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LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

TROUNCE THE BJP COMBINE!

CITU call to working class
and an appraisal of the
anti-worker BJP rule
at the centre

A CITU PUBLICATION

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CEN.L

August 1999
1000 copies

Published by:
Centre of Indian Trade Unions
15, Talkatora Road
New Delhi - 110 001

Printed at:
Progressive Printers
A-21, Jhilmil Industrial Area
Shahdara
Delhi - 110 095

Price:
Rupees Two only

TROUNCE THE BJP LED COMMUNAL COMBINE!**1
BACK TO THE PEOPLE**

"After a hectic drama in the capital commencing from two of the Cabinet Ministers from Tamil Nadu exiting from the coalition Government at the Centre, a photofinish defeat of the Vajpayee Government in the Lok Sabha, parleys and politicking in search of an alternative government and lastly the dissolution of the twelfth Lok Sabha—the ball is now back in People's Court."

This is how the CITU monthly, "The Working Class", in its editorial in May, 1999 issue described the events leading to the present mid-term polls. It further noted:

"The arithmetic of the 12th Lok Sabha was such that adding any number of parties would not total upto five years. A measure of instability inherent in the composition of the House has finally led to the mid term poll"

Now the Election Commission has cleared the decks for the mid term poll process to begin. The nation will vote for the 13th Lok Sabha from the 5th September to 3rd October 1999, in five phases.

The working people must seriously ponder over the gravity of the present situation, appraise in retrospect the course of events during the thirteen months of the BJP rule and yet another five months of its governance as caretaker government. The working class must be in the forefront of this all-important political fight and decide and shape the destiny of this country in the new millennium.

**2
CITU FORE WARNING**

Even during the 1998 election, the CITU appeal to the working

class, had correctly characterised the BJP- led combination, in the following words:

"The combination led by the BJP is seeking to capture power by resorting to all opportunist and dubious means. Its Hindutva plank is not gaining a wider appeal and hence it is resorting to deceptive appeals to minorities and lower caste voters. Its false promises cannot hide its semi-fascist and fundamentalist agenda, which seeks to divide the Indian population on religious lines and pit Hindus against minorities. This party had shamelessly come out in support of liberalisation, in favour of multinationals, big business and landlords. When the liberalisation policy was introduced, the BJP claimed that its policy was hijacked by the Congress(I). Now in the face of elections, the BJP is trying to confuse the electorate by taking anti-MNCs posture and making self-contradictory statements on economic policy every other day".

Unfortunately, such an opportunist, dangerous and reactionary force emerged as the single largest party. It catapulted itself into power with a motley coalition of eighteen parties. But the BJP stint in power has only demonstrated the correctness of what the CITU had forewarned.

3

NATIONAL INTERESTS AT STAKE

The BJP and its allies - the old as well as the 'new found ones - are readying to appeal to the sentiments of the people with a facade of injured innocence. They are trotting Vajpayee as some one who has been wronged and sinned against by those opposed to him.

But the fact remains that the mandate of the people in the 1998 elections was itself a fractured one and certainly not in favour of the BJP, as is sought to be claimed now. The BJP cobbled up a majority by hijacking support of parties like the TDP and National Conference, which had fought against the BJP in the last election. The multi-headed monster, misnamed as BJP led coalition, had only one factor unifying the allied parties - the lust

for power and greed to stay on to exploit the spoils of power. It collapsed when the second largest party of the coalition pulled itself out.

The BJP made all out efforts to win the confidence vote in Lok Sabha, resorting to every unfair means. The classic example is the 'purchase' of support of the four member Indian National Lok Dal of Chautala, who first declared to vote against the Vajpayee Government. This is 'moral' for the BJP. But, if the BSP first announced to remain neutral and later voted against them, it becomes "immoral".

Now the BJP bemoans that the opposition had conspired to topple their government and foisted this election on the nation. Did the BJP have any moral or political right to expect the opposition to bail it out when it collapsed under the weight of the contradictions in its own camp? Did they expect the opposition to come to their rescue and help them to stay in power for the rest of the five years. In retrospect shall we not ask them— Did the BJP do it when V P Singh or Dave Gowda or I K Gujral faced similar situations and were forced out of office?

During BJP rule it was not five years of tenure of Lok Sabha at stake. The interests of the nation in every respect was at stake - in grave danger at every minute of Vajpayee bandwagon rule or rather misrule and non-governance.

Better they have gone out - still better for the nation, if the electorate ensures that they do not return!

4

SWADESHI TO PSEUDO SWADESHI

The National Agenda for Governance (NAG) that the BJP coalitions adopted, tactically shelving BJP's own agenda, in a make believe exercise, chanted the Swadeshi mantra. It declared:

"We will continue with the reform process, give it a strong Swadeshi thrust to ensure that the National economy grows on the principle that "India shall be built by Indians."

The National Agenda also assured that "the effects of globalisation would be carefully analysed and its process calibrated so as to not undermine but strengthen the National economy, the indigenous industry base and the financial and service sectors."

But the big business in the country, as also the financial circles of the advanced capitalist countries, brushed aside this 'Swadeshi' cry, as something not to be worried about. They had reasons not to worry but to rejoice even.

Yashwant Sinha, Finance Minister in Vajpayee Cabinet, soon after assuming office declared: "the multinationals have nothing to fear from our Government." The message was loud and clear: 'foreign capital is welcome, no matter whether computer chips or potato chips.'

The first ever-foreign trip the Finance Minister undertook was expectedly to the United States in May 1998. In this first international mission, he asserted in Washington "We are committed to broadening, deepening and accelerating the reforms." He also claimed that his party, the BJP was the earliest proponent of liberalisation even during the halcyon days of socialism.

Sikandar Bakth, the Industries Minister, for his part, reaffirmed the commitment to the World Trade Organisation on the Patents issue. He had no qualms of conscience that prior to the last elections, the same BJP, in the opposition, supported the Left in stalling the amendments to the Indian Patent Act during Narasimha Rao regime.

Ramakrishna Hegde, Commerce Minister, was the one to start of in a big way by announcing a new Export-Import (Exim) policy. This policy accelerated the pace of import liberalisation by moving in a single stroke, 340 items from the restricted list to the Open General License (OGL) category of imports. It included a whole range of consumer goods - fishery products, dolls and toys, toilet articles, soap, bottled drinking water and what not. With subsequent dose of import liberalisation, over 840 items are now included in the OGL list paving the way for invasion of Indian market by foreign goods.

PM's ECONOMIC PROGRAMME

The Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would not allow himself to be outdone by his colleagues. Addressing the 1998 annual Conference of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), he declared that continuity will be the hallmark of his government in the realm of economic reforms. He assured that 'whatever be the changes in the political arena, the economic agenda will not be impacted. He also outlined a 13-point programme, which included inter alia,

- * The Government will withdraw from the economic production sectors and adopt the role of legislator, facilitator and regulator.

- * All laws and regulations governing trade and industry will be reviewed, radically simplified and, wherever need be, scrapped.

- * A transparent and non-discriminatory policy will govern the Foreign Direct Investments.

