

ML Updates: 23 Feb-01 March 2010

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Contents

- [Nitish Mission of Mahadalit](#)
- [6th Conference of Paschim](#)

Nitish Mission of Mahadalit Mockery Versus Bihar Poor's Struggle for Dignity and Development

With Assembly elections round the corner, Nitish Kumar has pulled out all stops to play his social engineering cards. Just a day before the inauguration of the budget session of the Assembly, Kumar accompanied by his deputy from the BJP, Sushil Modi, addressed a Mahadalit unity rally in Patna. The rally was convened and conducted by none other than the Speaker of Bihar Assembly, Uday Narain Chaudhary, who is projected by Nitish Kumar as a Mahadalit leader. Chaudhary, on his part, thanked Kumar for making a Mahadalit the Speaker of the Assembly and for 'looking after' the Mahadalits in the state.

The rally has been in the news on several counts. The role of the Speaker in openly calling upon a group of people to recognize the Chief Minister as their biggest benefactor has predictably created a major controversy. Apart from flaunting his partisan identity, Chaudhary was also involved in an unseemly row with another Mahadalit leader of the JD(U), former minister in RJD government, Shyam Rajak, over the seating arrangement on the stage. Denied a front row seat on the stage, Rajak had reportedly left the venue in a huff before being pacified and 'rehabilitated' by Nitish Kumar. A bigger embarrassment was reported on the evening prior to the rally when television cameras showed JD(U) MLA from Jeeradei in Siwan district (the ancestral place of India's first President Rajendra Prasad) participating in vulgar dances in his MLA flat ostensibly to provide entertainment to Mahadalits from his constituency who had come to attend the Patna rally!

The RJD-LJP combine has demanded the resignation of the Speaker for violating the dignity and neutrality of Speaker's office. Nitish Kumar on the other hand is happy with this allegation for this gives him the opportunity to project the Speaker and his government as a victim of anti-Mahadalit social prejudice! They had also cleverly organized the Mahadalit rally under the banner of a so-called Mahadalit morcha and not formally as a JD(U) or NDA show. Instead of questioning the propriety of the Speaker's conduct, the very content of Nitish Kumar's 'mission Mahadalit' should be subjected to serious scrutiny.

When the move was first initiated, 18 among Bihar's 22 Dalit sub-castes were identified as Mahadalits. In two successive revisions, all Dalit sub-castes except Paswans were brought under the Mahadalit category and in the February 21 rally, Nitish Kumar also expressed his readiness to examine the case of bringing Paswans under the Mahadalit umbrella. Mahadalit has thus become just another name for Dalits and this clearly exposes the essential political gameplan underlying the Mahadalit campaign. Nitish has also reduced the agenda of land reforms to Mahadalit tokenism, the Land Reform Commission's recommendation of one acre cultivable land for every landless family

and 10 decimal homestead land for every homeless family has been reduced to a token assistance of Rs. 20,000 to Mahadalit families with which they are supposed to 'buy' homestead land!

Nitish and his deputy also talked about mandatory inclusion of all Mahadalit names in the BPL list, but the precondition for this promise is that the Centre should first accept Bihar government's estimate of 1.40 crore BPL families in the state Bihar! Instead of taking responsibility for the criminal exclusion of millions of deserving Mahadalit families from Bihar's existing BPL list, Nitish cleverly plays Centre-state political football with the rights of Mahadalits. He should also answer what has been stopping his government from ensuring that all Mahadalit families got jobs and proper wages under NREGA.

In yet another gem of shameless hypocrisy, Nitish Kumar asked Mahadalit women to guard the funds provided by the government so their men-folk did not squander it in drinking! It has been his government's signal achievement that liquor shops have mushroomed in every panchayat even as the Excise minister has had to face dismissal for demanding a credible probe into large-scale excise theft by the liquor mafia!

