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Latest move to operationalize disastrous Nuke deal

Countrywide movement needed to foil the pernicious act

The political weather has turned squally over the dubious Indo-US nuclear deal following pull out of support from the Congress-led UPA government by the CPI(M) and its associates who four years back consecrated the Congress as a secular formation and decided to give a government formed under its leadership unqualified support

under the pretext of combating communalism by keeping communal BJP out of power. The UPA boat is rocking no doubt but whether it will sink or somehow float precariously till the end of its journey looks like a toss-up. Fingers are working furiously on party abacuses as Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party supremo and

hitherto considered by the CPI(M) and its allies as one of their trusted friends has been suddenly found handing an olive branch to the Congress high command and pledged to stand by its government when it faces confidence vote in parliament on 22 July next. But to prove majority, the UPA still needs backing of some smaller parties and possible defectors. So the horse-trading is at the peak and the smaller parties, splinter groups and fence-sitters are demanding their pound of flesh for spelling out their allegiance in the upcoming trial of strength. It is learnt that the price per MP has crossed Rs 300 million and the funds are provided by corporate houses and giant monopolists. The nuclear deal which is the reason for the current floor test has receded to the back. Instead, the political space has been inhabited by unholy deals struck on astronomical monetary considerations, increasing number of strange bedfellows, charges of corporate rivalries being settled through political bargains and bit players trying to make capital out of the situation. Not the debate over the merits and demerits of the controversial nuke treaty but speculation over survival of the government and allied sideshows are hogging the centrestage. No principle but unlimited corporate finance would decide the outcome of this tug of war for power. Glaringly laid bare is the façade of murky bourgeois vote politics. Even the rift within the CPI(M) has come to the fore. Somnath Chatterjee, the CPI(M) leader, is reportedly not inclined to resign from the post of

the speaker despite a party whip. Hectic parleys are going to persuade Jyoti Basu, the CPI(M) patriarch known for his pro-Congress leaning and cordiality with the Congress top brass to prevail upon the speaker and make him toe the line of dissociation. On the other hand, a section of the CPI(M) leadership is openly criticizing the CPI(M) general secretary in the media for precipitating crisis and granting advantage to communal BJP. RSS, the core Hindu fundamentalist organization whose political front is the BJP, is euphoric in praise for Prakash Karat, the CPI(M) general secretary.

Obviously, this has created great concern among the common people back-broken by the intensified assail of ruling capitalism. Apprehensions are being expressed about the future once the deal is operative. Questions are being raised in regard to the role of the CPI(M) and its associates who till the other day did not consider the deal "an issue to bring down the government" but suddenly does a somersault to snap ties raising bogey of that very deal. So is the imperativeness to look into the various aspects of the matter and bring out the people's perspective.

Essence of the nuke deal

In the pages of *Proletarian Era*, we had earlier (vide issue dated 18 August, 2006) elaborately discussed the various features as well as import of this insidious deal and pointed out the grave danger it was fraught with. Let us once again briefly recapitulate the cardinal

SUCI dubs support withdrawal from UPA government by CPI(M) and its allies as perfidious and calls for building up anti-imperialist movement to annul the deal

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in course of a statement issued July 11, 2008 strongly condemned of the latest move of the Congress- led UPA government of India to formalize the insidious India- US nuke deal designed in the aggregate interest of the aspirant ruling Indian monopolists. Comrade Mukherjee also said that the withdrawal of support to the UPA government by the CPI(M) and its allies has not been prompted by any genuine opposition to this dubious treaty but to buttress an altogether different agenda as would be evident to anyone closely examining the sequence of events since the proposal for such a treaty was mooted three years back. Referring to the backdrop, Comrade Mukherjee said that immediately after dismantling of the socialist camp, the ruling Indian bourgeoisie aspiring to emerge as a regional superpower and a force of reckoning in the international arena with the backing of the US imperialists began to increasingly hobnob with the Pentagon regime to enter into a strategic alliance in economic, political as well as military spheres. It is in furtherance of this effort that the current deal surfaced in the scene which was unequivocally hailed by the corporate houses, monopolist circle and their subservient media.

Way back in July 2005 when the Congress-led UPA government running with full support of the CPI(M) and its associates signed a ten-year Defence Framework Agreement with the US, then itself the US President and Indian premier through a joint statement provided framework for the deal to follow. After that, during his visit to India in July 2006, the US President Bush facing no opposition from the CPI(M)

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Apologists of Deal rest on fraudulent argument

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points and the sequence of incidents. It was on 18 July 2005 that US president and Indian premier issued a joint declaration in regard to India civilian nuclear co-operation. That declaration provided basic framework of the deal to follow. Prior to the joint statement the UPA government signed a ten-year Defence Framework Agreement with the US. It is alleged that this was at the instance of Bush as a precondition to move forward with the proposed treaty. This agreement, incidentally, was in continuation to the Agreed Minutes on Defence Cooperation signed during the Congress government led by Narasimha Rao in the early nineties of previous century and taken forward by the BJP-led government. During his visit to India in March, 2006, George Bush, the US President signed an agreement of Indo-US civilian nuclear co-operation and agreed to work with friends and allies of the US to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India. India reciprocated by agreeing to assume responsibilities and practices which consisted of identifying and separating civilian and military nuclear facilities and programmes in a phased manner and filing a declaration regarding India's civilian facilities with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); taking a decision to place voluntarily her civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.

In all discussions and debates on the subject, both 123 agreement and Hyde Act are being referred to. So it is required to have some idea about these two while understanding the deal in proper context. The 123 agreement between India and USA refers to Sec. 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act, 1954. Since as per US law, there is a ban on transfer of nuclear technology to other countries, the Hyde Act was passed by US in December 2006 to make an exception for India. The Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006, is known as the "Hyde Act", is the legal framework for a bilateral pact between the US and India under which the US would provide access to civilian nuclear technology and access to nuclear fuel in exchange for International

Atomic Energy Agency-safeguards on civilian Indian reactors. This act which provides the legal basis for a 123 Agreement with India requires separate US congressional approval and Indian cabinet approval and defines the exact terms and conditions for the deal.