- * Proposals involving Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) will be cleared within a maximum time limit of 60 days.

- * Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) will be replaced.

- * Pension and insurance funds will be utilised to finance infrastructure development.

- * Urban land ceiling laws will be repealed.

- * Immediate steps will be taken for imaginative restructuring, disinvestment and reduction in losses of the public sector.

- * All electricity boards will be restructured.

The neo-convert to Sangh Parivar, Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, Minister for Power, in a display of over enthusiasm, resorted to promulgation of an ordinance to set up electricity regulatory authorities at the Centre and in the States.

R K Kumar, the State Minister for Finance, even during his short-lived tenure, announced that enactment will be made to open up the insurance sector and establish the Insurance Regulatory Authority.

These initial pronouncements were faithfully followed in the subsequent months.

For the BJP coalition, Swadeshi was just a slogan to deceive the gullible masses of the country. The magic moment of assuming office in Central Government at once transformed the swadeshis into pseudo swadeshis, who worked overtime to show themselves up as the real champions of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation and prove their unflinching loyalty to MNCs and their mentors in World Bank and IMF.

6

LABOUR TOTALLY IGNORED

On the other hand, the National Agenda for Governance, totally ignored the labour except for a pious swearing that "we will make labour an equal and proud partner in the production of the nation's wealth and its progress."

The callousness towards the working people revealed itself as the Prime Minister Vajpayee, who had innumerable meetings with the big business representatives, did not care to meet even once the central trade union organisations. His predecessor, I K Gujral, while heading the caretaker government prior to last elections, at least symbolically showed his concern for labour by addressing the tripartite Indian Labour Conference. But the 35th Indian Labour Conference was held in April 1999, just prior to the present Government losing the confidence vote; and Vajpayee did not bother to even make a presence at the forum. This is not accidental. It is by design. The five central trade unions, viz., the AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS and INTUC sought an appointment with the Prime Minister to discuss the issues relating to coal industry; the PMO did not even acknowledge the communication. On yet another occasion, when the IDPL workers gathered in New Delhi in a rally, the Prime Minister Vajpayee cancelled an appointment, earlier given, to meet the representatives of central trade unions on their issues.

On the other hand, instead of being made "equal and proud partner" the working class have been given the worst treatment. They lost their jobs in several thousands through closure,

retrenchment and VRS route. All their basic rights have been subjected to severe onslaught through overhauling exercise of the existing labour laws and their tardy implementation in connivance with the employers. Workers' struggles have been tackled with brutality and repression by the BJP government.

The BJP Government, even while deciding to appoint the Second National Commission on Labour did not deem it necessary to consult the trade unions.

These amply expose the hypocrisy of the NAG promise to "make labour an equal and proud partner".

7

ECONOMY, ON RAILS OR DERAILED?

Soon after the fall of the Vajpayee Government, Lok Abhiyan, a pro-BJP outfit, resorted to a blitzkrieg of media advertisements, projecting the grace-fallen Prime Minister as "the true leader of India". The full page advertisement posed a question with Vajpayee's portrait: 'what wrong this man do?' "Established India's self-respect by conducting the Pokhran blasts".

"Extended hand of friendship with the bus ride to Lahore."

"Brought the economy back on the rails."

These and a few other claims were made, as the achievements of this man 'who did no wrong!'

Of these claims, the "Bomb" and the "Bus" claims have floundered in Kargil. So these are sought to be covered by yet another perfidious claim of the success of "Operation Vijay".

But what about the 'economy back on rail' refrain?

Vajpayee himself sang this tune at the 1999 annual conference of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). He gloated on the 'feel good' budget of his government and lamented that some of the gains, as reflected in the upswing in the capital market, had been rudely halted by the recent political turbulence. But tragically for the BJP and its Prime Minister, the subsequent trends in the economy only exposed their pathetic ignorance.

The CII, on whose platform Vajpayee reeled off the noble feats of his "good governance, came out with its survey of Indian industry on May 3, 1999. It observed:

"Recession held Indian industry in firm grip during the whole of the last financial year....

"Negative growth rates hit some crucial basic goods items such as steel, lead and lead alloy, pig iron and cold rolled steel. Also in this category were automobiles of all kinds and most capital goods such as textile machinery (production falling by a whopping minus 35 per cent), various types of transformers sugar machinery instrumentation and wagons.

"Analysing the growth in sales, the survey found the pattern to be more or less similar.

"Sales of textile machinery matched its poor production. Other items faring poorly were machine tools, wagon, refractories, lead, cold rolled steel, all vehicles and even cigarettes and tobacco.

"Exports were analysed over the period April-December 1998 as compared to the same period during the previous year and the picture was equally dismal."

(The Hindu 4 May 1999)

A week thereafter came the most dismal report on industrial growth.

"With statistics now available for the full financial year, it is clear that industry failed to grow even at four percent in 1998-99. According to quick estimates of Index of Industrial Production (IIP), released by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), the general index of industrial production recorded a 3.8 per cent growth only during 1998 - 99, against a 6.6 per cent growth in the previous year.

"The full year statistics also show that the mining sector recorded a 1.7 per cent decline against a positive growth of 5.9 per cent in 1997-98. The manufacturing sector recorded a 4.1 per cent growth lower than 6.7 per cent growth registered in the preceding year."

(The Hindu 12 March 1999)

These facts fly in the face of the BJP government, which in the

Ninth Plan document released not long ago, boasted of achieving a seven per cent growth in the remaining years of the Plan period.

8

INDIA ON SALE !

Writing in the weekly 'People's Democracy', its editor, Sitaram Yéchury, commented thus on the Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha:

" In his first innings, (in Chandrasekhar Cabinet in 1991), the present Finance Minister mortgaged India's gold reserves; now in his second innings he is preparing to mortgage India itself "

The BJP government, right from the day of its assuming office, started propitiating the MNCs. This process was doubly intensified as a panic reaction to the sanctions imposed by the US and other countries, in the wake of Pokhran blasts.

Using the sanctions as an excuse, the Vajpayee government rapidly accelerated the process of opening up the economy to multinational plunder. On the day after the second round of tests, the Prime Minister's office directed the ministries of power, telecommunications, petroleum and natural gas, coal and surface transport to quickly clear all projects, ignoring the many valid objections that were there. In the power sector, counter-guarantees were given (like in the case of Enron earlier) for three projects within 24 hours of the nuclear tests.

The ministry of mines cleared whopping 34 large proposals involving western multinational corporations. In a significant step it has approved an MNC, the Phelps Dodge's application for a prospecting license for copper covering a massive area of 2472 square kilometers. It must be recalled that many of these clearances to privatise coal mines were held up because the defence ministry had correctly objected to MNC participation in the mines that are adjoining defence installations. That these had since been cleared speaks volumes of the BJP-led government's so-called concern for the

country's security.

In the petroleum sector, the government decided to sign production -sharing contracts for 18 exploration blocks - 11 of these with US petroleum companies. It needs to be recollected that in the past, the CAG had made several objections to non-payment of compensation to the ONGC concerning these projects. Yet the government cleared these 18 projects. This again is a telltale of its concern for India's rich natural resources, which are being sold for a song to the multinationals.