Rejecting Nitish Kumar's false promises and political mockery, on 20 February tens of thousands of Mahadalits and other members of rural poor demonstrated in front of block and subdivisional offices of Bihar. Their slogans were: "Check Prices, Give us Jobs - No Escape from Land Reforms" and "We want Land and Housing - Not Crumbs of Deception but Guaranteed Rights." Class-conscious Communist organizers in Bihar villages will have to assert the supremacy of the Bihar poor's glorious legacy of struggle over Nitish Kumar's attempts to woo Mahadalits with vulgar dance and empty rhetoric.

Stop Operation Greenhunt, Start Talks

The CPI (Maoist) has reportedly proposed a ceasefire and talks to the Central Government. The Home Minister, by refusing to respond to this offer on the pretext that it is 'conditional,' has made it clear that the UPA Government is not interested in peace and is loath to call a halt to Operation Greenhunt. We demand that the UPA Government heed the democratic opinion in the country, and respond positively to the Maoist offer of ceasefire and talks by declaring a ceasefire on its part and initiating dialogue. The recent reports that an activist of the PCPA at Lalgarh has been killed in a fake encounter is disturbing. The saga of witch-hunt, fake encounters and state repression must end if talks are at all to be possible.

The Maoists too must desist from their dastardly attacks on the people - such as the recent attack on Phulwaria-Korasi village in Jamui district in Bihar, where they killed at least 12 people, including 2 women and a child and injured at least 50 villagers, most of them adivasis. Such attacks are described by them as 'retaliatory' - but no 'retaliation' can justify such a shameful massacre of innocents from the most vulnerable section of the people. Such massacres only go to prove that it is not just the state but often the people too who are finding themselves at the receiving end of Maoist actions. The act has justifiably earned widespread condemnation from democratic forces.

CPI(ML) Participation in Rajasthan Panchayat Polls

The CPI(ML) candidate won the seat for Panchayat Samiti member in Ward Number 5 of Bahuna Panchayat Samiti of Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan. The Party contested panchayat polls from three wards of the Jhunjhunu Zila Parishad, one ward of Jhunjhunu block and three wards of Bahuna block. One independent candidate had also been supported on one ward of Bahuna block. Com. Ranchandra Kulhari, the candidate from Ward No 5 of Bahuna block defeated the Congress candidate by 218 votes. Com. Ramkumar Yadav lost the Ward No 28 Zila Parishad seat by 90 votes. The independent candidate supported by the Party - Sharbati Devi from Ward No. 20 of Bahuna block, also won. While Com. Ramesh Kulhari, the panchayat samiti member elected from the CPI(ML), boycotted the election for Pradhan of Bahuna block on the grounds that there were only Congress and BJP candidates, the two independent Zila Parishad members supported by the CPI(M) and two who had been elected on a CPI(M) symbol all supported the Congress candidate in exchange for securing the Zila Pramukh seat.

Protest March against Price Rise in Bhind

The CPI(ML) held a protest march against price rise in Bhind from Galla Mandi to the Collectorate, where they submitted a memorandum via the Collector to the Governor of Madhya Pradesh. AISA, AIPWA, AIALA and the Hammal-Palledar Union joined the procession. The procession was held to highlight the demand for 200 days of work at Rs.200 per day under NREGA and to protest against the exclusion of the poor from the BPL lists, rampant corruption in the PDS.

The public meeting at the gate of the Collector's office was conducted by Com. Bhagwan Das, and the meeting was addressed by many comrades including District President and National Council member of AIPWA Surajrekha Tripathi, National Council member of AIALA Janved Singh Kushwaha, Subhash and Bittu Singh of AISA, Vinod Suman, President of the Hammal-Palledar Union, Mansingh Baudh of the Building Workers' Union, Dharmendra Singh of the Vegetable Sellers' Union and Com. Sadina Sengar. Addressing the meeting, Com. Devendra Singh Chauhan, District Secretary of the CPI(ML) condemned the anti-people policies causing price rise and also called for an end to state repression in the name of fighting Naxalism.

6th Conference of Paschim Banga Krishak Samiti

The Paschim Banga Krishak Samiti (West Bengal Peasant Association) held its 6th Conference with an open session in Barddhaman followed by a 2-day delegate session on 15-16 February. The conference took note of the acute agrarian crisis and resolved to impart a fresh impetus to the peasant movement in the State. Com. Dipankar addressed the open session while Com. Rajaram Singh, convenor of AIKSS (All India Peasant Coordination Committee) inaugurated the conference. Com. Kartick Pal, PBM and several other leaders of the Party's West Bengal State Committee also attended and addressed the conference.

