

History Is Not Moving

Yet another May Day and the world remains fundamentally unchanged. Labour continues to be hummed in the background with crushed spirit and hopeless future. Nobody talks of labour power, it is all about powers that be. The dreaming of the working community is shackled. In all fairness they do not dream for a better tomorrow anymore. For most of them the very survival in today's ruthless atmosphere is so hazardous that bright tomorrow literally means a distant future. Ever since the collapse of actually existing socialism in the former Soviet bloc in the 1990s workers everywhere have been depoliticising themselves, hopefully to buy industrial peace, much to the satisfaction of the status quo-ists. For most people the world is a horror. Clearly this is a world that cries out for radical change. Also, the defeat of revolution in China following Mao's death in 1976 exacts a heavy toll. As Indian workers in the organised sector are under the sway of political right and official left they are not allowed to know much, if anything, about the significance of international working men's day and most of what they do know or think they know because of biased propaganda of the established left, is wrong. To speak bluntly, the political and ideological climate in labour movement today is marked by a paucity of radical discourse, radical ferment and revolutionary imagination.

Labour is divided, nationally and internationally. Despite decades of organised trade union movement in this country it is the same old question of how to organise the unorganised even in the traditional and non-traditional sectors where the economy looks buyont. The bitter truth is that organised sector workers today represent a brand of trade unionism that is utterly aristocratic in its approach and practice. No matter whether they are ideologically motivated by leftism or anti-leftism, their half-hearted efforts even in a crisis situation, do not really challenge the status quo. They are systematically losing whatever bargaining power they still have and yet they do more of the same—somehow advance the cause of sectarian interests. And it mocks at labour solidarity making 'May' one more ritual devoid of substance. Also, the much publicised worker-peasant alliance which is generally heard on such occasions in communist discourse, sounds surrealistic.

Peasants are dying, they are committing suicides in thousands across the country, they are being evicted from their land and now joint forces are killing peasants—tribal peasants—in the jungles of Chattisgarh and Orissa, in the junglemahal region of Bengal and Jharkhand, by 'condemning' them as maoists. But workers have no role to play in this unjust war which has been launched by the government against its own people.

In two world wars workers in some countries effectively thwarted war efforts by their respective governments. Today it would be a rare scene to see organised workers across the globe opposing America's war against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. In anti-Vietnam war mostly students and middle-class people

rallied against the White House policy-makers. Workers can attack war industry more effectively than any segment of civic society. But they are not doing that and yet they think they symbolise the international spirit of May Day. The global war machine can be crucially crippled if port workers across the world withdraw labour even for a day. No that is not happening and it is unlikely to happen in the near future.

After the Dantewada incident in which paramilitary forces suffered huge casualties, the Centre is weighing options to press army into service against the maoist rebels. In other words they are advancing the time-table for massive collateral damage in the name of fighting 'naxals'. What is bone chilling is they might use air power *a la* Sri Lanka to immobilise the naxalites. The impact of a 250 kg bomb will be felt in a radius of at least 800 metres and what the hell awaits the agitating tribals in conflict zones is anybody guess. Not for nothing airchief Marshal P V Naik said the other day that they were ready for any eventuality. In plain language they are planning to carpet-bomb jungles to flush out maoists. In truth Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) used by US forces to fight the Afghan Taliban already flew over the dense forests of Bastar in the first trial run. And Indian Army Chief General V K Singh, who took over charge recently kept the people in good humour by issuing a nice statement that the army would not be used to fight "our own people". But the army in the northeast where the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is in operation is fighting its own people.

The hard reality is that even the corporate lobby admits though reluctantly that the maoist mutiny does have mandate from the toilers in tribal belts.

It is the most tragic aspect of maoist insurgency that workers remain passive in a supercharged situation like this.

The Centre's success in continuing the unjust war means a nightmare for Indian people. It will lead to mass murder. The future, it seems, is not 'green' in the jungles. The Centre has brought in 'anti-terror' legislation that it uses against peaceful and democratic demonstrators and the entire tribal community. The Centre is dismantling civil liberties bit by bit. But labour is not reacting. And the government is all set to enact anti-trade union legislation to crush working people's attempts at resistance to cuts in their pay and conditions. Unless labour begins to think beyond their sectarian interests the Centre's unjust war against its own people will escalate.□□□