The BJP government cleared joint venture proposals allowing major multinationals in the country's ports. In what can be termed as a total sellout, the government is allowing the MNCs to hold as much as 89 per cent of equity in Indian ports. With the government's equity being limited to 11 per cent only, it will now not be in a position to block any special resolution, which requires a minimum of 26 per cent equity share. In other words, the government will now have to watch helplessly, if any Indian port decides to service imperialist nuclear ships or allow Indian ports to be used in imperialist war efforts like the Gulf war. In fine, the BJP government had offered India on sale !

9

FAST TRACK LIBERALISATION

Unmindful of the declining trends in the economy and misery of the people, the BJP Government zealously pursued the economy reforms agenda.

Under the head "Economy Reforms Continue"; in the Economy Survey 1998-99, presented on the eve of 1999 budget session, the liberalisation measures have been listed covering the whole range of the economy. Here is a short list.

Industry

- * Delicensing of coal and lignite, petroleum (other than crude) and its distillation products and bulk drugs.
- * Delicensing of sugar.
- * Dereservation of coal and lignite and mineral oils.
- * Patent bill approved by Rajya Sabha and subsequently

promulgated through an ordinance. (Since enacted and assented to by President)

- * A number of items, including some farm implements and tools, have been removed from products reserved for exclusive manufacture by SSI sector.

(All these are aimed at destroying the indigenous industry and liquidate small scale sector).

Infrastructure

- * The Indian Electricity Act, 1910 and Electricity (Supply) Act 1948 have been amended to provide for private investment in power transmission.

- * Following enactment of the Electricity Regulatory Commission Legislation the Central electricity Regulatory Commission was set up, with enabling provision for States to establish their own independent regulatory commissions.

(These are aimed at curtailing State governments' ability to provide subsidised power for disadvantaged sections, privatising State Electricity Boards and also facilitating ENRON type loot of power sector).

Foreign Direct investment

- * Projects for electricity generation, transmission and distribution and construction and maintenance of roads, highways, vehicular tunnels and vehicular bridges, port; and harbours have been permitted foreign equity participation upto 100 percent under automatic route.

- * FDI permissible under Non-banking Financial Services includes "Credit Card Business" and "Money Changing Business".

Financial Sector

- * Bill for strong independent Insurance Regulatory Authority, and opening of Insurance and Pension funds to private companies introduced in Parliament proposed to allow 26 percent foreign equity and additional 14 percent NRI (Non-resident Indian) and FII (Foreign Institutional Investor) holding.

(This seeks to complete the opening up of the financial sector for speculative plunder by foreign capital).

- * New bill for Foreign Exchange Management, to replace FERA,

introduced in parliament

(This, coupled with the Money Laundering Bill, 'legalises' illegal transactions in foreign exchange and white- washes hawala type crimes).

Taxation

* Introduction of a new scheme called "*KAR VIVAD SAMADHAN SCHEME*" to recover the money locked in litigation both in direct and indirect taxes.

(This is buying peace with tax evaders at the cost of national exchequer).

The list goes on to full two pages of the Survey.

The Economic Survey proudly asserted that these and several other reforms had been introduced " in keeping with the firm commitment of the government" to economic liberalisation and concessions to foreign capital.

In all these measures, the main opposition in the Parliament, the Congress(I), was sometimes a pliant partner; at other times the driving force from behind. The ruling BJP and the opposition Congress(I) were only competing for one-upmanship in their servility to the IMF/World Bank.

10

PRIVATISATION MANIA

During the BJP rule, the Public Sector Units (PSUs) had been targeted for intensified attacks. The steps taken by earlier governments were some sort of a cautious and camouflaged approach towards wholesale privatisation due to pressure from the trade union movement. But the BJP government had thrown off all such inhibitions and is no longer talking in guarded language of disinvestment or the like, but has declared that they are going for total privatisation.

"Government has no business to be in business" is the mantra of the Industries Minister Sikander Bakht. He announced the decision to close down eight central public sector undertakings, viz., Mining and Allied Machinery Corporation (MAMC), Bharat Ophthalmic Glass Ltd. (BOGL), Cycle Corporation of India Ltd.

(CCIL), Weighbird India Ltd. (WIL), Rehabilitation Industries Corporation (RIC), National Bicycle corporation (NBC), Tannery and Footwear Corporation of India Ltd. (TAFCO) and Bharat Process & Mechanical Engineers Ltd. (BPMEL). The Government of India also decided to close down 64 coalmines in West Bengal and Bihar. In this process over 80,000 workers, directly related to these industrial units and mines will lose their jobs, besides several thousands more in ancillaries and supporting Industries.

It may be noted that the cost of revival of the above-named eight sick PSUs, as per rehabilitation packages pending before the BIFR is much less than the cost of their closure. Yet, the BJP government is hell bent on closing them down.

Strong public opinion has stalled these efforts for the time being; but we believe that BJP government is only biding for time. It has no intention to revive these units by infusing more money through state funding to modernise the technology or provide working capital. That is why no funds were allocated in the 1999-2000 budget for revival of these PSUs. Only a committee has been formed to "examine" these cases.

On the other hand, the same BJP government has become over-generous in granting assistance for bailing out various units of the big business houses. The bail out package for Essar Steel and to private cellular operators are cases in point.

The hypocrisy of the BJP government on reviving sick units stands exposed by its decision to disinvest shares of blue-chip companies like Indian OIL corporation (IOC), Gas authority of India Ltd. (GAL), Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL), Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) etc., which were contributing handsomely to the government exchequer.

Disinvestment Commission had suggested selling of PSU shares through "STRATEGIC BUYERS". These strategic buyers will be given 50% of shares in first installment and also control over the management. Rest of the holding will be transferred to the strategic buyers in a given time frame and at negotiated prices. The prices of shares of these blue-chip companies are being artificially pushed down by the government through market

mechanism so as to give them to MNCs on a platter. Share prices of private companies shoot through the roof if the profit increases, even marginally. But Indian OIL Corporation share prices have fallen from RS.570/- to Rs 280/- per share in spite of its registering enhanced profit. Transferring of National wealth to Multinational corporations is being accelerated doggedly by the BJP Government. and millions of dollars are changing hands. This Swadeshi movement will surely lead us to pre-1947 economic scenario, when only big foreign companies will dominate our entire industrial sector.

In a sick, crippled economy, disinvestment also has to go in a limping way inspite of so many concessions given to buyers. So the Government. had to invent a new process termed as "BUY BACK" of shares. BJP government found a novel way to garner huge amount of money through this Buy-back system. The Government had forced the cash rich oil companies to "buy-back" their shares from the President of India. The Government has earned Rs.5300crores by this way in 1998-99. And during the current year, 1999 - 2000, the BJP government has considerably progressed towards their set target of Rs.10000 crore earnings from disinvestment.

The process drains out the oil companies of their investible surpluses, needed for modernisation and expansion. When these companies will need money for upgradation of technology, the Government of India will not give them any support according to its present policies. Naturally they will become sick and then go into obliteration.