The delegates at the Conference included those who have come to us from the ranks of the CPI(M) in

recent times. There were also signals that the rural poor who had gone over to the TMC in reaction to the CPI(M)'s betrayal of the peasantry, are getting fast disillusioned by the TMC's approach to the peasants' questions. Among those who addressed the Conference was a leader of the Singur movement, who reminded that the whole Singur struggle had centred around the demand that 400 acres of land that had been grabbed without consent be returned to the peasants. Now, even the TMC which had made political capital from the struggle had shelved this demand - a demand that continued to move the peasantry to struggle.

On the eve of the Conference, a delegation of Krishak Samiti leaders had met State Agriculture Minister Naren De to demand fixing of the procurement price for potato at Rs.6 per kg, to address the distress of potato farmers who were now selling at an extremely low price even as potato prices in the market were high.

The Conference took up the issue of the reversal of land reforms in the State, whereby diversion of agricultural land and eviction of peasants was a state-wide phenomenon. Delegates discussed, in particular, how sharecroppers were being evicted in Dinajpur and in South 24 Parganas too, sharecroppers were being evicted to make way for prawn farming. The Conference demanded security of tenure and land ownership for sharecroppers, lowering of land ceiling as recommended by the report of the Expert Committee on Land Reforms appointed by the Ministry of Rural Development, as well as agricultural credit, irrigation, fertilizer, electricity and other kinds of support for sharecroppers and small peasants.

The Conference elected a 63-member state council and a 21-member state executive including Com. Annada Prasad Bhattacharya (President), Com. Altaf Hussein (Vice President), Com. Subimal Sengupta (General Secretary), as well as five secretaries.

Implementing a call given from the Conference, the Krishak Samiti held a state-wide road blockade demanding fixing of Rs.6/kg as procurement price for potato and protesting the rise in prices of fertilizer.

Street Vendors in Delhi Hold Convention

The Delhi Rehri-Khokha-Patri Mahasangh held a Convention on 21 February demanding guarantee of livelihood and licence for every street vendor under the new National Vendor Policy. They demanded democratisation of the Town Vending Committees through elected representation; enhanced representation of vendors and removal of representatives of market associations and RWAs. Because identity cards are being made a precondition for issue of licences, many poor and migrant vendors are in danger of losing their livelihood since the Delhi Government has made sure they get no identification.

The Convention was addressed by Shyam Kishore Yadav, President of the Delhi Rehri-Khokha-Patri Mahasangh, Vice President Ramsevak, Secretary Md. Shakil, treasurer Md. Shafi, Sanjay Sharma, State Secretary, CPI(ML), as well as AISA activists from Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU. The Convention was conducted by Uma Gupta of AIPWA. Through the Convention, the street vendors submitted a memorandum to the Delhi CM, opposing the plans to evict them from the streets in preparation for the Commonwealth Games, and demanding guarantee of livelihood.

Construction Workers' Workshop in TN

Tamil Nadu Democratic Construction Labourers' Union organised a day's workshop at Tanjore on 14th February, attended by 62 cadres from 10 districts. Workshop was conducted by a 3-member presidium comprising comrades Murugaiyan, Ponraj and Kuppabai. Com. S. Balasubramanian, President, AICWF, gave the inaugural address. Four papers were presented in the workshop: (1) Construction Industry - 21st Century Technology and 19th Century Labour Relations- presented by Com. NK Natarajan, (2) Migrant Labourers from Other States in the Development of Chennai - by Com. Desikan, (3) Functioning of Labour Welfare Board (with details of Corpus available and number of beneficiaries on various Schemes with disbursed money) and (4) Status of Various Decisions of the Union & Future Plans - by Iraniappan

After deliberations on all four papers, workshop concluded with two main action plans: (a) to launch a month long campaign in March and (b) forming 50 branches with 500 members in each branch.