The other step is to enter into an agreement with the IAEA for safeguards of the civil nuclear reactors to be set up under the 123 agreement and to enter into an agreement with the NSG (45-nation strong Nuclear Suppliers Group) for supply of nuclear fuel i.e uranium for the civil nuclear reactors. Once India completes the agreements with IAEA and NSG, then the U.S. Congress will vote on the 123 agreement. Once it is approved by the US Congress, then the deal is complete and India and US can enter into nuclear commerce i.e supply of nuclear reactors, transfer of technology, supply of nuclear fuel etc.

Apologists' version

Apologists of the treaty contend that the most important gain from the deal is the contribution it will make to building India's energy security. With the operationalization of the deal, the more than three-decade-old embargo on the export of nuclear reactor and fuel and related parts and technologies would be lifted and India would be able to import these items freely from the cheapest source. This will gradually lead to a sizeable expansion in India's capacity to generate nuclear energy. It is estimated that with this deal coming into operation, the contribution of nuclear energy to India's total energy supply would increase from the present level of less than 3 per cent to 15-16 per cent in the next 20-25 years. This would enable India to generate electricity from nuclear power and move away from environment-polluting thermal plants already threatened on account of depleting fossil fuel reserve as well. Without the 123 Agreement, India would have to scale down her nuclear power programme as she would not have access to global sources of nuclear fuel and hence remain backward in sourcing and utilizing energy. The dream of seeing India occupying position of honour and power will remain ever eluding. Advocates of the deal also argue that nuclear power would be cheaper.

And to play on nationalist sentiment, an impression is sought to be made particularly in the form of a sort of middle-class commonsense that with the deal undoing the iniquitous technology-denial sanctions imposed on India since the 1970s, she is being granted a rewarding status of a "responsible" nuclear weapons state (NWS), or, as the July 2005 agreement put it, "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology". In support, a reference is made to the defence pact with the US to strengthen military capabilities that preceded the initiation of the treaty as well as a statement issued by Pentagon on the eve of Bush's visit in 2006 which, inter alia, exuded confidence that the closer tie between the two powers as brought out through the deal "will serve key objectives of our (India and US) strategic partnership by helping to build ties among our defence establishments and industries and to develop interoperability among our armed forces. Defence technology cooperation will contribute to strengthened military capabilities and will also result in economic benefits through expanded trade." Going a step further, it is also argued that since the technology used in nuclear power generation is similar to that of producing nuclear weapons, enhancement of knowledge in civil application of nuclear energy which the deal is restricted to, would automatically enhance the country's superiority in military application complementing the efforts to be reckoned as a formidable NSW.

Rebuttal to fraudulent argument

Every contention is flawed and fraudulent to the hilt. Let us take the case of Nuclear power generation. Notwithstanding the fact that the process is "clean" from the point of carbon emission when compared with thermal plants, the people throughout the world are totally opposed and rightly so to harnessing nuclear sources for power generation because of extreme health hazard associated with the extraction process and waste disposal mechanism. There are several instances of the people having contracted deadly radioactivity-borne diseases or died because of exposure to radiations from nuclear power generation

plants operating without any preventive device. The Chernobyl disaster and the massive accident at Three Mills Island in Pennsylvania in 1979 (when radioactive gas escaped from a nuclear power plant) are some of such examples. Under the circumstances, till appropriate safety devices including full-proof technology for proper disposal or treatment of highly toxic and radioactive waste and sludge are found out, nuclear source can not be considered as any alternative means of power generation. In fact, many of the nuclear power plants have been shut down in the advanced capitalist-imperialist countries. Hardly, any new plants are coming up there. In US, no new plant has been established since 1970. So it is suspected that the rich countries particularly the US are now trying to unload their outdated technology on relatively weaker countries and harvest bumper profit. The present Indo-US deal is also alleged to have been contemplated by the US imperialists from that objective. As for the imputation that nuclear energy holds the key to India's future energy security, neither the country's own official projections nor those done by the US, its deal partner, bear this out. In its latest projection of International Energy Outlook published on June 25 last, the Energy Information Agency (EIA) of the US Department of Energy has said that while at global level, nuclear power consumption will climb down from 10.7% in 2005 to 7.1% in 2030, that of India might climb up marginally from present level of 3% to 5% in 2030.

Equally estranged from truth is the averment that nuclear power is cheaper. All calculations show that cost of producing electricity from nuclear source is much costlier when compared to other production methods. According to an MIT study, at 2002 US economic conditions, the real levelized cost of nuclear power per kilowatt per hour is estimated at \$6.7 as against \$4.2 for pulverized coal-based plants and \$3.8 and \$5.2 for Combined Cycle Gas Turbines, low and high gas respectively. Generation of hydel power is also much cheaper in comparison. So is generation from renewable sources.

The third argument put forth is in regard to augmenting India's defence capabilities is indeed a

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Deal is in aggregate interest of capitalism

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clever ploy to elicit public sanction to an obtrusive proposition. Can the very title of 'responsible NWS (Nuclear Weapon States)' as defined by the US imperialists indulged in international blackmailing and brigandish pursuit round the globe be anything other than an oxymoron? Imperialist-capitalist superpowers or the US-defined NWSs regardless of intent or the size and lethality of their arsenals know that with so many more number of countries possessing nuclear weapons, the apprehension of a war turning nuclear is far more receded than what it was during the days of Hiroshima-Nagasaki when US rulers were sole possessor of atom bomb. In the event of a nuclear warfare, each warring country even the US would face enormous casualty. So these NWSs particularly the US are now augmenting their nuclear weaponry solely to terrorize and blackmail the weaker countries and make them genuflect before their dictates. Pretending to be so concerned at possible possession of nuclear weapons by others, the US imperialists and their cohorts have been indiscriminately using lethal weapons of mass destruction containing radioactive material to commit unspeakably repulsive and condemnable acts of terrorism against unarmed civilians as was seen earlier in Vietnam and of late in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other places. The very urge to be an NWS moulded in US style is not of the people but the ruling exploitative bourgeoisie trading on the hunger of millions. The purpose of being perceived as NWS through continuous augmentation of nuclear capabilities is to flaunt supremacy in military power and thereby intimidate the countries not having nuclear armoury to either capitulate or perish. If the imperialist brigands go on terrorizing the world by dint of their possession of nuclear arsenal, any independent sovereign country having minimum self-respect and threatened of being attacked any time also has legitimate right to defend itself by acquiring similar weaponry. Thus proliferation of nuclear weapons will go on increasing. It is for this reason that the peace-loving people and erstwhile socialist world led by USSR under great Stalin gave call for total disarmament including nuclear disarmament. But the

imperialist war-mongers did not pay any heed to it. So the only course left before people is to impose total disarmament on these imperialist-capitalist NWSs by pressure of worldwide anti-imperialist militant peace movement. It thus stretches all credulity to contend that stepping up military might of an exploitative bourgeois state like ours that serves the class interest of handful of ruling oppressive capitalists and their lackeys and has already assumed the character of an imperialist power as evident from its substantial export of finance capital and hegemonistic predilections would be for public good. In fact, the people need to resist any move on the part of the capitalist Indian state to be increasingly armed with nuclear arsenal and raise their voice in favour of complete disarmament.