Cross holding has been devised as yet another method by which Government can make money. In this process, ONGC will buy shares of IOC and IOC will buy shares of ONGC and so on. The shares will be bought from the President of India again, and not from the market.

Deviating from the printed text of the budget speech of 1999-2000, the Finance Minister proudly announced that "hereafter I will talk only in terms of 'PRIVATISATION' and not disinvestment." The BJP Government had finally removed the veil of hypocrisy.

The madness with which the BJP government proceeded to sell out the public sector and in the process the country itself, is revealing. Since initiation of liberalisation, in 1991 by the Congress regime, Rs 11527 crore worth PSU shares were disinvested in seven years. The United Front regime could not make much headway in this regard due to resistance from the left parties and pressure of the trade union movement. But in less than eighteen months time, the BJP regime had almost equalled the disinvestment figure of the previous seven years. This is the mania, the commitment of the Swadeshis to sell out the Desh itself.

11

NO IDEOLOGICAL RIGIDITY

The BJP stalwarts are, of course, unfazed: They, while initiating steps to open up the insurance sector, to fulfil their commitment to their international mentors in economic philosophy, faced opposition from their own saffron brigade, Swadeshi Jagran Manch. Of course, the BMS too persists with its opposition.

But the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, justified the opening up of the insurance sector to foreign capital by stating that "there is no place for ideological rigidity" in economic policy matters.

Yashwant Sinha revealed his anxiety by stating that the "economic situation in the country was fragile" and the IRA Bill had become a "test case which would determine the flow of foreign investment into this country".

The reality is that on the foreign investment front as whole, the picture is utterly dismal. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) had observed that the non-debt foreign investment has fallen by 75% during April-September, 1998 compared to previous year and during the rest of the fiscal year also the situation had not changed in the least. Moreover, 75% of the FDI inflows were for merger, acquisition and takeover of Indian companies without any contribution to employment generation or increase in productive capacity of the country.

The Government boasts of India having a comfortable foreign

exchange reserve of 29 billion US dollar. But the truth that is concealed is, out of this reserve, more than 21 billion US dollar is "hot money" used for speculative purpose only. This can fly by night any time.

Despite these stark realities, the BJP vows to carry on such a disastrous policy, also after the elections if it is voted back to power.

Seeking to outsmart the Congress, which had initiated the economic reforms. Yeshwant Sinha asserted: "The first phase of liberalisation process had been adhoc and not well planned. Hence we felt the need to come out with a paper on second generation reforms soon to sequence the unfinished reforms agenda".

(The Observer of Business and Politics, 30April, 1998)

He is determined. His job is to finish the country and its economy!

12

RAW DEAL TO WORKERS

The BJP government had caused immense harm to the interests of the workers by its pursuit of the most disastrous economic policies. It also excelled in its anti-worker measures, in every labour-related matter.

At a conference on labour management organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry on 11th December, 1998, L.Mishra, Labour Secretary, listed "the changes that need to be carried out in the laws to bring about an alteration is the orientation of industrial relations". The amendments were expected "to make retrenchment of employees simpler, increasing working hours from eight to twelve hours, legitimise deployment of contract labourers everywhere and stringent laws for registration and recognition of the unions".

Against the backdrop of the Supreme Court verdict favouring regularisation of contract workers, the Labour Ministry under the BJP rule "accepted the demands voiced by sections of the industry that they be allowed to outsource certain functions which, is an international trend".

Acquiescing with the employers' lobbies, the labour ministry under BJP regime, has been working overtime to overhaul the existing law relating to contract labour to legalise deployment of contract workers even where the work is of a permanent nature. If these moves are allowed to succeed, a wide spread casualisation of workforce will take place at a much faster pace. Similar exercises are on to take away the service sector workers from the purview of the Industrial Disputes Act and dilute all labour related legislations to drastically curtail the rights of the workers and grant unbridled powers to employers.

The BJP regime has also sought to do away with the restriction on employers to deploy woman workers in night shift.

The BJP government has not taken a single step in favour of the working class. The united demand of the trade unions to amend the Payment of Bonus Act, to remove its ceilings, was not accepted by the government. The assurance to enact a comprehensive legislation in respect of agricultural workers was reneged, due to the pressure of landlord lobby. The nine year old Worker's Participation in Management Bill was deliberately not pursued.

Policy decisions concerning labour were announced by other Ministers over the head of Labour Ministry and with out any consultation with the central trade unions, The Finance Minister announced that 10% of the Provident Fund and Pension Fund would be invested in private sector bonds. The Commerce Minister announced that labour laws would not be applicable in the Export Processing Zones, to be renamed as Free Trade Zones. The Social Justice and Empowerment Minister announced that 20% of PF & Pension Fund would be invested in private companies and another 10% in shares. It also recommended severe restrictions on withdrawal of PF by workers, with a 10% tax. It also sought to withdraw the government contribution of 1.16% to Pension Scheme. On the other hand, the Finance Ministry refused to accept the unanimous recommendation of the tripartite Standing Labour Committees to enhance the rate of interest (from 8.5% to 12.5%) of the Pension Fund money held by the government in public account.

At the same time, the BJP government violated the pension scheme provision for annual review/revaluation. Only a 4% adhoc relief had been extended in last four years' period, that too only for the pensioners as on 15-11-1996.

The guidelines issued by the Bureau of Public Enterprises on wage revision for Public Sector employees were totally anti-worker and discriminatory. The BPE prescribed a ten year agreement, instead of the existing five year period and that there should be no increase in labour cost per unit. The BJP government which accepted the Mohan Committee Report in respect of PSU executives had adopted a different yardstick for the employees.

As noted earlier, the BJP government announced the decision to appoint the Second National Commission on labour without holding any consultation with the central trade unions. The terms of reference proposed were, besides the usual crocodile tears for suggesting an 'umbrella' legislation for protection of unorganised workers, aimed at rationalisation of existing labour laws applicable to organised sector workers. The latter was to bring the laws in tune with the needs of the employers to deregulate the labour market, fitting in with the globalisation and liberalisation policies.

These anti-labour moves of the BJP government were resented by all sections of workers. The entire spectrum of trade union movement condemned these attempts at the Indian Labour Conference held in April, 1999, even threatening to boycott its proceedings.

Yet, the BJP government is non-chalant enough to continue to mete out a raw deal to workers. It is reported that Ravindra Varma, a former labour minister, has been appointed chairman of the National Labour Commission, because of his proximity to and susceptibility for influence by the Sangh Pariwar. The suggestions of the central trade unions in this regard had been ignored. Even the Election Commission had to reject the government proposal to issue the notification constituting the Commission. But, the chairman along with the member-secretary had assumed office without even a formal notification. Strange

governance, indeed!

