

SEARCHING FOR MASSLINE

## Pagri Sambhal Campaign in Punjab

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AMIDST THE INTENSIFIED political atmosphere in the Punjab state assembly elections, a Pagri Sambhal Campaign Conference was organized by different prominent and struggling personalities.

The purpose of the conference was to create political consciousness among the broad revolutionary masses on the ensuing elections in Punjab, be it the students, youth, working class or peasantry. A series of meetings were held by the Lok Morcha, Punjab, the Bharatiya Kisan Union-Ekta (Ugrahan), the Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha propagating that all the political parties were simply hoodwinking the people.

All these organizations have played a prominent role in the democratic revolutionary movement of Punjab. They do not support candidates or participate in parliamentary elections nor do they call for boycotting parliamentary elections. They believe that the people's day to day class struggles have to be built up and political consciousness built up for the masses to assimilate politics of agrarian revolution and to build their own democratic institutions of political power. Today the peasantry is subjected to the burden of merciless exploitation, becoming victims of money lenders and are forced into debt resulting in a series of suicides. The landless labourers, mainly dalits are denied their minimum wages or the right to own a plot. The working class is subordinated to unprecedented repression in terms of retrenchments, denial of living wages and improper working or living conditions. The youth are victims of unemployment because of the tentacles of globalization and privatization and similarly the student community hardly has access to proper facilities nor can afford the exorbitant fee hikes. The problem with the working class is that 90% of its composition is of migrant labour from other states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc. All these workers are not the true proletariat as they virtually became destitutes in being unable to earn a living income from their lands and any time would be retrenched and be forced to return to cultivate and defend their lands. This sharply contradicts any thesis that India is a fully developed capitalist society. The chief problem of the peasantry is the non-acceptance of the landed sections to accept the landless Dalit class peasantry into the struggles. This is why separate organizations were created for the landed and landless peasantry. A model organization has to be created for the uniting of both the classes especially considering the organization of the Dalit peasantry.

While addressing the press conference, committee members declared that all the opportunist political parties, along with the ruling Akali-BJP combine, Congress and the so-called third alternative of Manpreet-Left brand Front, are in agreement with those anti-national policies which are responsible for the crises of farm-labourers, farmers, industrial and electricity

workers, government employees, unemployed youth, and women in Punjab as well as in the country. In Punjab too, people have lived through and experienced the rule of different political parties but to no avail. The toiling people, therefore, in order to get rid of their crises, should organize and march forward on the path of intense, united struggles. They further said that though the government will be changed as a result of the present elections, but, they warn, no one should hope that the policies, serving the interest of feudal lords and national-multinational capitalists; and exploitation and oppression of the people, will ever change through elections. Neither the repressive black laws, framed only to impose these policies on people, will be changed; nor the police, the jails and the bureaucrats, who punish people for demanding their rights, are going to change. Through elections, these parties only resolve the issue of political power and the division of the plunder among themselves.

The Lok Morcha, Punjab, a more advanced political body held a meeting for its activists in Bhatinda at Teachers Home on January 15th on the revolutionary alternative. Here the activists were asked to propagate to the common people to form their alternative forms of political power. Gurdial Singh Bhangal gave a historical preview explaining how since 1947 the peasants and workers were denied their basic rights and how from the 1990's the globalization has worsened their plight. N K Jeet explained the same with economic figures and examples. Finally Amolak Singh theoretically projected what the revolutionary democratic state would resemble. This author was deeply impressed with the readiness and preparation of the activists who attended the meeting.

The most significant meetings were at Lambai, first by the Punjab Khet Mazdur Union and the Technical Services Union. In the PKMU meeting the author witnessed the strong preparation of the landless peasants and their readiness to welcome a change from their present plight. Laxman Singh Sewewala, secretary of the PKMU, explained how the parliamentary political parties were fooling the peasants with all their promises and contrasted the lifestyles of the politicians who literally grabbed the land of the common people. He spoke about the false promises of *chana and ata* and the very government policies that denied the common people these very necessities. He described the very steps the landless peasants had to adopt to win their right for minimum wages and land. He elaborated that for acquiring any right intense class struggle had to be launched. He also refuted the casteist policies of the rulers. It is significant that the PKMU led a long protracted struggle for the peasantry to acquire some plots and for them to have electricity.

What was significant in Lambi area was the way chief minister Badal was challenged and the extent to which he was shaken. His daughter in-law had to virtually bow down to the masses trying to appease them. However they all shook their heads in disbelief that their demands would be addressed.

In the meeting of the Technical Services Union 1000 activists attended from all over the state. The workers displayed great enthusiasm in receiving the revolutionary politics. The speakers described the policies of retrenchment of the industrialists and government and the deployment

of the contract system. It was explained how so many crores of rupees was stolen by the corporate firms of the workers and the need for them to not only organize but give solidarity to other struggling sections of workers and the peasantry. The speakers gave a clear-cut stand demarcating the ruling class politics from the proletarian stand.

The BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) staged rallies in Nathpur, Malouka and Selbrah on 23rd January, where this writer was present. The speakers stressed the need for the landed peasants to wage a protracted struggle against usury, cancellation of debts, opposing corporate seizure of lands etc. They also stressed the need on uniting with the landless peasants. They also described the historic struggles in Gobindpura against land seizure and how the stealing of several crores from the peasantry was prevented. Janda Singh Jethuke stated that with a contingent of only 500 people several crores stolen was recovered and that a sensational impact would have been made if thousands of peasants had participated. Significant plays and cultural programmes were staged at Kotha Gura village. Jagseer Seedda, a famous cultural singer performed and his song reverberated through the hearts of the masses. Two plays were held explaining how the ruling parties made promises to the people but ultimately betrayed them giving agony to the masses who aspired for change. Amolak Singh made a gripping speech which captured the hearts of the participants.

Flag marches were held in Gaggar, Mithri, Singhewala, Killian Wali, Waring Kera and Mehna. In Nathpura, Ganga, Giddar, Neor, Malooka, Kothaguru, Dyalpura Mirza, Gumti, Bhai Rupa, Burj Gill, Selbrah, Sidhana, Phul and Mehraj both the Bharatiya Kisan Union and the Punjab Khet Mazdoor union participated.

Finally the Naujawan Bharat Sabha staged some significant protests and meetings in Bhatinda and Moga. This organization was re-organized last year by the members of the Punjab Students Union. (Shaheed Randhawa Group) They held meetings propagating the anti-feudal anti-imperialist politics of Bhagat Singh and their relevance to the youth. They explained how corrupt the rulers were who denied employment and made the youth victims of the imperialist culture. Propaganda was made against drugs. The Naujawan Bharat Sabha has three area committees in Punjab and had to literally start work from scratch. However in spite of small numbers they have made significant impact if one considers the time. Meticulous work was done to explain the need for the youth to combat the political oppression of the day. A convention was held in August. In October with Punjab Students Union (Shaheed Randhwa Group) it led a procession protesting against corruption. On December 30th it led a rally in Bhatinda propagating that the parliamentary political parties were simply creating illusions amongst the people. On January 23rd at a prominent educational centre of Punjab called Rajendra College a meeting of about 400 youth took place. The students received it well. Pavel Kussa, secretary of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha explained that in today's situation the youth of Punjab could not assimilate politics beyond a certain level and the trend of other youth organizations in the revolutionary camp was to either impose the political content through slogans or by mere rhetoric propaganda.

The BKU-Ekta Ugrahan conducted its propaganda work in 400 villages of Malwa region of Punjab, with support from the Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union. The Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union itself did work in 120 villages and in 30 villages where no BKU unit existed. The Naujawan Bharat Sabha carried out campaigns in 40 villages.

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The movement represented by the Lok Morcha and other struggling organizations in Punjab is by far the strongest and most correct in the democratic revolutionary camp in terms of mass line. Intense work has been done in preparing the masses for class struggle and for them to imbibe lessons from their own experience. It is significant that revolutionary forces ranging from CPI (ML) Liberation to the CPI (Maoist) did not participate in the Pagri Sammelan campaign. The former is participating in the parliamentary election while the latter is openly calling for “boycott”. Both these trends negate the mass line as the broad masses lack the required level of political consciousness. On the Democratic Rights Front the Lok Morcha led struggles against the arrest of Harbhinder Jalal, secretary of the Punjab Unit of CPI (Maoist), which the political organization itself could not take up against repression of their cadre. The protracted effort of Lok Morcha, Punjab accounted for his release. This trend also today opposes the participation in parliamentary elections. There is a strong trend in Punjab where party policies are imposed and directly imposed on mass organizations like Maoism. In recent years some of the most memorable democratic rallies have taken place in Punjab like the protest against the murder of Sadhu Singh Takhtupura and Sujit Hamada, the huge protest of all peasant organizations and electricity users in January 2011 all over the state and in the rally in memory of Gursharan Singh at Kussa. The greatest achievement was however in Gobindpura where uniting with other peasant organizations it defeated the corporate forces from seizing their land. Democratic Front Against Operation Green Hunt also took up many conventions against Operation Green Hunt where other revolutionary groups hardly participated. The weakness in the movement is that the intellectuals hardly gave any support. It is significant that Lok Morcha, Punjab did not attach itself to such programmes as it was an organization of superior political content. For this very reason the Lok Morcha does not join the struggling mass organizations on issues of partial demands as such organizations do not have the level of political consciousness of the Morcha and thus it's politics would be imposed on them. A strong meeting was held against the killing of Kishenji and against the death sentence on Jatin Marandi. The PKMU has built units in Bhatinda, Faridkot, Muktsar and has pockets in Ludhiana. The BKU (Ekta) Ugrahan is very strong in the Malwa region and at its full strength resembles a mass storm. The Technical Services Union has also made remarkable progress and organized broad rallies protesting privatization and mass retrenchments, saving jobs of several workers. It is significant that on Bhagat Singh's 100th birthday in 2007 all these organizations participated in a 50,000 strong rally at Barnala, the biggest ever revolutionary gathering in Punjab.

The mass revolutionary movement in Punjab is a model for correct mass political struggle nationwide. The Barnala rally was the strongest revolutionary mass gathering in the entire country. It could well lay the grounds for the building of a revolutionary movement where people could build their own organs of political power. □□