It is for this reason that while the pro-US lobby welcomed the deal as mark of de facto acceptance of India as a nuclear power and her freedom to import nuclear fuel and technology to meet domestic needs, well-meaning thinking people and eminent scientists sensed foul and correctly apprehended that through this deal, US in the name of so-called 'global nuclear energy partnership' was not only going to reap a huge benefit to the tune of as high as Rs 40,000 crore by dumping its outmoded and outdated technology as well as reprocessed fuel on India but would also be licensed to have an access to India's nuclear programme. And treading along this course, the intended strategic alliance would be further consolidated.

Other aspects of the murky deal

Apart from these very basic reasons having farreaching consequences upon the independence, sovereignty and anti-imperialist tradition of the country, the opposition had also been on other grounds. As per the two versions of the Bill as drafted by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations India would lose US co-operation on civilian nuclear matter if she would displease the US administration on any count. Bush administration has been categorical that as far as the US is concerned, India's public moratorium on further nuclear

weapons testing would be, so to say, the linchpin of the civil nuclear agreement. The UPA government has although been trying to defend itself by contending that India is not bound by the Hyde Act which is a matter of concern between the US Congress and the US Administration, not between the legislatures of the two countries. But a cursory glance at the factual position would show how futile is the contention. The claim of the Indian government that under 123 agreement, India is not debarred from conducting nuclear test is also found specious because the US State Department spokesman has clearly denied such interpretation of the agreement. The whole deal is based on India's compliance with the terms specified by the US imperialists including their exclusive right to terminate the agreement "on one year's written notice in the event of a violation of the agreement by India. Clearly, the US is much advantaged in this regard and hence likely to call the shots more authoritatively. It is in this regard that the deal is perceived by many and rightly so as discriminatory and a national humiliation.

Class design behind the treaty

The obvious question is what has been so pressing a compulsion that the Congress-led government has become so desperate to enter into the treaty even by risking its very survival? A careful observation would reveal that such has not been any exclusive fancy of individuals like Sonia—Manmohan but mandated by the class-need of the ruling Indian bourgeoisie that the Congress as one of its most trusted representatives is incumbent to articulate. In our previous article, we had shown that the Indian bourgeoisie has long been nurturing an aspiration to gradually emerge as one of the major constituents of the a junior partner of world imperialist bloc the immediate aim being to establish itself as a regional superpower in the south-east Asia and create its own sphere of influence. Though after independence, under public pressure, the bourgeois government of India had to adopt the policy of non-alignment, its pro-US tilt never went unnoticed. The Indian bourgeoisie tried to use its position of non-alignment to bargain aids and favours from both imperialist

and socialist camps and in the process some restraint worked on it in openly colluding with the US imperialists. But after dismantling of the socialist camp, the Indian bourgeoisie made no secret of its desperation to develop closeness with US imperialism, even by offering plethora of concessions and concurring, overtly or covertly, with many of its nefarious moves. The sole objective was to secure the backing of the imperialist kingpin in materializing the dream of becoming a regional superpower to begin with and then be upgraded to an imperialist power of reckoning. It is in this scheme of things that nuclear interest also featured for obvious reasons. The ball was set in motion during the Congress-led Narasimha Rao government in early nineties and then scaled up yielding to US pressure by the erstwhile BJP-led NDA government, equally committed to subserve bourgeois class interest, through the Strategic Partnership of 2001, expressing intention to sign controversial CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and co-operate in the negotiations for multilateral Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. It is because of that Manmohan Singh said to Atal Behari Vajpayee, his predecessor, while briefing him on the steps taken in finalizing the deal a year back, "I have completed what you began." He thus confirmed the legacy stemming from the compulsion of entering into a strategic alliance with the US imperialists in the aggregate interest of the ruling Indian monopolists nurturing ambitions to become an important partner of world imperialist camp. It is from the same class position that the BJP despite scoffing at the Congress over certain procedural aspects purely from the angle of parliamentary opposition has concurred to the need of the deal.

Like their Indian counterpart, the ruling monopolists of imperialist US state also have definite interest in this strategic alliance with India. In order to consolidate and perpetuate their hold on the South-East Asian region and keep both Russia and China, now their capitalist contenders, at bay through intermediation of India, the US imperialists are also keen to cement their ties with their Indian counterpart. So they are making friendly overtures to India,

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CPI(M) allowed the Deal to materialize

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liberalizing some of the trade norms, offering a little bit of extra concessions and co-operation in various economic and diplomatic areas and relaxing to some extent the restrictions hitherto imposed on providing help and assistance in the field of nuclear technology. It is here that there has been a convergence of interest of either side in striking the deal.

Hence, examining all the pros and cons, we had categorically said two year back that this most atrocious heinous treaty stemming from the class need of the respective ruling monopolists of India and US to forge a strategic alliance has to be opposed tooth and nail by building up a countrywide intense united anti-imperialist people's movement as an integral part of broader worldwide anti-imperialist peace movement.