The BJP - HVP coalition government of Haryana, with Bansi Lal as chief minister, had set a record of sorts, in terrorising and victimising trade union workers. Thirty-four nurses were summarily dismissed during their strike in Haryana in 1998. 240 state government employees were suspended in connection with the 11th December 1998 all India general strike. The Haryana government served a notice on the general secretary of the Haryana Sarv Karmachari Sangh for recovering Rs. 15 lakh loss caused to the State Electricity Board because of the strike. In all these, the BJP was a pliant coalition partner. Now, the BJP had toppled Bansi Lal; but their all out support to such flagrant anti-labour measures is permanently extended. The repression let loose on the Nathpa-Jhakri power project workers by the government of Himachal Pradesh and on the striking workers of UP Electricity Board by the UP government, both ruled by the BJP are another manifestation of their anti-labour bias.

The working people should realise that allowing the BJP to get into power at the centre only means giving an iron rod to beat the workers with and inviting conditions of slavery for the workers all over the country. The minimum safeguard the workers throughout the country can secure for themselves, is by ensuring the rout of the BJP alliance in the coming election.

13

INTOLERABLE EVEN TO BMS

The dogged pursuit of the reforms process by the BJP led Government had become intolerable to even the Bharatiya Mazddoor Sangh (BMS), the central trade union with the saffron flag. The Working President of BMS, R. Venugopal, presented a statement at the pre-budget consultation meeting on 13th January, 1999 and raised a question: "Is there a Government functioning at all?"

'It is worthwhile to go through the following excerpts from his statement:

"Let us face the fact that the liberalisation, globalisation,

opening up etc. started in 1991 have not benefited the general workers of our country. On the other hand, it has resulted only in increased unemployment, contractorisation, closure ; and of course capture of our industrial establishments and even agricultural sector by multinationals. Still the government is bent on continuing the process ; may be under the pressure of the various clauses of GATT. But we feel that the government is going beyond the compulsions of GATT also in its various economic policies. For example, the permission given to the American Company 'Monsanto' to produce non-germinating seeds is bound to affect our agriculturists in future. Even oranges, sugar, etc. which we are already producing in plenty, are being allowed to be imported freely. By increasing the import duty of gold, the government is promoting smuggling of the precious metal. Indiscriminate disinvestment of Government-owned companies in the name of privatisation will only result in multinationals purchasing the same. Closures of companies are being ordered without enquiring into reasons for loss and taking corrective measures. Giving orders to private companies for construction has resulted in thousands of workers being left without getting their wages in HSCL, NPCC, etc. On the whole, the workers have begun to ask, "is there a government functioning here at all, or, are the bureaucrats doing the things on their own without any coordination?" "On the whole, take the people into confidence. Remember that the country is not to be ruled by a few advisers who are over enthusiastic to please their foreign masters. People are willing to sacrifice if the government determines to defy the WTO, even as they suffered under Gandhiji's leadership to fight the British Government for attaining freedom. We trade unions shall help you in that process". But this government has no sense of shame.

14

PHENOMENAL PRICE RISE

Under BJP rule, the country had witnessed a situation of an

alarming phenomenon of price rise, surpassing all previous records.

The admission by the Government in the Economic Survey - 1998-99, is revealing. Below is an extract from a Box item in the Survey:

Onion Prices

"Never before was the domestic price scene, especially in north India, dominated by the rise in the price of just one, rather low weighted consumer item as onion. With its retail price normally ranging from Rs 6 to Rs 12 per kg in Delhi, this year's price shot up to Rs 16 per kg in January and after dropping to Rs 6 in April-May, rose to Rs 13-Rs 33 in July-August reaching a peak of Rs 45 in October-November, 1998. On some days retail prices were even quoted at Rs 60 per kg. This unprecedented rise overshadowed all other prices, even edible oil prices, particularly mustard oil whose price had almost doubled and potato whose price too had doubled this year ranging from Rs 10 to Rs 6 per kg between June-October 1998."

The BJP Government remained unconcerned over the skyrocketing prices all those days. Despite continuous rise in the prices of onion, vegetables, edible oil, pulses etc., from April 1998 onwards, they continued to allow export of onions and other agro products from the country in thousands of tonnes. This aggravated the shortage to the advantage of the black marketeers, hoarders and traders. The Government's involvement with and sole concern for the wholesale traders, hoarders and blackmarketeers exposed its brazenly anti-people bias.

The trend of price rise during 1998-99, reveals that the increase in the prices of essential commodities was actively promoted by the BJP regime to oblige their support base among the traders and hoarders to the detriment of the interest of the common people. During April-December, 1998, the index of wholesale prices of rice shot up by 44 points(12%), wheat by 43 points(13%), pulses by 88 points(20%) and edible oil by 43 points(14%). During the same period, All India Consumer Price Index was up by 37

points compared to only 13 points during the corresponding period in 1997 when BJP was not in power.

Now, much is sought to be made of the statistical jugglery of an all time low inflation rate. But the fact remains that there has been no let up in spiralling rise in prices of essential commodities of daily use by the common people.

The Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) observed: "The rate of inflation has hit a 17 year low primarrily due to the slow rise in prices of manufactured goods (0.4%) while prices of primary food articles increased by 3% up to June 5, 1999" (The Observer, 20-7-99). Such a phenomenon manifests the depth of all round recession and not the good health of the economy. Hence this manifestation of "falling inflation rate" accompanied by rising prices of essential commodities under the BJP regime may please their World Bank bosses but the people of the country continue to reel under crushing burden of price rise of essential items. Moreover the slow-down of the economy under recession along with continuously rising prices of essential commodities indicates all round aggravation of the poverty among the mass of the people. People cannot afford to bear the burden of this government inflicting miseries on their livelihood!

15

FANATIC UPSWING OF COMMUNALISM

This period saw increasing attempts, overt and covert, by the forces of Hindutva to push through their hidden agenda, using the fragile coalition government led by the BJP.

The scant disregard with which the Srikrishna Commission report, on Mumbai riots against the muslim minorities after the Babri Masjid demolition, was consigned to dustbin is proof enough of what could be expected of the Sangh Parivar. This stand of the Maharashtra Government, of the Shiv Sena-BJP coalition, was brazenly justified by the BJP government at the centre.

Yet another attempt, by the saffron government in Maharashtra

against Muslim minorities, was the illegal deportation of Indian Muslim workers hailing from West Bengal, branding them as "Bangladeshis", L.K. Advani justified it in Parliament on 28th July 1998.

Another disquieting aspect of saffron onslaughts is the well meditated attacks on the Christian community, which has peaked in the BJP ruled state of Gujarat. Similar attacks had been reported in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka as well as Punjab. It is shocking to learn that violent incidents against christians have assumed staggering proportions ever since the Hindutva forces came to power at the centre. Between 1964 and 1996, in a span of 32 years, 38 cases were reported. This went up to 15 in the year 1997 itself. In the eleven months up to November 1998, the figure shot up to an alarming 98. Of these, 15 were in Gujarat alone, where 11 churches/chapels have been destroyed. Commencing from the Christmas day, 1998, the Bajrang Dal and VHP went on a rampage in Gujarat, setting fire and destroying churches, forcefully hoisting saffron flags atop christian places of worship, brutally attacking the christian community, particularly the tribals; indulging in vandalism inflicting huge loss of properties - all this with the brazen support of the BJP's Keshubai Patel Ministry and blatant connivance of official machinery.