A press conference held later was attended by comrades Balasubramanian, NK Natarajan, Iraniappan and Desikan. Com NK Natarajan reiterated the demand for a white paper on the condition of 4000 migrant workers involved in the construction of New State Assembly and Secretariat. Also we demanded doubling of welfare benefits with increase in cess from 0.3 to 1 percent immediately. Leaders also condemned Police' manhandling of Com. Anthony Muthu, State Honorary President of the Construction Union, while demanding house site pattas for the labourers in Kanyakumari dist. Workshop concluded with a resolve to achieve 50000 membership by the end of March. Com. Asai Thambi, SCM of CPI(ML) also spoke on the occasion.

AIPWA Foundation Day Observed In AP

AIPWA foundation day programmes were held in East Godavari, Krishna and Ananthpur Districts. 150 AIPWA members attended the Flag hoisting at Dharmavaram village of Prathipadu mandal in East Godavari and later took out a rally. In Kodavali village 80 women conducted a padayatra after hoisting the Flag. In Eleswaram town dozens of women marched in a rally after Flag hoisting. Flag was also hoisted at Kattipudi. In krishna dist. a dharna was organised before the mandal office at Vissannapeta town in which 40 women participated. In Anantapur town AIPWA Flag was hoisted at Pressclub in which 150 women participated. The programme concluded with a rally marching 2 km in the town.

AIPWA Team Meets Tribal Victims of Police Rape

In yet another incident of tribal women being raped by the security forces, the 'Greyhounds' special force personnel raped four women on 22 January in Bhalluguda village of Munchangipattu mandal which is a remote part of Visakha District bordering Orissa. These personnel had entered the village

at midnight on pretext of 'combing operation' for Maoists. The police also dragged the men out of the village and destroyed property. This bloody act was blatantly denied by the police officials, who alleged that 'Maoists' cooked up this false story. Meanwhile women's groups, democratic organisations and some political parties have condemned the incident and demanded a judicial enquiry. A team of AIPWA leaders met the victims at Visakhapatnam's King George Hospital when they were brought there for medical tests. Later, an AIPWA team comprising R.Nagamani, T.Aruna, K.Ratnakumari, B.Vijaya, P.Sundaramma, and Appalaraju submitted a memorandum to the Collector.

Protest against Repression by Coaching Institutes in Bihar

The All India Students' Association (AISA) took up several initiatives against the repression unleashed on students protesting against coaching centres in Bihar and against the loot in the name of Nitish's boasts of turning Bihar into an 'education hub.' On 12 February protest demonstrations and burning of Nitish's effigy took place at Ara, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Bhagalpur, Sitamarhi, Nawada and other district HQs. At Patna, students marched from the local radio station to Dak Bangla Chauraha where they held a protest meeting and burnt the CM's effigy. Addressing the gathering, AISA National VP Abhyuday demanded compensation for the two students - Sachin Sharma and Krishnakant Jha who died in the violence against protesting students, confiscation of the immense ill-gotten wealth and weapons of those who run coaching institutes, a pro-student coaching policy, and end to political patronage of the coaching mafia and an end to the policies of privatisation and commercialisation of education, of which the worst example are the coaching institutes.

On 13 February, AISA called for a state-wide bandh in universities. AISA held a militant march and ensured success of the bandh at Lalit Narayan Mithila University and Tilkamanjhi University, Bhagalpur. At Sitamarhi, AISA's bandh call not only resulted in shutting down of the government colleges but also private coaching institutes. At Patna University, classes remained fully suspended in Darbhanga House, Patna College, Science College; university offices remained shut and students boycotted exams. Teachers and karmacharis also supported the bandh. The Bandh was also successful at Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, and many colleges in Samastipur, Nawada, Jamui, Vaishali and Jehanabad.

Through the bandh, AISA demanded that maximum fees for any course be fixed at Rs. 1000, a cap of 60 students per batch, a high-level enquiry into the nexus of coaching institutions with politicians, confiscation of the wealth of coaching centre operators, compensation of a crore each to the students who were killed, and fixing of room rent at Rs. 500 in private hostels. AISA warned of a state-wide protest demonstration and hunger strike outside the Bihar Assembly if the Government failed to introduce a bill to rein in the coaching institutes on the first day of the Assembly session.