Mock opposition of CPI(M) and its allies

But was that what the CPI(M), CPI masquerading as Marxists-leftists were interested in while feigning opposition to the ruinous pact? If one carefully examines the very nature of their much-hyped 'dispute' with the Congress over the deal, it will be seen that the same is nowhere near the very basic premise of legitimate objection which has been explained by us in the foregoing paragraphs. Even today, the CPI(M) leaders and their friends are not uttering a single word about the class motive of the bourgeoisie behind the deal and in the endeavour to transform India into a nuclear power-studded imperialist state. They are at arm's length from people's genuine demands and interest. Rather, they are on a spree to divert people's attention from the crux of the issue to putting the onus on the Prime Minister for keeping them in the dark about the pending schedule and document drafts. The BJP too is criticizing the Congress on the same line from its parliamentary angle. In fact, CPI(M)'s position borders on the BJP's opposition from narrow nationalistic angle purported to reap benefits in the hustings. So it leads one to believe that behind this apparent opposition of the CPI(M) and its allies, there is a totally different ball game altogether.

As partner of the UPA, they had full knowledge of the deal and the

roadmap towards its finalization. They also claimed that they were providing 'content and character of the policies' of the government (vide editorial in *People's Democracy* dated 18 October 2004). So, had they been genuine in their opposition based on principle and serious in stalling the treaty, they were expected at the very first place to develop the desired intense countrywide anti-imperialist movement for which the condition judged in the context of public mood was extremely favourable and conducive. While thus creating pressure of extra-parliamentary struggle, they would have at the very initial stage three year back put their foot down and given an ultimatum to the Congress-led government that in the event of any further advance towards the deal, they would pull the plug. That could have been extremely effective as they were in full control of the life support system of the government. One would recall that Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, West Bengal chief minister and CPI(M) polit bureau member, openly declared in a public meeting in Calcutta that "The Congress-led government which has been formed with our support will move ahead if only we give the go ahead. If we say 'no', it would not dare proceeding even a step further but stay where it is." (*Ganasakti*, CPI(M)'s Bengali daily dated 24 April 2004) Thus they would have coordinated both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary battles to bend the government. If the government opted to defy, it would have only caused its own downfall. In the face of the rising tempo of organized mass movement in demand for scrapping of the proposed treaty, the power-seeking opportunists like Mulayam and others would not have dared to come to the rescue of the Congress. So in both the eventualities of either the government retracting in the face of the pull out threat or collapsing because of defiance, the deal would have been nipped in the bud. Possibility of the BJP or any other force reviving the issue being saddled in power instead was also ruled out in view of the decisive pressure of intense widespread people's resistance movement.

But the CPI(M) and its associates showed no inclination whatsoever to traverse that path. All

their opposition was confined to some carefully worded statements and apparent belligerence in the media for playing to the gallery in order to brighten electoral prospect. Through formation of a nuclear deal coordination committee of theirs and the parties having representation in the government and organizing meetings of that committee at long gaps to "understanding each other's views" and "fixing date of next meeting at suitable time interval", they in fact gave enough leeway to the Congress to complete the procedural formalities as well as negotiations to put through the deal. In fact, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau leaders are on record to have opined that the party did not consider the nuclear treaty to be that important an issue to ponder over pulling the support plug. "We may shout against the government on the floor of the parliament ... as we have reservations over the proposed deal. But under no circumstances, we will vote against the UPA government", stated categorically by Jyoti Basu, the veteran CPI(M) polit bureau member." (*Economic Times* - 8/8/06). Mr Biman Bose and Sitaram Yechury, two of its senior members rubbished the question of their withdrawal of support on this count. (*Statesman* 17-08-07) Even when the Prime Minister dared the CPI(M) to whatever they wanted including withdrawal of support (PM's interview in *the Telegraph* of 10 August, 2007) the reaction of Prakash Karat was not only mild but a touch reconciliatory as well. There deliberate acquiescence in the move was also clear when they refrained from putting up any effective pressure on the Congress-led government to stop joint military exercise with the Pentagon regime as a part of strategic military cooperation. The CPI(M) government in West Bengal on the contrary allowed a joint air exercise to be carried out in Kalaikunda in West Midnapur district in November 2005. Likewise, when a joint naval exercise was arranged in Bay of Bengal off Andhra coastal belt in September 2007 with Kitty Hawk the infamous aircraft carrier battleship belonging to the Seventh Fleet of the US navy that pounded Vietnam, the CPI(M) ended its responsibility by remaining confined to a show of token protest at Vishakhapatnam, the spot. By remaining within customary murmuring, the CPI(M) and its

allies also allowed the Indian government to get away by conniving with the US in voting against Iran in IAEA. All this prove beyond doubt that the CPI(M) and its allies did never want to obstruct the deal nor did they intend any true opposition to closing tie with the US imperialists. The Congress high command could also understand this sham opposition of the CPI(M) and hence had no problem in going ahead with its scheme.

It is clear from the above discussion that as pursuer of social democratic political line that stands for shameful compromise between labour and capital thereby protects the class-interest of the bourgeoisie creating smokescreen of revolutionary jargons, the CPI(M) can not and will not go against the aggregate interest of the ruling capitalism. So notwithstanding some apparent belligerence against US imperialism and few stunts centring around that to stay in the imagination of the working people, it would not undertake any such step that may jeopardise the Indo-US strategic alliance needed to serve that aggregate interest.

Why CPI(M) withdrew support now

In this backdrop, we need to understand what prompted the CPI(M) and its allies to time snapping ties with the Congress at this juncture. To any discernible mind, the answer will not be far to seek. The CPI(M) is now confronted with twin problems. The Singur-Nandigram incident has considerably discredited it before the people. Its left image has been thoroughly shaken. On the other hand, people have been despising the party for being accomplice to all the misdeeds and rabid anti-people policies of the Congress government. In other words, the anti-incumbency factor that features in a parliamentary democracy because of increasing peril in the capitalist rule is also working against the CPI(M). Debacle in the last panchayat poll followed by reverses in the municipality elections in West Bengal bore testimony to that. Apprehensive of losing power even at the state level and impelled by the need to salvage its image before the left-minded people for bouncing back mouthing leftist vocabulary, it found it

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Behind the fuel price escalation

Another dose of steep hike in the retail tariff of petrol-diesel has made the people bleed white yet more profusely. And as usual, the government and its subservient lobby are squarely passing on the blame to the spurt in international oil price. The government's has been an argument that in the face of this galloping rise of price in the international market, the oil companies in India are incurring huge loss which is unsustainable. The government can not go on bearing the burden of subsidizing the loss. Hence, it has no other way but to raise the domestic fuel tariff. The stand is plain and simple—soaring international market is not controllable, loss of the oil behemoths is not affordable, further debit to government exchequer is not permissible and hence squarely passing on the burden on the wretched ruined toiling masses is the sole option available.