This evoked a nationwide condemnation. But the BJP Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, after visiting the places where violent incidents took place, gave a clean chit to the State government. He also echoed the Sangh Parivar line in demanding a "National debate" on conversions. Partisanship cannot be more naked! Democratic public opinion, nationwide, rejected this dubious call for National debate and asked the Prime Minister to reign in the Sangh Parivar and ensure protection of minorities. Shiv Sena supremo triggered off a lunatic frenzy against Pakistan Cricket team playing in India, digging up the pitch at Delhi, besides threatening to disrupt the Delhi-Lahore bus service, which had completed its trial dry run by then. Unashamedly, the Prime Minister deputed his Home Minister, to prostrate before

the Sena leader to buy breathing time. But the Shiv Sena barbarism has shown no respite. The attacks on artist M.F. Hussain, actor Dilip Kumar and vandalism in the premises of Board of Cricket Control for India are still recent episodes.

The gruesome spine-chilling criminal act indulged in by these rabid communalists was at Manoharpur in Orissa during January 1999. A christian priest of Australian origin, Graham Staines, was set on fire by a mob while sleeping in a jeep with his two young sons. Staines had spent 34 years in India, running a leprosy treatment centre.

This state of affairs had aptly been described by 'The Statesman' in its editorial on 2nd February 1999. It said:

"Having reduced governance to a farce, repudiated the rule of law, protected those accused of serious offences and indulged in other gross abuses of power, the government embarks on a suicidal mission to explain away atrocities committed against christians, torching of places of worship, rape of nuns, destruction of bibles and finally burning alive of a revered missionary and his minor sons. Note that operation damage control was not born of an attack of conscience. Prime Minister Vajpayee wanted a debate on conversions, suggested a justification for the vulgarity, L K Advani declared that there would be no inquiry because he "knew" the Bajrang Dal and he could tell that there was "no criminality in them."

Later, the government came out with the Justice Wadhwa Commission of enquiry as a route for bail-out. The enquiry, which was a farce, had come out with a report on the expected lines, echoing what L K Advani had said.

All these brutal manifestations of a fascistic majoritarian communalism must squarely be defeated, in the forthcoming election.

16

DECEPTIVE MASK

In this election, the BJP has formed a "National Democratic Alliance (NDA)" and swears that they will have a common

manifesto, broadly on the lines of the National Agenda for Governance. Unlike in the previous elections, the BJP will not come out with its own separate manifesto. But it is another matter that other partners of the NDA will be free to release separate manifestos of their parties. By this, the BJP is trying to put up a deceptive mask suggesting that the contentious issues like Ayodhya, Article 370, common civil code etc., have permanently been put on the back-burner. Both the NDA and its Prime Ministerial candidate, Vajpayee, are the 'mukhota' (mask) of the BJP.

Will the BJP succeed in deceiving the people in this way? Can people forget what had happened ever since Vajpayee assumed office in March, 1998?

The National Executive Committee of the BJP met on April 11th and 12th 1998, after the BJP Government took over. In his address at the meeting, L.K. Advani advocated that the BJP must be 'guided not by the issues of yesterday but by the agenda of tomorrow'. He talked of building a "Rashtra Mandir" (National Temple). But he added that "this, in fact, what we meant when championing the cause of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya". His next proposal was that "Ayodhya must be taken out of both the judicial and legislative spheres".

What does this mean? The Sangh Parivar will take law in their own hands on Ayodhya issue!

Some people believe that the BJP has become "responsible" after coming to power and hence has cast aside these issues. It is not so in the least. Here are two reports in the Press:

"The Dharma Sansad of the Viswa Hindu Parishad today asked the BJP to return to the "Hindutva" agenda...

"The resolution (passed at the Dharma Sansad) pointed out that the people in the country voted the BJP to power at the Centre and in some of the states only to implement the VHP's "Hindutva Agenda", but the discrepancies within the coalition partners in Delhi had made the Vajpayee administration "lame" to implement it.

(The Hindu, 7 February, 1999)

"The Viswa Hindu Parishad has openly extended a helping hand

to the BJP to create a "Hindu vote bank" to enable the party to "stand on its own" in the next parliamentary election.....

"He (Acharya Giriraj Kishore, national senior vice-president of the VHP) said the VHP on its own had no political ambitions but only desired that the "Rajshakti" (the Government) should function within the ambit of the "Dharmashakti". He denied that the BJP was the political outfit of the VHP, but agreed that it was ideologically the political party "nearest" to the VHP."

(The Hindu, 8 February, 1999)

This makes it abundantly clear that BJP in government will only be subordinate to the Sangh Parivar. It also gives out that once Vajpayee administration gets rid of its crutches (read allies) and stands on its own (not lame), it will implement the "Hindutva" agenda.

Yet, some allied to the BJP may say that Vajpayee had distanced himself from the Sangh Parivar and ask why then harangue him with the statements of VHP? That too what was said before the defeat of Vajpayee government?

To those "conscience keepers" of Vajpayee, we humbly submit the undernoted report by Vijay Sharma, the Lucknow correspondent of the Hindustan Times:

"The BJP is all set to raise the sensitive Ayodhya issue once again....Talking to The Hindustan Times here on Monday (4th June 1999), the Chief Minister, Mr. Kalyan Singh vehemently denied that the issue had been dropped from the BJP agenda. The party was fully committed on it, he asserted.

"He, however clarified that due to 'political compulsions' and 'coalition politics', the issue had been put in cold storage for a 'short while'.

"I would appeal to the people to vote for the BJP for a stable government, speedy development, social harmony and for the temple construction to be possible. For all this the BJP had to get a clear majority in the Lok Sabha", the Chief Minister said."

(The Hindustan Times, 16 June, 1999)

This is what Kalyan Singh, a BJP chief minister - and not a VHP or RSS spokesman - had said, that too after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and as part of the election

campaign.

Let us also remind the people of what Vajpayee himself said at the meeting of the BJP National Executive Committee. ..

"Vajpayee declares that" the government will not run the party, the party has to run the government." The Prime Minister adds, for good measure, that coalition rule will probably be temporary and that the BJP ought to strive for one-party rule."

(Indian Express editorial, 13th April 1998)

In this connection, people will do well to recall the brazen attempt by Murli Manohar Joshi (one of the BJP triumvirate and Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister) to saffronise the education system, at the Education Minister's conference in October, 1998.

The HRD ministry circulated, as part of agenda papers, the recommendations seeking to "Indianise, nationallise and spiritualise" the education system. They recommended making Sanskrit a compulsory language from class III to X, "moral and spiritual education" to be compulsorily introduced at all stages in schools and universities, the Vedas and Upanishads to find due place in the curriculum at all levels, and most importantly, to negate Article 30 of the Constitution which confers the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

Here again, "The Hindu" in the editorial warned: "The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's assurance while inaugurating the conference that "there is no place for religious bigotry and intolerance while imparting value education cannot be taken at face value given the BJP's past record of pushing its sectarian agenda into the education system" (emphasis added) . The editorial went on to cite instances of the BJP using control of the state machinery to further Hindutva agenda particularly in education in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh .

