

Nothing But Time

The popular leftist rhetoric that a better world is possible does not prevent toilers from seeing that a far worse world is possible also. The most striking thing about the way official communists talk about May Day these days is just how little they talk about it at all. May Day for the established left is one more area of populism. But populism is a volatile force. Devoid of long-term agenda, strong social base and organisational solidarity, it can bring wage-earners and job seekers out on the streets. Then there ends the matter.

The old stereotypes, once so evocative have lost their potency. They are just slogans, not for action. They are too powerless to unite those who can be united even on the spirit of May 1. Not that labour organising was smooth-sailing in the yester years. Labour has been defensive ever since the emergence of global rightist resurgence in the '80s. If today workers find it increasingly difficult to get organised against the onslaught of neo-liberal capital, it is because the most vocal section of the working community is under the sway of anti-working class political parties.

In Indian panorama nothing changes but time. Official communists who were once in the forefront in labour organising, are now the worst defenders of the status quo. They are suppressing popular protest movements with iron fists. Right now they are all set to crush the just rebellion of tribals in Lalgarh in West Midnapur district of West Bengal, bordering Jharkhand state. Yet they have no problem in giving call for May Day solidarity. Hypocrisy abounds.

Global crisis, or what they call melt-down, provides tremendous opportunities for the left. But there is no genuine left that can take advantage of it. Social unrest is gaining pace, somewhat spontaneously outside the ambit of the traditional left. In all likelihood it will sharpen further in the coming days. Popular outbursts are taking place both here and abroad defying the traditional left and refusing to abide by the rules of the game.

In February the French government flew riot police to the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, where there has been a general strike for more than a month, with protesters demanding lower prices and higher wages. In the same month half a million truckers brought Mexico's national high ways to a halt, demanding lower diesel prices. Britain has seen in recent months several wild cat strikes at oil refineries over the employment of foreign workers at lower wages. Latvia, Greece, Chile and Iceland have all seen huge protest marches and mass rallies. And everywhere state clampdown is the answer. "Mass unemployment leads to mass riots". So capitalist Russia is arming itself with new laws making participation 'mass disorders—a crime against the state', for which defendants will be tried by a special court of three judges. In other words strike, by workers would be a cognizable offence under the new law.

The hard reality is that union movements are in disarray because the left itself is in disarray. The left has no coherent and consistent explanation as to what and who make the toilers miserable and what they can really do about it. No doubt moments of current economic crisis create an audience eager for alternatives. But the left in India, including the communist left, as in other parts of the globe, is in

a shambles, having no viable alternative to offer. The bitter truth is that the extreme right is actually hijacking the crisis and social unrest associated with it for its own ends.

As for the far left, the naxalite camp to be precise, the less said the better. They think ideologically they are strong. But unlike in the '70s they do not have a better approach to popularise. Their target remains elusive. Generally speaking their social movements have been decimated over the years. They continue to remain isolated from industrial workers and white collar employees. Though they talk of radical change but that doesn't necessarily mean they are heading in the same direction.

Not that there is no model of alternative labour organising in international arena. The Polish Solidarity once successfully broke with the past by defeating labour aristocracy. Even in the recent past in America sporadic strikes by workers forced the authorities to bow down. The situation demands radical change but the forces of change are nowhere around. For most progressives May Day is just another day. □□□