We had earlier shown in the pages of *Proletarian Era* how an international conspiracy of the US-led international oil cartel works behind this unilateral and whimsical oil price hike. In the backdrop of ever-accentuating crisis of capitalism fuel being an indispensable item, the prospect of incessant profiteering is what motivates capitalists-imperialists to make the best of any little scope of raising fuel price. Simultaneously we had shown how frivolous has been the contention that but for jacking up the domestic price level, the government does not have any alternative. No wonder, this time too, the ruling class and its political agents are working up arguments which can be rightly deemed palpable lies or blatant falsification of facts. Without repeating the detailed analysis, we thought it necessary to point out the fallacies in each of the major arguments the government and its obedient lobby has been putting forth to justify this savage economic assault on the common masses that has wider ramifications and ominous consequences.

Why is our oil price so high?

It is known to all that compared to western countries, China or Japan, where consumption is far greater, oil prices are much higher in our country. When asked to state the reasons for that, the government and its apologists straightaway point finger at our excessive dependence on import. But they would never clarify as to what is the precise reason for this. Is it driven by necessity or is outcome of a design? In seventies, 70% of the requirement was produced in the country. Today it is 25% and expected to go down further to 14% by 2010. When oil MNCs were debarred from doing business here and the activities of ONGC widened, country was nearing self-sufficiency in oil. However, the oil behemoths, both

domestic and foreign, have always been reluctant to devote on newer exploration of oil fields within the country as because there is no guarantee of immediate success or generation of instantaneous super profit. On the contrary, procurement of oil from outside and selling it in the domestic market is much more profitable. So with introduction of economic liberalization in 1991, twenty-three oil-producing blocs were handed over to multinationals, both domestic and foreign, in 1996. Immediately there was progressive decline in domestic crude production. Gradually the aforesaid monopoly houses took control over the oil sector of the country, domestic exploration and refining was spurned with alacrity and import was fallen back upon to convert the field of oil trade into an area of minting super-profit. Moreover, though domestic production is much cheaper, it is not that the same is made available to the end customer at relatively cheaper price. That is prohibited by statute of import price parity which mandates sale of domestic produce at the price the imported staff is being marketed. The very objective behind this 'import price parity' was to allow domestic and foreign MNCs reap bumper profit. In fact, oil PSUs make huge profit by selling domestic produce at import price.

Are the oil companies incurring loss?

The government seems to be excessively perturbed over the 'losses' booked by the oil companies to the tune of not less than Rs.600 crores per day. But the 2007-08 financial year, Indian Oil company, the PSU giant alone has reaped a neat profit of Rs.6962 crore 58 lakhs. Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC), another PSU giant had reaped a profit of as high as Rs. 5097.48 crores in the first six

months of 2007-08. Even after the unprecedented spurt in the global oil market, it has minted profit of Rs 1603 crores in 2006-07 and Rs 2397 in 2007-08. Reliance Industries, one of the monopolists in oil trade in private sector, has been increasing its profits after tax (PAT) by leaps and bound. As per annual reports of the company, its PAT in 2004-05 was Rs. 7572 crores while in 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08, the figures have been Rs 9069 crores, 11, 943 crores and Rs 15, 546 crores respectively. More such examples can be cited. Moreover, if the oil companies were so cash-starved, how could they go on venturing abroad acquiring oil fields and refineries?

Other reasons behind oil price spiral

It is not only import parity pricing and planfully created over-dependence on import that is pushing up the price beyond the roof. There is massive dose of taxation on oil in the form of import duty, excise, sales tax and various kinds of cess. Both central and state governments have imposed these taxes. In 2006-07, a sum of as high as Rs 1, 07, 000 crore was raised by the central and state governments as excise collection from oil. As revealed from the report of a parliamentary committee, figure of this collection touched Rs 1, 64, 000 crores in 2007-08. A recent calculation shows that had there not been any tax, petrol would have cost Rs 27.96 a litre and diesel Rs 26.95 a litre. Prior to the recent duty adjustment and price hike, the tax component in the retail selling price of petrol and diesel was placed at 53 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. After the changes, in the retail price of Rs.50.52 a litre, the actual price (Rs.27.96) still accounted for just 55.3 per cent of the price paid, excise duty (Rs.13.45) for 26.6 per cent and State-level sales tax, dealers' commission and delivery charges for the balance 18.1 per cent. State-level sales tax accounted for the bulk of the last figure and several States reduced it to neutralize part of the price increase. (The relevant proportions in the case of diesel (price Rs.34.76) were 77.5, 10.4 and 12.1 per cent respectively.) (*Frontline* June 21- July 4 2008)

In fact, with a miniscule of the heavy taxation withdrawn by the various state governments under

public pressure and in response to electoral exigencies, the amount of hike came down by around 50%.

An argument is often heard that since government of countries like the US have greater earnings from other sources, which India government does not have, here it justifies a procurement through tax on oil. But such an argument proves false, if tax imposed by other underdeveloped countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Pakistan is considered. For these countries, the tax for petrol amounts to 37%, 24% and 30% respectively whereas In India the tax for petrol amounts to 54% and for diesel 36%.

Fraudulent argument of depleted exchequer

There is no reason to believe that the proceeds of this massive collection are spent on public welfare. Way back in 1975, an 'oil fund' was created to supply oil and oil products at a uniform price throughout the country and giving subsidy to diesel, kerosene and cooking gas. Till 1989, the fund was in surplus at Rs. 8,900 crores (which is equivalent to over Rs. 50, 000 crores if one takes accrued interest calculated till date). But erstwhile V. P. Singh government, supported by the BJP and CPI (M), manipulated to use this fund for financing budget deficit.

In 1975, as we had pointed out in our previous articles on the subject, the central government began imposing besides other taxes cess on domestic oil production. The resources raised through this route inclusive of interest have been over Rs.1 lakh crore rupees. But only Rs.902 crores is stated to have been spent for the declared objective while around Rs.99, 000 crores have been usurped violating all norms and regulations by the governments run by the Congress, BJP and CPI (M) supported United Front. The cost of the oil import in 2003-04 was Rs. 93, 159 crores higher by Rs. 8117 crores compared to Rs. 85,042 crores in 2002-03. Had the accumulation of Rs. 99,000 crores in the oil fund be available, people could have well been spared from shouldering repeated bouts of domestic tariff hike.