People must realise that the moderate face assumed by BJP and Vajpayee is just a deceptive mask. They must see through this game of deception and reject the mask as well as the rabid communal face behind it,

THE POKHRAN BLASTS

In the evening of May 11, 1998, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee announced, at a Press meet, that India had carried out three successful nuclear explosions at Pokhran. Two more explosions on May 13 followed this.

Whose agenda was this nuclear misadventure? The National Agenda for Governance had stated that "We will establish a National Security Council to analyse the military, economic and political threats to the nation, also to continuously advise the government. This council will undertake India's first ever Strategic Defence Review. We will re-evaluate the nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons."

But it was the BJP manifesto for 1998 elections that categorically pledged to "exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons." Making of an atom bomb had been on the agenda, of perhaps the one and only party, i.e. the BJP, right from its Jan Sangh days. Rather, it is the agenda of RSS, mouthed by its political outfits.

Thus it is clear that at Pokhran, the hidden agenda of the BJP had exploded.

The Pokhran explosions are a sudden break from the principled nuclear policy followed by India. India's nuclear policy was firmly rooted in its advocacy of peace and disarmament and opposition to arms race. It was determined to develop a many sided nuclear energy programme aimed at peaceful, non-military use of nuclear energy with the perspective of achieving universal nuclear disarmament. India firmly ruled out surrendering its nuclear option including weaponisation, unless all the nuclear weapons states agreed to do so.

Keeping the option open, India all along maintained utmost self-restraint by not exercising the option, until the BJP regime ruptured it.

There was not only a National consensus on this policy; it has also received international appreciation. Besides, this policy acted as a restraining factor on Pakistan also, despite its belligerent postures.

All these were tumbled down in a single stroke. Besides, the irresponsible statements of the ruling clique, even after the blasts, inflicted more damage,

L K Advani, Home Minister, the trusted one of the RSS parivar, went hammer and tongs over Pakistan, after the blasts. He talked of a 'pro-active' response and a 'hot pursuit'. He linked the Kashmir issue to the nuclear blasts and said, 'India's decisive steps to become a nuclear weapon state has brought about a qualitative new state in India-Pakistan relations, particularly in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. Islamabad has to realise the change in the geo-strategic situation in the region and the world.' He added: "India is resolved to deal firmly with Pakistan's hostile activities. We should not shy away from our strengths, nor would security be neglected because of international disapproval."

This "Hindutva" belligerence was responded to in ample measure by the 'Islamic' Pakistan.

The National agenda talked of a 'reciprocal basis in the context of neighbourly relations. Isn't it? Neighbour Pakistan reciprocated, by exploding five nuclear devices on 28th May and adding one more to it on 30th May, 1998, in the Chagai hills.

Nawaz Shariff, Pakistan Prime Minister, matched L.K. Advani, by declaring that Pakistan had settled its scores with India. He took pride in that he was not the leader of a coward nation.

Thus, Pokhran tests heralded a nuclear arms race in South Asia, with India and Pakistan claiming superior capability over each other.

The recent Kargil conflict and subsequent incidents have demonstrated that the 'Bomb' had not served as a deterrent.

The BJP government choosing to ride the nuclear bomb tiger, will take its own toll by way of huge escalation in defence expenditure. Our people will have to pay for it bleeding through their nose in the period ahead, unless they deliver a big blow to the post-Pokhran jingoists in the ensuing electoral battle!

THE KARGIL CARD

The BJP and its allies have realised that neither sympathy nor the Three Bs - (Bomb-Bus-Budget) - will sail them through in this election. Therefore, they have now taken up Kargil as their sole election issue, trying to portray Vajpayee as hero. But they are not sure of themselves.

The Hindu, on 27th July 1999, noted the welcome extended by the BJP to the newly appointed Subramaniam Committee to review the Kargil issue and reported thus:

"In short, it would seem the BJP does not think that any one should be held responsible for the entry of some 2000 to 3000 Pakistani soldiers into India and holding of some 1500 Sq. Kms of our territory before it was even discovered that this had happened" (emphasis added).

This failure is the crux of the Kargil issue, which resulted in the martyrdom of over four hundred of our officers and jawans of the armed forces.

The entire nation is proud of the saga of the death-defying courage displayed by our armed forces in defending the country, against very heavy odds, repulsing the enemy attack and making supreme sacrifices! The entire nation is also unanimous in condemning attempts by Pakistan to alter the line of control on Indo-Pak border by pushing in the infiltrators backed by armed regulars.

But the nation cannot pardon the intolerance of the BJP combination to genuine criticism of their government role in this episode. In this process, they also attempt to portray every critic as anti-national.

Even at the time when the Kargil operations were at a peak, The Hindustan Times, on 3rd June 1999 came out with an editorial captioned "Indefensible". It said:

"A moratorium on statements by Mr. George Fernandes has become an urgent national necessity. Not content with issuing an unsolicited clean chit for the Nawaz Sharif Government and its killer outfit, the ISI, the Defence Minister has followed that up with an offer to "consider safe passage of exit" for Pakistani

militants who have dug themselves in on the Indian side of the Line of Control. If this is what the Indian Government wants- it is not, says the Prime Minister - what was the need for launching sustained air strikes and ground operations to flush out the Pakistani elements from the Kargil area of Kashmir, at not only an enormous financial costs, but also of precious young life?

"Aberrant is a mild word for what the Vajpayee Government's spokesmen are saying about an operation which by and large has the approval of the entire country. The actions too seem to match the words. The Defence Ministry's decision to allow the senior officers of the forces to explain the situation to the BJP takes the defence establishments into uncharted waters. Explaining the position to parliamentarians and political leaders of all parties would have been understandable, but choosing a party audience sets a precedent which could be dangerous for both future governments and civil-military relations.

"In a war-like situation with casualties on both sides, the government and the political leadership cannot afford the luxury of the unruly politics. The nation must speak in one voice and that voice cannot be that of George Fernandes".

But instead of addressing these concerns, the BJP chose to observe a Kashmir Day on 23rd June 1999. While the Prime Minister was appealing to all not to politicise the Kargil issue, that was precisely what the BJP did. In a full page advertisement paying "a tribute to those who made the supreme sacrifice to our mother land", the BJP claimed that among the first ones to die for the Kashmir cause was Shyama Prasad Mukherjee on 23rd June, 1953.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was a founder leader of the Bharathiya Jan Sangh, the previous incarnation of the BJP. Here is what Lajpat Rai, political activist and commentator, said on the BJP claim:

"The connection seems grossly mistaken considering Mukherjee died long after Kashmir's merger with India in 1947.

"The BJP advertisement seems most treacherous, more so at a time when our jawans are laying down their lives at Kargil while trying to push out Pakistani infiltrators. This would have not

been possible without the patriotic co-operation of the Kashmiri people. Men like Mukhjerjees may inspire RSS volunteers but nationalism and patriotism of the Hindutva brand has nothing to do with Indian nationalism”.

(Mid-Day, 30 JUNE, 1999)

Aberrations, false claims apart, the utterances of BJP leaders and their saffron brigade were specimens of fanatic frenzy. We note a few of them here and leave people to draw their own conclusions.

