests of all sections of toiling people of Assam. While sympathising with the woes and ordeal of the Assamese people of all sections, we would urge upon them not to lose heart but to draw appropriate lessons for the incoming harder battles.

Bangalore City Organising Committee Registers Protest

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knowledge should not be allowed.

Further, the SUCI demands that the Government should arrive at a consensus from among the educationists, litterateurs, intellectuals and others before proceeding to implement the Gokak panel recommendations.

Correction

In our issue dated 15th February, 1981, in obituary column we inadvertently made a mistake in the name of our departed Comrade. His name was Comrade A.N.R. Reddy. Very deeply we regret the mistake.—Ed. P. Era

the jotedars. The poor and exploited peasantry is learning this hard reality but they also find that there is also a party, the only party SUCI which is upholding their cause, the cause of struggle. Let this truth reach every home of the exploited.

Editor-in-Chief—NIHAR MUKHERJEE