The government's plea of being unable to bear the burden of subsidy is another bluff. When it comes to the question of providing relief to the people, the echelons in the

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Fuel price-rise a ploy of capitalists-imperialists

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governmental hierarchy and ruling dispensation find the coffer dried up. But if it is an issue of giving subvention to monopolists, immediately they become extremely benevolent offering plethora of tax exemptions through SEZ etc, showing amnesty to tax defaulters, allowing them to get away with huge bank and other financial loans rendering the lending institutions burdened with massive non-performing assets and so forth.

Hoax of wastage during refining process

Next argument is that there is considerable wastage during the refining process which does not get reflected in the pricing mechanism. It is stated that from one barrel (159 litres) of crude, only 100 litres of petrol is produced. So if a barrel of crude costs \$132 or Rs 5676 (assuming \$1= Rs 43), then the market price of petrol (production volume 100 litres) should be Rs 56.76 per litre excluding distribution cost. Apparently it seems to be so benign a submission! But if one delves a little more, the trickery will be visible without an iota of ambiguity. None of the extracts from crude goes waste. Based on the quality of the crude, a

host of products like naphtha (basic ingredient for polythene used in manufacturing so many items), lubricant like mobile oil (whose price is higher than diesel), perfumes, detergents, fertilizers, computer materials, etc. are obtained from the waste. In fact, oil is such an item that some of the products obtained from its wastes cost even more than petrol and diesel! Hence, one ought to take the prices of such waste-related products while estimating oil price. Otherwise, it is akin to suppression of facts.

Why is international market soaring?

Next question that arises is what is triggering this mind-boggling spurt in international crude price? Is it because of disparity between demand and supply as is sought to be made out? Unfortunately not. This price is arbitrarily manipulated by an international cartel of mega oil companies of the West mainly the US-based sharks like Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texas, Concho Philips and Shell. Taking advantage of the unipolar world following dismantling of socialist camp, the imperialist-capitalist bloc led by US imperialists has practically established monopoly control over

refinement and distribution of global oil sector. Hence, they are flexing their muscle at will to jack up international crude market and using this as a weapon to bully others and sustain their dominance as well as game of profit maximization. Even within US, allegations have been levelled against these giant oil companies for creating artificial crisis, raising prices and mobilize huge profits. To cover up their heinous game, these oil barons often point fingers at the OPEC (Oil Producing and Exporting Countries) of West Asia for market aberrations. It is this oil lobby of the US imperialists which orchestrated invasion of Iraq through subservient Bush administration and is now showing red eyes to Iran for grabbing their oil resources.

But the Indian government whether led by Congress and its allies of different hues including pseudo Marxists like the CPI (M) and CPI or communal BJP and its associates never raised any voice against this oil lobby. No attempt has been seen on their part to mobilize world public opinion against such a sinister activity of the US-led imperialist lobby holding world people to ransom. On the contrary, theirs has been a policy to

consistently follow a pro-US stand in international affairs thereby concurring to, among other things, this sinister design of maneuvering global oil tariff at will and assume the periodic price escalation as fait accompli. The CPI (M) and CPI who pretend to be so anti-US over the nuclear treaty have also been conspicuously silent on this issue let alone prevailing upon the UPA government running on their support to take it up in right earnest.

People's protest is just and legitimate

Thus it is clear that not a single argument or plea put forward by the government to justify increase in domestic fuel tariff stands to reason. In fact, it is a capitalist-imperialist ploy to systematically shift the burden of the insurmountable crisis of the decadent moribund capitalist system on the common people groaning under the yoke of savage capitalist exploitation. Even in the eyes of bourgeois jurisprudence and law, it is a crime to pass on one's own crisis to another under fraudulent pretext. So people have every moral and even legal right to rise in protest against this steep hike in fuel price 'at the drop of a hat' and resist such an onslaught on their life and livelihood

Maipith — A Manifest of Unbending Resistance to Gruesome Terror

Gory incidents of violence and terrorization at Maipith, a remote area of Kultali in South 24 Pargana District in West Bengal, having recently been divulged, leave people shocked and stunned afresh, after the incidents of Nandigram and Singur. Refusing to fall unquestioningly in line with the words and deeds of the ruling party and its government, the people

there, mostly poor peasants, have been subjected to the worst ever sort of barbaric attacks by CPI(M) goons over the last two decades. Most of the male members have been forced out of their houses, even the areas, routed out of their jobs and occupations and deprived of the barest means of subsistence and sustenance. More often than not, hundreds of villagers became victim

to the attacks of the CPI(M) goons, shot, or beaten to death in the most brutal manner or maimed and crippled. The injured were not allowed to avail of hospital treatment; honour of women in hundreds was violated; even children were not spared from heartless cruelty.

For over two decades, common toiling people of Maipith area have

been carrying on class struggle against the jotedars and their henchmen, under the leadership of SUCI. Theirs is a tradition of developing, and participating in, movements to resist anti-people, pro-capitalist policies of the government, of whatever shade it be. This can be traced right back to the days of the well-known Tebhaga movement of poor peasants and sharecroppers of the 1940s-'50s. Over the years, Maipith thus became a stronghold of SUCI organization and hence an eyesore to the CPI(M). The root of all attacks, all terrorization, all killings lies here, and here only. Added to it, before the Panchayat polls this year, peoples' committees were formed there, much in the same way as in Nandigram and Singur. Apprehending definite debacle in election results as in Nandigram and Singur, the CPI(M) escalated manifold their activities towards terrorizing people. What followed,



Left : SUCI and TMC leaders at Maipith. Right : Victims narrating their plight

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Annul the deal under pressure of mass movement