“Swamy Chinmayanand Saraswati (of the VHP) said; In the present situation, the Prime Minister has told the world that if we can make the friendly gesture of taking the bus to Pakistan, we also know how to ride tanks across the border. He aggressively added that 1999 was a good year to wipe Pakistan off the globe”.

(The Asian Age, 27 June, 1999)

“BJP National President Kushabhai Thakere today (July 3rd) said that the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government should make every effort to reclaim the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK)... However, it was for the government as well as the defence experts to decide how and when.

(The Hindustan Times, 4 July, 1999)

“And when the RSS preferred to break its silence over Kargil after a fortnight, it put its foot in the mouth. Its mouthpiece Panchjanya, in its latest issue, has exhorted the Vajpayee Government not to hesitate in using the nuclear bomb on Pakistan to teach it a lesson. The paper went on to ask Vajpayee, “After all, why we have made the bomb? Only for the sake of its successful testing?”

“Bharat Karnad, a member of the Advisory Board of the National Security Council is telling the nation that “Pakistan has done nothing illegal by crossing the LOC since it is elastic and yet to be delineated. This is exactly what Pakistan Foreign Minister Sardar Aziz had been telling....”

(Hari Shankar Vyas in Sunday Pioneer)

The BJP on Thursday (July 1) challenged Congress President Sonia Gandhi...”we invite her to a public debate on Kargil. She can choose the platform and the venue and debate the issue

with a BJP leader...", BJP General Secretary Narendra Modi told reporters here (New Delhi)".

(The Asian Age, 2 July, 1999)

But the BJP and its allies would not even heed the advice of the President and convene a session of the Rajya Sabha to discuss the Kargil issue, even when the conflict has come to near-cessation!

Thus the BJP attempt to portray the achievements of the armed forces as that of its government and the Prime Minister, to use the Kargil card as a vote catching device, must be debunked. Is it not ridiculous to name the Kargil operations as "Operation Vijay", when the government yielded 1500 Sq.Kms. of our territory to intruders, without even coming to know of it for weeks together?

In blowing the trumpet of succeeding in winning international support for India's stand on Kargil, the BJP rulers are unwittingly falling a prey to the U.S. design to play an active, interventionist role in Kashmir. This again is a matter of grave concern in the coming period.

Kargil is on one side a glorious chapter written by our armed forces with the blood of the martyrs - on the other, it speaks volumes of the inept, incompetent handling, bordering on irresponsibility, by the BJP government. We have to ring out the dubious BJP combination, playing perilous games on a sensitive issue like national defence, to ensure that our mother land faithfully defended by our heroes on the battle front is safe and secure!

19

"ABLE PM & TRUE LEADER"

The BJP alliance is devoid of issues and policies to project before the people. So it is projecting only an individual, Vajpayee, as "an able Prime Minister and a true leader"!

But less said of the abilities of this prime ministerial candidate, the better.

From the day he assumed office till this day, Vajpayee could not

even complete formation of a full fledged council of ministers. "Enter one, exit another", has been the state of his cabinet.

It took almost a year for the 12th Lok Sabha to elect its Deputy Speaker. Nothing except the vagaries and ambitions of the coalition that Vajpayee led, had accounted for this.

Admiral Vishnu Bhagwath episode is a slur on the governing abilities of this Prime Minister. The revelations made by the sacked Admiral are yet to get a logical explanation from the Vajpayee government. On the eve of the last parliamentary session, Vajpayee pleaded with the opposition not to rake up the issue for discussion, as sensitive defence related matters were involved. But his Defence Minister, the irrepressible George Fernandes, used the media extensively to put forth his lame justification and call the Admiral names. Vajpayee remained a mute spectator.

Mohan Gurusamy is another name that exploded the myth of able governance by this Prime Minister. He was adviser to the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha. He was sacked. The trading of charges by the sacked Adviser and the Minister, the recipient of his "advices", is a mockery of the administration of an all-important ministry. Vajpayee still owes a convincing reply to the charges elaborately leveled by this Adviser.

Telecom muddle - rather scam - drawing flak from the President, Election Commission and the Delhi High Court is yet another "feather in the cap" of this Prime Minister. He eased out the Telecom Minister, Jag Mohan, took over the portfolio himself and embarked on a wide ranging changes in the Telecom policy, behind the back of the Parliament. The amount involved in this could be around Rs.50000 crores. Why this "able Prime Minister" showed such unseemly hurry, that too in the run up to the elections, is a mystery. It also reflects on the standards of morality in BJP governance !

For the first time, the Government of India, under this 'able PM', stooped to such an unprecedented low levels of manipulations, misleading the Supreme Court itself. This was in the case relating to transfer of M.K. Bazbaruah, Chief of Enforcement Directorate. The Supreme Court commenting on the manipulation by this

Government, said :

"The relevant words of the judgement (cited by the Government in its defence) are omitted. How can you do so? If this is not an attempt to mislead the Court, then what it is? The sentence is completely rewritten and that too by the Government".

The "able PM" is yet to unravel the mystery behind this manipulation.

India urgently requires deliverance not only from this coalition, but also from this "able PM and true leader". The people's verdict in this election should ensure this deliverance.

20

TROUNCE THE COMMUNAL COMBINE

The BJP rule(during this thirteen plus five months)had demonstrated that it is the worst enemy of the working class and the people of the country as a whole.

The BJP governance has :

- * plunged the national economy in the severest depth of disaster;
- * auctioned everything precious in the country to MNCs, NRIs and big business in the country;
- * targeted the indigenous industrial base for destruction at a rapid pace in the interest of the MNCs;
- * enabled the foreign goods and services to occupy vantage position in Indian market edging out domestic products;
- * served the World Bank and IMF overlords with a "more loyal than the king" servitude;
- * communalised governance, administration and every institution in all spheres
- * torn apart the secular fabric of the country;
- * disrupted people's unity, creating a fertile soil for imperialist games of destabilisation and dismemberment of this great country
- and
- * weakened the country, economically and politically, turning it an easy prey for imperialist hegemony !

The working people must realise that the BJP rulers want to

impose perpetual slavery on the the workers, pit people against one another with the sole intention to weaken peoples' resistance against their anti people, anti national treacherous policies. If they are allowed to succeed in their attempt to return for power, it will mean an unmitigated disaster. Their misdeeds and crimes deserves exemplary punishment at the hands of the people.

The coming elections offer a golden opportunity to the people to

- > Reject the communal forces lock, stock and barrel
- > Preserve the unity of the people
- > Clear the economy from the crisis in which it has been plunged
- > Defend the national sovereignty
- > Repair the damage of India's image before international community and
- > Strengthen the left and secular democratic forces, who alone can accomplish these tasks.

The choice before the working people is clear. At the moment, the BJP combine poses the gravest danger to the country. It must be squarely defeated and trounced.

The working class must vote in this election for the candidates of the Left parties, which alone have defended the interests of all sections of the masses, inside and outside the Parliament.

Wherever the working class does not have the opportunity to vote for the left, they must back the most effective secular candidates to defeat the communal forces!

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