

LETTERS

THE QUESTION OF 99

A wave of rage and unrest is seen worldwide. The youth are out on the streets protesting, resisting, hitting back. They are supported and joined by people from a wide spectrum. Dictators, who squeeze out the life breath of freedom; rulers, who load all the hardship of the crisis on the people's backs; billionaire sharks, who speculate and profit on hunger and homelessness; politicians, who plunder public funds—the whole lot is targeted. This is wonderful!

In some Arab countries the people have achieved an initial victory by ending dictatorial regimes. In Europe, powerful outbursts of popular fury have forced the rulers to tread slow on their plans to choke the people with cuts in public spending. And in the midst of this, mass protest has broken out all over the USA, the centre of the world imperial system. The slogans raised by the Occupy movements, initiated by Occupy Wall Street, capture the anti-capitalist sentiments and desire for change of the broad masses everywhere. Occupations replicate the world over and the call resonates with ever greater force.

People need to end distinctions of class, caste, gender, race and ethnicity. They need to tear out the economic and social relations on which they rest. They need a thorough cleaning out of all the rotten ideas that go with them. And when people really get down to it, that's the communism, a whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of life—for all across this globe.

Communist Party of India

(Marxist-Leninist), Naxalbari

HYPOCRISY OF THE 'POVERTY LINE'

PUDR wishes to draw public attention to the recent controversy where Planning Commission informed the Supreme Court that anyone earning more than Rs 32 in urban and Rs 26 in rural areas per day is considered above the poverty line. Article 43 of India's Constitution lays down that "(t)he state shall endeavour to secure by suitable legislation or economic organisation or in any other way to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities". India's low ranking in major human development indices and the fact that an overwhelming majority of the population continue to be denied this conceptualisation of what would be considered a "fair wage", raises disturbing questions with regard to the official standpoint on poverty.

In 1957 at the 15th Indian Labour Conference moves were made towards setting down norms for fixing Minimum Wage, a euphemism for a "living wage." The 15th ILC recommended

that in the first place the standard working class family should be taken to mean husband, wife and two children below the age of 14 yrs. Second, minimum food requirement should be calculated on the basis of 2700 calories daily per adult man, 2160 for woman and 1620 for the child. Further clothing requirement of 72 yards for a family per annum would be added while housing allowance corresponding to the minimum area provided for under the government's industrial housing schemes. Lastly fuel, lighting and other items of expenditure should constitute 20 percent of the total Minimum Wage.

While the Government did not accept these recommendations, Supreme Court approved these norms through its judgement in the case of U.Unichoyi v. State of Kerala (AIR 1962 SC 12) and thereby acquiring the force of law behind it. The apex court through its judgement in Workmen v. Reptakos Brett & Co Ltd (AIR 1992 SC 504) added a sixth norm - 25 percent of the total Minimum Wage was supposed to cover children's education, medical treatment, recreation etc. The Court observed that these six norms would be nothing more than Minimum Wage at "subsistence level" which the workers must get "at all times and under all circumstances".

Adherence to the six norms, let alone the five norms laid down by the 15th ILC, has been followed in breach. As a "living wage", at current wage rates declared under MWA, comes to Rs 247 per day for unskilled. Rs 32 touted by the Planning Commission as "below poverty line" is less than seven times the MW which itself is a "subsistence, wage". Thus MW is seven times that of BPL rate. What this implies is that mass of Indian people are being robbed of their right to life by artificial constructions of poverty line. PUDR reiterates that the letter and spirit of Article 43 which forms part of the Directive Principles of State Policy be the basis for providing basic requirement to all citizens of India so that their right to a life of dignity and liberty can be ensured.

Harish Dhawan and Paramjeet Singh,

Secretaries,

PUDR

"OCCUPY WALL STREET"

"Occupy Wall Street" demonstration is sweeping across the capitalist world including the US.

Millions of people took to the streets in more than 1,500 cities in over 80 countries, sounding a note of warning against the capitalist system.

This was a stern judgment of unpopular system that brings exploitation, oppression, unemployment and poverty to the popular masses.

As known, the catastrophic financial crisis that broke out in the US in 2007 prompted unprecedented business bankruptcy and unemployment, causing huge damage to the people's living.

Low-income earners' pent-up wrath against avaricious big banks and companies that caused economic inequality finally gave its vent.

As more people joined the protesters, slogan reading "We are 99%" appeared.

The capitalist society where money is everything is an unpopular one where the rich get ever richer while the poor ever poorer. In this society 1% of privileged class is granted all preferential treatment while 99% of working masses are forced into poverty and death.

The gap between the rich and the poor now in the US is the most serious since the great depression in the 1930s. The amount of income held by the privileged class which accounts only for 1 % of population increased from 10% to 24% for the past three decades in the US. The real income for 90% of Americans showed decrease from 1970 and over 15% of the population joined the poor group.

401,000 more people were registered as unemployed in the first week of October in the US while the number of unemployed reached 22,785,000 in EU member nations.

The number of people suffering from poverty totaled 46.2 million in the US last year. The number of homeless families showed steady increase in recent years. The income for American families went down nearly 10 % over the past four years.

The worsening global financial crisis proves that the capitalist society is a heaven for a handful of exploiters and oppressors but a hell for the majority of working class and that this kind of unpopular society cannot last long. Capitalism has nothing to do with the well being of the people.

The nature of the exploiting class never changes and the socio-class contradiction of capitalism gets acuter even though the world entered the new century.

KCNA,

Pyongyang