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impelling to dissociate from the Congress at least for the present. But at the same time, the CPI(M) leaders did not want to face elections right now. So they under this or that pretext were deferring the withdrawal of support till the time they were sure that consequent to their pulling out, the government did not collapse. Once Mulayam, hitherto a bosom pal of theirs, from his compulsion of gaining electoral advantage in Uttar Pradesh took a 180 degree turn to back the Congress raising the bogey of combating the BJP and that too, in our opinion, after getting green signal from the CPI(M) leadership, the CPI(M) and its associates heaped a sigh of relief and went ahead with the pulling out game. Now, they feel they could avoid receiving the blame for either premature termination of the government or foisting another untimely expensive election on the countrymen. They also knew it full well that if the government continued, the deal would be finalized and hence they would not have their relationship with the US corporate houses and big moneybags built over all these years in course of wooing them to invest in West Bengal and Kerala that strained. Also the door for aligning with the Congress is not shut but kept ajar as has been spelt out by the CPI general secretary and hinted by the CPI(M) general secretary as well. This is nothing strange in the politics of opportunism as unprincipled alliance, dissociation, shifting allegiance, floor crossing—all are in the book of bourgeois power politics. It is, therefore, obvious that this sundering between the CPI(M) and the Congress is nothing but a mutual separation based on a kind of a secret understanding. The snapping of tie has not been prompted by any genuine hostility to US imperialism but exigency of safeguarding parliamentary interest through retrieval of lost image as well as the ruling class interest by providing a safe passage to the deal. Thus in their penchant for continued enjoyment of power and staying afloat in the mainstream parliamentary politics by aligning with one or the other principal bourgeois outfits, the associates

of the CPI(M) also could not but become party to this dubious game.

Organized conscious people's movement—only recourse

So it is incumbent on the right-thinking patriotic-minded people to correctly understand the emerging scenario in its entirety. A dark cloud looms large in the horizon. Not only operationalization of the ruinous features of the treaty but the very danger of India being turned into an appendage of the US imperialists have to be taken due cognizance of. Such collaboration with and submission to the imperialist kingpin hated throughout the world as the worst enemy of the mankind is menacingly threatening to democracy, democratic environment and democratic mass movement and fraught with the danger of increasing US interference in India's internal affairs. While the power-greedy bourgeois politicians and power-hungry pseudo-Marxists are playing ducks and drakes with people's life spurning all norms, principles, etiquette and culture, upholding people's cause and exerting effective people's pressure through surge of democratic mass movements in billows is the sole deterrent. It is in the milieu of this conscious mass movement on the edifice of higher culture, ethics and morality that all divisive and disruptive thoughts like communalism-parochialism-regionalism-separatism could be fought out with conducting sustained ideological struggle and desired unity of the toiling people cemented like a rock. So the need of the hour is to resist implementation of the black treaty by developing countrywide intense united organized protracted mass movement. All foul machinations of opportunist bourgeois politicians, formation of unholy nexus and alliances, nasty communal-casteist games of the BJP and other sectarian forces could be combated and defeated only with this weapon of people's movement. We fervently appeal to all including the honest rank of the CPI(M) and its allies in this crossroad of history to build up this movement, annul the ruinous deal and repel such wrecking attack of the ruling imperialists-capitalists.

SUCI Central Committee on support withdrawal from UPA government by CPI(M)

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and its allies signed an agreement of India-US civilian nuclear co-operation and agreed to initiate moves to amend US domestic laws as well as IAEA provisions suitably to make them compatible with the deal and work with friends and allies of the US to adjust international regimes for enabling full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India. In that it was further stipulated that India shall have to consent to place her civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. It is very important to note that India's public moratorium on further nuclear weapons testing became the linchpin of the US-India nuclear agreement. Quite naturally, the entire freedom-loving people of the country burst forth against this ignominious treaty which apart from paving way for the US imperialists to reap huge commercial benefit by dumping their outmoded and outdated technology as well as reprocessed fuel on India would also provide them enough power to have an access to India's nuclear programme. And thus the deal once put through would open up scope for US interference in the internal affairs of the country. Hence the urgency to force the government to annul this most humiliating nuke deal, lock, stock and barrel under pressure of people's movement, stressed Comrade Mukherjee.

It was never possible for the Congress-led government to proceed with the deal like all other outright anti-people policies unless the CPI(M) and its associates notwithstanding their apparent belligerent posture of opposition gave covert clearance to each and every move. Though fully aware of the scheme of things and the implementation time table, they did nothing tangible to dissuade the government totally dependent on their support to retract from the move. Had they seriously meant it, it was incumbent on them to develop an all-out resistance movement involving both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means. They could have put their foot down when the proposal was on roll three year back, threatened pull out in the event of the government making any advance towards the pact and responded to the call of ours for building up a countrywide intense resistance movement. Instead, in the name of discussing the various aspects of the deal in the 'UPA-Left Coordination Committee' and 'understanding each other's view', they have only provided ample time to the UPA government surviving on their support to proceed with the treaty and even gave it clearance to go to the IAEA for ratification. By remaining within customary murmuring, they also allowed the UPA government to get away even after conniving with the US in voting against Iran in IAEA. Orchestrating some mock protest shows in the most benign form for public consumption, the CPI(M)-led combination, recalled Comrade Mukherjee, also gave pass to conducting joint military exercises with the Pentagon regime in West Bengal and later in Bay of Bengal. The CPI(M) leaders are on record to have commented on several occasions that the nuclear deal is not an issue to bring down the government, mentioned Comrade Mukherjee.

But now when the next parliamentary election is on the anvil and the CPI(M) and its allies would have to fight the Congress in the states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, the CPI(M) think tank, pointed out Comrade Mukherjee, aware of their sagging left image and being perceived as a trusted ally and companion of the Congress has calibrated the pull out to wear an anti-Congress cloak and encash the simmering discontent among the people over the misrule of UPA government in the hustings. But that this is a mutual separation based on a kind of secret understanding became obvious since the withdrawal after a definite dilatory tactics was timed only when it could be ensured that the government would survive with the backing of the Samajwadi Party and other smaller outfits and the deal would get a safe passage. Also the scope for alliance and unity with the Congress after the elections remains wide open. Thus it is akin to running with the hare and hunting with hounds. Though the CPI(M) and its allies are now trying to pose themselves as champions of anti-imperialism, their social-democratic character of clandestinely serving bourgeois class interest through crafty manipulations, camouflage, trickery and maneuvering tactics has been thoroughly laid bare, asserted Comrade Mukherjee.