DU Students Defy Diktats of Moral Police

AISA and AIPWA held a public meeting on 'Love in Our Times' (Hamaare Samay me Prem) on February 15 in Delhi University, in which students, poets, writers, singers and intellectuals raised their voice against the attempts by Sangh Parivar outfits and 'khaap panchayats' to attack people

who love and marry by choice. Hundreds of students participated in the meeting to assert their freedom of expression and speech. The public meeting was organised at Vivekananda Statue (Arts Faculty) - the entire area around the statue was decorated with posters made by students. Women students had taken the initiative to organize the event. On the previous day (February 14), students under the banner of AISA had held a March in the Kamala Nagar market area near DU, to protest threats and attacks by Sangh Parivar outfits on people celebrating Valentine's Day.

At the public meeting, Rukmini Bhaya Nair (English poet and professor, IIT) and Anamika (Hindi poet) read their poetry. Rukmini Bhaya Nair also spoke about the need to resist communal forces that try to dictate terms about 'culture' and 'way of life.' Anamika spoke about how patriarchy affects relations between men and women. Noor Zaheer (writer and activist) spoke of the need to challenge those who force women to marry young and called for young people to assert their right to live and love in freedom. Pankaj Bisht (editor, Samayantar) talked about how capitalism distorts 'love.' Arbind Jain (Supreme Court advocate and author of 'Aurat Hone ki Saza') spoke about the anti-woman nature of the Indian laws relating to family, marriage and property, as well as rape and crimes against women. Nandini Chandra, (Department of English, DU) said that 'love' and sexuality was often alienated and commercialised by the market; yet in spite of that, there continues to be something about love that presents a threat to the social order - resulting in attacks by khaap panchayats etc. Kavita Krishnan, Secretary, AIPWA read from the writings of Periyar and Engels and stressed that the struggle to defend the freedom to love can only be part of the struggle for a society free from oppression in the name of caste, gender and class. Revolutionary people's poet Ramashankar 'Vidrohi' recited several of his own poems which powerfully attacked patriarchy.

Many students of DU spontaneously participated in the event, singing songs and reciting their own poems. Some read out selections from the writings of Margaret Atwood, Jeannette Winterson, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Alok Dhanwa, Kishwar Naheed, Habib Jalib, Lehar Zaidi and many others.

The large number of students who participated in the public meeting is testimony to the fact that young people are outraged by and determined to reject and resist the diktats of moral police brigades.

Panchayat Gherao at Tripura

The CPI(ML) and AIALA held protest gheraos of five panchayats in Udaipur, South Tripura - on 29 January at Salgara, 2 February at Amtali, 8 February at Murapara, 10 February at Khilpara, and 17 February at Dakshin Maharani ADC village. The main demands raised included implementation of 100 days work under NREGA, implementation of the Tripura Agricultural Workers Act 1986, and legislation for registration of names of bargadars (sharecroppers) in panchayats. Protestors participating in the gherao were detained and released later. The South Tripura District Secretary Partha Karmakar, AIALA State VP and CPI(ML) State Committee member Gopal Roy, and RYA leader Badal participated in all the gheraos. On 25 February, the 30th anniversary of the Hurua Martyrs (marking the day in 1980 when the first LF Government unleashed police repression and killed 7 leaders of the agricultural poor including Com. Gobind Teli.)

Building Workers' Union Conference in Lucknow

On 22 February, the Building Workers' Union held its 11th annual conference at Gomti Nagar, defying attempts by the police to create difficulties. AICCTU State President, addressing the Conference, said the Mayawati Government was trying to crush the workers' movement. The law for building workers had been kept in cold storage.

The Conference was inaugurated by AIPWA VP Tahira Hasan. A 15-member executive was elected from the Conference, with Raghunath Prasad as President, Baburam Kushwaha and Naumilal as VPs, Balmukund Dhuria as Secretary and Surendra Prasad and Santosh Kushwaha as Joint Secretaries.

P.S.

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