Comrade Mukherjee appealed to the people including the honest rank of the CPI(M) and its partners not to get deceived by this mock fight but come forward to build up a countrywide intense anti-imperialist resistance movement for immediate annulment of this insidious treaty.

Comrade Shankar Saha attends ILO Conference in Geneva

The 97th session of the International Labour Conference organized by the ILO was held in Geneva from 27 May to 30 June, 2008. AIUTUC was represented by Comrade Shankar Saha, General Secretary.

Comrade Saha in course of his speech, pointed out how throughout the world legitimate basic rights of the working class are being trampled with impunity. In this context, he highlighted how assault on legitimate workers' movement has become literally a daily brutality in Columbia. Till date 2,269 trade union workers, have been butchered; 26 Trade union leaders killed in just last 5 months. Without the backing and help of the state power, such genocide was impossible.

Comrade Saha mentioned how capitalist globalization has triggered

huge job loss, unemployment, underemployment, wage cuts, outsourcing, contractization, casualization and total insecurity of jobs. Quoting ILO document he said, during globalization, the 94% workforce worldwide are in informal sector with no minimum wages, no security or proper conditions of service. The SEZs set up to save moribund capitalism have become slaughter house of workers. ILO has shown, worldwide, 1.23 crore are forced labours subject to worst economic, commercial and sexual exploitation.

Comrade Saha reminded that rights are the products of working class struggle and they can be defended and achieved only through conscious and organized struggle against the capitalist-imperialist system.

AIDSO earns victory against seat curtailment in Ravenshaw University

As a part of commercialisation of education, the famous Ravenshaw College of Orissa was facing a series of attempts since the nineties of the last century. Declaration of 'university' status, and finally curtailment of seats by about 50-60% with 2 to 3 times increase of seats for self-financed courses proved to be the steps in this regard. As in the previous cases AIDSO took up a programme of sustained movement against curtailment of seats. It organized submission of memorandum to the Registrar to revoke the decision of seat curtailment, "Chhatra Dharna" or squatting in front of the main gate of the University, a massive students' rally and demonstration before Vice-Chancellor's office on

12 June, finally proposing a "Gherao" of the university on 18 June, 2008. These were paralleled with massive signature campaign, leaflet distribution, postering, group discussions etc. These created immense enthusiasm and support among the common people. Initially nonchalant, the government and the authority had to concede to students' demands on 17 June, bowing down before the students' movement and peoples' pressure.

Corrigendum

In the article on Karnataka election published in the last issue, from under the subheading **Outcome** and onwards, JD(S) has been referred wrongly as JD(U). We sincerely regret this mistake.

— Ed. Board, *Proletarian Era*

Freedom of Expression Conference at Ahmedabad

Eminent citizens and prominent personalities from all walks of life of Gujarat came out in resolute steps to stand in fraternity with struggling peoples' cause and subversion of democratic rights in a massive Gujarat State Freedom of Expression Conference held at Ahmedabad on June 22 last.

It was organized jointly by the PUCL, Movement for Secular Democracy, JP Centenary Committee, PRASANT, Nirikshak, Nayamarg, Bhoomi Putra, and JalSeva. The extremely well-participated conference was presided over by Sri Chunibhai Vaidya, known Sarvodaya leader. Sri Kuldip Nayar, Justice Rajendra Sachar, Sri Kannaviram, the President of PUCL, Prof B.J. Banhulawalla, Sri Girishbhai Patel, Dwarika Nath Rath were among the speakers in the conference. Several messages standing firmly for the cause of upholding the freedom of expression were received by the Conference from people like Narayanbhai Desai .

Referring in particular, to the sedition charge against Times of India for the article by its reporter

Prasant Dayal, that exposed a nexus hitting at the credibility of the Police Officer in high ranks and at the level of criminalization of Police in the state and to the police case registered against Prof. Ashish Nandy for his article "Blame the Middle Classes?" after the Gujarat elections, which analysed the silence of middle class in Gujarat, the speakers unequivocally, and from different angles covering different aspects, condemned the moves as shameless attacks of the BJP-led Modi government of Gujarat and its police-administration on, rather a gross insult to, the basic tenets of freedom of expression.

The conference decided to publish a Gujarati rendering of Prasant Dayal's article and also put forward several demands including among others and highlighting immediate withdrawal of the charges of sedition and conspiracy. It called upon people of the state and the country to join the Conference's pledged effort to uphold and fight for the freedom of expression to save the democracy from growing fascist onslaught

Manifest of unbending resistance

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was experienced by observers from many different quarters. In fact, the gruesome attacks on Maipith people have surpassed even the likes of that in Nandigram and Singur. These simply made it clear that the CPI(M) did care the least for the universal despise and criticism they faced for their heinous crimes of rape, arson, loot and killing at those two places; they felt no pang at unleashing fresh savage attacks to cow down people of Maipith.

In such a situation, for reasons best known to them, the print and electronic media were at first astonishingly reticent about bringing into focus the goings-on at Maipith. It was only after Comrade Debaprasad Sarkar, the leader of SUCI legislators and, Partha Chatterjee, TMC MLA and, leader of Opposition, West Bengal Assembly and other leaders of the two parties jointly visited Maipith for an on-spot inquiry and investigation of the extent and intensity of attack and the plight of people there, that the media changed their stance and news of Maipith trickled through in some measure.

Doubts have been raised from certain quarters as to how the poor

unarmed peasants of Maipith will ever put up with the ruling party-sponsored violence and the concerted attacks of the CPI(M) goons aided and abetted by the police and administration. Such sceptics may rest assured that the people of Maipith, who have been themselves putting up resistance for so long to sustained and palpable threat to their life, property and honour, will not fail to continue their fight in future too. Over and above that, with a view to acquainting people of the state about the dastardly attacks perpetrated against them, they rallied to Calcutta for a two-day long sit-in demonstration on June 19 and 20 last. From there, they have also met the Governor to demand that the safe return of those forced out of their houses be ensured, the injured be paid compensation and the perpetrators be brought to book.

Theirs is an unrelenting struggle in face of state-engineered attacks on the life, rights and honour of the people of Maipith. Simultaneously, people of the state from all walks of life also face the task of standing by the side of these valiant fighters, struggling for justice and democracy.

Observe on 18 July All India Protest Day against disastrous Nuke Deal

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